

CIVIL SERVICES MONTHLY

MARCH 2020

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- MINERAL LAWS (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2020
- RBI MEASURES TO DEAL WITH COVID - 19
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- ROLE OF SIRT1

INDIA PERSPECTIVES

MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

ONE STOP SOLUTION FOR CIVIL SERVICES



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INDIA PERSPECTIVES

MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

PRELIMS

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

New domicile rules for J&K

Why in news?

- After the special status of J&K was revoked, followed by its reorganization into 2 UTs, the Centre redefined its domicile and recruitment rules, effectively opening its government jobs except Level 4 to anyone from the rest of the country.
- Under the J&K Reorganization (Adaptation of State Laws) Order 2020, issued on 31 March 2020, 29 laws were repealed and 109 others amended.
- Section 3A under the J&K Civil Services (Decentralization and Recruitment) Act, which was part of the notification, defines a domicile as an individual "who has resided for a period of 15 years in the UT of J&K or has studied for a period of 7 years and appeared in class 10th/12th examination in an educational institution located in the UT of J&K".
- Earlier, a permanent resident of J&K had to be born there while one could become a 'state subject', with exclusive rights to residence, employment, education, contesting elections and property in the state.
- Now, the definition has been expanded to also include children of Central government officials, All India Service officers, officials of PSUs and autonomous bodies of the Central government, public sector banks, and officials of statutory bodies, officials of central universities, and recognised research institutes of the Central government who have served in J&K "for a total period of 10 years".
- Additionally, anyone registered as a migrant by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commissioner (Migrants) in the UT of J&K will also be included as a domicile; as will be children of those J&K residents who live outside but whose parents fulfill any of the conditions above.

- A tehsildar has been made the competent authority for issuing a domicile certificate, as opposed to deputy commissioners or officers notified for this earlier.
- Section 5-A of the J&K civil services (decentralization and recruitment) Act states that no person shall be eligible for appointment to a post carrying a pay scale for not more than level-4 (25500) unless he is a domicile of UT of J&K.

The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019

- It is an act of the Parliament of India.
- It contains provisions to reconstitute the Indian-administered state of J&K, into two Indian-administered UTs, one to be called Jammu and Kashmir, and the other Ladakh. The Union Territory of Ladakh will comprise Kargil and Leh districts, and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir will comprise the remaining territories of the existing state of Jammu and Kashmir.

SC upholds right to discuss COVID-19

Why in news?

- The Supreme Court on 31 March 2020 upheld the right to free discussion about COVID-19, even as it directed the media to refer to and publish the official version of the developments in order to avoid inaccuracies and large-scale panic.
- It ordered the government to start a daily bullet in on COVID-19 developments through all media avenues in the next 24 hours.
- A Bench, led by Chief Justice of India, was responding to a request from the Central government that media outlets, in the "larger interest of justice", should only publish or telecast anything on COVID-19 after ascertaining the factual position from the government.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said any panic reaction in the midst of an unprecedented

situation based on such reporting would harm the entire nation. Creating panic is also a criminal offence under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

- The court took a view balancing free press and advice the media (print/electronic/social) to maintain a strong sense of responsibility and ensure that unverified news capable of causing panic is not disseminated.

Taxation and Other Laws (Relaxation of Certain Provisions) Ordinance, 2020

Why in news?

- The government has promulgated the 'Taxation and Other Laws (Relaxation of Certain Provisions) Ordinance, 2020', which brings into effect various tax compliance related measures announced in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.
- The government has extended the deadline for filing income tax, last dates for making investments in instruments such as National Savings Certificates, Public Provident Fund for claiming income tax benefits, etc.
- The last date for linking PAN with biometric ID Aadhaar has been extended by three months to June 30.
- The Ordinance has also amended the provisions of the Income-tax Act to provide the same tax treatment to the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM-CARES Fund) as available to the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF). The donation made to the PM CARES Fund shall be eligible for 100% deduction under section 80G of the IT Act. The limit on deduction of 10% of gross income shall also not be applicable for donation made to PM CARES Fund.

Aircraft (Amendment) Bill, 2020

Why in news?

- Lok Sabha has passed the Aircraft (Amendment) Bill, 2020 which seeks to amend the Aircraft Act, 1934.
- The Act regulates the manufacture, possession, use, operation, sale, import and export of civil aircrafts and licensing of aerodromes.
- The Bill will provide statutory status to regulatory institutions like the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) and the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB). Each of these bodies will be headed by a Director General who will be appointed by the centre.
- The DGCA will carry out safety oversight and regulatory functions with respect to matters under the Bill and the BCAS will carry out regulatory oversight functions related to civil aviation security. Further, the AAIB will carry out investigations related to aircraft accidents and incidents.
- The Bill proposes to increase the fine amount for violations of rules from ₹10 lakh to ₹1 crore for aviation industry players.
- Under the Act, the central government may make rules on several matters such as registration of aircraft, regulating air transport services, and prohibition of flight over any specified area.
- Under the Bill, the central government may cancel the licences, certificates or approvals granted to a person under the Act if the person contravenes any provision of the Act.
- The Act exempted aircrafts belonging to the naval, military, or air forces of the Union.
- The Bill expands this exemption to include aircrafts belonging to any other armed forces other than these three.

Permanent Commission for Women in Indian Navy

Why in News?

- Recently, the Supreme Court upheld the right of serving Short Service Commission (SSC) women officers of the Navy to be granted Permanent Commission (PC) on a par with their male counterparts.
- The judgement also grants pension benefits to retired women officers who were not granted permanent commission.
- The judgment was based on a case filed by 17 women SSC officers who were denied PC and discharged despite completing 14 years of service as SSC officers.
- The verdict comes after the top court had opened the doors for similarly-placed women officers in the Army.

Judgement: The apex court bench headed by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud scrapped the statutory bar on giving permanent commission to women and said that the government cannot discriminate against women.

Major Port Authorities Bill 2020

Why in news?

- Major Port Authorities Bill 2020 was introduced in the Lok Sabha by the minister of state for shipping and it was also approved by the Union Cabinet.
- This Bill will replace the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963 and will empower the Major Ports to perform with greater efficiency on account of full autonomy in decision making and by modernizing the institutional framework of Major Ports.
- The Bill has been prepared after extensive consultation with all the stakeholders and Ministries/ Departments and taking into account the recommendations of PSC.
- The Bill will apply to the major ports of Chennai, Cochin, Jawaharlal Nehru Port, Kandla, Kolkata,

Mumbai, New Mangalore, Mormugao, Paradip, V.O. Chidambaranar, and Vishakhapatnam.

Background

- Earlier, the Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha in 2016 and thereafter referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee (PSC). The PSC, after taking evidence and wide spread consultations, submitted its report in July 2017. Based on this, the Ministry of Shipping introduced the official amendment to the Bill in the Lok Sabha in 2018. However, the Bill got lapsed after the dissolution of 17th Lok Sabha.

Aims of the Bill

- Decentralizing decision making and to infuse professionalism in governance of major ports.
- To impart faster and transparent decision making benefiting the stakeholders and better project execution capability.
- To reorient the governance model in central ports to landlord port model in line with the successful global practice. This will also help in bringing transparency in operations of Major Ports. (In the landlord port model, the publicly governed port authority acts as a regulatory body and as landlord while private companies carry out port operations—mainly cargo-handling activities.)

Salient features of the Bill 2020

- The Bill is more compact in comparison to the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963 as the number of sections has been reduced to 76 from 134 by eliminating overlapping and obsolete Sections.
- The new Bill has proposed a simplified composition of the Board of Port Authority which will comprise of 11 to 13 Members from the present 17 to 19 Members representing various interests. A compact Board with professional independent Members will strengthen decision making and strategic planning.
- Provision has been made for inclusion of representative of State Government in which the Major Port is situated, Ministry of Railways,

Ministry of Defence and Customs, Department of Revenue as Members in the Board apart from a Government Nominee Member and a Member representing the employees of the Major Port Authority.

- Tariff Authority for Major Ports (TAMP) has now been given powers to fix tariff which will act as a reference tariff for purposes of bidding for PPP projects. PPP operators will be free to fix tariff based on market conditions.
- The Board of Port Authority has been delegated the power to fix the scale of rates for other port services and assets including land.
- An Adjudicatory Board has been proposed to be created to carry out the residual function of the erstwhile TAMP for Major Ports, to look into disputes between ports and PPP concessionaires, to review stressed PPP projects and suggest measures to review stressed PPP projects and suggest measures to revive such projects and to look into complaints regarding services rendered by the ports/ private operators operating within the ports would be constituted.
- Under the 1963 Act, all major ports are managed by the respective Board of Port Trusts that have members appointed by the central government. The Bill provides for the creation of a Board of Major Port Authority for each major port. These Boards will replace the existing Port Trusts.
- The Boards of Port Authority have been delegated full powers to enter into contracts, planning and development, fixing of tariff except in national interest, security and emergency arising out of inaction and default. In the present MPT Act, 1963 prior approval of the Central Government was required in 22 instances.
- The Board of each Major Port shall be entitled to create specific master plan in respect of any development or infrastructure established or proposed to be established within the port limits and the land appurtenant thereto and such master plan shall be independent of any local or State Government regulations of any authority whatsoever.

- Provisions of CSR & development of infrastructure by Port Authority have been introduced.
- Provision has been made for safeguarding the pay & allowances and service conditions including pensionary benefits of the employees of major ports and Tariff of Major Ports.

Vidyo App

Why in news?

- The Supreme Court decided to further restrict its functioning on account of the COVID-19 pandemic and resort to the digital mode to maintain social distancing and prevent spread of infection. The court premises would be completely shutdown.
- It was decided that only extremely urgent cases would be taken up by a Bench(es) through a video app.
- The SC Bench led by CJI used its extraordinary powers under Article 142 to lift the limitation period for all cases across tribunals and courts in the country until further notice.
- The cases would be heard through an app called Vidyo.
- Vidyo is a video conferencing application vetted by the National Informatics Centre (NIC). The app developed by a US-based firm was first used by NIC in 1995 to host studio-based video conferencing. In 2009, the app was used for desktop-based video conferencing.

Gairsain

Why in News?

- Uttarakhand Government named Gairsain as the new summer capital of the state, which is used as an administrative capital during extended periods of particularly hot weather.
- With the fresh announcement, there is no clarity whether Dehradun's current status will remain the same or it will be considered as the new winter capital.

Background

- Uttarakhand was carved out as a separate state from Uttar Pradesh in 1998. Those who spearheaded the movement for statehood to Uttarakhand wanted Gairsain to be made its permanent capital.
- However, Dehradun was made the temporary capital of the state as it still houses the chief minister's residence, Raj Bhavan and MLA residences.
- The state Assembly is located in Dehradun but sessions are held in Gairsain as well.

Why Gairsain?

- Statehood activists had long contended that Gairsain, a tehsil in Chamoli district, was best suited to be the capital of the mountainous state as it was a hilly region falling on the border of Kumaon and Garhwal regions.
- It covers a large area suitable for the construction of the capital and accommodating people.
- It is emerging as a tourist place and it is also a part of the major route connecting Garhwal with the Kumaon region.
- It is the site of the source of the Ramganga River which rises near the Dudhatoli Parvat.
- The famous tourist attractions are the Nanda Devi and Valley of Flowers National Parks (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Badrinath, Vasundhara Falls etc.

Court Documents Accessibility to Third Party

Why in News?

- Supreme Court ruled that court documents such as copies of judgments and pleadings can now be obtained by third-parties or those not party to a case.
- The information will be only available after the court rules permit it and not under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005.

- This decision comes a few months after a five-judge bench of SC opened the office of the Chief Justice of India to scrutiny under the RTI Act.

About

- Rule 151 of Gujarat High Court Rules was being upheld, which allows access to certified copies of judgments, orders and pleadings to a third-party, or those not party to a case, only under the order of an officer of the court.
- High courts of Bombay, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madras etc have similar provisions.
- The bench held that the High Court holds the information as a trustee for the litigants in order to adjudicate upon the matter and administer justice.
- Third parties should not be permitted to have open and easy access to such personal information of the litigants or information given by the government in the proceedings because there would be a misuse of the court process and the information to an unmanageable level.
- According to the rules, litigants are entitled to receive copies of documents/judgments, etc on filing of an application with prescribed court fees stamp.
- Third parties are not given copies of judgments and other documents without the assistant registrar's order.
- The registrar, on being satisfied about the reasonable cause for seeking the information/certified copies of the documents, allows access to the documents.

While Right to Information (RTI) Act doesn't prohibit seeking such information, the petitioner sought the information under the statute, instead of the High Court rules. "In the absence of inherent inconsistency between provisions of the Right to Information (RTI) Act & other law, overriding effect of Right to Information (RTI) Act would not apply," the Supreme court held.

Dwar Praday Yojana (Door Delivery System)

Why in news?

- Dwar Praday Yojana is a pilot project that was started in Indore by the State Government of Madhya Pradesh.
- Applicants living within the boundaries of the Indore Municipal Corporation (IMC) get five types of documents — domicile certificate, income certificate, birth certificate, death certificate and copy of Khasra-Khatauni (a land ownership document) — delivered at their home within 24 hours of applying online.
- The administration has engaged a local courier agency, which delivers the documents after collecting them from public service centres.
- The central idea is to improve the government's service delivery mechanism.

Ekam Fest

Why in News?

- The week long exhibition-cum-fair "EKAM Fest" was organised by the National Handicapped Finance Development Corporation (NHFDC) in New Delhi starting from 2 March 2020.
- EKAM Fest is an effort for promoting entrepreneurship and knowledge among the Divyangjan community.
- EKAM stands for Entrepreneurship, Knowledge, Awareness and Marketing.
- It will help in generating awareness among society about Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) entrepreneurs' potential.

National Handicapped Finance Development Corporation

NHFDC was set up in January 1997 as a non-profit company under Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. It provides financial assistance for wide range of income generating activities to disabled persons. The company is managed by Board of Directors nominated by Government of India.

CHAHAL ACADEMY

Status of Institution of National Importance (INI) on 5 more IITs

Why in news?

- The Lok Sabha passed a Bill to confer the status of Institution of National Importance (INI) on 5 more Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIITs).
- The IIITs Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2020 proposed to bring the 5 institutions- located in Surat, Bhopal, Bhagalpur, Agartala and Raichur- under the Indian Institutes of Information Technology (Public-Private Partnership) Act, 2017, similar to the other 15 IITs established under the scheme through public private partnership.
- The status will also help the institutes attract students required to develop a strong research base in information technology.

Passport surrender in contempt cases: SC

Why in news?

- The SC has held that courts are empowered to order parties in a contempt case to surrender their passport in order to ensure their presence in the proceedings.
- In order to ensure the presence of the parties in the contempt proceedings, the court is empowered to pass appropriate orders, including the surrender of passport.
- The court clarified that contemnors would only be depositing their passport with the court.
- The court referred to a 2003 decision in David Jude vs. Hannah Grace Jude, in which the top court directed the Centre to cancel the passport of the contemnor to ensure her appearance before the court on the date of hearing.

Contempt of Courts

- Contempt is anything that curtails the freedom of limits of the judicial proceedings must of

necessity result in hampering of the administration of Law and in interfering with the due course of justice.

- India, under Section 2(a) of the Contempt of Courts Act of 1971 defines contempt of court as civil contempt or criminal contempt, it is generally felt that the existing law relating to contempt of courts is somewhat uncertain, undefined and unsatisfactory.
- The jurisdiction to punish for contempt touches upon two important fundamental rights of the citizens, namely, the right to personal liberty and the right to freedom of expression. It was, therefore, considered advisable to have the entire law on the subject scrutinized by a special committee.

Delimitation Commission for Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, Manipur, Arunachal, Nagaland

Why in news?

- The Ministry of Law constituted a Delimitation Commission, to be headed by former SC judge Ranjana Prakash Desai, to redraw Lok Sabha and assembly constituencies of the UT Jammu and Kashmir and the 4 north-eastern states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland.
- Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra and state election commissioners of Jammu and Kashmir and the four north-eastern states will be the ex-officio members.
- The Commission will delimit the constituencies of Jammu and Kashmir in accordance with the provisions of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, and of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland in accordance with the provisions of the Delimitation Act, 2002.
- According to section 60 of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, the number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of UT of

Jammu and Kashmir shall be increased from 107 to 114.

- Out of these 24 seats are in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. So effectively, the seats will go up from 83 to 90.

Delimitation

A Delimitation Commission was set up under the Delimitation Act, 2002 to readjust the division of each state and union territory into territorial constituencies for the purpose of Lok Sabha and state assembly elections on the basis of census figures of 2001.

Anti-CAA protests

Why in news?

- The Allahabad High Court directed the Lucknow administration to remove all hoardings displaying photos and personal details of those accused of violence during protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act.
- It said the state government's move to put up posters was an "unwarranted interference in the privacy of people" and violative of Article 21 of the Constitution of India.
- The police put up several hoardings across Lucknow identifying those accused of violence during the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in December last, triggering those named to fear for their safety. Later, the Allahabad High Court had taken suo motu notice of this act.
- The placement of personal data of selected persons "reflects colourable exercise of powers" by the government.

Private property

Why in news?

- The Supreme Court has reiterated that forcible dispossession of a person of his/her private property without due process of law is a human right violation.
- In a recent judgment by a Bench led by Justice S.K. Kaul, the court stressed, quoting from its judgments, that right to property is both a human right and a constitutional right — the latter under Article 300A of the Constitution.
- The verdict came on the acquisition of a few acres in Sikkim by the State's Agriculture department in 1980 for building the Progeny Orchard Regional Centre.

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill 2020

Why in news?

- Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill 2020 has been passed by the Parliament.
- The bill seeks to remove bottlenecks and streamline the corporate insolvency resolution process. It aims to provide protection to new owners of a loan defaulter company against prosecution for misdeeds of previous owners.
- The latest changes pertain to various sections of the IBC as well as introduction of a new section.

New CIC

Why in news?

- Information Commissioner Bimal Julka was appointed as the Chief Information Commissioner (CIC). President of India administered the oath of office to Julka as the CIC in the Central Information Commission.
- The transparency watchdog has been functioning without a chief after Sudhir Bhargava retired on 11 January 2020 and is at a reduced strength of six information commissioners, against the sanctioned strength of 11 (including the CIC).

- There is a vacancy of five more information commissioners at the commission after Julka's appointment as the CIC.

Mineral Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2020

Why in news?

- Parliament passed The Mineral Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2020 for amendments in Mines & Mineral (Development and Regulation) Act 1957 and The Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act, 2015.
- The Bill replaces the ordinance for amendment of the MMDR Act 1957 and CMSP Act which was promulgated in January 2020.
- The MMDR Act regulates the overall mining sector in India. The CMSP Act provides for the auction and allocation of mines whose allocation was cancelled by the Supreme Court in 2014.
- This Bill will open a new era in Indian coal & mining sector specially to promote Ease of Doing Business.
- The amended provisions clearly provide that companies which do not possess any prior coal mining experience in India and/or have mining experience in other minerals or in other countries can participate in auction of coal/lignite blocks. This will not only increase participation in coal/lignite block auctions, but also facilitate the implementation of FDI policy in the coal sector.
- The removal of the end use restriction would allow wider participation in auction of coal mines for a variety of purposes such as own consumption, sale or for any other purpose, as may be specified by the Central Government.
- The new provisions will also augment the exploration of the deep seated minerals and minerals of national interest by allowing Non Exclusive Reconnaissance Permit (NERP) holders to apply for composite licence or Mining Lease (PL-cum-ML). Various repetitive and redundant provisions of MMDR Act and CMSP Act have also been omitted for Ease of Doing Business.

Companies Act

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet approved as many as 72 amendments to the Companies Act, including decriminalising various offences, a move which would protect corporates in case of genuine commercial failures.
- The Bill removes criminality under the Act in case of defaults which can be determined objectively and which, otherwise, lack the element of fraud or do not involve larger public interest.
- This Bill furthers ease of living for law-abiding corporates and de-clogs the criminal justice system in the country.
- The Union Cabinet has approved the Companies (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019 to amend the Companies Act, 2013. With the amendments, as many as 23 offences would be re-categorised out of 66 compoundable offences under the Act. Adding to it, seven compoundable offences would also be omitted under the Act.
- Earlier, the Companies (Amendment) Act, 2015 amended certain provisions of the Act to remove difficulties faced in implementation of various provisions of the Act.

ECONOMY

Growth in 8 core sector industries

Why in news?

- According to the data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the eight core sector industries recorded a growth of 5.5% in February, 2020 which is highest in 11-months.
- This spike is because of growth in refinery products, electricity, fertiliser, cement and coal production.

- However, crude oil, natural gas, and steel recorded negative growth rate in February.
- This was the fourth consecutive month when the index of eight core industries reported growth.
- The outlook may not be very bright for March 2020, as the lockdown to check the spread of Covid-19 has disrupted the production process in the country and globally.

Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts Cancels IHGF

Why in news?

- Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) has cancelled the 49th edition of the Indian Handicrafts & Gifts (IHGF) Delhi Fair Spring-2020 in view of present status of COVID-19 in India and abroad.
- Indian Handicrafts & Gifts Fair (IHGF) is Asia's largest gifts & handicrafts trade fair.
- The next (50th) edition of IHGF-Delhi Fair Autumn will be organized from October 14-18 2020 at India Expo Centre & Mart, Greater Noida in Delhi NCR.

RBI measures to deal with COVID-19

Why in news?

- The repo rate has been cut by 75 basis points (bps) from 5.15% to 4.40%.
- The rates have been cut to encourage banks to lend more and to revive growth.
- The reverse repo rate has been cut by 90 bps to 4%.
- The higher reduction in the reverse repo rate was aimed at prompting banks to lend more rather than keeping their excess liquidity with the RBI.
- RBI has also allowed banks to defer payment of Equated Monthly Installments (EMIs) on home, car, personal loans as well as credit card dues for three months till May 31.
- The RBI also allowed lending institutions, banks to defer interest on working capital repayments

by 3 months — a move aimed at addressing the distress among firms as production is down.

- Through measures that pertain to Targeted Long-Term Repo Operations (TLTRO) of up to ₹1 trillion, a 100-bps cut in Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) and easier borrowing requirements under the Marginal Standing Facility (MSF) window.


Easing the burden

The Reserve Bank of India has permitted a three-month deferral on all term loan repayments, even as it moved to inject more liquidity in the system. A look at RBI's moves and observations:

- Repo rate cut by **0.75 percentage points** to 4.4%
- For **all term loans** (home, auto, personal, agricultural, retail and crop loans) outstanding as of March 1, lenders can grant a moratorium, i.e., a **temporary halt**, of three months on payment of instalments
- Instalments include equated monthly instalments, credit card dues, principal or interest payments and bullet payments
- Tenure for such loans will be extended by three months after the moratorium period. This means that the instalments are **deferred but not waived**
- Interest **shall continue** to accrue on the outstanding portion of the term loans during the moratorium. Thus, at the end of three months, the interest will be added to the outstanding loan and that amount **will have to be repaid**
- Tweaks to the cash reserve ratio and marginal standing facility, apart from long-term repo auctions, to inject liquidity of **₹3.74 lakh crore** into the system
- Centre's estimates for **GDP growth for Q4 and the whole year** are now at risk

All lending institutions shall frame policies for providing the relief to eligible borrowers

from pandemic's impact



Features of BIP

- Keeps a regular track on developments with respect to the coronavirus.
- Provides latest information on various central and state government initiatives, and answers and resolves queries through emails and on WhatsApp.
- Includes frequently asked questions on important aspects like locations of COVID-19 testing and other location-specific information.
- Maps and highlights the response mechanism put in place by leading Indian companies such as sanitation of staff vehicles, disabling biometric attendance systems, usage of video-conferencing and tele-conferencing, developing online solutions and other unique initiatives.

Ease the burden of companies

Why in news?

- Ministry of Corporate Affairs has made a series of announcements to ease the burden of companies during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Increase in the threshold for initiation of corporate insolvency from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 1 crore.
- This would prevent small businesses from being dragged into insolvency (inability to pay debts when they are due).
- This would also ease the compliance burden on companies during the coronavirus outbreak.
- A suspension on mandatory filings with the Corporate Affairs Ministry's MCA-21 portal, also additional fees for late filing has been removed.
- A 60 day relaxation in the rule requiring that board meetings be held once every 120 days for the next two quarters.
- The companies would also be exempt from the requirement under the Companies Act that at least one director be in residency in the country for at least 182 days in the year.

Invest India Business Immunity Platform

Why in news?

- Invest India, under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has launched the 'Invest India Business Immunity Platform'.
- The Business Immunity Platform (BIP) is designed as a comprehensive resource to help businesses and investors get real-time updates on India's active response to COVID-19 (Coronavirus).
- Invest India has also announced a partnership with SIDBI (Small Industries Development Bank of India) for responding and resolving queries for MSMEs.
- BIP is an active platform for business issue redressal, operating 24/7, with a team of dedicated sector experts and responding to queries at the earliest.

“Tech For Tribals” program

Why in news?

- Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) has launched a transformational “Tech For Tribals” program in partnership with Institutes of National Importance (INIs) to develop Tribal entrepreneurship.
- Tech For Tribals program aims to transform 5 crore Tribal Entrepreneurs by capacity building and imparting entrepreneurship skills to tribal forest produce gatherers enrolled under the Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana (PMVDY).
- The program will ensure higher success rate of the Tribal Entrepreneurs by enabling and empowering them to run their business with marketable products with quality certifications.
- Under the program trainees will undergo a 30 days training program over six weeks comprising 120 sessions. The Partner institutions will develop course contents relevant to Entrepreneurship in Value Addition and Processing of Forest Produces.
- The course curriculum will include Achievement Motivation and positive psychology, Entrepreneurial Competencies, capacity utilization, Product positioning - Grading / Sorting, Branding, Packaging, etc.

World Consumer Day

Why in news?

- The Ministry of Consumer Affairs observed the World Consumer Day (15th March) by organizing a webinar on, ‘The Sustainable Consumer’.
- Every year 15th March is celebrated as World Consumer Rights Day.
- However, India celebrates 24th December as National Consumer Day every year.
- On this day the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 had received the assent of the President and came into effect.

- The webinar was organized in place of a physical event to maintain social distancing in the wake of COVID19 pandemic.
- The theme for World Consumer Rights Day 2020 is ‘The Sustainable Consumer’.
- The theme aims to focus on the need for sustainable consumption globally, as well as highlighting the important role that consumer rights and protection can play.
- It signifies solidarity in the international consumer movement, demanding that consumer rights are to be respected and protected.
- The event also gives a chance to protest against the market abuses and social injustices which undermine those rights.

World Energy Statistics 2019

Why in news?

- India is the third largest producer of electricity in the world. India was 106th in terms of per capita consumption in 2017.
- It generates 1497 Terawatt-hour (TWh).
- India is also the third largest consumer of electricity in the world after the US and China.
- Electricity is also one of the 8 core industries of India.

Real Time Train Information System

Why in news?

- The Real-time Train Information system is being installed in locomotives to enable better tracking of train movement.
- This real time data of RTIS is also linked with the National Train Enquiry System (NTES).
- The RTIS Project is being executed by the Centre for Railway Information Systems (CRIS) in collaboration with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- RTIS is an example of ‘Make In India’ as it has been entirely designed, developed and manufactured within the country.

APEDA signs MoU with SFAC

Why in news?

- Recently, the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) has signed an Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) to bring in better synergy in the agricultural activities.
- APEDA has been in dialog with SFAC for linking of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), farmers' cooperatives to the export value chain through quality production as per the requirement of importing countries.
- Agri Export Policy announced by Government of India with Farmers' Centric Approach suggests for developing product specific clusters in the country to help improve productivity and quality of the varieties of crops with special involvement of FPOs.
- FPOs are an institutional innovation to help small holders to reduce cost of produce by procuring necessary inputs in bulk at wholesale rates, aggregation of produce and bulk transport reducing marketing cost etc. and extend their reach to modern technology and distant markets.
- The Policy also aims at addressing the obstacles faced by FPOs through organisations like SFAC to expand its network.
- The joint collaboration will enable SFAC and APEDA to reach a large farmer base for improving the production base of agri products quantitatively and qualitatively.
- It will maintain the consistency of supply and establish an image of quality suppliers in the International market leading to increase in export volume and value, contributing indirectly to doubling of farmers' income.

RBI opens dollar-swap window

Why in news?

- The Reserve Bank of India has opened a 6 month US dollar sell-buy swap window to pump liquidity in the foreign exchange market, the first move following financial markets in India and across the globe experiencing turbulence over the spread of COVID-19.
- The central bank conducted US dollar-rupee sell-buy swaps worth USD 2 billion on 16 March 2020, to begin with, in its effort to fight market volatility.
- The swaps would be conducted through the auction route in multiple tranches and the auctions would be multiple price-based, that is, successful bids will be accepted at their respective quoted premiums.
- The central bank also announced long-term repo operations (LTRO) of Rs 1 lakh crore in multiple tranches at the policy rate.
- LTRO is a measure that market participants expect will bring down short-term rates and also boost investment in corporate bonds. These new measures coupled with RBI's earlier introduced 'Operation Twist' are an attempt by the central bank to manage bond yields and push transmission of earlier rate cuts.

Re-capitalization of RRBs

Why in news?

- The Centre has approved a Rs.1340 crore recapitalisation plan for regional rural banks (RRBs) to improve their capital to risk weighted assets ratio (CRAR) during 2020-21, strengthening these institutions that are critical in rural areas.
- On 18 March 2020, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs gave its nod for an outlay of Rs.670 crore as the central share for the scheme on the condition that the release of the

funds will be contingent upon the release of the proportionate share by the sponsor banks.

- This would provide minimum regulatory capital for one more year viz. up to 2020-21 for those RRBs that are unable to maintain the minimum CRAR of 9%.
- This has been an ongoing scheme since 2011.
- The RRBs are required to provide 75% of their total credit as priority sector lending with primary focus on agricultural credit, including small and marginal farmers, as well as micro entrepreneurs and rural artisans.
- At a time of lockdown due to the COVID-19 crisis, financially stronger rural banks could also be crucial to ensuring liquidity in rural areas.

Plan for electronic manufacturing

Why in news?

- In a bid to boost large-scale electronics manufacturing in India, the Union Cabinet approved three schemes, including a production-linked incentive scheme, with a total outlay of almost Rs. 48,000 crore.

About

- The three schemes together will enable large scale electronics manufacturing, a domestic supply chain ecosystem of components and a state of the art infrastructure and common facilities for large anchor units and their supply chain partners on 21 March 2020.
- The schemes are expected to attract new investments worth at least Rs.50,000 crore in the sector, while generating more than 5 lakh direct and 15 lakh indirect jobs.
- The production linked incentive scheme aims to attract large investments in mobile phone manufacturing and specified electronic components, including assembly, testing, marking and packaging (ATMP) units, at a budgetary outlay of Rs.40,995 crore for 5 years.
- The scheme will offer an incentive of 4-6% on incremental sales of goods manufactured in India and is expected to create a total of 8 lakh jobs.

- Domestic value addition for mobile phones is expected to rise to 3540% by 2025 from the current 20—25% due to the impetus provided by the scheme
- For the 'Scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electronics Components and Semiconductors' the outlay has been kept at ₹3285 crore over 8 years and is expected to create about 6 lakh jobs.
- The third scheme, Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC) 2.0, aims at creating quality infrastructure with a minimum area of 200 acres along with industry-specific facilities such as common facility centres, ready-bult factory sheds/plug and play facilities at an outlay of Rs.3762.25 crore over eight years.
- The scheme is expected to create about 10 lakh jobs.

Finance Act

Why in news?

- Parliament passed amendments to the Finance Act, with the introduction of a monetary threshold of Rs. 15 lakh for taxing NRIs, an equalisation levy for e-commerce operators, increased TDS compliance for cash withdrawals by those who have not filed income tax returns for 3 years and a lower rate of tax collected at source (TCS) for remitting education loan money overseas as some of the amendments introduced.
- The government also expanded the ambit of the equalisation levy for non-resident e-commerce operation involved in supply of services, including online sale of goods and provision of services

Kisan Rail

Why in news?

- The government has formed a committee under the Ministry of Agriculture which also includes representatives of the Indian Railways to work out the modalities of 'Kisan Rail'.

- Kisan Rail was proposed to set up through the public-private-partnership (PPP) mode for a cold supply chain to transport perishable goods.
- Nine such refrigerated vans were already available on its network. These vans, with a carrying capacity of 17 tonnes each for transportation of highly-perishable parcel traffic, were developed and procured through the Rail Coach Factory at Kapurthala.

Deadline to bid for Air India extended

Why in news?

- The department of investment and public asset management (DIPAM) declared on 13 March 2020 that it has extended the bidding deadline for Air India Ltd to 30 April 2020. The earlier deadline to submit expression of interest (Eoi) was 17 March 2020.
- The Centre has also extended the last date for the response on queries related to Air India's preliminary information memorandum (PIM) from 16 March to 20 March 2020.
- The extensions come against the backdrop of the COVID-19 outbreak, which has severely hurt the economy, particularly the aviation and tourism sectors, and investment sentiments across the world.
- The spread of the virus to more than 100 countries has hit the travel and hospitality industry the hardest, with countries imposing both inward and outward travel bans.
- The government, which aims to divest its entire stake in Air India, had begun the stake sale process in January 2020 by inviting offers from potential investors, after the failure of a costly turnaround plan and an earlier effort to sell a controlling stake in the national carrier.
- The Centre has also reduced Air India's debt from about ₹56,334 crore to about ₹23,287 crore.
- The cabinet had recently approved an amendment to the foreign direct investment (FDI) policy to permit FDIs of up to 100% in Air India by NRIs under the automatic route.

ROPAX Service

Why in news?

- Union Minister for Shipping inaugurated ROPAX service from Bhaucha Dhakka, Mumbai to Mandwa, Alibag in Maharashtra
- ROPAX service is a 'Water Transport Service Project', under Eastern Waterfront Development.
- ROPAX Vessel M2M -1 can carry 200 cars and 1000 passengers at a time and has a ramp on both sides, hence cars can move in and out of the vessel easily and reduce the turn- around time.
- The benefits of this service include reduction in the travel time, vehicular emission and traffic on the road.
- Mumbai Port Trust has developed ROPAX jetty and terminal facilities at Bhaucha Dhakka (Ferry Wharf) at the cost of Rs 31 Crores. Maharashtra Maritime Board has developed Breakwater, ROPAX jetty and terminal facilities at Mandwa at the cost of Rs 135 Crores.

DA of government employees hiked

Why in news?

- The government hiked the dearness allowance (DA) by 4%. The decision was approved in a cabinet meet on 13 March 2020. This means the dearness allowance has been increased from 17% of basic pay/pension to 21% of basic pay/pension for central government employees and pensioners.
- The move will benefit at least 50 lakh government employees and 65 lakh pensioners. The hike would be effective from January 1. The cost to the exchequer will be ₹14,500 crore.
- DA is a cost of living adjustment allowance paid to government employees, public sector employees and pensioners and is calculated as a

percentage of basic salary to mitigate the impact of inflation.

- It can be basically understood as a component of salary which is some fixed percentage of the basic salary, aimed at hedging the impact of inflation.

Shared economy at \$2 bn by end-2020

Why in news?

- The shared economy in India is estimated to be an about \$2 billion industry by the end of 2020, according to 'Shared Economy — India Story' report by Maple Capital Advisors.
- The 'shared economy' includes segments such as co-working (Awwfis, WeWork India), co-living (Stanza Living, OYO Life, Oxford Caps), shared mobility (Uber, Ola, Shuttli) and furniture rental (Furlenco, Rentomojo.)
- As per the report, with high mobile penetration, high millennial concentration and an aspirational population, Asia has the highest willingness to use shared assets.
- India mirrors Asia trends in these aspects and is thus poised for high growth and adoption of shared services.
- The market size for the co-working sector is pegged at \$500 million, while that for co-living is estimated to be \$400 million, shared mobility at over \$630 million, and furniture rental at \$200 million. The report noted that about \$3.7 billion worth of capital has been infused in India in such services till now, adding that a similar amount is expected to be infused in the next couple of years.
- The report added, "In this era of growing concern on climate, wastage, resource scarcity and population intensity (especially in the developing world), the shared economy seems to be a sustainable, scalable and efficient form of addressing these concerns."

Cocoon production in Karnataka

Why in news?

- After being hit by a mulberry disease, Cocoon production in Karnataka, appears to pick up just in time to meet the growing demand for indigenous silk.
- A recent change in climate in the state coupled with the use of pesticides has brought the disease under control, and most cocoon markets across the State had reported an increase in arrivals.
- Silk imports from China have been badly hit on account of Coronavirus. With no consignment of silk from China reaching the Indian shores for almost two months now, the indigenous silk is expected to bridge the gap.
- Sericulture is an agro-based industry. It is the rearing of silkworms for the production of raw silk.
- The major activities of sericulture comprise food-plant cultivation to feed the silkworms which spin silk cocoons and reeling the cocoons for unwinding the silk filament for value-added benefits such as processing and weaving.
- There are five major types of silk of commercial importance, obtained from different species of silkworms. These are Mulberry, Oak Tasar & Tropical Tasar, Muga and Eri.
- Out of the above muga silk with its golden yellow glitter is unique and prerogative of India.
- South India is the leading silk producing area of the country and is also known for its famous silk weaving enclaves like Kancheepuram, Dharmavaram, Arni, etc.

Rename Mumbai Central station as Nana Shankarseeth Terminus

Why in news?

- Maharashtra Assembly unanimously passed the proposal to rename Mumbai Central station as Nana Shankarseeth Terminus.

- Jagannath Shankarseth was an industrialist and educationist in the early 19th Century. He was one of the first directors of India's first railway company.

Integrated Project for Source Sustainability and Climate Resilient Rain-Fed Agriculture

Why in news?

- The Government of India, Government of Himachal Pradesh and the World Bank signed a US\$80 million loan agreement to improve water management practices and increase agricultural productivity in selected Gram Panchayats (Village Councils) in Himachal Pradesh, a mountain state richly endowed with natural resources.
- The Integrated Project for Source Sustainability and Climate Resilient Rain-Fed Agriculture in Himachal Pradesh will be implemented in 428 Gram Panchayats in 10 districts benefiting over 400,000 smallholder farmers, women and pastoral communities.
- The project will improve upstream water sources in forests, pastures and grasslands and ensure sufficient water is available for sustainable agriculture both in Himachal Pradesh and in downstream states.
- Enhancing the climate resilience of agriculture and its allied activities is a key component of the project for which efficient use of water is the focal point. The project will set up hydrological monitoring stations to monitor the water quality and quantity. This will not only help lay the foundation for future water budgeting through better land use and agricultural investments, but also ensure more holistic catchment area treatment (CAT) plans that are based on source sustainability, carbon sequestration, and water quality.

Solar rooftop installations

Why in news?

- To achieve renewable power generation goals, Gujarat has topped the list in the installations of solar rooftop plants across the country with about 50,915 systems being fixed on domestic rooftops in the State as on 2 March 2020. Maharashtra follows with 5,513 installations as on the same date.
- Of 79,950 systems installed across the country, Gujarat has topped with 64 per cent or two-thirds of total domestic solar rooftop installations.
- The State government has adopted a solar rooftop scheme — Surya Gujarat — to cover about eight lakh domestic electricity consumers under the scheme by 2022. The State government has also allotted ₹912 crore for the scheme.

E-marketing of products made by Self Help Groups (SHGs)

Why in news?

- Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) under Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs signed MoU with Amazon for e marketing of products made by Self Help Groups (SHGs) across the country in urban areas.
- With an underlying narrative of women empowerment, the collaboration aims to provide access to wider customer base for products made by SHGs and strengthening the mission of creating sustainable livelihoods in urban areas.
- The Mission has also undertaken similar collaboration with Flipkart recently. These collaborations are part of the key initiatives for the 2nd edition of Shehri Samridhi Utsav to be organised from March 28 to April 12, 2020.
- By promoting the products made by SHGs, the initiative will be helpful in documenting and

preserving the unique traditional art and crafts of different states.

- DAY-NULM is a flagship programme of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to reduce poverty and vulnerability of the urban poor households by enabling them to access gainful self-employment and skilled wage employment opportunities, resulting in an appreciable improvement in their livelihoods on a sustainable basis, through building strong grassroots level institutions of the poor.

Falling crude oil prices

Why in news?

- Oil prices crashed after a price war was initiated between Saudi Arabia and Russia, two of the world's largest oil producers.

OPEC-Plus alliance

- After 2014 "glut" diplomacy which brought down prices below USD 30 a barrel, Saudi Arabia and Russia came together to cut output and steady prices. Known as the OPEC Plus arrangement (Russia is not a member of the OPEC), this alliance kept production lower and pumped up the prices.
- This alliance collapsed in March 2020 after Russia rejected a Saudi Arabia request to affect more cuts in output given the fall in demand owing to the economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak.

What do Saudis want?

- As it was clear that Russia was not ready to cut its output further, the Saudis moved to the attack mode.
- The plan is to flood the markets with Saudi Oil and depress the prices, which would hurt all oil exporters.
- Falling crude oil prices, lower food prices and weak demand led to moderation in inflationary trend. Retail inflation based on CPI slowed to 6.58% in February 2020, while the industrial production growth as measured in the Index of

Industrial Production (IIP) quickened to 2% in January 2020 amid subdued performance by the manufacturing sector.

SOCIETY AND HEALTH

Gender Social Norms Index

Why in news?

- Gender Social Norms Index has been released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
- This index measures how social beliefs obstruct gender equality in areas like politics, work, and education, and contains data from 75 countries, covering over 80 percent of the world's population.
- This Index sheds light on why enormous "power gaps" still exist between men and women despite real progress closing gender inequalities in basic areas like education and health.
- This is because while men and women vote at similar rates, only 24 percent of parliamentary seats worldwide are held by women and there are only 10 female heads of government out of 193 Member States.
- Furthermore, women are paid less than men working the same jobs and are much less likely to be in senior positions.
- The report maintained that "there is no country in the world with gender equality."
- According to the index, about half of the world's men and women feel that men make better political leaders, and over 40 percent feel that men make better business executives and that men have more right to a job when jobs are scarce. 28 percent think it is justified for a man to beat his wife.
- Information is also available on how bias is changing in around 30 countries. It shows that while in some countries there have been improvements, in others, attitudes appear to have worsened in recent years, signaling that progress cannot be taken for granted.

- 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+25), the most visionary agenda on women's empowerment to date.
- UNDP is calling on governments and institutions to use a new generation of policies to change these discriminatory beliefs and practices through education, and by raising awareness and changing incentives.
- World leaders to accelerate action to meet global targets on gender equality.

Operation Namaste

Why in news?

- Indian Army has code-named its anti-COVID-19 campaign as Operation Namaste to help the government in its fight against the pandemic.
- Soldiers are advised to follow the lockdown, wherever they do not have any operational role, and stay fit. They are assured that their families will be well taken care of.
- Leave extension of those on leave as well as curtailment of leave to bare minimum have been imposed.
- Segregation facilities have been set up to observe troops already back from leave from various states.
- So far six quarantine facilities at Manesar, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Chennai, Hindan and Mumbai have been established where 1,463 people evacuated from coronavirus-affected countries have been accommodated.
- The forces are setting up more such facilities at Kolkata, Visakhapatnam, Kochi, Dundigal, Bengaluru, Kanpur, Jaisalmer, Jorhat and Gorakhpur which can be ready within 72 hours, if needed.
- 28 Armed Forces hospitals have been earmarked as COVID hospitals.
- These hospitals will include armed forces patients as well as civilian patients transferred from state health authorities.
- Five hospitals from the Army, Navy and the Air Force are conducting coronavirus tests using

the RT-PCR methodology and more hospitals will be equipped soon with the resources.

- 62 Cantonment Boards have been instructed to identify beds in hospitals and health centres and guesthouses for any eventuality.

United Nations released the World Happiness Report

Why in news?

- United Nations released the World Happiness Report has been released on World happiness Day (20 March), assigned by the UN General Assembly in 2012.

About

- Report ranks 156 countries by how happy their citizens perceive themselves to be.
- The rankings are based on polling (Gallup World Poll) which looks at six variables: GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom, generosity, and absence of corruption.
- The 2020 Report for the first time ranked cities around the world by their subjective well-being and looked into how the social, urban and natural environments combine to affect happiness.

Key Highlights

- Finland is ranked as the world's happiest nation for the third consecutive year.
- Nordic states dominated the top 10, along with countries such as Switzerland, New Zealand and Austria.
- Luxembourg edged into the 10th spot for the first time this year.
- The countries at the bottom are those afflicted by violent conflicts and extreme poverty, with Zimbabwe, South Sudan and Afghanistan classified as the world's least happy nations.

India

- India, previously ranked at 140 dropped to 144.
- Its rank is way lower than its neighbours. Nepal is ranked 92, Pakistan is at 66, Bangladesh at 107 and Sri Lanka at 130.
- India is a new entrant to the bottom-fifteen group.

New Regulatory Bodies to cover traditional medicines

Why in news?

- Rajya Sabha passed the National Commission for Indian Systems of Medicine (NCIM) Bill, 2019 and the National Commission for Homeopathy Bill, 2019 for setting up separate commissions for Indian traditional systems of medicine and homoeopathy respectively.
- The National Commission for Indian Systems of Medicine (NCIM) Bill, 2019 seeks to replace the existing regulator Central Council for Indian Medicine (CCIM) with a new body to ensure transparency.
- Whereas, the National Commission for Homeopathy Bill, 2019, aims to replace the Central Council for Homeopathy, which is the current regulatory body for homeopathy.

Ayush Wellness Centre to come under NAM

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet has approved the inclusion of the AYUSH Health and Wellness Centre (AYUSH HWC) component of Ayushman Bharat in the National AYUSH Mission (NAM).
- The proposal entails an expenditure of Rs.3,399.35 crore — Rs.2,209.58 crore as Central share and Rs.1189.77 crore as State share- for operationalization of AYUSH HWCs within a period of 5 years (from financial years 2019-20 and 2023-24)

- The move is aimed at establishing a holistic wellness model based on Ayush principles and practices focusing on preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative healthcare by integration with the existing public health care system.
- The National Health Policy 2017 had advocated mainstreaming the potential of AYUSH systems (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-rigpa and Homoeopathy) within a pluralistic system of integrative healthcare.

Organ Donation

Why in News?

- Maharashtra surpassed Tamil Nadu and Telangana and became the top performer in the field of organ donation.
- Sensitisation drives and the meticulous efforts of Regional Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation – State Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (ROTTO-SOTTO) along with four Zonal Transplant Coordination Centres (ZTCCs) are important contributing factors behind this achievement.
- The Ministry of Health and Family welfare has established National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO) at National level, State Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (SOTTO) in States and Regional Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (ROTTO) at regional level.
- Organ Transplantation and Donation is permitted by law, and covered under the "Transplantation of Human Organs Act 1994", which has allowed organ donation by live & Brain-stem Dead donors.
- In 2011, amendment of the Act also brought in donation of human tissues, thereby calling the Amended Act "Transplantation of Human Organs & Tissues Act 2011".

Divya Kala Shakti: Witnessing the Abilities in Disabilities

Why in news?

- The first ever regional event “Divya Kala Shakti: Witnessing the Abilities in Disabilities” was organized in Chennai (Tamil Nadu) by the National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Multiple Disabilities (Divyangjan), Chennai in collaboration with Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India .
- It is a cultural event which provided a wider and unique platform to showcase the potential of Persons with Differently Abled in the field of performing art, music, dance, acrobatics etc.
- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment had organized the event at national level on 18 April and 23 July 2019.
- About 98 children and youth with different disabilities from the Southern region participated in the event. They performed dance, music, etc. in classical, folk and modern style. This event also included for the first time Yoga and Acrobatics.

International Women’s Day (IWD) 2020

Why in news?

- The Ministries of Women and Child Development, Information & Broadcasting and other Ministries of Govt. of India like Health & Family Welfare (H&FW), Human Resource Development (HRD), Agriculture & Farmer’s Welfare (A&FW), Rural Development (RD), Housing and Urban Affairs (HUA), Finance, Defence and Home launched a campaign to observe International Women’s Day (IWD) 2020 on 8 March 2020.
- The campaign had a theme for all the days beginning from 1 March, 2020. The themes that were observed: education, health and nutrition,

empowerment of women, skills & entrepreneurship and participation in sports, special circumstances, rural women & agriculture and urban women.

- Doordarshan also organised special programmes to commemorate the contribution of women members of the Indian Constituent Assembly to honour their contribution in the foundation of the Indian Republic.
- The Ministry of Panchayati Raj has directed all the States and Union Territories to organise Special Gram Sabhas and Mahila Sabhas (Women’s Assemblies) in all Gram Panchayats on the International Women’s Day.
- Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), Hyderabad also celebrated International Women’s Day.
- Prime Minister of India marked International Women’s Day by handing over control of his social media accounts to seven women achievers.
- It has been declared on this Day that the Centre would make it mandatory for sanitary napkin companies to provide bio-degradable disposal bags from January 2021.
- In fact, Scotland has moved to become the first nation to make tampons and pads free. The Scottish parliament passed the Period Products (Free Provision) Scotland Bill on 25 February 2020 that would ensure free universal access to tampons, pads and other menstrual products, in a huge stride for the global movement against period poverty.
- To acknowledge Women’s achievements, the Government of India conferred Nari Shakti Puraskars on eminent women and institutions in recognition of their service towards the cause of women empowerment by the President of India on 8 March 2020.
- According to the United Nations Women, the theme for International Women’s Day 2020 is “Generation Equality: Realizing Women’s Rights”.
- Earlier, it was called National woman’s day and was acknowledged by the U.S. on February 28, 1909.

- National Women's Day was recognised as International Women's Day only in 1910 after German women's rights activist Clara Zetkin suggested at an International Conference.
- It was on this day that women in Soviet Russia gained the right to vote in 1917, hence March 8 was declared a national holiday for them. The United Nations General Assembly invited member states to proclaim March 8 as the UN Day for women's rights and world peace in 1977.

Malnutrition among urban poor women

Why in news?

- Poor women in urban areas were shorter, thinner and more anaemic as compared to those from higher wealth categories, according to a recent study.
- It analyses data from two rounds of the Demographic Health Survey conducted during 2005-2006 (DHS-3) and 2015-16 (DHS -4).
- The study also examines the socio-economic characteristics of urban poor mothers and finds that 49.3% of them were married before the age of 18 years as compared to 31.2% of all urban mothers, a quarter or more of the mothers among the urban poor were from the Scheduled Castes households as compared to 17% to 18% among all urban mothers and less than 40% of them in DHS-4 had a BPL card.
- The study proposes a greater focus on urban poor women while extending nutrition services as well as screening for anaemia. It also calls for a need to evolve new methods to ensure improved coverage of government schemes in urban areas as frontline health workers (ASHAS and Anganwadi workers) active in rural areas are unable to deliver results in cities because of various reasons, including higher population density. The study also harps on the need to ensure access to nutritious foods and counselling services and criticises the government for failing to address challenges of overweight and obesity in its National Nutrition

Mission as the urban population and especially the poor are at a greater risk.

Workplace safety

Why in news?

- According to a report released by Network of Women in Media, India (NWMII), over 70% of respondents who had approached an internal committee to report sexual harassment at the workplace were not completely satisfied with the outcome.
- The survey found that 36% of all respondents reported having experienced sexual harassment at the workplaces. Of the respondents who experienced such harassment at work, 53% did not report it to anyone.
- A small percentage made a report to the internal committee (IC) of their media houses. But 70% of those who made a complaint were not completely satisfied with the outcome.
- Among the women who said that their organisation did not have a mechanism to deal with sexual harassment, 47% had faced sexual harassment.
- In terms of the kinds of harassment experienced by the respondents, the most common were sexist comments, unwelcome sexual jokes, embarrassing gestures or body language, attempts to establish unwanted romantic and/or sexual relationships, and pestering for dates.

Mahua-based alcoholic drink

Why in news?

- A new alcoholic beverage is likely to be introduced by the government for the first time in the Indian market. The beverage is mahua-based and is named Mahua Nutribeverage. This is the first time that the Ministry of Tribal Affairs is getting into bottling and sale of alcoholic beverages.
- It has been developed by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi in collaboration with the

Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED). The marketing is being undertaken under the Van Dhan Vikas Karyakram.

- According to the report, the beverage is likely to be available in the market by April 2020. Priced at around Rs 700, the drink will have six fruit-based flavours and the quantity will be 750 ml. The report said that alcohol content is comparatively low at 5 per cent and the drink has a high nutritional value.

SC, ST student enrolment in Ph.D. Programmes

Why in news?

- According to HRD Ministry that enrolment of students from marginalised communities, mainly the Scheduled Castes (SC) and the Scheduled Tribes (ST), was abysmally low in Ph.D. programmes in the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) from 2015 to 2019.
- Of the 25,007 Ph.D. scholars admitted in the 23 IITs over the five-year period, only 9.1% were from the SC communities and 2.1% from the STs. This is lower than the 15% seats reserved for the former and 7.5% for the latter.
- Those from the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) made up 23.2%, which is also lower than the reservation-mandated 27%. Nearly two-thirds of the admissions (65.6%) went to general category students.
- Though the total enrolment in Ph.D. programmes went up by 20% during the period, this increase did not result in a corresponding rise in the number of students from the two communities.

Zero Discrimination Day

Why in news?

- Every year Zero Discrimination Day is observed on 1 March. It is observed by the United Nations AIDS Programme.

- It was first observed in 2014 after UNAIDS launched its Zero Discrimination Campaign on World AIDS Day in December 2013.
- 2020 Theme: Zero Discrimination against Women and Girls

Deficits in the government school infrastructure

Why in news?

- The Parliamentary standing committee on Human Resource Development (HRD) report revealed that only 56% of schools have electricity, with the lowest rates in Manipur and Madhya Pradesh, where less than 20% have access to power.
- As per UDISE survey, Less than 57% of schools have playgrounds, including less than 30% of schools in Odisha and Jammu and Kashmir.
- In 2020-2021 demand for grants, there was a 27% cut from proposals made by the School Education Department in the Budgetary allocations.
- Dismal rate of progress in building classrooms, labs and libraries to strengthen government higher secondary schools would alienate students from government schools.
- Out of 2,613 sanctioned projects for 2019-20, only three had been completed in the first nine months of the financial year.
- In government higher secondary schools, out of 1021 sanctioned, not a single additional classroom had been built by December 31, 2019.
- Against sanctioned funds for 1,343 labs, only three laboratories had been built.
- In the case of libraries, art/craft culture rooms, none had been built yet despite a sanctioned target of 135 and 74 respectively.
- Overall, for the core Samagra Shiksha Scheme, the department had only spent 71% of revised estimates by December 31, 2019.

Hydroxychloroquine combination allowed

Why in news?

- The Union Health Ministry has allowed the use of Hydroxychloroquine in combination with Azithromycin under close monitoring for patients with severe disease and requiring ICU management as per the revised Guidelines on Clinical Management of COVID-19.
- Hydroxychloroquine was previously under testing and was allowed to be administered only to doctors and caregivers in direct contact with COVID-19 positive cases.
- The Health Ministry has noted that no specific antiviral has been proven to be effective as per currently available data. However, based on the available information (uncontrolled clinical trials), the following drugs may be considered.

UltraViolet (UV) sanitiser

Why in news?

- Industrial Design Centre (IDC) of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Bombay has developed a portable UltraViolet (UV) sanitiser.
- It can sterilise wallets, purses and other small items that are passed on from hand to hand.
- The UV sanitiser has been made using stainless steel kitchen containers and aluminium mesh and is in the proof-of-concept stage right now.
- Its design is based on a study published in a journal PubMed, by the US National Library of Medicine.
- The study demonstrates how ultraviolet C light can inactivate Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus, Crimean-Congo

Haemorrhagic Fever (CCHF) Virus and Nipah Virus.

- Objects might be carriers of the viruses and sanitising gel cannot be used on every object humans come in contact with like papers, files, currency notes and phones.

Wheat variety MACS 4028

Why in news?

- Scientists from Agharkar Research Institute (ARI), Pune, have developed a biofortified durum wheat variety MACS 4028.
- ARI Pune is an autonomous institute under the Department of Science & Technology, Government of India.
- Biofortified durum MACS 4028 wheat variety shows high protein content of about 14.7%, better nutritional quality having zinc 40.3 ppm, and iron content of 40.3 ppm and 46.1 ppm respectively, good milling quality and overall acceptability.
- MACS 4028, is a semi-dwarf variety, which matures in 102 days and has shown the superior and stable yielding ability of 19.3 quintals per hectare.
- It is resistant to stem rust, leaf rust, foliar aphids, root aphids, and brown wheat mite.
- The MACS 4028 variety is also included by the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) programme for United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to alleviate malnutrition in a sustainable way and can boost the Vision 2022 "Kuposhan Mukh Bharat", the National Nutrition Strategy.
- The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has also tagged this variety under the Biofortified category during the year 2019.
- MACS 4028 has been notified by the Central Sub-Committee on Crop Standards, Notification and Release of Varieties for Agricultural Crops (CVRC) for timely sown, rainfed condition of Peninsular Zone, comprising Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Test kits for COVID-19

Why in news?

- Test kits for COVID-19 developed by the Pune-based MyLab Discovery Solutions and Germany's Altona Diagnostics have been approved by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).
- The two companies have also received approval to mass manufacture the kits after they received commercial approval from the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO).
- Currently, the diagnostic kits to test people for COVID-19 are imported from the USA.
- Earlier, the kits approved by the United States Food and Drugs Administration or certified by the European Union were allowed to offer commercial tests for detecting SARS CoV-2.
- However, ICMR stated that it is no longer a requirement and even those approved by the National Institute of Virology (NIV) would be eligible for testing.
- The developed kit detects the infection within two and half hours compared to over seven hours taken by current protocol.

Whiteflies-resistant variety of cotton

Why in news?

- National Botanical Research Institute (NBRI), Lucknow has developed a whiteflies-resistant variety of cotton.
- Whiteflies are one of the top ten devastating pests in the world that damage more than 2000 plant species and also function as vectors for some 200-plant viruses.
- Cotton is one of the worst-hit crops by whiteflies. As two-third of the cotton crop was destroyed by the whiteflies in Punjab in 2015.

Nanocomposite coatings

Why in News?

- A group of scientists at the International Advanced Research Centre for Powder

Metallurgy & New Materials (ARCI), an autonomous R&D center of the Department of Science & Technology (DST) have developed a process for size-selective deposition of nanocomposite coatings.

- Nanocomposite coatings are formed by mixing two or more dissimilar materials at nanoscale to improve the physical, chemical and physicochemical properties of the new materials.
- The scientists have found that nickel tungsten-based coatings with infusion of particular sized Silicon Carbide (SiC) submicron particles using a pulsed electroplating can provide an excellent combination of wear and corrosion resistance.

Coating to save steel from rusting

Why in news?

- A team from the Indian Institute of Technology (Indian School of Mines), Dhanbad, and Ohio State University has created a superhydrophobic coating to save steel from rusting.
- The coating was made from polyurethane and silicon dioxide nanoparticles.

Iron Rain on WASP-76b

Why in News?

- Wasp-76b, an exoplanet (planet outside the solar system), probably has iron raining on it.
- Wasp-76b orbits so close to its host star that its dayside temperatures exceed 2,400 degrees Celsius - hot enough to vaporise metals like iron.
- The planet's nightside, on the other hand, is 1,000 degrees cooler, allowing those metals to condense and rain out.
- Wasp-76b is a huge gas planet that is twice the width of Jupiter. Its name comes from the UK-led Wasp telescope system that detected it in 2016.

- It is 640 light-years from the Earth and is so close to its star that it takes just 43 hours to complete one revolution.
- Another of the planet's interesting features is that it always presents the same face to the star - a behaviour scientists call being "tidally locked". Earth's Moon does exactly the same thing.

Successful Trails in Treating Drug-Resistant TB

Why in News?

- Recently, a small trial was undertaken to test the safety and efficacy of a few oral drugs against the extensively drug-resistant TB (XDR-TB) and multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB).
- The trial showed encouraging results with a success rate of 90%.
- The favourable results held true regardless of the HIV status of the patients.
- The trial (Nix-TB) tested three oral drugs namely bedaquiline, pretomanid and linezolid in patients with XDR-TB and MDR-TB.

Bulk Drug parks

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet has approved a scheme for promotion of bulk drug parks with a financial assistance of Rs. 3,000 crore for the next 5 years
- It has also approved a Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for promotion of domestic manufacturing of critical drug Intermediates and active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) with a financial assistance of of Rs. 6,940 crore for the next 8 years
- Government will give grant-in-aid to States with a maximum limit of Rs. 1000 crore per bulk drug park, which will have common facilities such as solvent recovery plant, power and steam units, common effluent treatment plant etc.

- The bulk drugs parks scheme is expected to reduce the manufacturing cost of bulk drugs in the country.
- It will also bring down the dependency on other countries for such drugs.
- The Production Linked Incentive Scheme will lead to expected incremental sales of Rs. 46,400 crore and significant additional employment generation over 8 years.

Fish eating Neanderthals

Why in news?

- Neanderthals were feeding regularly on mussels, fish and other marine life over 80,000 years ago, according to a study which suggests it was not just the modern humans who sourced food from the sea.
- The study, published in the journal Science, found the first robust evidence during an excavation in the cave of Figueira Brava in Portugal.

Fossils of a fearsome dinosaur unearthed

Why in news?

- Scientists have unearthed fossils of a fearsome feathered dinosaur in northwestern New Mexico that was a quick and agile predator.
- Dineobellator notohesperus, dating back to 67 million years, could chase down smaller prey or swarm larger prey in packs.

Pi Day

Why in news?

- Pi Day is celebrated on March 14 dedicated to Pi (Greek letter π). The idea originated in the United States, where the convention is to write dates in a format that expresses March 14 as 3/14. These three digits match the value of pi up to two decimal places, at 3.14.

- By definition, pi is the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter. Pi is also the area of a circle divided by the square of its radius. The ratio is always constant.
- Pi is an irrational number, it is denoted by a symbol ' π '.
- Pi has its use in geometry, trigonometry, physics, astronomy and other sciences.

New Test with Quantum Coins & Computers for Quantum Sensing

Why in News?

- Researchers from the Raman Research Institute (RRI) (autonomous institution under the Department of Science & Technology) have devised a new test for fairness of quantum coin or qubit using entanglement theory.
- The test uses entanglement to test the fairness of the quantum coin. Their strategy enables better discrimination between quantum states. Such an advantage is valuable in quantum sensors
- This is a significant contribution to quantum state discrimination and an essential aspect of quantum information science which is expected to influence quantum sensing.

Ink to curb fake printing of passports and counterfeiting of currency notes

Why in news?

- The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)-National Physical Laboratory has developed a bi-luminescent security ink which glows in red and green colours when illuminated by two different excitation sources.
- The ink was given to Bank Note Press (BNP), Dewas, a unit of Security Printing Minting Corporation of India Ltd. (SPMCIL), New Delhi.
- The formulation can be used to check the authenticity of passports, Government documents, tamper evident labels, identity cards, etc.

Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System

Why in news?

- Department of Space (DoS) has reported that Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has designed NavIC messaging system and developed a NavIC receiver and the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information System (INCOIS) is using this messaging system to broadcast emergency warning messages like cyclone, tsunami and high waves as and when it occurs and also for broadcasting of information of Potential Fishing Zone (PFZ).
- DoS have reported that ISRO has transferred this technology to five industries in India to manufacture the receivers. The Fisheries Department of various coastal States have been made aware of this technology for the fishermen community.
- ISRO has distributed about 250 units each to the State Fisheries Department of Kerala and Tamil Nadu for the use of fishermen. ISRO also has proactively conducted trials for fishermen of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Distribution of NAVIC has to be implemented by the Department of Fisheries of the respective State Governments.

Sanitizer without harmful chemicals

Why in news?

- Amid rising cases of fake sanitisers in the market following increasing demand for such products due to the coronavirus scare, scientists at CSIR-Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology (CSIR-IHBT) based in Palampur, Himachal Pradesh, have developed a new type of hand sanitiser.
- The natural flavours, active tea constituents and alcohol content in this hand-sanitiser have been used as per the guidelines of the World Health Organisation (WHO). One of the special things is that chemicals like parabens, triclosan, synthetic fragrance and phthalates have not been used in this product.

Biofuel from microorganisms

Why in news?

- Researchers at the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB) are developing a method to improve the growth rate and sugar content of a marine microorganism called *Synechococcus* sp. PCC 7002.
- By this, biofuel sector could get a boost. Most biotechnological processes, including biofuel production, are dependent on the availability of low-cost and sustainable supply of sugars and a nitrogen source. The sugars typically come from plants. Plants utilize light energy through the process of photosynthesis.
- Some bacteria, such as the cyanobacteria (blue-green algae), too can perform photosynthesis and produce sugar by fixing the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The yield of sugars from cyanobacteria could potentially be much higher than that of land-based crops. Further, unlike plant-based sugars, cyanobacterial biomass provides a nitrogen source in the form of proteins.
- Cyanobacteria are found in both fresh and marine waters. Using marine cyanobacteria could be better as freshwater is increasingly getting scarce.
- A team from ICGEB has successfully engineered a marine cyanobacterium called *Synechococcus* sp. PCC 7002 which showed a higher growth rate and sugar (glycogen) content. When grown on air, the growth was doubled and the glycogen content of the cells increased by about 50%.
- *Synechococcus* sp. PCC 7002 is a model marine cyanobacterium.

Low-cost flow-diverter stent developed

Why in news?

- The research team of Sree Chitra Thirunal Institute of Medical Science and Technology (SCTIMST), has developed an innovative

intracranial flow diverter sent for the treatment of aneurysm of the blood vessels of the brain.

- Intracranial aneurysm or brain aneurysm is a localised ballooning, bulging or dilation of arteries in the brain caused by progressive weakening of the inner muscles of the wall of the blood vessels.
- The spontaneous rupture of the aneurysm can result in bleeding into the space around the brain resulting condition called a subarachnoid Haemorrhage (SAH). SAH can lead to paralysis, coma or death.
- The Chitra flow diverter is designed to have better grip on the walls of arteries of complex shapes in order to reduce the risk of migration of the device.

ICONSAT 2020 in Kolkata

Why in news?

- The International Conference on NanoScience and NanoTechnology (ICONSAT) 2020 was organized during 5-7 March 2020 at Kolkata under the aegis of Nano Mission, Department of Science and Technology (DST).
- ICONSAT is the series of biennial international conferences that intends to bring out cutting-edge developments in the domain of physical, chemical, materials as well as biological sciences with the help of nanotechnology.
- The event emphasised on 5Ms – Mechanical, Material, Machines, Manufacturing and Manpower, and integration of these 5 Ms with nano-science and technology.
- It also aimed to integrate nanotechnology with sustainable development and new technology (machine learning, artificial intelligence and so on).
- It emphasized the need to create a network of experts in nano-science and to collaborate the knowledge across sectors like energy, agriculture, transport, health and so on.
- It also aims to provide a potential platform for young researchers and students from within the country and abroad to keep pace with the latest

development in the emerging areas of Nano Science and Technology.

Bacteria that can replace fertilizers & fungicides in tea plants

Why in news?

- Researchers at Institute of Advanced Study in Science and Technology (IASST) Guwahati, an autonomous institute under Department of Science & Technology, have found significant plant-growth-promoting and antifungal activities of endophyticactino bacteria associated with Tea plant and related genera, Eurya to find potent plant growth-promoting strains. Application of endophytic Actinobacteria could reduce chemical inputs in Tea plantation.
- IASST isolated 46 endophyticactino bacteria (predominantly free-living microorganisms) found in diverse environments that lives within a plant for at least part of its life cycle without causing apparent disease associated with Tea plants and characterized through molecular techniques. Out of 46 isolates, 21 isolates inhibited the growth of at least one test fungal phytopathogens and strains SA25 and SA29 exhibited broad-spectrum antifungal activity.
- Tea (*Camellia sinensis*) plays an important role in the Indian economy as a major portion of the tea produced is exported. However, in the recent years, due to higher demand of chemical residue-free made tea by the importing countries has led to a decline in the export of tea. The present study attempts the use of endophyticactino bacteria having plant beneficial characteristics to reduce and replace the use of chemical inputs in the tea industry.

Fuel Cell Technology for Disaster Management

Why in news?

- Scientists at International Advanced Research for Powder Metallurgy & New Materials (ARCI),

Hyderabad, an autonomous R&D Centre of Department of Science and Technology (DST) have developed Polymer Electrolyte Membrane fuel cells (PEMFC).

- PEMFC, in its entirety, have an advantage of operational capability at low-temperatures with applications in decentralised power generation systems.
- ARCI is now planning to set up a PEMFC system up to 10 kW capacity at Tamil Nadu State Emergency Operation Centre (TN SEOC) to operate the systems like early warning systems, VHF set, IP phone, BSNL Ethernet and office equipment like scanner, computers, printers, phone, FAX and normal requirements like lighting and fan.

MicroRNAs are made in plants

Why in news?

- Researchers from National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bengaluru, and SASTRA University, Thanjavur, have discovered how small molecules called microRNAs are made in plants.
- This finding makes it much easier for studying processes in plants. MicroRNAs are small molecules, about 21 nucleotides long, and help in controlling the levels of proteins in the cell. The research was published in the journal Nucleic Acids Research.
- All aspects of growth and development of plants, whether it is initiation of flowering or control and distribution of hormones in response to external stress, are regulated at various levels in the cell. Such regulation is always mediated by proteins – the work horses of the cells. At one level, regulation of the processes is about controlling the amount of specific proteins being made in the cells. This is achieved by the microRNAs.
- In order to decrease the level of a particular protein in specific cells, the microRNAs destroy the messenger RNA molecules that help with the production of that specific protein in the cell. This process is called the silencing of the messenger RNA. The microRNA that achieve

this silencing are evolutionarily conserved – that is, they are found in all flowering plants, whether they are mosses or roses.

- Similarly, the best way to study the effect of a gene in the DNA is to silence or “knockout” the gene. Knocking out a gene does not mean removing the entire gene. In knocking out processes, those RNA that induce the gene to produce proteins are destroyed or their levels are reduced by the microRNA as described earlier.

RAISE 2020

Why in news?

- The Government of India (GoI) announced the mega event, RAISE 2020- ‘Responsible AI for Social Empowerment 2020,’ to be held from 11-12 April 2020 in New Delhi. It is India's first Artificial Intelligence summit to be organized by the Government in partnership with Industry & Academia.
- The summit will be a global meeting of minds to exchange ideas and charter a course to use AI for social empowerment, inclusion and transformation in key areas like Healthcare, Agriculture, Education and Smart Mobility amongst other sectors.
- During session, the Government also launched the AI-Startup Challenge and the event website as a part of championing the AI movement in India.
- RAISE 2020 is a first of its kind, global meeting of minds on Artificial Intelligence to drive India's vision and roadmap for social empowerment, inclusion and transformation through responsible AI. The event will start with a Startup Challenge – Pitchfest followed by the two-day summit, organized by Government of India along with Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology will witness robust participation from global industry leaders, key opinion makers, Government representatives and academia.

2020 CD3

Why in news?

- Astronomers have observed a small object orbiting Earth, which they have dubbed a “mini-moon” or the planet’s “second moon”.
- Dubbed 2020 CD3, the mini-moon was discovered by Kacper Wierzchos and Teddy Pruyne of the NASA-funded Catalina Sky Survey (CSS) in Arizona on the night of February 15.
- It is actually an asteroid, about the size of a car; its diameter is about 1.9-3.5 m.
- Orbit integrations indicate that this object is temporarily bound to the Earth. i.e. unlike our permanent Moon, the mini-moon is temporary; it will eventually break free of Earth’s orbit and go off on its own way.

Gene editing tool Crispr

Why in news?

- Scientists say they have used the gene editing tool Crispr-Cas9 inside a person’s body for the first time, a new development in efforts to operate on DNA to treat diseases.
- Doctors first tried in-the-body gene editing in 2017 for a different inherited disease using a tool known as zinc fingers. Many scientists believe Crispr is a much better tool for locating and cutting DNA at a specific spot, and interest in the new research is very high.
- One of the biggest potential risks from gene editing is that Crispr could make unintended changes in other genes, but Pierce said the companies had done a lot to minimise that and to ensure that the treatment cuts only where it’s intended to.

Light Machine Guns (LMG)

Why in news?

- Ministry of Defence (MoD) signed a contract with the Israeli Weapon Industries (IWI) for procuring Light Machine Guns (LMG).
- LMG is designed to be employed by an individual soldier, with or without an assistant, as an infantry support weapon.
- It is often called the squad automatic weapon.

Draft Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) 2020 released

Why in news?

- The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has for the first time introduced leasing of defence requirement as a new category for acquisition in the draft Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) 2020 on 20 March 2020 for further suggestions from industry before being finalized promulgation.
- It will come into effect from 1 April 2020 and supersede DPP 2016.
- This DPP would remain in force till 31 March 2025.
- Other proposed measures include making after-sales support part of the capital acquisition contract, higher indigenous content in acquisitions and incentives for local material and software and emphasis on product export under offsets.
- The draft was finalized by a committee headed by the Director General (Acquisition), which was set up in August 2019.
- Leasing has been introduced as a new category for acquisition in addition to the existing 'Buy' and 'Make' categories to substitute huge initial capital outlays with periodical rental payments.
- The draft proposed increasing the indigenous content stipulated in various categories of procurement by about 10% to support the

'Make in India' and a simple and realistic methodology had been incorporated for verification of indigenous content for the first time.

- It included "assurance of procurement on a single vendor basis from Aero Engine manufacturing unit and chips from FAB manufacturing units established in the country."
- New chapters have been introduced for procurement of software and systems related projects due to fast obsolescence, Post contract Management to facilitate and provide clear guideline, given long time of defence deals.
- Another new category introduced is 'Buy' (Global Manufacture in India) with minimum 50% indigenous content on cost basis of total contract value.

Exercise Milan 2020

Why in News?

- The Indian Navy has postponed its multi-nation mega naval exercise 'MILAN' due to continuing spread of the coronavirus.
- MILAN (11th edition) was scheduled to be held in Visakhapatnam from 18th - 28th March 2020.

Exercise MILAN

- It is a biennial, multilateral naval exercise which started in 1995.
- The Navy has held 10 editions of the Milan exercise, with the theme of "synergy across the seas" to enhance professional interactions between friendly foreign navies and learn best practices from each other, since 1995.
- It was conducted at the Andaman and Nicobar Command until 2018.
- It is held under the aegis of Eastern Naval Command.
- Over 40 countries were expected to participate in the exercise in 2020.

Pragyan Conclave 2020

Why in news?

- “PRAGYAN CONCLAVE 2020”, a two-day Indian Army International Seminar was organised by Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS) on 4 March 2020, New Delhi.
- The event brought together a cross-domain national and international experts to deliberate on the complex subject of ‘Changing Characteristics of Land Warfare and its Impact on the Military’.
- The seminar provided a platform for deliberations on emerging ideas, perspectives and narratives that define the ‘New Age Warfare’ which is increasingly witnessing a change in its character as well as battlespace with the usage of new ‘means’ to pursue the ‘ends’.

83 indigenous Tejas fighter aircraft

Why in news?

- Defence Acquisition Council approved procurement of 83 indigenous Tejas fighter aircraft for Indian Air Force. The Light Combat Aircraft Tejas is going to be the backbone of Indian Air Force in future.
- While orders of 40 Tejas aircraft had been placed with HAL in initial configurations, DAC paved the way for the procurement of another 83 of the more advanced version of the aircraft from HAL.
- This procurement will be a major boost to Make in India as the aircraft is indigenously designed. The Defence Acquisition Council also accorded approval for acquisition of indigenous Defence equipment for about 1,300 crore rupees.

New explosive detection device

Why in news?

- RaIDer-X, a new explosive detection device, was unveiled at the National Workshop on Explosive Detection (NWED-2020) in Pune.
- RaIDer-X has the capability to detect explosives from a stand-off distance. The data library can be built in the system to expand its capability to detect a number of explosives in pure form as well as with the contaminants.
- Bulk explosive in concealed condition can also be detected by the device. RaIDer-X has been co-developed by High Energy Materials Research Laboratory (HEMRL) Pune and Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore.

National Security Day

Why in news?

- National Security Day is celebrated every year on 4th March
- It marks the day when the National Security Council (NSC) was established in 1998.
- NSC is a three-tiered organization that oversees political, economic, energy and security issues of strategic concern. It comprises the Strategic Policy Group, the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) and a secretariat from the Joint Intelligence Committee. Members of NSAB are usually senior retired officials, civilian as well as military, academics and distinguished members of civil society drawn from and having expertise in Internal and External Security, Foreign Affairs, Defence, Science & Technology and Economic Affairs.
- NSC operates within the executive office of the Prime Minister of India.
- The National Security Advisor presides over the NSC

GEOGRAPHY, ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

Effects of Dump sites in Delhi

Why in news?

- National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed a committee to assess the amount of damage caused to the environment due to the dump sites (legacy waste) in Delhi.
- The committee comprises representatives from the Central Pollution Control Board, National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) and IIT Delhi.
- Legacy wastes are the wastes that have been collected and kept for years at some barren land or a place dedicated for Landfill (an area to dump solid waste).
- Biomining method has been proposed by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) for the effective disposal of legacy wastes.

Glaciers in Sikkim melting

Why in news?

- Scientists from the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (WIHG), Dehradun have found that glaciers in Sikkim are melting at a higher magnitude as compared to other Himalayan regions.
- The study published in Science of the Total Environment assessed the response of 23 glaciers of Sikkim to climate change for the period of 1991-2015.
- This study studied multiple glacier parameters, namely length, area, debris cover, Snowline Altitude (SLA), glacial lakes, velocity, and downwasting.
- The Sikkim glaciers have been poorly studied till now, and field-based mass balance measurements have been limited to only one

glacier (ChangmeKhangpu) and for a short period (1980-1987)

- Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (WIHG), Dehradun is an autonomous research institute for the study of Geology of the Himalaya under the Department of Science and Technology.

World Water Day

Why in news?

- World Water Day is observed on 22 March every year. It focuses on the importance of freshwater.
- The World Water Day has been observed since 1993 and intends to raise awareness of the 2.2 billion people living without access to safe water.
- The theme for 2020 is 'Water and Climate Change' which aims to explore interrelation between water and climate change.
- A core focus of World Water Day is to support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6: water and sanitation for all by 2030.
- In addition to it, the International Decade for Action on Water for Sustainable Development (2018-2028) is being observed.
- These observances serve to reaffirm that water and sanitation measures are key to poverty reduction, economic growth, and environmental sustainability

World Sparrow Day

Why in news?

- Every year March 20 is observed as the 'World Sparrow Day' to raise awareness about the bird
- The Day was first celebrated in 2010.
- The initiative was started by the 'Nature Forever Society (NFS)' of India.
- In India, House Sparrow is found throughout the country, up to the Assam valley and lower parts of the Assam hills. Towards the eastern Himalayas, the species is replaced by the Eurasian tree sparrow.

Sparrow

- Scientific Name- *Passer domesticus*
- Conservation Status- Least Concern on the Red List of The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- The house sparrow is widespread across the world, inhabiting every continent, except Antarctica, China and Japan. It is native to Eurasia and North Africa.
- It is the State bird of Bihar and Delhi.

Green Companies (GreenCo) Rating System

Why in news?

- It has been developed by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).
- The system evaluates the companies on 10 broad green parameters, including GreenHouse Gases (GHG) reduction, renewable energy use etc.
- Accordingly, ratings are provided which remain valid for three years.
- It is the "first of its kind in the world" holistic framework that evaluates companies on the environmental friendliness of their activities using a life cycle approach.
- The life cycle approach considers product design, materials used, procurement, vendor management, logistics, packaging, manufacturing, distribution, product use, disposal and recycling.
- Its mission is to facilitate Indian industry to make a substantial improvement in their environmental performance thereby saving both natural and financial resources.
- It has been acknowledged in India's Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) document, submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2015, as a proactive voluntary action of Indian industry/ private sector towards combating climate change.

Long-tailed macaques show rich tool-use behavior

Why in news?

- Long-tailed macaques (*Macaca fascicularis umbrosus*), non-human primates, in Greater Nicobar Island handle objects and use tools to simplify their efforts.
- This study has been published from IISER Mohali.
- The researchers observed interesting behaviour related to object manipulation and tool use in six behavioural contexts involving 8 different types of objects.
- They also saw that males were more frequently involved in tool use than females.
- They are like humans with distinct features, for example, presence of black or white spots in different locations of the face, scar marks, body size, sex and behaviour.
- Though the long-tailed macaques are further from humans in relatedness than chimpanzees or apes, this study could offer a perspective on evolutionary origins of tool use behaviour.

Mass nesting of olive ridleys begins

Why in news?

- Mass nesting of olive ridleys started at Odisha's Rushikulya rocky coast.
- Around 2000 turtles dug up nests in the sand to lay their eggs. Each nest, on an average, contains around 100 eggs.
- Usually these turtles nest in darkness, but there have been instances in the past when they have nested during day time.

Olive Ridleys

- Olive ridley turtles are the smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world.
- These turtles are carnivores and get their name from their olive colored carapace.
- They are found in warm waters of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans.
- They migrate thousands of kilometers between feeding and mating grounds in the course of a

year.

- They are best known for their unique mass nesting called Arribada, where thousands of females come together on the same beach to lay eggs.
- The species is recognized as Vulnerable by the IUCN Red list, they are also protected under CITES Appendix I. They are also listed on Schedule – I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- To reduce accidental killing in India, the Orissa government has made it mandatory for trawls to use Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs), a net specially designed with an exit cover which allows the turtles to escape while retaining the catch.

Recommendations

- Community-based conservation and protection for the species as its habitat stretches across remote areas.
- Trans-boundary law enforcement co-operation through the use of multi-government platforms like SAWEN (South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network).
- SAWEN was formally established at an inter-governmental meeting hosted in Paro (a town in Bhutan) by the Royal Government of Bhutan, in January 2011.
- It aims to establish multilateral collaboration to fight wildlife crime in the region.

Illegal trade of Red Panda

Why in News?

- The trade monitoring network TRAFFIC has released a report titled “Assessment of illegal trade-related threats to Red Panda in India and selected neighbouring range countries” recently.
- The report has analysed poaching and illegal trade of the species for the ten-year period from July 2010 to June 2019.
- The red panda survival is crucial for the eastern and north-eastern Himalayan subalpine conifer forests and the eastern Himalayan broadleaf forests.
- The animal has been hunted for meat and fur, besides illegal capture for the pet trade.
- An estimated 14,500 animals are left in the wild across Nepal, Bhutan, India, China and Myanmar.
- The report has indicated that the traditional demand for red panda meat and related products has reduced over time.
- Also, the reduction in poaching and illegal trade of red panda is indicative of the success of awareness campaigns about the conservation of the species.

Toothed pterosaur

Why in news?

- Scientists have discovered three new species of toothed pterosaur - flying reptiles that inhabited the Sahara 100 million years ago.
- These were part of an ancient river ecosystem in Africa that was full of life, including fish, crocodiles, turtles and several predatory dinosaurs.

Sukhna Lake

Why in news?

- The Punjab and Haryana High Court has declared Sukhna lake (Chandigarh) as a living entity recently.
- The court invoked its parens patriae jurisdiction to declare the lake as a legal entity for its survival, preservation and conservation having a distinct persona with corresponding rights, duties and liabilities of a living person.
- All the citizens of Union Territory, Chandigarh, are hereby declared as loco parentis (in the place of a parent) to save the lake from extinction.
- Sukhna Lake is a rain-fed lake, located within Chandigarh and its catchment area falls both in Punjab and Haryana.

- The lake was constructed in 1958 and is spread over 3 sq km.
- An area of 2 km to 2.75 km around the lake has been declared as an eco-sensitive zone by the Chandigarh Administration.
- All activities in this area fall under provisions of the Environment Protection Act.
- The court has completely banned new construction in the catchment areas falling in the states of Punjab, Haryana and Union Territory Chandigarh as well as in the Sukhna Wetland and Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary.
- Earlier, Uttarakhand High Court declared the rivers Yamuna and Ganga as legal or juridical persons, enjoying all the rights, duties and liabilities of a living person.
- The HC bench was hearing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) petition filed in 2014 and gave a landmark judgment stating that the Ganga and the Yamuna must be treated as living entities.

World Wildlife Day

Why in news?

- World Wildlife Day is celebrated every year on the 3rd of March since 2013. The date chosen coincides with the day the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) which was signed in 1973.
- The UNGA resolution also designated the CITES Secretariat as the facilitator for the global observance of this special day for wildlife on the UN calendar.
- Theme: 'Sustaining all Life on Earth', highlights the unique place of wild fauna and flora as essential components of the world's biodiversity.
- The year 2020, known as "biodiversity super year," will host several major global events that place biodiversity at the forefront.
- This aligns with UN Sustainable Development Goals 1, 12, 14 and 15, and their wide-ranging commitments on alleviating poverty, ensuring sustainable use of resources, and on conserving

life both on land and below water to halt biodiversity loss.

1. Goal 1: No Poverty
 2. Goal 12: Responsible Consumption And Production
 3. Goal 14: Life Below Water
 4. Goal 15: Life On Land
- Our planet is currently facing the urgent challenge that is the loss of biodiversity and up to a million species could disappear in the coming decades if unsustainable human activity, climate change and habitat degradation are left unchecked.
 - There might come a time when these species remain only in videos for future generations to see.

Fishing Cat and Otters

Why in News?

- Recently, the presence of a viable, breeding population of a fishing cat has been found in Chilika Lake.
- Further, the presence of a smooth-coated otter and a Eurasian otter has also been recorded in the lake.

	Fishing Cat	Smooth-Coated Otter	Eurasian Otter
Scientific Name	Prionailurus viverrinus	Lutrogale perspicillata	Lutra lutra
Habitat	In India, fishing cats are mainly found in the mangrove forests of the Sundarbans, on the foothills of the Himalayas along the Ganga and Brahmaputra river valleys	Smooth-coated otters are distributed throughout India from the Himalayas to the south.	Throughout Europe and Asia from Ireland in the west as far as eastern Russia and China. They are also found in North Africa (Morocco, Algeria and

	and in the Western Ghats.		Tunisia) and the Middle East (Israel, Jordan, Iraq and Iran).
IUCN Red List	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Near Threatened
CITES	Appendix II	Appendix II	Appendix I
Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972	Schedule I	Schedule II	Schedule II

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Extradition Treaty between India and Belgium

Why in news?

- Union Cabinet has approved the signing and ratifying of the Extradition Treaty between the Republic of India and the Kingdom of Belgium.
- This will replace the pre-Independence Extradition Treaty between Great Britain and Belgium of 1901 that was made applicable to India through the exchange of Letters in 1958.
- The Treaty provides a legal framework for seeking extradition of terrorists, economic offenders, and other criminals from and to Belgium.

India-US Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF)

Why in news?

- India-US Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF) was established under an agreement between the Governments of India and the United States of America in March 2000.
- It is an autonomous bilateral organization jointly funded by both the Governments that

promote Science, Technology, Engineering, and Innovation through substantive interaction among government, academia, and industry.

- IUSSTF's vision is to ensure excellence in Science, Technology and Innovation space through collaborative initiatives between India and the United States of America.
- Its mission is to act as a catalyst to promote long-term scientific collaborations between India and the U.S. through partnerships amongst individual scientists, scientific institutions and the scientific community at large.
- The Department of Science & Technology (DST), Governments of India, and the U.S. Department of State are respective nodal departments for this program.

UN Security Council

Why in News?

- Recently, China has taken over as president of the UN Security Council for the month of March 2020.
- The Security Council was established by the UN Charter in 1945. It is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations.
- The other 5 organs of the United Nations are—the General Assembly, the Trusteeship Council, the Economic and Social Council, the International Court of Justice, and the Secretariat.
- Its primary responsibility is to work to maintain international peace and security.
- The council has 15 members: the five permanent members and 10 non-permanent members elected for two-year terms.
- The five permanent members are the United States, the Russian Federation, France, China and the United Kingdom.
- Each member of the Security Council has one vote. Decisions of the Security Council on matters are made by an affirmative vote of nine members including the concurring votes of the permanent members. A "No" vote from one of

the five permanent members blocks the passage of the resolution.

- Any member of the United Nations which is not a member of the Security Council may participate, without vote, in the discussion of any question brought before the Security Council whenever the latter considers that the interests of that member are specially affected.
- The council's presidency is a capacity that rotates every month among its 15 members.
- The council is headquartered at New York.

G7 meet via videoconference

Why in news?

- US President is scrapping this year's G7 summit in Washington due to the COVID-19 crisis and will instead hold the event by videoconference, declared on 19 March 2020.
- The US heads the group of 7 wealthy democracies in 2020
- The summit will now take place remotely in order of each country to focus all of its resources on responding to the health and economic challenges of COVID-19
- G7 countries- Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States- are all in crisis mode to stop the spread of the virus and equally to try and halt financial panic that threatens to send their economies into recession.

Hypersonic missile test successful in US

Why in news?

- The US Defense Department announced on 20 March 2020 that it has successfully tested an unarmed hypersonic missile, a weapon that could potentially overwhelm an adversary's defence system.
- A test missile flew at hypersonic speeds- more than 5 times the speed of sound or Mach 5- to a designated impact point.

G20 Virtual Summit

Why in news?

- Leaders of the G20 (Group of 20) nations held a video conference on 26 March 2020.
- The virtual summit was led by King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of Saudi Arabia, who is the current president of the economic grouping.
- G20 members were joined by leaders from invited countries, Spain, Jordan, Singapore and Switzerland as well as international organizations the United Nations, The World Bank group, WHO, WTO, FAO, IMF, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.
- Apart from 19 of the biggest economies of the world, G20 also includes the European Union.
- For India, this is the second virtual leadership summit after the video meet of the SAARC

Outcome of G20 Summit

- Indian leader asked G20 leaders to put "human beings" and not "economic targets" at the centre of the global cooperation to fight the disease, noting the alarming social and economic costs to the novel coronavirus.
- All the leaders decided to inject "USD 5 trillion into the global economy", as part of targeted fiscal policy, economic measures and guarantee schemes to counteract the social, economic and financial impacts of the pandemic.
- The leaders also agreed to contribute to the WHO led COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund on a voluntary basis.
- The G20 Summit did not include any reference to the origin of the crisis. This was in response to a possible face-off between US and Chinese leaders.
- India noted that 90% of the COVID-19 cases and 88% of deaths were in G20 countries, even as they share 80% of the world GDP and 60% of the world population.
- A joint statement has been issued which calls for a transparent, robust, coordinated, large-scale and science-based global response in the spirit of solidarity to come over the

interconnectedness and vulnerabilities of the countries highlighted by the pandemic.

- The member countries have agreed to share timely and transparent information, exchange epidemiological and clinical data, share materials necessary for research and development and strengthen health systems globally by supporting the full implementation of the WHO International Health Regulations.
- The leaders agreed to have more interactions before the Riyadh Summit which will take place in November 2020.

Criticism faced by the WHO and lockdowns

- WHO was criticised for failing to alert the world quickly enough of the potential threat from the pandemic, even after it had been informed of its spread in Wuhan by China in December 2019.
- The US has criticised China for not having been transparent and sharing information about the virus.
- There have been differences among G-20 countries on lockdowns in order to control the pandemic spread through social distancing.
- The US wants to lift the lockdown as it is impacting the economy.
- The President of Brazil has called state-imposed lockdowns a crime.
- India has imposed a stringent 21-day lockdown across the country.

ART & CULTURE

Martyrs' Day

Why in news?

- Every year, March 23 is observed as Martyrs' Day as a tribute to freedom fighters Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev Thapar, and Shivaram Rajguru.
- The Day is also known as Shaheed Diwas or Sarvodaya Day.

- This Day should not be confused with the Martyrs' Day observed on January 30, the day Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated.
- Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev Thapar, and Shivaram Rajguru died on March 23 in 1931.
- They were hanged to death for assassinating John Saunders, a British police officer in 1928. They had mistook him for British police superintendent James Scott.
- It was Scott who had ordered lathi charge, which eventually led to the death of Lala Lajpat Rai.
- Their lives inspired countless youth and in their death, they set an example. They carved out their own path for independence where individual heroism and their aggressive need to do something for the nation stood out, departing from the path followed by the Congress leaders then.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

Why in News?

- The 100th Birth Anniversary celebrations of 'Jatir Pita' Bangabandhu, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, is being celebrated on 17th March 2020 in Bangladesh.
- Mujibur Rahman was born on 17th March 1920 in Tungipara, India (now in Bangladesh) and passed away on 15th August 1975 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- He was a Bengali leader who became the first prime minister of Bangladesh (1972–75) and later became the president of the same in 1975.
- He began his formal political career in 1949 as a co-founder of the Awami League.
- He played a crucial role in advocating political autonomy for East Pakistan, the detached eastern part of Pakistan (now Bangladesh).
- Sheikh Hasina Wazed, the current prime minister of Bangladesh, is the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Digitise over 900 Yakshagana scripts

Why in news?

- More than 900 Yakshagana scripts, including the ones printed in 1905 and 1907, have now been digitised and made available online for free.
- The Prahlada Charitre printed in 1905 and Ramashwamdha printed in 1907, Putrakamesti published in 1913, Kanakangi Kalyana in 1929, Kumudhuwati Kalyana in 1931 and Sampoorana Ramayana printed in 1938 are among the ones digitised.
- The scripts sourced from different sources have been scanned, preserved in digital form in Google drive and made available on apps and websites.
- The collection and digitisation of scripts, both in printed and manuscript forms, is one among the four projects being taken up
- Among those digitised now are 65 scripts scanned and digitised by the Sristi Foundation.
- It was estimated that Karnataka had about 8,000 Yakshagana scripts.
- Of them, half might have disappeared due to various reasons.

Yakshagana

- Yakshagana is a traditional theatre form of Karnataka.
- It is a temple art form that depicts mythological stories and Puranas.
- It is performed with massive headgears, elaborate facial make-up and vibrant costumes and ornaments.
- Usually recited in Kannada, it is also performed in Malayalam as well as Tulu (the dialect of south Karnataka).
- It is performed with percussion instruments like chenda, maddalam, jagatta or chengila (cymbals) and chakratala or elathalam (small cymbals).

Lalit Kala Akademi Awards

Why in News?

- The President of India conferred the 61st annual Lalit Kala Akademi Awards on 15 meritorious artists at a function held at Rashtrapati Bhavan on 4th March, 2020.

About

- The Lalit Kala Akademi nominated seven member selection Jury of eminent art practitioners, artists and critics from all over the country to finalise the list of artists to be awarded.
- Lalit Kala Akademi organises art exhibitions and award ceremonies every year to promote art as well as to honour talents.
- Artwork of the award-winning artists will be on display till March 22, 2020, at the 61st National Exhibition of Art at the Lalit Kala Akademi galleries in New Delhi.

Nominations for the World Heritage List 2020

Why in News?

- Recently, the Minister of State of Culture and Tourism has informed Lok Sabha that India has submitted two nomination dossiers namely 'Dholavira: A Harappan City' and 'Monuments and Forts of Deccan Sultanate' for inclusion in the World Heritage List for the year 2020.

Dholavira: A Harappan City

- The City of Dholavira located in Khadir island of the Rann of Kutch (Gujarat) belonged to the mature Harappan phase.
- It was excavated by R.S Bisht in 1985.
- It demonstrates a highly organised system of town planning with perfected proportions, street-pattern and an efficient water conservation system that supported life for more than 1200 years (3000 BCE to 1800 BCE) against harsh hot arid climate.

- The water conservation methods of Dholavira are unique and measures as one of the most efficient systems of the ancient world.
- The presence of a three-tier zonation comprising of a distinct upper (citadel, bailey) and middle (having a distinct street-pattern, large scale enclosure and a ceremonial ground) towns enclosed by a lower town (with narrower streets, smaller enclosures and industrial area) – distinguishes the city of Dholavira from other metropolises of the Indus Valley Civilisation.

Monuments and Forts of Deccan Sultanate

- The 'Monuments of the Deccan Sultanate' demonstrates the convergence of national and international styles of Islamic architecture and their intersections with the prevalent Hindu architecture of the period southern Indian in present-day Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh,
- It comprises of four components namely,

Bahmani Monuments at Gulbarga, Karnataka

- It primarily comprises the Gulbarga Fort with the Great Mosque in the Fort, Jami Masjid and the Haft Gumbad complex with seven tombs.
- Gulbarga was the first capital of the Bahmani dynasty.
- Bahmani and Barid Shahi Monuments at Bidar, Karnataka
- It includes monuments at Bidar dating from late 15th to the early 16th centuries comprise of the Bidar Fort, the Madrasa Mahmud Gawan, the Bahamani tombs at Ashtur and the Barid Shahi tombs.
- The significant feature of Bidar is the sophisticated system of gates and sluices (A sluice is a water channel controlled at its head by a gate.) that could be used when required to flood segments of the moat and thus preserve water.

Adil Shahi Monuments at Bijapur, Karnataka

- These monuments date from the late 15th to the late 17th centuries.
- These are an ensemble of 80 small and big monuments including the fortifications, gates,

water systems and tanks, several mosques and tombs and palatial structures.

- The most remarkable monuments within the fort include the Gol Gumbaz which is the second largest dome in the world.

Qutb Shahi Monuments at Hyderabad Andhra Pradesh

- It comprises of Golconda Fort, Qutb Shahi Tombs and Charminar that symbolize the Qutb Shahi Dynasty.
- Golconda is a fortified citadel and an early capital city of the Qutb Shahi dynasty.
- The tombs of Qutb Shahis are a mausoleum complex comprised of the tombs of the Royal family and the officials who faithfully served them.
- Charminar is a ceremonial Gateway built to celebrate the foundation of Hyderabad, a new Millennial City, in 1591 A.D.

BHU team unearths 4,000-yr-old crafts village in Varanasi

Why in news?

- A nearly 4,000-year-old urban settlement has been unearthed in Varanasi by a team of surveyors from the Banaras Hindu University (BHU). This could be one of the craft villages mentioned in ancient texts.
- The university's Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, did the preliminary survey of the site in Babhanyav village, 13 kilometres away from Varanasi. It found remnants of one of the settlements mentioned in ancient literature about the holy city. The survey found a temple dating back to the 5th century through 8th century, potteries which are 4,000-year-old and walls which are 2,000-year-old.

Scheme for Pension and Medical Aid to Artistes

Why in news?

- Minister of State (I/c) of Culture and Tourism reported on 2 March 2020 that the Government is implementing a Scheme namely “Scheme for Pension and Medical Aid to Artistes” to improve financial and socio-economic status of the old aged artistes and scholars including various Folk Artists who have contributed significantly in their specialized fields of arts, letters etc., but leading a miserable life or are in penury condition.
- An amount of maximum Rs. 4000/- per month is being given to each beneficiary, out of which minimum Rs. 500/- financial assistance from State/UT Govt. is included. In case of death of a beneficiary, the financial assistance may be transferred, in the name of the spouse of the beneficiary till life if such request is received in the Ministry from the spouse along with the requisite documents within the period of six months from the date of death of the beneficiary artiste.

Central Sanskrit Universities Bill, 2019

Why in news?

- Parliament cleared a bill to grant central university status to Delhi-based Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan and Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth as well as Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth in Tirupati.
- Earlier, Rajya Sabha passed the Central Sanskrit Universities Bill, 2019. The Human Resource Development (HRD) had moved the Bill for its passage in the Upper House. The Lok Sabha had given its nod to the Bill in December 2019.
- Sanskrit scholars and academia had since long been demanding for grant of central university status to the three Sanskrit institutions.
- The grant of central university status to the three Sanskrit institutions, which are deemed to

be universities and certified by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council as grade 'A' institutions.

- The purpose of converting these universities into the central universities is to eliminate the other languages.

Chaitra Jatra Festival

Why in news?

- The annual Chaitra Jatra festival scheduled to be held on 17 March 2020 in Odisha's Tara Tarini hill shrine was cancelled as a precautionary measure against COVID-19 infection.
- The festival is held on each Tuesday in the month of Chaitra, which falls in March-April as per the English calendar.
- Tara Tarini hill shrine on banks of the Rushikulya river, is a major centre of Shakti worship in Odisha.
- The twin goddesses Tara and Tarini represent one Shakti and are the main deity of Ganjam district (Odisha).
- Tara is an important deity of Mahayana Buddhist Sect.
- This temple had been built as per traditional Rekha style of Odia temple architecture, as per which famous Jagannath temple of Puri and Lingaraj temple of Bhubaneswar have been built.
- Unlike other temples, it wasn't built under the patronage of a King or a Noble, the temple was set up by a Brahmin named Basu Praharaj as per popular legend.
- Since its inception it has been an established seat of Tantrism.
- Indian Navy's sailboat INSV Tarini was named after Tara Tarini hill shrine. The first Indian all-woman crew had circumnavigated the globe in INSV Tarini.

MAINS

GENERAL STUDIES I

(Indian Heritage and Culture, History and Geography of the World and Society)

Marakkars film controversy

Why in news?

- Recently, a petition was filed in the Kerala HC against the movie Marakkar: The Lion of the Arabian Sea.
- It was alleged that that film leads to 'distortion of history' and demanded a stay on the release. It is said to be the most expensive Malayalam film ever made.

Who were Marakkars?

- By some accounts, Marakkars were of Arab origin and had migrated from Tunisia to Panthalayani near Koyilandy in present-day Kozhikode.
- Marakkars later moved to the region around present-day Kottakkal and Thikkodi near Payyoli.
- By other accounts, the Marakkars were descendants of affluent businessman from the Cochin kingdom who migrated later to Calicut.
- The Marakkars were mostly Muslims, but in some parts, they have been found to be Hindus as well.

Description of movie

- The film is based on Kunjali Marakkar IV, who earned his reputation with his fierce onslaught on Portuguese ships, the favours he gave those

who fought against the Portuguese, and his efforts to strengthen the fort at Kottakkal.

- It is a war film depicting the heroics of the Marakkar clan, whose leaders were naval chieftains of the Zamorin of Calicut during the 16th and 17th centuries.
- The Zamorin, Samoothiri in Malayalam, was the title given to rulers of the Calicut kingdom on the Malabar coast. The Marakkars fought against Portuguese invaders for nearly a century.
- Their strategy was similar to guerrilla warfare. The Portuguese had massive ships which could not make easy manoeuvres in the sea.
- The Marakkars used small ships which could easily surround the Portuguese ships, enabling the fighters to attack at will.
- In the span of 100 years, the exploits of the Marakkars are said to have improved the naval fleet of Calicut as well as other kingdoms, stretching from Saurashtra to Ceylon along the Indian coast. War technologies and ammunition greatly improved as well.

Issue

- The petitioner argued that the film's version of events could mislead students and researchers. However, the High Court declined to impose a stay and asked the film certification Board if it had handed over the complaint to the Centre.
- The Board conveyed that the subject deals with art and that it cannot interfere in the freedom of expression of the filmmakers.

Attukal Pongala

Why in news?

- The annual Attukal Pongala festival begun on 9 March 2020 in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.
- It is one of the largest all-women religious congregations, began recently amid the COVID-19 virus threat.
- In this festival, thousands of brick hearths were lit across Thiruvananthapuram with the chief

priest of the Attukal Bhagavathy Temple lighting the 'Pandara Aduppu' — the main hearth — and passing down the flame.

- Women devotees had flocked in their thousands to make the Pongala offering to the presiding deity of the Attukal Bhagavathy Temple even as Kerala launched a fresh battle against the COVID-19.
- **Attukal Pongala** is described as the biggest congregation of women, is also known as the women's Sabarimala.
- The Attukal Pongala held in Attukal Temple, Thiruvananthapuram.
- The festival that has figured in the Guinness Book of World Records for being the single largest gathering of women for a religious activity.

Rituals

- Pongala, which means 'to boil over', is the ritual in which women prepare sweet payasam (a pudding made from rice, jaggery, coconut and plantains cooked together) and offer it to the Goddess or 'Bhagavathy'.
- The Goddess-fondly referred to as 'Attukalamma' is said to be appeased by this ritual.
- Pongala is a ten-day- long festival
- The festival commences with the musical rendering of the story of the Goddess (Kannaki Charitam) during the "Kappu Kettu ceremony".
- The story invokes the presence of Kodungallur Bhagavathy and the slaying of the Pandyan King. This festival commemorates the victory of Good over Evil, by the slaying of Pandyan King.
- The event of the Goddess annihilating the Pandyan King is accompanied by much sound and fury of the temple drums and "Vaykurava" by devotees, immediately followed by the lighting of the hearths for the preparation of the offering for the Goddess.

Impact of COVID-19 on society and health system

Why in news?

- The International Labour Organization (ILO) has recently said that the COVID-19 pandemic will drastically increase global unemployment, leaving up to 25 million more people out of work and slashing incomes.
- The rising wave of the COVID-19 outbreak in India has forced the corporate world in the country to opt for 'work from home' widely.
- India's labour laws and proposed Labour Codes do not recognise work from home as a viable work arrangement.
- COVID-19 is not only resulted global health crisis but also left a major impact on labour market and economic crisis that is having a huge impact on people.
- According to the estimates of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) the COVID-19 outbreak has pulled almost half (49.22%) the world's student population out of schools and universities.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends school closure (including preschool and higher education) as one of the "Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs)" for mitigating influenza pandemics.

Health system

- Demand in most sectors will continue to exceed supply in times of pandemic. The question arises here: whether national and state health systems will be able to cope with ever-rising demands- for testing kits, for hospital beds, ventilators. This extraordinary demand has traditional production and systems of delivery choking and most often, unable to match supply to demand.
- The recommendation to strengthen primary health services has been around for long. The setting up of public health cadres was recommended by the High Level Expert Group

(HLEG) on Universal Health Coverage in its 2011 report to the Planning Commission.

- The National Health Policy also calls for public health management cadres to be established. Only Tamil Nadu and Odisha have such defined cadres now.

Social issues

- Migrant workers, street vendors, contract workers, almost everyone in the informal sector- the bulk of the workforce- is being hit by economic tsunami brought by COVID-19.
- With transport routes dislocated, even the coming wheat harvest, a critical source of survival for millions of labouring families in north India, may not bring much relief.
- Lockdowns were imposed to slow down the epidemic, but poor people cannot afford to stay idle at home. There is a critical difference, in this respect, between India and affluent countries with a good social security.
- Large scale migration took place amid this strictly imposed lockdown in the country and this forced temporary workers or un-organized workers to move to their hometown or villages.
- There is a danger of people's hardships being aggravated by a tendency to shut down essential services.
- There is no work and resources are running out. Things are all set to get worse as the privileged hoard with abandon and food prices go north.
- The imposition of 21 day lockdown will prove right in due course but it is crying out for relief measures, including income support for poor families.

Steps taken to curb COVID-19

- The Delhi police on 22 March 2020 imposed Section 144 of the CrPC banning protest and assembly of four or more people in one place in the national capital till 31 March 2020 in view of the novel coronavirus outbreak. But Central Government further announced a nationwide lockdown till 14 April 2020.
- All train, metro and interstate transport services across the country were also suspended.

- Banks provide services such as cash deposit and withdrawal, clearing of cheques, remittances and government transactions.
- Government has developed a platform which will host webinars by All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) doctors for healthcare workers across the country.
- It has also developed an app that will trace the paths of COVID-19 positive patients, serving as a warning to possible contacts.
- Chat Boxes on Facebook and WhatsApp have been set up by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) for providing information about COVID-19.
- A portal to map the requirements of hospitals, and cross-referencing them with those who have offered to help with equipment is also being set up by the government.
- A webinar platform has been developed in tandem with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- DRDO had developed a ventilator along with the Society for Biomedical Technology (SBMT) and now the technology has been transferred to an industry in Mysuru.
- DRDO laboratories have manufactured 20,000 litres of sanitiser and supplied to various organisations like Delhi police.
- It has developed N-99 and 3-layered masks and supplied 10,000 masks to Delhi police personnel.
- It is tying up with some private companies to make personal protection equipment such as body suits and also ventilators.
- It is working on providing ready-to-eat meals for the government and health workers through the Defence Food Research Laboratory, Mysore which already supplies them to the armed forces.
- The Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) has also increased the production of sanitisers, masks and bodysuits.
- The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has issued "Comprehensive Disability Inclusive Guidelines" to States and Union territories.

- This is for the protection and safety of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) in light of Pandemic COVID19.
- The government has set up the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM-CARES Fund) to deal with any kind of emergency or distress situation like posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- This Fund has been set up owing to a number of requests made by the people to support the government in the wake of the COVID-19 emergency.
- Government has hiked Ways and Means Advance (WMA) limit with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) by 60%.
- WMA limit is proposed to be revised to Rs 1.20 lakh crore and would be reviewed on a need basis (from Rs 75,000 crore last year).
- This is to compensate for the cash flow mismatch in Financial Year (FY) 21 expected from higher spending to combat the spread of COVID-19.

PM-CARES Fund

- PM-CARES Fund is different from Prime Minister National Relief Fund, which was created in 1948.
- It was founded against the backdrop of the situation arising out of partition and was used for relief and rehabilitation of refugees from Pakistan who came to India.
- It was registered as a trust in 1973 with responsibilities of the trustees not clearly defined.
- The resources of PMNRF are now utilized primarily to provide relief to families of those killed in natural calamities. Donations to both funds can avail 100% tax exemption.

Steps to be taken

- Since time is of the essence, the first step is to make good use of existing social security schemes to support poor people- pensions, the Public Distribution System (PDS), midday meals and the MGNREGA, among others.

- Initial measures could include advance payment of pensions, enhanced distribution of takehome rations at schools and anganwadis.
- That in turn requires big money from the central government. It also requires the government to avoid squandering its resources on corporate bailouts: most crisis affected sectors of the economy will soon be lobbying for rescue packages.
- The PDS is the country's most important asset in this situation. That will not make up for most people's loss of income, but it will ensure that there is food in the house at least.
- Distribution needs to be staggered and tightly supervised, to avoid crowds and cheating at the ration shop.
- But many people are excluded from PDS and in that case, large scale cash transfers are also required, starting with advance payment of social security pensions and a big increase in pension amounts.
- Further, food rations may prevent hunger but people have many other basic needs; they will need money to cope with this spell of unemployment.
- The first step is to make relief measures an integral part of the lockdown plan. Failing that, it may do more harm than good. For one thing, a hungry and enfeebled population is unlikely to fight the virus effectively. A constructive lockdown should empower people to fight back together, not treat them like sheep.
- Finally, the Centre-State cooperation is essential. Many State governments have already initiated valuable social-security measures, but they are far from adequate.
- The Central government, for its part, has been struck with inexplicable paralysis on this.
- Adequate relief measures require big money from the Central Government. Implementation should be led by the States. They all have their own circumstances and methods. The Central Government is unlikely to do better on their behalf. If it foots the bill, that will be a good start.
- The primary goal of the government is to ensure availability and accessibility to diagnostic

tests free of cost. Setting up diagnostic centres in every district general hospital should be the top-most priority.

- Travel bans and quarantines are imperative measures, but testing alone can reveal the extent of the disease in the community.
- Government can provide guarantees to working capital loans and link it with assurances from the borrowers concerned that they will secure the jobs in their companies.
- The Reserve Bank of India should show regulatory forbearance in the matter of asset recognition for banks when it comes to various industries. But it should be made amply clear that this is only temporary accommodation till the crisis plays itself out.
- Government may have to look at offering temporary tax relief to business.
- There are other helpful actions that the government can take such as promptly discharging its bills, refunding taxes without delay, promptly carrying out direct benefit transfers already budgeted for, and, if necessary, even permitting affected businesses to temporarily delay payment of statutory dues such as provident fund and ESI.
- Government has to engage with the private sector while devising assistance measures.

New POCSO rules notified

Why in news?

- The Union government has notified the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Rules, 2020 which enables implementation of recent amendments to the Act under which provisions of punishment for child abuse has been made more stringent. The new POCSO rules became effective from 9 March 2020.

About

- The new rules include provision of mandatory police verification of staff in schools and care homes, procedures to report sexual abuse material (pornography), imparting age-

appropriate child rights education among others.

- For child pornography, "any person who has received any pornographic material involving a child or any information regarding such pornographic material being stored, possessed, distributed, circulated, transmitted, facilitated, propagated or displayed, or is likely to be distributed, facilitated or transmitted in any manner shall report the contents to the special juvenile police unit (SJPU) or police, or the cybercrime portal".
- The report shall include the details of the device in which such pornographic content was noticed and the suspected device from which such content was received including the platform on which the content was displayed
- Under the rules, the state governments have been asked to formulate a child protection policy based on the principle of "zero-tolerance" to violence against children, which shall be adopted by all institutions, organisations, or any other agency working with, or coming in contact with children.
- The central government and every state government shall provide periodic training including orientation programmes, sensitisation workshops and refresher courses to all persons, whether regular or contractual, coming in contact with the children, to sensitise them about child safety and protection and educate them regarding their responsibility under the Act
- The Centre and state governments have been asked to prepare age-appropriate educational material and curriculum for children, informing them about various aspects of personal safety, including measures to protect their physical and virtual identity; and to safeguard their emotional and mental wellbeing, prevention and protection from sexual offences and reporting mechanisms, including Childline helpline services through toll free number - 1098
- Orientation programme and intensive courses may also be organised for police personnel and

forensic experts for building their capacities in their respective roles on a regular basis

- Under the new rules, any institution housing children or coming in regular contact with children, including schools, creches, sports academies or any other facility for children must ensure a police verification and background check on periodic basis of every staff.

Analysis

- New rules in law to tackle child sexual abuse are a huge policy achievement in fight against this crime. This will make POCSO more effective and our country, child friendly
- Provision of mandatory police verification of staff in schools & care homes, immediate relief for victims, procedures to report sexual abuse material (porn), imparting age appropriate child rights education and monitoring indicators for state child rights bodies are significant steps.
- One of the key provisions in the new POCSO Rules is to provide timely compensation to the victim. It reiterates the role of POCSO courts in ensuring this is done within 30 days
- There are timelines for several actions which required to be performed under POCSO Act, 2012, and now the POCSO Rules 2020 emphasises on that while stressing on timeliness.
- However, a major issue that impacts child victim adversely is non-compliance and accountability, which has not been defined clearly. This must be looked at and monitored properly.

General Studies II (Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice and International relations)

Effectiveness of Anti-defection law

Why in news?

- The Supreme Court removed Thounaojam Shyamkumar Singh, from the Manipur state cabinet and restrained him “from entering the Legislative Assembly till further orders”.
- A disqualification petition against the minister was pending before the Speaker since 2017 but the Speaker failed to take the decision within a reasonable time period.
- The Speaker also failed to take any decision within the stipulated time period of 4 weeks as provided by the Supreme Court in the 21 January 2020 order.
- Article 212 of the Constitution bars courts from inquiring into proceedings of the Legislature. In this case, however, prompted by the fact that the Speaker’s conduct has been called into question on several occasions, the Court said it was “constrained” to invoke the court’s extraordinary powers under Article 142 of the Constitution.
- Earlier, the Manipur High Court, in this matter, had found grounds for disqualification under the Tenth Schedule but stopped short of issuing directions.
- The reason being that question of whether a High Court can direct a Speaker to decide on a disqualification petition within a time frame is pending before a Supreme Court Bench.

21 January 2020 Order

- The court in general said that “the Speaker, in acting as a Tribunal under the Tenth Schedule, is bound to decide disqualification petitions within a reasonable period”, which “will depend on the facts of each case.”

- The apex Court also held that disqualification petitions under the tenth schedule should be adjudicated by a mechanism outside Parliament or Legislative Assemblies.
- The Court has suggested a permanent tribunal headed by a retired Supreme Court judge or a former High Court Chief Justice as a new mechanism. However, this would require an amendment to the Constitution.
- Currently, disqualification of members of a House/Assembly is referred to the Speaker of the House/Assembly.
- Rationale behind Court's suggestion was to ensure that such disputes are decided both swiftly and impartially, thus giving real teeth to the provisions contained in the Tenth Schedule.

About the Tenth Schedule

- The Anti-Defection law was passed in 1985 through the 52nd Amendment to the Constitution, which added the Tenth Schedule to the Indian Constitution. The main intent of the law was to combat "the evil of political defections".
- The Tenth Schedule to the Constitution was meant to deal with the politics of opportunism.
- It provides for the disqualification of members of Parliament and legislative assemblies if any such member voluntarily gives up membership of the political party to which he or she belongs or votes against the whip issued by the party in the course of proceedings in Parliament or the Legislature.
- Initially the disqualification principle did not apply if one-third of the members of a political party severed their allegiance to the party on whose symbol they were elected and joined another political party.
- This led to mass defections, thereby destabilising elected governments.
- The Tenth Schedule was then amended and the one-third provision done away with.
- The Tenth Schedule now will not apply unless two-thirds of the members of a political party merge with another political party.

- The two-thirds rule is difficult to circumvent except in small States where the strength of the legislative assemblies allows for such mergers.
- To avoid the applicability of this schedule, members of legislative assemblies are now using another route to destabilise elected governments.
- Under Article 190(3)(b) of the Constitution, any legislator is entitled to resign from the House.
- The Speaker, of course, has the power to rule that such a resignation is neither voluntary nor genuine. The Speaker, upon enquiry, has the power to reject such a resignation.

Arguments in favour of anti-defection law	Arguments against anti-defection law
Provides stability to the government by preventing shifts of party allegiance.	By preventing parliamentarians from changing parties, it reduces the accountability of the government to the Parliament and the people.
Ensures that candidates elected with party support and on the basis of party manifestoes remain loyal to the party policies. Also promotes party discipline.	Interferes with the member's freedom of speech and expression by curbing dissent against party policies.

Suggestions

- Dinesh Goswami Committee on electoral reforms (1990) suggested that the issue of disqualification should be decided by the President/Governor on the advice of the Election Commission of India.
- Halim Committee on anti-defection law suggested that the words 'voluntarily giving up membership of a political party and the term 'political party' be comprehensively defined.
- Law Commission (170th Report, 1999) suggested that the political parties should limit issuance of whips to instances only when the government is in danger.
- Election Commission of India (ECI) suggested that decisions under the Tenth Schedule should

be made by the President/Governor on the binding advice of the ECI.

- Constitution Review Commission (2002) suggested that the vote cast by a defector to topple a government should be treated as invalid and that the defectors should be barred from holding public office for the duration of the remaining term.

Conclusion

- This is democracy at work. This is yet another virus that has afflicted the political system.
- The antidote can only be provided by representatives of the people who believe in the rule of law, are committed to democratic traditions and embrace constitutional values.
- The truth is just the opposite. Governors, political parties, other constitutional authorities, the police and state governments are facilitators and hotbeds of intrigue in dismantling democracy.
- What we are witnessing is constitutional anarchy. The courts watch in dismay and uphold such actions. The floor test has become a farce.

Nomination of former CJI to RS

Why in news?

- Former CJI, Justice Ranjan Gogoi was nominated to the Upper House or Rajya Sabha by the President of India. Shortly, before his retirement from the SC of India, he delivered several landmark verdicts with far-reaching political consequences that left the government pleased with scarcely any politically sensitive case being decided against the government's wishes.

About

- In the Constituent Assembly, K T Shah, suggested that High Court and Supreme Court judges should not take up an executive office with the government, "so that no temptation should be available to a judge for greater

emoluments, or greater prestige which would in any way affect his independence as a judge".

- However, this suggestion was rejected by B R Ambedkar. According to him "judiciary decides cases in which the government has, if at all, the remotest interest, in fact no interest at all".
- Article 124(7) of the Indian Constitution provides that a retired Supreme Court judge cannot "plead or act in any court or before any authority within the territory of India". However, this provision only restricts post-retirement appointments in Judiciary itself, but not in posts of president, governor, Member of Parliament, etc.
- Thus, the post-retirement appointment of judges may threaten or undermine judicial independence. This is because some judges — not all — are offered post-retirement employment by the government.
- In its 14th report in 1958, the Law Commission noted that retired Supreme Court judges used to engage in two kinds of work after retirement: Firstly, "chamber practice" (a term which would, today, mean giving opinions to clients and serving as arbitrators in private disputes) and secondly, "employment in important positions under the government".

Tenure of Justice Gogoi

1. Before Ayodhya verdict, he dismissed a review of the Rafale fighter aircraft deal without substantially dealing with the grounds on which the original judgment, negating an independent investigation, had been challenged. The original judgment relied upon several pieces of false and misleading information, conveyed to the SC by the government.
2. During his tenure, he presided over and pushed through the NRC in Assam, an exercise that has excluded more than 19 lakh people from the final version of the citizenship register, and which has been criticized on several grounds. This exercise resulted in a huge humanitarian crisis and divisive politics.
3. Sabarimala temple review: A constitution Bench of the SC held that excluding menstruating women from entering the temple was

discriminatory and therefore against “constitutional morality”.

4. He was also alleged of sexual harassment soon after he became CJI.

16-point code of conduct for judges

- The 16-point code of conduct for judges or as it was called the “Restatement of Values of Judicial Life” (adopted at a Chief Justices Conference in May 1997) lays the basis of degree of aloofness and the basis of how post-retirement conduct ought to be. For example, if a judge after deciding politically sensitive cases involving particular political parties or politicians, soon after retirement seeks and gets a plum post such as a Rajya Sabha nomination by those very politicians or parties, it would obviously raise serious questions about his/her independence as a judge when he or she had decided those cases.

Conclusion

- This nomination will be seen as a crass example of a regime rewarding a member of the judiciary for meeting its expectations during his tenure.
- It will be futile to argue that it is a well-deserved recognition for an eminent jurist.
- The gap of 4 months between his retirement and nomination and the fact that a series of decisions in his court were in seeming conformity with the present government’s expectations militate against such a justification.
- He no longer represents the judiciary, and his contribution will be limited to the expertise and knowledge he can bring to debates in Parliament.
- Any attempt to create ‘cohesion’ between the two wings would necessarily encroach on the judiciary’s role as a restraining force on the executive and legislature.
- He should have rejected the offer, considering not only the nature of judgments that Benches headed by him had delivered in the Ayodhya dispute and Rafale investigation and the

administrative decisions he had made in prioritizing some cases above matters such as the validity of electoral bonds and Kashmir’s altered status.

- Justice Gogoi and the government’s actions in the sexual harassment case and the offer of a Rajya Sabha seat by the government, raise serious doubts about the fairness of many critical judgments, including the ones mentioned above that were under Justice Gogoi’s watch.
- The precedent that he has set strikes a blow against the independence of the judiciary. It is hoped that this shameful act will lead to public opprobrium which will deter other judges from emulating such conduct.
- As for the government, making such an offer to a just retired CJI is not mere brazenness. It indicates an alarming intention to undermine judicial authority so that the elected executive is seen as all-powerful.

Cooling-off period

- Officials who retire from sensitive positions are barred from accepting any other appointment for a period of time, normally two years.
- These cooling-off periods in posts are premised on the snapping off of the nexus between previous incumbency and new appointment by the interposition of a sufficient time gap.

Lokpal (Complaint) Rules, 2020

Why in news?

- The Department of Personnel and Training had issued a notification, under Section 59 of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act. It lays down the rules and prescribed format called the Lokpal (Complaint) Rules, 2020 for filing complaints with the anti-corruption ombudsman, after a year when Lokpal became functional.

Lokpal (Complaint) Rules, 2020

- A complainant has to give a valid proof of identity, as specified therein.

- Foreign nationals can also lodge complaints. Only a copy of their passports will be accepted as proof of identity.
- The complaint can be filed electronically, by post or in person. In case the complaint is filed electronically, its hard copy has to be submitted to the Lokpal within 15 days.
- No complaints can be filed against a public servant under the Army Act, Navy Act, Air Force Act and the Coast Guard Act.
- A complaint may ordinarily be made in English, provided that the Lokpal may also entertain a complaint in any of the languages referred to in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution.
- Apart from the details of the accused official(s), allegation and the evidence relied upon, the complainant or the authorised signatory will also have to submit an affidavit.
- Registration/incorporation certificate of the organisation, on whose behalf the complaint is made and copy of authorisation certificate in favour of the signatory, if the complaint is on behalf of a board, body, corporation, company, limited liability partnership, authority, society, association of persons or trusts, has to be furnished.
- The Lokpal bench will decide the complaint in the first instance at the admission stage. The Lokpal may seek other details or affidavit, if necessary.
- The identity of the complainant or the accused official will be protected by the Lokpal till the conclusion of inquiry or investigation. However, the protection will not be applicable in cases where the complainant herself reveals her identity to any other office or authority while making the complaint to Lokpal.
- The complaints, whose contents are illegible, vague or ambiguous, which are trivial or frivolous, do not contain any allegation, are not filed within the limitation period of seven years, or are pending before any other court, tribunal or authority, will have to be disposed of within 30 days.

Lokpal

- From 1963, India has been nurturing the ambition to appoint a Lokpal, a phrase coined by L.M. Singhvi. Copied from Sweden's Ombudsman and its adaptation in the U.K. in 1967, the idea was to expose 'maladministration'.
- The Lokpal started functioning in India in March 2019 after the appointment of its Chairman (Justice P.C. Ghose) and 8 Members. It has so far received over 1,100 complaints, most of which have been disposed of without initiation of any inquiry.

Curbs on cryptocurrency trading was illegal

Why in news?

- The Supreme Court struck down the curb on cryptocurrency trade in India. SC rules curb on crypto currency trade is illegal and lifted ban on trading in virtual currency, cryptocurrency and bitcoins.
- RBI had virtually banned cryptocurrency trading in India on 6 April 2018, it directed that all entities regulated by it (banking channels) shall not deal in virtual currencies or provide services for facilitating any person or entity in dealing with or settling those.
- Regulated entities that were already providing such services were told to exit the relationship within three months.
- RBI banned Cryptocurrencies because it was considered as a poor unit of account, as demonstrated by their frequent and high fluctuation in value.
- They pose several risks, including anti-money laundering and terrorism financing concerns.
- On the perspective of consumers, issues linked to cryptocurrencies are heightened by the striking paucity of information on their design, use and operation and indications of market manipulation.

- That ban dealt a crippling blow to the industry and saw the closure of more than a dozen exchanges in India.
- This ban was challenged by the Internet & Mobile Association of India (IAMA) in the SC and pleaded that dealing and trading in cryptocurrency was a legitimate business activity and that the RBI did not have jurisdiction over it as these assets could be classified as commodities rather than currency.

Recent Ruling

- The apex court found RBI's actions 'disproportionate' to the risks it sought to address and, therefore, unconstitutional. It is in violation of the freedom to carry on trade guaranteed by Article 19(1)(g) of the Indian Constitution.
- The judgment holds that while the RBI had the power to take note of and deal with virtual currencies, the prohibition was excessive since it cut off the lifeline of otherwise legitimate trade.

Impact of lifting the ban on virtual currency

- The ruling is an opportunity for virtual currency investors and businesses in India to push against stricter rules being planned by a skeptical government, and potentially raises hope for projects such as Facebook Inc.'s Libra cryptocurrency.
- With this order, there is a likelihood of more mature and balanced regulation of cryptocurrencies and the fintech sector as a whole.
- This lifting of the ban will help in incorporation of blockchain technology.
- Supreme Court judgment may pave the way for revival of bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies as an asset class by reopening up the formal financial system to it.
- Allowing cryptocurrency will enable India to be part of this global deal.

Way Ahead

- SC is separately hearing another case, in which it will decide on regulations for digital currencies, and this judgment weakens the case for strict norms.
- Based on it, the government will have to revise its proposed legislation on cryptocurrency. This ruling is going to work towards changing India's image in adopting new age transactions.
- For India, aiming to be a digital economy powerhouse, embracing emerging technologies like cryptocurrency and blockchain is a must.

Freedom in the World 2020 report

Why in news?

- Freedom in the World 2020 report is an annual global report published by pro-democracy non-profit Freedom House, a U.S.-based watchdog, which has been tracking global political and civil liberties for almost half a century.
- Finland, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands and Luxembourg are the top five countries in the free category.
- India has become one of the world's least free democracies. India scored 34 out of 40 points in the political rights category, but only 37 out of 60 in the civil liberties category, for a total score of 71, a drop from last year's score of 75. This is the worst decline among the world's 25 largest democracies this year.
- This report ranks India at the 83rd position, along with Timor-Leste and Senegal. This is near the bottom of the pile among the countries categorised as "Free", with only Tunisia receiving a lower score.
- The report treats "Indian Kashmir" as a separate territory, which saw its total score drop precipitously from 49 to 28 this year, moving it from a status of "Partly Free" to "Not Free".
- The annulment of autonomy and the subsequent shutdown of Kashmir, the National Register of Citizens and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, as well as the crackdown on

mass protests have been listed as the main signs of declining freedom in India.

- These three actions have shaken the rule of law in India and threatened the secular and inclusive nature of its political system.
- The report noted that India has long been seen as a democratic counterweight to China and hence a strategic partner for the United States in the region. However, that view is changing, with India attracting criticism similar to that levied against China.
- The report slammed the internet blackout in Kashmir, terming it the longest shutdown ever imposed by a democracy. It said freedom of expression was under threat in India, with journalists, academics and others facing harassment and intimidation when addressing politically sensitive topics.
- The report stated that "democracy and pluralism are under assault" across the world and highlights the decline of the US and India.
- It also highlights the spread of fake news and manipulated content, creating political divide.
- Compared with the previous year, in 2019, individuals in 64 countries experienced deterioration in their political rights and civil liberties while those in just 37 experienced improvements. More than half of the countries that were rated free or not free in 2009 have suffered a net decline in the past decade.

About the Report

- The report derives its methodology from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948.
- It covers 195 countries, awarding scores based on political rights indicators such as the electoral process, political pluralism and participation and government functioning, as well as civil liberties indicators related to freedom of expression and belief associational and organisational rights, the rule of law and personal autonomy and individual rights.



Land acquisition

Why in news?

- Supreme Court upheld that proceedings under the Land Acquisition Act 1894 will not lapse if the compensation has been tendered by deposit in treasury in the Indore Development Authority case.
- A five-judge Constitution Bench also overruled an earlier 2014 ruling under the Section 24 (2) of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013.

About

- In this latest ruling, the Bench interpreted Section 24 (2) of the 2013 Act, which states that an acquisition will lapse if physical possession of the land has not been taken "or" the compensation has not been paid.
- The recent judgement said that there was no obligation that the amount should be deposited

in the court in order to sustain the land acquisition proceedings. The compensation would be considered paid if the amount is put in the Treasury.

- Thus, there is no lapse if possession has been taken and compensation has not been paid. Similarly, there is no lapse if compensation has been paid and possession not taken of the land.
- SC also held that Section 24(2) of the 2013 Act does not give rise to a new cause of action to question the legality of concluded proceedings of land acquisition.
- According to this act government has to initiate “fresh Proceedings” under the 2013 act to provide fair compensation if the physical possession has not been taken or the compensation is not paid.
- The issue was whether deposit of compensation by the government in treasury can be deemed as payment to landowner as per Section 24(2) of the 2013 Land Acquisition.
- The apex court aimed to clear the air over two contradictory judgements, delivered in 2014 (Pune municipality case) and 2018 (Indore development case), over whether land acquired by the government would lapse if it fails to deposit the compensation within five years in the bank account of the landowners.

The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013 (2013 Act)

- This Act replaced the Land Acquisition Act, 1894 (1894 Act).
- The new Act provides for higher compensation to those deprived of land by the government for both public and private sector projects.
- It also mandates consent of a majority of landowners, and contains provisions for rehabilitation and resettlement.

Issue

- There are cases of farmers and landowners refusing compensation which delays the possession by the government.

- In such cases, the compensation is deposited in the government treasury and according to one interpretation, the acquisition process is saved.
- This interpretation has been contended on the basis that such cases will fall under the new Act because compensation has not been paid to the landowners, and the lapsing clause in Section 24 should be applied.
- If a long-pending land acquisition process closes under the old law and fresh acquisition proceedings start under the new one, the landowners will benefit and project proponents will have to pay higher compensation.
- In the Pune Municipal Corporation vs Harakchand Misirimal Solanki case 2014, a three-judge bench held that acquisition proceedings initiated under the 1894 Act, which were initiated five years before the 2013 law was enacted (in 2014), would lapse if the land in question was not taken control of or if compensation was not paid to displaced farmers.
- The judgment came as a relief for landowners.
- However, in the Indore Development Authority vs Shailendra (D) Through LRS & Ors case 2018, another three-judge bench declared the 2014 judgment “per incuriam”.
- It held that if a landowner refuses to accept the compensation offered by the developer, they cannot take advantage of their own wrongdoing and have the acquisition proceedings lapse under the old law.
- This judgement was a relief for developers.

Organisation without political goal not penalized

Why in news?

- The Supreme Court held that the Central government cannot brand an organisation ‘political’ and deprive it of its right to receive foreign funds for using “legitimate forms of dissent” like bandh, hartal, road roko or jail ‘bharo’ to aid a public cause.

About

- Any organisation which supports the cause of a group of citizens agitating for their rights without a political goal or objective cannot be penalised by being declared as an organisation of a political nature.
- But their foreign funding could continue as long as these organisations worked for the “social and political welfare of society” and not to further “political interests”.

Political objectives

- The court wholesomely agreed that organisations with “avowed political objectives in its memorandum of association or bye laws” cannot be permitted access to foreign funds. Such organisations were clearly of a “political nature”.
- The verdict came on a petition filed by Indian Social Action Forum challenging certain provisions of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010 and the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Rules of 2011, both of which confer the Centre with “unguided and uncanalised power” to brand organisations ‘political’ and shut down their access to foreign funds.
- The FCRA 2010 prohibited acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality for any activities detrimental to the national interest.
- The purpose for which the statute prevents organisations of a political nature from receiving foreign funds is to ensure that the administration is not influenced by foreign funds.
- Prohibition from receiving foreign aid, either directly or indirectly, by those who are involved in active politics is to ensure that the values of a sovereign democratic republic are protected. On the other hand, such of those voluntary organisations which have absolutely no connection with either party politics or active politics cannot be denied access to foreign contributions.

Provisions under challenge before the court

- The provisions under challenge before the court included Section 5 (1) of the FCRA. This provision allowed the Centre a free hand to decide whether a seemingly non-political organisation was actually political in nature.
- INSAF argued that Section 5(1) was vague and thus unconstitutional. The Delhi High Court, which INSAF approached first, said the provision was “expansive” and not vague. The Supreme Court agreed with the High Court.
- The next provision under the microscope was Section 5(4) of the FCRA. INSAF said the provision did not exactly identify the authority before which an organisation could represent its grievance. But the apex court dismissed this contention.
- INSAF had also challenged the various clauses of Rule 3 of the 2011 Rules. This provision identified the various types of ‘political’ activities for which/organisations whose foreign funding could be stopped by the government.

COVID-19 and multilateralism

Why in news?

- Global leaders have reached this consensus that the pandemic Covid-19 and the crisis it has generated is a turning point in modern history.
- The crisis offers the world an opportunity to forge a new human-centric concept of globalisation.
- The coronavirus has shown up at a moment of deepening tensions between the US and China.
- The grave collective challenge that the virus constitutes has only sharpened the conflict. The US blames China for letting this virus become a global monster and Beijing is doing all it can to deny that the virus came out of China.

WHO caught in the ceasefire

- The charge that the WHO leadership might have become a “tool of Chinese propaganda” shows how dramatically the relationship between

Beijing and the world body has transformed in recent years.

- As a nation battered by the Cultural Revolution, China used international cooperation and global institutions to rebuild itself in the last decades of the 20th century.
- Having developed its economy and advanced its scientific and technological base, China is now ready to reorder global governance and become a rule-maker.
- The effects are visible in the arena of global health. China's expanding global engagement with the WHO, its substantive international health assistance programmes and an impressive domestic health technology sector are poised to boost China's ambition to build a 'Global Silk Road for Health'.
- One of the casualties of the US-China wrangling over the coronavirus is the WHO, which is supposed to be at the very heart of the global effort to cope with the pandemic.
- The WHO has been accused of serving China's interests rather than preparing the world against the spread of the virus.
- The basis for these charges is the WHO's endorsement of the Chinese claim in mid-January that there was no evidence of human-to-human transmission of the virus, consistent support for Beijing's handling of the crisis and criticism of other nations for imposing travel restrictions to and from China.
- WHO also lulled the world into complacency by delaying the decision on calling it a global emergency
- All this point towards to the new geopolitics of multilateralism, disprove the assumptions in both the West and India on China's role in the UN and underline China's success in the leveraging of international organization for its national advantage.
- Nearly 2 decades ago, during the SARS crisis, WHO was at the front and centre of pressing China to come clean on the unfolding pandemic.
- In 2003, it had issued the organization's first travel advisory ever on travel to and from the epicentre of the pandemic in southern China.

- As the SARS crisis escalated, China's traditional arguments about the centrality of state sovereignty yielded place to a new policy of working with the WHO and taking proactive steps to reassure neighbours in South East Asia.
- Some attribute the turnaround in the relationship between China and WHO to China's growing financial contributions. Others suggest that China's political support was crucial in the election of Tadros in 2017.
- Observers of the UN point to something more fundamental- a conscious and consequential Chinese effort to expand its clout in the multilateral system.
- China, which was admitted to the UN system in the 1970s, was focused on finding its way in the 1980s, cautiously raised its profile in the 1990s, took on some political initiatives at the turn of the millennium and seized the leadership in the last few years.
- Neither the West nor India has been prepared to deal with the impact of China's rise on the UN system. They hoped that China will play by the rules set by the West.

Reaction at international level against COVID-19

- Interventions to deal with the COVID-19 crisis are so far almost entirely at the national level, relying on quarantine and social distancing. There is virtually no coordination at the international level.
- Blame game between China and US is visible which does not augur well for international cooperation and leadership.
- This is the present state of play, the long-term impact could follow alternative pathways. One, the more hopeful outcome would be for countries to finally realize that there is no option but to move away from nationalistic urges and embrace the logic of international cooperation through revived and strengthened multilateral institutions and processes.
- The other more depressing consequence may be that nationalistic trends become more intense, countries begin to build walls around themselves and even existing multilateralism is further weakened.

- Institutions such as UN and WHO, which are already marginalized, may become increasingly irrelevant.
- There could be a return to autarkic economic and trade policies and an even deeper and more pervasive anti-globalization sentiment. Unless there is a conscious effort to stem this through a reaffirmation of multilateralism, we are looking at a very depressing decade ahead.
- This is when the world needs leadership and statesmanship, both in short supply. The world today is 'inter-connected, inter-related and also interdependent', it has not been able to come on a single platform or frame a Global Agenda, a global goal of how to end terrorism, how to handle Climate change issues.

India

- India, which considered US dominance over the international institutions in the 1990s as a major threat, chose to align with China in promoting a 'multipolar world'. India convinced itself that despite differences over the boundary, Pakistan and other issues, there is huge room for cooperation with China.
- India discovered that Chinese global hegemony could be a lot more problematic than American primacy. After all, it is China that complicates India's plans for membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, protects Pakistan against international pressures on cross-border terrorism and relentlessly pushes the UN Security Council to take up the Kashmir question
- India now turns to the US and its allies to pursue some of its interests in the UN.
- If there is one lesson that India could learn from China's experience with WHO and the UN, it is that multilateralism is not an end in itself for major powers.
- It is an important means to secure one's national interest and shape the international environment.
- On its part, India needs to intensify the recalibration of India's multilateralism, rewrite its diplomatic lexicon at the UN, and build new political coalitions that will simultaneously

contribute to India's internal modernisation and enhance its international influence.

- The corona crisis is a good moment to start writing a new script for India's own health diplomacy. India is all set to join the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Solidarity Trial which aims at rapid global search for drugs to treat COVID-19.

Steps taken by India

- India government's policy of seeking friendship with all countries as contrasted from the earlier policy of non-alignment was laudable. It is equally firm in safeguarding its interests when these are threatened.
- Non-alignment was a defensive policy which advocated "equal distance from every country". India was still neutral, presumable meaning non-alignment, but not on the basis of distance but on the basis of friendship.
- India's traditional foreign policy emphasizes on global collaboration to deal with a densely inter-connected world. A leadership role in mobilizing global collaboration, more specifically in fighting COVID-19 would be in keeping with India's traditional activism on the international stage.
- Recently, India has shown active participation by convening first video-conferencing with SAARC member countries for a regional collaborative effort on COVID-19. This should be followed by an international initiative, either through the G-20 or through the UN.

Vaccine trail

- The search for a COVID 19 vaccine has become a matter of international competition.
- For the US, Europe and China, national pride is at stake in this race. Accusations have been made that the US is attempting to poach European, especially German, advances towards finding a vaccine in an effort to outdo its competitors.
- Self-perceived great powers such as the US and China are especially worried that their inability to control the virus and find antidotes to it

could not only lead to loss of face but also in the long run irretrievably erode their image as great powers with the capacity to set the international security and economic agendas.

- American commentators and policymakers are especially concerned that their failure to act quickly and lead the world in finding a solution to the crisis could even result in a reversal in the global pecking order with the U.S. losing its preeminent position to China.
- National pride and national security issues have thus become irretrievably intertwined with the search to combat COVID 19

Conclusion

- Moves such as closures of borders and bans on commercial international flights make sense for the simple reason that the effective structure of governance is largely circumscribed by national boundaries. Laws are made and enforced by state authorities.
- Despite all the talk of global governance, supranational bodies, whether regional or global, have very limited capacities to control the day-to-day lives of human beings. And a pandemic such as this needs effective methods of ordering the lives of citizens. Only the state and its representatives can perform this role.
- The COVID-19 pandemic presents India with an opportunity to revive multilateralism, become a strong and credible champion of internationalism and assume a leadership role in a world that is adrift.
- The inspiration for this should come from reaffirming the well springs of India's foreign policy since its independence rather than seeking to break free.

SAARC meet

Why in news?

- This meet held on 15 March 2020 via video conferencing, as its assertive expression to stabilize the region, between leaders of 8 countries in which India announced an initial non-trivial offering of USD 10 million and the

formation of a Rapid Response team (of doctors, specialists, testing equipment and attendant infrastructure) to be put at the disposal of the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), at this moment of outbreak of COVID-19.

- India has decided to set up an electronic platform to help member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) fight the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The decision has been conveyed during a virtual conference of health professionals of eight countries in the region.
- Nepal has also announced a contribution of 10 crore Nepali rupees for the SAARC COVID19 Emergency Fund.
- Virtual summit is the first high level SAARC meet since 2014.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) has also constituted the COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund with the help of corporate bodies, foundations and the UN Foundation.
- South Asia has seen a much lower cases globally, but given its much higher population density, it is clear that any outbreak will lead for far more casualties.
- Afghanistan and Pakistan have specific challenges as they share long borders with Iran, which has emerged, after China and Italy, as a major hub of the virus.
- Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka worry about the impact on tourism, which is the mainstay of their economies.
- Other concerns are about under-reporting, as fewer people are being tested in much of South Asia, and whether public health services can cope. It remains to be seen how closely the SAARC countries will cooperate to deal with the virus.

Role of South Asia

- South Asia is the world's least integrated region; less than 5% of the trade of SAARC countries is within.
- A South Asian Free Trade Zone agreed on, in 2006, remains, in reality, a chimera.

- The 19th SAARC summit, scheduled to be held in Islamabad in November 2016, was postponed after the terrorists attacks in Uri; none has been held since then. Since then, India, the largest SAARC country, has held that the grouping has inherent problems and has instead highlighted the role of newer outfits like the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) as an alternative to SAARC to deliver on connectivity, development and counter-terrorism efforts.
- SAARC lacked momentum for some time, after it, BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) and BIMSTEC and BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar) were started.

SAARC

- It was born at a moment of hope in the 1980s; the idea was indicated by General Zia Ur Rehman of Bangladesh, who, met many of the other leaders personally and dispatched special envoys to the capitals of the countries of the region.
- Dhaka's persistence resulted in the first summit of the 7 leaders of the region in 1985. Afghanistan joined in 2007. In the nearly 35 years of its existence, even its champions will concede however that SAARC has, to put it euphemistically, not lived up to the promise of its founder.

Fadeout of SAARC

- The reasons for the failure of SAARC have been enumerated several times as well. SAARC has not been successful in containing a regional threat of terrorism. Clearly, most of the smaller states and external players believe that the Indian Pakistan conflict has undermined SAARC.
- Bilateral issues can't be discussed in SAARC but since the organization relies on the principle of unanimity for all major decisions, Pakistan has often undermined even the most laudable initiative lest it give India an advantage: relative gains by India are more important for Pakistan than the absolute gains it secures for itself

- For India, Pakistan's use of terror as an instrument of foreign policy has made normal business impossible.
- This recent reviving of SAARC will not be easy, given poor ties between its two largest members, India and Pakistan. But it is significant that New Delhi seems to be willing to try to put politics aside when dealing with the pandemic that confronts all.

Analysis

- South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has suddenly acquired a new lease of life since 15 March 2020.
- It represents "out-of-the-box" thinking as the world faces the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic.
- Through a counter-intuitive initiative by Indian PM, SAARC has become the 'virtual platform' through which leaders of the 8 countries of our troubled region agreed to work together to combat unarguably the greatest immediate threat to the people: the COVID-19 health pandemic.
- The success of this recent SAARC meet will largely depend on India-the dominant power of the region, in every sense.
- Once New Delhi demonstrates that it has the capacity, the political willingness to institutionalize and to lead a mutually beneficial cooperative regime in the region, Pakistan's "churlish" behavior will become marginal to SAARC. Various international relations theorists view this as a function of "hegemonic stability".
- The initial steps announced by India in this recent meet are laudable, including the proposal to setup a COVID-19 Emergency Fund for SAARC countries.
- India has also proposed a rapid response team of doctors and specialists, along with testing kits and other equipment for all the member countries.
- India has set up an Integrated Disease Surveillance Portal to better trace possible virus carriers and the people they contacted. India has offered to share it with member countries.

Way Ahead

- Individual countries can't be developed because we are in the age of globalization. Fostering economic integration and development, supporting social and educational development and integration are some of the important things that India can do.
- The meeting initiated by India was welcomed. The people of Bangladesh have also shown a positive attitude. Besides, there is concern about the problem in all these countries. This will surely reduce tension and create robust cooperation.
- Much more will need to be done by India to establish that the video conference was not a mere event, but the assertive expression of its new willingness to stabilize the region through cooperative mechanisms, for our common future, without being distracted by short-sighted disingenuous ploys of a troubled Pakistan or being put off by its grandstanding.
- Pakistan should realize that the future of the region lies in cooperation with India. Not just India, the Afghan government is also having a very bitter experience in dealing with Pakistan as they say militants are coming from Pakistan. Nevertheless, Pakistan is a very important country and that is why it is necessary that Pakistan should come on board.
- This is a moment thus of a rare opportunity for India to establish its firm imprimatur over the region; and to secure an abiding partnership for our shared destiny.

General Studies III (Technology, Economic Development, Bio-diversity, Environment, Security and Disaster Management)

Bacteria capable of methane mitigation in rice plants

Why in news?

- Recently, scientists at the Agharkar Research Institute (ARI), Pune, an autonomous institute under the Department of Science & Technology (DST), have isolated 45 different strains of methanotrophic bacteria which have been found to be capable of reducing methane emissions from rice plants.
- Methanotrophs metabolise and convert methane into carbon dioxide. They can effectively reduce methane emission, which is the second most important greenhouse gas (GHG) and 26 times more potent as compared to carbon dioxide. This could lead to the development of microbial inoculants for methane mitigation in rice.
- ARI team have created the first indigenous methanotroph culture. They isolated indigenous methanotrophs from Western and Southern India, mainly from rice field soils and freshwater mud, and two novel genera and six novel species of methanotrophs from rice fields in western India have been documented. In pot trials, some of the strains were used as bio-inoculants in rice plants.

How rice fields contribute generates methane?

- In rice fields, methanotrophs are active near the roots or soil-water interfaces.
- Rice fields are human-made wetlands and are waterlogged for a considerable period. Anaerobic degradation of organic matter results in the generation of methane. Rice fields

contribute to nearly 10% of global methane emissions.

Application of methanotrophs

- Besides methane mitigation studies, methanotrophs can also be used in methane value addition (valorization) studies.
- Bio-methane generated from waste can be used by the methanotrophs and can be converted to value-added products such as single-cell proteins, carotenoids, biodiesel, and so on.
- The team is further working on methane valorization studies from the isolated methanotrophs. Such studies help reduce GHG emissions, especially anthropogenic or man-made emissions, which is a pressing need in the age of global warming.

Role of SIRT1

Why in news?

- A study has been published by researchers from Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai (TIFR) in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences which revealed that glucose controls the function of SIRT1 directly. A shortage or absence of this control can lead to a diabetic-like state, while excess feeding and sustained low levels of SIRT1 can lead to obesity and enhanced ageing.
- An enzyme called SIRT1 regulates metabolic activities and also ageing. SIRT1 stands for sirtuin.
- There are many diseases related to high calorie content in the body, such as metabolic disorders.
- Metabolic diseases are associated with wrong feeding regimen, even in humans. Every organism has evolved so as to feed and then alternately fast, so it becomes important to understand this cycle. This cycle, known as the feed-fast cycle is a basic pattern and the metabolism related to this is largely taken care of by the liver.

Role of glucose

- Glucose controls the functions of a protein SIRT1 which in turn maintains everyday feed-fast cycles and is also associated with longevity. In normal healthy individuals, SIRT1 protein levels are known to increase during fasting and decrease during feed, which is essential to maintain a balance between glucose and fat metabolism.
- Glucose puts a check on the activity of SIRT1 in the fed state. In the absence of this check, SIRT1 activity increases and results in hyperglycaemia in a fasted state, mimicking diabetic state. Constant feeding or high calorie intake that leads to sustained reduction in the levels of SIRT1 (by glucose) is associated with ageing and obesity.
- In other words, this study shows that both over-activation and under-activation of this longevity factor could lead to diseases.

Way Forward

- This study paves the way to regulating this modification, which might be beneficial in tackling lifestyle disorders and ageing related diseases.

Starch-based 'hemostat' material

Why in news?

- Scientists from the Institute of Nano Science and Technology (INST), an autonomous institute under the Department of Science & Technology, have developed a starch-based 'hemostat' material that stops rapid blood loss during accidents.
- After a serious injury, few challenges are more urgent than stopping life-threatening bleeding.
- Hemostat materials absorb excel fluid by concentrating the natural clotting factors in the blood that are critical for stopping the blood flow; however, the bleeding can restart when non-biodegradable materials are removed.
- The microparticles of the product, known as calcium-modified carboxymethyl-starch.

- By chemically modifying natural starch to form microparticles, they create an adherent gel that can remain on the wound until slowly dissipating as healing proceeds.
- The microparticles are prepared by modifying some of the chemical hydroxyl groups on starch to carboxymethyl groups while also incorporating the beneficial calcium ions, which encourages the aggregation of red blood cells and platelets and their activation to generate the fibrin protein network that forms a stable blood clot.
- This modification increases the ability of the molecules to interact with water. This is the basis of its impressive ability to absorb fluid from the blood and hence concentrate the clotting factors.

Significance of this development

- Presently, no single hemostatic agent exists that can work in all situations. That current hemostat materials are very expensive and available mostly in developed countries.
- Few starch-based biodegradable options are currently available are limited by their relatively slow fluid absorption and poor adhesion to wounded tissues. Besides, being rigid, imperfect biocompatibility are problems encountered in currently available options.
- The early-stage development of the material is potentially life-saving and inexpensive product that would be a more realistic solution for lower-income economies worldwide.
- The product has increased absorption capacity, improved absorption, inexpensive, biocompatible as well as biodegradable.
- In animal studies with real wounds, moderate to heavy blood flow was stopped in less than one minute. The animal studies also indicate that the material is non-toxic and confirmed its biodegradability.

Way forward

- These encouraging results suggest our modified starch microparticles are a very promising candidate for further exploration in clinical applications.

Cord blood banking

Why in news?

- Recently, Poona Citizen Doctor Forum (PCDF), a body that aims to rebuild trust among citizens and doctors, and promote ethical rational medical practice, dispels belief on commercial cord blood banking. It warned to-be parents against falling prey to the emotional marketing tactics by stem cell banking companies.
- Cord blood banking involves taking the umbilical cord blood, which is a rich source of stem cells, and preserving it for future use. It is the blood from the baby that is left in the umbilical cord and placenta after birth.
- Private companies who have forayed into this field offer packages anywhere between ₹50,000 and ₹1 lakh to store and preserve the cells in right conditions.
- As, it contains hematopoietic stem cells that can be used to treat some types of diseases. These cells can mature into different types of blood cells in the body.
- Globally, cord blood banking is recommended as a source of hematopoietic stem cell (derived from bone marrow, peripheral blood, or umbilical cord blood) transplantation for haematological cancers and disorders where its use is recommended. For all other conditions, the use of cord blood as a source of stem cells is not yet established.

Issue

- Over the past decade, stem cell banking has been aggressively marketed even as its use is still in experimental stages. But these companies charge enormous fees from parents to preserve cells

- It is merely by emotional marketing that companies convince parents to bank the cells for several years promising future therapeutic use.
- Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) does not recommend commercial stem cell banking. As there is no scientific basis for preservation of cord blood for future self-use and this practice therefore raises ethical and social concerns.
- Private storage of the cord blood is advisable when there is an elder child in the family with a condition treatable with these cells and the mother is expecting the next baby. In other situations, parents should be educated about the limitations of banking at this point of time.
- Despite such guidelines, a nexus of doctors and stem cell banking companies thrives and these companies get access to data of to-be parents.
- Activists say stem cell banking companies start approaching their prospective customers much before the delivery and offer competitive packages.

Impact of COVID-19 on economy around the world

Why in news?

- Due to global outbreak of COVID-19 across the world, a diverse set of industries has been impacted by the spread of the virus. The major impact is visible on supply chains in global economy, which will further tip into a recession unless the virus turns out to be seasonal.

Why should the economy be affected?

- Less engagement with the outer world and avoid work, education, fitness and entertainment, a lot less economic activity would occur.
- Businesses face the challenge of disrupted supply of components to make products or of having to shut some of their factories temporarily, not to mention large swathes of the workforce having to be quarantined.

- The economic impact of COVID-19 can be traced through 4 channels: external demand; domestic demand; supply disruptions, and financial and market disturbances.
- External domestic demand: As the economies of the developed countries slow down, their demand for imports of goods will go down and this will affect our exports. Not only merchandise exports but also service exports will suffer. Besides these, the IT industry, travel and transport and hotel industries will be affected. The only redeeming feature in the external sector is the fall in oil prices. India's oil import bill will come down substantially. But this will affect the oil exporting countries which absorb Indian labour. Remittances may slow down. Due to lockdown in country, it will impact transportation and several other sectors closely related to them. The laying off of non-permanent employees has already started. Supply disruptions can occur because of the inability to import or procure inputs. Domestic supply chain can also be affected as the inter-state movement of goods has also slowed down.
- Financial market issues: The stock market in India has collapsed. This has a wealth affect and will have an impact on the behaviour of particularly high wealth holders. Foreign Portfolio Investors have shown great nervousness and the value of rupee in terms of dollar has also fallen. The two major tools that are available to government are monetary policy and fiscal actions. Monetary policy in a situation like this can only act to stimulate demand by a greater push of liquidity and credit. But any substantial reduction of policy rate can also affect savers. Interest is a double edged sword. RBI needs to go beyond cutting policy rate. A certain amount of regulatory forbearance is required to make the banks lend. Any relaxation of rules regarding the recognition of non-performing assets has to be across the entire business sector. Fiscal actions have a major role to play. Fiscal deficit of the Central government will turn out to be higher. Revenues are likely to go down further because

of the virus related slowdown in economic activity. The virus has to be fought and brought down. All expenditures to test and to take care of patients must be incurred. Therefore, the first priority is to mobilise adequate resources to meet all health related expenditures which includes the supply of accessories such as masks, sanitisers and materials for tests. The challenge is not only fiscal but also organisational.

- The job sector: Daily-wage earners, temporary employees have been thrown out of employment. Migrant labourers have gone back to home States. In this case, business units should keep temporary workers on their rolls and provide them with a minimal income. In case of sectors such as hospitality and travel, the government can extend relief through deferment of payments of dues to the government. At this moment when all the energies of the government are required to combat the virus, to institute a system of universal cash transfer will be a diversion of efforts. The burden on the government will depend upon the quantum of per-capita cash transfer and the length of the period.

Predictions

- The problem with current predictions is that it is unknown that how long the virus will remain potent. Rabobank predicted global GDP growth to be 1.6% for 2020, a figure that was 2.9% the last year, as per IMF estimates.
- In March 2020, the Institute for International Finance predicted that global economic growth could turn out to be as low as 1% and this was even before the OPEC club and Russia fell out on production agreements to maintain stable oil prices.
- The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) said that the virus outbreak could cost the global economy up to USD 2 trillion this year and that the pandemic could cause a recession in some countries causing global economic growth to check in below 2.5%. (Recession sets in when the

economy shows two consecutive quarters of contraction)

- It has been projected that the COVID-19 outbreak and 21 day lockdown will reduce India's GDP in the first half of 2020 by Rs.10.3 lakh crore, bringing GDP growth for FY20 down to 4.8% and causing a 3% contraction of GDP in the first quarter of fiscal year 2020-21.
- Rating agency Crisil has cut the country's GDP growthforecast for the next financial year to 3.5% from 5.2% projected earlier, due to the spread of COVID-19.

Global Scenario

- Stock markets globally have declined.
- Crude oil prices also began declining due to fears of global recession and drop in demand for energy.
- Travel and trade have been severely affected in large parts of the world, with restrictions on movement and cancelation of visa, etc.

Which industries are impacted in India?

- There is no industry that has experienced the impact. When China, with the disease's epicenter in Wuhan, was brought to its knees, the Indian pharmaceuticals, automobile and mobile phone industries, for example, immediately wobbled. India depends on China for supplies of components for products that these sectors make.
- The Indian pharma industry, which depends on China for 70% of raw materials needed to manufacture drugs here, has seen input costs go up by 50% as of February 2020.
- The pesticides sector is another that has been affected as manufacturers depend on China for raw materials.
- The current supply chain disruption requires that either Indian production is ramped up where possible or alternative sources of supply abroad are found. But given the fact that, much of the alternative production possibilities have been disrupted in last 20 years by cheap Chinese goods, finding producers who can

quickly ramp up production is not easy. Even if alternative sources of supply are found within India, their prices will be higher, so inflation will go up.

- This inflationary tendency will be countered by the global decline in demand and a fall in commodity prices, similar to what is being witnessed in the case of energy.
- In a recessionary scenario, there is fall in incomes and reduction in demand in spite of decline in inflation.
- Expenditure on health and disease control will rise but not enough to counter the slowdown.
- The impact on the small producers is likely to be sharper due to the fact that they have small working capital. As demand declines, they are left holding inventory and also have to pay wages; this exhausts their working capital. If their units shut down for even a few months, it becomes difficult to bring them back to life.
- The financial sector is not very much attuned to catering to their demand and hence, they have to depend on the more expensive source of private funds.
- Also, as the economy declines, the already substantial NPAs of banks and NBFCs will increase in India. RBI has already reported falling business and consumer confidence and a decline in capacity utilization in the organized sectors of the economy. These factors are being aggravated by the virus related impact, further denting investment.
- Consumer confidence will remain low for a while even after the intensity of the spread of the virus declines with the onset of summer.
- People save more when the future is uncertain; hence, demand is not likely to increase immediately. Due to fear of lockdown and shortages, it is likely that people will hold more cash and essential items at their homes. Central banks will have to be prepared to issue more currency.
- They have reduced interest rates but this will have little impact since the primary reason for the global downturn and stock market volatility is decline in sentiment following the spread of the virus. It is not a cyclical downturn.

- Entertainment via mass media has seen significant impact. The very famous IPL has been postponed.
- Shut down of cinema halls. Indian movie releases have been postponed indefinitely.
- Travel has been hit severely as countries issue advisories to eliminate unnecessary travel and go into lockdown mode. The impact on profits of- and jobs at- airlines, airport authorities and oil marketing companies is obvious and immediate, not to mention the economy around air travel – the vendor of coffee and sandwiches pays out a monthly premium to occupy prime airport space so that they can sell food items to consumers.
- Textile and clothing exporters have started feeling the impact of COVID-19 because of supply chain disruptions, fall in exports and cancellation of international events. 11 countries buy 41% of India's cotton yarn exports and these countries have reported COVID-19 cases.
- There is a sharp fall in cotton yarn exports to China, Iran, Korea and Vietnam.

Conclusion

- In brief, the problem is not fully understood but fears of a big impact have grown. Supply shocks emanating from China have spread and due to impact on production, incomes are declining, leading to a fall in demand and threat of global recession. The poor are likely to be impacted more in India. At present, only the short run can be anticipated but since uncertainty has increased, governments will have to take fiscal steps anticipating the worst in the long term.
- Government should advise all business units not to retrench workers and provide some relief to them to maintain the workers. A supplemental income scheme for all the poor can be thought of once the immediate problem is resolved.
- Provision of food and other essentials must be made available to the affected as is done at the time of floods or droughts.
- The fiscal deficit is bound to go up substantially. The higher borrowing programme will need the

support of the RBI is the interest rate is to be kept low.

- Monetisation of deficit is inevitable. The strong injection of liquidity will store up problems for the next year.
- Inflation can flare up. The government needs to be mindful of this. All the same, the government must not stint and go out in a massive ways to combat the virus. This is the government's first priority.

Kerala sought relaxation of FRBM rules

Why in news?

- Kerala became one of the earliest States to announce an economic package of Rs.20,000 crore to mitigate the impact on livelihoods and overall economic activity from the sweeping steps taken to battle the COVID-19 pandemic, including the 21 day nationwide lockdown.
- Many states including UP, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Telangana, and Rajasthan followed suit.

Economic package by Central Government

- The Rs. 1.7 lakh crore economic package has been announced by Finance Ministry for the vulnerable sections - farmers, women, construction workers, senior citizens, widows and disabled people. It is less than 1% of India's GDP.
- The issue at hand is not just the size of the package relative to the GDP but the urgency of monetary transfer to unorganized sector workers, who have not only lost their jobs and income, but also face a massive health scare.
- It covers various sections of the vulnerable, ranging from farmers to and women Jan Dhan account holders, to organized sector workers, who will now get a sizeable insurance cover of Rs. 50 lakh.

About

- India has a high share of poor in its population, most of whom suffer from multiple economic and social deprivations.

- They earn their livelihoods from the informal and unorganized sectors, where there is neither job security nor continuity of income flows. Their livelihoods have to be protected through the lockdown period.
- To help fund the emergency relief package, the State proposes to borrow as much as Rs. 12,500 crore from the market in April itself and the Chief Minister has urged the Centre to provide Kerala with flexibility under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act so as to ensure that the State's finances are not adversely impacted in the rest of the financial year starting on April 1.

What is the FRBM Act?

- Enacted in August 2003, the legislation is aimed at making the Central government responsible for ensuring "inter-generational equity in fiscal management and long-term macro-economic stability".
- In other words, the current generation of the country's administrators must ensure that their management of the country's finances, both in terms of expenditure and revenue, does not leave future generations saddled with the burden of having to service unsustainably high levels of inherited debt that would in turn affect their ability to provide a stable economic environment for contemporary society.
- To achieve this, the Act envisages the setting of limits on the Central government's debt and deficits as well as mandating greater transparency in fiscal operations of the Central government and the conduct of fiscal policy in a medium-term framework.
- The rules for implementing the Act were notified in July 2004 and since then every Budget of the Union government has included a Medium Term Fiscal Policy Statement that specifies the annual revenue and fiscal deficit goals over a three-year horizon.
- The government also uses the Budget to spell out the longer-term glide path to achieve the key objective of reducing the fiscal deficit to 3% of GDP within a specified time frame — one that has shifted from the initial goal of March

31, 2009, to March 31, 2021, when the rules were amended in 2018, and most recently to the setting of a target of 3.1% for March 2023.

- To ensure that the States too are financially prudent, the 12th Finance Commission's recommendations in 2004 linked debt relief to States with their enactment of similar laws. The States have since enacted their own respective Financial Responsibility Legislation, which sets the same 3% of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) cap on their annual budget deficits.

Why is Kerala seeking flexibility under the FRBM?

- Kerala's current fiscal position means that it can borrow about ₹25,000 crore during the financial year 2020-21.
- Now, given that it proposes to raise half that amount of debt in the very first month of the new financial year, the State government is understandably concerned that the stringent borrowing cap under the fiscal responsibility laws should not constrain its borrowing and spending ability over the remaining 11 months — a period when it would not only need to continue with its COVID-19 mitigation measures but would also have to meet other expenditure for routine affairs related to the running of the State's socio-economic programmes as well as the post pandemic recovery.

How does a relaxation of the FRBM work?

- The law does contain what is commonly referred to as an 'escape clause'.
- Under Section 4(2) of the Act, the Centre can exceed the annual fiscal deficit target citing grounds that include national security, war, national calamity, collapse of agriculture, structural reforms and decline in real output growth of a quarter by at least three percentage points below the average of the previous four quarters.
- Given that the ongoing pandemic could be considered as a national calamity — which in conjunction with the ongoing lockdown to combat it is in all likelihood going to cause a severe contraction in economic output as well

— the current circumstances would be apt for suspending both the Centre's and States' fiscal deficit targets.

- This would allow both the Union government and States including Kerala to undertake the much-needed increases in expenditure to meet the extraordinary circumstances.

Economic Relief Package by Central Government

- The Centre would provide Rs. 50 lakh medical insurance cover for the next three months for about 22 lakh health workers in government hospitals fighting the spread of the virus at personal risk.
- The health workers include ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers, medical sanitary workers in government hospitals, paramedics, nurses and doctors.
- Each person who is covered under the National Food Security Act would get an additional five kg wheat or rice for free, in addition to the 5 kg of subsidised foodgrain already provided through the Public Distribution System (PDS).
- One kg of pulse a household would also be provided for free, according to regional preferences. This is expected to benefit about 80 crore people.
- About 3 crore poor pensioners above 60 years, widows and disabled people would be given ₹1000 in two instalments.
- The 20 crore women holding Jan Dhan Yojana accounts would get ₹500 a month.
- The 8.3 crore poor households, which received cooking gas connections under the Ujjwala scheme, would get free gas cylinders.
- Wages are being hiked under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act scheme, from ₹182 to ₹202 a day.
- The Centre is directing the States to use the ₹31,000 crore held by Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Boards to provide support to the 3.5 crore registered workers.
- The States can also use the money available under District Mineral Funds for medical screening, testing and treatment.
- The first instalment of ₹2000 due to them under

the PM-KISAN income support scheme will be paid promptly in April, the first month of the financial year.

- For small companies with 100 employees or less, of whom 90% earn less than ₹15,000 a month, the Centre will bear the cost of both employer and employee contribution (a total of 24%) to the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) for the next three months. This will benefit 80 lakh employees, and incentivise 4 lakh establishments.
- Collateral free loans provided for women self-help groups under the National Rural Livelihood Mission are being doubled to ₹20 lakh, potentially benefiting seven crore households.

Yes Bank crisis

Why in news?

- The Reserve Bank of India had placed India's fourth-largest private lender Yes Bank under moratorium. Bank's customers did not make regular withdrawals of more than Rs. 50,000 a day till 3 April 2020, subject to a maximum of Rs.5 lakh in exceptional cases and this moratorium got removed on 16 March 2020.
- The Union Cabinet on 13 March 2020 approved a draft 'Scheme of Reconstruction.' This entails State Bank of India investing capital to acquire a 49% stake. Four private sector lenders, including ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, Axis Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank, also be picking up stake in the bank.
- RBI superseded its board and appointed former SBI CFO Prashant Kumar as the new administrator.

How did Yes Bank fall into the crisis?

- It went on a loaning spree with advances rising by 334% between Financial Year 2014 and 2019.
- Many borrowers started defaulting The bank's gross non-performing asset percentage, that is the percentage of loans overdue for more than 90 days, zoomed to 7.39% as of September 2019, the highest among comparable banks.

- While bad loans piled up, the bank did not make enough provisions in its profits. Its provisions were the lowest among comparable banks.
- Customers withdrew large amounts, resulting in the credit-deposit ratio crossing 100% in 2018-19. That is, it lent more than it received.
- Loan spree and high NPA meant poor profitability, gauged by Yes Bank's sinking Return on Assets
- The bank's stock price fell steadily in the past year
- The bank has also experienced serious governance issues and practices in the recent years which have led to steady decline of the bank.
- Yes Bank's troubles are not exactly new or unique and its problems with mounting bad and dodgy loans reflect the underlying woes in the borrower industries, ranging from real estate to power and non-banking financial companies.
- The continued inability of several corporates to repay their loans resulting in many landing up in insolvency proceedings has meant that lenders have been the hardest hit.
- The troubles of Yes Bank were known for long. It is unwillingness of RBI to act quickly and decisively even after identification of structural weaknesses.
- In Yes Bank's case, the issue that has become a debating point is the complete liquidation of the additional tier 1 (AT1) capital bonds in the draft resolution scheme.
- AT1 bonds were introduced by BASEL-III as a special capital buffer that could be extinguished at certain trigger points without ceasing the operations of a bank and without liquidating the equity completely (so-called going concern capital).

How will this impact customer?

- The restriction on withdrawals disrupted the financial lives of not only Yes Bank account holders but even for non-Yes Bank account holders.
- Yes Bank customers could not access their accounts and were stuck not being able to pay

their loan EMIs, insurance premiums, bill payments and so on.

- It will have an impact on customers whose salary account is linked to Yes Bank
- The possibility of renewing or granting loans and making investments by the bank will reduce.
- Earlier capping withdrawals for depositors for Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative Bank was bad enough. Using the same principle for Yes Bank will only serve to erode the faith of depositors in private banks in general, and the banking regulator, RBI itself, in particular. The banking system runs on trust.
- To reinforce the sentiment of safety, the RBI needs to do is keep the chests open, and not restrict access to money. Tell depositors that they can withdraw all that they want. This is what the government did when there was a panic in 2008 regarding a large, aggressive private bank.
- Capping withdrawals for Yes Bank depositors is foolish for two specific reasons, particularly when the economy is floundering with growth rates of around 5%.
- One, people will gravitate towards public sector banks which are credit averse, and two, private banks will be forced to offer higher deposit rates, keeping the cost of credit higher.
- Under Section 45 of Banking Regulation Act, the government can relax the limits. To restore public faith back in the banking system, and improve trust in RBI as the regulator, the government should immediately raise the limit for withdrawals, and remove the cap at the earliest in these cases.

Effects of changing groundwater levels on Himalayas

Why in News?

- Recently, researchers from the Indian Institute of Geomagnetism (IIG) have found that the Himalayan range subsides and moves up depending on the seasonal changes in

groundwater, apart from the normal and common reasons.

- IIG is an autonomous institute under the Department of Science & Technology (DST).
- The Global Positioning System (GPS) and Gravity Recovery And Climate Experiment (GRACE) data were used to quantify the variations of hydrologic mass.
- The GRACE satellites, launched by the US in 2002, monitor changes in water and snow stores on the continents, enabling the researchers to study terrestrial hydrology.
- The combined GPS and GRACE data suggest a 12% reduction in the rate of the subsurface slip.
- The subsidence rate is associated with groundwater consumption.
- Subsurface slip refers to how fast the fault is slipping relative to the foot and hanging wall.
- The slip occurs at the Main Himalayan Thrust (MHT), due to hydrological variations and human activities, over which there is the periodic release of accumulated strain.

Causes of decreasing ground-water level

- Water acts as a lubricating agent and in the dry season, the rate of the slip of the fault in the region is reduced.
- There are normal and common reasons also affecting the Himalayas apart from the groundwater levels.
- The Himalayan foothills and the Indo-Gangetic plain are sinking because its contiguous areas are rising due to tectonic activity associated with landmass movement or continental drift.
- In the Himalaya, seasonal water from glaciers as well as monsoon precipitation plays a key role in the deformation of the crust and the seismicity associated with it.
- This is the first study to look at the rising Himalayas from a hydrological standpoint.

Significance of this study

- Since the Himalayas play an important role in influencing climate in the Indian subcontinent, the study will help in understanding the effects of hydrology on climate.

Water Crisis

- The world's major freshwater supplies located in Antarctica, Arctic and mountainous regions are shrinking at a faster pace. Inland glaciers and many large lakes are also receding almost everywhere around the world.
- According to the 'Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment Report: 2019', the Himalayas could lose at least two-thirds of its glaciers by 2100 affecting the livelihood of about 250 million people who live in the Hindu-Kush-Himalaya region.
- The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) in a joint monitoring report, 'Progress on Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: Special Focus on Inequalities' (2019), observes that about two billion people around the world do not have access to safely managed drinking water services to drink.
- According to a latest report by Water Aid (2019), despite the worsening water crisis, globally we use six times as much water today as we did 100 years ago and this figure is growing by about one per cent every year.
- The drying up of reservoirs in Chennai in 2019, South Africa's Cape Town narrowly avoiding 'Day Zero' water shut off, and rationing of water in Rome to conserve scarce resources, further sends a clear signal that the water situation in the world today is in fact getting much worse with each passing day.

Factors responsible

1. Unplanned urbanisation
 2. Climate change
- Across the region, the encroachment and degradation of natural water bodies (springs, ponds, lakes, canals, and rivers) and the growing disappearance of traditional water systems (stone spouts, wells, and local water tanks) are evident.

- Although only 3% of the total Hindu Kush Himalayan population lives in larger cities and 8% in smaller towns, projections show that over 50% of the population will be living in cities by 2050, placing stress on water availability.
- Under current trends, the demand-supply gap may double by 2050.

India's water crisis

- Being one of the largest water users per unit of GDP, India has about four per cent of the world's freshwater resources and is endowed with innumerable small and large water bodies. The Central Water Commission in its report on 'Reassessment on Water Availability in India using Space Inputs' (2019) estimates that the annual utilisable water resources stands at 1,123 billion cubic metres (bcm) per year, of which the share of surface water and groundwater is estimated at 690 and 433 bcm respectively.
- A total storage capacity of about 305 bcm has been created in the country through major and medium irrigation projects.
- Despite such a robust backup of water resources, the Ministry of Water Resources (2017) has stated that the country is indeed water-stressed, with the average annual per capita water availability most likely to reduce to 1,341 cubic metres and 1,140 cubic metres in 2025 and 2050 respectively.
- Last year, the NITI Aayog declared that the country is "suffering from the worst water crisis in its history and millions of lives and livelihoods are under threat". Severe water crisis has definitely arrived far earlier than predicted.

Conclusion

- The message is loud and clear from different reports that the world is in a water crisis and climate change is making it worse, compounding the scarcity challenge.
- Much of the impact of climate change is being felt through changing patterns of water availability, with shrinking rivers and changing

patterns of precipitation increasing the likelihood of drought and flood.

- We should shift from a 'supply-more water' mindset, to improving efficiency of use (and reuse) and restoring water bodies
- It is time to go back and make rainwater harvesting mandatory across all States and incentivise those who implement rainwater harvesting structures.
- Extensive adoption of water-saving technologies such as micro-irrigation in crops cultivation, volumetric supply and appropriate pricing of water should be implemented strictly to check reckless exploitation of groundwater. Crops that consume less water but give more output should be promoted by incentive schemes.
- People should be sensitised on the judicious use of water and a new legislation needs to be urgently enacted to make encroachments on water bodies a cognisable offence.
- As urban flooding is becoming more common and more intense, India can very well emulate Japan's efforts of building a massive underground tank beneath the city that stores floodwater and releases it later. Unless these climate resilient mechanisms are adopted at the earliest, creating a sustainable water future will remain a distant reality.

Concentration of Black carbon on Gangotri Glacier

Why in News?

- According to a research done by the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, the concentration of black carbon on Gangotri glacier has almost doubled in the past few years primarily because of agricultural burning and forest fires.
- Scientists have been monitoring black carbon through two weather stations on way to Gangotri glaciers - namely Chirbasa station at a height of 3,600 m, and Bhojbasa station at a height of 3,800 m - for the last few years.

- Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (WIHG) is an autonomous institution under the Department of Science & Technology. It is headquartered in Dehradun (Uttarakhand).

Seasonal Variation

- The concentration of the black carbon increases in summer months due to varied factors. Scientists have found a range of black carbon up to 4.62 micrograms per cubic metre.
- In the non-summer months, the concentration comes down to about 2 micrograms per cubic metre.
- Reasons for Increase in Black Carbon Concentration in Summer Season
- Period from April to June shows remarkable increase in black carbon concentration primarily due to direct and indirect activities related to tourism.
- Also, forest fires contribute to increasing black carbon concentration. According to the Forest Survey of India, the forest fire activity is generally reported in Uttarakhand from February to June, with a peak in fire incidences in May and June.
- Besides man made, other reasons for forest fires in the state include lightning, friction of falling rocks and monkeys accidentally throwing stones that create sparks leading to forest fires.
- Over 44,554 hectares of forest area has been damaged in forest fires in Uttarakhand since its formation in 2000.
- The lowest black carbon concentration has been recorded during August followed by December, likely due to the absence of tourist activities and forest fire incidences during these months.

Local Sources of Black Carbon

- Forest fires, domestic and commercial fuel wood burning, seasonal burning of crop residue and developmental activities.
- Pollution from local, regional and global sources that accumulate over the Himalayan region and increase the concentration of black carbon.

Possible Impact

- Black materials absorb more light and emit infra-red radiation which increases the temperature. So, when there is an increase in black carbon in the higher Himalayas, it will contribute to faster melting of the Himalayan glaciers.
- In the longer run, the changes in the atmospheric composition of the high Himalayan will affect the weather pattern (such as rain and snow precipitation patterns), and accordingly natural resources and socio-economic activities of Himalayan communities.

Way Forward

- The Black Carbon (BC) aerosols contribute significantly towards global warming due to its light-absorbing nature. Their presence in the eco-sensitive zone, such as the Himalayan glacier valleys, is a matter of serious concern and needs to be meticulously monitored.

Animal Protection Index 2020

Why in news?

- Animal Protection Index (API) 2020, created by international animal welfare charity, World Animal Protection, was released.
- Globally, India is one of the better-performing countries. India was the first country in Asia to ban the import of cosmetic products that were tested on animals in 2014.
- API aims to showcase where countries are doing well, and where they fall short on animal welfare policy and legislation, so they can take steps to improve.
- The index ranks countries from A (being the highest score) to G (being the weakest score) according to their policy and legislation.
- India has attained a C ranking in the index, along with countries like New Zealand, Mexico, France, and Spain.
- However, there is room for improvement in many domains related to animal welfare. For instance, animals used in scientific research are

exempt from cruelty considerations in the Prevention of Animal Cruelty Act 1960.

- Furthermore, there is a lack of regulations regarding the rearing of farm animals, notably with unregulated urban dairy systems developing quickly with very poor welfare standards.

Analysis

- This new research reveals poor animal welfare practices, in the trade and farming of wild animals and livestock, which provides the perfect breeding ground for viruses to mutate and spread. If animal welfare laws aren't improved, risk of disease outbreaks will become more frequent.
- World Animal Protection assessed the animal welfare policies and legislation of 50 countries and clearly identified a worrying lack of adequate animal welfare laws. It is pushing for urgent improvements.
- The index will help countries to put in place good animal welfare practices such as keeping animals clean, healthy and with sufficient space to exhibit natural behaviours.
- More countries need to follow their lead and World Animal Protection is calling on all governments to immediately improve their animal welfare standards, not only for the benefit of animals but also to reduce the risk to public health.

Defence Fund Shortfall

Why in News?

- Recently, a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence has shown concern at the widening gap between projections and allocations in the defence budget.

About

- The Committee noted that since 2015-16, none of the three Services (Army, Navy and Air Force) has been given the matching allocation as per the projection.

- There is a considerable shortage in the allocation in the Capital Head, which is 35% less than the projection.
- The Committee noted that committed liabilities constitute a significant part of the Capital Head and inadequate allocation would definitely lead to 'default situation' on contractual obligations.
- Committed liabilities are payments anticipated during a financial year for contracts concluded in previous years.
- Such a situation is not conducive for preparation of the country to modern-day warfare, where possession of capital intensive modern machines is a prerequisite for tilting the result of the war in favour and also to have a credible deterrence.
- Both the Navy and the Indian Air Force (IAF) have a situation where their committed liabilities are more than their share of the capital allocation in the Budget.
- To offset this, the Services have been forced to defer payment of committed liabilities of the Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSU) among other measures.

Impact of this shortfall

- Operationalisation of three tri-service organizations i.e. Defence Space Agency (DSA), Defence Cyber Agency (DCYA) and Armed Forces Special Operations Division (AFSOD).
- Operational readiness of Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC).
- Maintenance of SIGINT (Signal Intelligence) equipment.
- Administration of training institutes and operational units.

Recommendations

- The committee has recommended a dedicated fund for committed liabilities and procurements before the shortfall impacts modernisation, invariably from next Budget onwards (2021-22).

India, France conduct joint patrols from Reunion Island

Why in news?

- India and France have conducted joint patrols from the Reunion Island for the first time, signalling New Delhi's intent to engage with friendly foreign partners in expanding its footprint on the Indian Ocean, focusing on the stretch between the East African coastline and the Malacca straits.

About

- India has so far carried out coordinated patrols only with maritime neighbours and had rejected a similar offer by US.
- The Indian Navy conducted a joint patrol with the French Navy from the Reunion Island.
- The patrol was conducted by a P8I aircraft with French Navy personnel onboard.
- There was greater understanding between India and France on each other's concerns, especially in the maritime domain
- Currently, under the 'Neighbourhood First' policy and broader maritime cooperation, the Indian Navy undertakes joint Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) surveillance with Maldives, Seychelles and Mauritius and Coordinated Patrols (CORPATs) with Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia.
- The objectives of the CORPATs are to ensure effective implementation of United Nations Conventions on Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS).
- UNCLOS specifies regulations regarding protection and conservation of natural resources, conservation of marine environment, prevention and suppression of illegal, unregulated fishing activity, drug trafficking, piracy, exchange of information in prevention of smuggling, illegal immigration and conduct of search and rescue operations at sea.
- The joint patrolling with France shows India's intent to engage with friendly foreign partners in expanding its footprint in the Indian Ocean, focusing on the stretch between the East African coastline and the Malacca straits.

- India has recently become an observer to the Indian Ocean Commission. It consists of Reunion as one of its members.
- India has so far carried out CORPATs only with maritime neighbours and had rejected a similar offer by the US in 2016.

India- France Defence Relations

- France is the first country to deploy a Liaison Officer at the Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre (IFC-IOR) as part of efforts to improve Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA).
- France has steadily emerged as a major strategic partner for India with big ticket defence deals and increased military to military engagement.
- The Indian navy is currently inducting French Scorpene conventional submarines, being built in India under technology transfer, and the Indian Air Force will soon get the first batch of its 36 Rafale fighter jets.
- India is working with France to develop strategic and economic partnership involving Madagascar, Reunion Islands-Comoros so as to balance the growing influence of China in that part of the Indian Ocean Region.
- Defence Exercises between India and France:
 1. Varuna – Naval exercise
 2. Garuda – Air exercise
 3. Shakti – Army exercise

India admitted as fifth observer to IOC

Why in news?

- India has joined as a fifth observer of the Indian Ocean Commission — the inter-governmental organisation that coordinates maritime governance in the south-western Indian Ocean at the meeting of the IOC Conference of ministers in Seychelles. This move will bolster Delhi's Indo-Pacific vision.
- The decision made India the fifth observer. The other four observers China, Malta, European Union and International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF).

- The IOC was created in 1982 at Port Louis, Mauritius, and later institutionalised in 1984.
- It has five member nations- Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Reunion (an overseas region of France) and Seychelles.
- All 5 member states are known to be erstwhile French colonies or partly British, partly French colonies. With France a member of IOC because of Reunion Islands, they played a key role in ensuring India's admission.
- The five-member grouping is important for India's plans to expand in The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) which is strategically connects the Indian Ocean to the South-eastern coast of Africa and beyond.
- It is home to one of the key chokepoints in the Indian Ocean- the Mozambique Channel.
- While Comoros sits at the northern mouth of the Mozambique Channel, Madagascar borders the channel to its west. While the channel lost its significance post the opening of the Suez Canal, the recent hostilities near the Strait of Hormuz brought the channel back into focus as the original route for bigger commercial vessels (especially for oil tankers).
- Additionally, the growing importance of Africa in Indo-Pacific engagements combined with potential natural gas reserves in the Mozambique Channel will only continue to raise the significance of this region in wider maritime security.
- Keeping in mind the importance of geography for maritime power projection and naval dominance, there is little doubt about the rising significance of the islands in a new geo-political environment in the Indian Ocean.

Significance

- India has made some high-level visits to some of the member states like India's Vice President visited Comoros and President Kovind visited Madagascar in 2018 following which the defence agreement was signed
- Therefore, the admission of India, even as an observer, to IOC is of great strategic significance since it will allow collective engagement with the island nations of western Indian Ocean

(WIO) and further boost ties with an already strong friend, France.

- The move will also lend greater significance to India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for all in the Region) policy
- For India, engagements with this region will become critical as the Navy begins to strengthen its presence under its mission based deployments. Engagements with the region, especially with the islands- given their geo-strategic location- could become key in supporting Indian naval presence as well as furthering Delhi's Indian Ocean engagement.

Crime Multi Agency Centre and National Cybercrime Training Centre

Why in news?

- National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) celebrated its 35th Inception Day on 12 March 2020. On that day, Crime Multi Agency Centre (Cri-MAC) and National Cybercrime Training Centre (NCTC) were launched
- Crime Multi Agency Centre (Cri-MAC): launched for sharing of information on heinous crime and other issues related to inter-state coordination was launched.
- National Cybercrime Training Centre (NCTC): launched for professional quality eLearning services on cyber crime investigation on large scale to police officers, judges, prosecutors and other stakeholders.

NCRB and its initiatives

- NCRB was set-up in 1986 under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to function as a repository of information on crime and criminals so as to assist the investigators in linking crime to the perpetrators.
- It is headquartered in New Delhi.
- It was set up based on the recommendations of the National Police Commission (1977-1981) and the MHA's Taskforce (1985).
- It was constituted by merging the Directorate of Coordination and Police Computer (DCPC),

Inter-State Criminals Data Branch of CBI, Central Finger Print Bureau of CBI and Statistical Branch of BPR&D.

- The role of NCRB is very important for networking 15993 Police Stations and 8208 higher Police offices across the country under CCTNS project. The huge database of CCTNS will help investigators in solving crime cases faster.
- Fingerprints were being used in the country from very early times and National Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS) being setup by NCRB will be a game changer for police.
- NCRB releases 'Crime in India', 'Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India', 'Prison Statistics India' and 'Finger Print in India', which are being widely referred to by the researchers and policy makers.
- NCRB had joined in Global efforts against Child pornography.
- CCTNS Hackathon & Cyber Challenge 2020 were organised by NCRB in collaboration with Cyber Peace Foundation, which received overwhelming response from police, industry and academia. It has helped in gathering innovative ideas for improving CCTNS.

India and Armenia signed a defence deal

Why in news?

- India signed a deal worth over USD 40 million with Armenia in Europe to supply four Swathi weapon locating radars by beating the competing bids from Russia and Poland
- Swathi weapon locating radars provide fast, automatic and accurate location of enemy weapons like mortars, shells and rockets in a 50 km range.
- SWATHI weapon locating radars developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and manufactured by the Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) to Armenia in Europe.
- The radar can simultaneously handle multiple projectiles fired from different weapons at different locations. The Indian Army is also

using the same radars for its operations along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir where this system is used to trace the source of attack by Pakistani positions. The system was handed to the Indian Army on a trial basis in 2018.

- The Armenians also carried out trials of Russian and Polish systems which were found to be good but they finally chose the Indian system for acquisition
- This would be a big boost for Make in India as the Indian Prime Minister has declared a target of increasing exports to Rs 35,000 crore in next five years.
- This deal will open a new market for the sale of India's indigenous systems, which are much cheaper than its European and other rivals
- The government is also targeting South-East Asia, Latin America and Middle-East countries to secure defence orders.
- With the growing trend of shipments in recent years, the government has set a defence export target of Rs 35,000 crore by 2024-25. The defence exports rose from Rs 1,500 crore in 2016-17 to Rs 4,500 crore 2017-18 to Rs 10,700 crore in 2018-19. For the current fiscal, the Centre has set a target of Rs 20,000 crore.

INDIA PERSPECTIVES

1. India-Brazil relations

Brazilian President Jair Messias Bolsonaro joined the select group of world leaders to have graced India's Republic Day celebrations. During his visit to India, both the nations took their multi-faceted ties to new heights.

This is the first time in many years that a leader from Latin America has been invited for India's national day festivities, which highlights the growing importance of the region in India's foreign policy calculus.

Trade agreements

Mapping the road ahead, the two leaders had agreed to "comprehensively enhance strategic partnership," and identified major focus areas for bilateral trade and Investment.

These included, among others things, agricultural equipment, animal husbandry, post-harvest technologies and biofuels. The two leaders had also discussed expanding cooperation in areas such as space and defence, which will provide greater strategic depth to the burgeoning partnership. The talks provided "further boost to the strategic partnership between the countries based on common global vision and shared values.

Economic synergies

- The two emerging economies, India and Brazil, whose combined GDP is around \$5 trillion, are set to infuse new economic vitality in their partnership. The interaction between top business leaders of India and Brazil fleshed out a blueprint for upscaling two-way trade and investment. Buoyed by economic synergies, the two sides raised the bar and set ambitious targets for doubling current bilateral trade of around \$8 billion in the next couple of years.
- India offered its full support to President Bolsonaro's economic resurgence agenda and exhort Brazilian companies to invest in India and forge long-term commercial partnerships with Indian companies.
- India, on its part, will be pitching for greater market access and investment opportunities for Indian products and companies in Brazil.
- Brazil has a five-fold per capita income than that of India, but has a population one-sixth of

India. Brazil has huge reservoirs of natural resources and mineral deposits like iron ore, manganese, nickel, tungsten, diamonds, potassium, phosphate, gold, lead and graphite. The Latin American powerhouse is also increasingly looking at India as a knowledge power with its proven expertise in IT sector and its prowess in biotech and pharmaceuticals industries.

- In the agriculture sector, India can learn a lot from Brazil's emergence as an agricultural superpower as it sets new benchmarks in productivity and modernises its technology of storage, distribution and agro-processing industries.
- Brazil highlights the country's importance as the largest destination for Indian upstream investment in the oil and gas sector. With Brazil's proven record as an energy power, the two countries are planning to collaborate in research and development of second-generation biofuels.

Way ahead

Enhancing trade and investment will certainly add more substance to this partnership, but what will impart it greater content is a growing convergence of strategic and global interests. India and Brazil are set to enhance their coordination to reform the global governance architecture.

The global canvas of the India-Brazil partnership is set to widen further with closer cooperation in a host of multilateral platforms, including, BRICS, IBSA, G4, G20, BASIC and the United Nations.

2. The India way in Foreign Policy

Over the last decade, India's foreign policy initiatives have undergone a metamorphosis. India's new global image now projects a more mature, sound and efficient force driving the country's diplomatic initiatives.

The 25-million strong Indian diaspora, spread across different countries and continents, will play an important role in building the New India.

Purposeful, pragmatic and proactive. Shaper, not an abstainer; stabiliser, rather than a disruptor; a net security provider and a dispenser of global good. India's foreign policy has found a new vocabulary and framework. The country's foreign policy in a world undergoing unprecedented transformation.

What is powering the diverse strands of India's foreign policy is the overarching goal of transforming the lives of over 1.3 billion people in the country and spurring the country's rise as a leading power in an increasingly multipolar world.

Sharper & Stabiliser

- A new India is emerging in the second decade of the 21st century, one that is proactively shaping the international agenda on a wide array of cross-cutting issues, including climate change, sustainable development, counterterrorism, maritime security and the architectural reconfiguration of global governance.
- This new India, with an economy of around \$3 trillion and the surging aspirations of a vast population, is poised to reclaim its place on the global stage.
- It is not the India way to be a disruptionist power internationally, we should be a stabilizing power. It's also not the India way to be self-centred and to be mercantilist.

- Driven by the ethos of mutual empowerment, India has shared funds, technology and expertise with countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. This development cooperation, channelized through Lines of Credit and grants, includes assistance in capacity building, training and enhanced cooperation in education and health.
- In the spirit of South-South solidarity, India has committed around USD 29 billion in Line of Credit for a host of development projects in 160 countries.

Key features of a new foreign policy for a new India

- The India way would be to be more of a decider or a shaper, rather than an abstainer
- India had made a difference in the last few years on issues like climate change and connectivity.
- The India way would be a country which brings its capacities to bear on the international system for global good.

Diplomatic outreach

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has travelled to over 70 countries in the last five-and-a-half years.
- As India's global stature rises, the Indian government has also embarked on an unprecedented diplomatic outreach mission to mobilize global support for national resurgence.
- In an evolving multipolar world, India has chosen the path of multi-alignment which entails forging issues-based alignment with like-minded countries and major power centers.

Diplomacy for a new India

What animates this outreach is the mantra of diplomacy for development which seeks to promote a national resurgence. With the Indian government setting an ambitious target of creating a \$5 trillion economy, its foreign policy is being directed to harness the network of partnerships with all friendly countries to create a “New India” by 2022, the 75th anniversary of India's independence.

Development-focused diplomacy is seen in the interweaving of flagship schemes of national renewal — like “Make in India,” and “Stand-up India” — with the country's diplomatic outreach. Forging robust and sustainable partnerships in technology, innovation and start-ups will be crucial to creating a New India and making India count on the global stage. Doubling the gross domestic product to a \$5 trillion economy is not possible without a conducive international environment and supportive external partnerships.

India has advocated reformed multilateralism to create a new world order that reflects the ongoing shift of power and realities of the 21st century. India has also taken the lead in combating climate change by fulfilling its commitments under the Paris accord and taking a series of initiatives for promoting a low-carbon economy.

In recognition of India's leadership role in this area, more countries are joining the International Solar Alliance that seeks to usher in a white revolution for a clean and green world. India has launched a new international initiative called the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, which is finding greater global support.

Way forward

Going forward, as it scripts its global ascent on its own terms, India will have to relentlessly assert its strategic autonomy as it navigates geopolitical rivalries to make independent decisions that benefit the country's people.

3. A path to the Future: US President visit in India

US President Donald Trump has completed a highly successful maiden visit to India from February 24 to 25, 2020.

India- US relations

Indo-US relations have seen an all-round upswing over the past few years, including trade, investments, defence, counter terrorism, energy, coordination on regional and global issues as well as people to people exchanges.

Both countries have moved on to sign key agreements of secure communication and sharing of military logistics like Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA).

It was agreed during the visit to move swiftly towards signing of the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) for geospatial cooperation. These agreements open up the possibility of joint operations in the future.

India as a major defence partner, will look for transfer of technology and co-production with a view to making India a production hub for American equipment.

- In 2018, the US levied global tariffs of 25 per cent and 10 per cent on steel and aluminium, also affecting India. On June 5, 2019, the US withdrew GSP (Generalized System of Preferences) status accorded to Indian goods, affecting USD 6.3 billion worth of Indian exports. On June 16, 2019, India levied additional duties on 28 American products.
- The US has been pushing for lower duties and market access for medical devices, information and communications technology goods like smart watches and iPhones, Harley Davidson motor cycles, market access for its dairy products and agricultural commodities like almonds, blueberries, pecan nuts and walnuts. India would like to see its GSP beneficiary status restored, additional duties on steel and aluminium removed and also be able to get market access for its fruits like grapes and mangoes.
- The definition of employment and speciality occupations under H1 B visa and its impact on the Indian IT industry is a pending issue and India continues to stress on the importance of the contribution made to the growth and development of the US economy by the highly skilled Indian professionals.
- India's trade surplus with the US has narrowed down drastically over the last two years, with bilateral trade jumping to USD 142 billion in 2018 mainly due to Indian energy imports from USA. The US-India energy trade has reached USD 20 billion in the last four years alone and will be a new driver in commercial relations between the two countries. The US International Development Finance Corporation has decided to establish a permanent presence, and has announced a USD 600 million financing facility for renewable energy projects in India.

- The two sides had discussed the importance of a secure 5G wireless network and “the need for this emerging technology to be a tool for freedom, progress and prosperity, not to do anything with where it could even be conceived as a conduit for suppression and censorship.”
- The two sides agreed to upgrade their relationship to the status of a “Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership”. In the joint statement, the two leaders came down heavily on the “use of terrorist proxies and strongly condemned cross-border terrorism in all its forms”.
- Both sides recognised the importance of connectivity, which they stated should be linked to the respect for “territorial integrity, sovereignty of states, good governance, transparency, and accountability”. The statement recognises India as a net provider of security, as well as developmental and humanitarian assistance in the Indian Ocean region.
- The sides agreed on a new partnership between USAID, which has announced USD 400 million for the Indo-Pacific, and India’s Development Partnership Administration for cooperation in third countries. They took note of efforts towards a meaningful Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, and urged that it does not prejudice the legitimate rights and interests of all nations according to international law.
- The US reiterated support for India’s permanent membership of a reformed UN Security Council and an entry in the Nuclear Suppliers Group.
- India expressed interest in the “Blue Dot Network” mentioned by the US President, which is a multi-stakeholder initiative, unlike the BRI, which will bring governments, the private sector, and civil society together to promote high quality trusted standards for global infrastructure development.

MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

Refining Draft DPP 2020

In News:

The Ministry of Defence (MoD), on March 20, 2020, released the draft Defence Procurement Procedure 2020 (DPP-2020). The draft builds upon DPP-2016, which itself has undergone 47 amendments as part of the Business Process Reengineering.

The new draft intends to achieve two broad objectives:

- (a) Hastening the procurement process by removing procedural bottlenecks
- (b) Promoting Make in India in defence

Drafts Highlights

- The draft has revised the existing procurement categories, increased the requirement of indigenous content (IC) under various categories, and incorporated some new concepts of defence procurement.
- The draft has revised the existing offset guidelines and made changes in the contract template and other provisions of the document.
- The draft has added a new category, Buy (Global-Manufacture in India), to the existing five prioritised procurement categories in DPP-2016, besides increasing the IC requirement by 10 percentage points in almost all the categories.
- Apart from the new prioritised category, several stand-alone categories/sub-categories have

been created. One of these is 'Leasing', which is intended to enable the armed forces to possess and operate costly equipment like transport and trainer aircraft and simulators without having to own them.

- The 'Make' category, introduced for the first time in DPP-2006, was split into two sub-categories in DPP-2016: 'Make I (Government Funded)' and 'Make II (Industry Funded)'. A third sub-category, 'Make III (Indigenously Manufactured)', has been added to these two.
- The 'Innovation' category brings the existing two schemes, Innovation for Defence Excellence (iDEX) and Technology Development Fund (TDF), under the ambit of capital acquisition.
- The draft refers to aero-engines and FAB (fabrication facilities to manufacture silicon wafers) as projects of national importance and calls for their procurement, even if there is only a single source of supply.
- To streamlining the Procurement Process, draft envisages constitution of a multi-disciplinary Services Qualitative Requirement Formulation Committee (SQRFC) under the chairmanship of a Brigadier level officer for preparation of Qualitative Requirements (QRs).
- To speed up procurement, a timeline of six months (from the date of receiving responses to the request for information) has been mandated for the formulation of QRs, and up to one year for seeking AoN from the competent authority.
- In regard to quality assurance, four major provisions have been made to make the process of acceptance of equipment more objective and transparent.

(a) Quality Assurance Plan

(b) Acceptance Test Procedures

(c) party inspection

(d) no repetition of quality assurance tests

Key issues with draft DPP 2020

1. Multiplicity of procurement categories

The changes envisaged in draft DPP-2020 will increase the number of procurement categories from just two in 2003 ('Buy' and 'Buy & Make') to eight (six prioritised categories plus the 'Leasing' and Strategic Partnership Model). There are 'Make' and 'Innovation' categories, with several sub-categories, which are meant for prototyping by using indigenous or imported technology with a high percentage of indigenous content.

Proliferation of these categories could make the categorisation process confusing, cumbersome and time-consuming. For the sake of making the process simpler, there is a case for clubbing some of the categories.

2. Capacity Building for Costing

Between 2001 and 2018, about 40 per cent of the total capital procurement was through Inter-Government Agreements (IGAs), including the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) programme of the United States (US) Government. Together with contracts signed on nomination basis with DPSUs and OFB, the share of single-source procurement is overwhelmingly high. Reasonability of cost assumes great significance in such single-source procurements.

While there is an internal cost assessment mechanism for products manufactured by DPSUs and OFB, this task is left to the Costing Committees, headed by Cost Advisors in the Capital Acquisition Wing. This may, however, not be adequate as cost assessment requires extensive database, specialisation in defence-related costing techniques, etc.

Though draft DPP-2020 provides for institutionalised training of acquisition personnel, costing is an area which requires special focus. There is not only a need to study the institutional mechanism of other countries, particularly the US, the United Kingdom (UK) and France, but also to lay down a detailed methodology for costing for the guidance of the Costing Committees and to ensure uniformity in costing.

3. Development of Military Materials and Aero-engines

The draft DPP-2020 seeks to promote use of artificial intelligence and indigenously developed software and military materials, ostensibly through incorporation of these requirements in the QRs. While this is a welcome directive, provisions made in the draft regarding development of military materials to meet the future needs and to treat the development of aero-engines and FAB as projects of national importance are sketchy and overlap with the mandate of DRDO. There are issues like economy of scales, funding cost of projects, assurance of post-development purchase order, etc., which will need to be resolved before any such projects are undertaken.

4. Specific Offsets Through RFP

Transfer of technology has been added to the existing avenues for discharging the offset obligation. While this is a welcome step, it may be more effective if the MoD demands transfer of specific technologies for discharge of the offset obligation by specifying the requirement in RFP.

5. Code of Integrity for Public Procurement

The Pre-Contract Integrity Pact template of the DPP contains a provision that seeks to encourage the sellers

to have an internal code of conduct, restraining employees from bribery and unethical behaviour and have a compliance programme for the implementation of the code. For the sake of reciprocity, a Code of Integrity for Public Procurement (CIPP) could be prescribed for the acquisition personnel who should also be required to sign a declaration on the lines of the relevant provisions in the Ministry of Finance's Manual for Procurement of Goods 2017.

Patterns of Arms Trade

In News

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) released a report showcasing an increase of 5.5 per cent in the volume of international arms transfers during 2015–19, compared with the previous five-year period. The report highlights the strength of key strategic partnerships such as Russia-India, US-Japan and China-Pakistan, reinforced by arms trade.

SIPRI is an international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament. SIPRI provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public. The institute is based in Sweden and was established in 1966. SIPRI is based in Stockholm.

Report highlights

- The United States, Russia, France, Germany and China continue to be the world's largest arms exporters.
- The US has further strengthened its position as the world's largest arms exporter, with its exports of major arms being 76 per cent higher than those of the second largest arms exporter in the world, the Russian Federation.

- Between 2010–14 and 2015–19, major arms exports from the US grew by 23 per cent, and it was the primary exporter to 19 of the top 25 arms importers in the world.
- Asia and Oceania became even bigger markets for the US, Russia and China in the past five years, generating 30 per cent of trade for the US, 57 per cent for Russia and 74 per cent for China.
- Russia accounted for 56 per cent of India's arms imports.
- 96 per cent of Japan's arms imports came from the US.
- Chinese equipment made up 73 per cent of Pakistan's arms imports.
- French arms exports registered a 72 per cent increase in 2015-19, reaching their highest level for any five-year period since 1990 and accounted for 7.9 per cent of total global arms exports.
- Germany's arms exports were 17 per cent higher in 2015–19, compared with 2010–14, and accounted for 5.8 per cent of global trade.
- The United Kingdom registered a negative growth of 15 per cent.
- Brazilian arms imports in 2015–19 were the highest in South America — accounting for 31 per cent of the sub-region's arms imports, South Africa, the largest arms importer in sub-Saharan Africa in 2005–2009, imported almost no major arms in 2015–19.
- South Korea's arms exports rose by 143 per cent during 2015-19, as compared to 2010-14, propelling it to the list of the top 10 largest exporters for the first time.
- Countries in the turbulent and conflict-ridden Middle East registered a 61 per cent increase in arms imports, accounting for 35 per cent of the global total over the past five years.
- United Arab Emirates (UAE) was the eighth-largest arms importer in 2015–19.
- Egypt's arms imports tripled in volume in 2015-19 and Saudi Arabia's imports increased by 130 per cent, accounting for 12 per cent of global arms imports in 2015–19.
- Nearly three-fourths of Saudi Arabia's arms imports came from the US and 13 per cent from the UK.
- The report flags a decrease in Turkish arms imports, which were 48 per cent lower than in the previous five-year period.

Way ahead

Arms trade between states can be better regulated through adherence to best practices of informal mechanisms such as the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA) and the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).

The MTCR seeks to limit the proliferation of missiles and missile technology, the WA promotes greater responsibility in transfers of conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies.

Points to remember

- Out of the top 10 arms exporters, the US, Russia, France, Germany, the UK, Spain, Italy and South Korea are members of the WA and MTCR; only China and Israel are non-members.
- On the other hand, of the 25 top arms importers, only nine (Australia, India, Italy, Japan, Norway, South Korea, Turkey, the US, and the UK) are members of the WA and the MTCR.

Iran's Nuclear deal

In news

The Iran nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), has been in a precarious position ever since US President announced that he was withdrawing from the agreement.

Background

In 2015, Iran agreed a long-term deal on its nuclear programme with a group of world powers known as the P5+1 - the US, UK, France, China, Russia and Germany. Under the accord, Iran agreed to limit its sensitive nuclear activities and allow in international inspectors in return for the lifting of crippling economic sanctions.

Commitments set out in the JCPOA

1. Uranium enrichment

- Enriched uranium is used to make reactor fuel, but also nuclear weapons.
- In July 2015, Iran had almost 20,000 centrifuges. Under the JCPOA, it was limited to installing no more than 5,060 of the oldest and least efficient centrifuges at Natanz until 2026 - 10 years after the deal's "implementation day" in January 2016.
- Iran's uranium stockpile was reduced by 98% to 300kg (660lbs), a figure that must not be exceeded until 2031. It must also keep the stockpile's level of enrichment at 3.67%.
- By January 2016, Iran had drastically reduced the number of centrifuges installed at Natanz

and Fordo, and shipped tonnes of low-enriched uranium to Russia.

- In addition, research and development must take place only at Natanz and be limited until 2024.
- No enrichment will be permitted at Fordo until 2031, and the underground facility will be converted into a nuclear, physics and technology centre. The 1,044 centrifuges at the site will produce radioisotopes for use in medicine, agriculture, industry and science.

2. Plutonium pathway

- Iran had been building a heavy-water nuclear facility near the town of Arak. Spent fuel from a heavy-water reactor contains plutonium suitable for a nuclear bomb.
- World powers had originally wanted Arak dismantled because of the proliferation risk. Under an interim nuclear deal agreed in 2013, Iran agreed not to commission or fuel the reactor.
- Under the JCPOA, Iran said it would redesign the reactor so it could not produce any weapons-grade plutonium, and that all spent fuel would be sent out of the country as long as the modified reactor exists.
- Iran will not be permitted to build additional heavy-water reactors or accumulate any excess heavy water until 2031.

3. Covert activity

- At the time of the agreement, then-US President Barack Obama's administration expressed confidence that the JCPOA would prevent Iran from building a nuclear programme in secret.

- Inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the global nuclear watchdog, continuously monitor Iran's declared nuclear sites and also verify that no fissile material is moved covertly to a secret location to build a bomb.
- Iran also agreed to implement the Additional Protocol to their IAEA Safeguards Agreement, which allows inspectors to access any site anywhere in the country they deem suspicious.
- Until 2031, Iran will have 24 days to comply with any IAEA access request. If it refuses, an eight-member Joint Commission - including Iran - will rule on the issue. It can decide on punitive steps, including the reimposition of sanctions. A majority vote by the commission suffices.

4. Lifting sanctions

- Sanctions previously imposed by the UN, US and EU in an attempt to force Iran to halt uranium enrichment crippled its economy, costing the country more than \$160bn (£118bn) in oil revenue from 2012 to 2016 alone.
- Under the deal, Iran gained access to more than \$100bn in assets frozen overseas, and was able to resume selling oil on international markets and using the global financial system for trade.

US-Taliban Deal

In News

US officials and Taliban representatives have signed an agreement after months of negotiations in Qatar's capital that is aimed at ending the United States's longest war, fought in Afghanistan since 2001.

The deal and its background

- On 11 September 2001, terrorist attacks in America killed nearly 3,000 people. Osama Bin Laden, the head of Islamist terror group al-Qaeda, was quickly identified as the man responsible. The Taliban, radical Islamists who ran Afghanistan at that time, protected Bin Laden, refused to hand him over.
- A month after 9/11, the US launched airstrikes against Afghanistan. The US was joined by an international coalition and the Taliban were quickly removed from power. Since then, the US is fighting a war against the Taliban.
- Donald Trump's 2017 policy on Afghanistan, was based on breaking the military stalemate in Afghanistan by authorizing an additional 5,000 soldiers, giving US forces a freer hand to go after the Taliban, and strengthening Afghan capabilities.
- However, the US realized that the Taliban insurgency could not be defeated as long as it enjoyed safe havens and secure sanctuaries in Pakistan, the US changed track and sought Pakistan's help to get the Taliban to the negotiating table. The negotiations began in September 2018 with the appointment of Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad to initiate direct talks with the Taliban.
- After nine rounds of US-Taliban talks in Qatar, the two sides seemed close to an agreement.

Significance

- U.S.-Taliban could pave the way towards a full withdrawal of foreign soldiers from Afghanistan over the next 14 months and represent a step towards ending the 18-year-war in Afghanistan.

- Along with this, a separate joint declaration was also signed between the Afghan government and the US at Kabul.
- The peace deal is expected to kick-off two processes- a phased withdrawal of US troops and an 'intra-Afghan' dialogue.
- The deal is a fundamental step to deliver a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire and the future political roadmap for Afghanistan peace process and the Central region.

Troops withdrawal

The US will draw down to 8,600 troops in 135 days and the NATO or coalition troop numbers will also be brought down, proportionately and simultaneously. And all troops will be out within 14 months.

Taliban Commitment

The main counter-terrorism commitment by the Taliban is that Taliban will not allow any of its members, other individuals or groups, including al-Qaeda, to use the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies.

Sanctions Removal

UN sanctions on Taliban leaders to be removed by three months and US sanctions by August 27. The sanctions will be out before much progress is expected in the intra-Afghan dialogue.

Prisoner Release

The US-Taliban pact says up to 5,000 imprisoned Taliban and up to 1,000 prisoners from —the other side|| held by Taliban —will be released|| by March 10.

Impact of deal on other stakeholders

- US -The promise to end America's —endless wars|| in the greater Middle East region was one of the central themes of US President Donald Trump's election campaign in 2016.
- This deal may demonstrate progress on that front in his bid for re-election later this year.
- Though, the US doesn't recognise Taliban as a state under the name of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (key demand of Taliban), though many experts are of the view that this deal is a little more than a dressed-up U.S. surrender that will ultimately see the Taliban return to power.
- Pakistan -The deal provides the strategic advantage to Pakistan, who is a long-time benefactor of the Taliban.
- China -After the launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Pakistan is seen as more of a protectorate state of China.
- Thus, China may leverage Pakistan's influence on the Taliban, to propel its strategic projects like the Belt and Road Initiative.

Impact of deal on India

- This deal alters the balance of power in favour of the Taliban, which will have strategic, security and political implications for India. The deal may jeopardise the key stakes of India in Afghanistan:
- India has a major stake in the stability of Afghanistan. India has invested considerable resources in Afghanistan's development.
- India has a major stake in the continuation of the current Afghanistan government in power, which it considers a strategic asset vis-à-vis Pakistan.

- An increased political and military role for the Taliban and the expansion of its territorial control should be of great concern to India since the Taliban is widely believed to be a protégé of Islamabad.
- As Afghanistan is the gateway to Central Asia, the deal might dampen India's interest in Central Asia.
- Withdrawal of US troops could result in the breeding of the fertile ground for various anti-India terrorist outfits like Lashkar-e-Taiba or Jaish-e-Mohammed.



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