

CIVIL SERVICES MONTHLY

MAY 2021

International labour day 2021

Green URJA Award

OPERATION SAMUDRA SETU II

Black Fungus

Iron Dome

Zhurong rover

SAMVEDNA

E-way bill integrated with FASTag, RFID

CYCLONE YAAS: changes in Cyclones of BoB

Mission COVID Suraksha

India, Israel, and Palestine

Second wave, double challenge

A TRIPS waiver is useful but not a magic pill

Impact of second wave on economy

Social media and safe harbour



INDEX

PRELIMS

International labour day 2021	1
Consumer price index for industrial workers march, 2021	1
8 Naga women sentenced for humiliating woman	1
SUTRA model for charting trajectory of covid-19	2
India reducing oil imports from OPEC	2
GST exemption on Imports of COVID-19 relief material	2
Production Linked Incentive Scheme for Food Processing Industry'(PLISFPI)	3
G7's First in-person talks held in two years	3
DoT allows to conduct trials of 5G technology	4
New framework for implementation of SVAMITVA Scheme	5
Cabinet approves MoU between India and UK on Global Innovation Partnership	6
SC declares Maratha reservation as unconstitutional	6
Liquidity facility can increase bed capacity in hospitals	7
Discussion on bringing the USA back into the nuclear deal with Iran	7
Chinese Space agency criticized by NASA	9
No link between 5G technology and spread of COVID-19	9
India's food processing market	10
Green Urja Award	10
China's population growth slows to lowest rate in decades	11
PLI FOR "National Programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell Battery Storage"	11
OPERATION SAMUDRA SETU II	12
Agricultural exports zoom 17.5% in 2020-21	12
Most NGOs do not have SBI account	13
eSanjeevani during the COVID-19 Pandemic	14
Black Fungus	15
1st BRICS Employment Working Group (EWG) Meeting	16
Covishield, Covaxin made fewer antibodies against B.1.617 variant	16
Iron Dome	17
Judicial Activism in the recent Judgments	18
Punjab wheat procurement hits new high	18
Zhurong rover	18
Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance 2021.	19

SAMVEDNA	21
FDI hits all-time high in FY21; forex reserves jump over \$100 bn	21
West Bengal government decides to set up a Legislative Council	22
Iran to develop Farzad B gas field domestically, dumps India	22
E-way bill integrated with FASTag, RFID	23
Doordarshan plans to launch DD International to present 'India story'	23
CYCLONE TAUKTAE: Arabian Sea is becoming more cyclone prone	23
China completes strategic Tibet highway near Arunachal border	24
Guardian of the forest, Sunderlal Bahugana passed away	25
Nomination seeking the World Heritage Site tag for 14 forts	25
Bangalore based startup receives TDB National Award 2021	26
Singapore top source of FDI followed by US, Mauritius	27
IIT-Delhi centre to study light properties	27
India and Israel sign a program for cooperation in Agriculture	28
EU agreed to donate at least 100 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines	29
CYCLONE YAAS: changes in Cyclones of Bay of Bengal	29
Indian Railways has witnessed the DOUBLE DIGIT growth in Freight Traffic	30
Ayush Clinical Case Repository (ACCR) portal and Ayush Sanjivani App	31
Sharp forex gains led to higher RBI surplus	31
Mission COVID Suraksha	32
The monsoon's arrival over Kerala has been delayed to June 3-IMD	32
Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) expanded - ECLGS 4.0	33
GST loss- A Matter of compensation	33
Why edible oils are costlier	34

GENERAL STUDIES – 1

INDIAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE, HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY OF THE WORLD AND SOCIETY

In Ireland's complex troubles, lessons for India	36
A collage of laws that leaves the worker out in the cold	37
Losing the way with a map	39
Culture, increasingly fractured and unplanned	40

GENERAL STUDIES-2

GOVERNANCE, CONSTITUTION, POLITY, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

A COVID blot on India's foreign policy canvas	41
---	-----------

The nuclear challenge	43
The czar of brinkmanship must seek peace	44
The outdated nature of bureaucracy	46
The road from Ladakh is paved with disruptions	47
Second wave, double challenge	48
Free Jabs for all	51
IP wavier for COVID vaccines	52
Delhi to London, a reconnection	53
Share of Women, Youth in New Assemblies	55
The Middle East reset AND Afghanistan	56
Article 311 (2) under which Sachin Waze was dismissed	58
Wolf Warriors in the Subcontinent	59
India, Israel, and Palestine	60
India and the Biden moment	63
Efficiency vs Dignity	64
A Fine Balance in Nepal	66
A 'reform wave' in Lakshadweep	67

GENERAL STUDIES-3

TECHNOLOGY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, BIO-DIVERSITY, ENVIRONMENT, SECURITY AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

A 'One Health' approach that targets people, animals	68
A TRIPS waiver is useful but not a magic pill	70
Guarantor beware	71
The debate over vaccine GST exemption	72
How rice & wheat exports hit a record high	73
Covid induced crisis on Indian dairy sector	74
Catch the New Tech wave	75
Benefits under pension schemes for COVID-hit families	77
How Fertiliser Subsidy works	78
Impact of second wave on economy	79
Social media and safe harbour	80

GENERAL STUDIES-IV

ETHICS, INTEGRITY & APTITUDE

SOLI SORABJEE: Defender of Free Speech	82
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PRELIMS

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR DAY 2021

- a. Each year, May 1 is celebrated as International Labour Day, also known as May Day, International Workers' Day, or as Labour Day across the world.
- b. This day is observed to celebrate the labour community around the globe and commemorate their contributions and the historic 1886 Haymarket riots.
- c. May Day subsequently became an annual event. The 1904 Sixth Conference of the Second International, called on "all Social Democratic Party organisations and trade unions of all countries to demonstrate energetically on the First of May for the legal establishment of the eight-hour day, for the class demands of the proletariat, and for universal peace."
 - d. Demand for MGNREGA work spikes
 - i. The demand for MGNREGA work so far in the month of April has increased to 2.57 crore households, 92% higher than a year ago, and a record high for April since 2013, as per State Bank of India (SBI) research.
 - ii. REVERSE MIGRATION: This indicates the extent of reverse migration from the lockdown States to their native States
 - iii. BUDGET ALLOCATION: The government had allocated ₹73,000 crore in this year's Budget for the MGNREGA, nearly 34.5% lower than last year's revised estimates of ₹1.11 lakh crore, on the assumption that the economic recovery would alleviate the need for such spending.
 - iv. The original budgeted spending for the scheme for 2020-21 was around ₹60,000 crore but was enhanced over the year as the national lockdown and large-scale reverse migration from urban employment centers to the hinterland triggered greater demand under the scheme.
 - e. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said in Parliament that the government would allocate more funds for the rural jobs scheme for 2021-22 if needed, over and above the ₹73,000 crore outlay proposed in the Budget.

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX FOR INDUSTRIAL WORKERS MARCH, 2021

- a. Key Highlights.
 - i. All-India Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers for March, 2021 increased to 119.6 points compared to 119.0 points for February, 2021.
 - ii. The increase observed in index is mainly due to items like Cooking Gas, Petrol, Poultry Chicken, Edible Oils, Apple, Tea Leaf, Served & Processed Packaged Food, etc. which experienced an increase in prices.
 - iii. Inflation for March, 2021 went up to 5.64 per cent compared to 4.48 per cent of previous month. Similarly, Food inflation also rose to 5.36 per cent from 4.64 per cent in the previous month.
- b. Labour Bureau: An attached office of the M/o Labour & Employment, is releasing Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW) on Base: 2016=100 for the month of March, 2021.
 - i. Labour Bureau, inter-alia, compiles and releases CPI-IW every month.
 - ii. It is primarily used for measuring Dearness Allowance (DA) payable to government employees and pensioners and workers in the organized sector.

8 NAGA WOMEN SENTENCED FOR HUMILIATING WOMAN

- a. CONTEXT: A court in Nagaland's Tuensang district has sentenced a group of eight women to a year in prison for publicly humiliating a woman three years ago.
- b. The eight had chopped off the woman's hair, stripped and paraded her naked on the road in 2018 after a kangaroo court subscribing to tribal customary laws found her guilty of having an extra-marital affair.
- c. COURT VIEW:
 - i. Court observed that the victim did have an extra-marital affair, but the villagers took matters into their own hands and meted out "inhumane justice" in their kangaroo court

- ii. The village folk asserting the so-called rights given unto them by the customary law outraged the modesty of the victim in the most barbaric fashion," the court said in its order.
- iii. It is such an inconceivable fact to even think that the women folk would go to the extent of chopping off a lady's hair, stripping her and parading her naked on the roadside," the court noted.
- d. 'Village resolution'
 - i. The eight women said their village had passed a resolution in 2018 to punish adulterous women according to the customary practices.
 - ii. The judicial magistrate's court said the "misconceived notion of empowering oneself with the so-called "village resolutions" to do barbaric acts should be avoided at all cost.
- e. CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS
 - i. Article 371A recognises the customary practices of the Nagas. But if all villagers allude to the constitutional provision for invoking laws that "uncultured civilisations" practised, there would be a total breakdown of law-and-order in society, the court observed.

SUTRA MODEL FOR CHARTING TRAJECTORY OF COVID-19

SUTRA (Susceptible, Undetected, Tested (positive), and Removed Approach)

Scientists working on SUTRA model for charting trajectory of COVID-19

- a. IT is a mathematical model to predict the spread of the virus functioning under Dr. Manindra Agrawal, Professor, IIT Kanpur
- b. It is important to note that a mathematical model can only predict future with some certainty so long as virus dynamics and its transmissibility don't change substantially over time. Mathematical models can also provide a mechanism to predicting alternate scenarios corresponding to various policy decisions such as non-pharmaceutical interventions.
- c. SUTRA model for charting the trajectory of COVID-19, would like to clearly point out some facts related to predictions of our mathematical model, especially since some of these have been misunderstood and misquoted.
- d. **Clarification by Dr Agrawal:** Recent reports in some media seem to suggest that scientists working on the SUTRA model cautioned in March about the second wave but attention was not paid to it. This is incorrect.

INDIA REDUCING OIL IMPORTS FROM OPEC

India reducing oil imports from OPEC

- a. OPEC's share of India's oil imports fell to the lowest in at least two decades in the year to the end of March as overall purchases by Asia's third-largest economy fell to a six-year low, data obtained from industry and trade sources showed.
- b. Total crude imports by the world's third-biggest oil importer fell to 3.97 million barrels per day (bpd) in FY21, down 11.8% from a year earlier, data showed.
- c. India bought more U.S. and Canadian oil at the expense of that from Africa and West Asia, reducing purchases from members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to about 2.86 million bpd and squeezing the group's share of imports to 72% from about 80% previously.
- d. That is the lowest share since at least FY02, before which crude import data is not available.

GST EXEMPTION ON IMPORTS OF COVID-19 RELIEF MATERIAL

Imports of COVID-19 relief material, including vaccines, medical oxygen and Remdesivir vials, will get a conditional 'ad-hoc' Goods and Services Tax (GST) exemption till June 30

- a. The government had already exempted the import of these items from customs duty and health cess, but integrated GST (IGST) was being levied on such imports, which will be withdrawn for two months for 'relief materials being donated from abroad'.

- b. The exemption won't be available for domestic companies or charities importing these items if they are purchasing them, even if for free distribution in the country.
- c. State chief secretaries were told to appoint nodal officers so that 'entities desirous of importing COVID relief material for free distribution may approach them for certification.

PRODUCTION LINKED INCENTIVE SCHEME FOR FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRY (PLISFPI)

The Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) has issued detailed operational scheme guidelines and has launched an online portal for 'Production Linked Incentive Scheme for Food Processing Industry' (PLISFPI). The detailed guidelines of the scheme are available at Ministry's website www.mofpi.nic.in. Union Minister for Food Processing Industries Shri Narendra Singh Tomar launched an online portal for the beneficiaries. The link of the online portal is: <https://plimofpi.ifcilttd.com>

As a part of Prime Minister's announcement of Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, Government of India has approved a new Central Sector Scheme namely 'Production Linked Incentive Scheme for Food Processing Industry' for implementation during 2021-22 to 2026-27 with an outlay of Rs. 10,900 crore to support creation of global food manufacturing champions commensurate with India's natural resource endowment and support Indian brands of food products in the international markets.

Ministry of Food Processing Industries is inviting applications for availing sales based incentives and grants for undertaking Branding & Marketing activities abroad under the scheme from three categories of Applicants:

- i. **Category-I:** Applicants are large entities who apply for Incentive based on Sales and Investment Criteria. Applicant under this category could undertake Branding & Marketing activities abroad also and apply for grant under the scheme with a common application.
 - ii. **Category-II:** SMEs Applicants manufacturing innovative/ organic products who apply for PLI Incentive based on Sales.
 - iii. **Category-III:** Applicants applying solely for grant for undertaking Branding & Marketing activities abroad.
- a. Applicant for the Scheme shall be
 - i. Proprietary Firm or Partnership Firm or Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) or a Company registered in India
 - ii. Co-operatives; and
 - iii. SME and making an application for seeking approval for coverage under the Scheme.
 - b. Applicant may also include company applying on its own behalf and its subsidiary/ies provided the applicant company holds more than 50% of the stock of its subsidiary/ies and that none of such subsidiary company/ies is included in any other applicant company under the scheme; or Marketing Federation or Apex level co-operatives applying on behalf of Member Unions or Member co-operatives in the case of co-operatives.

G7'S FIRST IN-PERSON TALKS HELD IN TWO YEARS

- a. The Group of Seven wealthy democracies discussed how to form a common front towards an increasingly assertive China in the Foreign Ministers' first in-person talks in two years.
- b. Backing U.S. President Joe Biden's calls for a deeper alliance of democracies, host Britain invited guests, including India, South Korea and Australia, for talks in central London stretched out over three days.
- c. The G7 devoted its first session on Tuesday to China, whose growing military and economic clout, and willingness to exert its influence at home and abroad have increasingly unnerved Western democracies.
- d. **About Group of Seven(G7):** (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, and the US);
 - **The G7 emerged as a restricted club of the rich democracies in the early 1970s.**

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- **The quadrupling of oil prices just after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, when members of the OPEC imposed an embargo against Canada, Japan, Netherlands, and the US, shocked their economies.**
- **Thus, French organized a G6 Summit by inviting the Finance ministers of other 5 states.**
 - **1975 Summit: G6: France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK & US.**
 - **1976: Canada joined and G7 was made.**
 - **1980: EU was represented as a "non-enumerated" participant.**
 - **It represented 2/3rds of world GDP at that time.**
 - **1997: On the invitation of Bill Clinton(US President) it was expanded and Russia was invited.**
 - **Reformed as G7 after exclusion of Russia from 2014, after annexation of Crimea.**

The **Group of Seven (G7)** is an informal club of wealthy "liberal democracies" consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. The heads of government of the member states, as well as the representatives of the European Union, meet at the annual G7 Summit. As of 2018, the G7 represents 58% of the global net wealth (\$317 trillion), more than 46% of the global gross domestic product (GDP) based on nominal values, and more than 32% of the global GDP based on purchasing power parity. The seven countries involved are also the largest IMF-advanced economies in the world.

DoT ALLOWS TO CONDUCT TRIALS OF 5G TECHNOLOGY

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) gave permission to Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) to conduct trials for the use and application of 5G technology.

- a. **Points to be noted:**
 - i. This formally leaves out Chinese companies like Huawei and ZTE from the 5G race in India.
 - ii. The applicant TSPs include Bharti Airtel Ltd., Reliance JioInfocomm Ltd., Vodafone Idea Ltd. and MTNL.
 - iii. These TSPs have tied up with original equipment manufacturers and technology providers which are Ericsson, Nokia, Samsung and C-DOT," a statement from the Ministry of Communications said. In addition, Reliance JioInfocomm Ltd. will also be conducting trials using its own indigenous technology.
 - iv. **Duration of the trials** is for **six months**, which includes a time period of two months for the procurement and setting up of the equipment. "The permissions have been given by DoT as per the priorities and technology partners identified by TSPs themselves," it stated.
 - v. Each TSP will have to conduct trials in rural and semi-urban settings also in addition to urban settings so that the benefit of 5G technology proliferates across the country and is not confined only to urban areas, the statement said.
- b. **Objective:** It include testing 5G spectrum propagation characteristics in the Indian context, model tuning and the evaluation of chosen equipment and vendors, testing of indigenous technology, testing of applications such as tele-medicine, tele-education, augmented, virtual reality and drone-based agricultural monitoring, and to test 5G phones and devices.
- c. **Advantages:** The **Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI)** welcomed the go-ahead for the 5G trials.
 - i. It will stimulate local Research and Development [R&D] ecosystem to develop innovative applications tailored to commercial needs.
 - ii. It will enable TSPs to validate 5G technologies and use cases such as IoT and Industry 4.0. We hope the government will also look into the industry's call for revisiting the 5G spectrum pricing.

About 5G trial- The trials for 5G technology important for telcos

- i. 5G or fifth generation is the latest upgrade in the long-term evolution mobile broadband networks.
- ii. 5G mainly works in 3 bands, namely low, mid and high-frequency spectrum — all of which have their uses and limitations.
- iii. The telecom market in India is left with only three private telcos, with the rest having surrendered to the low returns on investments over the years.
- iv. Apart from the private telecommunication companies, the two state-run companies, MTNL and Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) have also survived but are making losses.

5G trials in India entail for now

- i. In the initial phase, these trials will be for 6 months, including a 2 month period for procurement and setting up of the equipment. In these 6 months, telcos will be required to test their set up in urban areas, semi-urban areas as well as rural areas.

During this period, the telcos will be provided with experimental spectrum in various bands, such as the mid-band of 3.2 GHz to 3.67 GHz, the millimeter wave band of 24.25 GHz to 28.5 GHz, and others.

China expressed “concern and regret” at India’s move to not include Chinese

telecommunication firms among the companies permitted this week to conduct trials for the use of 5G technology.

NEW FRAMEWORK FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF SVAMITVA SCHEME

Shri Narendra Singh Tomar releases the new framework for implementation of SVAMITVA Scheme

- a. **News:** Union Minister for Panchayati Raj Shri Narendra Singh Tomar released the new framework for implementation of the SVAMITVA Scheme and Coffee Table Book (CTB) to mark the nationwide roll-out of the SVAMITVA Scheme today. The Minister also addressed the States and other stakeholders virtually on this occasion.
- b. The SVAMITVA Framework developed by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj provides a detailed roadmap and guidelines for the various States in terms of the Scheme objectives, coverage, various components involved, year-wise funding pattern, survey approach and methodology, stakeholders involved and their roles and responsibility, monitoring and evaluation, and deliverables.
- c. Coffee Table Book on SVAMITVA Scheme is an effort to condense the vast efforts of various stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Scheme, learnings and best practices that have emerged during the course, glimpses of various challenges and success stories and provide a way forward.
- d. **About SVAMITVA SCHEME**
 - i. A Central Sector Scheme of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj was nationally launched by the Prime Minister on the occasion of National Panchayati Raj Day on 24th April 2021 after successful completion of the pilot phase of the Scheme in 9 States.
 - ii. **AIM:** It provide property rights to the residents of rural inhabited areas in India by using Drone survey and CORS Networks which provides mapping accuracy of 5 cms. To provide the ‘record of rights’ to village household owners in rural abadi areas and issuance of digital Property cards.
 - iii. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) is the Nodal Ministry for implementation of the SVAMITVA scheme.
 - iv. In the States, the Revenue Department/Land Records Department will be the Nodal Department and shall carry out the scheme with the support of State Panchayati Raj Departments.

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The Minister was also updated that property cards have been distributed in more than 7400 villages and more than 7, 00,000 beneficiaries have been benefited from the Scheme across the country. The scheme will benefit rural residents by providing them with property cards that can be used for taking loans and the creation of accurate land records for rural planning.

CABINET APPROVES MOU BETWEEN INDIA AND UK ON GLOBAL INNOVATION PARTNERSHIP

Cabinet gives ex-post facto approval to MoU between India and UK on Global Innovation Partnership

- a. The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi gives ex-post facto approval to the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of Republic of India and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) of the United Kingdom on Global Innovation Partnership (GIP).
- b. Objectives:
 - i. Through this MoU, India and UK agree to launch the Global Innovation Partnership.
 - ii. GIP will support Indian innovators to scale up their innovations in third countries thereby helping them explore new markets and become self-sustainable. It will also foster the innovative ecosystem in India. GIP innovations will focus on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) related sectors thereby assisting recipient countries achieve their SDGs.
 - Through seed funding, grants, investments and technical assistance, the Partnership will support Indian entrepreneurs and innovators to test, scale up and take their innovative development solutions to select developing countries.
 - The innovations selected under GIP would accelerate the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals and benefit the base of the pyramid populations thus promoting equity and inclusivity in recipient countries.
 - iii. GIP will also develop an open and inclusive e-market place (E-BAAZAR) for cross border innovation transfer and will focus on results based impact assessment thereby promoting transparency and accountability.

SC DECLARES MARATHA RESERVATION AS UNCONSTITUTIONAL

A separate reservation for the Maratha community violates Articles 14 (right to equality) 21 (due process of law), says the top court.

- a. **MARATHA RESERVATION UNCONSTITUTIONAL:** A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court on Wednesday unanimously declared a Maharashtra law which provides reservation benefits to the Maratha community, taking the quota limit in the State in excess of 50%, as unconstitutional.
- b. The Bench led by Justice Ashok Bhushan found there was no "exceptional circumstances" or "extraordinary situation" in Maharashtra which required the Maharashtra government to break the 50% ceiling limit to bestow quota benefits on the Maratha community.
 - i. A separate reservation for the Maratha community violates Articles 14 (right to equality) and 21 (due process of law).
 - ii. Only the President could make changes to the Central List of socially and backward classes based on data given from various sources, including the National Commission for Backward Classes.
 - iii. The States could only make "suggestions". The "final exercise" of including castes and communities was done by the President alone.
- c. **Justice N.G. Gaikwad Commission:** The Supreme Court struck down the findings of this commission which led to the enactment of Maratha quota law and set aside the Bombay High Court judgment which validated the Maharashtra State Reservation for socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act of 2018.

- i. The High Court had, in June 2019, reduced the quantum of reservation for Marathas from the 16% recommended by the Gaikwad Commission to 12% in education and 13% in employment. The Supreme Court concluded that even the reduced percentages of reservation granted by the High Court were ultra vires.
- d. **1992 Indira Sawhney judgment**
 - i. In 1992, a nine-judge Bench of the court had drawn the "Lakshman rekha" for reservation in jobs and education at 50%, except in "extraordinary circumstances".
 - ii. However, over the years, several States like Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu have crossed the rubicon and passed laws which allows reservation shooting over 60%.
 - iii. The five-judge Bench had decided not to confine the question of reservation spilling over 50% limit to just Maharashtra.
 - iv. The Bench had expanded the ambit of the case by making other States party and inviting them to make their stand clear on the question of whether reservation should continue to remain within the 50% boundary or no.

LIQUIDITY FACILITY CAN INCREASE BED CAPACITY IN HOSPITALS

LIQUIDITY FACILITY CAN INCREASE BED CAPACITY IN HOSPITALS

- a. **CONTEXT:** The ₹50,000 crore liquidity window offered by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to banks under priority-sector lending to augment Covid-19 healthcare infrastructure will help raise treatment capacity, and availability of medicines and medical equipment.
- b. Hospitals could be among the biggest beneficiaries as the incremental funding can potentially increase bed capacity in the country by 15-20%, the rating agency added.
- c. Loans under the scheme for tenures up to three years are available to banks at repo rate.
- d. Such loans will also be classified under the priority sector. Consequently, banks are expected to extend these loans below current interest rates for companies engaged in healthcare activities.
- e. **BENEFICIARY:** These include makers and suppliers of vaccines and drugs; hospitals; pathology labs; suppliers of oxygen; makers of emergency medical equipment; logistics firms; and Covid-19 patients.

Eligibility criteria

- i. Those with aggregate exposure of up to ₹25 crore, who had not availed restructuring under any of the earlier restructuring frameworks (including under last year's resolution framework) and whose loans were classified as 'standard' as on March 31, 2021, were eligible for restructuring under the proposed framework.
- ii. In respect of small businesses and MSMEs restructured earlier, lending institutions have been permitted as a one-time measure, to review the working capital sanctioned limits, based on a reassessment of the working capital cycle and margins.

DISCUSSION ON BRINGING THE U.S. BACK INTO THE NUCLEAR DEAL WITH IRAN

Iranian envoy says all sides committed to finding a solution

- a. World powers held a fourth round of high-level talks on Friday aimed at bringing the U.S. back into the nuclear deal with Iran, with both sides signalling a willingness to work out the major stumbling blocks.
- b. The U.S. pulled out of the landmark 2015 deal in 2018 after then-President Donald Trump said the pact needed to be renegotiated. The deal had promised Iran economic incentives in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme, and the Trump administration reimposed heavy sanctions on the Islamic republic in an unsuccessful attempt to bring Tehran into new talks.
- c. Iran reacted by steadily increasing its violations of the deal by enriching uranium to a greater purity than permitted.
- d. U.S. President Joe Biden says he wants to rejoin the deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, but that Iran needs to return to compliance.

e. The pact is meant to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear bomb, something the country insists it is not inclined to. Iran insists all sanctions must be lifted before it reverses violations.

ABOUT Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action(JCPOA) JULY 2015: b/w Iran v/s P5 + EU + Germany after 18 months of negotiations, in return of crippling sanctions Iran agreed to limit its nuclear activities & allowed international inspectors at its sites;

- a. **Fuel Enrichment:** Iran had more than 20,000 centrifuges, in **2015**. Iran was allowed to have no more than 300kg of enriched Uranium(95% reduction).
- b. **IAEA inspection:** Inspectors allowed to continuously monitor all nuclear sites until **2031**. It had to comply within 24 days of Inspection request.
- c. **Plutonium production:** Iran had been working on a heavy water facility near **Arak**, spent fuel from which could have been weaponized. Iran had agreed to redesign the reactor to prevent it from producing weapon grade material.
- d. **Break-out time:** Prior to 2015, Tehran had enough material to create 8-10 bombs within months. The deal extended this breakout time to about an year or two.
- e. **Sanction relief:** Iran gained access to more than \$100bn assets frozen overseas; It could resume selling oil on international markets; & begin using global financial system for trade.
 - But it would continue to remain under UN arms embargo for up to 5 years. Although it could end earlier if IAEA is satisfied that its nuclear programme is entirely peaceful.

Below is a summary of Iran's breaches of the accord as well as additional steps taken by the Trump administration to undermine the JCPOA since the United States formally withdrew from the deal.

- **First Breach – May 8, 2019:** Iran announced it would no longer be bound by limits on heavy water and enriched uranium stockpiles. The JCPOA prohibits Iran's stockpile from exceeding 130 metric tons of heavy water and 300 kilograms of uranium hexafluoride gas (UF6) enriched to 3.67 percent uranium-235. The IAEA verified that Iran breached the uranium stockpile limit July 1, 2019, and the heavy water limit on Nov. 17, 2019. Since that time, Iran continues to produce uranium in excess of the stockpile cap, but its heavy water stockpile has fluctuated and, at times, returned to below the 130-ton limit.
- **Second Breach – July 7, 2019:** Iran announced it would exceed the 3.67 percent uranium-235 enrichment limit designated by the JCPOA. On July 8, 2019, Iran reported it had begun enriching uranium to 4.5 percent uranium-235. Iran's breach of the 3.67 percent limit was verified by the IAEA on July 8, 2019, and since then, Iran has continued to enrich uranium up to 4.5 percent.
- **Third Breach – September 5, 2019:** Iran announced it would cease to honor the limitations on research and development of advanced centrifuges imposed by the JCPOA. On Sept. 7, 2019, the IAEA verified that Iran had begun to install advanced centrifuges in excess of the amount permitted by the JCPOA. On Sept. 25, 2019, the IAEA reported that Iran had begun to accumulate enriched uranium from advanced machines. Iran continues to install advanced centrifuges and to produce enriched uranium using those new machines, both in violation of the accord.
- **Fourth Breach – November 5, 2019:** Iran announced that technicians would begin enriching uranium up to 4.5 percent uranium-235 at the Fordow enrichment facility. Under the JCPOA, Iran is prohibited from enriching uranium at Fordow for 15 years.. The IAEA verified on Nov. 6, 2019, the transfer of uranium gas from Natanz to Fordow. The IAEA confirmed the resumption of uranium enrichment at Fordow on Nov. 9, 2019. In response, the Trump administration announced on Nov. 18, 2019, that it would no longer waive sanctions related to Iran's Fordow facility. That waiver expired Dec. 15, 2019.
- **Fifth Breach – January 5, 2020:** Iran announced that it would no longer be bound by any operational limitations of the JCPOA, but that it would maintain compliance with its safeguards obligations under the deal. Since then, Iran has not taken any additional observed steps in violation of the deal, according to IAEA reports.

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CHINESE SPACE AGENCY CRITICIZED BY NASA

Chinese Space agency criticized by NASA for failing to meet responsible standards

- a. **Context:** Debris from the last stage of China's Long March rocket that had last month carried a key component of its under-construction space station fell into the waters of the Indian Ocean west of the Maldives.
- b. Most of the debris had been burned during re-entry and that a fall into international waters was most likely, says China
- c. **Fourth-largest uncontrolled reentry in history:** The re-entry of the rocket, described by astrophysicists as the fourth-largest uncontrolled reentry in history, had evoked concerns in recent days about possible damage should it have fallen on land, and had been criticised by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in the U.S. for "failing to meet responsible standards".
- d. China had rejected those concerns, saying most of the debris had been burned during re-entry and that a fall into international waters was most likely.
- e. The China Manned Space Agency (CSMA) said "the vast majority of the device burned up during the reentry, and the rest of the debris fell into a sea area with the centre at 2.65 degrees north latitude and 72.47 degrees east longitude," placing it west of the Maldives in the Indian Ocean.

About long march rocket- **Long March 5 (LM-5)**, also known as **Chang Zheng 5 (CZ-5)**, is a Chinese heavy-lift launch vehicle developed by the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology (CALT). It is the first Chinese launch vehicle designed to use exclusively non-hypergolic liquid propellants. It is the fifth iteration of the Long March rocket family, named for the Chinese Red Army's 1934–35 Long March, during the Chinese Civil War.

NO LINK BETWEEN 5G TECHNOLOGY AND SPREAD OF COVID-19

No link between 5G technology and spread of COVID-19

- a. Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Ministry of Communications: several misleading messages are being circulated on various social media platforms claiming that the second wave of coronavirus has been caused by the testing of the 5G mobile towers.
- b. The press statement informs that the general public is hereby informed that there is no link between 5G technology and spread of COVID-19 and they are urged not to be misguided by the false information and rumours spread in this matter.
- c. The claims linking the 5G technology with the COVID-19 pandemic are false and have no scientific basis. Moreover, it is informed that the testing of the 5G network has not yet started anywhere in India. Hence, the claim that 5G Trials or networks are causing coronavirus in India is baseless and false.
- d. **SCIENTIFIC FACT:** Mobile towers emit non-ionizing Radio frequencies having very minuscule power and are incapable of causing any kind of damage to living cells including human beings. Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has prescribed norms for exposure limit for the Radio Frequency Field (i.e. Base Station Emissions) which are 10 times more stringent than the safe limits prescribed by International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) and recommended by WHO.
- e. **Initiatives already taken by DoT:**
 - i. DoT has a well-structured process so that TSPs strictly adhere to these prescribed norms. However, any citizen having any apprehension about any mobile tower emitting radio waves beyond the safe limit prescribed by the department, a request for EMF measurements/testing can be made on Tarang Sanchar portal at <https://tarangsanchar.gov.in/emfportal>.

To allay the fear of general public regarding health effects of EMF emission from mobile tower, DoT has been taking several steps to generate awareness among the public about EMF radiation such as Nation-wide Awareness Programme, distribution of pamphlets/ information brochure on various topics related to EMF, publishing detailed information on EMF related issues on the website of DoT, advertisements in newspapers, launch of "Tarang Sanchar" portal etc.

INDIA'S FOOD PROCESSING MARKET

India's food processing market may touch \$470 billion by 2025: KPMG report

- a. The pandemic could aid the growth of the food processing market in India, consultancy firm KPMG has said in a new report.
- b. Tier-II and tier-III cities could mirror the trend visible in metropolitan areas, by buying more processed food in the coming years, with the pandemic restricting mobility thus forcing people to work and learn from home, the report states.
 - i. As a result, the food processing market could touch \$470 billion by 2025 from \$263 billion in 2020, an increase of more than \$200 billion in five years.
 - ii. The report says the central government needs to negotiate more free-trade agreements with foreign nations, and also invest in testing and certification to meet stringent hygiene standards of these countries to improve exports.

The online food ordering business in India is in its nascent stage, but witnessing exponential growth. With online food delivery players like FoodPanda, Zomato, TinyOwl and Swiggy building scale through partnerships, the organised food business has a huge potential and a promising future. The online food delivery industry grew at 150 per cent year-on-year with an estimated Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) of US\$ 300 million in 2016.

Government of India (GOI) has approved a new Central Sector Scheme – **Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMPADA** Yojana (Scheme for Agro-Marine Processing and Development of Agro-Processing Clusters) with an allocation of Rs. 6,000 crore for the period 2016-20 coterminous with the 14th Finance Commission cycle. The scheme will be implemented by Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI).

PM Kisan SAMPADA Yojana is a comprehensive package which will result in creation of modern infrastructure with efficient supply chain management from farm gate to retail outlet. It will not only provide a big boost to the growth of food processing sector in the country but also help in providing better returns to farmers and is a big step towards doubling of farmers income, creating huge employment opportunities especially in the rural areas, reducing wastage of agricultural produce, increasing the processing level and enhancing the export of the processed foods.

The following schemes will be implemented under PM Kisan SAMPADA Yojana :

- Mega Food Parks
- Integrated Cold Chain and Value Addition Infrastructure
- Creation/ Expansion of Food Processing/ Preservation Capacities (Unit Scheme)
- Infrastructure for Agro-processing Clusters
- Creation of Backward and Forward Linkages
- Food Safety and Quality Assurance Infrastructure
- Human Resources and Institutions

GREEN URJA AWARD

- a. Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Ltd. IREDA has been conferred with "Green Urja Award" for being the Leading Public Institution in Financing Institution for Renewable Energy this year by Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC).

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- b. The award was received by Shri Pradip Kumar Das, Chairman & Managing Director (CMD), IREDA
- c. **IREDA** gets the award for the pivotal and developmental role it plays in Green Energy Financing
- d. The award recognises immense contribution in development of Renewable Energy Sector in line with the Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision of Atma Nirbhar Bharat.
- e. **About Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC)**
 - i. Founded in 1925, It is the leading and only National Chamber of Commerce having headquarter in Kolkata, and one of the most pro-active and forward-looking Chambers in the country today.
 - ii. Its membership spans some of the most prominent and major industrial groups in India. ICC's forte is its ability to anticipate the needs of the future, respond to challenges, and prepare the stakeholders in the economy to benefit from these changes and opportunities.
 - iii. Set up by a group of pioneering industrialists led by Mr G D Birla, the Indian Chamber of Commerce was closely associated with the Indian Freedom Movement, as the first organised voice of indigenous Indian Industry.

CHINA'S POPULATION GROWTH SLOWS TO LOWEST RATE IN DECADES

China's population growth slows to lowest rate in decades

- a. **China's once-in-a-decade population census:** It has recorded a slowing population growth rate that will likely see China's population peak - and be overtaken by India's - by as early as 2025, experts said, with the number of births falling for the fourth consecutive year.
- b. **The seventh census by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS):** (in Beijing) noted 12 million babies were born last year, the lowest number since 1961, a year when China was in the midst of a four-year famine unleashed by Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward policy in 1958 that devastated the farm sector and claimed millions of lives.
- c. **2020:** China's population was 1.41 billion, according to the census, increasing by 72 million since the last census in 2010, recording a 5.38% growth in this period. The average annual growth was 0.53%.
- d. **One child policy:** The slowing growth rate, a consequence of China's stringent family planning rules over decades - known as the "one-child policy" but involving a range of varying restrictions across urban and rural areas - has evoked concerns of a rapidly ageing society and the impact on China's labour force, and fears that China will, as some experts have said, "get old before it gets rich."

PLI FOR "NATIONAL PROGRAMME ON ADVANCED CHEMISTRY CELL BATTERY STORAGE"

Cabinet approves Production Linked Incentive scheme "National Programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell Battery Storage"

a. **CONTEXT:** The Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has approved the proposal of Department of Heavy Industry for implementation of the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme 'National Programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery Storage' for achieving manufacturing capacity of Fifty (50) Giga Watt Hour (GWh) of ACC and 5 GWh of "Niche" ACC with an outlay of Rs.18,100 crore.

b. **Advanced Chemistry Cell Battery Storage (ACCs):** These are the new generation of advanced storage technologies that can store electric energy either as electrochemical or as chemical energy and convert it back to electric energy as and when required.

c. The consumer electronics, electric vehicles, advanced electricity grids, solar rooftop etc. which are major battery consuming sectors are expected to achieve robust growth in the coming years. It is expected that the dominant battery technologies will control some of the world's largest growth

sectors.

d. While several companies have already started investing in battery packs, though the capacities of these facilities are too small when compared to global averages, but there still is negligible investment in manufacturing, along with value addition, of ACCs in India. All the demand of the ACCs is currently being met through imports in India.

e. SELECTION:

i. ACC battery Storage manufacturers will be selected through a transparent competitive bidding process. The manufacturing facility would have to be commissioned within a period of two years. The incentive will be disbursed thereafter over a period of five years.

ii. Each selected ACC battery Storage manufacturer would have to commit to set-up an ACC manufacturing facility of minimum five (5) GWh capacity and ensure a minimum 60% domestic value addition at the Project level within five years.

iii. Furthermore, the beneficiary firms have to achieve a domestic value addition of at least 25% and incur the mandatory investment Rs.225 crore /GWh within 2 Years (at the Mother Unit Level) and raise it to 60% domestic value addition within 5 Years, either at Mother Unit, in-case of an Integrated Unit, or at the Project Level, in-case of "Hub & Spoke" structure.

f. The outcomes/ benefits expected from the scheme are as follows:

1. The National Programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery Storage will reduce import dependence.
2. It will also support the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative and it also Facilitate Make-In-India: Greater emphasis upon domestic value-capture and therefore reduction in import dependence.
3. The incentive amount will increase with increased specific energy density & cycles and increased local value addition.
4. Setup a cumulative 50 GWh of ACC manufacturing facilities in India under the Programme.
5. Direct investment of around Rs.45,000 crore in ACC Battery storage manufacturing projects.
6. Facilitate demand creation for battery storage in India.
7. Import substitution of around Rs.20,000 crore every year.
8. Impetus to Research & Development to achieve higher specific energy density and cycles in ACC.
9. Promote newer and niche cell technologies.

OPERATION SAMUDRA SETU II

OPERATION SAMUDRA SETU II - INS TARKASH BRINGS MEDICAL OXYGEN CONSIGNMENT FROM QATAR

a. As part of ongoing COVID relief Operation 'Samudra Setu II' launched by Indian Navy, INS Tarkash, with two Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) filled (20 MT each) cryogenic containers and 230 Oxygen cylinders embarked, arrived at Mumbai on 12 May 21.

b. The Oxygen containers were facilitated by the French Mission as part of "Oxygen Solidarity Bridge" and Oxygen cylinders were gifted by Indian diaspora in Qatar.

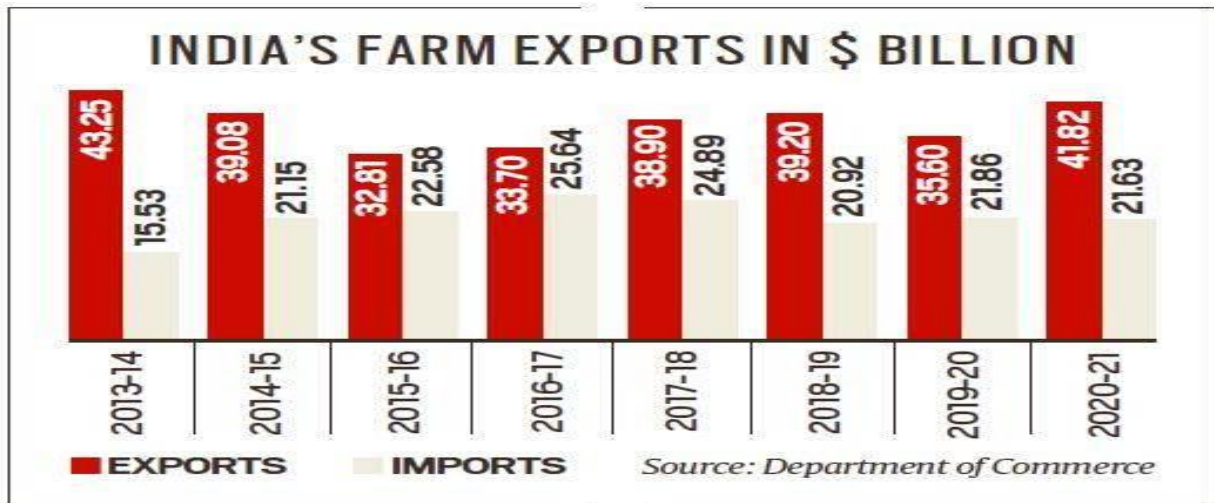
AGRICULTURAL EXPORTS ZOOM 17.5% IN 2020-21

India's agricultural exports grew 17.5 per cent to cross \$41.8 billion in 2020-21. This came even as the

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country's overall merchandise exports fell 7.2 per cent to \$290.8 billion, from \$313.4 billion in 2019-20.



- The farm sector's standout export performance, the best since the \$43.25 billion of 2013-14, was thanks to a good monsoon, agriculture production being relatively unaffected by the Covid-19-induced lockdown, and a steep surge in global commodity prices. It is also in line with GDP numbers: Agricultural growth for 2020-21 is estimated at 3 per cent, even as the Indian economy contracted by 6.5 per cent.

MOST NGOs DO NOT HAVE SBI ACCOUNT

From April 1, a Delhi account is a mandatory provision to receive foreign funds

a. **Context:** Only 16% registered NGOs have active bank accounts with the State Bank of India's main branch in Delhi, a compulsory requirement to receive foreign funds from April 1, according to submission made by a non-governmental organisation in the Delhi High Court on Wednesday.

b. FOREIGN CONTRIBUTION REGULATIONS:

1. Registered NGOs can receive foreign contribution **under five purposes — social, educational, religious, economic and cultural.**
2. An **FCRA registration is mandatory for NGOs** to receive foreign funds. There are 22,591 FCRA-registered NGOs.
3. FCRA amendment enacted in September 2020: the **NGOs registered under the Act were asked to open a designated bank account at the SBI, Delhi and compulsorily register the Aadhaar details** of the chief functionaries, trustees and office-bearers.
4. All **the existing FCRA accounts of the NGOs will be linked to the SBI account** in Delhi, and while they may not be able to receive fresh foreign funds from April 1 in the existing accounts, they could utilise the money that already exists in the old account.

c. **News:** An Assam-based NGO has also moved the Gauhati High Court against another amended provision of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) that makes Aadhaar mandatory for opening and operating the account in Delhi.

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1. It said in its petition that it applied for opening of an FCRA account in SBI, Delhi on March 9, before the March 31 deadline, but the application was not processed.

2. The Gauhati High Court on May 5 sent a notice to the SBI asking it to explain why Aadhaar was necessary to open a bank account, when in 2018, the Supreme Court in the K.S. Puttaswamy (Aadhaar) case had ruled that mandatorily linking Aadhaar to a bank account "does not satisfy the test of proportionality".

d. Pandemic poses hurdles

1. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many NGOs could not complete the stringent paper work, making it impossible for foreign donors to send help during the second wave that has now spread to rural areas. Many said that they did not fulfil the eligibility criteria as they did not possess an Aadhaar card as a "matter of principle".

2. An Andhra Pradesh NGO that had moved the Delhi High Court last week seeking exemption from the March 31 deadline to open an account in Delhi, informed the court on Wednesday that out of the 22,457 NGOs with active FCRA licences, only 3,616 have active bank accounts with the SBI Main Branch, Delhi (NDMB).

3. Three more Andhra NGOs have approached the court with the same plea.

e. The Ministry of Home Affairs did not comment on whether the government was considering to extend the March 31 deadline.

eSANJEEVANI DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

More than Half a Crore patients served by the National Telemedicine Service (eSanjeevani) during the COVID-19 Pandemic

- CONTEXT:** In around a little over one year eSanjeevani, the flagship National Telemedicine Service of MoHFW has served more than 50 lakh (more than half a crore) patients.
- Patient to Doctor remote consultation services were rolled out by the Union Ministry in April 2020 while the OPDs in the country were closed during first lockdown.
- The eSanjeevani initiative is operational in 31 States/Union Territories in the country and daily around 40,000 patients across the country are using this contactless and risk-free modality of healthcare services delivery.
- There are two modules of eSanjeevani:
 - eSanjeevaniAB-HWC -(the doctor to doctor telemedicine platform)-** is being implemented at all the Health and Wellness Centres in the country in hub and spoke model under Ayushman Bharat Scheme of Government of India. So far, eSanjeevaniAB-HWC has been implemented at 18000+ Health and Wellness Centres .
 - eSanjeevaniAB-HWC was rolled out in November 2019 and 22 States have started using this digital modality for far close to around 2 million patients have been extended health services by doctors and specialists.
 - In all over 21,000 users including specialists, doctors and community health officers have been trained and onboarded on eSanjeevaniAB-HWC.
 - eSanjeevaniOPD (Out-patient department):** It has been rolled out in 28 States/UTs.
 - Over 350 OPDs have been set up on eSanjeevaniOPD, over 300 of these are specialty OPDs.
 - Over 30,00,000 patients have been served through eSanjeevaniOPD, a free of cost service. This modality of digital health enables delivery of health services to the citizens in the confines of their homes.

e. SIGNIFICANCE:

- i. These National OPDs will enable doctors to offer remote health services to patients in any part of the country. This will, to some extent help in addressing the challenges like shortage and uneven distribution of doctors and specialists in various regions of the country.
- ii. Since the onset of the pandemic, the National Telemedicine Service of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare amongst patients and doctors has witnessed rapid and widespread adoption.
- iii. eSanjeevani has been performing as a parallel stream of country's healthcare delivery system that is already over-burdened.

BLACK FUNGUS

Mucormycosis, also known as **black fungus**, is a serious fungal infection, usually in people with reduced ability to fight infections. Symptoms depend on where in the body the infection occurs.^{[13][14]} It most commonly infects the nose, sinuses, eye and brain resulting in a runny nose, one sided facial swelling and pain, headache, fever, blurred vision, swollen and bulging eye, and tissue death. Other forms of disease may infect the lungs, stomach and intestines, and skin.

- a. It mainly affects people who are on medication for other conditions, especially diabetes, that reduce their ability to fight environmental pathogens.
- b. Cases of mucormycosis, a serious fungal infection, are rising in India among patients who are either suffering or have recovered from covid-19. Commonly called black fungus, it can invade the lungs and brain, and has a high mortality rate.
- c. **Mucormycosis (black fungus)**
 - i. Mucormycosis is caused by a group of moulds called mucormycetes that are found throughout the natural environment.
 - ii. It often affects the sinuses, lungs, skin and brain.
 - 1. It mainly affects people who are on medication for other conditions, especially diabetes, that reduce their ability to fight environmental pathogens.
 - 2. The sinuses or lungs of such individuals get affected after fungal spores are inhaled from the air.
 - 3. Warning signs include fever, headache, coughing, breathlessness, blood vomits and altered mental status.
- d. **Affecting covid-19 patients**
 - i. Patients with uncontrolled diabetes are anyway at high risk of contracting covid-19.
 - ii. When this happens, they are treated with steroids which further compromises immunity.
 - iii. Doctors in India hold that steroids which are being used as a life-saving treatment for severe and critically ill covid-19 patients, can prove to be a trigger for mucormycosis.
 - iv. While steroids help in reducing inflammation in lungs they can decrease immunity and increase blood sugar levels in both diabetics and non-diabetic covid-19 patients alike.
 - v. Patients with prolonged ICU stay are also at high risk of mucormycosis.
- e. **Symptoms of mucormycosis**
 - i. The ICMR mentions sinusitis (nasal blockage or congestion), blackish/bloody nasal discharge and pain on the cheek bone.
 - ii. Pain on one side of the face, numbness or swelling, blackish discolouration over the bridge of nose/palate, loosening of teeth, blurred or double vision with pain, fever, skin lesion, blood clot, and chest pain.
- f. **Precautions**
 - i. Covid-19 patients should control hyperglycemia by regularly monitoring their blood glucose level post discharge. Diabetics should also monitor their blood glucose levels.
 - ii. Doctors have been advised to use antibiotics, antifungals and steroids judiciously.
 - iii. Hospitals should use clean, sterile water for humidifiers during oxygen therapy.

- iv. Doctors have been warned not to miss warning signs and symptoms and not lose crucial time to initiate treatment. Use masks at dusty construction sites.
- g. **Treatment of mucormycosis**
 - i. Patients should control diabetes and diabetic ketoacidosis.
 - ii. Doctors should reduce steroids in case the patient is still on them and discontinue rapidly.
 - iii. Immunomodulating drugs should also be discontinued.
 - iv. Doctors can go for surgery for removing all necrotic (dead) material.
 - v. Antifungal therapy has also been advised for at least four to six weeks.
 - vi. Amphotericin B is being used for treatment, leading to a sudden increase in demand in some states.

1ST BRICS EMPLOYMENT WORKING GROUP (EWG) MEETING

1st BRICS Employment Working Group (EWG) Meeting amongst BRICS Countries

- a. **1st BRICS Employment Working Group (EWG) Meeting:** Shri Apurva Chandra, Secretary, Labour and Employment chaired the held in Sushma Swaraj Bhawan, New Delhi in virtual format.
- b. India has assumed BRICS Presidency this year.
- c. **The prime agenda for the discussions:** Promoting Social Security Agreements amongst BRICS Nations, Formalization of labour markets, Participation of women in labour force and Gig and platform workers – Role in labour market.
 - i. **On the issue of formalization of labour market,** Member Nations discussed various initiatives taken by them towards formalization of jobs and how Covid-19 has enhanced informalization risk.
 - ii. **On participation of women in the labour force:** the member countries resolved to promote participation of women in remunerative, productive and decent work and to extend social security cover to the women workers engaged in informal sector. Impact of Covid-19 on participation of women in labour force was also discussed.
 - iii. **On the issue of Gig and Platform workers** and their role in labour market, the member nations discussed how the proliferation of Digital Labour Platforms is transforming the labour processes in the world of work. Challenges faced by them and various measures being taken by member nations including extension of social protection system were also discussed.

BRICS is the acronym coined to associate five major emerging economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. The BRICS members are known for their significant influence on regional affairs. Since 2009, the governments of the BRICS states have met annually at formal summits. Russia hosted the most recent 12th BRICS summit on 17 November 2020 virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The BRICS have a combined area of 39,746,220 km² (15,346,101.0 sq mi) and an estimated total population of about 3.21 billion, or about 26.656% of the world land surface and 41.53% of the world population.

COVISHIELD, COVAXIN MADE FEWER ANTIBODIES AGAINST B.1.617 VARIANT

Covishield, Covaxin made fewer antibodies against B.1.617 variant

- a. **ICMR report:** Both Covishield and Covaxin, while effective at generating an immune response against the coronavirus, appear to generate only half as many antibodies against the B.1.617 strain, or the Indian strain, according to a series of early reports authored by scientists at the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).
- b. Scientists at the ICMR-National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune have since January been collecting samples from coronavirus-positive individuals and testing them for prominent variants — mostly the international variants of concern B.1.1.7 (UK variant), the B.1.351 (South Africa variant), the P2 (Brazil variant) and B.1.617 (Indian variant). Three related variants of the B.1.617 now make up an increasing proportion of cases in India.

- c. Like their global counterparts, the two vaccines authorised in India, Covaxin and Covishield while made differently, were designed on the blueprint of the virus variant, called B.1, that became the dominant strain in India by last April.
 - i. With reports emerging from vaccine trials, across the globe, of certain mutations in the virus helping it evade immune systems and antibodies, several labs have been working to check the potency of vaccines against emerging variants.
 - ii. When the NIV scientists tested the virus, bearing the B.1.617 signature mutations, on antibodies that were extracted from the blood serum of those with two doses of Covaxin, they found roughly 55% fewer antibodies than the antibodies generated against B.1.
- d. **About Antibodies:** Antibody (Ab) is also known as an immunoglobulin(Ig). These are large, Y-shaped blood proteins produced by plasma cells. They bind to foreign particles and invade them. These particles are foreign bodies that get attacked by Antibody.
- e. **Antigens** are foreign pathogens that invade the body and have the capability to give rise to a response from our immunity system either by grouping up with a larger molecule or alone after binding with antibodies for a particular immune response. Hence, antigens stimulate the production of antibodies by the immune system.

IRON DOME

Iron Dome is a mobile all-weather air defense system developed by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and Israel Aerospace Industries. The system is designed to intercept and destroy short-range rockets and artillery shells fired from distances of 4 kilometres (2.5 mi) to 70 kilometres (43 mi) away and whose trajectory would take them to an Israeli populated area.

- a. It is a short-range, ground-to-air, air defence system that includes a radar and Tamir interceptor missiles that track and neutralise any rockets or missiles aimed at Israeli targets. It is used for countering rockets, artillery & mortars (C-RAM) as well as aircraft, helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles.
 - i. The genesis of the Iron Dome goes back to the 2006 Israeli-Lebanon war, when the Hezbollah fired thousands of rockets into Israel. The following year, Israel announced that its state-run Rafael Advance Systems would come up with a new air defence system to protect its cities and people. It was developed with Israel Aerospace Industries.
 - ii. The Iron Dome was deployed in 2011. While Rafael claims a success rate of over 90%, with more than 2,000 interceptions, experts agree the success rate is over 80%. Rafael says on its website that it can "protect deployed and manoeuvring forces, as well as the Forward Operating Base (FOB) and urban areas, against a wide range of indirect and aerial threats".
 - iii. It has three main systems that work together to provide a shield over the area where it is deployed, handling multiple threats. It has a detection and tracking radar to spot any incoming threats, a battle management and weapon control system (BMC), and a missile firing unit. The BMC basically liaises between the radar and the interceptor missile.
 - iv. It is capable of being used in all weather conditions, including during the day and night.
- b. **Similar systems in India:**
 - i. At the moment, India has Akash short-range surface-to-air missiles, and Russian systems including Pechora. "All are being gradually replaced with more modern systems,"
 - ii. "Israel had to master it because of the threat around them and they work very closely with the Americans."
 - iii. As India is in the process of buying S-400 air defence systems from Russia for over \$5 billion, "Iron Dome was one of the systems that was being spoken of", he said.
 - iv. While India is continent-sized, Israel is smaller and has to deal with threats that are relatively close around it. "We have got S-400, which also caters to the three threats (rockets, missiles and cruise missiles). But they have much longer range. S400 has to cater to shooting down missiles, aircraft in some 300 to 400 km range." Chopra said the S-400 "has a much larger air defence bubble to knock off threats".

- v. India and Israel have significant cooperation in missiles, including the Barak-8. "We have also done a lot of work with Israel on air defence radars,"

JUDICIAL ACTIVISM IN THE RECENT JUDGMENTS

Judicial Activism in the recent Judgments:

- a. **Context:**
 - i. THE RECENT JUDGMENT of the Supreme Court in the Election Commission of India case is an example of judicial statesmanship.
 - ii. During the hearing of a matter, the Madras High Court felt that in the state elections, the EC had failed to enforce Covid safety guidelines, resulting in the spread of the pandemic. Oral observations from the bench stated that the "EC is the institution that is singularly responsible for the second wave of Covid-19" and "EC should be put-up for murder charges".
- b. The EC approached the SC. The judgment protects the media's right to report accurately the court's proceedings even if not made a part of the record; it has also recorded an appreciation of the performance of the EC and nullified the effect of oral observations stating that "observations during the course of hearing do not constitute a judgment or
 - i. The degree of caution and circumspection by a high court has direct co-relationship with the nature and dimensions of the power of judicial review entrusted to it under the Constitution, which is on a high pedestal. "This message is to all the occupants of judicial seats who, momentarily, reacting to action or inaction of the government, a party before them, have failed to restrain themselves.
 - ii. The SC warns that "the judges... cannot misuse their authority by intemperate comments, undignified banter, or scathing criticism."
- c. **The fundamental principles of the power of judicial review** over administrative action are that the courts review the decision-making process and not the decision itself unless the decision is unconstitutional, illegal or perverse. The court cannot impose its decision on the executive simply on being convinced that "if I were you, this would have been a better decision".
 - i. **Judicial activism**, howsoever liberally interpreted, would be counter-productive and would fail in achieving its laudable purpose if it assumes the role of judicial governance. It is one thing to direct the executive to perform, it is an other to say "if you do not do, we will do it ourselves".

PUNJAB WHEAT PROCUREMENT HITS NEW HIGH

Riding on direct payment, Punjab wheat procurement hits new high

- a. News: Government agencies have procured 132.08 lakh metric tonnes of wheat, 2 lakh metric tonnes more than the target set by the state, with more than 9 lakh farmers receiving over Rs 23,000 crore directly into their bank accounts.
- b. In the midst of the **second coronavirus surge** and the agitation by farmers against agricultural laws that has been now on for five months, Punjab has surpassed all previous records in wheat procurement for the rabi season.
- c. Government agencies have procured 132.08 lakh metric tonnes of wheat, 2 lakh metric tonnes more than the target set by the state, with more than 9 lakh farmers receiving over Rs 23,000 crore directly into their bank accounts. It was the first time in Punjab that farmers were paid directly instead of through arhtiyas or middlemen.

ZHURONG ROVER

How the Chinese landed a rover on Mars in first attempt

- a. **Context:** China has provided an impressive demonstration of its deep space capabilities by landing a rover on Mars in its first attempt. It is only the second nation after the US to have pulled off a

successful Mars landing.

b. About Zhurong Rover

- i. **The six-wheeled**, solar-powered Zhurong rover weighs about 240 kg and its stated technological mission is to collect and analyse rock samples and look for water.
- ii. Zhurong was launched from **the Tianwen-1 orbiter** after three months of preparation.
- iii. **Tianwen** reached Mars in February after being launched in July 2020. It went into orbit around the red planet after the seven-plus-month trip.
- iv. Zhurong had an initial speed of 4.8 km per second (over 17,000 kmph) when it started its descent. It was protected by a heat shield from friction as it entered the thin Martian atmosphere.
- v. It released a parachute to slow down, and also used rocket boosters to brake. At about 100 metres above the surface, it hovered and used a laser-guidance system to check for boulders or other hazards in the landing zone.
- vi. The Zhurong rover carries an inventory of six instruments for scientific studies. This includes two panoramic cameras, one of which is multispectral and perhaps capable of judging mineral content. It also has ground-penetrating radar and a magnetic field detector as well as a laser and meteorological instrument to study the climate and weather.

c. Oldest Missions to Mars:

i. **Viking 1 mission:** The first successful Mars landing was the Viking 1 Mission, which landed in July 1976.

ii. **The Viking 2 Mission**, which followed Viking 1 in short order, landed in Utopia Planitia but somewhat North of Zhurong's chosen spot, in September 1976. Both Viking landers worked for many years but they had far less sophisticated instruments, of course.

d. Climate lessons in Mars

i. **Mars was a warm, wet planet with dried surface oceans basins**, a much thicker atmosphere and a strong magnetic field. It could well have harboured life, given the likely conditions.

ii. Then **Mars lost the magnetic field**. We don't know how. Once it lost the magnetic field, it inevitably lost atmosphere. A strong magnetic field protects a planet by blocking solar radiation. Without a shield against solar radiation, the atmosphere is ionised (electrically charged) and gradually stripped away.

iii. **History:** Once the atmosphere thinned out, the temperature dropped. The liquid water vapourised, or turned into ice. If we can understand how this happened, we'll have a better understanding of climate change on Earth and we'll also have a better idea of whether this process is reversible. Water is also critically important if rockets are going to refuel on Mars and make return journeys.

TRIBUNALS REFORMS (RATIONALISATION AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE) ORDINANCE 2021.

Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance 2021.

a. **Context:** The Centre has abolished several appellate tribunals and authorities and transferred their jurisdiction to other existing judicial bodies through the Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance 2021.

i. The Ordinance has incorporated the suggestions made in **Madras Bar Association v. Union of India (2020)** on the composition of a search-cum-selection committee and its role in disciplinary proceedings.

b. Features:

i. Abolishing several tribunals such as the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal without any stakeholder consultation and transfer their functions to existing judicial bodies.

ii. Empowering Central Government to make rules for terms and conditions of service of Members of Tribunals.

iii. Selection of members:

1) Chairperson and Members of Tribunals will be appointed by Central Government

2) Search-cum-Selection Committee headed by the CJI or SC Judge nominated by him

iv. Tenure of members

1) Chairperson - 4 years or 70 years

2) Members - 4 years or 67 years

c. Importance:

i. Uniform Administration: One of the main reasons that has motivated the idea of NTC is the need for an authority to support uniform administration across all tribunals.

ii. Separation of powers: The NTC could therefore pave the way for the separation of the administrative and judicial functions carried out by various tribunals.

iii. A 'corporatised' structure of NTC with a Board, a CEO and a Secretariat will allow it to scale up its services and provide requisite administrative support to all tribunals across the country.

iv. Can Set Standards: It could set performance standards for the efficiency of tribunals and their own administrative processes.

v. Greater Independence: It could function as an independent recruitment body to develop and operationalise the procedure for disciplinary proceedings and appointment of tribunal members. Giving the NTC the authority to set members' salaries, allowances, and other service conditions, subject to regulations, would help maintain tribunals' independence.

vi. Smooth functioning of Tribunals: Administrative roles of the NTC include providing support services to tribunal members, litigants, and their lawyers. For this purpose, it would need to be able to hire and supervise administrative staff, and to consolidate, improve, and modernise tribunals' infrastructure.

d. News: This Ordinance has been challenged in the Supreme Court.

e. Sharp criticism:

i. Ordinance: Bypassing the usual legislative process.

ii. Abolition of several tribunals.

iii. Despite the Supreme Court's direction in *Roger Mathew v. South Indian Bank* (2019), **no judicial impact assessment** was conducted prior to abolishing the tribunals through this Ordinance.

iv. Fixing of four-year tenure "notwithstanding anything contained in any judgment, order, or decree of any court" by blatantly disregarding the court's direction for fixing a five-year term.

v. Further, the Centre is yet to constitute a National Tribunals Commission (NTC), an independent umbrella body to supervise the functioning of tribunals, appointment of and disciplinary proceedings against members, and to take care of administrative and infrastructural needs of the tribunals. The idea of an NTC was first mooted in *L. Chandra Kumar v. Union of India* (1997), but it has still not seen the light of day.

vi. Executive interference: In India, executive interference in the functioning of tribunals is often seen in matters of appointment and removal of tribunal members, as well as in provision of finances, infrastructure, personnel and other resources required for day-to-day functioning of the tribunals.

f. Way forward:

i. Developing an independent oversight body for accountable governance requires a legal framework that protects its independence and impartiality. Where the institutional design is not properly conceived, partisan interests can twist the law to serve political or private interests. Therefore, the NTC must be established vide a constitutional amendment or be backed by a statute that guarantees it functional, operational and financial independence.

ii. As the Finance Ministry has been vested with the responsibility for tribunals until the NTC is constituted, it should come up with a transition plan. The way to reform the tribunal system is to look at solutions from a systemic perspective supported by evidence. Establishing the NTC will definitely entail a radical restructuring of the present tribunals system.

SAMVEDNA

Children impacted by Covid-19 Pandemic being provided Tele Counselling through SAMVEDNA

- a. About **SAMVEDNA**(Sensitizing Action on Mental Health Vulnerability through Emotional Development and Necessary Acceptance) - a Toll-Free Helpline launched .
- b. **Objective:** provide psychological first-aid and emotional support to children affected during COVID-19 Pandemic, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)is providing Tele-Counselling to children.
- c. **Features:**
 - i. **Tele-counselling** is being provided through a network of qualified Experts/Counselors/Psychologists trained under the guidance of Professor.
 - ii. **SAMVEDNA tele-counselling** service is for psychological support to children to address their stress, anxiety, fear and other issues during the Pandemic. This service is available on a toll-free No: 1800-121-2830 from Monday to Saturday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 8 p.m.
 - iii. This service is exclusively for children who are willing to talk and are in need of counseling. When a child/ caretaker/Parent dials SAMVEDNA1800-121-2830,they get to speak to a professional counselor in a safe environment.
- d. **Beneficiaries:** Tele counselling is provided to the children under **three categories:**
 - i. Children who are in Quarantine/isolation/COVID Care centers.
 - ii. Children who have COVID positive parents or family members and near ones.
 - iii. Children who have lost their parents due to Covid-19 Pandemic.

FDI HITS ALL-TIME HIGH IN FY21; FOREX RESERVES JUMP OVER \$100 BN

FDI hits all-time high in FY21; forex reserves jump over \$100 bn

- a. **Net foreign direct investment (FDI)** into the country hit a fresh high of \$43.366 billion in the year ended March 2021 as it crossed the previous high of \$43.013 billion that it had reached last fiscal.
- b. According to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), while the direct investment to India in FY21 stood at \$54.665 billion, FDI by India amounted to \$11.299 billion, thereby resulting into a net FDI of \$43.336 billion.
- c. Beside the FDI, even the foreign portfolio investments jumped significantly.
- d. **States dominance:** Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and NCT of Delhi — accounted for nearly 90% of the FDI inflows received during the year, with Maharashtra receiving nearly over 46.67% of the flows, followed by Gujarat at 24.38%, according to government data for first nine months of the previous financial year.
- e. **Sector dominance:** IT, pharma, telecom and digital economy sectors attracted most of the flows.
- f. **Production-linked incentive (PLI)** scheme offered by the government for several sunrise sectors, potential growth in digital economy segments, as well as privatisation plans of the Central government are being seen as the pull factors for foreign investors.
- g. The strong inflow of FDI and foreign portfolio investor (FPI) money ensured that the forex reserves jumped significantly. In the financial year ended March 2021, the foreign exchange — or

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forex — reserves jumped by over \$100 billion and amounted to \$576.8 billion as on week-ended April 2, 2021.

WEST BENGAL GOVERNMENT DECIDES TO SET UP A LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

West Bengal government decides to set up a Legislative Council

- a. The West Bengal Government will set up a Legislative Council, or a Vidhan Parishad. A decision on setting up the council was taken up at a State Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.
 - b. The Trinamool Congress in its manifesto has promised formation of Legislative Council.
 - c. **REQUIREMENTS:** For setting up the council, a Bill has to be introduced in the State Assembly and then a nod from the State's Governor is required.
 - d. **History of West Bengal Legislative Council:** The Upper House of the bicameral legislature in West Bengal existed till 1969, till a resolution was passed in the State Assembly for its dissolution. Not all States in the country have Legislative Councils.
- a. **Currently, six states have it** — Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka.
 - b. **Formation of Legislative council: Art 169**
 - i. It empowers the Legislative Assembly to create or abolish a Legislative Council by passing a resolution.
 - ii. The resolution has to be passed by two-thirds of the Assembly members.
 - iii. Then a Bill to this effect has to be passed by Parliament.
 - c. **Meaning:**
 - i. Thus the setting up of a second chamber is not exclusively in the hands of the state government. The central government also has to pilot a Bill in Parliament.
 - ii. **Problem:** This issue could, therefore, lead to another potential flash point between the state and the Centre.
 - d. **How Councils came to be**
 - i. The **Montagu-Chelmsford reforms** led to the formation of the Council of State at the national level in 1919.
 - ii. Then the **Government of India Act of 1935** set up bicameral legislatures in Indian provinces. It was under this law that a Legislative Council first started functioning in Bengal in 1937.
 - iii. The framers of the Constitution provided that in the beginning, the states of Bihar, Bombay, Madras, Punjab, the United Provinces and West Bengal would have a Legislative Council.
 - iv. Then they gave states the option of abolishing an existing second chamber or setting up a new one by passing a resolution in their Legislative Assembly.

IRAN TO DEVELOP FARZAD B GAS FIELD DOMESTICALLY, DUMPS INDIA

- a. Iran gave the Farzad B gas field to Petropars, a domestic gas producer.
- b. **News:** According to Iran's news agency Shana, the deal was signed in an event which was presided over by Iran's Minister of Petroleum Bijan Zanganeh. The deal was signed between Mohammed Meshkinfam, CEO of Pars Oil and Gas Company, on behalf of the National Iranian Oil Company, and Hamid Reza Masoudi, CEO of Petropars Group.
- c. **A Setback for India:**
 - i. This is a setback for India's energy ties with Iran as ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL) had discovered the gas field in 2000 and has been part of the ongoing cooperation on that front.
 - ii. It comes despite India's long-standing cooperation regarding the gas field and is indicative of the impact of the U.S. sanctions on India-Iran energy cooperation, which had been drastically reduced during the Donald Trump administration in the U.S.
- d. Last year, Mr. Zanganeh had indicated that foreign talks on the Farzad B block had become difficult because of the sanctions.

"Iran had decided to develop the Farzad B gas field on its own and wanted to involve India at a later stage," the MEA said.

The Farzad B gas field holds 23 trillion cubic feet of in-place reserves, of which about 60% is recoverable. It also holds gas condensates of about 5,000 barrels per billion cubic feet of gas.

E-WAY BILL INTEGRATED WITH FASTAG, RFID

E-way bill integrated with FASTag, RFID

- a. **CONTEXT:** In a move which will help curb tax evasion, GST authorities will now be able to track real-time data of commercial vehicle (CV) movement on highways by integration of the e-way bill (EWB) system with FASTag and RFID.
- b. Under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime, EWBs are mandatory for inter-state transportation of goods valued over Rs 50,000 from April 2018, with the exemption to precious items such as gold.
- c. **SIGNIFICANCE:**
 - i. The integration of e-way bill, RFID and FASTag will enable tax officers to undertake live vigilance in respect of EWB compliances by businesses and will aid in preventing revenue leakage by real-time identification of cases of recycling and/or non-generation of EWBs.
 - ii. Tax officers can now access reports on vehicles that have passed the selected tolls without EWBs in the past few minutes. Also, vehicles carrying critical commodities specific to the state and having passed the selected toll can be viewed. Any suspicious vehicles and vehicles of EWBs generated by suspicious taxpayer GSTINs, that have passed the selected toll on a near real-time basis, can also be viewed in this report.
 - iii. The officers can use these reports while conducting vigilance and make the vigilance activity more effective.
 - iv. The officers of the audit and enforcement wing can use these reports to identify fraudulent transactions like bill trading, recycling of EWBs.

DOORDARSHAN PLANS TO LAUNCH DD INTERNATIONAL TO PRESENT 'INDIA STORY'

Doordarshan plans to launch DD International to present 'India story'

- a. **CONTEXT:** State broadcaster Doordarshan is planning to set up a new channel DD International to "project India's point of view" to the world.
- b. **REASON:** It comes amid criticism in global media of government's handling of pandemic.
- c. **Objective:** The EOI says the channel will present India's point of view on contemporary issues of both global and domestic significance. Idea is to "build a global presence for Doordarshan and to establish an international voice for India".
 - i. Officials said it was felt that India's perspective was getting lost in the noise. The EOI also mentions that the channel will specifically tell "the India story to a global audience".
 - ii. Doordarshan's global outreach is primarily through bilateral distribution arrangement with select broadcasters in other countries apart from live streaming through Prasar Bharati's global digital platform.
 - iii. It looks to create a reach like BBC.

CYCLONE TAUKTAE: ARABIAN SEA IS BECOMING MORE CYCLONE PRONE

Riding the storm: Arabian Sea is becoming more cyclone prone. We need to reimagine development on the western coast

1. **News:** More than 75 people have lost their lives in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Goa, Karnataka and Kerala **after Cyclone Tauktae swept** in from the Arabian Sea, leaving a trail of destruction.
 - i. Furious gusts of winds going up to 185 km/hour uprooted trees and blew away walls and mud houses leading to the death of at least 20 people in western and southern India before the cyclone made a landfall in Gujarat, leading to a loss of more lives.

- ii. Several areas battered by Tauktae had borne the brunt of Cyclone Nisarga last year, some others had been affected by Cyclone Vayu the year before.
- iii. Tauktae is the fourth consecutive pre-monsoon extreme weather event in the Arabian Sea, indicating new disaster management and planning challenges for the country's western shores.

2. Changes in Climate:

- i. Traditionally, the Bay of Bengal has been more prone to cyclonic activity compared to the Arabian Sea. The Arabian Sea averaged two or three cyclones a year, most of which would dissipate over the sea — it did seed four extremely severe cyclonic events since the 1998 Gujarat super cyclone that claimed at least 4,000 lives.
- ii. **Reason:** The Eastern Indian Ocean is much warmer than its western part and till 2018.
- iii. **Climate Change:** Rising temperatures because of global warming seems to be changing cyclonic behaviour.
- iv. **Study:** In 2014, a paper in the American Meteorological Society's Journal of Climate warned "the western tropical Indian Ocean has been warming for more than a century, at a rate faster than any other region of the tropical oceans." That year, winds blowing at 125 km per hour forced authorities in Gujarat to evacuate more than 30,000 people.
- v. Since then, the frequency and intensity of storms in the Arabian Sea have increased.

3. Improvement in country's weather alert system

- i. Since the super cyclones in Gujarat and Odisha in the closing years of the last century resulted in significant reduction in the loss of lives, India has improved its systems.
- ii. More than 2 lakh people were evacuated in the coastal states to temporary relief shelters this year.

Problem: There are concerns that these crowded centres could become Covid hotbeds. Last year, for instance, Cyclone Amphan complicated West Bengal's and Odisha's path to recovery.

- 4. **Conclusion:** Nevertheless, the states along the western coast have much to learn from the experiences of their counterparts on the east — both in terms of successes and failures. As a first step, they need to invest in more cyclone shelters. Over the long-term, conversations must be initiated on ways to factor in climate related vagaries while planning construction and developmental activities close to the coast.

CHINA COMPLETES STRATEGIC TIBET HIGHWAY NEAR ARUNACHAL BORDER

China completes strategic Tibet highway near Arunachal border

- a. China has completed construction of a strategically significant highway through the world's deepest canyon in Tibet along the Brahmaputra river, enabling greater access to remote areas along the disputed border with Arunachal Pradesh in India.
- b. The highway, official media in China reported this week, took seven years to complete and passes through the Grand Canyon of the Yarlung Zangbo river, as the Brahmaputra is called in Tibet.
- c. **SIGNIFICANCE:** The highway will reduce the distance between Nyingchi city and Medog from 346 km to 180 km and will cut the travel time by eight hours.
- d. **UPCOMING PROJECTS:** In November, China began work on a strategically important railway line — its second major rail link to Tibet after the Qinghai-Tibet railway that opened in 2006 — that will link Sichuan province with Nyingchi.
- e. **Concerns:**
 - i. **Civilian settlements in disputed territories:** Another part of the border infrastructure push is the construction of new civilian settlements — along with the expansion of existing smaller hamlets — along border areas, some of which lie in disputed territories claimed by India and Bhutan, to strengthen China's control over the land.
 - ii. **Issues with Bhutan:** Last year, satellite images emerged showing a new village called Pangda built 2-3 km into what Bhutan sees as its land. On January 18 this year, another

village built newly 4-5 km into what India sees as its territory in Arunachal came to light via satellite images.

- iii. **Military Preparedness:** Indian officials said this land has been under China's effective control since 1959 and there were military barracks there earlier. The civilian settlements, along with the new infrastructure connectivity, are seen as aimed at bolstering China's control over the areas.

GUARDIAN OF THE FOREST, SUNDERLAL BAHUGNANA PASSED AWAY

Guardian of the forest, sunderlal bahugnana passed away

a. About **The Chipko movement or Chipko Andolan**

- i. It was a forest conservation movement in India in Uttarakhand's, **Chimoli**.
- ii. It began in **1973 in Uttarakhand**, then a part of Uttar Pradesh and went on to become a rallying point for many future environmental movements all over the world. It created a precedent for starting nonviolent protest in India.
- iii. It successfully resisted deforestation in several areas and has shown afforestation with indigenous species can be successful.
- iv. Led by **Chandni Prasad Bhatt** and **Sunderlal Bahuguna** against mindless deforestation in Garhwal Himalayas.
- v. **Chandi Prasad Bhatt (born 1934)** is an Gandhian environmentalist and social activist, who founded **Dasholi Gram Swarajya Sangh (DGSS)** in Gopeshwar in 1964, which later became a mother-organization to the Chipko Movement.
- vi. It was **an example of Eco-feminism**: women were not only its backbone, but also its mainstay, because they were the ones most affected by the rampant deforestation, which led to a lack of firewood and fodder as well as water for drinking.
- vii. **Similar movement: Appiko(Hug) Movement(1983):** In Salkani forest, Sirsi distt. Karnataka 160 men, women & children hugged the trees & forced the woodcutters to leave. They kept vigil for 6 weeks.

b. About **Sunderlal Bahugana:**

- i. Born in pre-Independence India, Bahuguna was drawn to Gandhian methods of politics and social service.
- ii. Bahuguna became the public face of Chipko, though he was one of its many streams, along with environmentalists like Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Gaura Devi. His remarkable skill was in joining the dots between the local and the global.
- iii. Long before climate change challenged the consensus on "growth", Bahuguna had warned about the high costs of the unchecked march of profit.
- iv. He and Vimla moved to another Himalayan town to protest against the construction of the Tehri dam, he had become a prophet easily ignored. The recent disasters in his beloved Himalaya, from the Kedarnath floods to the Chamoli tragedy, are a reminder that Bahuguna's lessons can be ignored at our own peril.

NOMINATION SEEKING THE WORLD HERITAGE SITE TAG FOR 14 FORTS

How UNESCO grants World Heritage Site tag

- a. The Maharashtra government has submitted a tentative "serial" nomination seeking the World Heritage Site tag for 14 forts from the era of 17th century Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj on

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the theme of Maratha Military Architecture in Maharashtra.

b. The serial nomination was forwarded by the Archaeological Survey of India to UNESCO through the Ministry of Culture.

i. UNESCO has accepted the nomination in Tentative Lists of its World Heritage Site.

THE 14 FORTS IN MAHARASHTRA'S PROPOSAL

RAIGAD FORT

Originally called Rairi, it is built on a large wedge of a hill in the Sahyadris, separated from the main range by a ravine. The capital fort of the Maratha Empire, it was rebuilt for the coronation of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.

RAJGAD FORT

Hill fort in Pune district, capital of the Maratha Empire under Chhatrapati Shivaji for almost 26 years, before the capital moved to the Raigad Fort.

SHIVNERI FORT

Near Junnar in Pune district. Shivaji's birthplace, it consists of 7 gates. It is an example of Bahamani/ Nizamshahi architecture providing a backdrop to narrative of guerrilla warfare.

TORNA FORT

Fort in Pune district, captured by Shivaji in 1646, when he was 16, and marked the beginning of the Maratha empire.

LOHAGAD

Close to Lonavala, it overlooks one of the most picturesque valleys and is believed to have been built in the 14th century. It is an example of Maratha hill fort architecture until Peshwa period.



Raigad Fort. Wikipedia

SALHER FORT

One of the highest forts in the Sahyadris, located in Dolhari range of Nashik. The fort witnessed a key battle in 1672 between Marathas and Mughals.

MULHER FORT

In Nashik; one of three forts situated on a hill, flanked by Mora to the east and Hatgad to the west. The surrender of Mulher ended the third Maratha War.

RANGANA FORT

In Kolhapur, bordering Sindhudurg. Aurangzeb tried to conquer it along with Bhudargad and Samangad in his Deccan campaign, did not succeed.

ANKAI TANKAI FORTS

In Nashik district, Ankai and Tankai are separate forts on adjacent hills, with a common fortification wall.

KASA FORT

Popularly known as Padmadurg, built on a rocky island off coast of Murud, and provided a base for naval military operations.

SINDHUDURG FORT

Built by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in 1668, This sea fort is considered a masterpiece in military defence..

ALIBAG FORT

Popularly known as Kulaba Fort, it was chosen as one of the forts to be modelled as a naval base by Chhatrapati Shivaji.

SUVARNADURG

Built on an island, it was repaired and strengthened by Shivaji Maharaj in 1660.

KHANDERI FORT

Khanderi, officially named as Kanhoji Angre Island in 1998, is 20 km south of Mumbai. Built in 1679, Khanderi Fort was the site of many battles between Shivaji Maharaj's forces and the navy of the Siddhis.

c. Process:

i. According to the World Heritage Convention's operational guidelines, a tentative list is an "inventory" of properties a country believes deserves to be a World Heritage Site. After UNESCO includes a property in the Tentative List, that country has to prepare a nomination document that will be considered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.

ii. A World Heritage Site is a location with an "outstanding universal value". This signifies "cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity".

BANGALORE BASED STARTUP RECEIVES TDB NATIONAL AWARD 2021

Recycling Carbon technology by Bangalore based startup receives TDB National Award 2021

a. **Context:** A Bangalore based startup has received the National Award 2021 from Technology Development Board (TDB) for developing a commercial solution for conversion of CO₂ to chemicals and fuels.

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- b. Breathe Applied Sciences, a startup incubated at Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR) developed efficient catalysts and methodologies for the conversion of CO₂ to methanol and other chemicals.
- c. It has led to improvisation of process engineering to enhance the production of chemicals and fuels from anthropogenic CO₂ generated from various sources including coal and natural gas power generation sectors, steel industry, cement industry, and chemical industries and integrating multiple components involved in the CCUS (Carbon capture, utilization, and sequestration) to develop a complete solution for the environmental issues due to global warming.
- d. In the pilot mode, the current capacity of CO₂ conversion is 300 kg per day, which can be scaled up to several 100 tons in an industrial scale. It will take some time to reach the level of industrial production. A few industry sectors are in discussion with Breathe for potential use of our developed technology soon.

SINGAPORE TOP SOURCE OF FDI FOLLOWED BY US, MAURITIUS

Singapore top source of FDI followed by US, Mauritius

- a. India's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflow increased 10 per cent in 2020-21 (year-on-year) to touch the highest ever level of \$81.72 billion with Singapore, the US and Mauritius topping the list of investor countries.
- b. FDI equity inflow grew by 19 per cent in 2020-21 to \$59.64 billion compared to the previous fiscal, according to an official release issued by the Commerce & Industry Ministry.
- c. **Reforms:** "Measures taken by the government on the fronts of the FDI policy reforms, investment facilitation and ease of doing business have resulted in increased FDI inflows into the country.
- d. Top investing country: Singapore, which was the top investing country in 2020-21, accounted for 29 per cent of the total FDI inflow into India, followed by the US with 23 per cent share and Mauritius with 9 per cent share.
- e. **Top recipient state:**
 - 1. Gujarat was the top FDI recipient State during the fiscal with 37 per cent share of the total FDI equity inflows.
 - 2. Maharashtra with 27%
 - 3. Karnataka with 13%
- f. **Top sectors:**
 - 1. Computer software & hardware was the top sector during the fiscal attracting about 44% of the total FDI equity inflow
 - 2. Construction (infrastructure) activities accounting for 13%
 - 3. Services sector attracting 8% of the inflows.
- g. Gujarat attracted the bulk of FDI (78%) that came into the computer, software & hardware sector followed by Karnataka (9%) and Delhi (5%) in 2020-21.

IIT-DELHI CENTRE TO STUDY LIGHT PROPERTIES

- a. Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, announced that it will be setting up 'Optics and Photonics Centre' to study the fundamental properties of light and harnessing them in practical application.
- b. The institute's Board of Governors has given its approval for the new centre that will seek collaboration with establishments like the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and industry to undertake R&D in the areas of importance for them,
- c. Significance: there would be many opportunities for such collaborations, including, setting up of start-ups.

1. The centre will play a pivotal role in the near future development of photonics-based quantum technologies, for next generation computing, secure communications etc. Sustained linkages with industry will also be developed and established
2. On the teaching side, the centre will focus on doctoral and postgraduate programmes including special programmes for industry professionals.
3. It will also encourage and help students in entrepreneurial efforts and connect them with suitable investors through due processes at the institute.

INDIA AND ISRAEL SIGN A PROGRAM FOR COOPERATION IN AGRICULTURE

India and Israel sign a three-year work program for cooperation in Agriculture

- a. **Context:** Taking forward the ever-growing partnership in agriculture between Israel and India, the two governments have agreed to enhance their cooperation in agriculture and signed a three-year work program agreement for development in Agriculture cooperation, while affirming the ever-growing bilateral partnership and recognizing the centrality of agriculture and water sectors in the bilateral relationship.
- b. India and Israel are implementing the **"INDO-ISRAEL Agricultural Project Centres of Excellence"** and **"INDO-ISRAEL Villages of Excellence"**
- c. **Stakeholders:** MIDH, Ministry of Agriculture & Farmer's Welfare, Government of India, and MASHAV - Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation - are leading Israel's largest G2G cooperation, with 29 operational Centres of Excellence (COEs) across India in 12 States, implementing Advanced-Intensive agriculture farms with Israeli Agro-Technology tailored to local conditions
- d. **Significance:** The Centres of Excellence generate knowledge, demonstrate best practices and train farmers. Every year, these COEs produce more than 25 million quality vegetable seedlings, more than 387 thousand quality fruit plants and train more than 1.2 lakh farmers about latest technology in the field of horticulture.
- e. Shri Narendra Singh Tomar, Minister of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare said that the agriculture sector always remains a priority for India. India and Israel have had bilateral relations since 1993 in the agricultural sector.
 - i. This is the 5th IIAP. "So far, we have successfully completed 4 action plans. This new work programme will further strengthen the bilateral relations and mutual cooperation between the two countries in the field of agriculture for the benefit of the farming community."
 - ii. The COEs established under these Israeli-based action plans are playing an important role in doubling farmers' income. The exchange of technology between India and Israel will greatly improve the productivity and quality of horticulture, thereby increasing the income of farmers
- f. **"INDO-ISRAEL Villages of Excellence":**
 - i. **Aim:** creating a model ecosystem in agriculture across eight states and alongside 13 Centers of Excellence within 75 villages.
 - ii. **Significance:** The program will promote the increase of net income and better the livelihood of the individual farmer, transforming traditional farms into modern-intensive farms based on IIAP standards.
 - iii. Large-scale and complete value chain approach with economic sustainability, embedded with Israeli novel technologies and methodologies will be tailored to local conditions
 - iv. The IIVOE program will focus on:
 1. Modern Agriculture infrastructure
 2. Capacity Building
 3. Market linkage.

EU AGREED TO DONATE AT LEAST 100 MILLION DOSES OF COVID-19 VACCINES

EU leaders agreed to donate at least 100 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to poorer nations by the end of the year as supplies steadily rise across Europe.

- a. **Decision in EU Summit**, Brussels: the 27 leaders backed a text in which they pledge to continue efforts "to increase global vaccine production capacities in order to meet global needs."
 - i. Leaders also called "for work to be stepped up to ensure global equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines" and reiterated their support for the UN-backed COVAX programme.
- b. **COVAX** aims to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 shots for low-and middle-income countries.
 - i. The programme suffered a major setback last week when its biggest supplier, the Serum Institute of India, announced it would likely not export any more vaccines until the end of the year due to the COVID-19 crisis in the subcontinent.
 - ii. Leaders acknowledged that vaccination has finally picked up across their continent following a painfully slow start.
- c. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen presented data to the leaders suggesting that 300 million doses will have been delivered in the region by the end of May, with about 46% of the adult population in the bloc of 450 million getting at least a first dose of vaccine. But as vaccination campaigns continue to progress in the Western world, poorer countries are struggling to acquire supplies.
- d. **Help in local production:** The leaders also pledged to help countries in need to develop vaccine production locally.

CYCLONE YAAS: CHANGES IN CYCLONES OF BAY OF BENGAL

Climate Scientists study changes in Cyclones of Bay of Bengal.

- a. **News:** Climate scientists say the Bay of Bengal, where cyclone Yaas has formed, is at least two degrees warmer than what is normal for this time of the year.
- b. **Evidences of climate Change:**
 - i. "The north Bay of Bengal is exceptionally warm with temperatures up to 32°C." Roxy Koll, climate scientist at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune, said on Twitter.
 - ii. Cyclones in the Bay of Bengal are not unexpected in May and result from increased ocean surface temperatures. The formation of storms in this period is not favourable for drawing in the monsoon into the Andamans and subsequently onto the Kerala coast.
 - iii. Researchers have pointed to trends that suggest a relative decrease in the number of cyclones in the Bay of Bengal and a rise in the Arabian.
- c. **Facts:**
 - i. Generally, cyclones in the Bay of Bengal are ferocious and cause significant devastation.
 - ii. Cyclone Amphan was a super cyclone that ravaged West Bengal in March last year.
 - iii. It was the strongest storm that hit India's eastern coast since the super cyclone of 1999, that struck Paradip, Odisha.
 - iv. Before Amphan, cyclone Fani in 2019 also hit Odisha, causing immense damage that lasted weeks.
 - v. About 60% of the cyclones that form in these seas make landfall in India causing damage and devastation, according to data from the Earth Sciences Ministry.
- d. **About Cyclone Yaas:**
 - i. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) had first warned on May 19 the likelihood of the formation of Yaas, even as Tauktae was still to completely abate after landfall over Gujarat.
 - ii. The maximum wind speeds from Yaas, a name furnished by Oman's meteorological agency, are expected to touch 125 kmph, lower than recorded from Tauktae, which landed at the

Gujarat coast earlier this month, and was categorised as an 'extremely severe' cyclone, which is only one category lower than the highest 'super cyclone' grading on the weather agency's cyclone grading scale.

- iii. Yaas is expected to heighten into a 'very severe' cyclone and make landfall between the Odisha and West Bengal coasts.
- iv. "It is very likely to cross north Odisha-West Bengal coasts between Paradip and Sagar Island around Balasore (Odisha) during noon of 26th May as a Very Severe Cyclonic Storm," said an IMD statement.
- v. With the advent of the storm, rains and gale force winds are expected in northern Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal, Sikkim. Tidal waves up to 4 metres in height are expected over the West Bengal and Odisha coasts as the storm approaches.

DEATH TOLLS FROM RECENT CYCLONES				
Year	BAY OF BENGAL		ARABIAN SEA	
	Cyclone	Deaths	Cyclone	Deaths
2021			Tauktae	104
2020	Amphan	90	Nisarga	4
	Nivar	12		
	Burevi	9		
2019	Fani	64	Hikka	13
	Bulbul	25		
2018	Titli	78	Mekunu	26
			Luban	14
2017	Ockhi	110		
2016	Vardha	6		
2015			Chapala	5
			Megh	18
2014	Hudhud	46		
2013	Phailin	21		
2012	Nilam	43		
2011			Keila	14
2010	Laila	6	Phet	44
TOTAL		510		148



648 deaths include 552 in India, 43 in Bangladesh (Nilam), 38 in Oman (Keila and Phet), and 15 in Pakistan
Source: IMD

INDIAN RAILWAYS HAS WITNESSED THE DOUBLE DIGIT GROWTH IN FREIGHT TRAFFIC

Showing an extra ordinary resilience against the Covid, Indian Railways has witnessed the **DOUBLE DIGIT** growth in Freight Traffic.

- a. **Facts about Revenue:** Railways recorded more than 10% increase in Freight loading as compared to normal year of 2019-20. In FY 2021-22, Indian Railways total loading is 203.88 Million Tonnes (MT) which is 10% more than FY 2019-20 loading figures (184.88 MT) for the same period.
- b. **The important items transported** includes Coal, Iron Ore, Food grains, Fertilizers, Mineral Oil, Cement (excluding clinker) and Clinker.
- c. **Improvements:**
 - i. Wagon Turnaround time.
 - ii. It is worth mentioning that a number of concessions/ discounts are also being given in Indian Railways to make Railways Freight movement very attractive.
 - iii. It may be noted that speed of freight trains has been enhanced in the existing network.
 - iv. Freight speed Improvement leads saving of costs for all stake holders. Freight speed has doubled over last 18 months.

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- v. Few zones (around six zones) have registered average speed of freight trains even above 50 Kmph. Due to geographical conditions, certain sections offer good speed to freight trains. An average speed of 45.42 Kmph is registered in May 2021 for freight trains which is 23% more as compared to 36.84 Kmph for the same period.
- d. Covid 19 has been used by Indian Railways as an opportunity to improve all round efficiencies and performances.

AYUSH CLINICAL CASE REPOSITORY (ACCR) PORTAL AND AYUSH SANJIVANI APP

Yet another milestone reached in Ayush domain when the Union Minister of state (IC) for Ayush Shri Kiren Rijiju launched the Ayush Clinical Case Repository (ACCR) portal and the third version of Ayush Sanjivani App in a virtual event.

- a. The Ayush Clinical Repository (ACCR) portal serve as a platform to support both Ayush practitioners and general public. This portal aims to aggregate information about clinical outcomes achieved by Ayush practitioners on a large scale. It will facilitate not just dissemination of information but also further analysis and research. It is expected to document the strengths of Ayush systems for treatment of various disease conditions.
- b. The portal not only benefit the practitioner community and the public but also help widen the solid scientific base of all streams of Ayush. One notable feature of the ACCR portal is the dedicated section for reporting and publishing details of Covid 19 cases treated through Ayush Systems.
- c. Ayush Sanjivani App (3.0):
 - i. This version facilitates a significant study/ documentation regarding the efficacy of selected Ayush interventions, including Ayush 64 and Kabasura Kudineer medicines in the management of asymptomatic & mild to moderate Covid 19 patients.
 - ii. It is worthwhile to note that a national distribution campaign is on through which the Ayush Ministry is providing these two very effective Ayush formulations free to Covid patients who are in home isolation.

SHARP FOREX GAINS LED TO HIGHER RBI SURPLUS

RBI Annual Report for 2020-21: 'Fall in provisions, sharp forex gains led to higher RBI surplus'; It has been able to transfer a higher amount to the government

- a. The foreign exchange transactions of the central bank have come as a saviour for the government even as the Covid pandemic continues to rage across the country.
- b. **Context:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has been able to transfer a higher amount to the government as surplus this year following a sharp fall in provisions and gains from foreign exchange transactions during the year ended March 2021.
- c. The central bank's gain from foreign exchange transactions rose from Rs 29,993 crore to Rs 50,629 crore in 2020-21. A good chunk of the money transferred to the government was profit from the sale of dollars during the last three months of FY21 — \$25.94 billion in March, \$24.57 billion in February and \$15.37 billion in January. Last year, RBI dollar sales were just \$8.03 billion in March and \$1.46 billion in February.
- d. **News:** The RBI last week decided to transfer a higher amount of Rs 99,122 crore to the government despite the year FY21 being a nine-month period as against Rs 57,127 crore in the previous 12-month period.
 - i. The RBI move, which is likely to boost the government's finances, comes at a time when the real economy indicators moderated through April-May 2021 as the second wave of Covid-19 took a heavy toll.

- ii. "While the economy has not moderated to the extent during the first wave, the surrounding uncertainties can act as a deterrent in the immediate period," RBI said in its Annual Report for 2020-21, while expecting a 10.5 per cent growth in 2021-22.

MISSION COVID SURAKSHA

Indian Immunologicals Limited to start production of drug substance for Covaxin under Mission COVID Suraksha

a. The Government has decided to support some public sector companies with grants under the Mission COVID Suraksha. One such company is the Hyderabad based **Indian Immunological limited (IIL)**, which a facility under the PSU, National Dairy Development Board.

b. **A technical collaboration agreement** has been reached between IIL and Bharat Biotech, for IIL to supply of the drug substance required the for manufacturing Covaxin Vaccine to Bharat Biotech.

c. Indian Immunologicals is expected to produce the drug substance for about 10-15 million doses per month.

d. They are converting the Karkapatla manufacturing unit of IIL near Hyderabad into a **Bio Safety Level -3 (BSL3) facility** for the production of the drug substance and is also taking up construction of another block.

e. The IIL is also working on another COVID -19 vaccine and the animal trials are underway currently and is expected to come out by next year for human vaccination.

f. **Atmanirbhar Bharat 3.0 Mission COVID Suraksha** was announced by the Government of India,

i. to accelerate the development and production of Indigenous COVID Vaccines.

ii. This is being implemented by Department of Biotechnology.

iii. The Indian Immunologicals Limited (IIL), Hyderabad has been sanctioned grant of Rs. 60 crore towards enhancing production capabilities.

THE MONSOON'S ARRIVAL OVER KERALA HAS BEEN DELAYED TO JUNE 3-IMD

The monsoon's arrival over Kerala has been delayed to June 3, according to an update by IMD.

a. "As per the latest meteorological indications, the south-westerly winds could strengthen further gradually from 01st June, resulting in likely enhancement in rainfall activity over Kerala. Hence the monsoon onset over Kerala is likely to take place by 03rd June 2021," the IMD statement noted.

b. "The monsoon winds haven't picked up. We expected that in the aftermath of the cyclone [Yaas] there would be a pickup in windspeeds but that hasn't happened. We expect the wind flows to strengthen in the next few days"

Rain trail

A look at the date of monsoon onset over Kerala in the past five years

Year	Actual onset date	Forecast date
2016	June 8	June 7
2017	May 30	May 30
2018	May 29	May 29
2019	June 8	June 6
2020	June 1	June 5

Source: IMD



Sharp showers: A man riding through rain in Kochi on Saturday. ■ THULASI KAKKAT

c. The criteria of judging the arrival of monsoon are:

- Rain-bearing westerlies being at a minimum depth and speed;
- Atleast 60% of the available 14 stations in Kerala and coastal Karnataka, namely Minicoy, Amini,

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Thiruvananthapuram, Punalur, Kollam, Allapuzha, Kottayam, Kochi, Thrissur, Kozhikode, Thalassery, Kannur, Kudulu and Mangalore reporting rainfall of 2.5 mm or more for two consecutive days after May 10;

iii. A certain degree of clouding, indicated by a parameter called 'outgoing longwave radiation' (OLR), being below 200 W/square metre.

The **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** is an agency of the Ministry of Earth Sciences of the Government of India. It is the principal agency responsible for meteorological observations, weather forecasting and seismology. IMD is headquartered in Delhi and operates hundreds of observation stations across India and Antarctica. Regional offices are at Chennai, Mumbai, Kolkata, Nagpur, Guwahati and New Delhi.

EMERGENCY CREDIT LINE GUARANTEE SCHEME (ECLGS) EXPANDED - ECLGS 4.0

Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) expanded - ECLGS 4.0 for onsite oxygen generation, wider coverage of ECLGS 3.0 and increase in tenor for ECLGS 1.0.

a. On account of the disruptions caused by the second wave of COVID 19 pandemic to businesses across various sectors of the economy, Government has further enlarged the scope of Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme as under:

i. ECLGS 4.0:100% guarantee cover to loans up to Rs.2 crore to hospitals/nursing homes/clinics/medical colleges for setting up on-site oxygen generation plants, interest rate capped at 7.5%;

ii. Borrowers who are eligible for restructuring as per RBI guidelines of May 05, 2021 and had availed loans under ECLGS 1.0 of overall tenure of four years comprising of repayment of interest only during the first 12 months with repayment of principal and interest in 36 months thereafter will now be able to avail a tenure of five years for their ECLGS loan i.e. repayment of interest only for the first 24 months with repayment of principal and interest in 36 months thereafter;

iii. Additional ECLGS assistance of upto 10% of the outstanding as on February 29, 2020 to borrowers covered under ECLGS 1.0, in tandem with restructuring as per RBI guidelines of May 05, 2021;

iv. Current ceiling of Rs. 500 Cr. of loan outstanding for eligibility under ECLGS 3.0 to be removed, subject to maximum additional ECLGS assistance to each borrower being **limited to 40% or Rs.200 crore**, whichever is lower;

v. Civil Aviation sector to be eligible under ECLGS 3.0

vi. Validity of ECLGS extended to 30.09.2021 or till guarantees for an amount of Rs.3 lakh crore are issued. Disbursement under the scheme permitted up to 31.12.2021.

b. The modifications in ECLGS, would enhance the utility and impact of ECLGS by providing additional support to MSMEs, safeguarding livelihoods and helping in seamless resumption of business activity. These changes will further facilitate flow of institutional credit at reasonable terms.

GST LOSS- A MATTER OF COMPENSATION

Matter of compensation: Centre and states must amicably arrive at GST loss estimate, how to finance it, and road ahead.

a. **Problems:**

i. **The slide in economic activities** due to the imposition of localised lockdowns to deal with the

second wave of Covid-19 is likely to further strain the fiscal position of state governments.

ii. The **sharp decline in GST e-way bills** in April and May suggests that collections are likely to be subdued at least in the first quarter of the current financial year.

iii. **Gap in Financing vaccines:** While economic activity may well firm up as the second wave ebbs and the vaccination drive gathers momentum. The issue of how to finance this gap was raised in the 43rd meeting of the GST Council on Friday.

iv. **Any uncertainty over the states' revenue stream**, especially when they have to ramp up spending, will complicate the task of fiscal management.

b. Compensation:

i. The Centre has pegged the total compensation requirement for states this year at Rs 2.7 lakh crore.

ii. It says it will borrow around Rs 1.58 lakh crore to compensate states for the shortfall in collections, while pegging revenue through the GST compensation cess at Rs 1.1 lakh crore.

c. Issues:

i. The Centre has assumed a revenue growth of 7% like last year to arrive at the compensation requirement. This projection may not materialise.

ii. Considering that the virus spread and lockdown restrictions have varied across states, the loss across states may not be uniform.

iii. There is also the issue of the shortfall from last year that is yet to be adjusted. On its part, the Centre is hopeful that if collections rise to around Rs 1.15 lakh crore per month, then not only will the deficit this year be lower, but it will be able to compensate states by another Rs 30,000 crore for last year. However, this depends on how the economy recovers.

d. The Original Promise: As part of the grand bargain between the Centre and states to ensure the shift to this new indirect tax architecture, state governments were promised protection against any revenue loss (**against a growth of 14%**) for a five-year period which ends in June 2022.

i. Considering that GST collections have failed to live up to expectations, there is a demand from some states to extend the cess beyond 2022.

e. Way Forward:

i. While the Centre has agreed to call a special session of the GST Council to discuss this issue, states must also show flexibility.

ii. The revenue base for the purpose of the calculation, the time horizon for the levy, should be amicably discussed.

iii. A guarantee on protecting revenue growth to the tune of 14% may be unreasonable. Linking it to nominal GDP growth may be a better alternative.

WHY EDIBLE OILS ARE COSTLIER

Context: The prices of six edible oils — groundnut oil, mustard oil, vanaspati, soya oil, sunflower oil and palm oil — have risen between 20% and 56% at all-India levels in the last one year, data on the Department of Consumer Affairs website show.

b. India's Consumption:

i. Between 1993-94 and 2004-05, monthly per capita consumption of edible oils increased from 0.37 kg to 0.48 kg in rural areas, and from 0.56 kg to 0.66 kg in urban areas.

ii. By 2011-12, it had risen further to 0.67 kg in rural areas and 0.85 kg in urban areas.

iii. Although comparable figures are not available beyond that, a steady rise in the per capita

availability of vegetable oils, through domestic sources as well as imports, indicates that demand has continued to rise.

iv. According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, the per capita availability of vegetable oils in the country has been in the range of 19.10 kg to 19.80 kg per annum during the last five years.



c. India's Production:

i. According to the Agriculture Ministry, the demand for vegetable oils has been in the range of 23.48–25.92 million tonnes between 2015-16 and 2019-20.

ii. However, domestic supply in this period has been much lower, in the range of 8.63–10.65 million tonnes.

iii. In 2019-20, domestic availability of edible oils from both primary sources (oilseeds like mustard, groundnut etc.) and secondary sources (such as coconut, oil palm, rice bran oil, cotton seed) was only 10.65 million tonnes against the total domestic demand of 24 million tonnes — a gap of over 13 million tonnes.

iv. Thus, India depends on imports to meet its demand. In 2019-20, the country imported about 13.35 million tonnes of edible oils worth Rs 61,559 crore, or about 56% of the demand. This mainly comprised palm (7 million tonnes), soyabean (3.5 million tonnes) and sunflower (2.5 million tonnes). The major sources of these imports are Argentina and Brazil for soyabean oil; Indonesia and Malaysia palm oil; and Ukraine and Argentina again for sunflower oil.

d. Price Rise: The increase in domestic prices is basically a reflection of international prices, because India meets 56% of its domestic demand through imports. In the international market, prices of edible oils have jumped sharply in recent months due to various factors.

e. International Demand rise:

i. There is a shifting of edible oils from food basket to fuel basket. There has been a thrust on making renewable fuel from soyabean oil in the US, Brazil and other countries.

ii. buying by China,

iii. Labour issues in Malaysia,

iv. Impact of La Niña on palm and soya producing areas, and

v. Export duties on crude palm oil in Indonesia and Malaysia.

vi. According to the FAO, reports of "lower than-expected planting intentions and accounts of below-

average temperatures and dry conditions in parts of USA's main soya growing regions cast doubts over the supply prospects for the upcoming 2021/22 season".

vii. Besides, Argentina's production outlook is conditioned by reports of lower-than-anticipated yields owing to prolonged dryness, says the FAO's Oilseeds, Oils & Meals: Monthly Price and Policy Update for the month of May.

f. Way Forward: It is an opportunity to replace imports by domestic production, boosting procurement and oil to fuel technologies.

GENERAL STUDIES-1

IN IRELAND'S COMPLEX TROUBLES, LESSONS FOR INDIA

A functioning democracy must commit to addressing communal issues with vigilance, tolerance and compromise

GS 1: Communalism

Background:

- The communal clashes took place in April in Northern Ireland contains many relevant lessons and warnings for India.
- Those riots, that left 74 policemen injured, threaten to undermine the fragile peace between Protestant pro-British loyalist unionists who want to remain part of the United Kingdom forever, and Catholic pro-Irish nationalists who wish Northern Ireland to become part of the Republic of Ireland.
- The riots are the culmination of a complex mix of change, resistance to change, and ingrained political and social inertia.
- Northern Ireland altered enormously for the better after the signing of the **Anglo-Irish Good Friday Agreement in 1998**, and for the accord to have received strong support across the divided island was a remarkable achievement.
- This Agreement began the process of dismantling border controls between the North and the Republic of Ireland. Many social issues remained unaddressed: both religious communities 'experienced little or no peace dividend after the Agreement, and poverty and deprivation linked to educational under-achievement and high unemployment affects both nationalist and loyalist areas alike' in Northern Ireland.
- There is an acute lack of social and economic opportunities; 120,000 children are living in poverty, and more than 40,000 people remain on the social housing waiting list. Between 1998 and 2014 suicides were on rise.
- The localities most deprived during the pre-Agreement communal riots remain the most affected areas within Northern Ireland today.

Brexit, a stress test

- Britain's break from the European Union (Brexit) was always going to prove a major stress test for Northern Ireland because 56% of its electorate voted to remain in the European Union.
- The specific protocol concerning Northern Ireland, which 'provided for the territory to remain in the customs union and single market of the European Union while protecting its status as part of the United Kingdom' is causing the present trouble.

- Irish Protestant loyalists argue that the deal puts the union at risk. The unionist party 'campaigns for Brexit on the basis that a United Kingdom outside the European Union would make a future united Ireland much more difficult to achieve.
- The Irish Catholic nationalists are talking up the prospects of achieving an early united Ireland and demanding a vote on it, which instils acute anxiety among the union loyalists.
- In short, 'Brexit has encouraged a **strong revival of identity polarisation**, and a possible Irish Language Act, that would give the Irish tongue equal status to English in Northern Ireland', is feared by unionists as yet another nail in the United Kingdom's coffin.
- Demography has changed since the Good Friday Agreement; though unionist parties do not have the majority, but political inertia prefers a vacuum, so progress toward an equitable and liveable peace has stalled.
- The 'past traumas continue to weigh heavily on current politics in Northern Ireland and that is unlikely to change as the twin challenges of managing the Protocol and preventing communal violence occupy the attention in that territory.

Scheduled events

- Elections scheduled next year to the 'Northern Ireland Assembly will be followed in 2024 by an important vote on the Northern Ireland Protocol because under the terms of the Brexit agreement, the Assembly will have to vote on whether or not to accept the continuing operation of the Protocol.
- If unionists decide to boycott this vote, the legitimacy of the Protocol will be thrown open to question.
- Scottish referendum on independence likely to be held around 2024 may well further destabilise Northern Ireland's fragile politics.

Lessons for India

- Peace is an extraordinarily brittle entity, and any functioning democracy must ensure a daily commitment to addressing communal issues with vigilance, tolerance and compromise. These are lessons to be drawn in India.
- The recent violence in Northern Ireland shows that every country needs leadership that takes responsibility for peoples' social and economic problems and steers prejudices away from entrenched phobias.
- The ruling party in India needs to be aware that creating religious tensions between communities has **incalculable deep-seated negative consequences** that will severely damage every section of society and all our established political and national institutions.

Conclusion:

- Mutual fear, esteem and consent, of Irish people is never addressed and artificial differences are played up by political elements wishing to stoke communal sentiments and keep both communities at the mercy of irresponsible and divisive forces.
- While the British, Irish and American governments have condemned the violence, there is a **lack of local political leadership to stabilise this volatile situation.**

A COLLAGE OF LAWS THAT LEAVES THE WORKER OUT IN THE COLD

GS 1/2: Social empowerment and Vulnerable Section

Context: COVID-19 left the informal workers (which constitute 91 percent of workforce) into deeper poverty as they are without social security nets. The author brings to light the issue of gaps in the social security code enacted by govt.

What's the issue:

Due to lack of social security like free basic curative care in public clinics and hospitals, the elderly had

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old age pensions, the dying had death/disability insurance or life insurance the poorest section became more vulnerable to poverty.

Without a minimum income guarantee, they have fallen into debt; and it's currently exploding among the poor as their incomes collapsed.

Gaps in the code

- India's Parliament in September 2020 passed a Social Security Code and author highlights that a miniscule percent of health budget (1 percent of GDP) has left the vulnerable section helpless.
- It is also argued that although health budget in FY 2021-22 is higher than last year but a larger chunk of it is devoted to vaccines thus leaving out the other sectors.
- The SS Code 2020 merges existing social security laws and attempts to include informal workers within the ambit of social security administration.
- The SS Code 2020 amalgamates and rationalises the provisions of eight existing central labour laws. Of these acts, employees **provident fund, employees state insurance (ESI), maternity benefit, gratuity** are entirely for **organised sector workers**.
- For employees' state insurance, the existing employee threshold has been withdrawn and now the government can extend ESI benefits to any organisation irrespective of the number of workers employed therein.

Hurdles for informal workers

- It proposes that both the central and State governments will formulate schemes for unorganised workers.
- To avail social security, an informal worker must register herself on the specified online portal to be developed by the central government.
- The absence of definite and unambiguous provisions in the present code would further complicate achievement of universal registration.
- There is lack of awareness among informal workers regarding social security schemes. Online registration places a further challenge as most informal workers lack digital literacy and connectivity.
- It is difficult for informal workers to furnish all documentary papers required as part of the registration process.
- As most of them are **footloose casual workers** (26% of all workers) and self-employed (46% of all). Because of constant movement furnishing proof of livelihood and income details is very difficult.
- Such requirements deter informal workers from completing the registration and they continue to remain outside the social security ambit.

Inter-State cooperation must

- The code does not provide for interstate cooperation.
- Without formulation of a basic structure by central govt., implications of this code would be too varied across States to be administered.
- Effectiveness of social security code is something lost in the Centre-State labyrinth and jurisdictional or institutional overlap.
- This identity should be primal and all unorganised workers should have basic social security coverage, irrespective of labour market classifications.

Key benefits

MATERNITY BENEFIT

Under the SS Code, the provision of maternity benefit has not been made universal. It is presently applicable for establishments employing 10 workers or more. The definition of 'Establishment' did not include the unorganised sector.

Thus women engaged in the unorganised sector would remain outside the purview of maternity benefit.

EMPLOYEES PROVIDENT FUND

It remains applicable, to every establishment in which 20 or more employees are employed. Thus, for informal sector workers, access to employees' provident fund remains unfulfilled too in the new code.

PAYMENT OF GRATUITY

Gratuity shall be payable to eligible employees by every shop or establishment in which 10 or more employees are employed, or were employed, on any day of the preceding 12 months.

But due to such provisions it still remains inaccessible for a vast majority of informal workers.

Lost opportunity

- The provision of social security could be used to formalise the workforce to a certain extent.
- The state has a responsibility but the primary responsibility still lies with employers since they are taking advantage of workers' productivity.
- The code also faces financial constraints but the onus is left on state govt.
- This code remains a collage of existing pieces of legislation without that interweaving thread of integration. It has promise but cannot meet those expectations.

Conclusion

At a time when India chairs a **BRICS meeting** in Delhi (preparatory to a Summit) that is **focused on issues of labour**, especially informality, it is an opportunity for India to work on the loopholes of the SS Code, 2020. This will provide ample social security to the demographic dividend of the young workforce that could support the ageing which ends in 15 years.

LOSING THE WAY WITH A MAP

Impediments in being a cultural powerhouse

- While allocations for culture have been marginal at best over the last decade, they have declined in the last five years, now standing at a mere 0.07% of the Budget. For 2021-22,
- The budget for the MoC is just ₹ 2,688 crore, with another ₹ 4 crore accruing from indirect allocations to other ministries.
- The government slashed culture funding by a further 21% during the pandemic. Contrast this to countries like China, Singapore, Australia and the U.K., which increased allocations, besides announcing billion dollar relief packages.
- The government's cultural institutions are plagued by vacancies (ranging from 30% to 70%) and lack of trained manpower.

National Mission on Cultural Mapping –

- The idea of National Mission on Cultural Mapping emerged in 2015 with a budget of 3000 CR. A partly amount of 42.78 Cr was allocated in year 2018-20 and only 1.17 Cr rupees has been utilized till now.
- Project's mission is to identify, collect and record cultural assets and resources.
- It mentions a portal and a database listing organisations, spaces, facilities, festivals and events.
- Database can be used to preserve culture and provide or ameliorate livelihoods.

Role of mapping –

- Mapping would chart geographies, artists, resources and institutions, find the gaps, and ensure optimal fund utilisation.
- Mapping can create a database that anybody can plug into, thus becoming a resource for the media,

researchers and funders.

- It can create transport and tourism infrastructure around a declining crafts village.

Case study - When the European Capitals of Culture programme picked Glasgow, the city was rife with crime and poverty. The programme built and renovated its cultural facilities, created a garden festival, and constructed a museum. Today, Glasgow has among the highest per capita culture budgets in Britain.

Conclusion –

A cultural map might be a crucial tool in the chaos that currently reigns over the space, and the concept cannot be abandoned just because many bureaucrats and ministers are unaware of its significance or breadth. Even this blueprint, if its irrelevancies, absurdities, and overreach are removed, and the focus is retained on a deeper examination and comprehension of the variety of the cultural basis, without caste, communal, or regional hierarchies, can assist the MoC solve its financial problems. Official India must take a closer look at itself in the mirror in order to be a cultural leader.

CULTURE, INCREASINGLY FRACTURED AND UNPLANNED

GS 1: urbanization, their problems and their remedies

Background: It is about the **Central Vista project** and emphasises that the urban planning for a single, linked cultural district seems to have been tossed out.

What is the Issue?

- “**Central Vista Redevelopment Project**”, that the National Museum of India will occupy South Block offices of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Defence, and the Ministry of External Affairs, as well as the North Block offices of the Home and Finance Ministries.
- The Parliament House building designed by Edwin Lutyens is to be turned into museum, known as a ‘museum of democracy’.
- The new residences and offices of the Prime Minister and the Vice-President of India are to be positioned at the bottom of Raisina Hill, sandwiching the cultural plaza between the most high security premises in the country.
- Rajpath will be closed, and restricted access to this public space is inevitable whenever there is any movement of very important persons.
- The design by Lutyens formed a **cultural district**, set within public gardens, Raisina Hill at Rashtrapati Bhavan on the one side, and historic Purana Qila beyond India Gate on the other.

Disaggregation as leitmotif

- The educational arm of the Museum, called the National Museum Institute, deemed a University, has been relocated to Noida while the Archaeological Survey of India’s prized collections have been relegated to Greater Noida.
- The National Museum’s collections may also have to be split up: some in the Red Fort, some in storage, some awaiting their new home. Disaggregation, rather than unification of India’s cultures and communities seems to be the leitmotif.
- The relocation of our National Museum provides an opportunity to think through its narrative at a decisive moment when India needs to see what it is projecting through its display, and be aware of whom it is leaving out, or relegating to different parts of the city.
- Our history museums on the other hand serve to provide information as deemed appropriate by archaeologists of the early 20th century.
- Museums must serve the requirement of telling multiple histories from varied perspectives for diverse audiences.

OUR BRANCHES: New Delhi | Mumbai | Kolkata | Chennai | Ahmedabad | Bengaluru | Bhubaneswar | Chandigarh | Dehradun | Gandhinagar | Guwahati | Hyderabad | Kanpur | Lucknow | Mehsana | Nagaland | Patna | Raipur | Rajkot | Ranchi | Surat | Vadodara |

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Handle with care

- What does shifting a museum practically mean? The National Museum contains fragile Harappan terracottas, the ashes of the Buddha and sculptures as fine as filigree. At the same time it has sculptures that weigh many tonnes requiring a feat of engineering to shift. There are bronzes: from the iconic "Dancing Girl" to Chola bronzes, coins and more coins of gold, silver, copper and bronze from every epoch of Indian history etc.
- The sheer scale of arranging for the packing and moving each of these items will present a **logistical nightmare**.
- The author advises that every single object to have its own special packing case and fragile objects had data loggers within climate-controlled cases objects can be given a barcode number which was connected to an online location index that allowed curators.
- The inventory is to be safeguarded. Insurance indemnification will help the preservation better.
- Finding qualified specialists for the same purpose is tough therefore vacancies for 92 posts at the National Museum had to be closed a couple of years ago.

The choices ahead

- The author gives an example of Los Angeles County Museum of Art which had to be shut down. Rebuilding that museum cost over \$750 million.
- Refurbishing old buildings such as the North and South Blocks to provide the facilities necessary costs money and takes time. It requires exceptional skill of architects.
- The largest Pallava and Chola sculptures in the National Museum weigh many tonnes, putting stress on heritage buildings.
- In a recent appeal made to the Supreme Court, the government's lawyers argued that the buildings were structurally unsafe and "are ill-equipped to meet even the basic fire and earthquake safety norms".
- None of the details are publicly available yet. Perhaps the courts and Parliament will decide it is not wise to split an entire cultural district at this moment in time.

Conclusion:

This move offers us an unprecedented opportunity to build our nation's capacities in the field of museum management like never before. Either way, the epitome of our collective wealth as a nation is in the balance.

GENERAL STUDIES-2**A COVID BLOT ON INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY CANVAS**

A direct consequence of the pandemic is that New Delhi's claim to regional primacy and leadership could take a hit

GS 2: International Relations**Background:**

- ❖ The second wave of COVID-19 and its agonising consequences, prompting the country to accept foreign aid after a gap of 17 years, is bound to have far-reaching strategic implications for India.
- ❖ While the world realises that India is too important to ignore, which perhaps explains the rush to help.

- ❖ As a direct consequence of the pandemic, New Delhi's claim to regional primacy and leadership will take a major hit, its 'leading power' aspirations will be dented, and accentuate its domestic political contestations.
- ❖ These in turn will impact the content and conduct of India's foreign policy in the years to come.

Regional Primacy

- ❖ COVID 2.0 has quickened the demise of India's regional primacy.
- ❖ The country's geopolitical decline is likely to begin in the neighbourhood itself, a strategic space which New Delhi has been forced to cede to Beijing over the past decade.
- ❖ Its political influence is steadily declining, its ability to materially help the neighbourhood will shrink in the wake of COVID-19, and its historical ties alone may not do wonders to hold on to a region hungry for development assistance and political autonomy.
- ❖ This might result in bandwagoning of South Asian states with China which are in dire need of development assistance.
- ❖ In July 2015, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, who was then the Foreign Secretary, stated that India aspires to be a "leading power, rather than just a balancing power".
- ❖ Being boxed in a China-dominated region will provide New Delhi with little space to pursue its regional, let alone global, geopolitical ambitions except in the Indo-Pacific region.
- ❖ While the Indo-Pacific is geopolitically keen and ready to engage with India, the pandemic could adversely impact India's ability and desire to contribute to the Indo-Pacific and the Quad.
- ❖ COVID-19, for instance, will prevent any ambitious military spending or modernisation plans (called for in the wake of the stand-off at the Line of Actual Control (LAC)) and limit the country's attention on global diplomacy and regional geopolitics, be it Afghanistan or Sri Lanka or the Indo-Pacific.
- ❖ With reduced military spending and lesser diplomatic attention to regional geopolitics, our ability to project power and contribute to the growth of the Quad will be uncertain.
- ❖ The outpouring of global aid shows India is too important but it also puts question on India's ability to be "leading power".
- ❖ New Delhi is pivotal to the Indo-Pacific project, but with India's inability to take a lead role and China wooing smaller states in the region away from the Indo-Pacific with aid and threats, the Indo-Pacific balance of power could eventually turn in Beijing's favour.

Domestic Politics

- ❖ Domestic political contestations in the wake of the COVID-19 devastation in the country could also limit New Delhi's strategic ambitions.
- ❖ General economic distress, a fall in foreign direct investment and industrial production, and a rise in unemployment have already lowered the mood in the country.
- ❖ The upcoming elections may fan communal tensions on the country, triggering more violence.
- ❖ A depressed economy, politically volatile domestic space combined with a lack of elite consensus on strategic matters would hardly inspire confidence in the international system about India.

India-China Equations

- ❖ One potential impact of COVID-19's devastating return and the damage it has done would be that India might be forced to be more conciliatory towards China, albeit reluctantly.
- ❖ From competing with China's vaccine diplomacy a few months ago, New Delhi today is forced to seek help from the international community, if not China, to deal with the worsening COVID-19 situation at home.
- ❖ China has, compared to most other countries, emerged stronger in the wake of the pandemic. The world, notwithstanding its anti-China rhetoric, will continue to do business with Beijing — it already has been, and it will only increase.
- ❖ It is yet unsure of the nature of China-U.S. relations in the days ahead, the rise of China and India's COVID-19-related troubles could prompt Washington to hedge its bets on Beijing.
- ❖ Finally, claims that India could compete with China as a global investment and manufacturing destination would remain just that — claims.

- ❖ Due to mismanagement of second wave of COVID-19 India's ability to stand to China has diminished today, in terms of political will and balance of power.

Depressed Foreign Policy

- ❖ Given the much reduced political capital within the current government to pursue ambitious foreign policy goals, the diplomatic bandwidth for expansive foreign policy goals would be limited, leading thereby to a much depressed Indian foreign policy.
- ❖ This, however, might take the aggressive edge off of India's foreign policy under the current regime. Less aggression could potentially translate into more accommodation, reconciliation and cooperation especially in the neighbourhood, with Pakistan on the one hand and within the broader South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) framework on the other.
- ❖ The aftermath of the pandemic may kindle such a conciliatory tone in Indian foreign policy for other reasons as well. COVID-19 has forced us to reimagine, to some extent at least, the friend enemy equations in global geopolitics.
- ❖ Initially United States seemed hesitant, to assist India even as the pandemic was wreaking havoc in the country, Moscow was quick to come to New Delhi's aid.
- ❖ Even though New Delhi did not accept the aid offers from Pakistan and China, these offers sounded more than the usual diplomatic grandstanding that states engage in during natural calamities.
- ❖ It is true that these changes will not lead to fundamental shifts in India's strategic partnerships, but that they could definitely moderate the sharp edges of India's pre-existing geopolitical articulations.

Strategic autonomy

- ❖ The pandemic would, at the very least indirectly, impact India's policy of maintaining strategic autonomy.
- ❖ Strategic consequences of the pandemic are bound to shape and structure India's foreign policy choices as well as constrain India's foreign policy agency.
- ❖ It could become more susceptible to external criticism for, a post-COVID-19 New Delhi might find it harder to resist demands of a closer military relationship with the U.S.

Conclusion

- ❖ Every crisis opens up the possibility for change and new thinking. COVID-19 will open up new regional opportunities for cooperation especially under the ambit of SAARC.
- ❖ New Delhi might do well to get the region's collective focus on '**regional health multilateralism**' to promote mutual assistance and joint action on health emergencies such as this.

Classical geopolitics should be brought on a par with health diplomacy, environmental concerns and regional connectivity in South Asia. COVID-19 may have opened precisely such an opportunity to the world's least integrated region.

THE NUCLEAR CHALLENGE

North Korea's economic worries and the U.S.'s nuclearisation concerns need addressing

GS 2: International Relations

Context:

- President Joe Biden's call for "stern deterrence" in response to North Korea's nuclear programme and Pyongyang's angry reaction, accusing the Biden administration of being "hostile", suggest that both countries are headed towards a diplomatic showdown.
- US president in his first congressional address said the nuclear programmes of Iran and North Korea posed a "**serious threat to America's security and world security**" and promised to respond through "diplomacy and stern deterrence".

The historical narrative of US's policy towards N. Korea

- The US president has reviewed US'S North Korean policy. What's the strategy of Biden? He wishes to balance between Obama's "strategic patience" and Trump administration's "top level summitry" in dealing with N. Korea.
- North Korea has remained an unresolved foreign policy puzzle for all post-War American Presidents. In recent times, U.S. Presidents have shown a willingness to diplomatically engage with Pyongyang.
- The Clinton administration had signed a framework agreement with Pyongyang to halt its nuclear programme. Obama had initiated talks with North Korea in 2012, which collapsed after Pyongyang launched a satellite. He then adopted a wait-and-watch approach, which came to be called "strategic patience". Mr. Trump altered his predecessor's North Korea policy by reaching out to the regime and meeting its leader, Kim Jong-un, thrice, but without a breakthrough.
- During Trump administration the approach to de-nuclearise Korean peninsula was initiated but it failed.
- In the 2019 Trump-Kim summit at Hanoi, the U.S. proposed removal of sanctions for de-nuclearisation, but North Korea rejected it. Pyongyang had taken a phased approach and sought sanctions removal in return. Ever since, there has been no improvement in ties.

Key challenges before contemporary US president

- After Mr. Biden assumed office, North Korea had conducted short-range missile tests, which the U.S. saw as a provocation. Mr. Biden does not have many good options in dealing with North Korea.
- The U.S.'s key goal in north-eastern Asia is the **de-nuclearisation** of the Korean peninsula. And the only practical way to achieve this is through diplomacy as a military strike on North Korea, a nuclear power, is out of the question.
- Despite its threats to expand its nuclear programme, North Korea sticks to the self-imposed moratorium on nuclear and long-range ballistic missile tests.

Conclusion:

North Korea as acknowledged by Mr. Kim recently, is going through a tough economic crisis and is open to talks. Mr. Biden should seize this opportunity and try to reach common ground with Mr. Kim that addresses both North Korea's economic worries and the U.S.'s nuclear concerns. That should be the focus of the Biden administration's new North Korean strategy.

THE CZAR OF BRINKMANSHIP MUST SEEK PEACE

Context: Increased tensions between Ukraine and Russia in the recent standoff has caught the media attention again.

GS 2: IR

What's the Issue:

Standoff between Russia and Ukraine sends the signals of chronic tensions

This geopolitical situation appears to be complex due to the indirect involvement of its multiple stakeholders, including the United States, Turkey and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It is seen as continuation of the unresolved conflict of 2014. The 'illegal annexation of Crimea' has become a buzzword in international politics, and Russia has been shown as an aggressor and a hostile power.

It's also criticised for its involvement in the **Donetsk and Luhansk regions in eastern Ukraine,**

where Russian-backed separatists have been fighting with Ukrainian troops.

Since, April 2021, Russia deployed thousands of troops as well as tanks and artillery near Ukraine's eastern border and mobilised troops in the annexed Black Sea region of Crimea.

NATO, U.S. response

- NATO chief said, 'Russia's considerable military build-up is unjustified, unexplained, and deeply concerning.' NATO would continue to provide significant political and practical support to Ukraine.
- Since Ukraine is not a NATO member how far will NATO go to take concrete actions is doubtful.
- In June 2020, NATO recognised Ukraine as an **Enhanced Opportunities Partner**, which aims to maintain and deepen cooperation between countries that have made significant contributions to the NATO-led missions and operations.
- The Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has also used the current tension as an opportunity to push for NATO membership, arguing that 'this is the only way to end the war in Donbas'.
- The U.S., under the new administration, has taken a more resolute stance towards this conflict and ready to support Ukraine militarily, if the need arises without provoking Russia.
- The recent visit of the U.S. Secretary of State, Antony J. Blinken, to Kiev indicates the U.S.'s foreign policy priorities. supporting the 'independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine'.

Support from Turkey

- Recent visit of Ukrainian President to Turkey underlined Turkish support i.e. standing by Ukraine amidst the current tensions with Russia.
- Visit was a diplomatic success for Ukraine as it had obtained the necessary guarantees from Turkey should tensions with Russia escalate.
- It is worth recalling that Turkey has not acted in synchrony with Russia during several conflicts, e.g., in Syria, Libya, and, most recently, in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Russia's moves

- The cornerstone of the Russia-Ukraine conflict is **insufficient communication**, especially on the Russian part.
- It is very difficult, if not impossible, to speculate on the overarching rationale behind Russia's tactical decisions towards Ukraine.
- The deficit of explicit messages from Russian side creates room for misunderstanding and misinterpretations and exaggerations on the part of Ukraine and its western supporters.
- Which is evident Russian recent 'military build-up' in western Russia. According to the Russian Defence Minister, Sergei Shoigu, it was just a 'three-week drill' meant to test combat readiness to respond to NATO's threats.
- Russian authorities possesses enough diplomatic (and pragmatic) skills not to indulge in yet another geopolitical endeavor that might entail serious repercussions from the international community.
- Thus, current 'military build-up' can be viewed as another round of muscle flexing and an attempt to perpetuate the narrative of a powerful and capable Russia.

For a peaceful resolution

- All the stakeholders in the ongoing crisis should focus on establishing a constructive dialogue among themselves using clear and unambiguous language.
- The only way forward is to seek a peaceful resolution to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Both countries do need support from the global community, but not in a military form.

Conclusion

There is a need for a platform that will facilitate negotiation, mutual consensus and possible compromises, as well as engagement with mediators. The long-term solution should be sought out in order to break the vicious cycle of animosity and misunderstanding.

THE OUTDATED NATURE OF BUREAUCRACY

GS 2: Role of Civil Services in a democracy

Context: Bureaucracy has emerged as a major concern for the ineffective response to the COVID-19 crisis. This inadequacy is the reflection of the outdated nature of public bureaucracy.

Generalist over Specialist

- Democratic countries relies on traditional bureaucracies to perform public policy formulation and implementation roles.
- These bureaucracies have outlived their relevance. Weberian bureaucracy still prefers a generalist over a specialist.
- Specialists in every government department have to remain subordinate to the generalist officers. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed this weakness.
- That policy options should be left to the in the hands of the specialists rather than generalists.

Weberian bureaucracy

- Traditional bureaucracy gives preference to leadership of position over leadership of function.
- Leadership of function is when a person has expert knowledge of a particular responsibility in a particular situation. Whereas Weberian bureaucracy prefers leadership based on position.
- Rigid adherence to rules has resulted in the rejection of innovation, example being COVID-19 aid getting stuck in cumbersome clearance processes.
- It is often suggested reform **new public management** is not viable in case of India as there are social inequalities and regional variations in development.
- If new public management is implemented it has risk of state a bystander among the multiple market players with accountability being constantly shifted.

Collaborative governance

- The most appropriate administrative reform suggested by author is the **model of new public governance**.
- It is based on **collaborative governance** in which the public sector, private players and civil society, especially public service organisations (NGOs), work together for effective public service delivery.
- In such model there won't be no domination of public bureaucracy as the sole agency in policy formulation and implementation.
- A network of social actors and private players would take responsibility in various aspects of governance with public bureaucracy steering the ship rather than rowing it.
- It needs a change in the behaviour of bureaucracy and needs flexibility in hierarchy
- A relook at the generalist versus specialist debate, and an openness to reforms such as lateral entry and collaboration with a network of social actors.

Conclusion:

All major revolutions with huge implications on public service delivery have come through the collaboration of public bureaucracy with so-called outsiders like These Green Revolution (M.S. Swaminathan), the White Revolution (Verghese Kurien) etc. Thus new public governance is the future of governance, especially public service delivery.

THE ROAD FROM LADAKH IS PAVED WITH DISRUPTIONS

China-India ties are moving into a zone of problems even as New Delhi grapples with pandemic-related issues

GS 2: IR

Context:

- It's been a year since the tensions between Indian and Chinese troops on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh escalated.
- India lost 20 soldiers in a violent clash with soldiers of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in mid-June last year.
- The crisis involved seven places: **Depsang plains, Galwan, Gogra, Hot Springs, North bank of Pangong Tso, Kailash range and Demchok.**

Border crisis

- The situation at Galwan was resolved a few weeks after the deadly clash, and the two sides disengaged from the face-off site.
- The Indian Army had occupied certain heights on the Kailash range in end of August.
- It was announced by our defence minister in February 2021 that , the two sides agreed to disengage from this location and from the north bank of Pangong Tso.
- India lost it's leverage on Kailsah Range after India reversed its position of simultaneously resolving all the flashpoints in Ladakh rather than deal with them piecemeal.
- It was also clear that by restricting itself to its own side of the LAC on the Kailash range, India had not taken control of the more dominating peaks like the Black Top and had a weak hand to play with.
- As of April 2020 on the north bank of Pangong, a new status quo has been created where the patrolling rights are yet to be restored. Similarly, the Kailash range has seen neither de-escalation nor de-induction so far.
- In each statement, both India and China reiterate the need "to ensure peace and tranquility" in border areas. But the ground reality is different as there are massive deployments on each side, which belie any hope of tranquility.

COVID-19 and geopolitics

- India's geopolitical concerns have been exacerbated by the devastation caused by the mismanagement of COVID-19.
- Under '**Vaccine Maitri**' programme, New Delhi was presenting itself as a better alternative to Beijing's vaccine diplomacy, particularly in South Asia.
- Shaken by scenes of massive suffering and public criticism, the current government has backtracked on existing contractual commitments to supply vaccines to its friendly neighbours.
- Countries such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have started procuring vaccines from China. Sensing the opportunity, Beijing also moved in quickly, organising a meeting with all South Asian countries

except India, ostensibly to deal with the pandemic.

- New Delhi was also the lynchpin of the Quad's pledge to deliver a billion doses of COVID-19 vaccine throughout the Indo-Pacific by the end of 2022, an effort focused on countering Chinese influence in the region.
- But India now is trying to import vaccines for its own population and reneging on its commitments to other poor countries under GAVI's COVAX scheme, the proposal now seems to be on a weak footing. This has given a "severe blow" to India's image as an emerging power.
- A weaker India is not only less attractive as a partner globally, it makes New Delhi more dependent on the United States to deal with China. It would further strain India-China ties, directly linking them to the vagaries of the China-U.S. relationship.
- The hypothesis that India can safeguard its land borders by strengthening its oceanic prowess could then be put to test, a scenario New Delhi wants to avoid at all costs.
- After the Ladakh crisis Indian govt. tried to establish peace at LOC (Line of Actual Control) with the help of UAE. But there has been mounting pressure from Islamabad.
- It is hard to predict the Pakistani course of action hence, but if the past is an experience to go by, it has usually been spiteful, reckless and dangerous, especially when India is seen as weak.
- An assertive China and a vengeful Pakistan acting in concert on the land borders is India's military nightmare, which New Delhi will have to avoid at all costs.

Chinese supplies

- China's President Xi Jinping sent a message to convey sympathy and express condolences over the pandemic, which was the first communication between the two since the border crisis began last year.
- Beijing's efforts have been largely confined to private companies and donations from the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, unlike other countries which have pledged government help to India.
- India is heavily dependent on China for crucial medical supplies. India's demand to keep the supply chain open has been met but the other demand to ensure stable product prices has not been met.

More point scoring

As the talks between India and China have floundered, New Delhi has taken a position that the border issue is central to the bilateral relationship. This runs contrary to Beijing's argument that the boundary question cannot be seen as the whole of the bilateral relationship.

Conclusion:

- India can hope for a settlement that delineates and demarcates the LAC in some form but China has ruled out any such proposal.
- As soldiers of both armies face each other in Ladakh and a lack of trust between the two countries, it is clear that the China-India bilateral relationship is moving into a zone of increasing disruptions, and attendant risks of conflagration on the disputed border.

SECOND WAVE, DOUBLE CHALLENGE

Poorly designed empirical & scientific systems, excessive centralization & a failure of execution are to be blamed for the current COVID crisis. Scientists, bureaucrats & the political class must answer.

GS2: Issues related to Health & Public Policies.

Context:

- On the backdrop of COVID resurgence, discuss what has really tripped up India's COVID efforts.

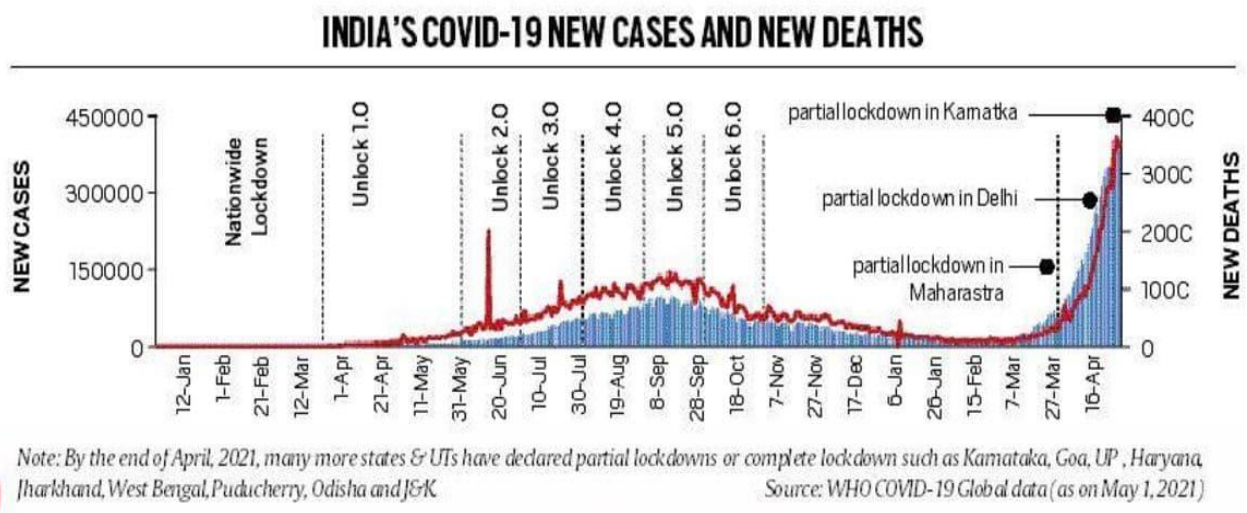
Reasons for India's Current state of Crisis:

OUR BRANCHES: New Delhi | Mumbai | Kolkata | Chennai | Ahmedabad | Bengaluru | Bhubaneswar | Chandigarh | Dehradun | Gandhinagar | Guwahati | Hyderabad | Kanpur | Lucknow | Mehsana | Nagaland | Patna | Raipur | Rajkot | Ranchi | Surat | Vadodara |

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- Though the second wave expected & prepared by the planning was confounded by two factors:
 - A more infectious mutation of the virus
 - The people became ignorant & stopped following COVID discipline & guidelines.
- The cases surge were inflated due to the untimed elections & their rallies and also religious mass confluence.
- But most of it, the recurrent failure of India's Centralized scientific & administrative bureaucracy.
- In most cities, the great demand for ICUs & critical care beds, shortage of oxygen & hoarding of key medicines have been aggravated the situation further.
- In India, scientific agencies failed to come out with key parameters & a planning approach that reveal the geography of the epidemic & helps predict shortage.
- It also failed to come up with any quantitative norm for state-specific preparedness or guidelines to follow.
- The usual problem of poor design of empirical & scientific systems.
- Excessive centralization & a failure of execution, which is compounded with the absence of research.

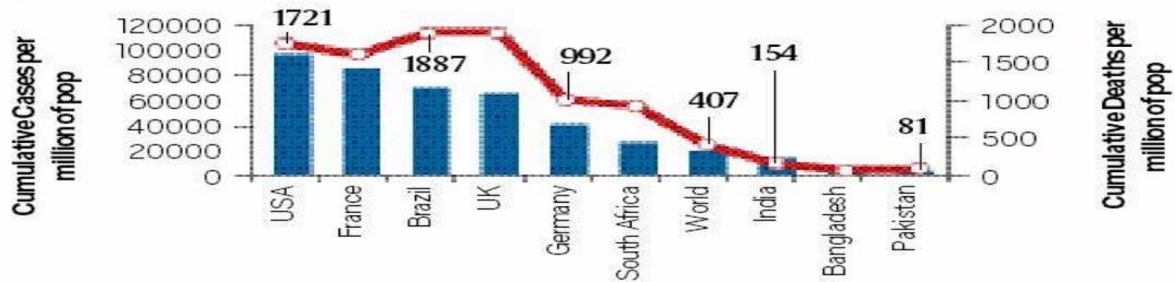
India with nearly 4 lakh cases & 4 thousand fatalities every day seems to have landed right into the eye of the storm.



India's dire state:

- A dire shortage of oxygen & beds in hospitals.
- Long waiting hours at crematoria & graveyards.
- Governments at the centre & state have lost control over the situation.
- Black marketing of oxygen & remdesivir injections are rife that indicates the collapse of the governance machinery.
- The virus has now reached the rural areas with a poor health care system that is waiting for further more devastation.
- Due to lack of awareness & trust, Vaccine hesitancy in rural areas is higher that results in a low vaccinated population among rural areas.
- The only consolation for India is that deaths in India per million population are still behind Brazil, UK, USA & even the World average.
 - Nevertheless, given our sheer numbers, it is time for everyone to put their shoulders to the wheel.

COMPARISON OF INDIA'S COVID-19 INFECTION AND FATALITY RATES PER MILLION OF POPULATION WITH SELECTED COUNTRIES



Source: Cumulative Covid confirmed cases and deaths taken from WHO Covid-19 Global Data (as on May 1st, 2021) and Population projection of 2020 from World Population Prospect 2019s

How did India land into COVID Tsunami?

- Since the peak of Sept 2020, the total number of daily infections had been coming down which led to complacency at the government level as well amongst the general public.
- Some experts believed Protests by thousands of farmers against farm laws in Nov 2020 could be potential super-spreaders.
- Then came several festivals from New year eve to Holi where people participated in thousands by disregarding COVID discipline.
- Though in March 2021, distress signals in Maharastra started by other states have ignored that signals.
- Many states continued several mass gatherings & rallies from Kumbh Mela to election rallies even in April.
- By April 2021, hell seems to have broken loose & India officially entered into 2nd wave that dismantled every govt machinery.

What to do?

- The first task is for elected representatives to calm down & help the distressed public.
- The national leadership needs to set up a war room comprising top medical experts & corporate leaders to ramp up oxygen supplies & necessary drugs & mobilize logistics to deliver them to the last mile.
- The losing public trust in the government machinery has to be overcome by addressing the nation at least twice a week & disclosing the facts about the disease.
- Although the Corporate sector had already come forward in supplying oxygen for medical use.
 - It is time for them to adopt PHCs in rural areas & second & third-tier towns, pump in resources from CSR funds & bank loans & upgrade health facilities.
- The govt should issue directives in this regard & the state govt should allow them to have equal say in managing PHCs.
- NGOs, Social activists, religious leaders & medical students come forward with financial & physical help & bring attitudinal change among people to get vaccinated.

Conclusion:

There is no dearth of good people & organizations in India who can contribute to bringing back public trust & fighting against the crisis effectively. The ample experience in managing larger outfits of corporate, social & religious leaders would come in handy in collating information, giving medical advice & saving lives & livelihoods. It is high time for govt to provide a framework for their effective participation & joining hands can turn the tables & the crisis can help India emerge stronger.

FREE JABS FOR ALL

Centre's vaccination policy leaves citizens at mercy of manufacturers, does not address shortage issues. Free shots at public health centres' is the strategy it must adopt.

GS2: Issues related to Health Sector & Public Policy.

Context:

- The author talks about India's Current Vaccination Policy based on the Liberalization approach.

Editorial Insights:

Issues with vaccination policy:

- At a time fair & speedy COVID-19 vaccination is of the essence, the Indian govt depends on only two suppliers, one reason for vaccine shortage.
- The more baffling issue is that govt has allowed suppliers to set different prices for different buyers, enabling them to charge based on the affordability of different segments.
- The above approach goes completely against the single-payer model that ensures equitability in the market.

What is Single-Payer Approach?

- It is where the Central govt would order all the vaccines & then distribute them equitably between States & Private healthcare providers.
- In healthcare, where the govt tries to get the best possible from drug manufacturers by acting as the single buyer.
- The single-payer model was tried to follow in India's 1st Phase of the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

But, recently govt released the policy note "Liberalized Pricing & Accelerated National COVID-19 Vaccination Strategy" that effectively moved away from the past Single-Payer model.

What is Liberalized Pricing Strategy?

- In the vaccine market, each manufacturer would charge one transparently declared price to all buyers other than the central govt.
- The main intention was clearly to supplement central procurement that will help in accelerating the vaccination drive.
- It also aims to incentivize vaccination production.

What are the issues with this strategy?

- The manufactures defeating the intention announced different prices for states & private hospitals(for a higher price).
 - This leads to states are being squeezed out of the vaccination.
- The above issue is accentuated with the Centre's another aspect of policy whereby private hospitals are allowed to set their own prices for vaccination.
 - the prices as a symbolic gesture monitored but not controlled.
- These two issues will set the stage for a thriving vaccine market where private hospitals charge hefty vaccination prices & manufacturers make profits by selling vaccines only to private at inflated prices.
- Regarding incentivizing vaccination production, a single-payer system can equally be incentivized by paying an adequate price,
 - but the centre wants to save the huge financial burden that will cause by an adequate pricing policy.
- Compared with the liberalization strategy, the Single-Payer system is far better in the following regards:
 - Without undermining production incentives, Govt in a Single-payer framework can negotiate a much lower price than in a liberalized system.
 - The central procurement would lead to a more equitable distribution of vaccines in the population.

- Today in times of vaccination shortage in India, the Public sector is ensuring a reasonably equitable system while in the private market scarce vaccines are distributed according to the ability to pay.
- This may get worse, in a situation of vaccine scarcity, private provision degenerates into an extortionate black market.
- In India, the current issue is with vaccine shortage but not of vaccination capacity of the public.
- In summarizing everything, Liberalization doesn't really ease the shortage of vaccines, it just shifts the financial burden from the centre to other buyers.
 - In any case, trimming the vaccination budget is hardly a priority when COVID-19 threatens to sink the economy.

Conclusion:

For a nation like India, as far as public interest is concerned free vaccination at public health centres is a much better strategy. The need of the hour is to examine any proposed departure not only with the most scrupulous but with the most suspicious attention.

IP WAVIER FOR COVID VACCINES

GS2: Issues related to IP rights.

Context:

Here we talk about the US announcement for waving intellectual property protection for COVID-19 vaccines by using Text-based Negotiations.

• What are Text-based Negotiations?

- It involves negotiators exchanging texts with their preferred wording & then thrashing out a consensus on the working.
- They are expected in a mix of virtual & in-person meetings.
- It will be time taken process due to the consensus-based nature & complexity of the issues.
- All 164 WTO members are required to agree on the draft & anyone can veto it.

What are Patents & IP rights?

- **Patent:** It represents a powerful IP right which is an exclusive monopoly granted by a govt to an inventor for a limited, pre-specified time.
 - It provides an enforceable legal right to prevent others from copying it.
 - Patents are of two types:
 - **Product Patent:** It ensures that the rights to the final product are protected & anyone other than the patent holder is restrained from manufacturing it for a specific period.
 - **Process Patent:** It enables any person other than the patent holder to manufacture the patented product by modifying certain processes in the manufacturing exercise.
 - In the 1970s India moved from product patenting to process patenting that enabled India to become a significant producer of generic drugs on a global scale.
 - But with international pressure & obligations due to the TRIPS agreement, India had to amend the Patents act in 2005 & shifted back to a Product regime across the pharma, chemicals & biotech sector.

What does the Intellectual property waiver for COVID-19 vaccines mean?

- IP waiver will open up space for the production of COVID vaccines with emergency use authorizations (EUA) on a larger scale in middle-income countries.
- Since most production is currently concentrated in high-income countries, through licensing or tech transfer agreement production by middle-income countries happening.

- Ramping up production capacities will be a lengthy process & the agreement will face challenges in the next WTO conference.
- As per experts, the IP waiver proposal should include other interventions going forward.
- The US support for an IP waiver stems from a proposal by India & South Africa in the WTO last year.
 - They asked the WTO to waive certain conditions of the TRIPS agreement that could impede timely access to affordable medical products to combat COVID-19.
 - The countries also asked the TRIPS council to waive 4 sections of the agreement related to copyright, industrial designs, patents & the protection of undisclosed information.

Deterrents for the Waiver & Challenges in scaling up production:

- The pharma companies have opposed the proposed waiver on grounds that eliminating IP protection would undermine the global response to the pandemic.
- It also creates confusion that could potentially undermine public confidence in vaccine safety & create a barrier to information sharing.
- Most importantly, eliminating protections would not speed up production.
- Sharing vaccine tech with developing countries would not be feasible for a company to move vaccines to a developing nation.
- **The real challenges in scaling up production & distribution of COVID-19 vaccines are:**
 - Trade barriers.
 - Bottlenecks in supply chains.
 - The unwillingness of rich countries to share doses with poorer nations.
 - The scarcity of raw materials has been a growing issue for ramping up production.
 - Several manufacturers relayed on specific suppliers & alternatives are limited.
 - Also, countries like the US had blocked exports of critical raw materials used in the production of some COVID-19 vaccines.
 - This led to a delay in the production of COVID vaccines by Indian companies that further lead to vaccine shortage in the country.

DELHI TO LONDON, A RECONNECTION

While few western powers are as deeply connected to India as Britain, both have found it hard to move on from entrenched prejudices of the past.

GS2: India & its Bilateral Relations.

Context:

- It is about the significance of Indo-Britain ties on the backdrop of the digital summit to be scheduled between both countries' PMs

Significance of the Indo-Britain ties:

- India needs the UK for immediate relief supplies of oxygen & other medical equipment needed to treat COVID victims.
- Beyond that, India & UK must tap into the enormous potential for bilateral strategic cooperation in the health sector & contribution to the global war on the virus.
- Using the G7 ministerial summit platform, there is a need for figuring out the issue of resilient medical supply chains between both countries
 - The possibilities range from ramping up vaccine production to the structuring of a strong public health system in India.
- Delhi must seize the opportunities to work with its international partners in overcoming India's failings that have been exposed during the 2nd wave.
- Britain & G-7 are well-positioned to help transform India's internal capabilities as well as benefit from them in the management of future global pandemics.

Though Britain is deeply connected to India as few western powers, yet building a sustainable partnership with Britain has been hard & lagged.

Reasons for Unsustainable relation:

- The colonial prism has distorted mutual perceptions.
- The anti-colonial resentment against Britain is always seething below the surface among the Indian elite class.
- The same holds with London, which has finding difficult to shed its own prejudices about India.
- The bitter legacies of the partition & Britain's perceived tilt to Pakistan have long complicated both countries' engagement.
- To make it further complicated, the South Asian diaspora in the UK transmits the internal & intra-regional conflicts in the subcontinent into Britain's domestic politics.

Though it is difficult to separate South Asian & British domestic politics but problems are further accentuated by the labour party's negativity towards India.

British Domestic Politics & India: before Johnson

- For many decades, Indian elites developed trust in the Labour party for its empathetic reach towards India & resented the Conservatives/Tories.
- But the last three decades saw a turnaround, where Tories became natural partners & Labour party become meddlesome in India's domestic issues.
- In past, the labour party has been critical & denounced the empire in its exploitative approach to India, but now it resents every act of India.
- While Tories are sentimental about the colonial era & willing to view India through the prism of shared interests.
- Though in the 2000s, Tony Blair sought to make amends but the party drifted steadily away from India.
- In many instances, the Labour party has attacked India's sovereignty by meddling in the Kashmir issue & recent farmers' agitation.
- While Tories have been warming up to India, in the 1990s they were quick in supporting India's economic reforms.
- Though David Cameron & Theresa May, sought to revive & advance bilateral ties but both nations continued to struggle in translating goodwill into strategic outcomes.

The Johnson Era: A hope for Sustainable ties.

- Both nations have a fresh basis & strong political will on the part of two PMs.
 - They expected to announce a 10-year roadmap to transform the bilateral relationship that will cover a range of areas.
- While the health sector will be the dominated agenda but there other business & agendas that has been long pending.
- In the current era of the void, both PMs confront a whole new set of circumstances for their countries & recognize that India & Britain need each other to achieve their larger goals.
 - **On Trade**, both nations are on the rebound from their respective regional blocs.
 - Although they were not part of the blocs & continue to trade with their regional partners but they are eager to build new global economic partnerships.
 - **On the Strategic front**, Britain is tilting to the Indo-Pacific where India is a natural ally.
 - While India needs as wide a coalition as possible to restore a semblance of regional balance that is tilted in China's favour.
 - **On the Defence front**, Britain would also contribute to the strengthening of India's domestic defence industrial base.
 - Both sides could expand India's regional reach through sharing of logistical facilities.

- **Other frontal areas,**
 - Both nations are exploring an agreement on “migration & mobility” to facilitate the legal movement of Indians into Britain.
 - Also, both sides are committed to finding common ground on climate change.

Conclusion:

As both nations deepen their bilateral partnerships & expand regional & international cooperation, they may find it easier to manage the allying issues among them. The need of the hour is to lay down mutually beneficial terms of endearment, where any future govt might be less tempted to undermine the partnership.

SHARE OF WOMEN, YOUTH IN NEW ASSEMBLIES

GS2: Elections

Context:

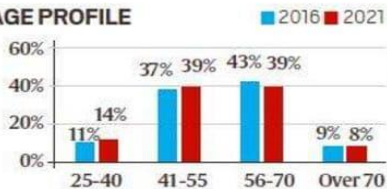
The representation of Women & Youth in New Assemblies.

Looking into Numbers:

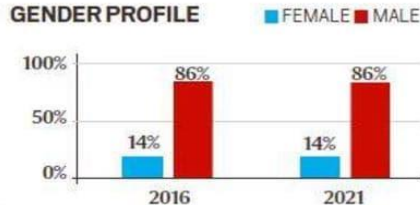
WEST BENGAL

NUMBER OF YOUNG MLAs (UP TO AGE 40) INCREASES;
WOMEN REPRESENTATION REMAINS UNCHANGED

AGE PROFILE

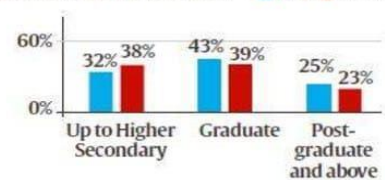


GENDER PROFILE



DECLINE IN THE NUMBER OF MLAs
WHO HAVE AT LEAST A
BACHELOR'S DEGREE

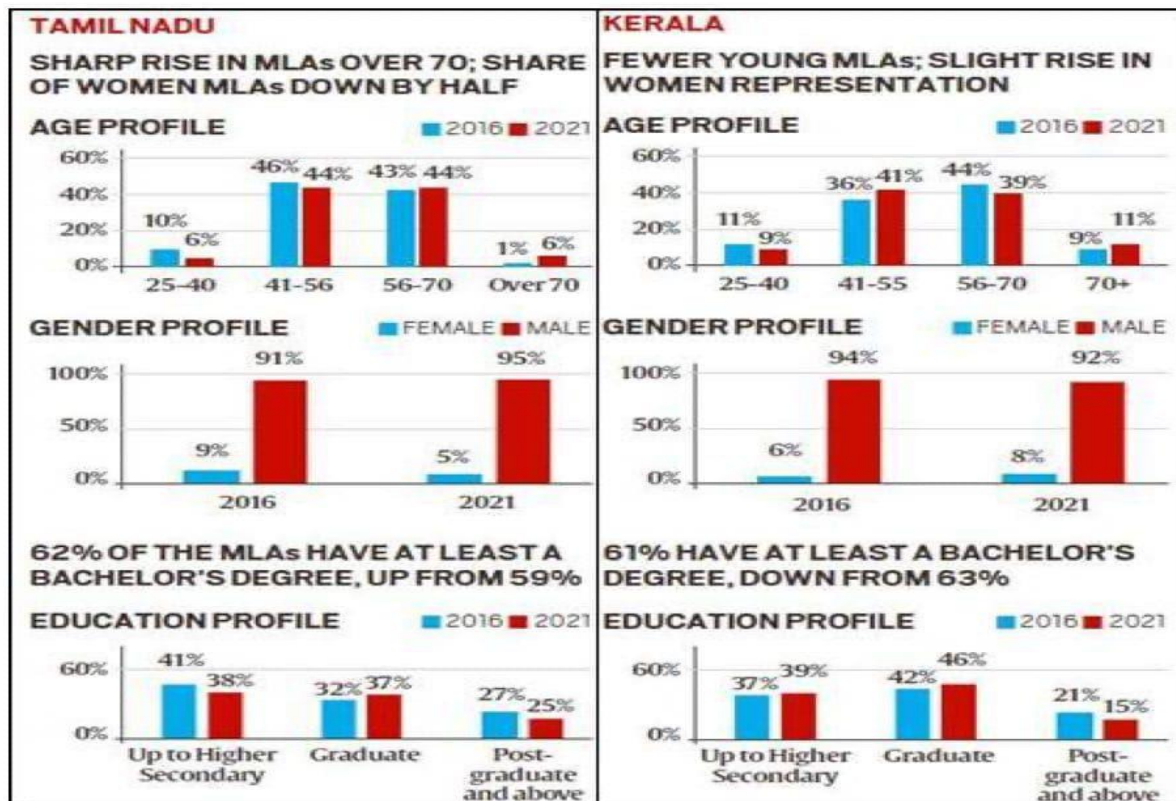
EDUCATION PROFILE



Sources: Election Commission; Candidate affidavits uploaded on ECI website; MyNeta; West Bengal Legislative Assembly website; PRS

- **No of Parties:**
- **West Bengal:**
 - Total 294 seats, seen reduction in parties' representation from 8 in 2016 to 3 in 2021.
- **Tamil Nadu:**
 - Total 234 seats, witnessed a doubling of parties representation from 4 in (2016) to 8 in (2021).
- **Kerala:**
 - Total 144 seats and 14 parties represent them.
- **Maharashtra:**
 - Total 288 seats made up of MLAs from 15 parties.
- **Formation of Govt:**
 - Few states such as **Bihar, Maharashtra & Assam** are **fell short** of the majority mark.
 - States **like West Bengal & Tamil Nadu** witnessed single-party majorities.
 - **While Kerala** will once again have a coalition govt.
- **The Gender Profile:**
 - Out of 3 new Assemblies, **only Kerala recorded a** marginal increase in seats for women from 8 to 11.
 - **In West Bengal**, Women's representation remained unchanged with 40 (2021) compared to 41 (2016).
 - Notably, **Tamil Nadu witnessed** a decline from 21 to 12 women seats.

- In states like **Bihar women** MLAs, strength remained largely same i.e. 26 (2020) & 28 (2016).
- In **Maharashtra**, a marginal increase is seen from 20(in 2014) to 24 in (2019).



• The Age Profile:

- **Only in West Bengal**, Young MLAs number has risen to 14%.
- **In Kerala & Tamil Nadu**, their representation stands at 9% & 6%.
- While Tamil Nadu also witnessed a record jump of 70- plus representation with 15 members.

Summarizing the Numbers:

The age and gender profiles of 3 of the newly elected Assemblies show that the share of women MLAs is unchanged in West Bengal, has grown slightly in Kerala, and fallen in Tamil Nadu. West Bengal has more young MLAs than earlier while the other two Assemblies have less than 10% MLAs under 40.

THE MIDDLE EAST RESET AND AFGHANISTAN

India & Pakistan long assumed that **American role in the Middle East was unchanging**, both must now imagine a region that is not micromanaged by the US

GS2: India & Its Neighbourhood Relations

Context:

Here talks about the consequences that South Asia faces after the US departure from Afghanistan.

Editorial Insights:

Since the last USA troops leave Afghanistan & it turns away from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific, there is a scramble to redo foreign policy maths in the region.

Brief Background: The Power Game in the Region

- Before the 1970s, Britain is the major external power in Greater Middle East Region.
- But half a century ago, the USA replaced it & has been playing a pivot role in regional politics.

- While the old European powers deferred to American leadership, both Russia & China sought to chip away at US dominance in the region.
- Many regional actors sought alliances with the USA to secure themselves while some sought to balance against it.

But as Washington recasts its role in the region, new realignments have become inevitable.

What Changed USA stances?

- From Israel's security to regional peace & stamping out terrorism are no longer compelling factors demanding massive USA's military, political & diplomatic investments in the region.
- After prolonged intervention in the region, the US realized that it can't fix centuries-old conflicts in the region.
- As global power equations are changing, the battle arena has been shifted to Indo-Pacific that demands the US to counter assertive China.

US departure from Afghanistan: Changing Regional Equations

- With the US exit, the regional actors either need alternate powers or reduced tensions with their neighbors.
 - Although Russia & China have regional ambitions neither can bring the kind of strategic heft the US brought.
 - It forces regional actors in adapting to live with neighbors.
- Turkey figured out that its troubled economy can't sustain the ambitious regional policies.
 - After years of efforts in challenging Saudi leadership & destabilizing Egypt, Turkey has started to amend with both nations.
- After prolonged intense hostility, Saudi & Iran are exploring ways to reduce bilateral tensions & proxy wars in the region.
 - Saudi is trying to heal the internal Gulf rift by reaching out to Qatar.
- All these changes come at a time when Arab states normalize ties with Israel.
- India has been pragmatic by emphasizing good relations with all the regional actors except Turkey that has turned hostile to India in the recent past.
 - India's expansion of ties with most regional actors may encourage Turkey to take a fresh look towards India.
- But Pakistan has struggled to recalibrate its policies towards the Middle East.
 - Despite benefits arising from it, Pakistan is unable to overcome domestic ideological opposition to establish diplomatic ties with Israel.
 - It also fell between the stools in coping with regional rivalries in the Middle East.
 - The rivalry with Saudi & UAE brought Pakistan to its knees & with great efforts Pakistan mend its ties with Gulf nations.
 - Pakistan's about-turn on Saudi underlines that the Subcontinent does not have the luxury of relying on old ideological tropes in a region that is undergoing a major transformation.
 - Nationalism, Economic interests & Regime security trumped transcendental ideologies.

For India & Pakistan:

- The regional reset in the Middle East has coincided with efforts by India & Pakistan to cool their tensions.
 - The ceasefire agreement on the Line of Control in Kashmir.
 - Pakistan's changed stances on the Kashmir issue.
- For very different reasons, both nations long assumed that the US role in the greater Middle East unchanging.
 - At this juncture, US departure from Afghanistan poses major challenges to the Subcontinent.

- For India, US military presence would have kept a check on extremist forces & created a conducive environment for India's role in Afghan.
- For Pakistan, The presence keeps the US utterly dependent on Pakistan for geographic access & operational support, which would be mobilized against India.
- Now with the US leaving, Both nations have to live with the consequences that include the triumphal return of the Taliban to power.
 - The prospect of trans-border links between the Taliban & other extremist forces in the region is a challenge that South Asian nations will have to confront.

Way-Ahead:

A state that cedes power to the extremism of any kind courts the danger of being consumed by it. The need of the hour is that both India & Pakistan must come to terms with the changing dynamics in Greater Middle East. Unless the regional actors collaborate on countering extremism & terrorism, every one of them will be weakened.

ARTICLE 311 (2) UNDER WHICH SACHIN WAZE WAS DISMISSED

What is Article 311 (2) under which Sachin Waze was dismissed without an enquiry?

GS2: Role of Civil Services.

Context:

- Here we talk about Article 311 on the backdrop of the Ambani terror scare case.

Editorial Insights:

After his arrest in connection with the Ambani terror case, Waze was dismissed from services under Article 311(2)(b) of the Constitution.

Article 311:

- It is meant to act as a safeguard for civil servants that give them a chance to respond to the charges in an enquiry to prevent arbitrary dismission.
 - **What clause 2(b) of the 311 article says?**
 - It is an exception to the safeguards provided in article 311.
 - It empowers the authority, to dismiss or remove or to reduce a rank of the person, without any enquiry if it satisfies that for some reason.

Safeguards under Article 311:

- Section 1: No govt employee either of an all India service or a state govt shall be dismissed or removed by an authority subordinate to the one that appointed him/her.
- Section 2: No civil servant shall be dismissed or removed or reduced in rank except after an inquiry in which s/he has been informed of the charges & given a reasonable opportunity of being heard in respect of those charges.

Departmental Enquiry Mechanism:

- In this, the civil servant is served with a formal charge sheet after the inquiry officer is appointed.
- S/He can be represented themselves or choose to have a lawyer.
- The inquiry officers after the process submit the report to the govt for further action.

Dismission without Departmental Enquiry:

- Under the Article 311 sub clause 2 provision, govt employee convicted in criminal cases can be dismissed without departmental enquiry.
- Under 311 (2)(c), S/He can be dismissed when the Prez/Governor is satisfied that in the interests of the security of state without any enquiry.

Usage of Article 311(2) sub-section:

- It invoked in exceptional circumstances.
- But recently J&K admin set up a Task Force to scrutinize cases of employees suspected of activities requiring action under article 311(2)(c).
- The dismissed employee under these provisions can approach either State or Central Administrative Tribunal or the Courts.

WOLF WARRIORS IN THE SUBCONTINENT

GS2: India & Its Neighborhood relations, Groupings.

Context:

Here we talk about the Chinese assertive diplomacy in the Subcontinent.

What is the issue?

- Recently Chinese envoy warned Bangladesh against joining the Quad which points to new kinds of challenges that the Subcontinent will face from the assertive superpower at its doorstep.
- He added that Bangladesh will risk significant damage to its relationship with China if it warms up to the Quad.

Why does the Chinese envoy warn?

- China being aware that the Quad has not invited Dhaka & closely tracking US policies in the region, wanted to lay down a red line for Bangladesh.
- China is conscious that Bangladesh's impressive economic performance in recent years & its location at the Bay of Bengal littoral lends a new strategic salience.
- It also notes India's growing diplomatic investment in developing a strategic partnerships with Bangladesh.
- It was anxious about Bangladesh's policy that supports China's BRI but is also open to infra cooperation with the US, Japan & India.
- In this scenario, the envoy remarks about the Quad were to warn Bangladesh to resist any Indo-Pacific temptation.
 - This pre-emption is very much part of China's strategic culture.
 - For the 1st time, it was witnessed in subcontinent in 2007 against Malabar exercises in the Bay of Bengal conducted by India with 5 nations.
 - Which ultimately led to bar similar multilateral exercises for a long time.
- The envoy's remarks are indeed part of China's party line that the Quad is a "small geopolitical clique" which wants to divide Asia & contain China & takes any engagement with the Quad very seriously.
- At the same time, the remarks underline China's top strategic priority is to prevent the emergence of any countervailing Asian coalition.

This above diplomatic style is new for China that strives for assertiveness.

New Wolf Warrior Diplomacy:

- China has always used an aggressive style in the matters of its sovereignty & territorial integrity and pushed back vigorously against any interference in its internal affairs.
 - This aggressiveness covers a much broader range of issues.
- In the 1970s, When Deng opened up the Chinese economy & sought for international cooperation for rebuilding China, its diplomatic focus was on winning friends & influencing people.

- But the 21st Century marks discourse for China's diplomatic style known as "**Wolf Warrior Diplomacy**" which boldly defends China's interests & actively shapes the international discourse on the issues of the day.
 - It confronts head-on any criticism of China in the public sphere.
 - Lecture host govts & ignores summoning of host nations.
- For a while, India has been at the receiving end, But India's neighbors that has good relation with China are now experiencing China's new diplomatic treatment.

Impact of China's Assertive diplomacy on South Asia:

- On diplomatic style & political substance, India & China are trading places in South Asia.
 - For a long time, India's neighbors resented the imperious style of India's diplomacy, now Chinese envoys inheriting that "pro-consuls" dubious mantle.
 - After a long time, India learned that too much diplomatic swag in the region had undermined its pursuit of regional objectives.
 - But China is eager to bet its substantive leverages in deterring smaller nations from crossing the markers that it lays down while limiting the costs.
 - In the case of Interventionist policy, for a long time, South Asian elites seethed at Delhi meddling in their affairs & they have welcomed China's non-interventionist policy.
 - But now, China is no longer reluctant to intervene & its interventions are quite ostentatious.
 - Whereas India is now more circumspect than before about the interventions in the region & also demonstrates greater patience with uncomfortable developments in the neighborhood.
- For decades, India's neighbors have complained about its inefficiency in implementing projects vis-à-vis China's speed & economic purposefulness.
 - But today everyone discovering the flip side of Chinese cooperation that is not in favor of the host nation.
 - Also, they soon discover that they have no political recourse at all in China's closed political system.

Way-Ahead:

Until now, India's neighbors have seen Chinese support against India free of cost, convenient & off-the-shelf solution. But the increasing assertiveness of China, likely to cost them. At the same time, having strong ties with India, the US, Japan & Russia does increase the bargaining power of South Asia's smaller nations with each of them. The Dhaka controversy enables them to discover the joys of dealing with the new hegemon in the South Asian horizon.

INDIA, ISRAEL, AND PALESTINE

GS2: India & Its Bilateral relations.

Context:

Here we talk about India's statement at UNSC seeking a balance between its old ties with Palestine & growing relations with Israel.

Present Issue:

- India at UNSC stressed on an open debate on the escalating Israel-Palestine violence & striving to maintain a balance between India's historic ties with Palestine & its blossoming relations with Israel.

- The statement appears to implicitly hold Israel responsible for triggering the current cycle of violence by locating its beginning in East Jerusalem rather than Gaza.
- It also requested both sides to refrain from unilateral attempts to change the existing status quo in East Jerusalem & its neighborhood.

At the same time, it also emphasized that the historic status quo at the holy places of Jerusalem



Tracing India's Tightrope walk through the decades:

India's policy on the issue has gone from being unequivocally pro-Palestine for the first four decades, to a tense balancing act with its three-decade-old friendly ties with Israel. In recent years, India's position has also been perceived as pro-Israel.

From Nehru to Rao:

- In 1948, India was the only non-Arab state among 13 countries that voted against the UN partition plan of Palestine in the General Assembly that led to the creation of Israel.
- In 1950 India recognized Israel, Nehru reasoned that it was an established fact & not doing so would create rancour between two UN members.

OUR BRANCHES: New Delhi | Mumbai | Kolkata | Chennai | Ahmedabad | Bengaluru | Bhilai | Bhubaneswar | Chandigarh | Dehradun | Gandhinagar | Guwahati | Hyderabad | Kanpur | Lucknow | Mehsana | Nagaland | Patna | Raipur | Rajkot | Ranchi | Surat | Vadodara |

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- But for a long in terms of bilateral relations only a consulate office was established in 1953 for issuing visas for pilgrims.
- The balancing act began with India's decision to normalize ties with Israel in 1992, which came on the backdrop of the Soviet Union break-down & 1990 Gulf war consequences.
 - At the same time, PLO lost much of its clout in the Arab world by siding with Iraq.
- The opening of an Indian embassy in Tel Aviv in 1992 marked the end to four decades of giving Israel the cold shoulder.
- Including Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount must be respected.

India and PLO:

- For over four decades the relationship with Palestine was an article of faith in Indian foreign policy.
 - At the 53rd UN session, India co-sponsored the Palestinians self-determination resolution.
 - In 1967 & 73 wars, India lashed out at Israel as the aggressor.
 - In 1975, India became the first non-Arab country to recognize the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people & accorded diplomatic status in 1980.
 - In 1988 When Palestine with East Jerusalem was declared as an independent state, India granted recognition to it.
 - During Rao's regime, after Tel Aviv's diplomatic mission, India opened a Representative office in Ramallah.
 - In 2003, India at UNGA voted against Israel's construction of a separation wall.
 - It votes Palestine to become a full member of UNESCO in 2011 & enabled Palestine to become a non-member observer state at the UN.

Changes after 2014:

- Though India never acknowledged the relationship fully but from 1992, the India-Israel relationship continued to grow from defense deals to agriculture collaborations.
- There were many few high-level visits to Israel during the 2000s.
 - That year two countries established a joint anti-terror commission.
 - In 2003, Ariel Sharon became the first Israeli PM to visit India.
- During UPA rule, the balancing act intensified & the head of the Palestinian Authority visited India frequently.
- The current NDA regime decided to take full ownership of the relationship with Israel.
 - The new phase with an abstention by India at the UNHRC on a resolution that alleges war crimes on Israel & Hamas during 2014 airstrikes against Gaza.
- But the big change was the status of the East Jerusalem that both claims.
 - Until, 2017 with its expression of support for a two-state solution, India had always included a line in support of East Jerusalem.
 - But during Modi's regime, the reference to East Jerusalem was dropped & Started to stress on De-Hyphenated the Israel-Palestine relationship.
 - India meanwhile continues to improve ties with Arab countries.

Balancing Act: De-Hyphenation:

- The de-hyphenation is a careful balancing act that gives leverage to India in shifting its stand.
 - For example, India voted against USA recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital.
 - In 2021, at the 46th UNHRC session, India voted against Israel in three resolutions:

- On the right of Palestinian people self-determination.
- On Israeli settlement policy.
- On the human rights situation in the Golan Heights.
- It abstained from 4th resolution that asked for the human right situation in Palestine.
- In Feb, When ICC named Israel & Hamas as perpetrators in the human rights violation in Palestinian territory, Israel wanted India to take a stand on behalf of it.
 - But India has its own balancing act that abstained from that.
- The current statement can also be seen in the light of India's balancing act in the region which is neither pro-Palestine nor pleases Israel.

INDIA AND THE BIDEN MOMENT

GS2: India-US relations

Context: Here we talk about India-US strategic partnership under Biden

What's happening?

- Recently India's MEA Jaishankar visit to New York & Washington highlights the new India-US synergy between bilateral, regional & multilateral issues.
 - The 3 domains are beginning to come together as India raises its multilateral ambitions & Prez Biden discards Trump's unilateralist impulses.
 - But Biden has embraced & reinforced the Indo-Pacific regional idea of Trump.
- **New Indo-Pacific Consensus:**
 - This presents India & the US enduring geography for regional cooperation.
 - In the past, regional issues were a major source of friction between Delhi & Washington.
 - But the QUAD security mechanism that arose from India-US bilateral defense cooperation is emerging as a potential instrument to shape the regional architecture in the east.
- India's present major problem is beating COVID that requires US cooperation.
- **Reinforcing India's Diplomacy in Washington & New York:**
 - The main ambition in New York for Jaishankar is to make India's current tenure as a non-permanent member of the UNSC count.
 - But traditionally, there is very little in common between India's bilateral goals in Washington & its global discourse in New York that needed to reinforce each other.
 - The profound changes in Washington formed the background to the talks, where Biden has promised to restore US leadership in multilateral institutions.
 - He declared the US will not cede the top slot to China.
 - The US allies who were despondent with Trump, are now welcoming the opportunity to engage with the better organized Biden administration.
 - **India-Biden:**
 - India finds itself in a sweet spot with the Biden administration.
 - Continuing with the recent tradition of advancing ties with India, Biden demonstrated the commitment to deepen partnership with India at 3 levels.
 - Initially, the US has delayed the COVID cooperation to India, but now it strongly facilitating essential items & relief supplies.
 - Before the April surge in India, Biden plans to use India as a critical element in the regional effort to expand vaccine production & deliver them across the Indo-Pacific.

- But the 2nd wave kept a road block for Biden's Plan & India's Vaccine Maitri initiative.
- As 2nd wave is receding, both nations now plan to reboot the strategy to vaccinate the Indo-Pacific.
- **India's Multilateral Journey:**
 - During Cold war, India & the US had great ideological differences that limited possibilities for international cooperation between them.
 - During the Post-Cold war, Delhi aligned with Chinese & Russian positions on multilateral issues.
 - This resulted in China blocking India's entry into NSG & India's quest for a UNSC permanent seat.
 - Even today, China is supporting Pakistan's cross order terrorism.
 - It is the US that ended India's nuclear isolation & France took the lead in blocking China's Kashmir moves at the UNSC.
 - India's past default position of opposing West is history. In the past few years, India is actively backing European Alliance for Multilateralism & now open to positively with Biden on global issues.
- **Beyond Regional:**
 - India & the US could do much by pooling resources & strategies in boosting resilience against pandemics & framing new international norms to combat it.
 - Climate Change & Trade are the top priorities of the agenda.
 - On climate change, the key to success here is finding a way for the US to support India's transition to green growth.
 - On the trade front, there is unexpected convergence & serious differences in trade-related issues for decades.
 - Time has come now, in taking fresh look at the trade theology & convince that overexposure to China has hollowed out their domestic manufacturing.
 - Both US & India must explore possibilities for a new bilateral trade compact & potential cooperation to reform the global trading order.

Further-Ahead:

Prez Bush helped transform the bilateral relationship, Trump created the basis for regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Prez Obama had begun a major conversation with India on multilateral issues, mainly climate change. It is now Time for Prez Biden, in making multilateralism an important part of the India-US strategic partnership.

EFFICIENCY VS DIGNITY

GS2: Issues related to Criminal Justice System

Context:

Here we talk about the possible impact of a centralized database for the justice system on Habitual offender communities.

What's happening?

Recently SC's e-committee headed by Justice D Y Chandrachud published a draft document digitizing the criminal justice system.

- The main aim is to integrate digital technologies in courts to enhance judicial efficiency.
- The vision is to put in place an interoperable digital architecture that facilitates easy data-sharing among all pillars of the criminal justice system.

Interoperable Criminal Justice System (ICJS):

- The project is launched in 2019 & is set to be fully operational.
- It will replace the existing need-based physical exchange of information.
- It will integrate existing centralized data systems such as CCTNS, e-prisons & e-courts that ensure seamless exchange of live data among them.

Criticism/Concerns:

- The main concern is privacy due to the absence of data protection laws in India.
- There is also the concern of implications of the data being housed in the home ministry for judicial independence.
- The major issue is of a neglected danger that this seamless exchange likely to whitewash the biased & illegal process of data creation.
 - In other words, it can possibly hamper the objectivity & neutrality of technology.
- It will have a huge impact on certain tribes classified as Habitual Offenders.

Habitual Offenders & Central Database:

- Habitual offenders are historically maintained a register of persons belongs to certain communities like Vimukta Janjatis that have been criminalized by the British through the Criminal Tribe Act 1871.
- For colonial rulers, Caste System offered the rationale to identify & branding of communities as HOs that resulted in extensive surveillance & intrusive policing.
 - This has been sustained post-independence through state laws allowing the police to maintain records of lives & movements of the communities.
 - The gravest injustice of being labelled as a HO is that it entirely hinges on police suspicion & discretion that are based on caste prejudices.
 - The register also includes juveniles that contravene the principles enshrined in the Juvenile Justice Act.
- The creation of permanent digital databases based on biased offline databases with no oversight that utilizes ambiguous & outdated provisions is grave injustice & illegal.
- For years, the Hos registers were hidden inside specific police stations & shred with other stations when required.
 - With CCTNS, police used digitized data for crime & criminal mapping & predictive policing.
 - The existence of HO registers is a ready refuge for the police both while looking for a person to pin a crime on as well as manufacturing one.
- Before the interoperable system, the accused has given a right to challenge the correctness of the record, but now the interoperable system creates a potential for the police information to be used to the detriment of accused persons without their knowledge.
- The e-committee's vision to integrate all existing data systems to make ICJS one expansive centralized system would be feed with biased data of habitual offenders.

Way-Ahead:

Even if caste-informed biases of data are taken away, we still need to consider the risks of centralized, interoperable & permanent digital databases on privacy & individual liberties. Efficiency & Digitization

cannot recede the rights & dignities of marginalized individuals who are often the subjects of the Indian criminal justice system.

A FINE BALANCE IN NEPAL

GS2: India & its Neighborhood relations

Context:

As we talk about the possible impacts of Nepal's Political uncertainty on India.

What's happening?

- The game of musical chairs on Nepal's stage continues, where PM Oli has persuaded President Bidya Devi to dissolve parliament & call for fresh elections.
 - While several political parties & leaders challenged the current dissolution in the apex court.
- Oli was supported by a faction of the JSP led by a Madhesi leader that has promised a share in the power & longstanding Madhesi's demand of removal of the constitutional provision that denied citizenship to children born of Nepali mothers who had foreign husbands.
 - Though the provision has been reverse through the Presidential ordinance.
 - The current move will make the Madhesi's happy but it could turn out to be a reversible tactical agent if & when Oli is dethroned.

Nepal's Political Uncertainty: India

- Political uncertainty in Nepal is never good news for India because it shares a long & open border with it.
 - Nepal is always a hotbed for conspiracies that implicate India without any tangible basis.
- From the Indian perspective, India's either engagement or intervention in Nepal will always be suspected.
 - At the present juncture, the popular view of Nepal is that Oli is a favourite for present India's regime.
 - Even some speculate that India is working to bring back the monarchy to Nepal.
 - The recent visit of Nepal's former King Gyanendra to the Kumbh festival gave impetus to such speculation.

Relevance of Past Learning's in Current Turmoil:

- The monarchy in Nepal has always tried to distance Nepal from India & promoted a nationalism that takes hostility to India as its main driver.
 - The abolition of the monarchy is a net gain for India & India should break the speculation & declare its unconditional support to Nepal's republican democracy.
- India should remain fully engaged with Nepal at all levels & across the political spectrum to safeguard its vital interests.
 - A hands-off policy will only create space for external influence like China that proves to be hostile.
 - However, India should move away from its current engagement that labels Nepal leaders as friends/foes.
- The Terai belt & Madhesi population plays a vital role in India's engagement with Nepal.
 - Also, India's engagement with Nepal must find an important place for Nepali citizens who act as kinship, cultural & religious bridge between both countries.
- Finally, India needs to appreciate that the people-to-people links between both nations have an unmatched density.
 - The challenge to India's Nepal policy lies in leveraging these ties and assets to ensure a stable & mutually productive state-to-state relationship.

Conclusion:

India's experience showcases that people-to-people relationships cannot be a substitute for sensible state-to-state relations, but they can be a powerful instrument to enhance state relations. India has every reason to approach its relations with Nepal with confidence & assurance.

A 'REFORM WAVE' IN LAKSHADWEEP**GS 2: Devolution of powers**

Context: A slew of reforms being introduced by the new administrator of Lakshadweep is being talked about in the given article.

What is the issue?

- Draft laws introduced like **the Lakshadweep Animal Preservation Regulation, 2021; the Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Regulation (PASA); the Lakshadweep Panchayat Regulation, 2021 and Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation 2021.**
- Minister said he intends to develop Lakshadweep like neighbouring Maldives, "**a renowned international tourist destination**".

The IDA framework

- Specially constituted **Island Development Authority (IDA)**, in Kavaratti in 1988, approved a framework for the development of India's island territories.
- It held "**an environmentally sound strategy for both island groups hinges on better exploitation of marine resources coupled with much greater care in the use of land resources**". Published in 1989, the report carried six recommendations for Lakshadweep.
- Lakshadweep had its own **decentralised political entity from the adoption of panchayati raj** much before the constitutional amendments of 1993, in which the **Island Development Council**, was mandated to advise the Administrator on development.
- It gives India a **vast and exclusive economic zone with three distinct ecosystems: land, lagoon and ocean.**
- **Fishery** is a **primary occupation** here. The **language, except in Minicoy, is Malayalam; in Minicoy, Mahl** is spoken, a language akin to the 17th century Divehi of the Maldives.
- The **society** in all islands **is matriarchal**. The religion is Islam of the pristine Shafi school of law.
- **Vatteluttu** was the **earliest script** used with its **heavy Sanskrit component**. With the introduction of Islam, Arabi-Malayalam, with Malayalam in Arabic script and associated with the literature of the Mappilas developed on the mainland.
- Earlier Prime Minister like Rajiv Gandhi during his visit to Lakshadweep was concerned about the development agenda for these ecologically fragile territories.

A 'no' to the Maldives model

- Specifically rejecting the Maldives model, the plan for Lakshadweep required that the industry had to be **people-centric and enrich the fragile coral ecology.**
- Lakshadweep today has **rainwater harvesting facilities**, first introduced in government buildings on every island and now accessible in every home.
- **Solar power**, which covers 10% of lighting needs, makes Lakshadweep a pioneer in India's present flagship initiative.
- **All islands** have been **connected by helicopter service** since **1986**, and high-speed passenger boats were purchased in the 1990s by an international tender.
- A study by the **National Institute of Oceanography** found practical applications, helping a

redesign of the tripods reinforcing the beaches against sea erosion, and ensuring piped water supply especially designed to draw from the fresh water thus saving the fragile ecology.

- The islands boast **total literacy**. **Minicoy** had among the **country's first Navodaya Vidyalayas**. **Vernacular building traditions**, they are the theme of all government housing projects undertaken in the islands in the 1980s, with leading architects providing the designs.
- Although the poverty line in terms of GDP is only slightly higher than the World Bank's poverty threshold, Lakshadweep today has no poor people with good calory intake.
- Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Finance Commissions (1984-2005), this established, in the words of the last of these Commissions "**speedy and accurate generation of accounting information that might be needed for purposes of better planning, budgeting and monitoring**".

There is much room for improvement:

- Income disparities have grown. Indiscriminate trawling endangers the coral, as experienced in the Maldives and now banned there.
- The Government recognises the need to develop policies for enhancing employment opportunities, environment-friendly management of fisheries, sanitation, waste disposal and widening access to drinking water.
- **Revenue from tourism** has **declined** with the closure of resorts (including at Bangaram) from litigation. A clear policy must include conservation and natural resource management arrived at after wide consultation.
- Youth, having acquired a modern education, preferring salaried jobs over pursuing traditional occupations.
- Maldives is hardly a suitable model. **Water bungalows** — an expensive concept and also hazardous to the coral — favoured by the NITI Aayog, may collapse in Lakshadweep's turbulent monsoon.

Obtuse plans

- Pursuit of '**holistic development**', using the 'claim' that there has been no development in Lakshadweep for the past 70 years is wrong.
- **Preventive detention law** undermine tribal land ownership, with judicial remedy denied, with also plans for road widening on the islands where the maximum road length is 11 km is fragile for ecology.
- Provision to allow **the mining and exploitation of mineral resources** which could convert the islands into a hub for cement manufacture is not suitable for the island's geography.
- **Panchayat rules** designed to **restrict the population growth** in a territory where, according to the **National Health and Family Survey-5 (2019-20)**, the **total fertility rate is 1.4** and relaxing prohibition, extant in the Union Territory because of public demand.
- Relaxation of quarantine restrictions for travel have introduced the novel coronavirus into a pandemic-free archipelago.

GENERAL STUDIES-3

A 'ONE HEALTH' APPROACH THAT TARGETS PEOPLE, ANIMALS

The battle against COVID-19 should also be used as an opportunity to meet India's 'One Health' targets.

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GS Paper 2 &3: Health, Science & Technology

Background:

- The father of modern pathology, **Rudolf Virchow**, emphasised in 1856 that there are **essentially no dividing lines between animal and human medicine**.
- This concept is ever more salient as the world continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic. **"One Health"** can be defined as the interconnectedness of animals, humans, and the environment.
- Discussions that took place around **World Veterinary Day**, on April 24, 2021, focused on acknowledging the interconnectedness i.e. "One Health".

Across the species barrier

- Infectious diseases can be divided into two categories, i.e. **"zoonotic"** (can be transferred between animals and humans and vice-versa) and **"anthropozoonotic"** (gets transferred from humans to animals).
- The transboundary impact of viral outbreaks in recent years such as the Nipah virus, Ebola, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Avian Influenza has further reinforced the need for us to consistently document the linkages between the environment, animals, and human health.

India's framework, plans

- India's 'One Health' vision derives its blueprint from the agreement between the tripartite-plus alliance comprising the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) — a global initiative supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank.
- India established a National Standing Committee on Zoonoses as far back as the 1980s.
- In the year 2021 funds were sanctioned to **establish "center for one health"** at Nagpur.
- the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD) has launched several schemes to mitigate the prevalence of animal diseases since 2015, with a funding pattern along the lines of 60:40 (Centre: State); 90:10 for the Northeastern States, and 100% funding for Union Territories.
- Under the National Animal Disease Control Programme, ₹13,343 crore have been sanctioned for Foot and Mouth disease and Brucellosis control.
- Government is working to revamp programmes that focus on capacity building for veterinarians and upgrading the animal health diagnostic system such as **Assistance to States for Control of Animal Diseases (ASCAD)**.
- Assistance will be extended to State biological production units and disease diagnostic laboratories.
- WHO estimates that rabies (also a zoonotic disease) costs the global economy approximately \$6 billion annually. Considering that 97% of human rabies cases in India are attributed to dogs, interventions for disease management in dogs are considered crucial.
- DAHD has partnered with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in **the National Action Plan for Eliminating Dog Mediated Rabies**. This initiative is geared towards sustained mass dog vaccinations and public education to render the country free of rabies.

Need for coordination

- Due to the discovery of the fact i.e. there are around 1.7 million viruses circulating in wildlife India risks many more pandemics.

- To achieve targets under the 'One Health' vision, efforts are ongoing to address challenges pertaining to veterinary manpower shortages, the lack of information sharing between human and animal health institutions, and inadequate coordination on food safety at slaughter, distribution, and retail facilities.
- These issues can be remedied by consolidating existing animal health and disease surveillance systems — e.g., **the Information Network for Animal Productivity and Health**, and the National **Animal Disease Reporting System** — developing best-practice guidelines for informal market and slaughterhouse operation (e.g., inspections, disease prevalence assessments), and creating mechanisms to operationalise 'One Health' at every stage down to the village level.
- Increased investments toward meeting 'One Health' targets is the need of the hour.

A TRIPS WAIVER IS USEFUL BUT NOT A MAGIC PILL

A TRIPS waiver is useful but not a magic pill

The U.S.-supported move will have an effect if countries simultaneously address non-IP bottlenecks among other things

GS 3 : Intellectual Property Rights

Background:

- In the year 2020, India and South Africa, at the WTO, proposed waiving **Sections 1, 4, 5, and 7 of Part II of the TRIPS agreement** (covering copyrights, industrial designs, patents, and undisclosed trade information) related to the prevention, containment, or treatment of COVID-19.
- But this move was opposed by many developed countries like UK, US, EU, Canada etc. But most recently United States has declared its support for a **temporary waiver** of the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement for COVID-19 vaccines at the World Trade Organisation (WTO)
- Hopefully, the U.S.'s decision would cause other holdouts like Canada and the European Union to give up their opposition. The stumbling block is the political will of the richer countries.
- Legally, the waiver is a possibility under **Article IX of the WTO Agreement** which allows for waiving obligations in '**exceptional circumstances**' which the COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly is.

Devil in the details

- The devil would be in the details. The countries would now negotiate on the text of the waiver at the WTO. But with the prior experience at hand of the 2003 waiver of TRIPS obligations aftermath of HIV/ AIDS crisis of 1990 did not yield expected results.
- This is so because specifically, the obligation contained in **Article 31(f) of TRIPS** that medicines produced under a compulsory licence are predominantly for the domestic market of that country was waived, paving the way for the export of such medicines to a country that lacked manufacturing capability.
- It was subject to several stringent requirements such as the drugs so manufactured are to be exported to that nation only; the medicines should be easily identifiable through different colour, or shape; etc. these cumbersome requirements, didn't allow effective use of this waiver.

Developing world must watch

- The statement issued by Katherine Tai, (U.S. Trade Representative) states that the negotiations on the text of the waiver **will 'take time'** given the WTO's consensus-based decision-making process and the complexity of the issues involved.

- This signals that the negotiations on the waiver are going to be difficult. While the U.S. would not like to be seen as blocking the TRIPS waiver and attracting the ire of the global community, but it will strongly defend the interests of pharma giants.
- Currently the IP waiver talks only about vaccines but India and South Africa also proposed a waiver on medicines and technologies related to COVID-19. But the latest statement of US representative has narrowed the approach to vaccines only.

Overcoming key obstacles

- While the TRIPS waiver would lift the legal restrictions on manufacturing COVID-19 vaccines, it would not solve the problem of the lack of access to technological 'know-how' related to manufacturing COVID-19 vaccines.
- *Waiving IP protection does not impose a legal requirement on pharmaceutical companies to transfer or share technology.* Coercive legal measures for a forced transfer of technology, would be too draconian and counterproductive.
- Therefore, governments would have to be proactive in negotiating and cajoling pharmaceutical companies to transfer technology using various legal and policy tools including financial incentives
- A TRIPS waiver would enable countries to escape WTO obligations, it will not change the nature of domestic IP regulations.
- Therefore, countries should start working towards making suitable changes in their domestic legal framework to operationalise and enforce the TRIPS waiver.
- In this regard, the Indian government should immediately put in place a team of best IP lawyers who could study the various TRIPS waiver scenarios and accordingly recommend the changes to be made in the Indian legal framework.

Conclusion

- Notwithstanding the usefulness of the TRIPS waiver, it is not a magic pill.
- It would work well only if countries simultaneously address the non-IP bottlenecks such as technology transfer, production constraints, and other logistical challenges such as inadequacy of supply chains and unavailability of raw materials to manufacture vaccines and medicines.

GUARANTOR BEWARE

GS 3: Economy

Context: The Supreme Court judgment upholding creditors' right to proceed against personal guarantors to loans provided by them to a corporate borrower helps lift the uncertainty in the financial market.

What's the matter

- The financial system of our country which is, under a mountain of bad loans, the recent judgement will help in expediting the resolution of stressed assets.
- Thus those entrepreneurs signing guarantee will have to be certain that the business will not flounder.
- The SC Bench was considering petitions challenging the government's 2019 notification that made personal guarantors a separate category of individuals who could be proceeded against under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code as part of the insolvency proceedings initiated by lenders against defaulting corporate entities.
- SC dismissed such petitions, by saying that "carving out personal guarantors as a separate species

of individuals”, given the “intimate connection between such individuals and corporate entities to whom they stood guarantee”.

- Thus banks now stand a real chance of recovering substantially more from the resolution of a stressed corporate entity.

Impacts

- Several corporate leaders will be impacted. The promoters of many defaulting corporates, which are facing action under the IBC, had furnished guarantees for thousands of crores in loans availed by the companies they ran.
- The court further clarified that it is bound to strengthen the creditors’ positions in all ongoing, future and even completed insolvency proceedings.
- The approval of a resolution plan for the corporate debtor does not extinguish the personal guarantor’s liability, as it “arises out of an independent contract”.
- Lenders can now proceed against the guarantors to enhance recovery given that most banks agree to ‘haircuts’ when negotiating a resolution plan with a new promoter for the defaulting company.
- Once the resolution plan becomes legally binding, the guarantor loses the recourse to remedy from the borrower when the creditor invokes the personal guarantee.

Conclusion

Thus with the passing of new judgement entrepreneurs will now have to be more careful before signing a personal guarantee unless they can be very certain that the business they found will not flounder.

THE DEBATE OVER VACCINE GST EXEMPTION

GS3: Indian Economy & Taxation related issues.

Context:

As we talk about the debate surrounding GST exemption for vaccines.

- **States Request:**
 - Several states have called for removing taxation on COVID-related medicines & supplies including a GST exemption on vaccines to help in removing supply constraints & contribute towards effective management of the COVID pandemic.
- **Centre’s Response:**
 - A full exemption from GST will prevent vaccine manufactures from offsetting their input taxes & which would be passed on to the end consumer with an inflated price.
 - The present 5% would ensures that the manufacturer can utilize ITC & in case of overflow of ITC, claim refund.
 - Hence exemption to the vaccine from GST would be counterproductive without benefitting the consumer.
- **Present Taxes & Sharing:**
 - A 5% GST is levied on domestic supplies & commercial imports of vaccines.
 - A 12% GST on COVID drugs & oxygen concentrators.
 - These items are already exempted from customs duty & health cess.
 - Also, IGST exemption is provided for all COVID relief material imported by the red cross for free distribution.
 - The GST revenues collected from the sale of vaccines is shared between centre & states & a further 41% of the centre's collections devolve to the states.

Some experts feel that categorizing domestic supplies as zero-rated might be a better option than granting a full exemption since it will pave the way for availing input tax credit.

What are zero-rated supplies?

- Under section 2(47) of the CGST Act 2017, a supply is exempt when it attracts a nil rate or is specifically exempted, but not equivalent to being zero-rated.
- Zero rating makes the entire value chain of the supply exempt from tax.
- Also, there is no bar on availing credit of taxes paid on the input side for providing the output supply.
- As per GST laws, zero ratings applies for exports & SEZs, the addition of any category requires legal amendment.

HOW RICE & WHEAT EXPORTS HIT A RECORD HIGH

GS3: Issues related to Agriculture & exports

Context:

AS we talk about the record high exports of wheat & rice.

The Twin Records:

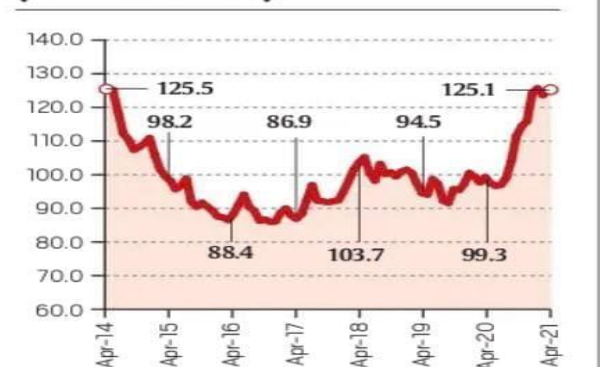
- **Last fiscal year, a record 92 million tonnes (mt) of rice & wheat was distributed from the central pool.**
 - Where 60.32 mt under the NFSA & regular schemes
 - 31.32 mt under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana(PMGKAY) in the wake of the COVID-19 induced lockdown.
 - And the total grain channeled through the public distribution system (PDS) in 2020-21 was nearly 50% higher than in normal years.
- **2020-21 also saw exports of 19.81 mt valued at \$ 9.86 billion.**
 - While rice exports were at an all-time high with 13.09 mt non-basmati & 4.63 mt basmati.
 - Wheat was also the highest since 2014-15 with 2.09 mt exports.
- These twin records- exporting approx. 20 mt of grain & also distributing 92 mt under different schemes is a remarkable story of surplus production & stocks in public warehouses.
 - This also ensured no mass starvation in India's worst pandemic since 1918 Spanish flu, the 1943 Bengal & Travancore famines.
 - At present, even after the unprecedented off take of grain, the central pool stood above the required minimum buffer of 21.04 mt.

EXPORTS AND CENTRAL POOL OFFTAKE OF FOODGRAINS (in lakh tonnes)

	EXPORTS			CENTRAL POOL OFFTAKE	
	Wheat	Basmati	Non-basmati	Wheat	Rice
2012-13	65.15	34.60	66.88	332.09	326.37
2013-14	55.72	37.54	71.48	306.22	292.11
2014-15	29.15	37.02	82.26	252.54	306.73
2015-16	6.14	40.45	63.74	313.97	318.01
2016-17	2.62	40.00	68.13	289.98	327.80
2017-18	2.30	40.52	86.33	253.33	350.40
2018-19	1.83	44.15	75.34	314.71	344.35
2019-20	2.17	44.55	50.36	272.16	349.74
2020-21	20.86	46.32	130.88	360.56	557.78

Source: Departments of Commerce and Food & Public Distribution.

FAO MONTHLY CEREAL PRICE INDEX (2014-2016=100)



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Why exports hit a record high?

- The exports have been surging mainly on the back of international prices.
 - The UNFAO's global cereal price index is currently ruling at its highest since 2014.
 - The increase in world prices has made exports from India a viable proposition.
- **Wheat's Case:**
 - Indian wheat is being offered at \$280-285 per tonne free-on-board, which is more than the govt's MSP of Rs 1975, that is fairly competitive vis-à-vis Australia & the US.
 - Wheat sourced from Gujarat, MP, or Rajasthan at below MSP can be easily exported today.
- **Rice's Case:**
 - The below-MSP sourcing for exports would be all the more in the case of rice.
 - At the MSP of Rs 1868/quintal for common paddy, the equivalent price of milled rice will be around Rs 28000 or \$ 382 per tonne.
 - This is more than the \$360/tonne rates at which white non-basmati rice is being shipped.
 - Similar to Wheat, Indian white rice is very competitive relative to Thailand & Vietnam.
- **Factors helped:**
 - The hardening of global prices helped the competitiveness of Indian grain.
 - Availability of grain at sub-MSP.
 - Currently, India has produced 110 mt of wheat, where govt has procured 90% of 36 mt from only 3 states – Punjab, MP & Haryana.
 - That allowed enough scope for below-MSP purchases in other states for supplying to domestic millers & exporters.

Way-Ahead:

With international prices continuing to rule high & the govt allocating an extra 5 kg of free grain on the same pattern as PMGKAY last year, the prospects for exports look good shortly. In contrast to the 1943 famines, this is unlikely to lead to any food scarcity.

COVID INDUCED CRISIS ON INDIAN DAIRY SECTOR**GS3: Issues related to Agriculture & Agricultural Income****Context:**

Here we talk about the pandemic induced crisis in the Indian Dairy sector

What's happening?

- In the 1st wave of the COVID, even when the economy contracted by 7.2% in 2020-21, the agriculture & allied sectors put up spectacular performance with an annual growth of 3.4%.
- But the 2nd wave has thrown the milk producers into a deep crisis, the further aggravated their crisis.

Stats/Data:

- Among the farm-dependent population, those involved in dairying & livestock constitute 70 million.
- The total workforce exclusively engaged in the raising of cattle & buffalo is 7.7 million, among them, 69% are female workers which is 5.72% of the total female workforce of India.

The Dairy Sector Crisis:

- The livestock sector contributed 28% of total Agri GVA in 2019-20.
- With a growth rate of 6% per annum, milk production has been supporting many farmer families in times of crisis/calamities.
- During crop failures due to natural calamities, milk production rises because farmers depend more on animal husbandry.
- In India, Milk producers are highly susceptible to even minor shocks as the demand for milk & its products is sensitive to changes in employment & income of consumers.

- In India, unlike sugarcane & cereals producing farmers, the cattle rearers are unorganized & don't have the political clout for rights advocacy.
- Though in terms of value, milk produced outweighs the combined value of the output of cereals in India.
- Even when in India, dairy cooperatives handle about 40% of the total marketable surplus of the milk, yet small & landless farmers ignore it because of its fat-based pricing which is 20-30% less than quantity-based pricing in the open market.
 - Moreover during the early lactation phase, fat content in milk is low & farmers manage their livelihoods by selling milk in the open market at a higher price.
- However, the 2nd wave which has reached rural & remote areas resulted in a self-imposed ban on the door-to-door sale of milk by households, which forced farmers to sell the entire produce to dairy cooperatives at lower prices.
- Even govt admitted that milk producers in India have been facing an unprecedented livelihood crisis because of:
 - Cut down of demand for milk due to shops closure.
 - The severe shortage of fodder & feed has pushed up the input cost.
 - Further, the availability of timely veterinary services has led to the death of milch animals.

Govt interventions & its evaluations:

- Animal Husbandry & Dairying Dept started nationwide Artificial Insemination programme with a target to augment milk productivity to 3000kg/annum/animal from present 1860 point.
- This would generate an expected additional income of Rs 67k cr.
 - But the programme is facing with technicians shortage that would result in the delay of programme completion.
- Recently govt has included Dairy farmers in the Kisan Credit Card Programme that provides a zero-risk scheme for banks as the dairy cooperatives deduct the loan installment from the sale proceeds of milk supplied & remits to the bank.
 - But in reality, not even 1/4th of 1.5 cr dairy farmer's application forwarded to the banks.
- Even Dairying has been brought under MGNREGA to compensate farmers for the income loss due to COVID-19.
 - However, the budgetary allocation of MGNREGA for 2021-22 was curtailed by 34.5% in relation to 2020-21 estimates.

Way-Ahead:

- The dairy farmers need to be provided with a stable market & ensured remunerative price for liquid milk.
- It also need to provide an uninterrupted supply of fodder & cattle feed at a reasonable price.
- It also needs to ensure a regular supply of veterinary service & medicines.

CATCH THE NEW TECH WAVE

GS3: Digital Economy & Block Chain Technology

Context:

Here we talk about opportunities posed by Crypto currency to India

What's happening?

- In a astonishing event, the Ethereum founder has donated crypto currency worth \$ 1 billion to support pandemic relief work in India.
- Recent China's crackdown on crypto currency has wiped out trillion dollars from the global crypto market within a 24 hrs span.
 - The crypto market grew by 500% even while the pandemic unleashed global economic carnage has not been seen since the Great Depression.

- Within 2-days of the China-provoked crash, the crypto market value again recovered by over 10%.
- This kind of extreme volatility has always been a concern for regulators & investors.

Brief about Block chain Technology & Crypto currency:

- Crypto currency is a fully decentralized, peer-to-peer electronic cash system that didn't need the purview of any 3rd party financial institution.
- It was a response to the lack of trust in the existing banking system that was reflected in the 2008 global financial crisis.
- Even though govts fully support it but Crypto currency has been one of the extraordinary stories of modern economic history.
- The crypto currency is based on an underlying system called Block chain technology that has far-reaching benefits.
- The basic architecture of block chain is a network where people share the extra space & computational power in their computers to create a global super-computer that is accessible to everyone. This network performs functions such as
 - Verification of transactions & contracts,
 - Updating & maintenance of these records in the form of tamper-proof ledgers.
 - The tasks are normally done by large intermediary organizations like banks.
- The participants of a network known as validators who were rewarded for their efforts by transaction fees.
- Integrating block chain into these sectors could result in hundreds of billions of dollars in savings.
 - Block chain could make every aspect of e-governance & judiciary more efficient & transparent.
- The crypto currency that is not backed up by any public institution would be able to shake up the financial markets.
 - Within a span of a decade, bitcoin has surpassed the size of most modern nation's economies.

India & Crypto currency:

- In India, the reflex action of law enforcement & taxation agencies has clamored for a ban on cryptocurrency on grounds of:
 - Possible misuse of these instruments such as
 - Money laundering
 - Terror funding
 - Drug & human trafficking
 - Cybercrimes & blackmailing
- In 2018 RBI barred the financial institutions from supporting crypto transactions but SC overturned it in 2020.
 - Still, Indian banks block crypto transactions.
- Even govt has circulated a draft bill outlawing all crypto currency activities.
- Despite no policy in place, RBI has announced the launch of a private block chain-supported official digital currency similar to the digital Yuan.
- India's impractical effort to while decoupling crypto currencies from their underlying block chain technology & reap benefits shows its lack of understanding of this disruptive innovation.

- Thousands of companies across the globe are working on projects that could bring in paradigm changes that make digital space more redistributive & fairer.
 - In 2021, while block chain-based startups worldwide raised \$2.6 billion in funding, Indian startups received less than 0.2% of that total amount.

Way-Ahead:

- Regulation is needed to prevent previous problems & misuse of cryptocurrencies & to protect unsuspecting investors from excessive market volatility & scams.
 - But effective regulation needs to be clear, transparent, coherent & animated by a vision.
- Any new regulation made in the sector should prevent the misuse of these digital assets without hindering innovation & investments.
- Provisions have to make route the value extracted from these networks transparently into the financial system.

Conclusion:

India was a late adopter in all the previous phases of the digital revolution. It is time for India to catch up with the crypto revolution. The world is now on the cusp of the next transformation led by block chain & AI. It is high time for India to channel its human capital, expertise & resources into the revolution & to emerge as the winner. To achieve this All India need is to have clear-headed policymaking.

BENEFITS UNDER PENSION SCHEMES FOR COVID-HIT FAMILIES

GS3: Pension & Insurances Issues.

Context:

Here we talk about the benefits of extended pension coverage & insurance for COVID impacted families.

What's happening?

- Recently govt has announced an extension of pension coverage & insurance benefits for dependents of those who died of COVID.
- The pension coverage under the ESIC scheme is now extended to all registered dependents of those who died of COVID.
- Similarly, it extended insurance benefits under the EDLI scheme for EPFO registered members.

ESIC Scheme benefits:

Coverage under ESIC:

- ESI act applies to all factories & notified establishments employing 10 or more & applies to employees drawing wages up to Rs 21000/month.
- It covers nearly 3.5 crores of families & provides benefits to 13.5 crore beneficiaries.

The Scheme:

- All the dependent family members of a person who died of COVID will be eligible for a pension equivalent to 90% of the average daily wage drawn by the existing rules.
- The benefit will be available retrospectively from last year's March.
- Eligibility conditions include:
 - The insured pension must have been registered on the ESIC online portal at least 3 months before the diagnosis of COVID resulting in death.
 - Also, he must have been employed for wages & contributions for at least 78 days should have been paid or payable for the deceased insured person during a period of one year immediately preceding the COVID diagnosis.

EPFO-EDLI:

EPFO Coverage:

- EPFO covers organizations employing 20 or more employees & any employee who has an EPF account automatically becomes eligible for EDLI Scheme.
- The EDLI scheme is managed based on a 0.5% monthly wages contribution paid by the employer to the fund & there is no employee contribution.

The scheme:

- The amount of maximum insurance benefit under EPFO-EDLI has been increased to Rs 7 lakh.
- The provision of minimum insurance benefit of Rs 2.5 lakh has been restored & apply retrospectively from last year's February.
- Eligibility:
 - Govt tweaked significant eligibility conditions for the workers
 - Now benefits are available to worker's families also who have changed jobs in the last 12 months preceding death.
 - All surviving dependent family members of EPFO are eligible to avail benefits of EDLI in case of death of the member.
 - About 6.53 crore families are expected to avail themselves of benefits.

HOW FERTILISER SUBSIDY WORKS

GS3: Issues related to Agriculture Subsidies

Context:

Here we talk about the fertilizer subsidy of India.

What is the issue?

- The central govt has announced a 140% increase in the subsidy on Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP) which is estimated to cost the exchequer an additional Rs 14775 crore in the coming Kharif season alone.

DAP & its importance to Farmers:

- Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP) is the second most commonly used fertilizer in India after urea, which is applied just before or at the beginning of sowing as it is high in phosphorus that stimulates root development.
 - Without well-developed roots, plants growth is stagnated & takes a long time to mature.

DAP Subsidy Scheme:

- For urea, the MRP is controlled by govt & the subsidy per tonne is varied according to the market. In simple, for urea price fixed but the subsidy is varied.
- But for other fertilisers, the MRP is decontrolled & companies fix their own MRP & govt pays a fixed Subsidy. In other terms, MRP is varied but the Subsidy is fixed.

Subsidy & Pricing Mechanism:

- The subsidy for all non-urea fertilisers varies which is governed by nutrient-based subsidy.
- Depending upon the nutrient content for different fertilisers, the per-tonne subsidy also varies.
 - For 2020-21, the centre fixed the NBS rates at 18.8/kg for N, 14.9/kg for P, 10.12/kg for S.
- Till recently when the DAP subsidy for 2020-21 was Rs 10231/tonne, companies were selling DAP at around Rs 24000/tonne because the international prices were at reasonable levels.

- But global prices of fertilisers & inputs have surged over the past 6-7 months, tracking a general bull run in commodities, that has made it unviable for companies to continue selling at the old rates.
 - So all the fertilizer companies have announced the hike in their MRP for DAP & other non-Urea fertilizers.
 - The hikes were effective from April 1st till the old stock lasts.
 - As the old stock running out, the companies started selling the new material at higher rates.
 - The farmers realized the extent of the price increase in the May 2nd week.
 - The focus fell on DAP because a steep 58% increase was too much.

Govt measures:

- The dept of fertilizers had notified NBS rates for 2021-22 on par with last year's levels, leaving companies little choice but to go ahead with the MRP hikes.
- But a recent meeting chaired by PM on global fertilizers price, the historic decision to increase the subsidy on DAP from the existing Rs 10231/tonne to Rs 24231/tonne.
 - The dept of fertilizers too notified a higher NBS rate for P. while keeping those for the N, K, S nutrients unchanged.
 - This will enable; ie companies to sell DAP at earlier MRP but other fertilizers at hiked MRP.

Further-Ahead:

The timing of keeping at least DAP prices is good as farmers will start sowing operations with the arrival of the southwest monsoon rains. It also sends positive signals to the farmers in taking up dialogues with govt.

IMPACT OF THE SECOND WAVE ON THE ECONOMY

GS3: Issues related to resource mobilization & redistribution

Context:

Here we talk about the impact of the pandemic on the economy.

Although the 2nd wave is receding, it continues to have a significant adverse impact on the economy & livelihoods.

Impact & Issues:

- The impact of 2nd wave will be lower than 1st but it is spreading to rural areas where health infra is very weak.
- The overall GDP growth in 2021-22 would be less than the expected growth i.e. 8%, as per current data the GDP growth be the same or lesser than 2019-20.
 - This means India apart from having slow down for the past 8 quarters, would have zero growth for this financial year also.
- India would take more years to become a \$ 5 trillion economy, it requires much more effort to compensate for the lost growth & to put a higher growth path.
- Similar to 1st wave, 2nd wave is widening the inequalities.
 - The State of Working in India 2021 report, revealed that both poverty & inequality increased during 1st wave which pushed 230 million people into poverty.
 - The CMIE data shows a decline in incomes & rising unemployment during the 2nd wave.
 - Currently, 56% of households reported income loss & Unemployment peaked at 14.5%, higher in rural areas.

- Recent RBI bulletin says that the impact of the 2nd wave appears to be U- Shaped where the most vulnerable are blue-collar, unorganized & front-line workers.
 - Whereas in 1st wave it is K-shaped, where wages declined but company profits are increased.
 - The informal workers, MSMEs, etc. suffered a lot of income loss & employment.
 - With rising inequalities, the recovery in post 2nd wave is also likely to be K-shaped.

A 3-Pronged Approach: Steps needed for Higher Growth & Inequality Reduction:

- The need is to have a Aggressive vaccination programme & improving healthcare facilities both in rural & urban areas:**
 - The crisis has to be used as an opportunity to revamp & create universal healthcare facilities, particularly for rural areas.
 - Govt needs to focus more on reducing Vaccine inequality between urban & rural areas.
 - Reducing the health crisis can lead to an economic revival.
- Capital investment in infrastructure:**
 - The Development Financial Institution for long-term infrastructure project funding is being established.
 - The infrastructure investment boost can lift the economy out of the slowdown, revive employment & reduce inequalities.
- Need for Safety Nets:**
 - During the last 1 year, MSMEs & informal workers have been experiencing loss of earnings due to COVID waves.
 - Therefore govt needs to provide safety nets in the form of food grains, expand work under MGNREGA in both urban & rural areas & undertake a cash transfer to provide a minimum basic income.

RBI on economic growth says that the biggest toll of the 2nd wave is in terms of a demand shock as aggregate supply is less impacted.

- The two views on Consumption revival:
 - Once 2nd wave subsides & the majority vaccinated, consumption returns to normal levels.
 - The demand will be a constraint because of loss of income & employment.
- From the present 30% of GDP, the investment has to be increased in the medium term to 35%-40% of GDP for higher growth & job creation.
- As the global economy is reviving, India needs to come out from protectionist regime & reduce tariff rates because Export is the main engine of growth & employment creation.
- Although Monetary policy is accommodative, the fiscal policy needs to play a vital role in achieving the growth objectives, jobs & equity by expanding the fiscal base.

Conclusion:

For a more equitable post-pandemic growth, the need of the hour is to include vaccination, rural healthcare expansion & cash transfers as a part of the strategy to boost demand & address inequalities.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND SAFE HARBOUR

GS2: Issues related to Fundamental rights

GS3: Issues related to Social Media

Context:

Here we talk about the impact of new rules under Section 79 of the IT ACT on social media.

What is the issue?

Recently new rules for social media platforms & digital news outlets called the "Intermediary Guidelines & Digital Media Ethics Code" came into effect that asked

- All social media platforms to set up a grievances redressal & compliance mechanism, which included appointing a resident grievance officer, chief compliance officer & a nodal contact person.
- The platforms to submit monthly reports on complaints received & action taken.
- The 3rd requirement is for instant messaging apps was to make provisions for tracking the first originator of a message.

Failure to comply with any one of the above requirements would take away the indemnity provided to social media intermediaries under Section 79 of the IT Act.

What is Section 79 of the IT Act?

- **Section 79 says** –“Any intermediary shall not be held legally or otherwise liable for any 3rd party information, data, or communication link made available or hosted on its platform”.
 - The protection shall be applicable if the intermediary does not in any way, initiate the transmission of the message in question, select the receiver of the transmitted message & do not modify any information contained in the transmission.
- In other words, As long as a platform acts just as the messenger carrying a message from point to point, without interfering in any manner, it will be safe from any legal prosecution brought upon due to the message being transmitted.
- The protection under Section 79 is not granted if the intermediary, despite being notified by the govt does not immediately disable access to the material under question.

The reason behind the introduction of these protection provisions:

- The need for protection of intermediaries from actions of third parties came into following following a police case in 2004.
 - When a Ceo of a website was arrested for obscene videos posted by the user.
 - In 2005, the Delhi HC held that prima facie, a case made out against Ceo & website.
 - The Ceo was held liable under Section 85 of the IT Act that says When a company commits an offence under the IT Act, all executives in charge at that time should be liable & proceeded against.
- But in 2012, SC overturned this judgment & held that Ceo & website could not be held accountable since they were not directly involved in the transaction.
 - Following the judgment, the IT Act amended & section 79 protection provisions were introduced.

New rules impact on Section 79 protection:

- No drastic impact on social media intermediaries will occur.
- As of now, as per new guidelines except Whatsapp, no social media giant has not appointed a resident grievance officer, chief compliance officer & nodal contact persons.
- They also placed to submit monthly action taken reports on grievances & complaints submitted to them.
- This all leads to undermining the safe harbor protections & following are consequences of it:
 - If any post violates local laws, the law agency not only books the person who shared the content but also the executives of the companies as well.
 - The liability can even be criminal in nature where CCO can be made to serve in prison up to 7 years.

- It could also lead to situations where employees of the platform may be held liable for no fault on their part.

Global norms on safe harbor protection for social media:

- In the US, Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act provides Internet companies a safe harbor from any content user posts on these platforms.
 - Like Section 79 of India's Act, Section 230 of the Communication Decency Act states that an intermediary shall only be like a bookstore owner who can't be held accountable for the books in the store unless it is proven that there is a connection between writer or publisher of the book & store owner.

Criticism/Concerns of new rules:

- The rule 4(2) provision requiring intermediaries to enable identification of the 1st originator of information on the platform
 - could also put journalists & activists at risk of retaliation in India & infringe upon rights to free speech & expression.
- The traceability provision also breaks the end-to-end encryption & impermissibly infringes upon the user's fundamental rights to privacy & freedom of speech.
 - Nowhere in the world intermediaries requires to enable the identification of the 1st originator of end-to-end encrypted information.
 - Across the globe, it was recognized the important benefits of end-to-end encryption & the dangers of undermining that security protocol.
- Rule 4(2) infringes upon Fundamental rights to privacy without satisfying the three-part test set forth by the apex court in *KS Puttaswamy vs Union of India* on aspects of legality, necessity & proportionality.

GENERAL STUDIES-4

SOLI SORABJEE: DEFENDER OF FREE SPEECH

A remarkable life in law, a tireless champion of civil liberties, press freedom, humanity

GS4: Personalities in Public Life.

Context:

Here we discuss the contributions of former AGI & renowned jurist Soli Sorabjee, who had died due to COVID.

About his life:

- He was born in a Paris family & trained at Bombay Law College along with Fali Nariman.
- He was started his career in 1853 at the Bombay High Court under Nani Palkhivala's guidance.
- Sorabjee was a warm, genteel, intellectual practitioner of the law of an era where facts & interpretation of the statutes were the overriding consideration.
- Sorabjee served as Attorney General between 1998-2004.
- He was a Special Representative to the UNHRC.
- From 1998-2004, he also served as chairman of the UN sub-committee on the Protection & Promotion of Human Rights.
- He served as a member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague.
- He was a life trustee of the India International Centre.
- He was awarded with Padma Vibushan

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- In 1997, he was appointed by the UN as a Special Rapporteur for Nigeria to report on the human rights conditions in the country.

Sorabjee Contributions & Achievements:

- When his contemporaries did not focus on social & economic rights, Sorabjee stood for civil & political rights mainly on the right to freedom of speech & expression.
- He by assisting Nani Palkhivala, made a significant contribution to the interpretation of constitutional law in Independent India especially in two landmark Golaknath & Keshavananda Bharati cases which protected the rights of the individual against the state.
- During the emergency, he provided legal assistance to many political prisoners under the draconian MISA.
- He believed judges after retirement should keep away from political positions.
- He was at the forefront of helping the poor & downtrodden

Contribution through Landmark Cases:

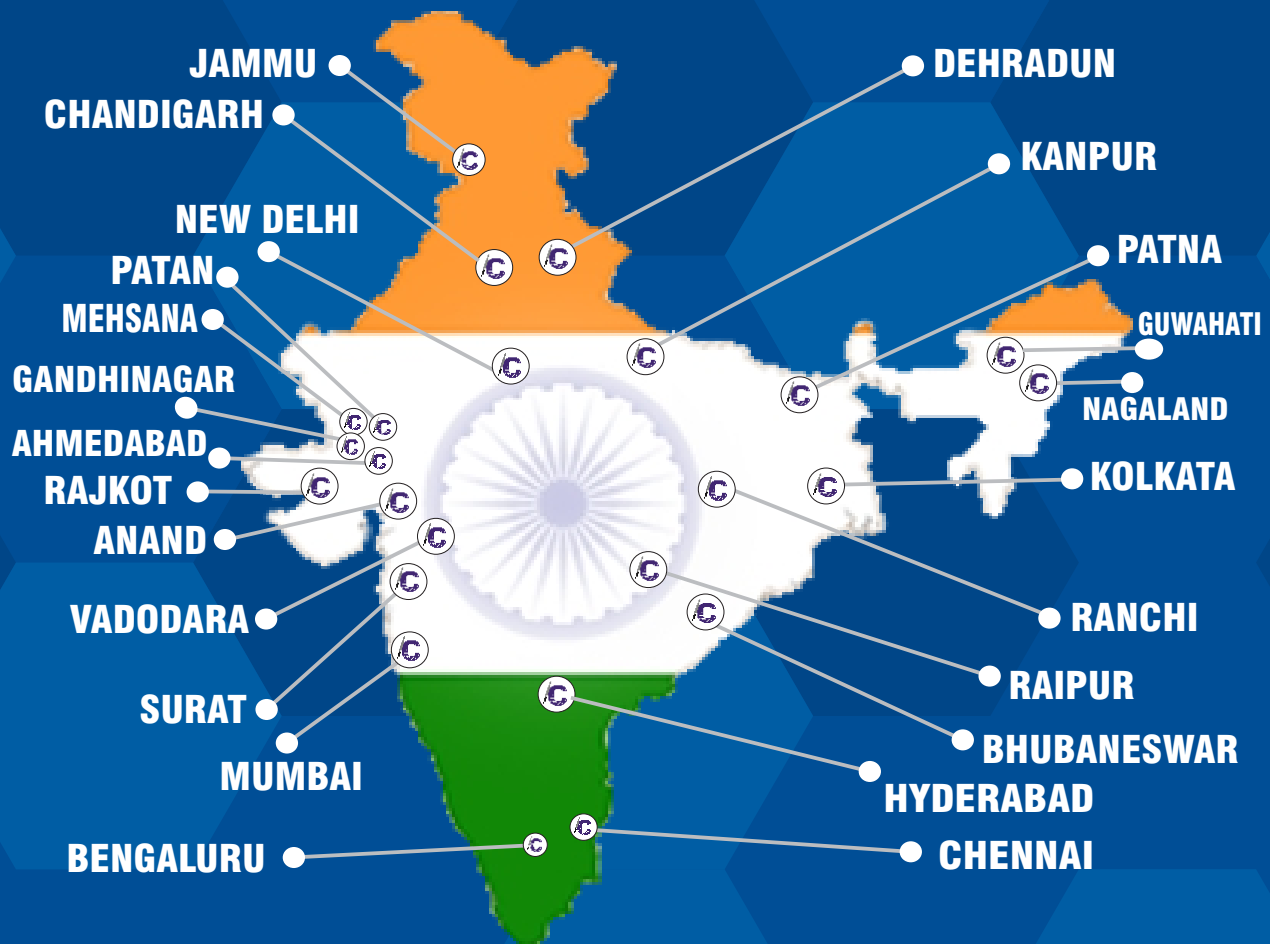
- In the 1970s, as assistant to Palkhivala, he represented the **Keshavananda Bharati case**, which gave landmark judgment & evolved the **famous "Basic Structure Of Constitution" concept**.
- In the **1978 landmark ruling in Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India also known as Passport Impounding Case**, Sorabjee despite appeared for the govt defended the petitioners right to be heard.
 - The court also held that **due process is substantive & not merely procedural in personal liberty cases**.
- In the 1980s, he represented the milestone **St Xavier's College petition** against Gujarat state, where the court **upheld the rights of minority bodies to set up & run their own educational institutions**.
- In the **1994 SR Bommai V Union of India case**, Sorabjee argued that the proclamation of the **President's rule is subject to judicial review, despite the protection that the Governor's office enjoys under the Constitution**.
 - This **judgment has come to be the litmus test for assessing the constitutionality of Article 356**.
 - Due to this, the misuse of this article to dismiss inconvenient state govt has drastically reduced.
- In the **Bhopal Gas Tragedy Case**, Sorabjee stood by the victims not for political reasons but out of his commitment to human rights.
- Although as AGI, he was criticized for advising the govt not to pursue the extradition of company officials.

Conclusion:

The Supreme Court went through a phase focusing on civil & political rights in the 1970s, & then on social & economic rights in the 1980-90s.

The time now has once again come for the court to focus on political & civil rights- mainly the right to speech & dissent.

The present & future generations have to take the lead & follow the ideals of Sorabjee to cherish the dream of a **True Democratic Nation which our constitutional forefathers dreamt off**.



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