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G.S PAPER II

1. POLITY

1.1 Inner Line Permit & CAA

Why in news?

The Supreme Court declined the petition to stay the operation of a Presidential order pertaining to Inner Line Permit (ILP) in Assam.

What is Inner Line?

- A concept drawn by colonial rulers, the Inner Line separated the tribal-populated hill areas in the Northeast from the plains.
- To enter and stay for any period in these areas, Indian citizens from other areas need an Inner Line Permit (ILP).
- The Inner Line protects Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram, and Manipur was added lately.

Where is the origin?

- The concept originates from the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act (BEFR), 1873.
- The policy of exclusion first came about as a response to the reckless expansion of British entrepreneurs into new lands, which threatened British political relations with the hill tribes.
- The BEFR prohibits the entry of an outsider (British subject or foreign citizen) into the area beyond the Inner Line without a pass and his purchase of land there.
- The Inner Line also protects the commercial interests of the British from the tribal communities.

What is the change made?

- After Independence, the Indian government replaced “British subjects” with “Citizen of India”.
- In 2013, the Home Ministry told that the main aim of ILP system is to prevent settlement of other Indian nationals in the States where ILP regime is prevalent.
- It said that settlement is prevented in order to protect the indigenous/tribal population.

How is it connected to the Citizenship Amendment Act?

- The CAA relaxes eligibility criteria for certain categories of migrants from three countries seeking Indian citizenship.
- But, it exempts certain categories of areas, including those protected by the Inner Line system.
- Amid protests against the Act, the Adaptation of Laws (Amendment) Order, 2019, issued by the President, amended the BEFR, 1873.
- This amendment extended the ILP to Manipur and parts of Nagaland that were not earlier protected by ILP.

What is the petition?

- AsomJatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) and All Tai Ahom Students’ Union (ATASU) petitioned the Supreme Court against the Presidential order.
- They claimed that the order deprived Assam of the powers to implement the Inner Line system in its districts and limit the applicability of CAA.
- The original BEFR included the then Assam districts of Kamrup, Darrang, Nagaon, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, and Cachar.
- Noting this, the petition said that the order took away the Assam government’s permissive power to implement the ILP.
- This could have made the CAA inapplicable in these areas, the petition said.

- Groups such as the AJYCP have long been campaigning for long for implementation of the ILP in Assam.
- The CAA has given fresh legs to the demand.

What does the SC order imply?

- The petition had sought a stay on the Presidential order, which the Supreme Court did not grant.
- The court said it will have to hear what the other side (government) has to say on the matter.
- It will hear the matter again in two weeks.

1.2 7.5% Quota for Govt. School Students in MBBS Intake

Why in news?

The Tamil Nadu Cabinet approved an ordinance, envisaging 7.5% horizontal reservation in the State government's quota of MBBS/BDS seats, for students of government higher secondary schools.

What is the long-felt need?

- The decision is a well-intentioned move to address the problem of poor representation from government schools in MBBS/BDS courses.
- This issue has been in existence even prior to the introduction of NEET (National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test).
- The issue of inequity has come in for criticism against NEET which came into operation in Tamil Nadu in 2017.
- Since then, there have been demands against NEET.
- Concerns were raised against the design and form of NEET.
- It was seen as being loaded against students of rural areas, government schools, Backward and Most Backward Classes, and SC/STs.
- Students from the CBSE stream perceivably enjoy greater advantage in NEET than those from the State board.
- Also, most candidates clearing NEET in Tamil Nadu are invariably those who undergo private coaching.
- The Cabinet decision now is based on a recommendation made by a panel in this regard.

What was the panel recommendation?

- It was headed by former judge of the Madras High Court, P. Kalaiyaran.
- The panel had observed that there was a “cognitive gap” among students studying in government schools.
- It thus suggested that students who had passed the higher secondary exam after having studied for 7 consecutive years in government schools be provided reservation.
- The prerequisite for qualification is that they should have qualified in the NEET.
- The “quota within quota” covers government seats in private colleges too.

How legally sound is the ordinance?

- The proposed ordinance would be sent to the TN Governor Banwarilal Purohit for assent.
- It is unclear whether the horizontal reservation will pass legal scrutiny.
- In 2002, the Madras HC quashed the horizontal quota of 25% in professional courses for higher secondary students from schools in village panchayats.
- However, this time, the State has acted on a panel recommendation.
- Apparently, there is also nothing in NEET's rules against States providing “special reservation” out of their quota of seats.
- This was even articulated, in 2017, by former Union Health Minister J.P. Nadda, in favour of rural students.
- The trend of horizontal reservation is also happening with respect to national law universities for students from the host States.

- In Karnataka too, there is a scheme of horizontal reservation of 15% of State government seats for rural students in admission to professional courses.

1.3 RTI on PM CARES Fund

Why in news?

Right to Information (RTI) applications seeking information pertaining to the PM CARES Fund have been stonewalled.

What is the concern?

- This violation of peoples' RTI is particularly concerning given the unprecedented crisis gripping the nation.
- Relief and welfare programmes funded through public money are the lifeline of people who lost income-earning opportunities during the lockdown.
- The poor and marginalised affected by the public health emergency are to have any hope of obtaining the benefits of government schemes.
- So, they must have access to relevant information.

What is a worrying narrative?

- A narrative seems to have emerged that public scrutiny of actions of the government is undesirable during the crisis and citizens must unquestioningly trust the state.
- This undermines the basic democratic tenet that citizens' oversight is necessary to ensure they are able to access their rights.
- Without information, peoples' ability to perform that role is eviscerated and corruption thrives.
- The RTI Act, 2005, has empowered citizens to access information from public authorities and hold them accountable.

Why openness is crucial?

- During the Covid-19 crisis, proper implementation of the law has assumed greater significance than ever before.
- Information related to implementation of relief measures announced by governments should be widely disseminated.
- Greater openness would **prevent controversies** of the kind exemplified by faulty testing kits and fake ventilators.
- It is a time when incentives for secrecy are great, and the scope for discretionary actions are wide.
- During this time, a culture of openness needs to be created to empower people to participate in the decisions that have profound effects on their lives and livelihoods.

How accessibility can be ensured?

- Numerous instances have been reported of Covid-19 patients requiring treatment in ICUs being shunted from one hospital to another.
- This could be prevented if hospitals and health centres publicly provide real-time information about availability of facilities.
- To ensure accessibility to those who need it the most, relevant information must be made available in local languages and widely disseminated.
- In fact, this is a statutory obligation of public authorities under Section 4 of the RTI Act.

How did the transparency watchdogs perform?

- Around 21 out of 29 commissions in the country did not hold a single hearing during the first three stages of the lockdown.
- The Central Information Commission and some State commissions used audio and video conferencing to hear and dispose cases.
- But, most commissions did not make provision for hearing even urgent matters.
- In the current scenario, the role of information commissions is crucial.



What is the way forward?

- In the midst of a pandemic, it is reasonable to expect delays in processing information requests.
- However, the public authorities must not be allowed to interpret the crisis as a justification for not complying with the RTI Act.
- People must be able to obtain information about how and where their money is being spent in the efforts to combat the pandemic.
- They should also know whether the funds are reaching the intended beneficiaries.

2. GOVERNANCE

2.1 Andhra Pradesh Scrapped Buses Scam

Why in news?

The Andhra Pradesh Transport Department has initiated an inquiry into a scrapped buses scam.

What happened?

- Transport officials contacted Ashok Leyland about its sale of scrap buses to two companies based at Tadipatri in Anantapur district.
- Ashok Leyland confirmed that in 2018, it sold 40 scrap buses to C Gopal Reddy and 26 scrap buses to Jatadhara Industries Private Ltd.
- Both these companies are illegally using them in private travels business.

Why is it illegal to use scrapped vehicles?

- In 2017, the Supreme Court had ordered that all vehicles that are not compliant to BS IV emission norms shall not be sold in India by any manufacturer or dealer from April 1, 2017.
- It also said that the registering authorities are prohibited from registering such vehicles from April 1, 2017.
- Plying the scrap and unfit vehicles was in violation of the Supreme Court orders and also put the lives of people at risk.

Who are involved in the scam?

- **Jatadhara Industries** is owned by J C Uma Reddy, wife of former TDP MLA J C Prabhakar Reddy, and their son J S Asmith Reddy.
- **C Gopal Reddy** is a close associate of Prabhakar Reddy.
- Prabhakar Reddy and Gopal Reddy were arrested.

What did the investigation find?

- It found that all the condemned vehicles were first registered with transport registration authority in Nagaland.
- They were brought to Anantapur district with an NOC from Nagaland.
- A team comprising officials of transport department and Anantapur Police went to Nagaland.
- They found that forged documents including Ashok Leyland invoices were used to get the vehicles registered there.
- The buses were shown as latest models and BS IV compliant.
- Though they purchased the vehicles as scrap, they tried to make them fit and road worthy on record for their unlawful gain.

What action was taken by the AP Transport Department?

- It lodged 24 police complaints against Jatadhara Industries and C Gopal Reddy in Anantapur and three FIRs in Kurnool.

- Apart from cases for cheating the government, cases were registered for producing fake insurance policies before RTAs, and endangering the safety of people on the road, and disregarding road safety.

Where are these buses now?

- Some of these vehicles have since been sold on to various others in AP.
- They purchased 154 vehicles (Jatadhara Industries got 50 and C Gopal Reddy 104) of BS III emission standards sold as scrap.
- All these were registered as BS IV vehicles in various parts of the country, including at RTA Ananthapur.
- The AP transport department has blocked and seized these buses.
- About 28 vehicles are in other states and transport authorities there have been informed to block and seize the vehicles.

2.2 Civil Servants as Joint Secretaries

Why in news?

A Union government circular set new conditions for empanelling civil servants for appointment as joint secretaries in central ministries.

What is the circular about?

- Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) stipulated that the qualifying service period for empanelment of Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers as joint secretaries at the Centre would be 16 years.
- Even earlier, an IAS officer would usually become eligible for empanelment as a joint secretary at the Centre after 16 years of service.
- However, in reality, many of them would get empanelled only after 18 years of service.
- The reiteration of empanelment as joint secretary after 16 years is, therefore, reassuring to the IAS officers.

What is the issue with the circular?

- The circular stated that not less than 2 years of experience at the deputy secretary or director level under the Central Staffing Scheme (CSS) would be mandatory for empanelment as joint secretaries at the Centre.
- This would be applicable to IAS officers from the 2007 batch onwards.
- The circular will have significant implications for many IAS officers across the country.

What was the bold step taken by the government previously?

- In 2019, the government decided to hire private-sector professionals as joint secretaries at the Centre.
- It was a bold step to get non-IAS experts to work in the government.
- In 2019, nine private-sector professionals were hired as joint secretaries in different ministries.
- Almost a year later, another decision has been taken that would make the journey of an IAS official to the post of a joint secretary at the Centre a little more difficult.

What does the joint secretary post mean for the IAS officers?

- For an IAS officer, the post of a joint secretary is almost like a gateway for securing a longish tenure in important positions in central ministries in New Delhi.
- A five-year stint as joint secretary is usually followed up with a promotion as additional secretary.
- After that, the officer will be promoted as either special secretary or secretary till retirement.
- Therefore, many IAS officers who joined the service after 2006 are not amused by the decision to introduce the new condition.

What do IAS officers prefer?

- Most IAS officers prefer to spend the first decade and a half of their tenure in the states.



- This is because of the relatively better designations, more power and perquisites like housing that are more generous than those they can enjoy at the Centre as a deputy secretary or even as a director.

What did the government do to make the post attractive?

- A deputy secretary at the Centre is a joint secretary in the state secretariat or a district magistrate and a director at the Centre is often a special secretary in the state secretariat.
- Even while at the Centre, a deputy secretary or a director would not be entitled to an official transport for a pick-up from residence till a few years ago.
- In 2016, these rules were modified to allow hiring of cars to pick them up from their residence.
- In February 2020, this facility was extended by another three years in a bid to make the position a bit more attractive.
- This facility was also extended to address the shortage of deputy secretaries and directors coming in from states under the CSS.

What is the monopoly?

- The IAS is only one of the 37 All India Services or Group-A Services, which take part in the CSS.
- It was created to meet the Centre's need for fresh talent at the middle or senior levels in its ministries.
- The officers would help the ministries to formulate policy and implement or monitor various programmes with assistance from domain experts.
- The idea was to make use of officers from specialised services like the Indian Police Service, Indian Economic Service, Indian Audit and Account Service, Central Engineering Service and Indian Statistical Service.
- But in practice, it is the IAS which has virtually monopolised the process of empanelling officers as joint secretary at the Centre.

What is the conclusion?

- The 2-year minimum stint as deputy secretary or director at the Centre for all IAS officers before being empanelled as joint secretary may help the government meet its shortage of deputy secretaries and directors.
- But it is debatable if the move will help the Centre recruit more non-IAS officers as joint secretary under the CSS.

3. SOCIAL JUSTICE

3.1 Custodial Deaths - Tamil Nadu Case (Sathankulam)

Why in news?

'Custodial death' of a father and son in Sathankulam town in Tamil Nadu's Thoothukudi district has led to protests.

What happened?

- The deceased have been identified as P. Jayaraj (58), a timber trader, and his son, J. Benicks, 31.
- They ran a mobile phone service and sales centre in Sattankulam town in Thoothukudi district.
- On June 19, 2020, Jayaraj was in the mobile phone showroom of his son Benicks.
- Personnel from the Sathankulam police station were on patrol duty in the evening.
- The police picked him up for allegedly keeping the shop open in the evening in violation of lockdown restrictions.
- The police reportedly verbally abused Jayaraj and assaulted him.
- His son Benicks, who came to the spot, appealed to the police to release his father.
- When the police allegedly assaulted Jayaraj with a baton and roughed him up, Benicks tried to save his father.
- After thrashing the father and the son, the officers took them to the police station.

- The father and the son were arrested for allegedly keeping their outlets open after permitted hours.
- Both of them were booked under several sections of the IPC including -
 - i. Section 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant)
 - ii. Section 383 (extortion by threat)
 - iii. Section 506 (ii) (criminal intimidation)
- They were remanded to judicial custody.
- The third day, after a medical check-up, the duo was lodged in the Kovilpatti sub-jail.
- That evening, local residents alleged that Benicks had complained of chest pain and Jayaraj had high fever.
- Both were taken to the Kovilpatti government hospital, where Benicks died the next day evening.
- The morning of the following day, Jayaraj too developed “chest pain”, had respiratory illness and died.
- Relatives alleged that both of them were thrashed again in the police station, as they were witnessing it from the entrance of the police station.
- Eye-witnesses have said that the father-son duo had suffered sexual torture (inflicted using lathis) at the police station.
- Jayaraj’s wife Selvarani has lodged a complaint, alleging that police brutality led to the death of her husband and son.

What was the State's response?

- In a swift response, the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court took suo motu cognisance of their death.
- It has decided to monitor the progress of the statutory magisterial probe.
- It has asked for a status report from the police, and also directed that the autopsy be video-graphed.
- Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami has announced a compensation of Rs. 10 lakh each.
- The two sub-inspectors involved have been suspended and an inspector placed on compulsory wait.

What are the serious concerns involved in this?

- **Custodial violence** is not new to India.
- Custodial deaths are often the result of the use of torture in India’s police stations for extracting admissions of crime.
- It is also common for the police to use their power and authority to settle personal scores.
- But even with such track record, the death of Jayaraj and Benicks is alarmingly absurd given the cause of arrest and the kind of violence inflicted.
- It is a wrongful abuse of authority by the law enforcement machinery.
- In this case, the father was thrashed even before being taken to the police station.
- **Lockdown** -Since the lockdown, there have been innumerable reports of the police and officials attacking citizens in the name of enforcing restrictions.
- They have been awarding personalised punishment on violators, and sometimes kicking and overturning carts containing items for sale.
- The custodial deaths flag the failure to have guidelines to handle lockdown violations.
- **Cases filed** -Their offence would have only attracted Section 188 of IPC (for disobeying the time restrictions ordered by a public servant).
- But they were also booked under other Sections stating extortion by threat and criminal intimidation.
- It is well known that the police include ‘intimidation’ in the FIR solely to obtain an order of remand, as it is non-bailable.
- The inclusion of non-bailable sections for a lockdown violation indicates a prior inclination to harass the two and cause suffering.

- **Larger concern** - If ultimately established as custodial murder, it would only mean that the problem is much deeper.
- The issue goes beyond mere lack of professionalism in investigative methods.

4. HEALTH

4.1 Handling of COVID-19 - Kerala's Strategy

What is the issue?

- Kerala has made global headlines for its handling of Covid-19, and K K Shailaja, Kerala Health Minister, has gained global attention too.
- Here is an account by her on how Kerala kept the numbers down and the challenges ahead.

What all contributed to Kerala's success model?

- **Panchayati Raj and healthcare systems** - In Kerala, the Panchayati Raj is implemented in a truly democratic way.
- The local self-governments are fully charged with power.
- The distribution of money also follows the same proportion.
- The Primary Health Centres (PHCs) are under the local-level panchayat, ensuring people-centric measures.
- **Planning** - Planning preparedness is one of the most important aspect in COVID-19 handling.
- Kerala started its planning well before in January 2020 itself.
- This was when reports on virus spread in Wuhan came out and WHO was yet to declare it a pandemic.
- Notably, many Keralites were in Wuhan.
- A Rapid Response Team meeting was held, and Kerala opened a control room at the state level.
- The Health department informed all 14 districts, district medical officers (DMOs).
- They also started district-level control rooms with expert groups in each.
- Additional health officials had different responsibilities.
- These included contact tracing, making isolation rooms and Covid hospitals, logistics collection, and even mental health.
- The State ensured that the surveillance team was at the airport to examine.
- The State then followed a rigorous strategy of trace, quarantine, test, isolate and treat.
- **Testing** - Testing is important, but Kerala did not follow the slogan, "Test, test, test, nothing else".
- Testing everybody is not necessary, as that might result in running out of testing kits etc.
- Instead, Kerala did testing in a strategic way.
- The priority is tracing first and testing the symptomatic cases first.
- Efficient and scientific quarantining is so far keeping the spread under control.
- With the help of local self-government, anganwadi workers and helpers, ASHA workers, there is a thorough watching of quarantined people.
- Every day, there is inquiry over phone or in person to check on symptoms if any.
- If detected, at once, the health department sends ambulance to the house and shifts that person to hospital and takes samples and tests.
- When new people are coming from the epicentres, there is increased testing among the highest contacts and also secondary contacts.
- Random testing is being done and sentinel surveillance testing is also there.

- **Recent resurgence of cases** - The situation changed when the lockdown was relaxed, air travel reinstated, and surface travel restarted.
- People again started to come back from other countries and also from other parts of India.
- But the State anticipated this and was well prepared for the second wave.
- It follows the same strategy of containment, tracing, testing and treating.
- Surveillance and tracing teams are deployed at airports, seaports, railway stations and checkpoints at road.
- Notably, more than 1.5 lakh people returned from the Gulf countries; a number of people tested positive.
- Population from other states included those from Chennai, Maharashtra Mumbai and Gujarat primarily.
- Not only were they positive, but also some of the people who returned from these epicentres were in a pathetic condition (advanced stages).
- This is another reason why the positive cases and deaths were increasing.
- **Strain on health systems** - The pressure on health care systems was high due to increasing cases.
- Nevertheless, the State went with Plan A, Plan B, Plan C etc.
- In Plan A, there were 3 COVID-19 hospitals in every district and nearly 1,500 beds for COVID-19 patients in each hospital.
- In Plan B, there were even more hospitals.
- Many hospitals were changed to COVID-19 hospitals with higher capacity.
- In Plan C, Kerala planned for arranging some hotels, hostels and some auditoriums.
- This is under consideration, and there is a good list of institutions under the plan.
- The State is also keeping track of human resources, not only in the government sector, but also in the private sector.
- The State is also giving training to medical resource personnel to handle the situation if many positive cases occur.
- **Community transmission** - As of now, there is no community transmission in Kerala.
- The cases are largely traceable at present.
- Some augmented samples from all parts of the society are also being tested, at a time 3,000 etc.
- Out of this, there were not many positive cases, which again shows that the virus has not entered the community.
- But the possibility of a community transmission cannot be ruled out altogether either.
- **Approach** - The overall approach in Kerala was towards breaking the chain of spread.
- Every individual is responsible. That is the slogan in Kerala: "My health is my responsibility".
- So ensuring health behaviours and habits among people was one of the key aspects in breaking the chain.

4.2 Delhi's Plasma Bank

Why in news?

The Delhi government will set up a plasma bank for coronavirus patients at the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS).

What is a plasma bank?

- The Plasma banks will extract and store plasma from people who have recovered from Covid-19.
- They will give this plasma to someone suffering from the disease.



- The bank is being started keeping in mind the experiences of many who struggle to arrange plasma for their loved ones.

At what stage is the therapy in Delhi?

- Delhi was among the first few states to get ICMR approval to conduct trials with plasma therapy, which is still at trial stage.
- Once a person contracts the virus, the blood produces antibodies and certain cells remember the antigen.
- These cells will produce antibodies when they come in contact with the same virus again.
- The plasma trial is examining if the plasma containing antibodies from recovered patients is beneficial to others as well.
- The CP therapy is not as effective on critical patients, but those with moderate symptoms appear to be responding well.

What are the results of the trial?

- In a controlled study conducted on patients at Lok Nayak Hospital, administration of the therapy was found to be safe.
- The results have also been shared with ICMR.
- While some patients were administered convalescent plasma (CP), the others were administered fresh frozen plasma (FFP).
- CP is extracted from a Covid patient who has recovered.
- FFP is extracted from a person who has no exposure to the disease.
- During the trial, it was found those who were given CP showed more improvement than those who were administered FFP.

Why is CP better than FFP?

- CP was administered to those whose respiratory rate had soared to 35.36 breaths per minute. [Normal rate is 12 to 20 breaths per minute.]
- Post administering plasma, the respiratory rate improved substantially.
- These results were better than the results seen in patients who were administered regular FFP.
- The duration of stay in the hospital was also reduced in those given CP.

Who can be a donor?

- A healthy person between the age group of 18-60 years with no co-morbidities could be a donor.
- The patient should have recovered at least three weeks before donating and tested negative for Covid-19 twice.

4.3 Homoeopathic Drug Arsenicum album - Covid-19

What is the issue?

- The Ministry of AYUSH listed a homoeopathic drug, Arsenicum album 30 among prophylactic (preventive) medicine against Covid-19.
- On several states recommending it, concerns are being raised from various circles.

What is Arsenicum album?

- Arsenicum album is considered to correct inflammation in body.
- It takes care of diarrhoea, cough and cold.
- It is used commonly by homeopaths to treat anxiety, restlessness, cold, ulcerations, burning pains, etc.
- Arsenicum album is made by heating arsenic with distilled water.
- The process is repeated several times over 3 days.
- Arsenicum album is taken in powder form or as a tablet.

- A small bottle with one course costs Rs 20-30.

What was the recommendation made?

- In January 2020, the Scientific Advisory Board of the Central Council for Research in Homoeopathy (CCRH) opined on the drug.
- Accordingly, Arsenicum album 30 could be taken as prophylactic medicine against Coronavirus infections.
- The CCRH released a fact sheet stating this medicine is only a “possible prevention” against flu.
- Soon, the AYUSH Ministry recommended taking the medicine for 3 days on an empty stomach.
- The dose is advised to be repeated after a month if COVID-19 outbreak continues locally.
- Recently, the Ministry released another notification with “preventive and prophylactic simple remedies” against Covid-19-like illness.
- Among them, it listed Arsenicum album 30 as a homeopathic solution.
- Homeopathy has reportedly been used for prevention during the epidemic of cholera, Spanish influenza, yellow fever, scarlet fever, diphtheria, typhoid, etc.

How prevalent is its use now?

- Arsenicum album 30 has been recommended by some state governments.
- These include Rajasthan, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala.
- The Maharashtra government is yet to take a formal decision.
- But the Mumbai civic authorities have been distributing the drug to high-risk populations in at least two wards.
- The Haryana prisons department and Mumbai police too are also distributing the drug to prisoners and officers respectively.
- Even in states that have no protocol for using the drug against Covid-19, people are reportedly getting to homeopathic clinics to buy the drug.
- Even local chemists have started stocking this medicine.
- The Central Drug Standard Control Organisation recently issued a notification in this regard.
- It allowed private practitioners to try alternative remedies like Ayurveda and homoeopathy to treat Covid-19.

4.4 Caps on Fee by Private Hospitals - COVID-19

Why in news?

Few States in India have stepped in to regulate the charges for COVID-19 care in private hospitals.

What was the need?

- For the initial part of the epidemic, the State was the primary testing agent and care giver for all COVID-19 cases.
- At that stage, few private hospitals, if any, were in the front line of the battle.
- Anyone who tested positive was shifted to a government hospital for isolation and treatment.
- However, increased number of cases necessitated a significant involvement of the private sector.
- But soon there were numerous reports about exorbitant bills being raised in private hospitals for care of COVID-19 patients.
- Costs were upwards of Rs. 7 lakh for a minimum 14-day period of hospitalisation even for mildly symptomatic or asymptomatic patients.
- If ICU (intensive care unit) care is warranted then the rates would be much higher.
- In some instances, the Indian Medical Association demanded for government intervention to regulate this.

- The Central government earlier capped the price of tests for COVID-19 at Rs. 4,500 in private labs, but not hospital charges.

What are the recent regulations by the States?

- Some of the states have now set a cap on the tariff that can be charged by private hospitals for COVID-19 care.
- Maharashtra was the first to fix a tariff, followed by Gujarat and Tamil Nadu.
- Hospitals have been graded into categories, depending on facilities provided.
- So, reasonable rates are fixed per day for each category.
- ICU rates are naturally higher.
- But States have specified that private hospitals should follow the tariff for beds.
- If not complied, the States could be charged for violations.
- Making it a participatory process, the private sector was also co-opted into discussions on tariff.
- **Tamil Nadu** has also fixed a separate tariff for beneficiaries under the Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme.
- [It is now subsumed under the Central Insurance scheme.]
- This would make it easy for patients from lower income groups to access private care treatments for COVID-19.
- Tamil Nadu has also re-fixed the rate for testing in a private lab at Rs. 3,000 per test.

What is the way forward?

- It is on part of the governments to ensure that harsh times are further not exacerbated by profiteering.
- While issuing the new fee-cap, the Tamil Nadu Government has not provided a helpline number to report defaulting hospitals.
- What is needed now is further watchfulness on part of the States and mechanisms for redressal.

5. INDIA & ITS NEIGHBORHOOD

5.1 Nepal's New Map - India's Concerns

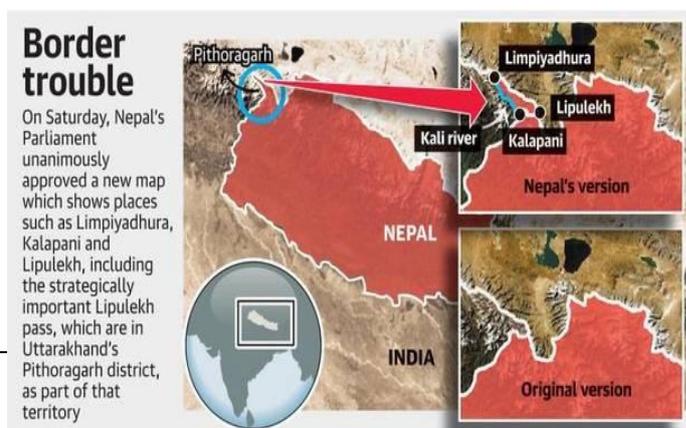
Why in news?

Nepal's Oli government has passed the constitutional amendment ratifying a change in its map which includes India's territories in Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district.

What is the dispute over?

- The new map includes Lipulekh, Kalapani and Limpiyadhura, territories that India controls. [Click [here](#) to read on Kalapani territorial issue]
- The territorial dispute stems from the fact that Nepal claims the land to the east of river Kali, which forms its western border.
- As per Kathmandu's understanding, the river originates from Limpiyadhura in the higher Himalayas.
- It is thus said to give Nepal access to a triangular-shaped land defined by Limpiyadhura-Lipulekh and Kalapani.
- India opposes the notion and says the origin of the river is much further down (to the east), which reduces Nepal's territorial demand.

What is the recent trigger?



- While the issue is an old one, it resurfaced in 2019.
- In 2019, New Delhi published new political maps to reflect some changes.
- This was following the decision on 5 August 2019 to reorganise the State of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Nepal objected to this depiction of disputed territory.

How are the responses?

- In 2000 and 2014, India and Nepal agreed to hold talks about Kalapani and Susta, without much success.
- [Susta is a disputed village near Bihar on which both India and Nepal stake a claim.]
- Matters became worse when India's Defence Minister inaugurated a surfaced road over the Kalapani territory.
- When Nepal protested, Indian Army Chief, General Naravane, suggested it was at the "behest" of China.
- Lack of diplomatic manoeuvring to allow a step back from the tensions is primarily widening the rift.
- New Delhi contends that it was willing to discuss matters "at a mutually convenient date."
- Kathmandu says that India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has rejected two dates suggested by Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- It is said that India had routinely dismissed requests from the Nepal Ambassador for a meet with the Foreign Secretary.
- The MEA said Kalapani talks could wait until both countries had dealt with the coronavirus pandemic first.
- This further enraged the Oli government in Nepal.
- For India, the timing with India-China border stand-off further adds to the belief that Oli is backed by Beijing.

How does the future look?

- Regardless of the accusations on who is more responsible for the downslide in ties, Nepal's quick move on the amendment leaves little space for diplomacy now.
- The fact that the vote was unanimous implies the futility on India's part to portray Mr. Oli alone as wholly responsible.
- The Indian government has in the past not hesitated to take tough measures.
- E.g. the 2015 blockade that severely affected land-locked Nepal
- The Oli government seeks to build its legacy by overturning what it calls "unequal" agreements made by the earlier monarchy.
- It could thus reverse old commitments on open and unsecured border posts.
- In turn, it could cause a security nightmare for India if Nepal opens up other parts of their long boundary.
- Both sides moved quickly to manage the recent fallout of border firing by Nepali police on a group of Indians that left one dead.
- The same readiness is needed now to manage the fallout of the recent amendment vote.
- Both sides should cooperate to preserve the once celebrated "special" relationship between India and Nepal.

5.2 Ceasefire Violations at LoC with Pakistan

Why in news?

Pakistani troops violated the ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) in Kamalkote sector of Jammu and Kashmir.

What are the recent happenings?

- Shelling and retaliations along the LoC with Pakistan is becoming an everyday occurrence.
- All of May 2020, the PirPanjal range, which fronts the Kashmir Valley, has seen mortar and small arms firing.
- The recent firing led to the unfortunate death of Sepoy Lungabui Abonmli.
- Sepoy Abonmli is the third soldier to succumb to shelling in this area in recent times.



- Two other soldiers with injuries were airlifted to the Command Hospital in Udhampur, due to shelling in Poonch sector.
- The recent shelling in Haji Pir in Uri claimed the life of Akhtar Begum, a civilian.
- This has been a worrying trend, as when the shells reach deeper they fall in residential areas, in villages such as Churunda and Silikote.
- When shells begin raining, villagers panic, leave their homes and run further, to temporary shelters.

How are the diplomatic ties currently?

- Unfortunately, aspects of relations with Pakistan in other spheres are not encouraging as well.
- Two personnel from the Indian mission in Islamabad were suddenly missing.
- All this implies further breakdown in relations.
- It makes evident that India and Pakistan are unable even to adhere to reciprocal protocols regarding staff posted in the missions.
- Earlier, India expelled two Pakistan High Commission officials, Abid Hussain Amid and Mohd Tahir Khan, on charges of espionage.
- Whether or not it is a tit-for-tat reaction by Pakistan for this, India must take steps to ensure its diplomatic personnel do not face such harassment.

What should be done?

- The incidents are an additional disruption to life for the J&K people, in the aftermath of the dilution of Article 370 in August 2019 and the COVID-19 lockdown.
- Shelling should not be allowed to be a regular occurrence.
- India needs to re-engage with Pakistan and end the ceasefire violations along the border.
- But currently, ceasefire with Pakistan along the Line of Control is obviously not working.
- The government thus needs to build bomb shelters for civilians until normalcy returns.
- It is also time to consider if the Indian staffing in Pakistan is commensurate with the vastly shrunk bilateral relations or not.
- The pandemic rages and there are travel curbs and reduced face-to-face opportunities now.
- So, it might be prudent to temporarily maintain only essential mission staff in Pakistan till India is able to obtain trust and stability in the ties.

5.3 India-China Galwan Faceoff

Why in news?

Violent clashes took place between Indian and Chinese soldiers at the Galwan valley in Ladakh along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), with reported casualties on both sides.

What exactly happened in the Galwan Valley?

- Tensions had been high in the area for few weeks.
- Large number of soldiers and military equipment were deployed along the LAC by both sides.
- Even though the LAC in Galwan Valley was never disputed by the two sides, the Chinese had moved into the Indian side of the LAC.
- Meeting was held at the level of Corps Commanders on 6 June 2020.
- After this, negotiations had been conducted between local military commanders of both the armies.
- They negotiated for a mutually agreed disengagement process.
- As part of that process, a buffer zone had been agreed to be created between the LAC and the junction of the Shyok and Galwan rivers.
- This was to avoid any faceoff between the two armies.

- The two armies were to move back by a kilometre each in that area as a first step.
- Colonel B Santosh Babu, who was monitoring this process, noticed that a Chinese camp was still existing in the area.
- He went to get it removed.
- This soon led to scuffle and blows being exchanged, resulting in deaths and injuries.
- More than 70 Indian soldiers were injured in a major scuffle.
- At least 20 soldiers including a Commanding Officer lost their lives on a single day.



How serious is the current standoff?

- This is the first time after the 1962 War that soldiers have died in clashes on the India-China border in Ladakh.
- Even otherwise, the last deaths on the LAC came from attack on an Assam Rifles patrol in Arunachal Pradesh by the Chinese in 1975.
- But the last real military engagement between the two armies was at Nathu La in Sikkim in 1967.
- In this, 88 Indian soldiers lost their lives, and more than 300 Chinese soldiers were killed.
- But all these incidents were prior to the two countries signing various agreements, starting from 1993.
- The agreements were aimed at maintaining peace and tranquillity on the border.

What does the nature of standoff reveal?

- Such a large number of soldiers were killed without firing a round.
- This means that these deaths were far more brutal than they would have been had guns and rifles been used.
- In most of these scuffles, the Chinese have used bats, clubs, sticks and stones to cause major injuries.
- Besides the use of these blunt objects, some soldiers are said to have been pushed into the fast-flowing Galwan river.
- Most of the deaths were due to injuries aggravated by the intense cold in the high-altitude area.
- However, that it remained restricted to a physical tussle points to the fact that there was no escalation to a kinetic level - rifles, howitzers, rockets, missiles, and fighter jets.
- China and India are both nuclear powers, and any escalation from the current situation is highly risky, and thus is less likely to happen.
- But this is only a slight hope seen in the light of the past.
- Notably, even at Nathu La in 1967, before the military engagement escalated to artillery guns and threats of fighter jets, there was a scuffle between the soldiers of the two sides.

Why were weapons not used?

- The soldiers were not carrying weapons.
- This is as per the drill followed by both sides in the border areas to avoid inadvertent escalation by opening fire.
- This is in tune with the 1996 agreement between the two countries on Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field Along the LoAC.
- This imposed many restrictions on military equipment, exercises, blasts, and aircraft in the vicinity of the LAC.

What happened to the Chinese side?



- The official statements put out by the Army and the MEA have no details of any deaths or injuries to Chinese soldiers.
- However, the first statement by the Army was amended to say that there were casualties “on both sides”.
- The Chinese government or the People's Liberation Army (PLA) there has not provided any details of soldiers killed or injured in the clash.
- The only numbers that have come from are from the news agency ANI.
- It has quoted unnamed sources claiming that as per radio transmission intercepts, 43 Chinese soldiers were either killed or injured in the clash.
- Another report in usnews.com has cited “American intelligence” to say that 35 Chinese troops, including an officer, are believed to have died.

Has the situation been defused?

- A meeting at the level of Major Generals of both armies took place at PP14 in the Galwan area.
- It brought the situation under control, and the Indian side was able to collect all the bodies.
- The Chinese were given permission to bring in helicopters to ferry their injured back.
- But tensions have already been running high at various places on the Ladakh border since May 2020.
- The latest incident has added to the tensions, but there have been no reports of any other clashes at the border.

Is an early resolution likely?

- There were hopes of an early disengagement and de-escalation after conciliatory statements following the meetings.
- But after the incident at the Galwan valley, the process is likely to slowdown.
- Naturally, an early resolution now looks unlikely.
- China has reasserted its claim over Galwan Valley.
- Chinese army has made sharp statements alleging that Indian soldiers twice crossed the LAC.
- The MEA too has categorically stated that the Chinese had violated the LAC in the Galwan Valley region.
- These allegations and counter-allegations, along with the heightened public sentiment on the deaths of so many soldiers, will test any process towards resolution.

5.4 India-China LAC Dispute

What is the issue?

- There is a national security crisis going on with the multiple Chinese intrusions across the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- India needs to change its national security strategy.

What has happened?

- The intrusions across the LAC are at Galwan River, Hot Springs, Pangong Tso in Eastern Ladakh and Naku La in North Sikkim.
- The MEA has made three perfunctory statements about the diplomatic and military engagements to defuse the situation.
- No formal statement has been made on the military situation at the sites of the intrusions or along the rest of the LAC.
- However, the Chief of Army Staff said that the Army is disengaging in a phased manner, starting from the Galwan river valley.

What is the pattern?

- The Depsang 2013, Chumar 2014, Doklam 2017 and now Eastern Ladakh 2020 are some of the Indo-China crises.
- Over the last seven years, India has followed a familiar pattern to resolve national security crises arising due to the ever-shifting Chinese claim lines on the undemarcated LAC.
- The Chinese actions catch us by surprise at strategic and tactical level.
- India reacts post-haste with a much higher force level.
- The exact place and extent of intrusion are never formally acknowledged.
- The outcomes of these engagements and concessions meted out are not put out in public domain.
- Disengagement happens again and India repeats the same process.

What is the government's concern?

- The jury is still out on the outcome of the 2020 crisis.
- The primary concern of the government in such a crisis that portends possible loss of territory is its fallout on domestic politics.

What is the problem with India's approach?

- Denial and obfuscation by peddling the **logic of differing perceptions** is the escape route.
- This virtually endorses China's stand that the PLA is operating in its own area and it is India that is interfering with its patrols.
- Instead of calling China the initiator of the crisis, India creates an ambiguity in the minds of the public and international community.
- This approach also misleads the nation about our military capabilities.
- India negotiates from a position of weakness, and hence concessions given are a cause of bigger worry.

What is India's national security strategy?

- No clear national security strategy has been spelt out by any Indian government so far.
- The capabilities are more tailored to fight the last war and not future wars.
- The Defence Planning Committee has had the mandate to formalise a national security strategy since 2018, but little seems to have been done.
- India has created a military suited to fight the wars of the 20th century.
- With incremental changes, India is desperately trying to adapt this military to fight high technology-driven short wars of the 21st-century.
- Moreover, in the absence of political guidance in the national security strategy, the military is always looking over its shoulders during a crisis.

What should be India's national security strategy?

- The logical approach to national security must begin with a strategic review to establish what the present and future security challenges are.
- This would help in evolving a comprehensive national security strategy.
- This must be formalised and put under parliamentary scrutiny.
- Unclassified aspects must be in the public domain so that in any crisis, it is generally known as to how the government will act.
- The national security strategy is the starting point for all security planning as it formally spells out the vision to tackle the threats faced.
- It leads to the acquiring of much-needed capabilities.
- It spells out the capabilities required in terms of force levels, technology and structures.

- The military works out the details, and after approving them, the government allocates the financial resources.
- Also, from the national security strategy flows the joint military strategy.

What is China's approach?

- In the last few decades, China has followed the logical approach towards national security and transformed its military.
- China is prepared to use the same to pursue its policy and has started the current border incidents to assert its hegemony over India.
- It wants to enforce a status quo with respect to border infrastructure on its own terms.

5.5 Darbuk-Shyokh-Daulat Beg Oldie Road

Why in news?

The construction of the DSDBO road may be the most consequential reason why China is targeting Indian Territory along the LAC in Ladakh.

What is the current situation?

- Large numbers of Chinese troops had massed along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and had come a little further than they used to earlier.
- The Chinese build-up along the Galwan River valley region overlooks, and hence poses a direct threat to the Darbuk-Shyokh-Daulat Beg Oldie (DSDBO) road.
- The token mutual de-escalation of the two armies is expected to be completed over an extended period.
- The withdrawals are subject to reciprocal endorsement.

Where is DSDBO road?

- It is a 255-km long “all-weather” road, running almost parallel to the LAC at Aksai Chin.
- The 37 **prefabricated military truss bridges** along the road are what that makes the DSDBO an all-weather road.
- It meanders through elevations ranging between 13,000 ft and 16,000 ft.
- It took India's Border Roads Organisation (BRO) almost two decades to construct this road.
- In 2019, 500-m-long Bailey Bridge (the world's highest bridge) was inaugurated on the road.
- Its strategic importance is that it connects Leh to Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO), virtually at the base of the Karakoram Pass that separates China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region from Ladakh.

Where is DBO?

- DBO is the northernmost corner of Indian territory in Ladakh, in the area better known in Army parlance as Sub-Sector North.
- DBO has the **world's highest airstrip**.
- This airstrip was originally built during the 1962 war.
- It was abandoned until 2008, when the Indian Air Force (IAF) revived it as one of its many Advanced Landing Grounds (ALGs) along the LAC.



What is the importance of the DSDBO highway?

- The DSDBO highway provides the Indian military **access to the section of Tibet-Xinjiang highway** that passes through Aksai Chin.
- The road runs almost parallel to the LAC in Aksai Chin that China occupied in the 1950s.
- The DSDBO's emergence seemingly panicked China.
- This is evidenced by the 2013 intrusion by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China into the nearby Depsang Plains, lasting nearly 3 weeks.



How is India protecting this region?

- DBO itself is less than 10 km west of the LAC at Aksai Chin.
- A military outpost was created in DBO in reaction to China's occupation of Aksai Chin.
- It is at present manned by a combination of the Army's Ladakh Scouts and the paramilitary Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP).
- There are additional strategic considerations in the area.
- To the west of DBO is the region where China has a boundary with Pakistan in the Gilgit-Baltistan area.
- This is also the critical region where China is currently constructing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK), to which India has objected.
- This is the region where Pakistan ceded over 5,180 sq km of PoK to China in 1963 under a Sino-Pakistan Boundary Agreement, contested by India.

Is there an alternate route?

- An alternate route exists from Leh to DBO through the 17,500-ft-high Sasser Pass.
- [Sasser Pass was part of ancient Silk Route connecting Leh to Yarkand.]
- It leads from the Nubra Valley into the Upper Shyok Valley en route to China's Karakoram Pass.
- This indicates the strategic interlinking of the entire disputed region between India and China and to a lesser extent, Pakistan.
- For most of the year, Sasser pass is snow-bound and inaccessible.
- The BRO is currently building a "glaciated road" between Sasoma (north of Leh, near the Nubra river) to the Sasser Pass, but it could take several years to complete.
- But even when it is, the alternate DBDSO will remain critical to the Army and its defences in the region.

6. BILATERAL ISSUES

6.1 Modi-Morrison Summit - India-Australia Ties

Why in news?

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Australian premier, Scott Morrison recently held a virtual summit.

What is the significance?

- India has for long been preoccupied with the perennial challenges in the neighbourhood and the ties with the great powers.
- It has, in the past, missed out on the opportunities for productive partnerships with the middle powers.
- Few countries have been underestimated in India such as Australia.
- The recent summit thus is an effort to plug that gap in India's diplomatic tradition.

What are Australia's strengths?

- With a GDP of more than US\$1.4 trillion, Australia is the 13th largest economy in the world.
- This is followed closely behind Russia that stands at \$1.6 trillion.
- Australia is rich in natural resources that India's growing economy needs.
- It also has huge reservoirs of strength in higher education, scientific and technological research.
- In the global diplomatic arena, Australia has a significant place than is believed.
- Its armed forces, hardened by international combat, are widely respected.

- Canberra's intelligence establishment is valued in many parts of the world.
- Australia has deep economic, political and security connections with the ASEAN.
- It also has a strategic partnership with one of the leading non-aligned nations, Indonesia.
- Canberra has a little "sphere of influence" of its own in the South Pacific (now under threat from Chinese penetration).

How relevant are these for India?

- All these Australian strengths should be of interest and value to India.
- India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, believed Australia is a natural part of Asia.
- He invited Australia to participate in the Asian Relations Conference in Delhi in 1947, a few months before independence.
- But the rest of the 20th century did not see much cooperation between the two countries.

How has the relationship been in the last few decades?

- India's nuclear tests in 1998 have been significant in changing the course of relationship with Australia.
- The following political differences between Delhi and Canberra complicated the possibilities that the end of the Cold War opened up.
- But since 2000, Canberra has taken consistent political initiative to advance ties with India.
- It has worked on resolving the nuclear difference and expanding the template of engagement.
- Notably, there was a gap of nearly three decades between Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Australia in 1986 and Modi's trip in 2014.

What are the challenges?

- It was exactly in that gap of nearly three decades that China transformed its relationship with Australia.
- Delhi's temptation to judge nations on the basis of their alignments with other powers stands in contrast to Beijing.
- Beijing always seems to put interests above ideology.
- China promotes interdependence with a targeted middle power.
- It then turns it into political influence and tries to weaken its alignment with the rival powers.
- However, now, India-Australia ties are being renewed with India's new political will to liberate its relations from ideological prejudice.

What are the scopeful areas of cooperation?

- The Indian diaspora, now estimated at nearly 7,00,000, is the fastest growing in Australia.
- This has become an unexpected positive factor in the bilateral relations.
- Besides, there is common membership of many groupings like the G-20, East Asia Summit, IORA, and the Quad.
- This has increased the possibilities for diplomatic cooperation on regional and global issues.
- The current downturn in the global economy limits the immediate possibilities for realising the full potential of commercial relations.
- But there are a host of emerging issues.
- Some of them include reforming the WHO, 5G technology, strengthening the international solar alliance, building resilience against climate change and disasters.
- The geopolitical events in the Indo-Pacific have opened up a massive space for consequential security cooperation between the two countries.



- Over the last few years, defence engagement between the two countries has also grown.

7. INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

7.1 US Supreme Court Ruling on LGBTQ Employees

Why in news?

The US Supreme Court (SC) ruled that the federal law that prohibits discrimination based on sex should be interpreted to include sexual orientation and gender identity as well.

What does this mean?

- The ruling is in relation to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- The Title prohibits employment discrimination based on race, colour, religion, sex and national origin.
- The US SC has now said that 'sex' here should be interpreted to include sexual orientation and gender identity as well.
- In other words, LGBTQ employees will also be protected under this Title.

What is the significance?

- The ruling involved three cases filed by employees, who are Aimee Stephens, Donald Zarda and Gerald Bostock.
- They claimed they were fired from their jobs because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- The ruling comes as a landmark victory for LGBTQ equality.
- It notably comes just a few days after US President Donald Trump rolled back some Obama-era regulations.
- The regulations prohibited discrimination in health care against transgender patients.

What lies ahead?

- For the past two decades, federal courts have determined that discrimination based on LGBTQ status is unlawful under federal law.
- The present historic ruling by the Supreme Court affirms that view.
- But in many aspects of the public square, LGBTQ people still lack non-discrimination protections.
- There are still too many places in law that lack protections in this regard.
- In this line, it is crucial that the Congress pass the Equality Act.
- The Act will codify protections for LGBTQ people in employment, housing, credit, education and jury service.
- This would go a long way in addressing the significant gaps in federal civil rights laws and improve protections for everyone.

7.2 G11 Grouping

Why in news?

United States President Donald Trump has proposed for a “G11” Summit.

What is G11?

- G11 will be the expansion of the G7 grouping.
- [G7 or Group of Seven is an intergovernmental economic organization.
- It consists of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.]
- G11 will include G7 countries, India, Australia, South Korea, and Russia.

- It is being widely perceived as an “anti-Chinese” platform.

Why was G11 initiated?

- **Outdated** - Mr Trump cancelled the G7 summit, originally scheduled for June at Camp David, on account of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- He has declared this 45-year-old organisation “outdated” because he didn’t feel it “properly represents the world”.
- This is a valid assertion, given the realignments of global economic power over the past half-century.
- **Global realignments** - The United Kingdom’s position after Brexit will weaken its already declining global heft.
- Italy has slipped behind India in terms of gross domestic product (GDP).
- But the exclusion of China, the world’s second-largest economy, has raised questions about Trump’s intentions.

What is the question for India?

- The big question for India is whether, if this invitation is issued, should be accepted, given its own current strained relations with China.
- On balance, the answer should be yes, both in terms of serving,
 1. India’s own geo-strategic interests and
 2. Within the dynamics of the immediate and long-term India-China relationship.
- China’s exclusion, however, should not stop India’s acceptance.

How will India benefit?

- A forum like G11 offering an opportunity for an exchange of views on issues that are important to India can be of considerable value.
- In particular, it may offer an occasion to discuss with some of the world’s most important leaders the impact of Covid-19 on the global economy.
- It will help lay down the contours of a coordinated response.

How will China view India’s acceptance?

- The question of India’s acceptance of any such invitation may be perceived as provoking China at a time when it is making aggressive inroads into Indian Territory.
- This move, in turn, is seen as partial retaliation for the Indian government’s closer embrace of a US establishment, which has been increasingly hostile to China.
- On the contrary, it is precisely because of these developments that the India should be receptive to G11 invitation.

What should India do?

- India would have the virtue of transmitting the message that no other country can dictate India’s foreign policy.
- Being seen to be intimidated by China’s military muscle-flexing in Sikkim and Ladakh leaves India open to pressure from China to exclude deeper partnerships with Japan or Australia.
- Both Japan and Australia, together with the US, are part of the 13-year-old Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.
- In addition, India is involved in groupings that exclude China, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IORA).
- So accepting potential G11 membership should not be seen as a precedent-setting move.

What are the uncertainties involved?

- U.S President Trump can invite any country as a G-7 special invitee.
- However, changing its composition will require the approval of the other members as well.

- Already, there are some concerns over Russia, which could derail the entire G-11 plan.
- So, this makes any concrete decision by New Delhi on the issue premature.
- Mr. Trump has indicated that he could hold the meet close to the UN General Assembly session in September 2020.
- But it is unclear when the summit will actually be held, given the November 2020 polls in the U.S.
- Despite its border tensions with China, India must also consider its objectives in attending this grouping.
- This is because G-11 is perceivably a grouping aimed at fuelling a new Cold War between the U.S. and China.
- Notably, there are deep member differences in G-7 itself on issues including climate change, security contributions, Iran, etc.
- In France, in 2019, the grouping was unable to issue a joint communique due to these differences, which was a first in its 45-year-old history.
- So, an evaluation of the G-7's effectiveness as a multilateral forum thus far is also needed.

7.3 U.S Sanctions on ICC Officials

Why in news?

The U.S. President Trump has authorised sanctions against the International Criminal Court (ICC) officials involved in investigations into possible war crimes by US troops or those of its allies.

What is the rationale?

- The Trump administration has long considered the international law forum, the ICC, a threat to US sovereignty.
- The US Justice Department is said to have received substantial credible information in this regard.
- It alleged of serious concerns about a long history of financial corruption and malfeasance at the highest levels in the office of ICC.
- US officials have also blamed Russia for manipulating the ICC in its favour.

What is the ICC?

- The ICC is a permanent judicial body based at The Hague in the Netherlands.
- It was created by the 1998 Rome Statute (ICC's founding and governing document).
- The ICC began functioning on 1 July 2002 when the Statute came into force.
- The forum was established as a court of last resort to prosecute offences that would otherwise go unpunished.
- It has jurisdiction over four main crimes:
 1. genocide
 2. crimes against humanity
 3. war crimes
 4. crime of aggression
- 123 nations are States Parties to the Rome Statute and recognise the ICC's authority.
- The notable exceptions to this are the US, China, Russia, and India.

How is it different from the ICJ?

- Unlike the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the ICC is not part of the United Nations system.
- The UN-ICC relationship is governed by a separate agreement.
- The ICJ is among the UN's 6 principal organs, and mainly hears disputes between nations.
- The ICC, on the other hand, prosecutes individuals.
- ICC's authority extends to offences committed in a member state or by a national of such a state.



- The ICC has been criticised for not pursuing investigations in Western countries as well as for working inefficiently.
- Notably, all 4 of its guilty verdicts pronounced so far are in trials from Africa.
- In 2019, the court ordered an independent expert review of its own functioning to address these concerns.

How has U.S.-ICC relationship been?

- The Clinton administration (1993-2001) was involved in Rome Statute negotiations, and signed the document in 2000.
- However, the next president, George W. Bush in 2002 had the US “unsign” the Statute.
- He then signed into law the American Service-Members’ Protection Act to protect US nationals from the ICC’s reach.
- Notwithstanding the differences with the ICC, Washington adopted a positive approach towards the forum during several instances.
- E.g. in 2005, it did not veto a UN Security Council request to the ICC to investigate crimes during the Darfur crisis in Sudan
- Likewise, in 2011, it voted for Libya’s referral to the court.
- The US also provided critical support in transferring suspects from Africa to the ICC for trial.

What happened in Trump's term?

- Since the election of President Donald Trump, the U.S.'s relations with the ICC have again soured.
- Trump declared at the UN General Assembly in 2018 that the US would provide no support or recognition to the ICC.
- He emphasized that as far as America was concerned the ICC had no jurisdiction, no legitimacy, and no authority.
- In 2019, the ICC’s chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda asked for a formal probe into alleged atrocities committed during the Afghanistan War between 2003 and 2014.
- This led to possible indictments of CIA officials and the US military.
- This came much to the disappointment of Washington.
- In March 2020, ICC judges approved Bensouda’s request.

What is the recent decision?

- Washington broadened the visa restrictions on ICC officials directly involved in probes against its nationals or those of its allies.
- It also includes anyone who has “materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support” to these officials.
- The restrictions also extend to the officials’ family members.
- Economic sanctions is said to be decided on a case-by-case basis.

What is ICC's stance?

- Following U.S.'s move, the ICC reacted by declaring support for its officials.
- It called Washington’s move an “unacceptable attempt to interfere with the rule of law”.
- The Court observed that an attack on the ICC also represents an attack against the interests of victims of atrocity crimes.

What is the global response?

- Israel welcomed the US decision.
- Its Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused the ICC of fabricating “outlandish charges” against his country.

- Except for Israel, many came out in support of the ICC.
- The UN said that it had “taken note with concern” about reports of the US order.
- The European Union’s foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, expressed concerns at the US decision.
- Germany and France also expressed their displeasure.
- The Dutch foreign minister Stef Blok called the ICC “crucial in the fight against impunity and in upholding international rule of law.”
- The international NGO Human Rights Watch noted that in penalising war crimes investigators, the Trump administration was openly siding with those who commit and cover up human rights abuses.

7.4 India to UNSC: A Diplomatic Victory

Why in news?

India’s election to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as a non-permanent member is a significant diplomatic victory for the country.

What is the UNSC?

- The United Nations Charter established six main organs of the United Nations, including the Security Council.
- It gives primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security to the UNSC, which may meet whenever peace is threatened.
- It has **15 members**, and each Member has **one vote**.
- Out of the 15 members, 5 are permanent and 10 are non-permanent members with 2-year tenure.
- Only the UNSC has the power to make decisions that member states are then obligated to implement under the Charter.
- It dispatches military operations, imposes sanctions, mandates arms inspections, deploys election monitors, etc.

Why is this election seen as a victory?

- India has long been pushing for reforms at global institutions.
- The victory was not unexpected as India was the only contestant for the Asia Pacific seat.
- In the UN General Assembly, the election would be done by secret ballot where India needed two-thirds of the votes for victory.
- India secured the seat with 184 votes in the 193-strong UNGA.

What happened at the election that India won?

- India was the only candidate for the vacancy from the Asia Pacific.
- Last year, India’s candidature for the seat was endorsed unanimously by the Asia Pacific group.
- This group comprises of 55 countries, including Pakistan and China.
- That endorsement meant that India would be a **clean slate candidate** for the elections, with an assured victory.
- Even if a country is a “clean slate” candidate and has been endorsed by its group, it still needs to secure the votes of two-thirds of the members present and voting at the UNGA session.
- This means that it should secure a minimum of 129 votes, if all 193 member states participate.

What are the other countries that were elected?

- Mexico, Norway and Ireland were also elected as non-permanent members.
- Mexico won the Latin American seat uncontested.
- But, Norway and Ireland emerged victorious from a three-way contest for the Western Europe and Others Group seat.

- Neither Kenya nor Djibouti, which were contesting the seat from Africa, won a two-thirds majority. They will face another vote.

How did India seek support?

- India sought the support of member countries by highlighting its commitment to **multilateralism and reforms**.
- Ahead of the vote, India had launched a campaign brochure which,
 1. Highlighted India's demand for transparency in mandates for UN peacekeeping missions and push for the India-led Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism,
 2. Called for joint efforts for UN reform and expansion of the UNSC

What would be India's objective?

- New orientation for a reformed multilateral system (NORMS) would be India's overall objective during its tenure that will begin next year.
- NORMS was laid out by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar.
- Achieving this would depend on how India will conduct diplomacy in the global body, build alliances and raise issues that go beyond the interests of the big five.

What is the impact of the pandemic on the geopolitics?

- India has long been of the view that the structure of the UNSC does not reflect the realities of the 21st century.
- It has got increasing support from member countries for its push for reforms.
- But the five permanent members of the UNSC have resisted it.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has already shaken up the global order and sharpened the rivalry between the U.S. and China.
- It has also opened up fresh debates on strengthening multilateralism and multilateral institutions.
- In this context, the challenges before India are many.

7.5 Russia-India-China (RIC) Trilateral Meeting

Why in news?

Russian Foreign Minister is hosting the Russia-India-China (RIC) trilateral foreign ministers' meeting.

What are the events planned?

- RIC trilateral meeting will be the first opportunity for Indian External Affairs & Chinese Foreign Minister for face-time with each other over video conference.
- Moscow is also hosting defence ministers of both the countries to attend the Victory Day parade.
- Earlier too, the Russian officials discussed with Indians about regional security, including developments on the Line of Actual Control.
- While India and China have not been talking to each other, the outreach to Moscow is noteworthy.

How has the Sino-Russian relationship fared?

- Russia and China have had a rocky start to their relationship, after Mao Zedong founded the People's Republic of China.
- When Mao made his first official visit to Moscow in 1949, he was made to wait for weeks for a meeting with the Soviet leader.
- There was Sino-Soviet split in 1961, due to ideological differences resulting in competition for control of the worldwide Communist movement.
- During the Cold War, China and the USSR were rivals after the.
- There was a serious possibility of a major war in the early 1960s.
- There was even a brief border war took place in 1969.

- This enmity began to reduce following Mao's death in 1976.
- But relations were not very good until the Soviet Union's fall in 1991.

How did the Sino-Russian bonding begin?

- In the post-Cold War era, China was Russia's biggest trading partner and the largest Asian investor in Russia.
- China saw Russia as a powerhouse of raw material and a growing market for its consumer goods.
- The harsh sanctions in 2014 towards Russia after the annexation of Crimea brought Moscow much closer to China.
- A Sino-Russian quasi-alliance has formed due to the anti-Chinese rhetoric from US, collapse of oil prices and growing dependence of Russia on Chinese consumption.
- Western analysts see this as a "friendship of convenience" between two countries.
- India believes that the approach of Western countries, especially that of the US towards Russia and China, has brought them even closer.

How cordial is the actual relationship?

- Beijing and Moscow do not always see eye to eye with each other on several issue.
- China does not recognise Crimea as part of Russia.
- Russia takes a neutral stance on China's claims in the South China Sea.

How is the Indo-Russia relationship?

- India has a historical relationship with Russia, which has grown in some areas and atrophied in some others.
- 60 to 70 % of India's defence supplies are from Russia.
- India also needs a regular and reliable supply of spare parts from the Russian defence industry.
- Russia's position during the 1962 war was not particularly supportive of India.
- However, India takes comfort in Russia's support during the 1971 war.
- Even on the recent events in Galwan, Moscow responded in a very calibrated manner last week.

What is the scope of the meet?

- Russian Foreign Minister had said that the agenda does not involve discussing issues that relate to bilateral relations of the countries.
- However, India decided to reach out to Russia since it believes Moscow has leverage and influence to shape and change Beijing's hard stance on border issue.

7.6 Racial Unrest in the U.S

Why in news?

The United States is witnessing widespread protests against the recent death of George Floyd, a black man, by the action of police.

What led to the protests?

- Floyd, an unarmed black man, died in the hands of Minneapolis police.
- Derek Chauvin, the police officer filmed kneeling on Floyd's neck, was arrested soon after.
- He was charged with murder and manslaughter.
- Demonstrations erupted in cities across the U.S. in response to the death of George Floyd.
- Another such issue took place in 2014 with the shooting death of a black 18-year-old, Michael Brown, by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri.

How prevalent were the protests?



- The anger in response to Floyd's killing descended into rioting and looting in several cities.
- Protests have erupted in at least 140 cities across the U.S. in the days after Floyd's death.
- Violence spread overnight despite curfews in several major cities rocked by civil unrest in recent days.
- The sight of protesters flooding streets fuelled a sense of crisis in the U.S. after weeks of lockdowns due to the coronavirus pandemic.
- The closely packed crowds and many demonstrators not wearing masks sparked fears of a resurgence of COVID-19.
- Police fired rubber bullets and tear gas in many cities.
- In London too, hundreds of protesters took to Trafalgar Square chanting "no justice, no peace."
- A crowd descended on the U.S. Embassy in Berlin too, calling for the police officers to face justice.

What controversy did Trump trigger?

- Besides protests, President Donald Trump let himself into the controversy.
- He triggered a broader debate on censorship of posts by social media platforms.
- The Twitter masked and attached a caution note to a tweet by Mr. Trump for "glorifying violence".
- In the tweet, he had labelled protesters calling for action against police for Floyd's death "THUGS".
- He added, "when the looting starts, the shooting starts."
- [This comes as a reference to a threat by a police chief, who in 1967 declared "war" and vowed violent revenge on African-Americans in Miami Beach.]
- This is hardly the first time that the U.S. President has spread messages of hatred.
- He has said, among other things, that Mexicans were rapists and drug dealers.
- In early 2017, he banned visitors from certain Muslim-majority countries.

What does this demand?

- The situation calls for far-reaching legislative reforms on -
 - i. the use of excessive force by police against minorities
 - ii. punishment for all hate crimes
 - iii. workplace discrimination
 - iv. inhumane treatment of migrants at the border
- Such an agenda, focused on the complete reform of government institutions toward supporting a pluralist ethos is crucial now.

7.7 US Visa Ban Extension - Impact on Indian IT Companies

Why in news?

The US administration extended the 60-day ban on immigration and non-immigrant worker visas till the end of 2020.

What is the stated reason?

- The US President Donald Trump said that the move was to protect domestic workers.
- They are said to have been impacted due to a contraction in the economy in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Popular work visas including the much-coveted H-1B and H-2B, and certain categories of H-4, J, and L visas shall also remain suspended.

What are the different categories of visas issued?

- Immigrant visas are issued to foreign nationals who intend to live permanently in the US.



- Non-immigrant visas are for foreign nationals willing to enter the US on a temporary basis.
- These may be for tourism, medical treatment, business, temporary work, study, or other similar reasons.
- The US issues a certain number of visas each year to fill a vacuum of highly-skilled low-cost employees in IT and other related domains.
- This allows companies from outside the US to send employees to work on client sites.
- Of these work visas, the H-1B remains the most popular among Indian IT companies.
- H-1B is issued for people to work in a specialty occupation.
- It requires a higher education degree of its equivalent.
- The US government has a cap of 85,000 total H-1B visas for each year.
- Of this, 65,000 H-1B visas are issued to highly skilled foreign workers.
- The rest 20,000 can be additionally allotted to highly skilled foreign workers who have a higher education or masters degree from an American university.
- Apart from the H-1B visas, the US government also issues L1 visas.
- This allows companies to transfer highly skilled workers to US for a period of up to 7 years.
- H-2B visas allow food and agricultural workers to seek employment in the US.

Why did the US suspend non-immigrant worker visas?

- Since it was started in 1952, the H-1 visa scheme has undergone many changes and revisions.
- These were done to allow or disallow certain categories of skilled workers into the US.
- The changes were made depending on the economic situation of the country.
- The eventual technology boom saw the arrival of the internet and low-cost computers in developing nations such as India and China.
- This led to a large number of graduates with a will to work at relatively low costs in the US.
- This turned out to be a win-win situation for both the employer and the employee.
- However, there raised a concern of having low cost workers in the US at the expense of domestic workers.
- In 2017, after taking over as the US President, Trump had hinted that the low-cost workers were hampering the economy and undercutting jobs of citizens.
- The US had then hinted at reforming the “broken” H-1B visa system.
- Now, Trump seized the opportunity provided by the economic contraction due to Covid-19.
- He first banned the entry of non-immigrant workers till 23 June 2020.
- It is now extended till 31 December 2020.

What are the likely implications?

- Since the ban is effective immediately, the processing of all new H-1B, H-2B, J, and L visa categories stand suspended.
- So, those who do not have a valid non-immigrant visa as of 23 June 2020 and are outside of the US, will not be allowed to enter the country until 31 December 2020.
- H-1B, H-2B, J and L visa holders, and their spouse or children already present in the US shall not be impacted by the new worker visa ban.
- Also, workers in essential services in the food sector have been given some reprieve.
- Their entry shall be decided by the consular officer of immigration services.

How does it affect the Indian IT companies?

- Indian IT companies are amongst the biggest beneficiaries of the US H-1B visa regime.
- Since 1990s, Indian IT companies have utilised a huge share of the total number of visas issued each year.

- As of April 1, 2020, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) had received about 2.5 lakh H-1B work visa applications.
- Indians had applied for as many as 1.84 lakh or 67% of the total H-1B work visas for the current financial year ending March 2021.
- Apart from the suspension, the executive order has also made sweeping changes to the H-1B work visa norms.
- So, the visa issuance will no longer be decided by the currently prevalent lottery system.
- The new norms will favour highly-skilled workers who are paid the highest wages by their respective companies.
- This could result in a significant impact on margins and worker wages of Indian IT companies that send thousands of low-cost employees to work on client sites in the US.
- The large Indian IT companies have cut down their dependency on H-1B and other worker visas by hiring as much as 50% of staff locally.
- However, they still rely on these visas to keep costs in check.
- Indian IT companies also offer subcontracts to Indian nationals already present in the US with valid H-1B visas.
- E.g. Bangalore-based Wipro spends as much as 20% of its revenue to subcontract Indian workers with valid H-1B visas
- In all, the changes are largely disadvantageous to the Indian IT companies.

7.8 North Korea - South Korea Stand-Off

Why in news?

North Korea blew up the joint liaison office with South Korea in Kaesong, a city in the southern part of North Korea.

What is the liaison office?

- In 2018, North Korea and South Korea jointly set up a liaison office at Kaesong in North Korea.
- The objective was to facilitate communication between North Korea and South Korea.
- It came as a result of a series of inter-Korean summits in 2018.
- The Kaesong Industrial Complex is a joint industrial zone where factories are operated and run by both North Koreans and South Koreans.

Why did North Korea resort to demolition?

- The demolition of the joint liaison office follows a recent deterioration in relations between Pyongyang (North Korea) and Seoul (South Korea).
- Activists and defectors in South Korea were sending anti-North Korean propaganda leaflets, rice and Bibles using balloons across the border.
- Tensions between the two countries had increased after Pyongyang objected to these activities.
- Pyongyang had also cut off communication with Seoul following this.
- These moves are also said to have come after North Korea's frustrations at South Korea's inability to revive inter-Korean economic projects.
- South Korea's delay was probably due to pressures from the US, along with UN sanctions.





- The economic projects had, notably, been beneficial to Pyongyang.

What are the other measures by North Korea?

- Following the demolition, North Korean state media KCNA announced that Pyongyang would be deploying troops in demilitarised areas.
- This also includes the Kaesong industrial zone.
- North Korea would be adding artillery units along the border with South Korea for reinforcement.
- North Korean police posts that had been withdrawn when relations had improved between the two countries would now be instituted once again.

What was South Korea's response?

- South Korea's President Moon Jae-in called for an urgent national security meeting following the demolition.
- The country's Unification Ministry called the incident "a senseless act."
- It is seen to have destroyed the hopes of those who wished for peace on the Korean Peninsula.
- The South Korean government said they would "respond strongly" if the situation worsens.

What is the significance?

- The demolition comes just days after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's sister Kim Yo Jong had threatened to destroy the liaison office.
- It occurred just hours after Pyongyang threatened to engage in military action at the border with South Korea.
- These actions by North Korea have been the most provocative in recent years.
- It has become one of the most serious incidents to have occurred between the two countries without them actually going to war.

What possibly caused the drift?

- South Korea's President Moon Jae-in has made efforts over the past few years to improve relations with Pyongyang.
- However, Pyongyang is probably hoping to pressure Seoul into giving it more concessions that would be economically beneficial for North Korea.
- Notably, North Korea has been hit hard by sanctions.
- It is still unclear how COVID-19 has impacted North Korea.
- However, it is expected to have been affected badly, especially China being North Korea's main trading partner.

What is the U.S.'s role in this regard?

- It has been 2 years after U.S. President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un met in Singapore to discuss denuclearisation.
- But little has been achieved in that direction.
- Mr. Kim had in principle agreed to denuclearisation in return for the lifting of American sanctions.
- But talks stalled as the U.S. insisted on "complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization" by North Korea in return for any concession.
- The North Koreans were wary particularly because of the U.S.'s history of tracking back on its promises.
- Mr. Kim's regime thus offered a staged approach.
- It put a freeze on nuclear tests and offered to shut its Yongbyon nuclear complex.



8. ECONOMY

8.1 IMF Forecast on Global Economy

Why in news?

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates the global economy to contract by -4.9% in 2020.

How the Indian economy could be revamped?

- As for the Indian economy, **growth has been decelerating** for the past eight quarters.
- The recently announced economic package provides near-term liquidity support and long-pending structural reforms.
- As the economy begins to reopen, there is a need to aid **demand recovery**.
- For aggregate demand to increase, at least one of the **components of GDP needs to expand**.
- Growth in the Indian economy has been dominated by consumption, investments, government expenditure and net exports.
- However, consumption and investment demand have been subdued for the past few quarters, dragging down overall growth.

How are the demands subdued?

- **Consumption demand** - The Non-Banking Financial Company sector suffered from funding crunches.
- This led to a further squeeze in credit supply, thereby affecting consumption demand.
- Moreover, the industry-wide job/pay-cuts with a growing uncertainty over the future may limit spending to non-discretionary items.
- **Investment demand** - Broad-based utilization levels dropped to 68.6% in Q3FY20.
- This is well below the 75% benchmark for new capacity addition, implying suboptimal levels of fresh investments.
- A higher investments is essential for sustainable economic growth.
- The deteriorating economic scenario and increasing levels of debt with rating downgrades for industries may aggravate the existing problems.
- **Export demand** - India's limited share in global trade along with a battered domestic and global outlook provides little room for exports to contribute towards growth.

Where should the push come from?

- There is limited room for consumption, trade or investments to expand significantly.
- Therefore, the positive push required to aid a demand recovery has to come through the **government**.
- However, with sparse resources that India has, it must deploy funds that yield a higher return.
- One key area that can provide the necessary support is **infrastructure investment**.

How will infrastructure investment help?

- A study by S&P Global estimates 1% of GDP spend on infrastructure can boost real growth by 2% while creating 1.3 million direct jobs.
- Historically, countries have used infrastructure to provide counter-cyclical support to the economy.
- Notably, infrastructure has strong links to growth.
- With both supply and demand-side features, infrastructure helps **generate employment and long-term assets**.
- For India, front-loading key projects with greater visibility from the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) could aid in a quicker recovery.

8.2 Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment Ordinance), 2020

What is the issue?

- The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment Ordinance), 2020 has come into force and is effective from June 5, 2020.
- The ordinance inserting Section 10A in the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016 has opened itself up to a legal challenge.

What is the government's rationale?

- The COVID-19-led lockdown has caused much disruption to businesses.
- This may lead to default on debts pushing such companies into insolvency.
- Therefore, it was felt that suspending Sections 7, 9 and 10 of the IBC would be the right course of action.

What is the IBC essentially?

- Insolvency and bankruptcy code 2016 was introduced to resolve the bankruptcy crisis in corporate sector.
- Under IBC, either the creditor (banks) or the loaner (defaulter) can initiate insolvency proceedings.
- It is done by submitting a plea to the adjudicating authority, the National Companies Law Tribunal (NCLT).
- According to IBC, a financial creditor holds an important role in the corporate insolvency process.
- The Committee of Creditors (CoC) under IBC includes all financial creditors of a corporate debtor.
- The CoC will appoint and supervise the Insolvency Professional.
- It has the power to either approve or reject the resolution plan to revive the debtor, or to proceed to liquidate the debtor.

What are the key amendments?

- The Ordinance provides for two amendments:
 1. the introduction of a Section 10A, suspending initiation of proceedings under the Code
 2. the introduction of Section 66(3) suspending the application of wrongful trading provisions under the Code when Section 10A is applicable
- The IBC provides for initiation of corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP) of a corporate debtor.
- Section 10A provides that no such application for CIRP initiation under Sections 7, 9 and 10 of the IBC could be filed, for any default arising on or after 25th March 2020.
- This will be applicable for a period of 6 months or such further period, not exceeding one year from this period, as may be notified.
- The suspension period is thus from March 25 to September 25, 2020 unless extended for another 6 months, in which case it would be till March 25, 2021.
- Section 10A shall not apply to any default committed under the said Sections before March 25.

What is the concern now?

- In clear terms, Section 10A prevents an application from being filed for initiation of a CIRP occurring during the suspension period.
- But the proviso (attached condition) to the section states that no application for CIRP shall ever be filed against a corporate debtor for any default occurring during the suspension period.
- While the main Section 10A suspends such applications for a limited period, the proviso enlarges the scope.
- The proviso provides complete amnesty under the IBC for 'any default occurring during such period'.
- The role of a proviso in a statute is to restrict the application of the main provision under exceptional circumstances.
- However, the proviso here expands the substantive provision in the main section.
- Further, if the main provision is unclear, a proviso may be given to explain its true meaning.



- In this case, the main provision appears clear, and the proviso is disputable.
- The proviso therefore does not appear to be legally tenable.
- Creditors can still approach courts, and banks/Financial Institutions can still approach Debt Recovery Tribunals.
- So the protection given by this proviso seems illusory.
- Also, Section 10A suspends provisions of Section 10 of the IBC that enables voluntary insolvency resolution.
- This is difficult to understand because such voluntary insolvency resolution should have been made easier for companies now facing distress.
- Also, the ordinance appears to consider every default occurring during the suspension period to be a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- There could be cases where defaults were imminent due to other reasons as well.
- Now all these will also enjoy the protection offered.

What could have been done?

- The ordinance should have protected only such defaults which occur as a direct consequence of the pandemic or the lockdown.
- It should have left this determination to the National Company Law Tribunal.
- Also, a company defaulting on its payment obligations on March 24 (a day before the lockdown started) would not be provided any relief.
- But a company defaulting on or immediately after March 25 due to similar reasons will get relief.
- In the absence of definition of a COVID-19 default, the suspension of IBC becomes arbitrary.

8.3 NCLAT Ruling - Liquidation holds Precedence

Why in news?

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has ruled that liquidation process of a company under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) holds precedence over outcome of an arbitration proceeding.

What is the case about?

- Tamil Nadu-based Surana Power was admitted into insolvency under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) in January 2019,
- It did not receive any valid resolution plans.
- So, it was ordered to be liquidated by the Chennai Bench of National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT).
- During the liquidation proceedings, state-run BHEL (Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited) won an ex-parte arbitration award against Surana Power.
- This gave BHEL complete and undisputed rights over all the assets, equipment, goods lying at the site of the Surana power plant.
- It also gave BHEL title rights over the finished and unfinished buildings.
- BHEL is also one of the secured creditors to Surana Power.
- On liquidation, BHEL would have got the money over other unsecured creditors.
- But its share would have come down by a lot going by IBC's waterfall mechanism (*discussed below*).
- So, following the award, BHEL, as a creditor, refused to give its consent for liquidation.
- BHEL's refusal was challenged by the liquidator at the Chennai bench of NCLT.
- The NCLT ruled in favour of BHEL.
- It said that BHEL had full rights to realise the security interests it had won as part of the arbitration.

What is the NCLAT ruling now?



- The NCLAT set aside the Chennai NCLT's ruling.
- NCLAT held that the liquidation process of a company under the IBC holds precedence over outcome of an arbitration proceeding.
- So just because BHEL won the arbitration award, the liquidation process would not be stopped to favour it.
- BHEL had claimed that it had the first right over the assets and properties of Surana Power.
- But the NCLAT held this claim as invalid.
- BHEL did not have the minimum 60% value in secured interest; it had 26.24% share.
- So, BHEL could not be allowed to stall the IBC proceedings.
- Moreover, all other creditors had given the assent to liquidate Surana Power ('corporate debtor').
- It would be prejudicial to stall the liquidation process at the instance of a single creditor having 26.24% share (in value), in the secured assets.
- NCLAT ruled that BHEL's charge over Surana Power assets were equal to the other 10 financial creditors.
- So, BHEL could not be given precedence.

What does the NCLAT order mean?

- Essentially, if a corporate debtor is being liquidated, a creditor cannot claim superiority over other secured creditors in the same band.
- Also, everyone must receive a fair share by following the waterfall mechanism of liquidation.

What is the waterfall mechanism for liquidation?

- Section 53 of the IBC deals with the waterfall mechanism for liquidation.
- The waterfall mechanism gives priority to secured financial creditors over unsecured financial creditors.
- Under this, if a company is being liquidated, the secured financial creditors must be first paid the full extent of their admitted claim.
- This should be done before any sale proceedings are distributed to any other unsecured creditor.
- The top most priority, however, is given to costs related to the liquidation process and dues of workmen of the corporate debtor.
- The dues of the workmen include all their salaries, provident, pension, retirement and gratuity funds.
- It also includes any other funds maintained for the welfare of the workmen.

8.4 SEBI on Takeovers and Equity

Why in news?

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) released an amended set of guidelines on takeovers and equity.

What is the relaxation regarding fresh equity?

- They sought to make it easier for entrepreneurs and promoters to raise fresh equity during 2020-21.
- Promoters may acquire up to 10% of shareholding via the creeping acquisition route without triggering mandatory open offers under the Takeover Code.
- [The previous threshold for this route was up to 5% of equity annually.
- Beyond this, the process of a mandatory open offer was triggered.]
- However, the new 10% limit doesn't apply to secondary market operations.
- The acquisition must occur through a preferential offer where the promoter group issues new shares to itself.
- This relaxation will be in force only until March 31, 2021.

What is the relaxation regarding voluntary open offers?

- SEBI has also relaxed the provisions for voluntary open offers.



- Earlier, a shareholder having 25% or more of shares, or voting rights, was permitted to make a voluntary open offer.
- But this was permitted only if he had not acquired any shares via the creeping acquisition route in the preceding 52 weeks.
- That condition has now been relaxed till March 31, 2021.
- This would enable promoters to use the creeping acquisition route and also make an open offer if they so choose.
- However, the overall limit of 75% shareholding for a listed company remains.

What is the relaxation regarding QIP funding?

- Another relaxation pertains to the interval between accessing qualified institutional placement (QIP) funding for a listed company.
- Compared with an initial public offer, raising money from QIPs is a relatively easy process in terms of compliance.
- However, prior to this, follow-on public offers (FPOs) made to institutional investors had to be staggered at an interval of at least 6 months.
- That period has now been reduced to 2 weeks, again only with respect to the 2020-21 fiscal year.

What is the conclusion?

- These measures would offer some comfort to cash-strapped companies struggling to fund operations during these difficult times.
- These relaxations remove the need to take on more debt, which is difficult due to the enormous amount of government borrowing and is crowding out private players from the bond market.
- Companies can now access funding via the equity route.
- They can tap into both promoter funding and QIP funding using the FPO route.
- Since stock-market valuations are down due to the pandemic and lockdown, committed promoters see this as a good time to increase their shareholding.
- One can make a case that SEBI could have been even more liberal with the annual thresholds while keeping the 75% limit unchanged.
- As of now, with both consumption and demand trending low, most companies may not see a great need to raise long-term capital.
- However, as and when activity picks up, these relaxations will make it easier for companies to access capital.
- India could see a spate of follow-on and preferential offers in the second half of the fiscal year if the economy does rebound.

8.5 SEBI's Norms for Preferential Issues

Why in news?

The Securities and Exchange Board of India has relaxed its norms for preferential issues.

What is SEBI?

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is a regulatory body established under the SEBI Act, 1992.
- It monitors and regulates the Indian capital and securities market.
- It will protect the interests of the investors formulating regulations and guidelines to be adhered to.

What are the relaxed norms?

- The SEBI has announced a pricing methodology that will make it easier for companies to raise funds.
- Now, the companies have the option of pricing the preferential offer at the weekly average price over the preceding **12 weeks or 2 weeks**.

- This pricing rule will be applicable only for preferential issues made from July to December 2020.

What are the existing rules?

- The existing rules required the pricing to take into account the average price over the preceding **26 weeks**.
- This would have resulted in the offers being priced very high, thus deterring potential investors.

What is the significance of this move?

- The SEBI's tweak to the pricing rules for preferential issue is among the preferred channel of fund raising due to its relatively easier process.
- It had also allowed distressed firms to raise funds through preferential issue considering the share price of only the preceding 2 weeks.
- Investors in distressed firms were also exempted from the need to make an open offer.

What are the other changes that SEBI has made?

- If an open offer is delayed due to omissions by the acquirer, 10% penal interest is to be paid to all shareholders who have tendered shares in it.
- This move is necessary to check bogus open offers announced with the mal-intent of manipulating the stock price.
- The Prohibition of Insider Trading Regulations has also been amended.
- This makes all companies to maintain a database of unpublished price-sensitive information and the names of persons who have shared it.

8.6 Transfer Cash Not Loans - Assessing Nyay Scheme

What is the issue?

- The economic package announced to deal with the COVID-19-led crisis is likely to take a long time to fix the situation.
- In this context, here is an assessment of the efficacy of the Nyay scheme proposed by former Congress President Rahul Gandhi during the Lok Sabha elections.

What is the shortfall in the economic package?

- The Centre has announced an economic package of Rs 20 lakh crore for the entire country.
- Of this, half has been used even before it was announced.
- Much of the rest will be provided to entrepreneurs in the form of debt.
- However, amid the current lockdown situation, how demand would be generated is highly uncertain.
- And if demand does not rise, how would these new loans boost the economy is a big question.

What is the Nyay scheme all about?

- The essential goal of Nyay scheme is "transfer cash not loans".
- It proposes direct cash transfers to be the best solution, be it for saving lives or the economy.

What example does Chhattisgarh offer?

- The Nyay Yojana is in place in Chhattisgarh since the start of 2019.
- The support price for the largest crop in the state, paddy, was raised from Rs 1,800 to Rs 2,500.
- Due to this liberal policy, 80.37 lakh metric tonnes of paddy was collected from farmers at the rate of Rs 2,500 per quintal.
- This injected Rs 20,000 crore directly into farmers' pockets.
- This was an increase of about Rs 8,000 crore from the support price that prevailed before.
- Not just the purchase of paddy, but a grant-in-aid is being provided for a total of 14 items, including maize and sugarcane.

- The State government waived loans worth Rs 9,000 crore for farmers, and Rs 244 crore worth of irrigation tax was forgiven.
- The same was done for the tendu patta collectors, whose wage rate was increased from Rs 2,500 to Rs 4,000 per standard bag.
- Also, the state government from 2019 buys 25 items of forest produce at the minimum support price, unlike the earlier 7 items.
- This increased the purchasing power of common villagers, farmers, and tribals residing in the forests.
- This went a long way in reducing the effects of the economic slowdown in the state within one-and-a-half years.
- In Chhattisgarh, 80% of the state's population is engaged in farming, and 44% of its area is covered with forests.
- So the system worked with an understanding that the real entrepreneurs were farmers and tribal forest produce collectors.

What does the COVID-19 situation call for?

- As learnt from the GDP growth rates, even before COVID-19 and lockdown, socio-economic life was in great distress.
- So, the need for a basic minimum monthly income was a long-felt one.
- Now, across India, migrant workers are returning back home due to prolonged stagnation of economic activity.
- Given this, direct cash transfers should be made into the bank accounts of farmers, labourers, villagers, tribals, women and the deprived sections of society.
- A minimum monthly income will help in times of illness and save families from starvation.
- More importantly, it will bring money to the market and strengthen the economy indirectly from the ground up.
- Most of the nations of the world affected by COVID-19 are following this path of recovery.

8.7 Interest-Free Moratorium - RBI's Stance

Why in news?

The Supreme Court has asked the finance ministry for its opinion on an interest-free moratorium.

What is the case about?

- The RBI has allowed lenders to extend a moratorium on term loans till August 2020-end, following the extension of lockdown.
- However, the levy of interest during the moratorium period has been challenged.
- It is said to create hardships to the borrowers and create hindrance and obstruction in 'right to life' guaranteed by the Constitution of India.
- In this light, the Court asked for the government's opinion on waiver of interest on loans during the ongoing moratorium period.
- The Court also observed that it could not prioritise economics over health issues.

What is the RBI's stance?

- The RBI has filed an affidavit in this regard.
- It has argued that a forced waiver of interest would affect banks badly.
- It would also endanger the interests of depositors.

How valid is RBI's argument?

- Covid-19 and the lockdown have resulted in significant hardships for most economic agents.
- However, the basic rules of economic and financial governance cannot be discarded.
- A waiver would result in about a Rs 2-trillion hit for the banking system.
- Lenders are expecting bad loans to rise because of the pandemic.
- But, a waiver could affect confidence in the banking system.
- The government has suspended the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code for 6 months.
- This is again likely to increase problems for lenders.
- The Indian banking system was anyway not in good form even before the Covid-19 crisis.
- So, in all, it is difficult to find fault with the RBI's argument.

How important are the depositors?

- If the borrowers are given an interest waiver, the banks' role to service the depositors would be at stake.
- Banks have an obligation to serve their depositors too and not just borrowers.
- There is no concrete reason why the system should serve only the interests of the borrowers at the cost of the depositors and investors.
- Their right to life is no less important than that of the borrowers.
- Thus, it is important to strike a balance.

What other measures has the RBI taken?

- To be fair, the RBI on its part has taken several steps to support borrowers.
- Apart from the moratorium, the central bank has lowered interest rates.
- This has infused significant amounts of liquidity.
- Besides, it is widely expected that the RBI would allow a one-time restructuring of debt.
- Over the last one year, SEBI has undertaken significant steps to reform the rights issue process.
- Besides some permanent reforms, it also provided some temporary relaxations in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic.
- SEBI relaxed certain guidelines for right issues that open on or before March 31, 2021.
- This is to expand the universe of listed entities that are eligible for raising funds through fast track rights issuance.
- It also aims at easing the process for companies to raise funds during the present crisis.
- SEBI reduced the eligibility requirement of average market capitalisation of public shareholding from Rs 250 crore to Rs 100 crore for a fast track rights issuance.
- It also reduced the minimum subscription requirement from 90% to 75% of the issue size.
- Also, listed entities raising funds up to Rs 25 crores (erstwhile limit was Rs 10 crores) through a rights issue are now not required to file draft offer document with SEBI.

8.8 Trade Ban on China

What is the issue?

- The Indian government has responded to the border dispute with China by training its guns on trade.
- Turning a defence dispute into a trade one is an ill-advised move.

What are the reasons that say this is an ill-advised move?

- **Trade deficits are not necessarily bad** - Having a trade deficit against a country does not make the domestic economy weaker.

- If one looks at the top 25 countries with whom India trades, it has a trade surplus with the US, the UK and the Netherlands.
- But, that does not mean the Indian economy is stronger than these three.
- Similarly, it has a trade deficit with the other 22 of them (including China), regardless of their size and geographic location.
- Yet, a trade deficit with China only means that Indians buy more Chinese products than what Chinese from India.
- But per se that is not a bad thing as it shows that Indian consumers, as well as the Chinese producers, gained through trading.
- Both sides are better off than what they would have been without trade.
- While a persistent trade deficit merits the domestic government to put in place policies and create the infrastructure that raises competitiveness.
- **Will hurt the Indian poor the most** - The poorest consumers are the worst-hit in a trade ban because they are the most price-sensitive.
- Similarly, the Chinese products that are in India are already paid for.
- By banning their sale, Indians will be hurting fellow Indian retailers.
- Again, this hit would be proportionately more on the poorest retailers because of their relative inability to cope with the unexpected losses.
- **Will punish Indian producers and exporters** - Some may argue that trading with China hurts many Indian producers.
- This is true, but it is also true that trading hurts only the less efficient Indian producers while helping the more efficient Indian producers.
- Several businesses in India import intermediate goods and raw materials from China.
- These, in turn, are used to create final goods - both for the domestic Indian market and the global market (as Indian exports).
- A blanket ban on Chinese imports will hurt all these businesses at a time when they are already struggling to survive.
- This ban will also hit India's ability to produce finished goods.
- **Will barely hurt China** - In any case, India has trade deficits with most countries so why single out China.
- Still, some may argue that we want to single out China because it has killed our soldiers at the border.
- If India and China stop trading, China would lose only 3% of its exports and less than 1% of its imports.
- But India will lose 5% of its exports and 14% of its imports.
- In the short to medium term, it would be both difficult and costly to replace Chinese products.
- India and Indians will be far more hurt than it will hurt China.
- **India will lose policy credibility** - It has also been suggested that India should renege on existing contracts with China.
- This would be hugely detrimental for India, which has been trying to attract foreign investment.
- One of the first things an investor tracks is the policy credibility and certainty.
- If policies can be changed overnight, or if taxes can be slapped with retrospective effect, no investor will invest.
- Or, if they do, they will demand higher returns for the increased risk.
- **Raising tariffs is mutually assured destruction** - It has been argued that India should slap higher import duties on Chinese goods.
- Others suggested that India can allow primary and intermediate goods from China at zero duty, but apply prohibitive tariffs on final goods.

- This would be in violation of the rules of the World Trade Organization.
- Also, it is relatively easy for the world to bypass India and carry on trading if India does not play by the rules.

What is the conclusion?

- The surge of protectionism and anti-globalisation sentiment since the start of the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 is well known.
- But it has also well established that trade leaves people better off.
- Of course, not everyone. However, this protection will come at the cost of domestic consumers.
- In the first four decades of India's existence, it has tried and failed making mantras like self-reliance, import-substitution and protecting infant domestic industries work.
- India must try to aggressively acquire a higher share of global trade by raising its competitiveness.
- India now has an insignificant share in world trade.
- If it is not careful, much smaller countries will further chip away.

8.9 Ban on Chinese Apps - Rationale and Impact

Why in news?

India has banned 59 apps originating from China, including very popular ones like the TikTok, UC Browser, ShareIt, and CamScanner.

What is the legal basis for India's action?

- The ban has been enforced under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000.
- It offers the power to issue directions for blocking for public access of any information through any computer resource.
- This is done in the interest of -
 - i. sovereignty and integrity of India
 - ii. defence of India, security of the State
 - iii. friendly relations with foreign States
 - iv. public order (or)
 - v. for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence relating to above
- The Ministry of Information and Technology said that it has received many complaints in this regard.
- There were reports on misuse of some mobile apps.
- There was stealing and secretly transmitting users' data in an unauthorised manner to servers that have locations outside India.
- The notification is expected to be followed by instructions to Internet service providers to block these apps.
- Users will soon see a message saying access to the apps has been restricted on the request of the government.
- [The list of the banned apps is provided below]

What is the impact of the ban?

- Some apps on the banned list are very popular in India.
- The TikTok app, especially, has over 100 million active users in the country.
- About 30% of TikTok's downloads is said to be coming from India.

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. TikTok | 31. Mi Video Call – Xiaomi |
| 2. Shareit | 32. WeSync |
| 3. Kwai | 33. ES File Explorer |
| 4. UC Browser | 34. Viva Video – QU Video Inc |
| 5. Baidu map | 35. Meitu |
| 6. Shein | 36. Vigo Video |
| 7. Clash of Kings | 37. New Video Status |
| 8. DU battery saver | 38. DU Recorder |
| 9. Helo | 39. Vault- Hide |
| 10. Likee | 40. Cache Cleaner DU App studio |
| 11. YouCam makeup | 41. DU Cleaner |
| 12. Mi Community | 42. DU Browser |
| 13. CM Browsers | 43. Hago Play With New Friends |
| 14. Virus Cleaner | 44. Cam Scanner |
| 15. APUS Browser | 45. Clean Master – Cheetah Mobile |
| 16. ROMWE | 46. Wonder Camera |
| 17. Club Factory | 47. Photo Wonder |
| 18. Newsdog | 48. QQ Player |
| 19. Beutry Plus | 49. We Meet |
| 20. WeChat | 50. Sweet Selfie |
| 21. UC News | 51. Baidu Translate |
| 22. QQ Mail | 52. Vmate |
| 23. Weibo | 53. QQ International |
| 24. Xender | 54. QQ Security Center |
| 25. QQ Music | 55. QQ Launcher |
| 26. QQ Newsfeed | 56. U Video |
| 27. Bigo Live | 57. V fly Status Video |
| 28. SelfieCity | 58. Mobile Legends |
| 29. Mail Master | 59. DU Privacy |
| 30. Parallel Space | |

- Google-owned YouTube has more users in India than TikTok.
- But TikTok was seen as having more potential in terms of personalisation of content and overall influence.
- TikTok made relentless push into India's hinterland. Evidently, the app supports over 15 Indian languages.
- This enabled the app to work on regional talent in a very personalised manner.
- New social media platforms like Helo and Likee, as well as video chat app Bigo Live, are immensely popular among Indians who are not comfortable in English.
- These users will have to look for substitutes.
- Also, most of these platforms have Indian creators, for many of whom this is the only source of income.
- Many of these apps have offices and employees in India, and a few thousand jobs could be at stake now.

Has TikTok been banned earlier?

- TikTok has been blocked in India once earlier.
- In, May 2019, in the run up to the general elections, the government banned the app's downloads for 2 weeks following a Madras High Court ruling.
- The Court observed that it could expose children on the app to graphic content or predators.
- TikTok had appealed and the court subsequently reversed its ruling.
- But this time, though, the ban could be there to stay.

How strategic is the move and how does it impact China?

- The move comes as an exercise of coercive diplomacy with China amid the tense standoff in Ladakh.
- The decision has been taken in a specific strategic and national security context.
- So, it could be a warning to bigger Chinese businesses in India, and to China itself.
- However, the government has, for now, picked up a low-denomination item - mobile apps.
- This has only a limited impact on Indian businesses.
- But it has a disproportionately large presence in the mass consumer segment.
- This may not hurt India given the alternatives in the app space.
- But for China, the Indian app market is growing and valuable.
- More so because internet costs here are one of the lowest in the world, and consumers number over 800 million.
- Nearly half of these smartphone users are below 25 and hungry for content on their devices.
- A decision at stopping physical goods could have been challenged by China at the WTO.
- Instead, this move focuses on the technology sector.
- A ban on physical goods would have also adversely affected India's business and economy while hardly making a dent on China's.
- The move is thus being seen as one that could be more effective from New Delhi's perspective.

8.10 GeM's Country of Origin Flag

Why in news?

The government made it mandatory for sellers on the GeM portal to clarify the country of origin of their goods when registering new products.

What is the GeM portal?

- Government e-Marketplace (GeM) is the Commerce Ministry's online marketplace.
- It procures goods and services by various Ministries and government bodies.

- Products sold on the portal range from stationery used by government officials to medical products that are used on patients.

What does this decision mean?

- The GeM portal will now have the **'country of origin' flag** for their products.
- The portal already has a **'Make in India' filter**.
- Therefore, the government offices can ascertain which products have a higher content of indigenously produced raw materials.
- This would help them choose products that meet the 'minimum 50% local content' criterion when selecting bidders for their tenders.
- The portal now allows buyers to reserve a bid for Class I local suppliers, or suppliers of those goods with more than 50% local content.
- For bids below Rs 200 crore, only Class I and Class II (those with more than 20% local content) are eligible.

Why this decision was taken?

- The decision comes in the backdrop of the government's **push for Aatmanirbhar Bharat**.
- [Aatmanirbhar Bharat intends to promote self-reliance by boosting the use of locally produced goods.]
- The decision also follows the **clashes between the troops of India and China** in Galwan Valley.
- This prompted several government departments to launch an offensive against imports from China.
- The Confederation of All India Traders is pushing for a country of origin tag in the private e-commerce firms.

What would be the impact?

- Over the time, the use of imported goods in government offices and facilities may be filtered out, as the following are combined,
 1. Announcement of the 'country of origin' of the products sold on the GeM portal,
 2. Make in India campaign &
 3. A push for Aatmanirbhar Bharat.
- This might provide an opportunity to Indian manufacturers across industries to push their products in government facilities.

9. INFRASTRUCTURE

9.1 Telecom AGR Dues Case - SC Ruling

Why in news?

The Supreme Court has directed the telecom companies (telcos) to file affidavits giving details on their Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR)-related dues to the government.

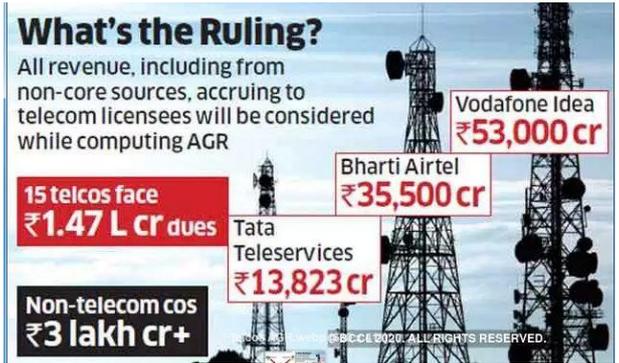
What is AGR?

- AGR is the basis on which the Department of Telecom (DoT) calculates levies payable by mobile operators.
- Essentially, it is a metric calculated from a company's gross revenues.
- It is used to determine the levy to be imposed on the tele-income.

What is the case about?

- The AGR issue is a 14-year-old case.
- It relates to mobile operators (telcos) locked in a legal battle with the government over the definition of the term AGR.

- The telecom providers insisted that AGR should only include revenue from core operations (telecom services).
- They say that other sources should be excluded from AGR calculations.
- But, the DoT maintained that AGR also embraced non-core revenue (non-telecom services).
- These include revenue from the sale of assets, interest on deposits, rental income and such like.



What was the earlier court ruling?

- Ending the legal tussle, the Supreme Court in October 2019 rejected telcos' definition of AGR.
- It thus held that telecom companies have to pay fines and penalties on the unpaid fees, other than termination fee and roaming charges.
- The Court allowed the Centre to recover over Rs 92,000 crore from the already financially stressed telecom industry within 3 months.
- The order came as a major blow to the two incumbent operators, Vodafone Idea and Bharti Airtel.
- This, in turn, forced them to hike tariffs.
- In February 2020, the Supreme Court condemned the mobile operators for non-payment of dues.
- The court warned them with contempt proceedings if they did not pay up the dues by March 17, 2020.

What is the issue with non-telecom PSUs?

- Non-telecom companies hold nearly 3,500 telecom licences, such as to provide Internet and national long-distance services.
- Some non-telecom PSUs were served demand notices by the DoT for over Rs 3 lakh crore of combined license fee dues.
- They include Gail India, Power Grid Corp of India Ltd (PGCIL), Oil India and RailTel Corp.
- This was done following the Court's ruling in October 2020.

What is the present ruling?

- The court has been quite harsh on the government for having raised a demand for dues against non-telecom PSUs such as GAIL.
- The court viewed that as going beyond what it had mandated.
- It had also asked the DoT to clarify why it did so.
- The Court had also come down heavily on the DoT for allowing companies to re-assess what they owed the government.
- The Court also said that its October 2019 order on revenues for calculating dues was final.
- The two companies- Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea, sought some time to make the balance AGR payments.
- They agreed to have their licences cancelled in case they failed to meet the deadline.
- **Repayment schedule** - On the time required by the telcos, the Union government had decided on a 20-year repayment schedule.
- But the court has observed that nobody can predict the next 20 years.
- It thus said that the "gentleman's promise" of 20 years cannot be a criterion for its judgment.
- This is naturally agreeable and thus the Court has asked the companies to file affidavits on timeframes.
- The court has also asked the companies to explain what security they will provide and what the road map for their payments will be.



9.2 Central Vista Project

Why in news?

The Central government is planning to restructure the Central Vista.

What is the Central Vista Project?

- The Central government wants to redevelop the Central Vista, the 3-km long stretch from Rashtrapati Bhavan to India Gate.
- Amid the Covid-19 battle, the Centre has been rushing ahead, ignoring pleas to pause it for further deliberations.
- The plan is to construct a new Parliament building by March 2022 and a common central secretariat by March 2024.
- These will be built along with new residences for the Prime Minister and the Vice President near South and North Blocks, which will be repurposed as museums.
- There will be a new building for the Prime Minister's Office.

What is the draft plan?

- A draft master plan by a private firm contracted by the government has proposed a Parliament building next to the existing heritage structure, and office buildings all along Rajpath.
- These buildings will be built after demolishing existing buildings.

What is the project cost?

- The government has not publicly stated the project's estimated cost.
- According to the CPWD application for environmental clearance for the project, the construction of the new Parliament building is estimated to cost Rs. 922 crore.

Why the Centre wants to restructure?

- For the pre-Independence buildings that came up between 1911 and 1931, the Centre has cited that the restructuring needs to be done having in mind the structural safety of the existing buildings.
- For the post-Independence buildings such as Shastri Bhawan and Krishi Bhawan, it has cited the need for modern workspaces.
- Once delimitation is done and the number of seats will increase.
- So, there will be need for more space **to seat MPs** and **office space** for all of them.

How was the decision taken?

- The decision on redevelopment was taken in a hurry and without adequate consultations.
- The utility of such a massive redevelopment is not easily defensible.
- Nevertheless, the government is eager to recondition the capital's landscape as its monumental legacy.

What were the actions that were taken in a hurry?

- Independent expert members of the Central Vista Committee could not attend the meeting where it was passed without much discussion.
- The process for change of land use by the Delhi Development Authority was completed just before the lockdown began.

Was there any opposition?

- The Opposition, environmentalists, architects and citizens have raised many concerns even before the pandemic brought in extra issues.
- They have questioned the lack of studies to ascertain the need for the project and its impact on the environment, traffic and pollution.
- But, several key approvals for the proposed Parliament building have been pushed during the lockdown.
- This led to allegations of a lack of transparency.



- There were enough reasons to be circumspect about this grand idea from the very beginning.
- In the situation created by the pandemic, it must be deferred and the idea revisited later.

10. AGRICULTURE

10.1 Need for Land Leasing Legislation

What is the issue?

- The government's recently announced set of agricultural marketing reforms as part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan is largely welcome.
- However, a critical big-ticket land sector reform, which is the legalisation on land leasing, is still pending.

What is the present scenario?

- At present, leasing of agricultural land is either banned or severely restricted in most states.
- Only some states allow selected individuals to let out their lands.
- These include disabled people, widows or armed forces personnel.
- The landholders do not lease them out for fear of losing the ownership rights.
- As a result, many tiny land parcels and land holdings of migrant farmers remain unutilised.
- But cumulatively, they amount for a sizable part of the cultivable land.
- Besides, tenant farmers and share-croppers are denied the compensation for crop damages.
- They also find it hard to access cheap bank loans and other government subsidies and doles.
- E.g. the direct income support through annual cash transfer of Rs 6,000 per hectare

What does this call for?

- The small farmers are now forced to either rent out their fields to quit farming or hire more land to make their holdings viable.
- A valid land lease market is, in fact, believed to have become an economic necessity for the small farmers.
- Legal validation of land leasing is imperative to undo the gross injustice done to farmers.
- Tenurial security, on the other hand, will incentivise tenant cultivators to invest in land improvement and crop yield-enhancing measures to raise their income.

What are the proposals in place?

- Legalisation of land leasing has long been a part of the agricultural reforms agenda laid down by the NITI Aayog.
- This has subsequently been endorsed by the high-level committee on doubling farmers' income too.
- The committee (headed by an agriculture ministry official Ashok Dalwai) mentioned it in its report submitted in 2019.
- The NITI Aayog also appointed a committee headed by the former chairman of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices, T Haque.
- This has already drafted a model land leasing Bill to serve as a guide for the states to amend their land laws.
- Several states are said to be favourably inclined to reform their land-related statutes.
- But, concrete action has not been forthcoming in this field by them.

What is the way forward?

- The land acquisition law faced stiff resistance from farmers who did not want to be uprooted from their ancestral lands.
- But unlike this, the land lease statute is non-controversial as it does not affect land ownership.



- All that the Centre needs to do now is nudge the states to make the necessary provisions in their laws for leasing of land.
- The reform needs the cooperation of the state governments, which the Centre will have to seek through persuasion.
- If brought into place, a land lease law can potentially help the rural poor move out of poverty.

10.2 Formalising Food Enterprises

Why in news?

An elaborate package for agriculture has been launched with proposal to formalise the food enterprises.

How was this package viewed?

- Several analysts and commentators then adjudged this as a turning point for agriculture.
- Much has been talked about it since, on the extent of fund commitment, the policy reforms related to the Essential Commodities Act, and amendment in marketing laws.

What is the importance of small and micro-enterprises?

- Small and micro-enterprises with 0 or <5 employees dominate the enterprise in low and middle-income countries.
- India has more than 60 million of these, and 20 million are in the food sector.
- These small food enterprises employ 25 million men and nearly 10 million women as entrepreneurs and workers.
- It supports 150 million people. India has about 120 million.

Why they need to be formalised?

- In fostering recovery, it is important to realise that these enterprises, and not agriculture, **drives the growth in India's food economy**.
- Between 2010-11 and 2015-16, their gross value added increased at 24% per year compared to a meagre 2% in the agricultural GDP.
- An overwhelming share of these enterprises are informal.
- Hence, their formalisation and is probably the most underrated proposal in the package.

What is the cluster-based approach for food enterprises?

- The package also emphasised a cluster approach for the food enterprises.
- This means that the idea of developing **commodity-specific clusters** like kesar from Kashmir, tapioca from Tamil Nadu, etc.
- In such a cluster, units could be horizontally or vertically linked.
- The success depends on how enterprises interact with one another, and how enterprises interact with each other depends on the extent of formalisation.
- Hence, the cluster approach to food enterprise development must undertake a massive pre-step of formalisation.

What should be the vision of food enterprises?

- The food enterprises are further envisioned to position themselves in the context as “Vocal for local with Global outreach”.
- But much more is needed for crossing the local-global viaduct.
- Given the history and tenets of consumer psychology, more vocal for local has happened only when the local has a global reach.

What is the reality?

- Some statistics underscore the realities confronting food enterprises.

- India is the second-largest horticultural producer in the world.
- But, much smaller countries like Thailand and Egypt do better in horticultural exports.
- Despite being a comparatively small exporter in food, India faces the highest number of consignment rejections from the US and Europe.
- Like any other product with credence attribute, **reputation effects** drive food products too.

What needs to be done?

- **GAP norms** - India needs to come up with good agricultural practice (GAP) norms to build a reputation for delivering on quality and safety.
- This would help India with much-needed credibility and reputation for going global would not be possible.
- If the package were to stipulate on quality and safety standards, set out a blueprint for GAP and other standards, one could see a prospect for the food enterprises.
- **Promoting clusters** - One-size-fits-all type interventions may not work in the promotion of these clusters.
- Farmers need to have real-time information on niche commodities and their prices to be able to tap on global export markets.
- Like Grapenet with registering of farmers and real-time information and monitoring on needed practices, there should be other nets like applenet.
- These systems involve fixed costs that disadvantage small farmers.
- Hence, suitable aggregation models that anchor on safety, quality and health attributes are needed for local to global outreach models.

10.3 Ordinances on Agriculture

What is the issue?

- Three agricultural Ordinances were announced recently.
- Just as all ordinances are not reforms, all reforms aren't the '1991 moment' for agriculture.

Why were the ordinances released?

- These ordinances were announced to facilitate trade in agricultural produce.
- They were historically resisted by the bureaucracy and the states.
- The ordinances were introduced rather than bills, because of,
 1. Unreleased frustration at repeatedly failing to change the status quo of depressed farmer livelihoods, and
 2. The pressure of the PMO seeking instant delivery
- Bills would require to be placed in the public domain for comments, consultations would be held with farmers and states.

What is the Farming Produce Trade and Commerce Ordinance?

- The baby has been thrown out with the bath water, specifically with the Farming Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance 2020.
- Due to the unionisation of middlemen and their financial power, politicians of the states have been reluctant to amend the exploitative agriculture marketing laws.
- This, in turn, does not allow farmers to receive a fair price.
- But, now, an unregulated marketplace has been created where 15 crore farmers will be exposed to the skulduggery of traders.
- Rather than replicate Punjab's successful agriculture mandi model, now states will lose revenue to even upgrade and repair rural infrastructure.



What would be the impacts of this ordinance?

- Over the time, the largest informal sector in the country will begin to get formalised and new business models will develop.
- A different breed of aggregators will create the much-needed competition to the existing monopoly of local traders.
- When farmers sell agricultural produce outside of APMC market yards, they cannot legally be charged commission on the sale of farm produce.
- To survive, the APMCs will have to standardise and rationalise their mandi fee structure and limit the commission charged by traders on sale of farmers' produce.

What the amendment should have done?

- The amendment limited the powers and revenues of the state, and not the agriculture department itself.
- An amputation was required in the Essential Commodities Act (ECA), 1955, where a band-aid dressing has been applied.
- This amendment was supposed to allay the fears of traders emitting from the bureaucracy's powers to arbitrarily evoke stockholding limits etc.
- The amendment's fine print makes it ambiguous and leaves space for whimsical interpretations.
- The trader's uncertainty is compounded by the arbitrary import-export policy decisions, which dilute the purpose of the amendment itself.

What is the Farmers Agreement Ordinance?

- Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance 2020 could have been simply called the contract farming ordinance.
- It tries to placate the fears of both the farmer and the contractor when they sign an agreement.
- For the farmer, the legal recourse isn't a practical choice as the powers of the aggregators' deep pockets cast a shadow over the redressal process.
- Likewise, the tediously stretched legal proceedings are dissuasion enough to either not seek redressal or settle for unfavourable terms.
- That produce derived from contract farming operations will not be subject to any obstructionist laws is a very good step.

What will be the impact of all these laws?

- Farmer-producer organisations and new aggregators will get a boost with these laws.
- They will become harbingers of prosperity in some small corners of the countryside.
- The union of the three ordinances appears to be a precursor to implementing the Shanta Kumar Committee recommendations.
- [The Committee recommended to dilute and dismantle FCI, MSP & PDS]
- This will push farmers from the frying into the fire.
- It may also be interpreted that the sugar industry needn't pay farmers the central government FRP or the state government SAP price for cane.
- The way the establishment has gone about pushing these ordinances, the government has lost moral and political ground.
- The government efforts aren't bearing fruit and the rural distress worsens.



11. ENVIRONMENT

11.1 Kerala Elephant Killing

Why in news?

A pregnant elephant in Kerala died due to the treacherous use of a food bomb by the locals.

What happened?

- Many elephants are killed every year in India as their paths cross those of humans.
- But the image of a mortally wounded animal standing impassively in a river in Palakkad as life ebbed out of it will remain in our mind.
- Whether the booby-trapped pineapple that took the life of elephant was intended for elephants or other animals matters little.
- Because such traps litter the troubled landscapes that surround forests across the country.
- The perpetrators may be prosecuted for the elephant's death.
- But this can do little to mitigate the larger issue of lost ranges and blocked corridors for these wandering giants.

What does this incident remind us?

- The tragic fate that occurred to this creature is a reminder of the **rising human-animal conflicts**.
- These conflicts are only destined to grow, as commercial pressures eat into already diminished habitat.
- India has just under 30,000 elephants but no strong science-imbued policy that encourages soft landscapes and migrating passages that will reduce conflict.
- It is the **lack of a scientific culture** and the **readiness** to spare forested lands from commercial exploitation.

What are the reasons for conflict?

- **Shrinking ranges and feeding grounds for elephants** cause serious worry, because the animals look for soft landscapes adjoining forests such as coffee, tea and cardamom estates.
- In the **absence of these soft landscapes**, they wander into food-rich farms falling in their movement pathways.
- Research in Karnataka showed that 60% of elephant distribution was encountered outside protected areas.
- In Kerala, such movement along human-dominated landscapes routinely produces conflict.
- **Politicians** in the State were opposed to the Madhav Gadgil Committee Report calling for the Western Ghats to be classified as ecologically sensitive and spared of destructive development.
- With such **fundamental philosophical disagreement**, and a vision of lush landscapes as just a resource to be exploited, animals have little chance of escaping deadly conflict.

What is needed?

- A sensible course open to conservation-minded governments is to end all intrusion into the 5% of protected habitat in India.
- The governments must draw up better compensation schemes for farmers who lose crops to animals.
- A culture shift to protect would genuinely enrich people and save biodiversity.

11.2 China & its Pangolin Protection

Why in news?

China accorded pangolin the highest level of protection and removed its scales from its list of approved traditional medicines.



What is China's latest decision?

- The Chinese State Forestry and Grassland Administration had issued a notice upgrading its protection of pangolins.
- It has also banned all commercial trade of the endangered mammal.
- The move came about after the 2020 edition of the "Chinese Pharmacopoeia" excluded traditional medicines made from four species.
- This 2020 edition also listed alternatives sourced from species which are not endangered.

What does Covid-19 have to do with China's decision?

- Back in February 2020, the reports linking the transmission of the virus to wet markets in Wuhan had emerged.
- So, China banned the consumption of wild animals, including pangolins, in an attempt to limit the risk of diseases being transmitted from animals to humans.
- Before its latest decision, China has removed health insurance cover to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) recipes with pangolin products.
- Also, pangolin meat is considered a delicacy in China and Vietnam.
- Their scales, which are made of keratin are believed to improve lactation, are considered to promote blood circulation, and remove blood stasis.
- These so-called health benefits are so far unproven.
- The mere suspicion of unproven link between pangolins and Covid-19 has increased public discussion on health risks from human-wildlife interactions.
- These discussions have raised awareness of the exploitation of pangolins.

What makes pangolins the most trafficked animals in the world?

- **Eightspecies** of pangolins, the scaly insectivorous creatures, are distributed across Asia and Africa.
- They have long been hunted for their meat and scales, which indigenous tribes in central and eastern India are also known to have worn as rings.
- Two of these species are found in 15 states in India, although their numbers are yet to be completely documented.
- The creatures are **strictly nocturnal**, repelling predators by **curling up into scaly spheres** upon being alarmed.
- The same defence mechanism however, makes them slow and easy to catch once spotted.
- They do not occur in large numbers and their **shy nature** makes encounters with humans rare.
- Their alleged health benefits in TCM prompted a booming illicit export of scales from Africa over the past decade.
- Conservation of pangolins received its first shot in the arm when the 2017 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) enforced an international trade ban.

Are the animals trafficked from India as well?

- Law enforcement authorities in India have made seizures of pangolin scales **from 2012 onward**.
- Once the demand for pangolins in China is known, indigenous tribes in India supply it to customers through middlemen in Bhutan and Nepal.
- Once Pangolins are caught, killed and skinned, the exchange of scales typically takes place at Siliguri (West Bengal) or Moreh (Manipur).
- Poachers use only trains and buses to avoid detection, and carry as much as 30 kg of scales at a time.
- **TRAFFIC study2018** found that 5,772 pangolins had been detected by law enforcement agencies in India between 2009 and 2017.
- The Madhya Pradesh Police's Special Task Force is the leader in tracking pangolin poachers and traffickers.

- It was formed in 2014 specifically to crack down the illicit export of the endangered creatures.
- Given the fluctuating demand for scales, the price ranges between Rs 30,000 and Rs 1 crore for a single animal.

How will China's decision impact pangolin trafficking?

- Some experts say that the immediate impact would be pangolin scales losing their legitimacy in TCM.
- However, some say that the history of the ban of wildlife trade in China is not encouraging.
- There is a continued availability of **tiger bone wine** — believed to have health benefits — despite its ban on tiger products in 1993.
- The price of the **elephant ivory** plummeted by two-thirds after China banned it.
- The same trend would apply to pangolin scales.
- India, where the trade largely remains local, has been registering a decline from before China's ban.
- This decrease is attributed to the border closures, shifts in law enforcement priorities, or decreased reporting on wildlife seizures.
- This decrease may also be credited the decline to the disappearance of public transport due to the national lockdown.

11.3 Draft EIA Notification, 2020

What is the issue?

- The government has put up for public consideration and comment the Draft Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2020.
- The draft is seen as an attempt to weaken environmental regulation and silence the affected communities.

What is EIA?

- The EIA process scrutinises the potential environmental impact of a project.
- It looks into the negative externalities of a proposed project i.e. before commencement.
- It then determines whether it can be carried out in the form proposed, or whether it is to be abandoned or modified.

How does it work?

- The assessment is carried out by an Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC).
- The EAC consists of scientists and project management experts.
- The EAC frames the scope of the EIA study and a preliminary report is prepared.
- The report is published, and a public consultation process takes place.
- During consultation, objections can be heard including from project-affected people.
- The EAC can then make a final appraisal of the project.
- It is then forwarded to the regulatory authority, which is the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF).
- The regulatory authority is ordinarily obliged to accept the decision of the EAC.

What is the idea behind?

- The basis in global environmental law for the EIA is the “precautionary principle”.
- Environmental harm is often irreparable.
- It is thus cheaper to avoid damage to the environment than to remedy it.





- Various international environmental treaties and obligations as well as Supreme Court judgments are based on this principle.
- Environmental regulation must balance damage to the environment with sustainable development and possible benefits of a project.
- In this line, any project that involves environmental factors needs an unbiased assessment made on a precautionary basis.
- It is with this idea that the Environmental Impact Assessment is carried out.
- However, industries and business interests have long regarded EIA as a constraint to them.

What are the concerns with the recent notification?

- The stated reason is to streamline the EIA process and bring it in line with recent judgments.
- If put into force, the EIA Notification, 2020 will replace the EIA Notification, 2006 for all future projects.
- But the Draft EIA Notification dilutes the effectiveness of the process, and shrinks its scope.
- The most devastating blow to the EIA regime is the creation of an ex-post-facto clearance route.
- Under this, the project proponent can enter an assessment procedure, with some minor fines for the violations.
- In other words, it offers a route when an EIA clearance is not sought or granted, and the construction of the project had taken place.
- Where such ex-post-facto clearances were being granted previously, the courts cracked down on them as illegal.
- Therefore, what could not be ratified will now find itself notified.
- The legality of sidestepping the courts is questionable and will have to be tested.
- In essence, the EIA would become a business decision as to whether the law needs to be followed or the violation can be “managed”.
- The argument that this route will be an “exception” is difficult, given the long history of expanding the exception into the rule.
- The draft notification also shortens the time for the public to furnish responses on the project.
- The project-affected people are frequently forest dwellers.
- For these and others who do not have access to information and technology, this will make it harder to put forth representations.
- Monitoring requirements have also been relaxed.
- The draft EIA notification halves the frequency of reporting requirements from every 6 months to once a year.
- It also extends the validity period for approvals in critical sectors such as mining.
- The scope of the EIA regime is also set to shrink.
- Industries that previously fell under the categories that required a full assessment have been downgraded.
- The construction industry will be one such beneficiary, where only the largest projects will be scrutinised fully.
- Defence and national security installations were always understandably exempt.
- But, a vague new category of projects “involving other strategic considerations” will also now be free from public consultation requirements.

How serious is this?

- A deadly gas leak at LG Polymers’ Visakhapatnam plant in May 2020 killed 12 people and harmed hundreds.
- What came to light after the disaster was that the plant had been operating without a valid environmental clearance for decades.



- Given such incidents, weakening the EIA process is essentially anti-democratic.
- Seismic shifts in the local environment can threaten livelihoods, flood a valley or destroy a forest.
- For affected communities, public consultation is a referendum on such existential threats.
- To curtail this is to silence the voices that are scarcely heard otherwise.
- It seems that the government views environmental regulation as an impediment to the ease of doing business.
- During the nationwide coronavirus-led lockdown, the MoEF has been working swiftly to clear projects.
- It is even carrying out public hearings over video conference.
- Notably, the Minister for Environment and Forests and the Minister for Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises is the same person now.
- Two charges that are oppositional are vested with the same person and the resultant conflict of interest is debatable.

11.4 Genetically Modified Seeds

Why in news?

The farmers' union ShetkariSanghatana (Maharashtra) announced fresh plans in its agitation for use of genetically modified seeds.

What are GM seeds?

- Conventional plant breeding involves crossing species of the same genus to provide the offspring with the desired traits of both parents.
- Genetic engineering aims to transcend the genus barrier by introducing an alien gene in the seeds to get the desired effects.
- The alien gene could be from a plant, an animal or even a soil bacterium.

What are the GM crops in India?

- **Bt cotton** - It is the only GM crop that is allowed in India.
- It has two alien genes from the soil bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) that allows the crop to develop a protein toxic to the pest pink bollworm.
- **HtBtcotton** - It is derived with the insertion of an additional gene, from another soil bacterium.
- This allows the plant to resist the common herbicide glyphosate.
- **Bt brinjal** - In this, a gene allows the plant to resist attacks of fruit and shoot borer.
- **DMH-11 mustard** - It was developed in University of Delhi.
- In this, genetic modification allows cross-pollination in a crop that self-pollinates in nature.
- Globally, GM variants of maize, canola and soya bean are available.

What is the legal position of GM crops in India?

- In India, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) is the apex body that allows for commercial release of GM crops.
- In 2002, the GEAC had allowed the commercial release of Bt cotton.
- More than 95% of the country's cotton area has since then come under Bt cotton.
- Use of the unapproved GM variant can attract a jail term of 5 years and fine of Rs 1 lakh under the Environmental Protection Act, 1989.

Why are farmers rooting for GM crops?

- **Cotton** - In the case of cotton, farmers cite the high cost of weeding.
- This cost goes down considerably if they grow HtBt cotton and use glyphosate against weeds.
- **Brinjal** - Brinjal growers in Haryana have rooted for Bt brinjal.



- This is because it reduces the cost of production by cutting down on the use of pesticides.

What is the problem?

- **Unauthorised crops** are widely used.
- Of the 4-4.5 crore packets (each weighing 400 g) of cotton sold in the country, 50 lakh are of the unapproved HtBt cotton.
- Haryana has reported farmers growing Bt brinjal in pockets which had caused a major agitation there.
- Environmentalists argue that the **long-lasting effect of GM crops** is yet to be studied and thus they should not be released commercially.
- Genetic modification brings about changes that can be harmful to humans in the long run.

12. DISASTER MANAGEMENT

12.1 IFLOWS-Mumbai - Integrated Flood Warning System

Why in news?

Maharashtra's CM and Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Science and Technology recently launched an Integrated Flood Warning System called 'IFLOWS-Mumbai'.

What is 'IFLOWS-Mumbai'?

- IFLOWS is a joint initiative between the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) and Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).
- It is a monitoring and flood warning system.
- It will be able to relay alerts of possible flood-prone areas anywhere between 6 to 72 hours in advance.
- The system can provide all information regarding possible flood-prone areas including -
 - i. the height the floodwater could attain
 - ii. location-wise problem areas across all 24 wards
 - iii. calculation on the vulnerability and risk of elements exposed to flood
- The early warning forecast would include alerts on -
 - i. rainfall information
 - ii. tide levels
 - iii. storm surge for low-lying areas anticipated to be affected
- The system is designed to generate flood warnings for specific geographical areas of the city.
- All this information will then be routed to authorities.
- It thereby will minimize the damage from cyclones and heavy rain events in Mumbai by evacuating people to safe areas.

How does it work?

- The primary source for the system's flood assessments is the amount of rainfall.
- However, Mumbai being a coastal city, the system also factors in tidal waves and storm tides.
- In the last 2 years, researchers have been conducting studies to provide real-time weather information.
- This is being done by measuring -
 - i. the city's rainfall, how much water drained out
 - ii. topography, land use, infrastructure development
 - iii. population

- iv. lakes, creeks
- v. data on river bathymetry of all rivers namely Mithi, Dahisar, Oshiwara, Poisar and Ulhas
- The system incorporates -
 - i. weather models from the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF), India Meteorological Department (IMD)
 - ii. field data from the rain gauge network of 165 stations set up by Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), BMC and IMD
- The system has provisions to capture the urban drainage within the city and predict the areas of flooding.
- It comprises of various modules namely Data Assimilation, Flood, Inundation, Vulnerability, Risk, Dissemination and Decision Support System.



What is the need?

- Mumbai, the financial capital of India, has been experiencing floods with increased periodicity.
- The flood during 26 July 2005, when the city received a rainfall of 94 cm, a 100-year high in a span of 24 hours had paralyzed the city completely.
- The flood on 29 August 2017 had brought the city to a standstill.
- In 2019, there were post-monsoon and unseasonal rainfall as late as October and two tropical cyclones in the Arabian Sea.
- These have left a trail of destruction in Mumbai.
- Urban flooding is common in the city from June to September, resulting in the crippling of traffic, railways and airlines.
- As preparedness for floods before they occur, the IFLOWS-Mumbai system will help in warning the citizens.
- Mumbai is only the second city in the country after Chennai to get this system.
- Similar systems are being developed for Bengaluru and Kolkata.

12.2 Russian Oil Spill

Why in news?

Russia declared a state of emergency, five days after a power plant fuel leak in its Arctic region.

What happened?

- This leak caused 20,000 tonnes of diesel oil to escape into the Ambaranya river, turning its surface crimson red.
- This river is part of a network that flows into the environmentally sensitive Arctic Ocean.
- The emergency measures were announced within Russia's Krasnoyarsk Region, located in the vast and sparsely populated Siberian peninsula.
- The power plant is located near the Region's Norilsk city, around 3000 km northeast of Moscow.

How did the leak happen?

- The thermoelectric power plant at Norilsk is built on permafrost, which has weakened over the years owing to climate change.
- This caused the pillars that supported the plant's fuel tank to sink, leading to a loss of containment on 29th May 2020.
- Around 20,000 tonnes of diesel oil was released into the Ambaranya river, which has since drifted 12 km on its surface.



- Norilsk Nickel is the Russian mining giant that owns the plant.
- It said that it had reported the leak in a “timely and proper” way.
- It also said that the pillars had held the tank in its place for 30 years without difficulty.
- It has also been blamed for another leak in 2016, when pollutants from its plant leaked into another river in the region.

What has Russia done so far?

- The leak, which took place on May 29, came to the notice of the Region’s governor, Alexander Uss, on May 31.
- Uss told President Vladimir Putin during a videoconference that he became aware of the spill after information appeared in social media.
- Putin ordered a probe into the incident.
- Boom obstacles were placed in the river, but they were unable to contain the oil because of shallow waters.
- So far, three criminal proceedings have been launched, and the head of the power plant has been detained.
- The state of emergency declared on June 3 would bring in extra forces and federal resources for the clean-up efforts.

What is the extent of the damage?

- The river would be difficult to clean, given its shallow waters and remote location, as well as the magnitude of the spill.
- World Wildlife Fund described this as the second-largest known oil leak in modern Russia’s history in terms of volume.
- The Russian chapter of activist group Greenpeace said damages to the Arctic waterways could be at least 6 billion rubles (over \$76 million).
- It has compared the incident to Alaska’s 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster.
- Its estimate does not include atmospheric damage due to greenhouse gases and soil pollution.
- The installed buoys will only help collect a small part of the pollution, nearly all the diesel fuel will remain in the environment.

What are the clean-up measures being suggested?

- During the video conference with Putin, the Russian minister of natural resources opposed setting the vast quantity of oil afire.
- The minister recommended diluting the layer with reagents.

13. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

13.1 Private Participation in Space Sector

What is the issue?

- Elon Musk’s SpaceX has become the first private company to launch human beings into orbit.
- In this context, here is a look on the role of private participation in the space sector.

How did private participation evolve in the U.S.?

- NASA used to have a fleet of five spaceships under its Space Shuttle programme.
- These were used to make a total of 135 of journeys into space and the International Space Station (ISS), in the 30 years from 1981 to 2011.
- Two of these were destroyed in accidents, the Challenger in 1986 and Columbia in 2003.
- Each resulted in the death of seven astronauts.

- In the 2003 accident, India-born astronaut Kalpana Chawla was among those killed.
- After that, the US government had decided to close the Space Shuttle programme.
- The three remaining spaceships, Discovery, Atlantis, and Endeavour, were formally retired in July 2011.
- But they were fit for many more flights.
- It was decided that it probably no longer made sense for NASA to build and operate these spaceships.
- It was not just costly, but was also consuming a lot of scientific resources.
- The transportation needs could easily be fulfilled by space vehicles that some private companies were promising to make.
- Accordingly, it was decided to help and support these companies in building these spaceships.
- These can be hired by other agencies as well and even private individuals.
- The NASA collaboration with SpaceX and Boeing was a result of this.
- In the meanwhile, NASA utilised Russian spaceships to travel to the ISS, for which it paid tens of millions of dollars for every trip.
- Russia also uses the ISS facility, and routinely sends its astronauts to the space station on its own spaceships.
- For NASA, private companies' role is expected to be a cheaper option.
- It also offers the comfort of operating from home soil and eliminates dependence on a foreign country.

How has private participation so far been?

- World over, more and more work of space agencies is already being done in collaboration with private companies.
- There are literally hundreds of private entities building commercial satellites for their clients.
- However, launch services remain a somewhat restricted zone, considering that it requires elaborate facilities and deep pockets.
- But here too, there are several players apart from SpaceX and Boeing.
- Many, like Virgin Galactic of businessperson Richard Branson, have already made space flights.
- It might soon start offering passenger rides to space to those who can afford to pay.
- In fact, in 2019, a spacecraft built by Scaled Composites, a US company, even took a human being for a very short ride into space, becoming the first private spacecraft to do so.

What is the case with India?

- Most of the private companies operating in the space sector in India collaborate with the ISRO.
- They contribute in building and fabricating the components that go into making rockets and satellites.
- There are several companies that have started making satellites for their own use, or for their clients.
- However, launch services, including the building of rockets or launch vehicles, is still some distance away in India right now.
- ISRO has been collaborating more and more with private industry.
- However, the capability to independently carry out even routine space missions, like that by SpaceX/Boeing/Virgin Galactic, has been missing in India.

What are the future prospects?

- SpaceX's flight underlines the fact that space research and exploration is now a much more collaborative enterprise than before.
- Space agencies of different countries are sharing data and resources.
- More importantly, they are increasingly getting together to carry out joint missions as well.
- The ISS itself is a good example of international cooperation in the space sector.

- The space facility (ISS) is set to retire somewhere around 2028.
- ISS's replacement being planned is likely to have participation from at least 10 countries, and possibly private players as well.
- There is also a growing realisation that space agencies need to direct their energies and resources more towards scientific research and deep space exploration.
- It's been 50 years since the landing on moon, and efforts to take human beings to Mars and other celestial bodies, needs to be expedited.
- Getting back to the Moon, which NASA and some other agencies plan to do in the next few years, is just the first step in that direction.
- But that would also require huge amounts of financial resources that most of the space agencies, including NASA, are currently starved of.
- Private players are expected to infuse fresh investments as well as technological innovation in this area.

13.2 SpaceX-NASA Dragon Demo-2 launch

Why in news?

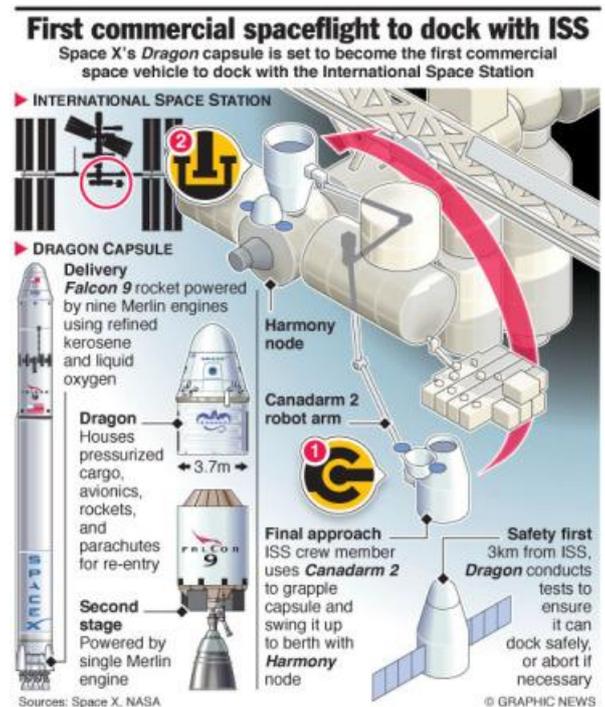
- SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket and Crew Dragon spacecraft, carrying two NASA astronauts, successfully blasted off from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.
- Elon Musk's SpaceX has thus become the first private company to launch human beings into orbit.

What are the component parts?

- SpaceX is a company founded by billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk.
- Elon Musk also heads Tesla Motors that produces new-age automobiles.
- The rocket, named Falcon 9, which carried the spaceship into the orbit, was built by SpaceX.
- Crew Dragon Capsule is the spaceship that carries the astronauts.
- The Florida launch facility used for the flight still belonged to NASA.

What is the mission plan?

- Veteran NASA astronauts Robert Behnken and Douglas Hurley flew onboard the spaceship named Crew Dragon.
- They have embarked on a 19-hour voyage to the orbiting International Space Station (ISS).
- [ISS is the world's only space-based laboratory. It is located about 400 km from the earth.]
- Crew Dragon Capsule will dock automatically into the docking port Harmony, with the help of sensors and cameras.
- They will perform tests on the Crew Dragon and conduct research.
- At ISS, they will spend 4 months before returning home.
- On atmospheric re-entry, the Crew Dragon capsule will splashdown in the Atlantic Ocean and will be recovered by the Go Navigator Recovery Vessel.



- The mission was called Demo-2, in keeping with the fact that it was still only a 'test flight.'
- If successful, this would lead to more missions in the coming years.



Why is the mission so special?

- For NASA, it was the first flight of its astronauts on an American spaceship, launched on American soil, since the STS-135 mission in 2011.
- Following the 2011 mission, all astronauts were flown to the ISS in Russia's Soyuz Capsule.
- With the launch of SpaceX's Crew Dragon space craft, NASA is heralding a new chapter in space exploration.
- It sets the precedence for private participation in space operations.
- There was an opinion that the government monopoly in space exploration was not sustainable.
- Inviting private players is expected to exponentially bring down the cost of space travel.
- SpaceX flight is a culmination of more than decade-long efforts to enable private players build and operate spaceflights.
- It will also allow NASA to concentrate on deep space exploration.
- NASA could now work more vigorously towards taking humans to moon, and Mars, and, possibly, on some asteroid, in between.

13.3 IN-SPACE - Private Space Industry in India

Why in news?

The Government of India has announced the creation of a new 'Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre' (IN-SPACE).

What is IN-SPACE for?

- IN-SPACE will be an autonomous nodal agency under the Department of Space.
- It is expected to be functional within 6 months (from June 2020).
- IN-SPACE is supposed to be a facilitator and a regulator.
- It will act as an interface between ISRO and private parties.
- It will provide the necessary support for the private space industry to conduct its activities.
- IN-SPACE will assess the needs and demands of private players including educational and research institutions.
- It will explore ways to accommodate these requirements in consultation with ISRO.
- It will also assess how best to utilise India's space resources and increase space-based activities.
- Existing ISRO infrastructure, scientific and technical resources and even data are planned to be made accessible to interested parties.
- [The infrastructure includes both ground- and space-based.]
- The decision comes as a part of an important set of reforms to open up the space sector.
- The objective is to make space-based applications and services more widely accessible to everyone.

How is India's private sector participation in space industry?

- Currently, there does exist private industry involvement in India's space sector.
- In fact, a large part of manufacturing and fabrication of rockets and satellites now happens in the private sector.
- There is an increasing participation of research institutions as well.
- However, Indian industry had a barely 3% share in a rapidly growing global space economy.
- Currently, the value of the global space industry is estimated to be \$360 billion.
- Only 2% of this market goes for rocket and satellite launch services, which require fairly large infrastructure and heavy investment.



- A huge 95% are related to satellite-based services, and ground-based systems.
- Indian industry, however, is unable to compete.

Why is Indian space industry lagging behind?

- Till now, Indian space industry's role has been mainly that of suppliers of components and sub-systems.
- Indian industries do not have the resources or the technology to undertake independent space projects or provide space-based services.
- Additionally, the demand for space-based applications and services is growing even within India.
- The need for satellite data, imageries and space technology now cuts across sectors.
- It ranges from weather to agriculture to transport to urban development, and more.
- But, ISRO is unable to cater to this.
- ISRO would have to be expanded 10 times the current level to meet all the demand that is arising.

What opportunity will IN-SPACE offer?

- Currently, all launches from India happen on ISRO rockets, the different versions of PSLV and GSLV.
- Several Indian companies were waiting to make use of the opportunities as IN-SPACE provides.
- A few companies were also in the process of developing their own launch vehicles.
- ISRO is now willing to extend its support to them.
- ISRO would provide all its facilities to private players whose projects had been approved by IN-SPACE.
- Private companies, if they wanted, could even build their own launchpad within the Sriharikota launch station.
- ISRO would provide the necessary land for that.

What does ISRO gain by this?

- **Commercial** - There is a need for greater dissemination of space technologies, and better utilisation of space resources.
- Moreover, there is an increased requirement of space-based services.
- ISRO seems unable to satisfy this need on its own and thus private participation would fill the gap.
- Notably, the private players will not take away the revenues that ISRO gets through commercial launches.
- The space-based economy is expected to “explode” in the next few years, even in India.
- So, there would be more than enough for all.
- Also, ISRO can earn some money by making its facilities and data available to private players.
- **Strategic** - Right now, too much of ISRO's resources is consumed by routine activities.
- This delays its more strategic objectives.
- There is no reason why ISRO alone should be launching weather or communication satellites.
- The world over, an increasing number of private players are taking over this activity for commercial benefits.
- ISRO, like NASA, is essentially a scientific organisation whose main objective is exploration of space and carrying out scientific missions.
- So, with private participation, ISRO can concentrate more on science, R&D, interplanetary exploration and strategic launches.

What are the other initiatives?

- IN-SPACE is the second space organisation created by the government in the last two years.
- In the 2019 Budget, the government had announced the setting up of a New Space India Limited (NSIL).
- The NSIL is a public sector company that would serve as a marketing arm of ISRO.



- Its main purpose is to market the technologies developed by ISRO and bring it more clients that need space-based services.
- This role was already being performed by Antrix Corporation, another PSU working under the Department of Space, and which still exists.
- It was unclear why there was a need for another organisation with overlapping function.
- However, the government said that it was redefining the role of NSIL.
- By doing so, NSIL would have a demand-driven approach rather than the current supply-driven strategy.
- So instead of just marketing what ISRO has to offer, NSIL would listen to the needs of the clients and ask ISRO to fulfil those.
- This change in NSIL's role is also part of the reforms that have been initiated in the space sector.

PRELIM BITS

14. HISTORY AND ART & CULTURE

Malabar Rebellion of 1921

- It is also called as the Mappila or Moplah Rebellion by the British.
- It broke out in the southern taluks of Malabar in August 1921.
- By the time the government troops captured Haji in January 1922, the rebellion had fizzled out.
- It largely took the shape of guerrilla-type attacks on janmis (feudal landlords, who were mostly upper caste Hindus) and the police and troops.
- Mappilas had been among the victims of oppressive agrarian relations protected by the British.
- The Khilafat movement launched in 1919 provided a fresh stimulus to the grievances of Mappilas.

Kunhamed Haji

- He was one of the three most important rebel leaders and considered as the face of the Mappila rebellion.
- He was familiar with the commemoration of shaheeds (martyrs) who fought against the tyranny of landlords and their helpers, mostly upper caste Hindus in the region.
- During the rebellion, he led many attacks on individuals, including Muslims, who had been loyal to the British.

Anubhav project

- It is a week-long online project, organized by SPIC MACY seeks to help youngsters indulge in mystical and diverse aspects of Indian art, culture and heritage. It is expected to reduce the stress triggered by Covid-19.
- The movement has a central executive body in New Delhi and organizes its programmes through a worldwide network of schools, colleges and educational institutions.
- SPIC MACAY (Society for the Promotion of Indian Classical Music And Culture Amongst Youth) is a non-political, nationwide, voluntary movement founded in 1977 by Dr Kiran Seth.
- He was awarded the Padma Shri for his contribution to the arts in 2009.
- It is a participatory student movement registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- In 2011, it was awarded the Rajiv Gandhi Sadbhavana award in recognition of its contribution to youth development.
- Its intention is to enrich the quality of formal education by increasing awareness about different aspects of Indian heritage and inspiring the young mind to imbibe the values embedded in it.
- It is supported nationally by the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, and the Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- It has been organizing national and international conventions for the last 35 years.



So'ham

- It is the first cultural media platform of India, under the banner of NGMA.
- The platform aims to develop a dialogue between NGMA, artists and art enthusiasts.
- It is inspired by the Vedic philosophy of So'ham, which stands for one's identity and its connection to the universe.
- **National Gallery of Modern Art** was established in 1954, at the Jaipur House, New Delhi.
- It is run and administered as a subordinate office to the Ministry of Culture, Government of India.
- The NGMA has two branches, one at Mumbai and the other at Bengaluru.
- One of its objectives is to acquire and preserve works of modern art from the 1850s onward.

Ambubachi Festival

- It is a four-day fair to mark the annual menstruation of the goddess at Kamakhya temple in Nilachal Hills in Guwahati, Assam.
- It is also considered as an occasion to promote awareness on menstrual hygiene.
- This ritualistic fair is one of the reasons why the taboo associated with menstruation is less in Assam compared with other parts of India.
- Recently, the festival was observed without mendicants, hermits and devotees for the first time in almost 500 years.
- The festival is celebrated since 1565.
- The attainment of womanhood of girls in Assam is celebrated with a ritual called 'TuloniBiya', meaning small wedding.
- A similar custom is followed at the Devi temple at Chengannur town in Alappuzha district of Kerala.
- The temple is shut for the days the Goddess there is believed to undergo her period.

Kamakhya Temple

- It is located atop the Nilachal Hills, in outskirts of Guwahati, Assam.
- It is one of 51 shaktipeeths or seat of Shakti followers.
- Shakti peeth is originated based on the story of the death of goddess Sati.
- God Shiva who held her dead body, then started his dance of destruction, causing Sati's body to disintegrate and fall into pieces.
- The sites where these portions of Sati goddess fell, are the Shakti peeth.
- Kamakhya temple's sanctum sanctorum houses the yoni - female genital symbolised by a rock.
- Four Major Shakthi Peeths in India
 1. Jagannath Temple, Puri
 2. Kamakhya Temple near Guwahati
 3. DakshinaKalika in Kolkata
 4. Tara Tarini near Brahmapur, Odisha.

Cairn Circles

- A megalith is a large prehistoric stone that has been used to construct a structure or monument, either alone or together with other stones.

Kodumanal

- Kodumanal is a village located in the Erode district in Tamil Nadu.
- The place is an important archaeological site.
- It is located on the northern banks of Noyyal River, a tributary of the Cauvery.
- The earlier excavations of Kodumanal revealed that multi-ethnic groups lived in the village.
- It also revealed that the site served as a trade-cum-industrial centre from 5th century BCE to 1st century BCE.

- Cairn-circles are the prehistoric stone row which is a linear arrangement of parallel megalithic standing stones.
- Recently, the State Department of Archaeology, Chennai has identified 250 cairn-circles from the Kodumanal excavation site in Tamil Nadu.
- This is for the first time that 10 pots and bowls were discovered from the site, instead of the usual 3 or 4 pots, placed outside three-chambered burial cists and inside the cairn-circle.
- More numbers and bigger size of boulders suggests that the grave could be of a village head or the head of the community.
- Findings from the site also include an animal skull, beads, and copper smelting units, the mud walls of a workshop, potteries, and Tamil Brahmi script.
- Other types of megaliths are
 1. **Dolmenoid cists** - Box-shaped stone burial chambers,
 2. **Capstones** - Distinctive mushroom-shaped burial chambers (found mainly in Kerala)



Cultural places in Bengal

- Super cyclone Amphan swept through south Bengal, it had severely damaged some of its centuries-old heritage structures.
- St. Andrew's Church - It is the only Scottish church in Calcutta. First stone was laid by the Marquis of Hastings in 1815 and opened to the public only in 1818.
- Serampore College - It was established in 1818 by William Carey. It is one of the oldest educational institutes in India that is still functional.
- Dupleix Palace - Located at Chandannagar, built by French Governor-General Joseph Francois Dupleix. It has preserved French antiques like painting (that of Mughal courts), clay model utensils of French times.
- Metcalfe Hall - It was built between 1840-1844 in honor of Metcalfe, the Governor-General of India for his efforts towards a free press. It is visually similar to ancient Greek temples.
- Hooghly Imambara - It is a Shia Muslim congregation hall and mosque it was established by Muhammad Mohsin in 1841-1861.
- JatarDeul - It is an early medieval brick temple located in Sundarbans settlements, dating back to the 11th and 12th century CE. It belongs to a small sub-group of Bengal temples, with architectural suggestions from Odisha.
- Currency Building - It was named when the government occupied a large portion of it for its Currency Department in 1868 from the Agra Bank Limited.

Maharashtra-Bengal Friendship Chapter

- Pune-based NGO Sarhad to launch a series of literary and cultural programmes to strengthen connections between Maharashtra and West Bengal.
- It aims in a bid to revive the Independence-era spirit of the 'Lal-Bal-Pal', named after nationalists Lala Lajpat Rai, 'Lokmanya' Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal.
- 'Maharashtra-Bengal friendship chapter' is a two year long event that will commence on Tilak's death centenary (August 1, 1920-August 1, 2020).
- The festival will go on till August 15, 2022 to mark the 150th birth anniversary of the great philosopher, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh.

Lala Lajpat Rai

- He was popularly known as Punjab Kesari.
- He was also associated with activities of Punjab National Bank and Lakshmi Insurance Company in their early stages in 1894.

- Following organizations are established by Lala Lajpat Rai - Arya Gazeera, Hisar congress, Hisar Arya Samaj, National DAV managing Committee.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak

- He was the first leader of the Indian Independence Movement.
- He is known as the "Father of the Indian unrest.", Mahatma Gandhi called him "The Maker of Modern India".
- Tilak was one of the first and strongest advocates of Swaraj ("self-rule") and a strong radical in Indian consciousness.
- Tilak helped found the All India Home Rule League in 1916–18, with G. S. Khaparde and Annie Besant.

Bipin Chandra Pal

- He was an Indian nationalist, writer, orator, social reformer and Indian independence movement activist.
- He stood against the partition of Bengal by the colonial British government.
- He was recognised as the chief exponent of a new national movement revolving around the ideals of Purna Swaraj, Swadeshi, boycott and national education.

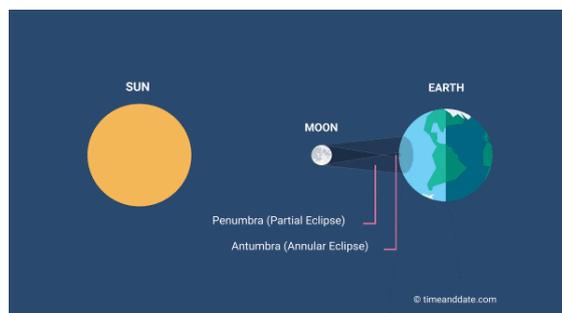
Aurobindo Ghose

- Aurobindo studied for the Indian Civil Service at King's College, Cambridge, England.
- He involved in nationalist politics in the Indian National Congress and the nascent revolutionary movement in Bengal with the Anushilan Samiti.
- At Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo developed a spiritual practice he called Integral Yoga and founded the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

15. GEOGRAPHY

Umbra, Penumbra and Antumbra

- Like any other opaque objects illuminated by a light source, the Moon and the Earth cast shadows into space as they block the sunlight that hits them.
- Each shadow has 3 different areas - Umbra, Penumbra, and Antumbra.
- Penumbra - It is the *lighter outer part* of a shadow. The Moon's penumbra causes partial solar eclipses, and the Earth's penumbra is involved in penumbral lunar eclipses.
- It is a half-shadow that occurs when a light source is only partly covered by an object – for example, when the Moon obscures part of the Sun's disk.
- Umbra - The shadow's dark center portion.
- Antumbra - The lighter part of the shadow that begins where the umbra ends.



Role of Anti-cyclone in North-east Asia

- New research has revealed a link between an increase in extreme summer heat events in Northeast Asia and the role of anticyclones in the region.
- Extreme heat events have increased across the world and are responsible for a large number of deaths and harming crops and livestock as well.
- Nearly half of the magnitude of the 2018 extreme heat event across China and Japan was caused by anomalous anticyclones in Northeast Asia.
- There are mainly 2 factors which make the extreme heat events more likely to occur over Northeast Asia.

- Dynamic (anticyclone) and thermodynamic (mean temperature shifts to warmer states and increasing greenhouse gases) changes in the atmosphere.
- Anticyclones similar to those in 2018 became more common and worse in recent decades (1991-2017) than the past (1958-1990).
- The more extreme the heat event, the larger the contribution of the thermodynamic change will be.

Arctic Sea

- It is located mostly in the Arctic North Polar Region in the middle of the Northern Hemisphere, besides its surrounding waters the Arctic Ocean is surrounded by Eurasia and North America.
- It is partly covered by sea ice throughout the year and almost completely in winter.
- The Arctic Ocean is the smallest and shallowest of the world's five major oceans and it is also known as the coldest of all the oceans.
- The International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) recognizes it as an ocean, although some oceanographers call it the Arctic Sea.
- It is sometimes classified as an estuary of the Atlantic Ocean, and it is also seen as the northernmost part of the all-encompassing World Ocean.
- The Arctic Ocean's surface temperature and salinity vary seasonally as the ice cover melts and freezes.
- Its salinity is the lowest on average of the five major oceans, due to low evaporation, heavy fresh water inflow from rivers and streams, and limited connection and outflow to surrounding oceanic waters with higher salinities.

Decline in Arctic Sea Ice

- Sea ice arises as seawater freezes, because ice is less dense than water, it floats on the ocean's surface.
- Sea ice covers about 7% of the Earth's surface and about 12% of the world's oceans.
- Recently, National Centre of Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR) has observed the largest decline in the Arctic Sea ice in the last 41 years.
- According to recent observations in the last 40 years (1979-2018), the sea ice has been declining at 4.7% per decade, while the current declining rate was found to be 13% in July 2019.
- Thus, it has been noted that the volume of ice formation during winters is unable to keep pace with the volume of ice loss during summers.
- Additionally, it has been predicted that if this trend continues, there would be no ice left in the Arctic Sea by 2050.
- The decrease of the Arctic Sea ice area and the increase in the duration of summer and autumn seasons affected the local weather and climate over the Arctic Ocean and its marginal seas.
- It may affect other components of the climate system such as reduction of heat, water vapor, and other material exchange between the atmosphere and the sea.
- The northern hemisphere experienced record high-temperature rise, especially during the spring and summer months.



Last Glacial Maximum

- About 19,000-21,000 years ago, ice-sheets covered North America and Eurasia, and sea-levels were much lower, with Adam's Bridge exposed so that the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka were contiguous.
- This period, the peak of ice age conditions, is called the Last Glacial Maximum.



- Global sea-level is rising and glacial ice is melting today, whereas the opposite was true for the Last Glacial Maximum.
- Researchers analyzed simulations of this past climate and predicted that the ongoing climate change could reawaken an ancient climate pattern of the Indian Ocean.
- They find that this could be similar to the El Nino phenomenon of the Pacific Ocean bringing more frequent and devastating floods and drought to several densely-populated countries around the Indian Ocean region.
- If current warming trends continue, this new Indian Ocean El Nino could emerge as early as 2050.
- It could bring more frequent droughts to East Africa and southern India and increased rainfall over Indonesia.

16. POLITY

Extension of Commission on Sub-Categorization of OBCs

- Recently, the Union Cabinet has approved a six-month extension to the commission appointed to examine sub-categorization of Other Backward Classes (OBCs), up to 31st January 2021.
- The commission is headed by Justice (Retd.) G Rohini.
- It was constituted under Article 340 of the Constitution with the approval of the President on 2nd October 2017.
- It had been constituted to complete the task of sub-categorising 5000-odd castes in the central OBC list so as to ensure more equitable distribution of opportunities in central government jobs and educational institutions.
- Article 340 deals with the appointment of a commission to investigate the conditions of backward classes.
- It shall investigate the matters referred them and present a report to the President.
- The President shall cause a copy of the report so presented together with a memorandum explaining the action taken thereon to be laid before each House of Parliament.

Rajya Sabha Polls

- Rajya Sabha is a permanent House and is not subject to dissolution.
- However, one-third Members of Rajya Sabha retire after every second year (biennial).
- A member who is elected for a full term serves for a period of six years.
- The election held to fill a vacancy arising otherwise than by retirement of a member on the expiration of his term of office is called 'Bye-election'.
- A member elected in a bye-election remains a member for the remainder of the term of the member who has resigned or died or disqualified to be member of the House under the Tenth Schedule.

Methods of Voting in RS Polls

- **Single Transferable vote** - In this method, a voter instead of voting for a single candidate, ranks all candidates according to his preference.
- Voting only takes place when there are more candidates than the vacant seats.
- The method would lead to the election of candidates opposed to the majority party in a state.
- **Cross voting** - During late nineties, MLAs were regularly convinced to vote against their party's candidate (cross-vote).
- The Supreme Court in 2006 held that the practice of cross-voting would not attract the penalty under the anti-defection law, which further promoted the practice of cross-voting.
- **Open Ballot** - To stem the Cross voting rot, a Rajya Sabha committee headed by S B Chavan(1999) mooted the idea of voting by open ballots in the elections to the upper house.



- Parliament passed a law in 2003 requiring MLAs to show their votes to their party before voting in a Rajya Sabha election.
- But neither did the law stop the MLAs from cross-voting, nor could it prevent the influence of big money.
- The open ballot provides legal and technical grounds for invalidating votes.
- **Postal Ballot** - In rare circumstances RS polling can be done by postal ballots subject to the condition that a notification under Rule 68 of 1961 rules (Conduct of Election Rules 1961) is made before the last date of withdrawal of nominations.

Postal Ballots System

- Ballot papers are distributed electronically to electors and are returned to the election officers via post.
- Currently, only the following voters are allowed to cast their votes through postal ballot:
 1. Service voters (armed forces, the armed police force of a state and government servants posted abroad),
 2. Voters on election duty,
 3. Voters above 80 years of age or Persons with Disabilities (PwD),
 4. Voters under preventive detention.

Amendments in Postal Ballot System

- Recently, Union Law Ministry has reduced the age limit for senior citizens who opt for postal ballot in the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections.
- Now, the voters aged above 65 years or a Covid-19 suspect can opt for postal ballot.
- Earlier, in 2019, the Law Ministry had amended the Conduct of Election Rules to allow persons with disabilities and those who are 80 years of age or above to opt for postal ballot during Lok Sabha and Assembly elections.
- Voters of Bihar will be the first to benefit from the amended rules, since Bihar will be the first state to have assembly polls after the coronavirus outbreak in India.
- The exception to the above-mentioned category of voters is provided under Section 60 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

Punjab Civil Service Board

- Punjab government has constituted a three-member civil services board to decide on IAS transfers and postings in the state.
- The civil services board is headed by Chief Secretary of a state.
- It has senior most additional chief secretary or chairman, Board of Revenue, Financial Commissioner or an officer of equivalent rank and status as member.
- In addition, it will have Principal Secretary or Secretary, Department of Personnel in the state government as member secretary.
- The board is mandated to decide on the transfer of a civil servant before completion of his or her fixed tenure.
- The rules mandate the civil services board to submit an annual report on January 1 to the central government about the date of the meetings held by them.
- In 2013, SC directed the Centre and the States to set up a civil services board to consider transfers and posting of bureaucrats among others.
- This is mainly to insulate the bureaucracy from political interference and to put an end to frequent transfers of civil servants by political bosses.
- As per rules, all states should have a civil services board to decide on transfers and postings of the bureaucrats.

17. GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

PM- Formalization of Micro Food Processing Enterprises

- Union Ministry for Food Processing Industries has launched the PM Formalization of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PM FME) scheme as a part of “Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan”.
- It is centrally sponsored scheme.
- The expenditure would to be shared in 60:40 ratio between Central and State Governments, in 90:10 ratio with North Eastern and Himalayan States, 60:40 ratio with UTs with legislature and 100% by Centre for other UTs.
- It is to be implemented over a period of five years from 2020-21 to 2024-25.
- The Scheme adopts One District One Product (ODOP) approach to reap benefit of scale in terms of procurement of inputs, availing common services and marketing of products.
- The States would identify food product for a district keeping in view the existing clusters and availability of raw material.

Operation Greens

- Operation Greens Scheme is being implemented by MoFPI, for TOP (Tomato-Onion-Potato) crops.
- Now the scheme has been extended to other notified horticulture crops for providing subsidy for their transportation and storage from surplus production area to major consumption centres. \
- The objective of intervention is to protect the growers of fruits and vegetables from making distress sale due to lockdown and reduce the post-harvest losses.

NIKSAHAY Portal

- It is the web enabled patient management system for TB control under the National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP).
- It is developed and maintained by the Central TB Division (CTD), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in collaboration with the National Informatics Centre (NIC), and WHO.
- It functions as the National TB Surveillance System and enables reporting of various surveillance data to the Government of India.

Decarbonizing Transport in India

- NITI Aayog and International Transport Forum (ITF) will collaborate to launch a new online project called ‘Decarbonizing Transport in India’.
- It is to chart out a path for a low-carbon transport system in the country.
- It will offer an opportunity to provide inputs for transport challenges and their relation to CO₂ reduction in the country.
- The project will include designing a transport emissions assessment framework for India, providing the government with a detailed understanding of transport activities and CO₂ emissions as a basis for decision-making.
- It is a part of the ITF’s DTEE (Decarbonizing Transport in Emerging Economies) series of projects.
- DTEEs aimed at lowering carbon emissions across different regions in the world.
- The current participants in the initiative are India, Argentina, Azerbaijan, and Morocco.

SATYABHAMA Portal

- Union Ministry of Mines has launched a portal "SATYABHAMA (Science and Technology Yojana for Atmanirbhar Bharat in Mining Advancement)".
- Its aim is to promote research and development in the mining and minerals sector.
- It has been launched to increase efficiency and effectiveness of the Science and Technology Programme Scheme.



- Under the Science and Technology Programme Scheme, the Ministry of Mines promotes research in applied geosciences, mineral exploration, mining and allied areas, mineral processing, optimum utilization and conservation of the mineral resources of the country.
- The portal has been designed, developed and implemented by the National Informatics Centre (NIC).
- The portal is also integrated with NGO Darpan Portal of NITI Aayog.

NGO-DARPAN

- NGO-DARPAN is a platform that provides space for interface between Non-Government organizations (NGOs)/Voluntary Organizations (VOs) and key Government Ministries / Departments / Government Bodies.
- It is an e-governance application offered by NITI Aayog to electronically maintain data and transparency regarding NGOs/VOs in the country.
- The NGO-DARPAN was earlier maintained by erstwhile Planning Commission, which has been replaced by the NITI Aayog in 2015.

Navigating the New Normal

- It is a behavioural change campaign developed under the guidance of Empowered Group 6, chaired by NITI Aayog CEO.
- The campaign focuses on Covid-safe behaviour, especially wearing masks, during the 'Unlock' phase of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The campaign has two parts.
- Web portal containing resources informed by behavioural science and the use of nudge and social norms theory.
- Media campaign focused on the wearing of masks.
- The campaign and website were launched in partnership with Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), Centre for Social and Behavioural Change (CSBC) and the Ministries of Health and WCD.

Sea Plane Project

- Ministry of Shipping has reviewed the seaplane projects on Indian water bodies.
- Seaplane projects will provide faster and hassle free travel option for the long, treacherous and hilly regions of the country.
- Till now, 16 seaplane routes have been identified under Regional Connectivity Routes under UDAN scheme.
- Sabarmati and Sardar Sarovar- Statue of Unity route is included in these 16 sea plane routes and hydrographic surveys of this route have been completed.
- Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) will manage the Project of Seaplane in Inland Waterways and Sagarmala Development Company Limited (SDCL) will manage the Projects of seaplane in Coastal Areas.

SPARC Initiative

- Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC) is an initiative of the Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- IIT, Kharagpur is the National Coordinating Institute to implement the SPARC programme.
- It aims at improving the research ecosystem of India's higher educational institutions by facilitating academic and research collaborations between Indian institutions and the best institutions in the world

NashaMukt Bharat: Annual Action Plan

- Recently, the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment has released the 'NashaMukt Bharat: Annual Action Plan (2020-21)'.
- It is released on the occasion of 'International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking'.
- It is a three-pronged attack combining efforts of Narcotics Bureau, Outreach/Awareness by Social Justice and Treatment through the Health Department.
- The Action Plan has the following components:
 1. Awareness generation programmes;
 2. Focus on Higher Educational institutions, University Campuses and Schools;
 3. Community outreach and identification of dependent population;
 4. Focus on Treatment facilities in Hospital settings; and
 5. Capacity Building Programmes for Service Provider.

TULIP Portal

- The Urban Learning Internship Program (TULIP) is an online portal jointly launched by Ministry of Human Resource Development, the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs, and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) have jointly launched an online portal.
- The program aims to provide internship opportunities to 25,000 fresh graduates in all Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and Smart Cities across the country.
- It has been conceived pursuant to the Budget 2020-21 announcement under the theme 'Aspirational India' which laid emphasis on changing the approach of education from 'doing by learning,' to 'learning by doing'.
- The internship opportunities will be provided for 'Smart City' projects which range from positions in urban planning, water supply, waste management, slum improvement and digital governance among others.
- Applicants must be Indian citizens who have completed their final year of college within the last 18 months and have a degree of B. Tech, B planning, B. Arch, BA, BSc, B.Com, LLB.
- Internship durations can range from eight weeks to one year.
- The TULIP's launch is also an important stepping stone for fulfillment of MHRD and AICTE's goal of 1 crore successful internships by the year 2025.

18. GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

SATAT Scheme

- Sustainable Alternative towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) scheme on Compressed Bio Gas was launched in 2018.
- It envisages targeting production of 15 MMT of CBG from 5000 plants by 2023.
- The Government of India has taken various enabling steps to ensure the success of the SATAT scheme.
- Oil Marketing Companies have offered long term pricing on CBG to make projects bankable and have agreed to execute long term agreements on CBG.
- Under SATAT scheme, IOT Biogas Limited (Namakkal, Tamil Nadu) decided to divert part/full biogas production to Compressed Biogas (CBG) generation.
- The Compressed Biogas procured from IOT Biogas plant shall be sold through Retail Outlets (ROs) and Institutional Business (IB).
- This is the first time an alternative to natural gas is being sold by Oil Marketing Companies.

Kumbhar Sashaktikaran Yojana



- It is an initiative of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) for empowerment of potter community in the remotest of locations in the country.
- The program reaches out to the potters in - U.P., M.P., Maharashtra, J&K, Haryana, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Assam, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Telangana and Bihar.
- It provides the following support -
- Training for advanced pottery products.
- Latest, new technology pottery equipment like the electric Chaak.
- Market linkages and visibility through KVIC exhibitions.

Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan

- Through this scheme, Union Government plans to provide employment to migrant workers and create rural infrastructure
- The scheme will be launched through video-conferencing from village Telihar in Khagaria district of Bihar.
- The scheme will empower and provide livelihood opportunities to the returnee migrant workers and rural citizens who have returned to their home states due to the Covid-19 induced lockdown.
- This campaign will work in mission mode for 125 days with an outlay of Rs. 50,000 crore.
- A total of 116 districts across six states, namely Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Odisha (where maximum migrant workers have returned) have been chosen for the campaign.
- Those districts where 25,000 migrants have returned have been chosen for this programme.
- It will involve intensified and focused implementation of 25 different types of works.
- Apart from these the workers will help build gram panchayat bhawans and anganwadicentres, national highway works, railway works and water conservation projects, among others across six states.
- 12 different Ministries/Departments, namely, Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, Road Transport and Highways, Mines, Drinking Water and Sanitation, Environment, Railways, etc. will be coordinating for the implementation of the scheme.
- The villages will join this programme through the Common Service Centres (CSCs) and Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) maintaining the norms of social distancing in the wake of the pandemic.

Works under Jal Jeevan mission

1. Construction of wells,
2. Plantation and Horticulture,
3. Angwadicentres,
4. Rural housing,
5. Rural connectivity and border road works,
6. Railway works,
7. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee RURBAN mission,
8. PM KUSUM works,
9. Laying of fiber optic cable under Bharat Net

PM SVANidhi

- PM SVANidhi was launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, on June 01, 2020.
- Its objective is to provide affordable Working Capital loan to street vendors to resume their livelihoods that have been adversely affected due to Covid-19 lockdown.
- Under the Scheme, the vendors can avail a working capital loan of up to Rs. 10,000, which is repayable in monthly instalments in the tenure of one year.
- On timely/ early repayment of the loan, an interest subsidy @ 7% per annum will be credited to the bank accounts of beneficiaries through Direct Benefit Transfer on quarterly basis.
- There will be no penalty on early repayment of loan.
- SIDBI will implement the PM SVANidhi Scheme under the guidance of Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA).

- It will also manage the credit guarantee to the lending institutions through Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE).

Nagar Van Scheme

- Union government has announced implementation of the Nagar Van Scheme on the occasion of the World Environment Day (5th June).
- The Nagar Van (Urban Forests) aims to develop 200 Urban Forests across the country in the next five years.
- Warje Urban Forest in Pune (Maharashtra) will be considered as a role model for the Scheme.
- The Scheme enforces people's participation and collaboration between the Forest Department, Municipal bodies, NGOs, Corporates and local citizens.
- These urban forests will primarily be on the existing forest land in the City or any other vacant land offered by local urban local bodies.
- The finances for the scheme will be paid for by the CAMPA (Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF) Act, 2016) funds.

19. BILATERAL ISSUES

Kholongchhu Hydroelectric Project (KHEL)

- India and Bhutan have signed a concession agreement on the 600 MW Kholongchhu Hydroelectric Project (KHEL) for work to start on it.
- The hydroelectric project will be the first-ever Joint Venture project to be implemented in Bhutan under an Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) signed in 2014.
- The joint venture partners of the project are India's Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam Limited (SJVN) and Druk Green Power Corporation Limited (DGPC).
- Other hydroelectric power projects in Bhutan build with India's involvement are
 1. 720 MW Mangdechhu
 2. 1200MW Punatsangchhu-1 and 1020MW Punatsangchhu-2.

China's Tariff Exemption to Bangladesh

- Recently, China has announced tariff exemption for 97% of exports from Bangladesh.
- Bangladesh had requested China to exempt its export items from tariffs in the background of the economic hardship triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- China considered Bangladesh's request and has granted the tariff exemption to Bangladesh on account of its Least Developed Countries (LDCs) status.
- The move will help Bangladesh to remove the economic impact of the pandemic and also emerge as a possible beneficiary alongside Vietnam and Chile of the U.S.-China trade war.
- The supply chain disruption caused by the U.S.-China trade war is likely to be filled by a boost in export of tariff-exempted goods from Bangladesh.
- It will also help Bangladesh to reduce its trade deficit with China.
- As a result of the latest announcement, a total of 8256 goods from Bangladesh will be exempted of Chinese tariffs.
- Earlier, Bangladesh used to receive tariff-exemption for 3095 items under the Asia Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA).

20. GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS

***IN-SPACe***

- Union Government has given approval to Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe)
- It will be the nodal national entity under the Department of Space to drive building of satellites, rockets, or launch services through Indian industry.
- It will provide a level playing field for private companies to use Indian space infrastructure.
- It will also hand-hold, promote and guide the private industries in space activities through encouraging policies and a friendly regulatory environment

NSIL

- New Space India Limited (NSIL) is a Central Public Sector Enterprise of Government of India.
- It is Head Quartered in Bangalore.
- It was established on March 2019 under the administrative control of Department of Space (DOS), India.
- The main objective is to scale up industry participation in Indian space programs.
- NSIL will endeavor to re-orient space activities from a 'supply driven' model to a 'demand driven' model, thereby ensuring optimum utilization of our space assets.

National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP)

- NIPFP is India's premier economic think tank - a centre for research in public economics and policies, located in Delhi.
- It is an autonomous body set up jointly by the Ministry of Finance, the erstwhile Planning Commission, and several state governments.
- It was founded in 1976 and registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- It undertakes research, policy advocacy and capacity building in areas related to public economics.
- One of the major mandates of the institute is to assist the Central, State and Local governments in formulating and reforming public policies by providing an analytical base.
- It receives an annual grant from the Ministry of Finance and various State governments, however it maintains an independent non-government character.
- It includes the Revenue Secretary, Economic Affairs Secretary and the Chief Economic Advisor from the Union Finance Ministry and representatives from NITI Aayog, RBI and 3 state governments.
- The usual tenure of a chairman is four years, which can be extended.

Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine and Homoeopathy (PCIM&H)

- Recently, the Union Cabinet has given its approval to re-establish Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine and Homoeopathy (PCIM&H) as a subordinate office under the Ministry of AYUSH.
- Pharmacopoeia Laboratory for Indian Medicine (PLIM) and Homoeopathic Pharmacopoeia Laboratory (HPL), central laboratories established at Ghaziabad (Uttar Pradesh) since 1975, will be merged into the PCIM&H.
- Presently, PCIM&H is an autonomous body under the aegis of Ministry of AYUSH, established since 2010.
- Pharmacopoeia is an officially recognized book of standards as per the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Rules 1945 thereunder.
- As per the Second Schedule of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, it is designated as the official book of standards for drugs imported and/or manufactured for sale, stock or exhibition for sale or distribution in India.
- It specifies the standards of drugs manufactured and marketed in India in terms of their identity, purity and strength.



- The merger intends to accord legal status to the merged structure of PCIM&H and its laboratory by making the necessary amendments and enabling provisions in the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945.
- Consultations have been done with the Director General Health Services, Drugs Controller General and the Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani Drugs Technical Advisory Board (ASUDTAB).

Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani Drugs Technical Advisory Board

- ASUDTAB is a statutory body under the provisions of Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.
- It advises the central and state governments in regulatory matters of Accelerated Shelf Life Testing (ASLT) drugs.

21. INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

United Nations Convention against Torture (UNCAT)

- The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (known as UNCAT) is an international human rights treaty, under the review of the United Nations.
- It aims to prevent torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment around the world.
- The Convention requires states to take effective measures to prevent torture in any territory under their jurisdiction, and forbids states to transport people to any country where there is reason to believe they will be tortured.
- The Convention was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1984 and came into force on 26 June 1987.
- 26 June is now recognized as the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, in honor of the Convention.
- India has signed the convention and yet to ratify it.

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)

- It is an independent, non-partisan & non-profit international non-governmental organization which works towards the practical realization of human rights in the countries of the Commonwealth.
- CHRI's objectives are
 1. To promote awareness and adherence to the Commonwealth's Harare Declaration (which set out the Commonwealth's core principles and values)
 2. To the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
 3. To other internationally recognized human rights instruments,
 4. To advocate for the domestic institutions supporting human rights in the Commonwealth member states.
- The organization specializes in transparency and accountability issues, with a focus on access to justice and access to information.

UN Arms Trade Treaty

- The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) is a multilateral treaty that regulates the international trade in conventional weapons.
- The treaty was negotiated in New York City at a global conference under the auspices of the UN in 2012.
- UN General Assembly adopted the ATT in 2013.
- It entered into force on 4th December 2014.

- 105 states have ratified the treaty, and a further 32 states have signed but not ratified it. [India is not a member to this treaty]
- It requires member countries to keep records of international transfers of weapons and to prohibit cross-border shipments that could be used in human rights violations or attacks on civilians.
- Recently China's efforts to join the treaty has been rejected by the United States.
- It comes after US President Donald Trump announced plans last year to pull the United States out of the agreement which entered into force in 2014.
- The US Senate never ratified the 2013 Arms Trade Treaty, even after former president Barack Obama endorsed it.

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

- The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is a multilateral development bank with a mission to improve social and economic outcomes in Asia.
- Its HQ is in Beijing, China.
- It is established by a multilateral treaty - AIIB Articles of Agreement.
- India joined AIIB in 2016 as a regional member of the Bank.
- Further, 14 of the G-20 nations are AIIB members including France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom.
- China is the largest shareholder in AIIB with a 26.06% voting power, followed by India with a 7.62% voting power.
- Recently, the AIIB has approved a \$750 million loan to India to strengthen the country's battle against the adverse impact of Covid-19 pandemic on poor and vulnerable households.
- The loan is co-financed by the AIIB and the Asian Development Bank.
- It aims to ensure economic resilience to prevent long-term damage to productive capacity, including human capital.

Election to Non-Permanent members of UNSC

- Recently India, Norway, Ireland, Mexico and Kenya were elected as the non-permanent members of the UNSC for a two-year term beginning January 1, 2021.
- The presidency of the Council is held by each of the members in turn for one month, following the English alphabetical order of the member states' names.
- India will assume the rotating presidency of the Council for the month of August in 2021.
- India will preside over the Council again for a month in 2022.
- Previously, India was elected for the years 1950-1951, 1967-1968, 1972-1973, 1977-1978, 1984-1985, 1991-1992 and most recently in 2011-2012.

Seabed 2030 Project

- This global initiative is a collaboration between Japan's non-profit Nippon Foundation and the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO).
- The mandate of GEBCO Seabed 2030 Project is to map the entire ocean floor.
- It helps in gaining the knowledge of bathymetry, the measurement of the shape and depth of the ocean floor.
- It helps in understanding natural phenomena, including ocean circulation, tides and biological hotspots.

GEBCO

- GEBCO is the only intergovernmental organization with a mandate to map the entire ocean floor.
- Its origins is traced back to the GEBCO chart series initiated in 1903 by Prince Albert I of Monaco.
- It launched Seabed 2030 project in 2017, it coordinates and oversees the sourcing and compilation of bathymetric data from different parts of the world's ocean through its five centers into the freely-available GEBCO Grid.



- It also provides key inputs for navigation, forecasting tsunamis, exploration for oil and gas projects, building offshore wind turbines, fishing resources, and for laying cables and pipelines.
- It would also help further achieve the UN SDG to conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources.
- It has announced that it had finished mapping nearly one-fifth of the world's ocean floor, by this it had added 1.45 crore square kilometers of new bathymetric data to its latest grid.

EAG Meeting

- Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism (EAG) is a regional body comprising nine countries.
- Members - India, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Belarus.
- It is an associate member of the FATF.
- Recently India has participated plenary virtual meeting of EAG, under the aegis of the Financial Action Task Force.
- In the meeting India plans to share more evidence with the key FATF members on the narco-terror cases linked to Pakistan-based syndicates, through which funds are allegedly being supplied to the terrorists operating in Jammu and Kashmir.
- FATF is an inter-governmental body to promote effective measures combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
- A country is put on the grey list when it fails to curb terrorism financing and money laundering.
- Grey list countries - Pakistan, Myanmar, Cambodia, Syria, Mongolia and Yemen in Asia along with few other countries.
- Putting a country on the blacklist means shutting all doors to international finance for that country
- Black list Countries - North Korea and Iran.

International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking

- The UN General Assembly in 1987, decided to observe 26 June as the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.
- The theme for the 2020 International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking “Better Knowledge for Better Care”.

International Comparison Program

- It is the largest worldwide data-collection initiative, under the guidance of UN Statistical Commission (UNSC).
- It's goal is to produce Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs) which are vital for converting measures of economic activities to be comparable across economies.
- Along with the PPPs, the ICP also produces Price Level Indices (PLI) and other regionally comparable aggregates of GDP expenditure.
- The World Bank has released new Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs) for reference year 2017, under International Comparison Program (ICP).
- Highlights of recent report
 1. The Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs) of Indian Rupee per US\$ at Gross Domestic Product (GDP) level is now 20.65 in 2017 from 15.55 in 2011.
 2. India is second largest economy in terms of its PPP-based share in regional Actual Individual Consumption and regional Gross Capital Formation.
 3. The Price Level Index (PLI)—the ratio of a PPP to its corresponding market exchange rate—is used to compare the price levels of economies, of India is 47.55 in 2017 from 42.99 in 2011.
- India has participated in almost all ICP rounds since its inception in 1970.

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation is National Implementing Agency (NIA) for India.
- It has the responsibility of planning, coordinating and implementing national ICP activities.

G7 Grouping

- It is an intergovernmental economic organization with 7 largest IMF advanced economies as members – Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK, US.
- European Union is an invitee to G7.
- **Recent Developments** - G7-Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence launched through a virtual meeting between national technology ministers.
- It was the initiative of Canada and France, which formed a group to guide the responsible adoption of AI on shared principles of “human rights, inclusion, diversity, innovation and economic growth.”
- Recently, USA joined the partnership, an international panel for setting ethical guidelines for the use of artificial intelligence.
- US involvement is important because of the large role that American tech firms play globally and its historic advocacy for human rights

Global Vaccine Summit

- Recently, the Prime Minister of India addressed the virtual Global Vaccine Summit.
- The Summit was hosted by the United Kingdom (UK). Almost 50 countries including the business leaders, UN agencies, civil society, government ministers, Heads of State and country leaders participated in the Summit.
- The Summit was intended to urge nations around the world to pledge funding for vaccinations to protect the world from future outbreaks of infectious diseases.
- The Summit was aimed at raising USD 7.4 million to immunize a further 300 million children in the world's poorest countries by 2025.
- India has pledged USD 15-million as India's contribution to the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations (GAVI).

22. ECONOMY

RBI Recommendations on ATMs

- An RTI petition reveals that RBI committee on ATM transactions made a few eyebrow-raising recommendations last year.
- The panel headed by **VG Kannan**, then CEO of Indian Banks' Association, had submitted the report last October, but the central bank hasn't released the report yet.
- The report recommended a population-based approach for fixing ATM interchange fee and customer charges, the report covered them all.
- The panel suggested charging ATM withdrawals above Rs 5,000 in order to discourage high cash withdrawals.

Committee to oversee Ownership of Private Banks

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has constituted an internal working group to review the existing guidelines on ownership and corporate structure of private sector banks.
- The group will be headed by RBI executive director P.K. Mohanty.
- The bank licensing rules mandated that a private bank's promoter will need to pare holding to 40% within three years, 20% in 10 years and to 15% in 15 years.
- The rules on promoter holding have changed over the years.

- It is, therefore, felt necessary to comprehensively review the extant guidelines on ownership, governance and corporate structure in private sector banks, taking into account key developments which have a bearing on the issue.
- The group will examine the existing licensing guidelines and regulations on ownership and control of private sector banks.
- It will also suggest appropriate norms, keeping in mind the issue of excessive concentration of ownership and control.
- Besides, it will examine and review the eligibility criteria for individuals or entities to apply for a banking licence, and review the promoter shareholding norms at the initial licensing stage.
- It will also study the current regulations on holding of financial subsidiaries through a non-operative financial holding company (NOFHC) and suggest steps to migrate all banks to a uniform regulation.

Upward Definition of MSME

- Micro, small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) popularly called as MSMEs are the backbone of Indian economy.
- Silently operating in different areas across the country, more than 6 crore MSMEs have a crucial role to play in building a stronger and self-reliant India.
- These small economic engines have a huge impact on the country's GDP-making a contribution of 29 percent.
- They contribute to almost half of exports from the country. Additionally, more than 11 crore people are employed in the MSME sector.
- In line with focus on energizing MSMEs in the country, Union government has approved the upward revision of MSME definition.
- It may be noted that this revision was done after 14 years since the MSME Development Act came into existence in 2006.
- It has also been decided that the turnover with respect to exports will not be counted in the limits of turnover for any category of MSME units whether micro, small or medium.
- This is yet another step towards ease of doing business.
- This will help in attracting investments and creating more jobs in the MSME sector.
- The following table provides the details of revised limits:

Category	Old Capital	New Capital	Old Turnover	New Turnover
Micro	25 Lakhs	1 crore	10 Lakhs	5 crores
Small	5 crore	10 crores	2 crores	50 crores
Medium	10 crore	50 crores	5 crores	250 crores

CHAMPIONS Platform

- Union Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) has launched CHAMPIONS portal.
- The CHAMPIONS stands here for Creation and Harmonious Application of Modern Processes for Increasing the Output and National Strength.
- It is a technology driven Control Room-Cum-Management Information System which utilizes modern information and communication technology (ICT) tools.

- It is also fully integrated on a real time basis with the Government of India's main grievances portal Centralized Public Grievances Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) and the Ministry's other web based mechanisms.
- The entire ICT architecture is created in house with the help of the National Informatics Centre.
- A network of control rooms is created in the Hub & Spoke Model.
- The Hub is situated in New Delhi in the Secretary MSME's office.
- The spokes will be in the States in various offices and institutions of the Ministry.
- Three basic objectives of the platform are
- Grievance Redressal - To resolve the problems of MSMEs including those of finance, raw materials, labor, regulatory permissions etc particularly in the Covid created difficult situation;
- To help them capture new opportunities - Including manufacturing of medical equipments and accessories like PPEs, masks, etc and supply them in National and International markets;
- To identify and encourage the sparks - i.e. the potential MSMEs who are able to withstand the current situation and can become national and international champions

Co-operative Banks under RBI

- Recently, the Central government approved an ordinance to bring all urban and multi-state co-operative banks under the direct supervision of the RBI.
- The decision comes after several instances of fraud and serious financial irregularities, including the major scam at the Punjab and Maharashtra Co-operative (PMC) Bank in 2019.
- Till now, all the co-operative banks came under dual regulation of the RBI and the Registrar of Co-operative Societies.
- Previously, the RBI had no powers to draw up an enforceable scheme of reconstruction of a co-operative bank.
- However, from now onwards the urban and multi-state co-operative will come under the direct supervision of RBI.
- The move will empower the RBI to regulate all urban and multi-state co-operative banks on the lines of commercial banks.

Co-operative Banks

- It is a financial entity which belongs to its members, who are at the same time the owners and the customers of their bank.
- It is distinct from commercial banks.
- They are broadly classified into Urban and Rural co-operative banks based on their region of operation.
- They are registered under the Co-operative Societies Act of the State concerned or under the Multi-State Co-operative Societies Act, 2002.
- The Co-operative banks are also governed by the
 1. Banking Regulations Act, 1949.
 2. Banking Laws (Co-operative Societies) Act, 1955.

Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund

- Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its nod to set up a Rs.15,000 crore Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund.
- The fund had been proposed as part of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat.
- Eligible beneficiaries under the scheme include the following with a minimum 10% margin money contribution by them,
 1. Farmer producer organizations,



2. MSMEs,
 3. Section 8 companies,
 4. Private companies and
 5. Individual entrepreneurs
 6. The balance 90% would be the loan component to be made available by scheduled banks.
- The Centre will provide 3% interest subvention to eligible beneficiaries, with a 2-year moratorium period for the principal loan amount and six-year repayment period after that.

Minimum Support Price

- Recently, Government has declared MSP for mature de husked coconut for the season 2020 at Rs. 2700/- per quintal, thus hiking the MSP by 5.02% from Rs. 2571/- per quintal during season 2019.
- The MSP is the rate at which the government buys grains from farmers.
- Reason behind the idea of MSP is to counter price volatility of agricultural commodities due to the factors like variation in their supply, lack of market integration and information asymmetry.
- The MSP is fixed on the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).
- Factors taken into consideration for fixing MSP include,
 1. Demand and supply,
 2. Cost of production (A₂ + FL method) Price trends in the market, both domestic and international,
 3. Inter-crop price parity,
 4. Terms of trade between agriculture and non-agriculture,
 5. A minimum of 50% as the margin over cost of production,
 6. Likely implications of MSP on consumers of that product.
- The Commission also makes visits to states for on-the-spot assessment of the various constraints that farmers face in marketing their produce, or even raising the productivity levels of their crops.
- Based on all these inputs, the Commission then finalizes its recommendations, which are then submitted to the government.
- The government, in turn, circulates the CACP reports to state governments and concerned Central Ministries for their comments.
- After receiving the feed-back from them, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) of the Union government takes a final decision on the level of MSPs and other recommendations made by the CACP.
- The Food Corporation of India (FCI), the nodal central agency of the Government of India, along with other State Agencies undertakes procurement of crops.

Crops Covered under MSP

- Government announces minimum support prices (MSPs) for 22 mandated crops and fair and remunerative price (FRP) for sugarcane.
- The mandated crops are 14 crops of the kharif season, 6 Rabi crops and two other commercial crops.
- In addition, the MSPs of toria and de-husked coconut are fixed on the basis of the MSPs of rapeseed/mustard and copra, respectively.
- The list of crops are as follows.
 1. Cereals (7) - paddy, wheat, barley, jowar, bajra, maize and ragi
 2. Pulses (5) - gram, arhar/tur, moong, urad and lentil
 3. Oilseeds (8) - groundnut, rapeseed/mustard, toria, soya bean, sunflower seed, sesame, safflower seed and nigerseed.
 4. Raw cotton.
 5. Raw jute.
 6. Copra
 7. De-husked coconut
 8. Sugarcane (Fair and remunerative price)

SEBI's Measure to Increase Market Liquidity



- In April, SEBI had relaxed certain regulatory requirements related to rights issues and initial public offerings (IPOs) to help companies to raise funds during this pandemic.
- It allowed any listed entity with a market capitalization of at least Rs.100 crore could use the fast-track route for a rights issue.
- Earlier, the norm was ₹ 250 crore for such offerings.
- Further, any company that had been listed for 18 months was permitted to raise funds through a fast-track rights issue. Earlier it was 3 years.
- Also, the minimum subscription requirement to make an issue successful was lowered from the earlier 90% of the offer size to 75%.
- Recently, SEBI has allowed companies to make 2 qualified institutional placements (QIPs) with a gap of just 2 weeks between them.
- This is a significant move as the earlier regulations mandated a minimum gap of 6 months between two such issuances.
- It also permitted promoters to increase their stakes in their companies through preferential allotments by up to 10% without triggering an open offer, the cap was earlier set at 5%.
- SEBI allowed the above relaxation only for the current financial year.
- These moves would help in enhancing liquidity in the market as companies would be able to better time fund-raising while promoters could also acquire shares at a time when valuations were quite low compared with the historic highs.

RBI Norms for NBFC's

- A housing finance company is considered a non-banking financial company (NBFC) under the RBI's regulations.
- A company is treated as an NBFC if its financial assets are more than 50% of its total assets and income from financial assets is more than 50% of the gross income.
- RBI has proposed stringent norms for housing finance companies by mandating 75% of their home loans to individual borrowers by 2024.
- Recently, RBI has proposed the definition of qualifying assets for housing finance companies (HFCs).
- It defined 'qualifying assets' as loans to individuals or a group of individuals, including co-operative societies, for construction/purchase of new dwelling units, loans to individuals for renovation of existing dwelling units, lending to builders for construction of residential dwelling units.
- Non-Housing loans - All other loans, including those given for furnishing dwelling units, loans given against mortgage of property for any purpose other than buying/construction of a new dwelling units or renovation of the existing dwelling units.
- Under new definition at least 50% of net assets should be in the nature of 'qualifying assets' for HFCs, of which at least 75% should be towards individual housing loans.
- Such HFCs which do not fulfil the criteria will be treated as NBFC – Investment and Credit Companies (NBFC-ICCs).
- They will be required to approach the RBI for conversion of their Certificate of Registration from HFC to NBFC-ICC.
- The NBFC-ICCs which want to continue as HFCs would have to follow a roadmap to make 75% of their assets individual housing loans.
- The central bank also proposed a minimum net-owned fund (NOF) of ₹ 20 crore as compared to ₹ 10 crore now.
- Existing HFCs would have to reach ₹ 15 crore within a year and ₹ 20 crore within two years.

Payments Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF)

- Recently, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced the creation of a Rs. 500-crore Payments Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF).
- PIDF has been created to encourage deployment of Point of Sale (PoS) infrastructure, both physical and digital, in tier-3 to tier-6 centres and north eastern states.
- The setting of PIDF is in line with the measures proposed by the vision document on payment and settlement systems in India 2019-2021.
- It is also in line with the RBI's proposal to set up an Acceptance Development Fund which will be used to develop card acceptance infrastructure across small towns and cities.
- It has a corpus of Rs. 500 crore in which the RBI has made an initial contribution of Rs. 250 crore.
- The remaining will come from the card-issuing banks and card networks operating in the country.
- The PIDF will also receive recurring contributions to cover operational expenses from card-issuing banks and card networks. RBI will also contribute to yearly shortfalls, if necessary.
- The fund will be governed through an advisory council but will be managed and administered by the RBI.

Border Adjustment Tax

- Border Adjustment Tax (BAT) is a duty that is proposed to be imposed on imported goods in addition to the customs levy that gets charged at the port of entry.
- BAT is a fiscal measure that imposes a charge on goods or services in accordance with the destination principle of taxation.
- Under this principle, a government taxes products based on the location of their sale to the final consumer rather than on the location of their production or origin.
- Thus, to adjust a tax "at the border," a country taxes imported products and domestically produced products sold on its market on the same basis and at the same rate; and exempts from this tax products exported for sale to foreign consumers.
- Generally, BAT seeks to promote "equal conditions of competition" for foreign and domestic companies supplying products or services within a taxing jurisdiction.
- The World Trade Organization (WTO) rules allow for the adjustment of certain types of internal taxes at the border under certain conditions.
- The main conditions are as follows
 - The tax must be applied equally to imports and "like" domestic products.
 - The tax must be "borne" by a product and not be "direct".
 - A permitted border tax adjustment must not subsidize exports.
- Recently, a NITI Aayog member has favored imposing a Border Adjustment Tax (BAT) on imports to provide a level-playing field to domestic industries.
- This suggestion comes in the backdrop of the USA-China trade tensions (trade war) which are expected to rise even further post-Covid-19.

23. ENVIRONMENT

State of India's Environment 2020

- Recently, the 'State of India's Environment 2020 in Figures' report was published by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).
- The report outlines the status of sustainable development, livestock, forests, water, waste, air, land, wildlife and other natural resources, environmental crimes and global economic risk.
- It states that India had around 50 lakh internal displacements caused by disasters and extreme weather conditions like floods, cyclones and drought in 2019.



- According to it, the internal displacements in India were the highest in the world in 2019.
- Internal Displacement refers to the forced movement of people within the country they live in, due to conflict, violence, development projects, natural disasters and climate change.
- It refers to the number of movements, not people, as individuals can be displaced several times.
- Major Factors of Internal Migration in India are as follows
 1. Natural Disasters (such as cyclones, flood and droughts)
 2. Forced Migration
 3. Impact of Covid-19

Aerosol Optical Depth (AOD)

- Recently, a study by the Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES) has found that radiative forcing of aerosols i.e. effect of anthropogenic aerosols is much higher over the high altitudes of western trans-Himalayas.
- The study analyzed the variability of aerosol optical, physical and radiative properties from January 2008 to December 2018 and the role of fine and coarse particles in Aerosol Radiative Forcing (ARF) assessment.
- ARF is the effect of anthropogenic aerosols on the radiative fluxes at the top of the atmosphere and at the surface and on the absorption of radiation within the atmosphere.
- The ARF values at top of the atmosphere were mostly low over Hanle and Merak.
- Hanle and Merak, situated in Ladakh are the part of Indian Astronomical Observatory (IAO).
- Highlights of the study are as follows
 1. Change in Temperature - The study shows that monthly-mean atmospheric radiative forcing of aerosols leads to heating rates of 0.04 to 0.13 degree Celsius per day.
 2. Aerosol Optical Depth (AOD) - The observations show that the AOD exhibited a distinct seasonal variation with higher values (0.07) in May and lower (0.03) in winter months.
 3. Composition of Air - Pure and polluted dust exhibited fractions between 16% and 23%, with a low frequency of less than 13% of absorbing aerosols, denoting weak influence of anthropogenic aerosols and Black Carbon over the trans-Himalayan sites.

- Aerosols are defined as a combination of liquid or solid particles suspended in a gaseous or liquid environment.
- In the atmosphere, these particles are mainly situated in the low layers of the atmosphere (< 1.5 km) since aerosol sources are located on the terrestrial surface.
- However, certain aerosols can still be found in the stratosphere, especially volcanic aerosols ejected into the high altitude layers.
- AOD is a measure of how light is absorbed or reflected by airborne particles as it travels through the atmosphere

Increase in Ozone Levels

- Recently, the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) has observed an increase in ozone (a harmful pollutant) levels in the several cities of the country.
- The analysis is based on Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data from 22 cities in 15 States.
- The ozone is primarily a “sunny weather problem” in India as the presence of sunlight has a direct impact on formation of ground level ozone.
- Heat acts as a catalyst, facilitating photochemical reactions, hence higher concentrations of ozone are seen during the summer months.
- Additionally, the intense heat waves are one of the factors responsible for increased ozone levels in the country.
- Usually, the ozone levels tend to spike when winter conditions subside, and its presence is felt most during the day.
- At night, ozone levels tend to deplete, before spiking again during the afternoon, when sunlight is available.



- Thus, the characteristics of summer pollution include high winds, intermittent rains, thunderstorms, high temperature and heat waves.

CrocBITE

- CrocBITE is an online database of crocodile attacks reported on humans.
- The non-profit online research tool helps to scientifically analyse crocodile behaviour via complex models.
- Users are encouraged to feed information in a crowdsourcing manner, the uploaded information needs to be verifiable.
- The database provides key insights into crocodile attack patterns and draws inferences to save human lives.
- The information is vital for Australia and Africa where such attacks are more likely than in other parts of the world.
- This is the only database of its kind with such comprehensive collection of information made available online.

Indian Crocodile Conservation Project

- The Crocodile Conservation Project was launched in 1975 in different States.
- The Gharial and Saltwater crocodile conservation programme was first implemented in Odisha in early 1975 and subsequently the Mugger conservation programme was initiated.
- Gharial crocodile project started in Tikarpada (1975) aims to increase the sighting to five crocodiles per kilometre length of water.
- As a result of the programme, the estimated number of the saltwater crocodiles increased from 96 in 1976 to 1,640 in 2012 in India.

Crocodile species found in India includes

1. Mugger or Marsh Crocodile
2. Estuarine or Saltwater Crocodile
3. Gharial or River water Crocodile

Human-crocodile conflict Hotspots in India includes

1. Vadodara in Gujarat (in Vishwamitri river)
2. Kota in Rajasthan,
3. Bhitarkanika in Odisha
4. Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Culling had been recommended a few years back in the Andaman and Nicobar islands by the forest department to the MoEFCC)

Guidelines on Exotic Animals

- The Environment Ministry's wildlife division has introduced new rules to regulate the import and export of 'exotic wildlife species'.
- Currently, it is the Directorate-General of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce that oversees such trade.
- Under the new rules, owners and possessors of such animals and birds must also register their stock with the Chief Wildlife Warden of their States.
- Officials of the Wildlife Department will also prepare an inventory of such species and have the right to inspect the facilities of such traders to check if these plants and animals are being housed in salubrious conditions.
- 'Exotic live species' will mean animals named under Appendices I, II and III of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) of Wild Fauna and Flora.
- It will not include species from the Schedules of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.

Advisory on Import of Exotic Animals

- The term exotic does not have a set definition but it usually refers to a wild animal or one that is more unusual and rare than normal domesticated pets like cats or dogs.
- These are those species which are not usually native to an area and are introduced to an area by humans.
- Recently, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has issued an advisory to streamline and formalize the process of importing live exotic animals.
- Many exotic species of birds, reptiles and amphibians are imported into India for commercial purposes.



- The major reason for issuing the advisory is to regulate trade because the issue of zoonotic diseases is linked to wildlife.
- With this advisory, it will be known how many such exotic animals are there in the country.
- The advisory has defined them as those that are mentioned under the Appendices of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) but not under the Schedules of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
- According to the advisory
 1. A person trying to import a live exotic animal will have to submit an application for grant of a license to the Director-General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
 2. Earlier, these imports were happening through the DGFT but they were beyond the purview of the forest departments and the chief wildlife wardens were not aware of them.
 3. The importer will also have to attach a No Objection Certificate (NOC) of the chief wildlife warden of the state concerned along with the application.
 4. For those people who have already imported exotic animals, a declaration will have to be made within six months.
 5. However, if the declaration is made after six months, documents related to the provenance of the animal will have to be submitted.
- Being an advisory, it does not have the force of law and can potentially incentivize illegal trade by offering a long amnesty period.

Haldwani Bio-Diversity Park

- Uttarakhand opened its biggest biodiversity park in Haldwani on the World Environment Day (5th June).
- Inside the Park, there are thematic gardens, a soil museum, species of plants, lichens, mosses and algae from the Jurassic era, a vermicomposting unit, an interpretation center, and a state-of-the-art weather station.
- The Park has 40 unique sections having 479 rare plant species of cactus, medicinal herbs, different types of trees, etc.
- The various species of plants have been brought to the park from diverse terrains like Niti Mana Valley and even from some glaciers around Kedarnath.
- Niti Mana Valley is located near the India Tibetan Border in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand.
- The plant species in the biodiversity park is divided into spiritual & religious, scientific, human health, and aesthetic value sections.
- The spiritual section has trees that find mention in holy scriptures like Guru Granth Sahib, Quran, Bible, and others.
- It showcases the different kinds of soil found in various topographies of Uttarakhand — alpine, bhabhar, sub-mountainous, mountainous, tertiary, loam, terai.

Maguri Motapung Beel

- Maguri Beel is a large wetland located near Dibru-Saikhowa National Park and Biosphere Reserve.
- A small channel connects Maguri Beel with the Dibru River to the North.
- It has been declared as an Important Birding Site (IBA) by Birdlife International.
- It is home to some of the rarest of the bird species and attracts varied species of birds from around the globe.

Dibru-Saikhowa National Park

- It is in Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts, Assam.
- It was designated a Biosphere Reserve in July 1997.
- It is bounded by the Brahmaputra and Lohit Rivers in the north and Dibru river in the south.
- Climate- Tropical monsoon climate with a hot and wet summer and cool and usually dry winter.
- Annual rainfall - 2,300 to 3,800 mm.
- Forests - Moist mixed semi-evergreen forests, moist mixed deciduous forests, canebrakes and grasslands.
- It is the largest salix swamp forest in north-eastern India.



- Some of them includes - Ruddy Shelduck, Baikal Teal, Bar-Headed Goose, Falcated Duck, Ferruginous Duck, Northern Pintail etc.
- It is also very rich in aquatic life and this has led to development of many fishing camps near it.
- The nearby areas of the beel displays grassland environment, creating a safe haven for grassland birds.

Kole Wetlands

- It is spread over Thrissur and Malappuram districts of Kerala.
- It is a Ramsar site and IBA (Important Bird and Biodiversity Area)
- It accounts for more than 40% of the rice production in the State.
- It is situated in the Central Asian Flyway of migratory birds.
- It contains subterranean habitats that are important habitats for some fresh water fish species which are endemic to southern Western Ghats.
- The Society for Odonate Studies has been conducting Odonate surveys at the Kole wetlands since 2018.
- 37 species of dragonflies and damselflies have been reported from the wetlands so far.

Rise in Population of Asiatic Lion

- Recently, the Gujarat Forest Department has announced an increase in the population of Asiatic lions in the Gir forest region.
- Total 674 lions were recorded compared to the 523 in the Lion Census of 2015.
- The count was estimated from a population observation exercise called Poonam Avlokan in place of the 15th Lion Census.
- Poonam Avlokan is a monthly in-house exercise carried out every full moon.
- It was a mechanism developed by the Forest Department in 2014 as part of preparations for the 2015 Lion Census.
- According to recent estimates the lion population has grown by almost 29% from the last count in 2015, the lion population in the state of Gujarat has doubled since 2001.
- The first Lion Census was conducted by the Nawab of Junagadh in 1936.
- Since 1965, the Forest Department has been regularly conducting the Lion Census every five years.
- The regular Lion Census is conducted once every five years. The last Census was conducted in 2015.

SPECIES IN NEWS

Gee's Golden Langur

- Golden langurs can be most easily recognized by the color of their fur, after which they are named.
- It has been noted that their fur changes colors according to the seasons as well as geography (region they live in).
- The color of the young also differs from adults in that they are almost pure white.
- They are highly dependent on trees, living in the upper canopy of forests, they are also known as leaf monkeys.
- It is endemic to western Assam, India, and southern Bhutan.
- Their habitat is restricted to the region surrounded by four geographical landmarks, such as
 1. Foothills of Bhutan (North),
 2. Manas river (East),
 3. Sankosh river (West),



4. Brahmaputra river (South).

- The Central Zoo Authority, New Delhi entrusted the state zoo with the project for the conservation breeding of golden langur in Assam in 2011.
- IUCN Status– Endangered.
- Listed in Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) - Appendix I and Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 - Schedule I.

Crocothemisservilia

- Scarlet Skimmer (*Crocothemisservilia*) is a peculiar dragonfly found in the Puzhakkal area of the Kole wetlands.
- It had a unique appearance as male dragonflies typically have prominent blood red colouration in almost all their body parts and the female is a pale yellow in colour with a dark brown thorax and legs.
- The individual spotted in Kole wetland had a mix of male and female external characters, ranging from almost entirely female to about equally divided.
- This is due to a rare biological phenomenon known as gyanandromorphism.
- Gynandromorphs are chimeric individuals having both male and female tissues, and are viewed by the scientific community as a genetic aberration.
- It is very rare and only 30 individuals from seven families have been reported with the condition worldwide.

Coccolithophores

- Coccolithophores are single-celled algae living in the upper layers of the world's oceans.
- It calcifies marine phytoplankton that produces up to 40 % of open ocean calcium carbonate and responsible for 20 % of the global net marine primary productivity.
- At equilibrium, it absorbs more carbon dioxide than they produce, which is beneficial for the ocean ecosystem.
- A study led by the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR) has found that there is a decrease in the concentration of oceanic calcium carbonate (CaCO_3) in the southern Indian ocean.
- This decrease in CaCO_3 is attributed to the increase in the concentration of another single-celled algae known as diatoms.
- This, in turn, will affect the growth and skeleton structure of coccolithophores, with potential significance for the world ocean ecosystem.

ScorpaenopsisNeglecta

- Recently, researchers at the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) have found a rare Scorpionfish (*Scorpaenopsisneglecta*) from Sethukarai coast in the Gulf of Mannar.
- This for the first time the particular species is discovered alive in Indian waters.
- It has been deposited in the National Marine Biodiversity Museum of the CMFRI.
- Scorpionfish belong to the family Scorpaenidae which are mostly marine fish that includes many of the world's most venomous species.
- It is commonly found in the Indo-West Pacific region of the world.
- It is a nocturnal feeder and lays motionless in the sea bottom and waits for the prey to come close to it.
- Characteristics of *Scorpaenopsisneglecta* includes -
 1. It uses its *lateral sensory system* instead of eyes to hunt its prey.
 2. The fish has the ability to *change colour and camouflage* to escape from predators and while catching a prey.
 3. The fish is called 'scorpionfish' because its spines contain neurotoxin.



4. Neurotoxins are chemical substances that are poisonous to the nervous system.
 5. King Cobra and marine snakes have these types of venom, thus Eating the fish would also lead to death.
- **CMFRI** is a leading tropical marine fisheries research institute, headquartered in Kochi, Kerala.

Domestication of Chicken

- A recent study by scientists has revealed new details about the earliest domestication of chicken.
- The DNA sequencing of 863 genomes has showed the first domestication of chicken occurred in south-western China, northern Thailand and Myanmar.
- According to Charles Darwin, chickens were domesticated around 4,000 B.C. from a single ancestor, Red Jungle Fowl in the Indus Valley.
- The recent study involved sequencing of genomes from all four species of the genus Gallus, five sub-species of Red Jungle Fowl and various domestic chicken breeds collected worldwide.
- It revealed single domestication from Red Jungle Fowl sub-species Gallus galluspadiceus.
- It contradicted the earlier claim that chickens were domesticated in northern China and the Indus Valley.

24. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

SPACE

Endeavour Spacecraft and Crew Dragon capsule

- Recently SpaceX launched two astronauts to the International Space Station.
- This is the first-ever time that a private spacecraft company, Space X used its own rocket to put humans into space.
- The Falcon 9 rocket lifted off from NASA's Kennedy Space Center carrying SpaceX's Crew Dragon capsule into orbit.
- The astronauts have named the commercial spacecraft after one of the retired winged orbiters 'Endeavour'.

The International Space Station (ISS)

- It is a modular space station (habitable artificial satellite) in low Earth orbit.
- The ISS programme is a multi-national collaborative project between five participating space agencies:
 1. NASA (United States),
 2. Roscosmos (Russia),
 3. JAXA (Japan),
 4. ESA (Europe),
 5. CSA (Canada).
- The ownership and use of the space station are established by intergovernmental treaties and agreements.
- It is suited for testing the spacecraft systems and equipment required for possible future long-duration missions to the Moon and Mars.
- It is the largest artificial object in space and the largest satellite in low Earth orbit, regularly visible to the naked eye from Earth's surface.
- It circles the Earth in roughly 93 minutes, completing 15.5 orbits per day.

Micius Satellite

- Micius is the world's first quantum communications satellite, launched by China in 2016.

- The satellite serves as the source of pairs of entangled photons.
- Recently, it has sent light particles to the Earth to establish the world's most secure communication link.
- It has successfully brought entanglement-based quantum cryptography to its original ground stations 1,200 km apart by sending simultaneous streams of entangled photons to the ground stations to establish a direct link between the two of them.
- The satellite provided entangled photons as a convenient resource for the quantum cryptography and the two ground stations then used them according to their agreed protocol.
- Until now, this had never been done via satellite or at such great distances.
- It has not been specified how the messages were transmitted in this instance but in theory it could be done by optical fibre, another communications satellite, radio or any other agreed method.
- Scientists have started using quantum encryption for securing long-range communication and Micius has been at the forefront of quantum encryption for several years.

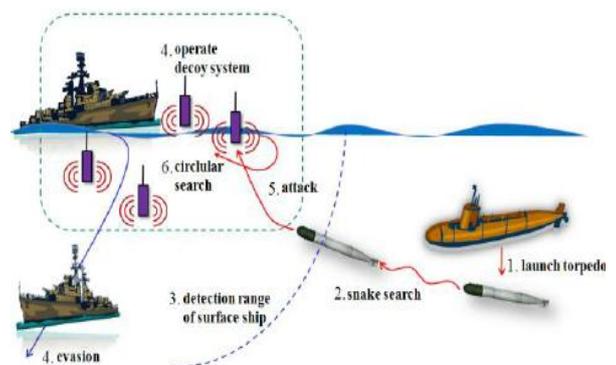
Entangled Photons

- Entangled photons are twinned light particles whose properties remain intertwined no matter how far apart they are.
- If one of the photons is manipulated, the other will be similarly affected at the very same moment.
- It is this property that lies in the heart of the most secure forms of quantum cryptography (the study of concepts like encryption and decryption).
- If one of the entangled particles is used to create a key for encoding messages, only the person with the other particle can decode them.

DEFENCE

Maareech

- Maareech is an Advanced Torpedo Defence System (ATDS) that is capable of being fired from all frontline ships.
- It has been designed and developed indigenously by DRDO.
- It is capable of detecting, locating and neutralizing incoming torpedoes.
- It applies counter-measures to protect the naval platform against attack.
- Bharat Electronics Limited, a Defence PSU, would undertake the production of this decoy system.
- Torpedoes are self-propelled weapons with a warhead and can be used under or on the water surface.
- They are one of the mainstay of sea-warfare attack systems.



Operation Samudra Setu

- Indian Naval Ship Jalashwa departed Colombo, Sri Lanka after having embarked 685 Indian nationals and set course for the port of Tuticorin in Tamilnadu.
- The ship, on her third trip as part of Indian Navy's Operation Samudra Setu under the aegis of Mission Vande Bharat launched by the Government of India.
- Mission Vande Bharat launched has been engaged in bringing Indian nationals home from foreign shores by the sea route.

HEALTH



Sickle Cell Disease

- It is a blood disorder that arises when both parents have the problem gene and pass it on to their child.
- If only one parent has the problem gene, then the child will not have symptoms but will have the gene called the 'sickle cell trait'.
- With sickle cell disease, the red blood cells have an abnormal crescent shape, taking the shape of a sickle, hence, its name.
- The sickle shape results in the red blood cells becoming rigid and sticky, getting stuck in the smaller blood vessels as they circulate in the body.
- This disrupts the supply of oxygen to parts of the body and results in symptoms such as anemia, episodes of pain due to bone and joint damage, swelling in the extremities, increased risk of infections, hampering of normal growth, and problems with the vision.
- In India, it is more common in south Gujarat, north Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and western Odisha with a smaller concentration in the southern regions in India.
- In 2008, the UN General Assembly recognized it as a public health problem and "one of the world's foremost genetic diseases".
- World Sickle Cell Day is observed on 19th June each year to raise awareness of sickle cell at a national and international level.

Reverse Zoonosis

- Zoonosis is an infectious disease caused by a pathogen that has jumped from an animal to a human.
- When the pathogen is transmitted from human to animals, it is known as reverse zoonosis.
- The animal infected through the process may in turn re-transmit the infection to humans under some circumstances.
- Recently novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 has begun infecting minks farms in the Netherlands.
- It could largely have been transmitted through indirect routes such as through feed or bedding material, infectious droplets or by contaminated dust from the bedding.
- Literature has shown that the phenomenon of reverse zoonosis can also happen in case of other pathogens such as resistant bacteria.
- This can add to the greater spread of bacterial infections in animals.
- It can also involve an increased use of antibiotics to treat or prevent such infections, eventually contributing to another slow pandemic of antimicrobial resistance.

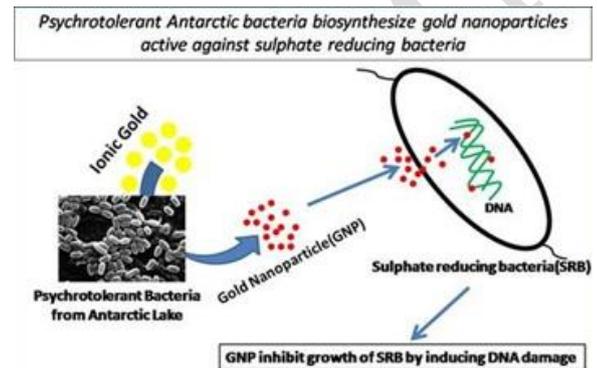
Guidelines for Recombinant DNA Technology in India

- Biosafety refers to policies and procedures adopted to avoid risk to human health and safety and to the conservation of the environment as a result of the use of GMOs for research and trade
- Under the Biosafety Research programme, main emphasis is given to facilitate the implementation of biosafety procedures, rules and guidelines under Environment (Protection) Act 1986 and Rules 1989 to ensure safety from the use of GMOs and products thereof in research and application to the users as well as to the environment.
- A three tier mechanism comprising
 - Institutional Biosafety Committees (IBSC) at the Institute/company.
 - Review Committee on Genetic Manipulation (RCGM) in the Department of Biotechnology.
 - Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) in the Ministry of Environment & Forests (MoE&F) for granting approval Genetically Engineered (GE) crops.

OTHERS

Gold Nanoparticles

- National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR) and Goa University (GU) has successfully synthesized gold nanoparticles.
- They used psychrotolerant Antarctic bacteria through a non-toxic, low-cost, and eco-friendly way for the synthesis.
- The study revealed genotoxic effect of GNPs on a Sulphate reducing bacteria (SRB).
- It displayed enough anti-bacterial properties by inhibiting the growth of SRB and its sulphide production by damaging the genetic information of the DNA of the bacterial cell.
- Geno toxicity describes the property of a chemical agent that is capable of damaging the genetic information of DNA and thus causing mutation of the cell, which can lead to cancer.
- These GNPs can be used as a composite therapeutic agent clinical trials, especially in anti-cancer, anti-viral, anti-diabetic, and cholesterol-lowering drugs



Compressed Bio-Gas

- Biogas and CNG are the same but for a few differences.
- Origin – CNG is found in nature as Natural Gas.
- Biogas, is produced in a sealed tank/ chamber, from an organic feed-stock.
- Composition - Biogas is mainly Methane & Carbon Di Oxide, while Natural Gas is mainly Methane.
- Compressed Biogas proposes to build large biogas plants that will continuously produce biogas from urban, domestic and industrial wastes.
- The biogas produced will be stored under pressure in gas cylinders for easy distribution to urban and semi-urban customers as alternative to charcoal and firewood.
- Union Government is in the process of including Compressed Bio-Gas under Priority Sector Lending.

Dhruva Chip

- It is a home-grown receiver chip developed by IIT-Bombay.
- It can be used in smartphones and navigation devices to find locations and routes within the country.
- It will receive signals from India's NAVIC group of navigation satellites as well as the US GPS-based satellites to determine these accurately under all weather conditions.
- It can receive in multiple frequency bands and handle weak signals.
- Such signals can be converted into digital bits and processed by any standard digital signal processor (DSP) to determine one's location precisely.
- It will help receive and clean up the signals received from NAVIC, which are 36,000 km above from the earth's surface.
- This Project was funded by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).
- SAMEER (Society for Applied Microwave Electronics Engineering and Research) is the nodal agency.
- NAVIC - Navigation with Indian Constellation is India's geo-positioning system with 9 satellites designed by ISRO to provide accurate positioning within the country.

Water Electrolysis

- Researchers from the IIT- Madras are collaborating with their counterparts in Germany, to develop alternative technologies to produce green hydrogen.
- It is to help the transition to hydrogen-based economy.
- The project is taken up under the Scheme for Promotion of academic and Research Collaboration or SPARC.

- Conventional methods of generating hydrogen result in a large quantity of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that imposed serious environmental concerns.
- Electrochemical splitting of water, called 'Water Electrolysis' (WE), is clean, facile, and highly efficient technology for large-scale production of high-purity H₂.

25. INDEX AND REPORT

India TB Report 2020

- The report was released recently by the Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare.
- According to the report, National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme has comprehensively moved closer to near-complete online notification of all TB cases in the country through the NIKSHAY portal.
- Under the programme, in 2019, Nagaland and Tripura have been awarded for being the best performing among small states (Population - less than 50 lakh)
- Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh were awarded as best performing States among larger states (Population - more than 50 lakh)
- Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu were chosen as the best performers in the category of Union Territory.



World Drug Report 2020

- The report was released recently by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).
- It has highlighted the possible consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on Illegal Drug Production, Supply and Consumption.
- According to it, due to economic hardship, people may resort to illicit activities linked to drugs to make a living.
- According to the report, India is one of the major hubs of illicit drug trade ranging from age-old cannabis to newer prescription drugs like tramadol, and designer drugs like methamphetamine.
- India is in the middle of two major illicit opium production regions in the world, the Golden Crescent (Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan) in the west and the Golden Triangle (South-East Asia) in the east.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), established in 1997, acts as the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention by combining the United Nations International Drug Control Program (UNDCP) and the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Division of the United Nations Office at Vienna.

Asian Development Outlook (ADO)

- Asian Development Outlook (ADO) is report released by Asian Development Bank.
- The ADO analyses economic and development issues in developing countries in Asia.
- This includes forecasting the inflation and growth rates of countries throughout the region, including China and India.
- Highlights of recent report are as follows
 - According to report the Indian economy is expected to contract by 4% during the current financial year (2020-21).
 - Earlier, in April 2020, ADB had projected India's economy to grow at 4% in 2020-21.

- The report also highlighted India's GDP slowed to 3.1% in the last quarter (Jan-March) of the financial year 2019-20, it is the slowest since early 2003.
- Developing Asia refers to a group of over 40 countries, including India that are members of the ADB.
- Growth of Developing Asia is expected around 0.1%, this is down from the 2.2% forecast in April 2020 and would be the slowest growth for the region since 1961.
- However, China is expected to record a positive growth of 1.8% in 2020-21.

Rule of Law Index

- It is released by the World Justice Project, an independent organisation.
- It is a quantitative assessment tool designed to offer a detailed and comprehensive picture of the extent to which countries adhere to the rule of law in practice.
- The World Justice Project defines the rule of law system as one in which the following four universal principles are upheld:
- The government and its officials and agents are accountable under the law.
- The laws are clear, publicized, stable and fair, and protect fundamental rights, including the security of persons and property.
- The process by which the laws are enacted, administered, and enforced is accessible, efficient, and fair.
- Justice is delivered by competent, ethical, and independent representatives and neutrals who are of sufficient number, have adequate resources and reflect the makeup of the communities they serve.
- India has secured 69th rank of 128 countries.

It measures countries' rule of law performance across eight factors:

1. Constraints on Government Powers,
2. Absence of Corruption,
3. Open Government,
4. Fundamental Rights,
5. Order and Security,
6. Regulatory Enforcement,
7. Civil Justice,
8. Criminal Justice.

Environment Performance Index

- Environment Performance Index is a biennial index released by Yale University.
- The global index considered 32 indicators of environmental performance, giving a snapshot of the 10-year trends in environmental performance at the national and global levels.
- India secured 168 rank in the 12th edition of the biennial (EPI Index 2020) out of 180 countries, the country scored 27.6 out of 100 in the 2020 index.
- India's rank was 177 (with a score of 30.57 out of 100) in 2018.
- India needs to re-double national sustainability efforts on all fronts, according to the index.
- The country needs to focus on a wide spectrum of sustainability issues, with a high-priority to critical issues such as air and water quality, biodiversity and climate change.
- All South Asian countries, except Afghanistan, were ahead of India in the ranking.
- India's rank on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among the South Asian countries was low, according to State of India's Environment 2020.
- India scored below the regional average score on all five key parameters on environmental health, including air quality, sanitation and drinking water, heavy metals and waste management.
- Among South Asian countries, India was at second position (rank 106) after Pakistan on 'climate change'.
- A ten-year comparison progress report in the index showed that India slipped on climate-related parameters.
- The performance on climate change was assessed based on eight indicators, adjusted emission growth rates; composed of growth rates of four greenhouse gases and one pollutant; growth rate in carbon dioxide emissions from land cover; greenhouse gas intensity growth rate; and greenhouse gas emissions per capita.

- The report indicated that black carbon, carbon dioxide emissions and greenhouse emissions per capita increased in 10 years.
- Its overall score under climate change has dipped 2.9 points.

International Religious Freedom Report 2019

- Recently, the US State Department has released its annual International Religious Freedom (IRF) Report 2019, which is a survey of the state of religious freedom across the world.
- It published a report i.e. the country report for India to highlight the issue of religious freedom in the country.
- Earlier, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF report) downgraded India's religious freedom to the lowest grade – in the 'Country of Particular Concern (CPC)' category.
- The IRF report listed countries for positive developments in religious freedom and negative examples.
- Nicaragua, Nigeria and China were cited as negative examples.
- It stated that in China, state-sponsored repression against all religions continues to intensify because of the Chinese Communist Party and India is not cited in either list.
- It highlighted the developments that took place in 2019 i.e. the status of Jammu and Kashmir, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).
- It discussed in detail about mob lynchings, anti-conversion laws, cow vigilantism and related issues.

Nature Index

- The Nature Index is a database of author affiliation information collated from research articles published in an independently selected group of 82 high-quality science journals.
- The database is compiled by Nature Research, which is a part of Springer Nature which is an American German academic publishing company based in Germany.
- The Nature Index provides a close to real-time proxy of high-quality research output and collaboration at the institutional, national and regional level.
- The Nature Index is updated monthly, and a 12-month rolling window (1 April 2019 - 31 March 2020) of data is openly available.
- Recently three of the autonomous institutions of the Department of Science & Technology, Government of India have found their place among top 30 Indian Institutions including universities, IITs, IISERs, and Research Institutions and Labs as per Nature Index 2020 ratings.
- The overall ranking of India is 12th in the index and top 3 Ranking of Institutions from India are as follows
 1. Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)
 2. Indian Institute of Sciences (IISc)
 3. Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR)

QS Rankings

- Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) is a leading global career and education network for ambitious professionals looking to further their personal and professional development.
- QS develops and successfully implements methods of comparative data collection and analysis used to highlight institutions' strengths.
- The 'QS World University Rankings' is an annual publication of university rankings which comprises the global overall and subject rankings.
- Six parameters and their weightage for the evaluation:
 1. Academic Reputation (40%)
 2. Employer Reputation (10%)
 3. Faculty/Student Ratio (20%)



4. Citations per faculty (20%)
 5. International Faculty Ratio (5%)
 6. International Student Ratio (5%)
- Recently, QS World University Rankings 2021 shows a decline in the rankings of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc).
 - Only the newer IITs in Guwahati and Hyderabad have shown some improvement.
 - Only three educational institutes from India, the IIT Bombay (172), IISc Bengaluru (185) and IIT Delhi (193) feature in the top 200 list.
 - Despite the Centre's flagship Institutes of Eminence (IoE) scheme to boost the Indian presence in these global rankings, the total number of Indian institutions in the top 1,000 global list has fallen from 24 to 21.
 - In private universities, BITS Pilani and the Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) have dropped out of the top 1,000 list, but OP Jindal Global University has climbed to the 650-700 band in the rankings.
 - Out of the six parameters, Indian institutions get zero scores on the ratio of international faculty and students while scoring well on research impact, measured through citations per faculty.
 - India also scores poorly on faculty-student ratio because of counting only full-time faculty whereas American universities include PhD students who are teaching or are research assistants.

Mobile Payments Market Report

- S&P Global Market Intelligence's has launched 2020 India Mobile Payments Market Report.
- According to the report mobile payments and card transactions exceeded cash withdrawals from automated teller machines (ATMs) for the first time in 2019, indicating that the country's push towards digital payments was bearing fruit.
- The highlights of the report are as follows
- Mobile payments, initiated by payment apps comprising account-to-account transfers and payments made from stored-value accounts, rose 163% to \$287 billion in 2019.
- By comparison, point-of-sale transactions completed using debit and credit cards, including online and in apps, rose 24% to \$204 billion.
- Card and mobile payments as a percentage of GDP rose to 20% in the quarter ended December 31, 2019.
- The report estimated that card purchases and Unified Payments Interface (UPI)-led mobile payments represented 21% of the \$781 billion in in-store transactions in 2019.
- Google Pay and PhonePe led the UPI payment space as the two handled more than 7 billion transactions in total, representing more than two-thirds of UPI transactions in 2019.