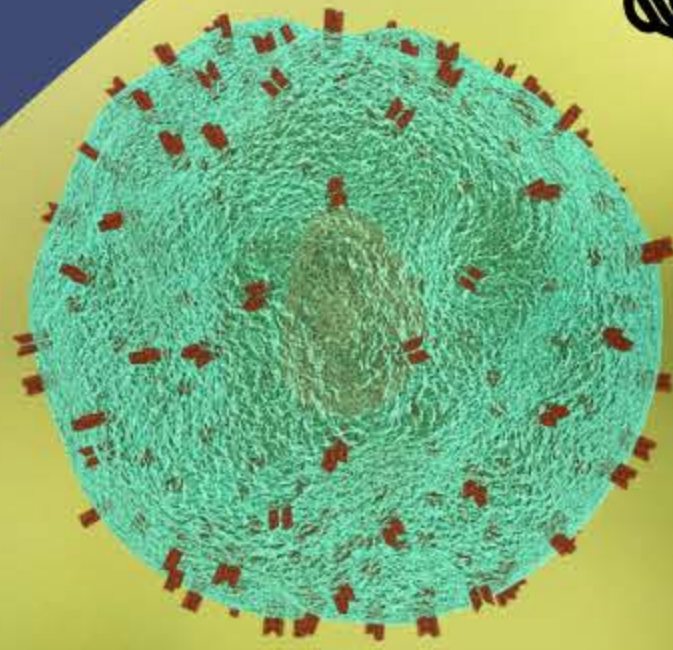


# CURRENT AFFAIR

APRIL 2020



**JOKTA  
ACADEMY**



**INDEX**

TOPICS	PAGE.NO
POLITY AND GOVERNANCE	2-14
ECONOMICS	14-26
INDIA AND WORLD	26-36
ENVIRONMENT	36-39
SCI & TECH. + HEALTH	40-53
HIMACHAL PRADESH CURRENT AFFAIRS	53-60
SPORTS	60-62
DEFENCE	62-63
BOOK AND AUTHORS	63
RANK AND INDICES	63-64
AGREEMENTS AND MOU	64-65
APPOINTMENTS	65-66
AWARD AND HONOURS	66-67
IMPORTANT DAYS AND THEMES	67-69
OBITUARY	69-70
STATES MISCELLANEOUS AFFAIRS	70-73

## Polity and Governance

### Supreme Court Upholds Right to Discuss Covid-19

#### Why in News?

Recently, the Central government appealed in the Supreme Court that **media outlets, in the “larger interest of justice”** should only publish or telecast anything on **COVID-19** after ascertaining the factual position from the government.

#### Concerns:

- Any deliberate or inaccurate reporting by the media, particularly web portals, has a serious and inevitable potential of causing panic in large sections of society.
- Any panic reaction in the midst of an unprecedented situation based on such reporting would harm the entire nation.

#### Highlights of the Judgement:

- A Bench, led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde, was responding to a request from the Central government that media outlets, in the larger interest of justice, should only publish or telecast anything on COVID-19 after ascertaining the factual position from the government.
- The court took a view balancing free press and the need to avoid panic in society during an unprecedented crisis.
- However, the SC has directed the media to refer to and publish the official version of the developments in order to avoid inaccuracies and large-scale panic.
- It is also noteworthy that **creating panic is a criminal offence under the Disaster Management Act, 2005**.
- It has ordered the government to start a **daily bulletin on COVID-19 developments** through all media avenues in the next 24 hours.

#### Constitutional Provisions for Freedom of Expression

- **Article 19(1)(a)** of the Constitution of India states that, “**all citizens shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression**”.
  - The philosophy behind this Article lies in the **Preamble of the Constitution**, where a solemn resolve is made to **secure to all its citizens, liberty of thought and expression**.
- The exercise of this right is, however, subject to “**reasonable restrictions**” for certain purposes being imposed under **Article 19(2)** of the Constitution of India.
  - These reasonable restrictions are imposed in the **interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India**, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.

### Centre defines J&K domicile rules

#### Why in News?

The Union government has issued a notification defining “**domiciles**” in the Union Territory (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir for protecting jobs in the **Group D category and entry-level non-gazetted posts for the domiciles**.

#### Background:

- On August **5th 2019**, the Centre withdrew J&K’s special status under **Article 370 and Article 35A** of the Constitution and bifurcated it into the Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh.
- Before, **Article 35 A** of the Constitution of India had empowered the **J&K Assembly to define a J&K resident**, who alone were eligible to apply for jobs or own immovable property.

#### Key Highlights:

- In the latest gazette notification, **Section 3A of the J&K Reorganisation (Adaptation of State Laws) Order 2020, under the J&K Civil Services (Decentralisation and Recruitment) Act**, has been introduced to define domicile.
- The order defines a domicile as one “**who has resided for a period of 15 years in the UT of J&K or has studied for a period of seven years and appeared in Class 10th/12th examination in an educational institution located in the UT of J&K or who is registered as a migrant by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commissioner (Migrants).**”

- **Children of Central Govt. officials**, All India Services, PSUs, autonomous bodies of the Centre, Public Sector Banks, officials of statutory bodies, Central Universities, recognised research institutes of the Centre who have served in J&K for a total period of **10 years** will be domiciles.
- The domicile status applies to “**children of such residents of J&K who reside outside J&K in connection with their employment or business or other professional** or vocational reasons but their parents should fulfil any of the conditions provided”.
- The Order says that the domiciles will be eligible for the purposes of appointment to any post carrying a pay scale of not more than Level 4.
  - **The Level 4 post comprises** positions such as gardeners, barbers, office peons and watermen, and the highest rank in the category is that of a junior assistant.
- Through the same order, the **Centre has repealed the J&K Civil Services (Special Provisions) Act**.
- A senior government official said the reservation for **domiciles would not apply to Group A and Group B posts**, and like other UTs, recruitment would be done by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).
  - This is according to the norms in other UTs and States.
- The provisions of the Act **authorise the Tehsildar** as competent authority for issuing the domicile certificate, as opposed to deputy commissioner or any officer specially notified by the state government by way of a gazette notification in the form of an SRO.
- **29 state laws** have been repealed while **109 have been amended**.

### Changes in Public Safety Act:

- The notification of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) also made changes to the Public Safety Act (PSA).
- A clause that prohibited **J&K residents booked under the Act to be lodged in jails outside has been removed**.
- It changes the criteria for appointing the PSA advisory board on the recommendation of a search committee headed by the Chief Secretary instead of the Chief Justice of the J&K High Court.
- It also bars sitting High Court judges to be made part of the board without the Chief Justice’s consultation.
  - **The board has a crucial role to play in the release of detenues.**
- The order scraps a clause that dealt with the power to regulate the place and conditions of detention.

### Article 370

- Included in the Constitution on **October 17, 1949**, Article 370 exempts J&K from the Indian Constitution (**except Article 1 and Article 370 itself**) and permits the state to draft its own Constitution.
- **It restricts Parliament’s legislative powers in respect of J&K**. For **extending a central law on subjects included in the Instrument of Accession (IoA)**, mere “**consultation**” with the state government is needed. But for extending it to other matters, “**concurrence**” of the state government is mandatory.

## Norms Relaxed under MPLAD Scheme

### Why in News?

The government has provided for “**one-time exemption in furnishing of utilization certificate**” for release of the first installment, and exemption from **furnishing of audit certificate** for release of the second installment under the Members of Parliament Local Area Development (MPLAD) Scheme.

### Highlights:

- This exemption is applicable only for the financial year 2020-21.
- The exemption is for the Members of Parliament (MPs) who have decided to contribute for COVID-19.
- The latest announcement comes after allowing a one-time dispensation under the Scheme to allow MPs to recommend funds for purchase of medical testing and screening equipment for government hospitals and dispensaries in the wake of COVID-19.
- Each year under MPLADS, MPs receive Rs 5 crore in two installments of Rs 2.5 crore each. Funds under MPLADS are non-lapsable.
  - Lok Sabha MPs have to recommend the district authorities projects in their Lok Sabha constituencies, while Rajya Sabha MPs have to spend it in the state that has elected them to the House.
  - Under the MPLADS rules, an MP can donate a maximum of **Rs 1 crore** to a trust or a public fund.

## Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme

## JOKTA ACADEMY

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It was announced in **December 1993** and initially came under the control of the **Ministry of Rural Development**. Later, in **October 1994**, it was transferred to the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation**.

- The 1st Guidelines were issued in **February 1994**, covering the concept, implementation and monitoring of the Scheme.

### Objective:

To enable MPs to recommend works of developmental nature with emphasis on the creation of durable community assets based on the locally felt needs to be taken up in their Constituencies.

- Lok Sabha Members can recommend works within their constituencies and elected Members of Rajya Sabha can recommend works within the State they are elected from.
- **Nominated Members of both the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha can recommend works anywhere in the country.**
  - To create durable assets of national priorities viz. drinking water, primary education, public health, sanitation and roads, etc.
- It is a **Central Sector Scheme**. The annual MPLADS fund entitlement per MP constituency is ₹5 crore.

## COVID-19 as a Notified Disaster

### Why in News?

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) will treat COVID-19 as a notified disaster for providing assistance under the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF).

### What is a disaster?

- The Disaster Management Act, 2005 (**DM Act, 2005**) has given a definition for disaster.
- **Disaster is a catastrophe, calamity or grave occurrence in any area, arising from natural or man-made causes.**
- It may result in substantial loss of life or human suffering or damage to, and destruction of, property or environment.
- Disaster would be of nature or magnitude as to be beyond the coping capacity of the community of the affected area.

### How are disasters classified?

The High Power Committee on Disaster Management of 1999 had identified 31 disaster categories.

- This committee organised these categories into 5 major sub-groups,
  1. Water and climate related disasters
  2. Geological related disasters
  3. Chemical, industrial and nuclear related disasters
  4. Accident Related Disasters
  5. Biological related disasters, which includes epidemics.

### What is SDRF?

- The SDRF was constituted under the DM Act, 2005.
- **It is the primary fund available with the State governments for responses to notified disasters.**
- This fund will help the State governments meet expenditure for providing immediate relief to the victims.
- The disasters covered under the SDRF include cyclones, droughts, tsunamis, hailstorms, landslides and pest attacks among others.

### How much does the Centre contribute?

- The Centre contributes **75% of the SDRF** allocation for general category States and Union Territories.
- It contributes **90% of the SDRF** allocation for special category States (northeast, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir).
- For SDRF, the Centre releases funds in two equal instalments as per the recommendation of the Finance Commission.
- The National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF), also constituted under the DM Act, 2005, will supplement the SDRF of a state.
- The NDRF will support the SDRF in case of a disaster of severe nature, if adequate funds are not available in the SDRF.

### Have there been such instances in the past?

- In 2001, the National Committee on Disaster Management under then Prime Minister was mandated to look into the parameters that should define a national calamity.
- However, the committee did not suggest **any fixed criterion**.
- As of now, there is no executive or legal provision to declare a national calamity.
- **In 2018**, in view of the devastation caused by the Kerala floods, Kerala politicians demanded that the floods be declared a “national calamity”.
- There have been demands from states to declare certain events as natural disasters, such as the Uttarakhand flood (2013).

### National Security Act, 1980

#### Why in News?

The Indore district administration invoked the National Security Act (NSA), 1980, against four persons accused of instigating residents of a locality to pelt stones and chase away health workers.

#### Historical Background

India is one of the few countries in the world whose constitution allows for preventive detention during peacetime. Article 22 (3) says that the rights available to an arrested person will not be applicable in case of preventive detention.

- The National Security Act (NSA) has its roots in the preventive detention laws. The first iteration of these laws was framed during the **British rule**. However, post-independence these laws were carried forward as the Preventive Detention Act of 1950. **This was replaced by the Maintenance of Internal Security Act of 1971 and finally the National Security Act of 1980.**

#### Provisions of the National Security Act 1980

- NSA empowers the Centre or a State government to detain a person so that he does not act in any manner prejudicial to national security. **The person need not be charged during the period of detention.**
- An individual can be detained without a charge for up to **12 months**.
- The detained person can be held for **10 days without being told the charges against him**.

#### Grounds of Detention

- **Acting in any manner prejudicial to the defence of India**, the relations of India with foreign powers, or the security of India.
- Regulating the continued presence of any foreigner in India or to make arrangements for his expulsion from India.
- Preventing them from acting in any manner prejudicial to the security of the State or from acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order or from acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of supplies and services essential to the community it is necessary so to do.

#### Constitution of Advisory Board

- The central or state government shall **constitute one or more Advisory Boards**.
- It consists of **three persons** who are qualified to be appointed as **Judges of a High Court**.
- The grounds of detention must be placed before the Advisory Board within **3 weeks** from the date of detention.
- The detained person can appeal before the Advisory Board but they are not allowed a lawyer during the trial.
- If the Advisory Board finds no sufficient cause for the detention, the government shall revoke the detention order and release the person.

#### Protective Measures

- No suit or other legal proceeding shall lie against the Central or State Governments, or any other person, for anything in good faith done or intended to be done in pursuance of this Act.

#### Criticism of the National Security Act

Article 22 and various provisions of Cr.PC safeguard the interests of an arrested person.

- The person arrested has to be informed of the **grounds of arrest**.
- The arrested person cannot be **denied the right to consult** and to be defended by a legal practitioner of his choice.
- The arrested person should be **produced before the nearest magistrate within 24 hours**.
- However, **none of these safeguards are available if a person is detained under NSA**.
- A person could be kept in the dark about the reasons for his arrest for up to 10 days.

- Even when providing the grounds for arrest, the government can withhold information which it considers to be against the public interest to disclose.
- The arrested person is also **not entitled to the aid of any legal practitioner** in any matter connected with the proceedings before an advisory board, which is constituted by the government.
- **Detaining someone without trial during normal times is hard to justify** when it is difficult to prove the legitimacy of the threat posed by the person.
- While it is true that Constitution provides for **Article 22 (3) that does not extend safeguards of the criminal system to preventive detention**, the justification for persisting with the same provisions even 70 years after independence needs to be reviewed.
- Since the **NSA allows custody of people without framing a charge**, it has become a convenient tool for the government and police to circumvent the formalities of the Criminal Procedure Code and the courts of the land.
- **The police make use of NSA when they are unwilling or unable to make a criminal case.** Instances of journalists critical of the establishment being charged with NSA are becoming common.
- Rather than for stopping future crimes, NSA is often used as a response to ordinary law and order cases. The NSA morphs into a punitive measure in such instances.
- **The vague language of the law means NSA being used for the detention of individuals based on the government's satisfaction** that an individual is a threat to foreign relations, national security, public order, or the maintenance of essential supplies and services. Thus, theoretically, the government can invoke the NSA if an individual's act threatens to disrupt public order like causing a commotion or obstructing the traffic.

### Conclusion

- There are no separate figures currently available for detentions under the NSA. The 177th Law Commission Report of 2001 reveals that **14,57,779 persons** were arrested under preventive provisions in India. It is paramount to review the continued usage of NSA and to close the loopholes that permit law enforcement to abuse constitutional and statutory rights.
- Preventive detention must not be used for regular law and order issues.
- **The endeavor must be to guard liberty** – one of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

### Rise in domestic violence post lockdown

Amid the lockdown due to COVID-19, the National Commission for Women (NCW) has recorded a **more than two-fold increase in the gender-based violence cases.**

### Key Highlights:

- The total complaints from women rose from 116 in the first week of March (March 2- 8), to 257 in the final week of March (March 23-April 1).
- Complaints of rape or attempted rape have risen sharply from two to 13, while cases of domestic violence have increased from 30 to 69 over the same comparative period.
- Simultaneously, there has been an **almost threefold increase in police apathy** towards women's complaints.
- National Commission for Women:
- **The National Commission for Women (NCW) is a statutory body of the Government of India**, generally concerned with advising the government on all policy matters affecting women.
- It was established in **January 1992** under the provisions of the Indian Constitution, as defined in the National Commission for Women Act, 1990.
- **The commission regularly publishes** a monthly newsletter, **Rashtra Mahila** in both Hindi and English.

### Objective of NCW:

To represent the rights of women in India and to provide a voice for their issues and concerns.

### Functions:

- Review the constitutional and legal safeguards for women
- Recommend remedial legislative measures
- Facilitate redressal of grievances
- Advise the Government on all policy matters affecting women.

### Indian Migrants and Challenges

### Why in News?



Recently, the **Covid-19 lockdown** has led to an exodus of migrant workers from cities to rural areas and threw the spotlight on the vast number of Indians who live outside their home states.

## About Migrant Workers:

- A **"migrant worker"** is a person who either migrates within their home country or outside it to pursue work. **Migrant workers usually do not have the intention to stay permanently in the country or region in which they work.**
- Migrant workers **who work outside their home country are also called foreign workers.** They may also be called expatriates or guest workers, especially when they have been sent for or invited to work in the host country before leaving the home country.
- The International Labour Organization estimated in 2014 there were 232 million international migrants worldwide who were outside their home country for at least 12 months and approximately half of them were estimated to be economically active (i.e. being employed or seeking employment).

## Problems with migrant workers :

**Coercion :**Undocumented migrant workers may not be willing to report a workplace injury because they are afraid of being reported to immigration authorities or losing their jobs and not being able to find another employer willing to take them on.. Sexual or physical assault incidents are also underreported in the migrant worker population because of the fear of consequences.

**Lack of Benefits :**Because they are often paid in cash off the books, migrant workers are not eligible for company benefits such as pensions and insurance plans. They also miss out on unemployment, disability and Social Security benefits from the government. Breaks, overtime, sick pay and minimum wage laws may not be followed because there is no recourse for the worker.

**Dangerous Conditions:**Workers may be housed in unsanitary conditions, which are especially dangerous for children. If the company provides food for its employees, it is often low quality and not very nutritious. With many families living together in the same facility, important items such as showers, ovens and toilets may break down. Migrant workers are also subject to harsh conditions on the job, such as working in extreme weather for long hours with no breaks.

**Cultural Differences:**Cultural differences present problems for migrant workers even when they are away from the job site. Local residents may discriminate or resent migrant workers for taking the available jobs in the area. Migrant workers are often isolated from their neighbors because they do not speak the language and shop mostly at ethnic stores. The language barrier can also make it difficult to understand legal documents such as leases and tax forms.

**Educational Issues :**Children of migrant workers often miss school and fall behind their peers because they have to work along with the rest of the family. Child labor laws are typically not enforced among the migrant population, so there is no protection for the children. Even when the child does not perform any actual work, he may spend the day at the job site with his parents because there is no available daycare. Families tend to move according to the seasons, which makes it even more difficult for the children to keep up in school.

**Lack of Legal frame work :**There is one legislation known as Inter-State Migrant Workers Act, 1979 which aims to safeguard migrants. However, it is obsolete and is hardly enforced anywhere. A serious constraint in framing an effective policy is the lack of credible data on incidence of seasonal migration. Census and NSS that have a significant impact on policy making are unable to capture seasonal and circular migration. Migrants may also be missed out in BPL Surveys.

## What Should be done?

**Making agriculture a profitable business:** Most of the workers are forced to go out due to the non-profit of agriculture, so this problem will be less after agriculture becomes profitable. And they should also be informed about agriculture related activities.

**Concept of minimum floor level income:** The concept of minimum floor income or minimum wage as described in the proposed labor condition will have to be brought in, thereby reducing the regional wage price differential.

**Increasing rural income:** By increasing schemes like Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana and MNREGA, rural income should be increased and forced migration should be stopped.

**Constitutional compliance:** Provision of workers' participation in the management of the industry, described in the Directive Principles of the State, should be formulated to improve the standard of living of the workers.

**Strengthening Legal framework:**Codifies labour laws and make sure about its implimentation

**Social Security Schemes:**It is necessary to manage the social security of migrant workers by making proper use of schemes like Shram Yogi Maan Dhan by the government, along with housing schemes will help in raising their standard of living.



## Way Forward :

- Economic growth in India today hinges on mobility of labour. The contribution of migrant workers to national income is enormous but there is little done in return for their security and well-being.
- There is an imminent need for solutions to transform migration into a more dignified and rewarding opportunity. Without this, making growth inclusive or the very least, sustainable, will remain a very distant dream.

## Restrictions on court hearings lawful: SC

### Why in News?

The **Supreme Court** has deemed all restrictions imposed on people from entering, attending or taking part in court hearings as lawful in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Highlights of the Judgement:

- The court invoked its extraordinary constitutional powers under **Article 142** to step away from the convention of open court hearings.
- The open court system ensures transparency in administration of justice.
- The court made it clear that **public health takes precedence over conventions**.
- "Access to justice is fundamental to preserve the rule of law in the democracy envisaged by the Constitution of India. The challenges occasioned by the outbreak of **COVID-19** have to be addressed while preserving the constitutional commitment to ensuring the delivery of and access to justice to those who seek it... Indian courts have been proactive in embracing advancement in technology in judicial proceedings," the order said.

### Way forward:

It was opined that the judiciary would have to improvise and continue to bank heavily on "**videoconferencing technologies**" in the wake of unprecedented and extraordinary outbreak of the pandemic.

## Durbar Move

Recently, for the first time in 144 years, the Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) administration has decided to **halt the bi-annual shifting of the capital, called 'Durbar move' due to the ongoing Covid-19 crisis**.

- From May to October, governmental offices are housed in the **summer capital of J&K, Srinagar**, and the other six months in **its winter capital, Jammu**.
- Durbar Move acts as a **bridge between two diverse cultures of the Kashmir Valley and the Jammu region**.
- The tradition was started during **Dogra ruler Maharaja Ranbir Singh in 1872**.
- **Ranbir Singh** was Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir from **1856 to 1885**.
- **He was the third son of Gulab Singh**, the founder of the Jammu and Kashmir state.

## Floor Test is Governor's Discretion: SC

### Why in news?

A Governor can call for a floor test any time he objectively feels a government in power has lost the confidence of the House and is on shaky ground, the Supreme Court held in its judgement on 13th March 2020.

### Highlights of the Judgement

- A Governor can call for a **trust vote** if he has arrived at a prima facie opinion, **based on objective material**, that the incumbent State government has **lost its majority in the Assembly**.
- The idea underlying the trust vote is to uphold the **political accountability of the elected government to the State legislature**.
- **In directing a trust vote, the Governor does not favour a particular political party**. It is inevitable that the specific timing of a trust vote may tilt the balance towards the party possessing a majority at the time the trust vote is directed.
- All political parties are **equally at risk of losing the support of their elected legislators**, just as the legislators are at risk of losing the vote of the electorate. This is how the system of parliamentary governance operates.

## C on Intention of a Trust vote Restriction on Governor

- **The intention behind a trust vote was to** enable the elected representatives to determine whether the Council of Ministers commanded the confidence of the House.

- It was the MLAs, and not the Governor, who made the ultimate call whether a government should stay in power or not.
- A Governor's power to call for a floor test is not restricted only before the inception of a State government immediately after elections, but would continue throughout its five-year term.

### When can the Governor call for the trust vote?

- The court clarified that the **Governor's requirement to have a trust vote does not "short-circuit" any disqualification proceedings pending before the Speaker.**
- **It said a Governor need not wait for the Speaker's decision** on the resignation of rebel MLAs before calling for a trust vote in the House.
- **But Governors cannot misuse their wide powers to call for a floor test to displace elected governments for political reasons**

### What is a no-confidence motion?

- A government can function only when it has **majority support in the Lok Sabha.**
- **The party can remain in power when it shows its strength through a floor test** which is primarily taken to know whether the executive enjoys the confidence of the legislature.
- If any member of the House feels that the government in power does not have a majority then he/she can move a no-confidence motion.
- If the motion is accepted, then the party in power has to prove its majority in the House.
- The member need NOT give a reason for moving the no-confidence motion.
- **According to rule 198 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of the Lok Sabha, a no-confidence motion is "a motion expressing want of confidence in the Council of Ministers."**
- This motion can be moved when **"the Member asking for leave shall, by 10.00 hours on that day give to the Secretary-General a written notice of the motion which such member proposes to move."**
- The Speaker then, once satisfied that the motion is in order, will ask the House if the motion can be adopted.

### How is the No-confidence Motion passed?

- Those Members that support the motion will have to rise in their seats, and with a minimum of 50 Members' approval, the motion can be moved.
- A no-confidence motion needs a simple majority vote to pass the House (i.e., 50% of members present and voting).
- If individuals or parties abstain from voting, those numbers will be removed from the overall strength of the House and then the majority will be taken into account.
- If the government is not able to prove its majority in the House, then the government of the day has to resign.

## Sahyog App: Survey of India

### Why in News?

**The Survey of India (Sol)** has developed an **e-platform that will collect geotagged information** on the nation's critical infrastructure in order to help the Government and public health agencies take critical decisions **in response to the current Covid-19 pandemic situation.**

- **To support this platform**, a mobile application called **Sahyog** has also been created. This app will help collect location specific data with the help of community workers.

### Key Points

- **Swift Solution:** Data collection by formal land survey is a lengthy and time taking process but the mobile app can help crowdsource data quickly.
- **Complement Arogya Setu App:** This will complement the recently launched **Aarogya Setu App** that helps trace the contacts of those who may have been infected by Covid-19.
- **Relevant Information:** Information regarding biomedical waste disposals, containment areas, available hospitals for Covid-19 cases, **ICMR (Indian Council of Medical Research)** testing laboratories and quarantine camps will be integrated on this platform with their latitudinal and longitudinal parameters. This could be customised to a variety of 'Covid-related applications' such as healthcare facilities, infection clusters and disaster management
- **Data Localisation:** Data collected using Sahyog application will be used for creating various applications for everyone's usage and would facilitate building a dataset that remains inside India.

- **Support System:** The data fed by the volunteers working on the ground such as the **ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist)** and Anganwadi workers will lead to a good support system for the government and doctors on ground.
- **Health Delivery System:** This will strengthen the public health delivery system of the central and state governments by providing necessary information support to workers dealing with the challenges of health, socio-economic distress and livelihood changes.
- **Integration on Single Platform:** A lot of geospatial data about locations of fire services, banquet halls etc. is already present with the Government which was not integrated in a single platform. This is a step in that direction.

### Concerns

- **Privacy:** Arogya Setu and applications like Sahyog that link to it, could infringe privacy as there wasn't clarity on how the data would be shared between the two applications.
- **Lack of Clarity:** Arogya Setu's terms of use were unclear on several aspects including how long data would be stored and what would happen to it after the pandemic has ceased.
- **Effectiveness:** Additionally, there is also a question of proportionality, i.e. in India, compared to its population, smartphone users are very less which means very few people will be able to download the app.

### Survey of India

- The Survey of India is **India's central engineering agency in charge of mapping and surveying.**
- **First modern scientific survey of India** was undertaken by **W. Mather in 1793–96** on instructions of Superintendent of Salem and Baramahal (TN), Col. Alexander Read.
- **Set up in 1767** to help consolidate the territories of the British East India Company, it is one of the oldest Engineering Departments of the GoI.
- **Its members are from** Survey of India Service cadre of Civil Services of India and Army Officers from the Indian Army Corps of Engineers.
- It is headed by the Surveyor General of India. At present, Survey of India is headed by **Lt Gen Girish Kumar, VSM.**

### Responsibilities

- **Advisor to Govt:** Survey of India acts as adviser to the Government of India on all cartography of India related matters, such as geodesy, mapping and map reproduction.
- **Geo names:** It is responsible for the naming convention and spellings of names of geographical features of India.
- **Certification and publication:** Scrutiny and certification of external boundaries of India and Coastline on maps published by the other agencies including private publishers.
- **Surveys:** geodetic datum, geodetic control network, topographical control, geophysical surveys, cadastral surveying, geologic maps, aeronautical charts within India, such as for forests, army cantonments, large scale cities, guide maps, developmental or conservation projects, etc.
- **National borders:** Demarcation of the borders and external boundaries of India as well as advice on the demarcation of inter-state boundaries.

## Woes of Migrants Amid Covid-19

### Why in News?

The Covid-19 pandemic and the **imposition of lockdown in order to curb it has brought the perils of migrant workers** into the light.

### Challenges

- Most of the migrant workers are **not routed through licensed contractors** so a huge number is **excluded from getting any benefit out of the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (ISMW) Act, 1979.**
  - **According to ISMW Act**, an inter-State migrant worker is any person who is recruited by or through a licensed contractor.
  - The ISMW Act was drawn up after repealing the **Orissa Dadan Labour Act, 1975.**
- The Act is only applicable to any establishment which has five or more inter-State migrant workers as employees which again leaves a significant number of workers.
  - In reality, **a small proportion of migrant workmen are placed under such establishments.**



- Migrants from establishments with **less than five migrant employees also cease to be migrants**, legally.
- The ISMW Act is also **not legally enforceable**.
- **Coronavirus crisis has exposed the inadequacy of the ISMW Act** highlighting needs for legal safeguards and welfare measures for migrants.

### Suggestions

- **Repealing of the ISMW Act, 1979 and replacing it with a new Act, or by enlarging the scope of Unorganised Workers' Social Security (UWSS) Act, 2008** to include legal entitlements, to define the migrant workman as a subset, to provide for contingencies of livelihood loss and to make the Act legally enforceable.
- Universalisation of registration and issuance of Aadhaar-based Unique Worker's Identification Number (UWIN).
- **Schemes like MGNREGA Public Distribution Scheme (PDS) and Ujjwala** need to be made portable and extensive.
- **Geofencing of different benefits** enabling a migrant worker to choose location-wise benefits.
- **Preparing a comprehensive database of the migrant workers'** source and destination, demography, employment patterns and skill sets.
  - It will help in skill development, providing social security benefits, planning for mass transit of migrant labour and preparing for any contingency plan in emergency situations.
- **Empowering the Inter-State Council set up under Article 263** of the Constitution to effectively and comprehensively deal with larger issues related to migrant workers.
- Migrant worker issues have complex Centre-State and inter-State dimensions.

### Steps Taken by Government

- The UWSS Act, 2008: It provides for social security and welfare of unorganised workers.
- The UWSS Act defines unorganised workers as home-based worker, self-employed worker or wage worker in the unorganised sector.

### It has two features:

1. Registration of unorganised workers.
  2. Portable smart I-card with a UWIN.
- **Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan Yojana** :To ensure old age protection for unorganised workers.
  - **Atal Pension Yojana**: It is a social security scheme launched under the National Pension System (NPS) and aims at providing a steady stream of income after the age of 60 to all citizens of India including the migrants and labourers.
  - **Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana** (under the Gram Swaraj Abhiyan): Both of the schemes provide for life insurance and accident insurance respectively to the migrants and labourers.
  - **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (Ayushman Bharat)**: It aims at providing health cover to protect the migrants among others against the financial risk arising out of catastrophic health episodes.

### Amendment in Epidemic Disease Act 1897

#### Why in News?

The Union Cabinet approved an ordinance proposing new amendments to the **Epidemic Disease Act, 1897** on **22 April 2020**. Now attacking the healthcare workers is a **non-bailable offence** which may cause **imprisonment ranging from 6 months to 7 years and fine up to Rs 5 Lac**.

#### Key Points:

- The Ministry of Health, Government of India, has decided to implement **sections 2 and 3 of the 123-year-old law Epidemic Disease Act, 1897** on **11th March 2020**.
- After witnessing several incidents of attacks on the corona warriors, the concerned government has brought out an ordinance to sharpen the teeth of the Epidemic Disease Act, 1897.

#### About Epidemic Disease Act, 1897

This act has **4 sections** in total and is probably the shortest act in India. There are some powers have been given to the **State government under Section 2 of this Act** and **some powers to the central government under Section 2 (A)** to implement this act to control any epidemic.

#### Provisions in Section 2 of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897

- When the state government at any time feels that a dangerous epidemic is spreading in any part of that state or there is a possibility of the same, then;
- If the state government is satisfied that the **ordinary provisions of the law for the time being in force are insufficient for the purpose, may take strict actions or may empower any person to take, adequate measures by public notice, so that the outbreak of such disease or the spread thereof,** can be checked.

**In section 2b of the same Act, the State Government shall have the right to;**

**If the inspecting officer suspects, that** People travelling by rail or port or otherwise are suffering from an epidemic, shall have the right to keep all such peoples in the hospital or temporary residence or Quarantine them for some time.

### **Section-2 (A) of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897:**

It states that when the Central Government is satisfied that an epidemic has spread or is likely to spread in India or any part of it and the **Central Government feels that the ordinary provisions of the law for the time being in force are insufficient to prevent the outbreak of such disease or the spread thereof,** the Central Government may take some drastic measures which include;

- Inspection of any ship or vessel leaving or arriving at any port in the country.
- To detain any person intending to sail therein, or arriving thereby, as may be necessary.

### **Section 3 of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897:**

- This section has the provision of **the Penalty under section 188 of the Indian Penal Code (45 of 1860).**
- If section 3 of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 came into force, **then non-compliance of the government order in relation to the epidemic would be an offence and the offender shall be punished as per Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code.**
- Apart from this, **if a person takes any good step to prevent the outbreak of this disease, then no legal action shall be taken against him.**

### **Amendments in Epidemic Disease Act, 1897:**

- The Union Cabinet has approved promulgation of an Ordinance to amend the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 to **protect healthcare service personnel and their property including living/working premises during epidemics.**
- The President of India has also given his assent to this ordinance.

### **Some provisions of this ordinance include;**

- The amendment makes **acts of violence**, (against health workers and other medical staff) as a **cognizable and non-bailable offence.**
- Commission or instigation of violence against health workers shall be punished with imprisonment for a term of three months to five years and with fine of **Rs.50,000/- to Rs.2,00,000.**
- In case of causing grievous hurt to the health workers, imprisonment shall be for a term six months to seven years and with fine of **Rs.1,00,000/- to Rs.5,00,000/-.**
- In addition, the offender shall also be liable to **pay compensation to the victim and twice the fair market value for damage of property** this includes living/working premises or car etc.

We hope the recent changes in the Epidemic Disease Act, 1897 would safeguard the life and property of the health workers and they would be able to serve the country better without any fear.

#### **Ordinance**

- Ordinance is a decree or law promulgated by a state or national government **without the consent of the legislature.**
- **Article 123** of the Constitution of India grants the President certain law-making powers to promulgate ordinances when either of the two Houses of Parliament is not in session.
- Similar powers are given to the **Governor of a state to issue ordinances under Article 213 of the Constitution.**
- **There are three limitations** with regard to the ordinance making power of the executive. They are:
  - The President can only promulgate an ordinance **when either of the two Houses of Parliament is not in session.**
  - The President cannot promulgate an ordinance **unless he is satisfied that there are circumstances that require taking 'immediate action'.**
  - **Ordinances must be approved by Parliament within six weeks of reassembling or they shall cease to operate.** They will also cease to operate in case resolutions disapproving the ordinance are passed by both the Houses.

## Kasowal Bridge on River Ravi

### Why in News?

The **Border Roads Organisation (BRO)** has constructed a permanent bridge on the Ravi river to connect **Kasowal enclave in Punjab** along the India - Pakistan border to the rest of the country.

- The **484-meter bridge was built under the Project Chetak of BRO.**

### Project Chetak

- This project of the BRO was raised in **June 1962 at Dehradun** for construction of **Joshimath-Malari-Rinkin road.**
- In 1980, the project was re-raised for expanding and improving the road networks and ditch-cum-bunds.
- The jurisdiction of the project is spread across the states of **Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab.**

## SVAMITVA Scheme

### Why in News?

Recently, the Union Minister of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj has issued guidelines regarding the SVAMITVA scheme. The scheme was launched on the **National Panchayati Raj Day (April 24).**

### Key Highlights:

SVAMITVA (Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improved Technology in Village Areas) scheme is a **collaborative effort of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, State Panchayati Raj Departments, State Revenue Departments and Survey of India.**

**Aim:** To provide an integrated property validation solution for rural India.

- It is a scheme for **mapping the land parcels in rural inhabited areas using drone technology and Continuously Operating Reference Station (CORS).**
- The mapping will be done across the country in a **phase-wise manner over a period of four years - from 2020 to 2024.**

### Benefits:

- The scheme will help in **streamlining planning and revenue collection in rural areas and ensuring clarity on property rights.**
- The scheme will enable **creation of better-quality Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDs)**, using the maps created under this programme.
  - The **Gram Panchayats are constitutionally mandated for preparation of Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDP)** for economic development and social justice.
  - The GPDP is based on a **participatory process in convergence with schemes of all related Central Ministries/Line Departments related to 29 subjects** listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution.

**Present Coverage Area:** The program is currently being implemented in six states - Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

## Rights of Minority Institutes not Absolute: SC

### Why in News?

The Supreme Court recently ruled that NEET will be the only exam for admission to the Medical courses and institutions **cannot be allowed to conduct their own separate exams** over and above NEET.

### What is the issue?

- The petitioners from **Christian Medical College, Vellore**, and others had said that **unaided minority professional colleges have the fundamental right to choose the method and manner of admitting students.**
- They have the **right to conduct the test of a fair, transparent, and non-exploitative process, and that NEET could not be the only parameter to determine the merit of a student.**
- However, SC quashed the petition by ruling that the **minority institutions are equally bound to comply with the conditions imposed under the relevant Acts and Regulations to enjoy affiliation and recognition, which apply to all institutions.**

### SC's verdict:

- **Article 19 (1) (g)** grants citizens the right to practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business while Article 30 relates to the right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.



- The rights to administer an institution **under Article 30 of the Constitution are not above the law and other Constitutional provisions.**
- Reasonable regulatory measures can be provided without violating such rights available under Article 30 of the Constitution to administer an institution.
- The rights under **Article 19(1) (g) are not absolute and are subject to reasonable restriction in the interest of the student's community to promote merit, recognition of excellence, and to curb the malpractices.**

### **Rights of Minority Educational Institutions:**

- **The National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions Act 2004 as amended by the NCMEI (Amendment Act 2006) lays down rights of Minority Educational Institutions as under:-**

#### **Right to establish a Minority Educational Institution:-**

1. Any person who desires to establish a Minority Institution may apply to the Competent authority for the grant of no objection certificate for the said purpose.

2. The Competent authority shall:-

- On perusal of documents, affidavits or other evidence, if any; and
- After giving an opportunity of being heard to the applicant, decide every application filed under sub-section (1) as expeditiously as possible and grant or reject the application, as the case may be:
- Provided that where an application is rejected, the Competent authority shall communicate the same to the applicant.

#### **Article 30 (1) of the Constitution and Section 2(g) of the NCMEI Act:**

- **To choose its governing body** in whom the founders of the institution have faith and confidence to conduct and manage the affairs of the institution.
- To appoint teaching and non-teaching staff.
- **To admit the students of its community.**
- **Non-minority students cannot be forced upon it.**
- **Neither the policy of reservation on admission can be enforced by the State nor any quota or percentage of admissions** can be carved out to be appropriate by the State in a minority education institution.
- But if the institution is receiving any financial aid from the State then **Sub-Article (2) of Article 29 of Constitution obligates the management to admit non-minority students to a reasonable extent.**
- To receive a reasonable fee structure of its own.
- To take disciplinary action against any member of its erring staff.

#### **P.A. Inamdar Vs. State of Maharashtra, 2006 case:**

- The policy of reservation in admission cannot be made applicable to a **minority institution.**
- The policy of reservation in **employment can not be made applicable to a minority institution.**
- Further, a minority educational institution covered under **Article 30(1) of the Constitution including a Madarsa is exempted from the purview of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act.**

## Economics

### **Economic disruption by Covid-19**

#### **Why in News?**

RBI has released the results of the **89th round of the Industrial Outlook Survey (IOS).**

#### **Economic disruptions caused by coronavirus:**

- Investors have feared that the spread of coronavirus would destroy economic growth.
- In the United States, the number of people filing for unemployment has hit a record high.
- Likewise, oil has slumped to low prices not seen since **June 2001.**
- According to the OECD estimates, **the world's economy could grow at its slowest rate since 2009 due to the COVID 19.**
- A "longer lasting and more intensive" outbreak could halve growth to **1.5% in 2020** as factories suspend their activity and workers stay at home to try to contain the virus.
- Sectors such as **tourism, aviation, hospitality and trade** are the worst hit.

- The “**supply side contagion effect**” has impacted manufacturing, agriculture and the pharmaceutical industry.
- With the likely consumption slowdown, production is also going to be hit.
- Rating agencies, both global and domestic, are unanimous that the **Covid-19 pandemic will be an economic tsunami for India.**
- On March 26, 2020 finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has announced a **\$23 billion package** aimed at cushioning the disruption.
- But the GDP growth is already **at a decadal low** and workers are seeing their wages erode in recent times.
- Moody’s has slashed its projection for India’s GDP growth in calendar year **2020 from 5.3% to 2.5%.**
- In its **Global Macro Outlook 2020-21**, it has cited severe liquidity constraints in India’s banking and non-banking sectors as a hindrance to growth.
- The domestic ratings agency Crisil has slashed its base case GDP growth forecast for India in financial year 2021 from **5.7% to 5.2%.**
- It has warned that if the pandemic is not contained by **April-June 2020, domestic consumption and investment would be affected.**
- **A recession across Asia-Pacific is predicted due to disruptions in China.**
- The overall financial system remains burdened with weak balance sheets, which has led to downside of credit growth.

### Steps taken by RBI:

- RBI has lowered the policy repo rate by **75 basis points to 4.4 percent.**
- It has directed all banks and housing finance companies not to take **installments on long term loans for three months.** This is applicable for all term loans, including agricultural term loans, retail and crop loans.
- The reverse repo rate has been lowered by **90 basis points.**
- Taken with the recent liquidity measures, the liquidity infusion by RBI is an unprecedented **Rs 6.5 trillion, or about 3.2 percent of GDP of the economy.**
- It has said that it will conduct auctions of targeted term repos of up to three years’ tenor for a total amount of up to **Rs 1 trillion.**
- The **cash reserve ratio (CRR) has been reduced to 3 percent** of the deposit base from 4 percent earlier which would pump in liquidity of about Rs 1.37 trillion uniformly across the banking system.
- The requirement of minimum daily CRR balance maintenance is reduced from **90 percent to 80 percent,** as a one-time measure till June 26, 2020.
- It has allowed foreign branches of domestic banks to trade in the **offshore non-deliverable forwards (NDF) markets in order to “improve efficiency of price discovery.”**
- Through a notification, it has increased the **Ways and Means Advances (WMA) limit** for state governments and union territories by 30 percent till September 30, 2020.
- The time period for realization and repatriation of export proceeds for exports made up to or on **July 31, 2020,** has been extended to 15 months from the date of export ( at present it is 9 months from the date of exports).
- The measure will enable the **exporters to realise their receipts from COVID-19 affected countries within the extended period and also provide greater flexibility to the exporters** to negotiate future export contracts with buyers abroad.

### Impact of Covid-19 on Global Economy

#### Why in News?

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has recently observed that the economic uncertainty sparked by the Covid-19 will likely cost the global economy **\$1 trillion in 2020.**

#### Highlights:

- It is based on the World Economic Situation and Prospects 2020 released by UNCTAD.
- The global economy slowdown will be under 2% for this year is envisaged which will probably cost in the order of \$1 trillion.
- If the world economy grew at only 0.5% which would involve a \$2 trillion hit to gross domestic product (GDP).
- With the moderate declines in private consumption, investment and exports and offsetting increases in government spending, global growth would fall to 1.2% in 2020.

- Due to the supply-chain interruptions from China and oil price uncertainty among major producers, the Global financial market is fluctuating.
- The economies of **European countries** had already been performing extremely badly towards the end of 2019, which is almost certain to go into recession over the coming months. German economy is in a fragile state. Italian economy and other parts of the European periphery are also facing very serious stresses right now.
- It describes that many parts of the Latin American region are also vulnerable. Particularly Argentina will be struggling as a consequence of the knock-on effects of this pandemic.
- **The economies of least developed countries** are driven by the sale of raw materials will also face hard consequences.
- Developing countries which are Heavily-indebted, particularly commodity exporters face a threat due to the weaker export returns linked to a stronger US dollar.
- **The likelihood of a stronger dollar as investors seek safe-havens** for their money and the almost certain rise in commodity prices as the global economy slows down, means that commodity exporters are particularly vulnerable.

### About United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD):

- It was established in **1964** to promote development-friendly integration of developing countries into the world economy.
- It is a permanent intergovernmental body headquartered at **Geneva in Switzerland**.
- The reports published by it are **Trade and Development Report, World Investment Report, The Least Developed Countries Report, Information and Economy Report, Technology and Innovation Report, Commodities and Development Report**.

### Way Forward:

- The policy responses and institutional reforms are needed to prevent a localized health scare from turning into a global economic meltdown. Governments need to spend now in order to prevent more damaging meltdown in the coming times.
- The Chinese Government is likely to introduce significant expansionary measures – shorthand for increasing spending or tax cuts. The US government is in an election year and it needs to do more than simply cutting taxes and Reducing Interest Rates.

## New Features Added to e-NAM

### Why in News?

- The union government has launched new features in electronic agriculture market platform (e-NAM), **to decongest wholesale markets amid coronavirus threat**.
- Whether these features would solve the problems of farmers is a matter of question.

### What is e-NAM?

- eNAM platform is an **online trading platform for agricultural commodities** in India.
- It was launched on **April 14, 2016** as a pan-India electronic trade portal linking agricultural produce market committees (APMCs) across all states.
- **It facilitates farmers, traders and buyers with online trading in commodities.**
- It helps in **better price discovery and provides facilities for smooth marketing** of their produce.

### Trading on e-NAM

- **Over 90 commodities** including staple food grains, vegetables and fruits are currently listed in its list of commodities available for trade.
- The farmer needs to upload details of his produce and a photo of the harvest on the platform.
- It actually provided for evaluation and grading of produce.

### Why farmers don't prefer e-NAM?

- **Lack of internet connectivity** is another issue impeding progress.
- Farmers feel more comfortable with **physical trading** rather than going online as they face issues with transportation for their produce.
- Only **8.42 per cent** of the total mandis are connected through the e-NAM platform.

### Issues with grading

- There are **no scientific sorting/grading facilities** or quality testing machines.



- The grading process makes farmers bring a sample of their produce that is evaluated and graded by agricultural assessors.
- A report on the sample can be accessed by any buyer in any state before making the purchase, once graded by assessors.
- The government realized the complexities allowed for **gradation from a warehouse nearest to them and farmers need not commute to a mandi** from remote areas.
- It is, however, still not clear whether produce can be graded at the warehouse or not.

### Monetary Policy Report

#### Why in News?

- The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has released its Monetary Policy Report (MPR).
- The report follows the **unscheduled monetary policy** meeting held in end March, 2020 to discuss the uncertainties arising from the nationwide lockdown.
  - Since the review was conducted in end March, 2020, the early policy review, scheduled for April, 2020 was withdrawn.

#### Key Points

##### Inflation

- **The consumer price index (CPI)-based inflation**, had stayed elevated in the last few months. It is expected to decrease during the course of the financial year.
- **CPI inflation** is tentatively projected to ease from **4.8%** in (Quarter) **Q1 of 2020-21 to 4.4% in Q2, 2.7% in Q3 and 2.4% in Q4**.
- This may be due to the prevailing high uncertainty.
- Aggregate demand may weaken further than currently anticipated and ease core inflation further.
- Supply bottlenecks could increase pressures more than expected.
- Estimates indicate that inflation could move in a range of **3.6-3.8%** assuming a normal monsoon and no major exogenous or policy shocks.

##### The RBI monetary policy:

- The **Repo Rate** was reduced by 75 basis points (bps) to 4.4%.
- The **Cash Reserve Ratio** was reduced by 100 bps to 3%.
- However, the RBI refrained from making any prediction on growth. Forecasts for **real Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** growth in India were not provided due to prevailing uncertainties due to **Covid-19**.
- Improvements in inflation and growth are expected to emanate from monetary, fiscal and other policy measures and the early containment of Covid-19. However, there are uncertainties with these factors.

##### Oil Price Drop

- The sharp reduction in **international crude oil prices**, if sustained, could improve the country's terms of trade.
- However, **the gain from this channel is not expected to offset the impact of shutdown and loss of external demand**.

##### Exchange Rates

- The global financial market volatility caused by the uncertainty of **macroeconomic impact of the Covid-19**, as in February-March 2020, could exert pressure on the Indian rupee.
- Should the rupee depreciate by **5%** from the baseline, inflation could increase by around 20 bps while GDP growth could be higher by about 15 bps through increased net exports.
- In contrast, **should Covid-19 normalise quickly, strong capital flows could revive**.
- An appreciation of the rupee by **5% could moderate inflation by around 20 bps and GDP growth by around 15 bps vis-a-vis the baseline**.

### 15,000 crore sanctioned to States

#### Why in News?

The Centre has announced that 15,000 crore has been sanctioned to States under the India **COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness Package**.

#### Key points:

- The 100% Centrally-funded scheme will be utilised for immediate COVID-19 Emergency Response (₹7,774 crore) and rest for medium-term support (1-4 years).

- This is to be provided under a mission mode approach.
- The project will be implemented in three phases between January 2020 and March 2024.
  - Phase 1 will span January 2020 to June 2020.
  - Phase 2 from July 2020 to March 2021.
  - Phase 3 from April 2021 to March 2024.

### Key objectives of the package include:

- Mounting emergency response to **slow down and limit COVID-19 through the development of diagnostics and dedicated treatment facilities.**
- Strengthening **national and state health systems** to support prevention and preparedness.
- **Procurement of essential** medical equipment, consumables and drugs.
- **Strengthening of surveillance activities** including setting up of laboratories and biosecurity preparedness.
- The major share of the expenditure will be used for **mounting robust emergency response, strengthening pandemic research, community engagement and risk communication and implementation, management, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation component.**
- The Union Health Ministry is authorized to **re-appropriate resources among components of the package and among the various implementation agencies which are NHM, Central Procurement, Railways, Department of Health Research, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), National Centre for Disease Control** on the basis of the evolving situation.

### Phase-1:

- The Union Health Ministry is releasing funds under the immediate response of this package for states/UTs under the **National Health Mission (NHM)** for the implementation of Phase 1.
- Other **activities to be done in the first phase** will be **procurement of personal protection equipment (PPE) and procurement of N95 masks and ventilators**, over and above what is being procured and supplied by the government.
- **During Phase 1, states would also be strengthening** identified laboratories and expanding diagnostics capacities, including procurement of diagnostic equipment, testing kits and other reagents and mobility support for sample transport, disinfection of hospitals, government ambulances, information education and surveillance activities.

## ADB Assures Covid-19 Support Package

### Why in News?

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has assured the Ministry of Finance of **USD 2.2 billion (about Rs 16,500 crore)** support to India in its fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

### Key Points:

#### ADB's Support to India:

- It is now preparing **USD 2.2 billion** in immediate assistance in response to Covid-19 to the health sector to help alleviate the economic impact of the pandemic on the poor.
- ADB announced an initial package of approximately **USD 6.5 billion** to address the immediate needs of its developing member countries, including India, as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- ADB is also engaged with the **private sector to meet its financing needs during this period.**
- It is ready to provide further financial assistance and policy advice whenever the situation warrants.
- ADB is also planning to consider **all financing options available to meet India's needs, to facilitate swift disbursement of ADB funds including emergency assistance, policy-based loans, and budget support.**

#### ADB praised efforts of the Government:

- ADB praised the Indian government's **decisive response to the pandemic**, including
- **Rs 1.7 lakh crore economic relief package (Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana)**, which provides immediate income and consumption support to the poor, women, and workers affected by the three-week nationwide lockdown.
- A national health emergency program.
- Tax and other relief measures provided to businesses.

## Asian Development Bank

- ADB is a regional development bank established on **19th December 1966**.
- ADB now has **68 members, 49 from within Asia**.
- **Japan holds the largest proportion of shares in ADB** followed by the USA.
- It aims to promote social and **economic development in Asia**.
- ADB is committed to **achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific**, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty.
- ADB is headquartered in **Manila, Philippines**.

## COVID-19 & Oil Price War & Implications

### Why in News?

- The oil prices have reached their **lowest levels in years**, leading to the deepest oil crisis in decades.
- Organization of the **Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** and its allies led by **Russia under the OPEC+ framework have agreed to cut their oil output by 10m barrels per day, or 10% of global supplies**. This move is aimed at propping up the falling crude oil prices.
- They expect the **United States and other producers to join in their effort by reducing up to 5m barrels per day**.

### Reduced demand:

- Restrictions on movement have reduced travel needs and industries have been closed down. **Major demand for crude oil comes from transportation and industries along with electricity sector which are under shut down mode**.
- China, a major demand market for crude oil was impacted the most in the initial phase of the Pandemic. **The western nations including the U.S. are currently under lockdown**. The pandemic has spread worldwide.
- The prevailing market conditions have led to a drastic fall in global demand for crude oil and led to steep drop in the oil prices.
- Current estimates place a **20-30% fall in demand due to the lockdown worldwide**.

### Disrupted supply chains:

- The restriction on movement has made the movement of oil from the producer countries to the demand economies difficult, making it expensive.
- Disruptions in the oil supply chains have also been reported.

### Business sentiment:

- Given the fact that economic recovery would need a **long period of time**, the disruptions would last for an extended time frame.
- This would lead to the **reassessment of planned projects in the major oil economies**. This would render investment at least in the short term, doubtful.

### Miscellaneous factors at play:

Corona virus pandemic has just increased the rate of fall in crude oil prices. There have been other factors at play too.

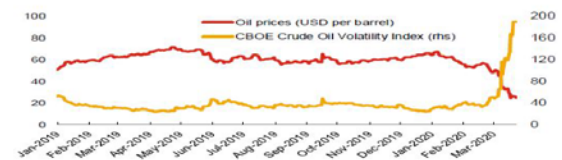
### Political agenda:

#### OPEC+:

- **Saudi Arabia and Russia** have been previously **engaged in a price war over the crude oil**. They have previously resorted to increasing their production to retain their market shares.
- Though Saudi Arabia and Russia both are reliant on oil revenues to support their economies, both nations had stayed away from cutting productions to prop up prices due to their political agendas.

#### Oil price plunge

Oil prices have been forced downward owing to falling global demand (due to the pandemic) and rising supply (stemming from a price war between suppliers).



Source: Bloomberg Finance LP.

Note: CBOE = Chicago Board Options Exchange. The CBOE Crude Oil Volatility Index measures the market's expectation of 30-day volatility of crude oil prices. The CBOE market Volatility Index measures the market's expectation of 30-day volatility, derived from the price inputs of the S&P 500 index options. Oil prices reflect average petroleum spot prices.

INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND



- **Saudi has been trying to target its regional rival Iran, also an oil producer.** The decreasing oil prices would have had a higher adverse impact on Iran (currently under an economic turmoil) than on Saudi Arabia.
- **Russia has been looking to target U.S. interests in the Shale gas sector** and is also looking to find a way out of the economic sanctions imposed by the west.
- **Each of the member nations of the OPEC+ has their own agenda and interests** which had made the conclusion of an agreement to cap oil production difficult. However the continued inability of the OPEC+ to agree on production cuts led to historic falls in oil prices.

### The U.S.:

- The U.S. interests were also hurt because **its shale gas sector was finding it difficult to compete against the low priced oil.** Crude oil prices of less than 40 dollar per barrel will pressurize shale gas producers and make it economically unviable. The shale gas sector supports a large proportion of the employment in the U.S. hence any disruption in this sector would lead to large scale unemployment and loan defaults by the sector.
- Hence with an **agenda to support its shale producers in the election year**, the U.S. decided to intervene to help conclude an agreement on production cuts of crude oil. Given its low leverage over Russia it has been pressurizing Saudi Arabia through the threat of sanctions to restart its negotiations with Russia.
- **A G-20 meeting under the chairmanship of Saudi Arabia has been called to stabilize the oil market.**

### Global recession:

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the world economy was going through a prolonged phase of low growth. There had been reduction in growth rates of oil demands.

### Move towards Renewable energy:

- Despite a predominantly Oil based global economy, there have been attempts being made towards more electrification and **shift to renewable energy sources.** Continued global investments in renewable energy sources had posed a challenge to the oil sector.

### Concerns:

#### Governance structure for energy sector:

- There is no one global governance structure for the energy sector involving all the major stakeholders. There are multiple international forums with limited leverage over all.
- **The global governance for energy sector has collapsed.**

#### Too low oil price level:

The current level of **oil prices is too low to economically sustain the oil production.** This would make the oil sector economically unviable.

#### Interdependency of the world economy:

- Given the **high interdependence of the world economy**, the oil crisis is not limited to just the oil producing countries.
- **For example**, though India, a major demand market for energy resources might benefit from the low oil prices in the short term, the long term impact might not be good for India. A large portion of Indian Diaspora is resident in the oil dependant economies of the Middle East. A major disruption of these economies might apart from reducing India's inward remittances also lead to reverse migration to India.
- The impact on the oil producing economies would also impact the **growth prospects of global economy**, due to disruptions in trade and investments.

#### India's case:

The Low oil prices has **both advantages as well as challenges for India**, as very low prices are equally bad as very high prices.

#### Positives:

- India is predominantly **dependant on import of its energy sources.** It imports around **80%** of its energy requirements. The steep drop in prices is beneficial given that it would help contain its Current Account Deficit.
- India should take advantage of the low prices to stock up on crude oil in its strategic oil reserves and refineries.
- **The oil savings** made by the government **could help it finance the economic package** announced by the government during the pandemic, without affecting its fiscal position.

## Challenges:

- The fall in oil prices could have an **adverse impact on India's large diaspora settled in the Middle East**. Apart from threatening the economic security of the Diaspora it would also lead to a subsequent reduction in inward remittances to India.
- The Domestic oil producers in India are also suffering due to the unviable low prices in the market and may need some relief from the government.

## Way forward:

### Finalize an agreement:

- The G-20 conference should help the oil sector finalize an agreement which could help bring the **oil prices to a healthy range of around 40 dollars per barrel** which could be beneficial for the producers and economically viable, even for the producers.

### Global governance structure:

- Given the criticality of the energy sector in the world economy, **the lack of an effective global governance structure in this domain is a cause of concern**. There is the need for an international intergovernmental framework for energy governance.

### Reforming the sector:

- There is the need for a relook at the energy sector as a whole.
- Reforming and streamlining the gas and oil sector must be considered.

## Conclusion:

Given the **heavy reliance of economies on oil**, there is likely to be a recovery of the oil sector in the post pandemic phase. However, there is an urgent need to protect the interests of the sector in the immediate future.

## Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Expenditure

### Why in News?

The **Ministry of Commerce and Industry** has clarified that the contributions to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund or the State relief fund will not qualify as **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** expenditure, while any donation to the **PM CARES Fund** will.

### Key Points

- The Chief Minister's Relief Fund or State Relief Fund for **Covid-19** is not included in Schedule VII of the **Companies Act, 2013**, and therefore any contribution to such funds shall not qualify as admissible CSR expenditure.
- **Schedule VII of the Companies Act, 2013** provides the list of activities that can be included in CSR.
- Some political parties criticised this saying it is discriminatory and goes against the constitutional principle of federalism.
- However, donations to the **State Disaster Management Authority** to combat Covid-19 can be counted as admissible CSR expenditure

### Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

- Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a **self-regulating business model that helps a company be socially accountable**.
- It is also called **corporate citizenship**.
- By practicing CSR, companies can be conscious of the kind of impact they are having on all aspects of society including economic, social, and environmental.

### Current provisions governing CSR:

- The laws governing CSR come under **the Companies Act, 2013**, and became effective **on 1 April 2014**.
- These laws state that companies with a net worth of **500 crore or revenue of 1,000 crore or net profit of 5 crore** during the immediately preceding fiscal should spend **2%** of their average net profit in the last three years on **activities related to social development such as sanitation, education, eradication of hunger, poverty and malnutrition, conservation of heritage, art and culture, and vocational training** such as setting up grooming outlets or training centres for sewing.
- **If a company is unable to fully incur the CSR expenditure in a given year, it could carry this amount forward and spend it in the next 12 months**, in addition to the money for that year.

## Ways and Means Advances {WMA} Borrowings of States

### Why in News?

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) increased the Ways and Means Advances (WMA) limit of state governments.

#### Why the WMA limit was increased?

- On 17th April 2020, the RBI announced a 60% increase in the WMA limit of the state governments.
- This increase is over the level as on March 31, 2020.
- It would enable the state governments to undertake effective COVID-19 containment and mitigation efforts.
- It would also enable them to better plan their market borrowings.

#### What is WMA?

- Section 17(5) of the RBI Act, 1934 authorises the RBI to lend to the Centre and state governments as WMA.
- It can lend them only if they can repay it within 3 months from the date of making the advance.
- These borrowings may help the governments to **tide over temporary mismatches** in cash flows of their receipts and expenditures.

#### How much does the RBI charge on these advances?

- The interest rate on WMA is the RBI's repo rate, which is currently 4.4%
- [Repo rate is a rate at which the RBI lends short-term money to banks.]
- But the governments can draw amounts in excess of their WMA limits.
- The interest on such overdraft is 2 percentage points above the repo rate, which now works out to 6.4%.
- Further, no state can run an overdraft with the RBI for more than a certain period.

#### What are the existing WMA limits and overdraft conditions?

- **For the Centre** - The WMA limit for the period of April-September, 2020-21 has been fixed at Rs 120,000 crore.
- This is 60% higher than the limit for the same period of 2019-20.
- **For the states** - After a 60% increase, the aggregate WMA limit is at Rs 51,560 crore.
- The higher limit will be valid until September 30.

#### Why all these relaxations been made?

- Due to lockdown, the revenues are collapsing and uncertain.
- The expenditures for combating the novel coronavirus are mounting.
- Therefore, the states are facing an unprecedented cash crunch.
- Most of the states are slashing expenditures of other departments in order to meet COVID-19 exigencies.
- However, these measures have not addressed the underlying problem of liquidity and cash flow mismatches.

#### So, will the increase in the WMA limits help?

- There is a likelihood of the total government borrowings crossing **Rs 20 lakh crore**.
- So a WMA limit of **Rs 120,000 crore for the Centre and Rs 51,560 crore for states** may prove grossly insufficient.

#### What could be done further?

- **Centre** - The Centre may invoke Section 5(3) of its Fiscal Responsibility & Budget Management Act, 2003.
- This would allow the RBI to subscribe to the primary issues of Central Government securities under very specified grounds.
- Those cover, among other things, "act of war" and "national calamity".
- **RBI** - It may undertake increased secondary market purchases and sales of central and state government securities.

## Kisan Rath App

### Why in News?

The Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare has launched 'Kisan Rath' mobile application (app) to facilitate transportation of foodgrains and perishable during lockdown.

- The application has been developed by the **National Informatics Centre -NIC** (backed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology).



- It will be **available in eight languages** initially, including english and hindi.

## Key Points

- The app is expected to connect farmers and traders to a network of more than 5 lakh trucks and 20,000 tractors.
- It is meant to help farmers and traders who are searching for vehicles to move produce. This includes:
  - **Primary transport from the farm to the mandis**, local warehouses or the collection **centres of farmer producer organisations**.
  - **Secondary transport from the local mandis to intra-and inter-State mandis**, processing units, railway stations, warehouses or wholesalers.
- The Government has granted **relaxation in the nationwide lockdown for activities related to agriculture-farming and allied activities** with a view to address problems being faced by the farming community.
- The app will be a stepping stone towards **provision of timely transportation service** at competitive rates for farmers and traders, besides achieving a reduction in food wastage.

## Govt. nod mandatory for FDI from neighboring countries

### Why in News?

The Government of India has made its approval for **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** by neighbouring countries mandatory.

- This revised FDI policy aims to curb opportunistic takeovers/acquisitions of Indian companies due to the **current Covid-19 pandemic**.

### Background:

**China's footprint in the Indian business space has been expanding** rapidly, especially since 2014.

- The Chinese investment in India in **2014 stood at \$1.6 billion**. This involved mostly investment from Chinese state-owned players in the infrastructure space in India.
- By 2017, the total investment had increased five-fold to at least **\$8 billion** accompanied by a marked shift from a state-driven to market-driven approach.
- The report, titled "Following the Money: China Inc's Growing Stake in India-China Relations" estimates that the total current and planned Chinese investment in India has crossed \$26 billion in March 2020.

The major Chinese investments in India span a range of sectors with a significant share in the start-up space. A 2017 survey of Chinese enterprises in India by the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China's Mumbai branch found that 42% were in the manufacturing sector, 25% in infrastructure and others in telecom, petrochemicals, software and IT.

### Threat due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Many **Indian businesses have come to a halt** due to the lockdown imposed to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. **Subsequently their valuations have plummeted**.
- Many such domestic firms may be **vulnerable to opportunistic takeovers or acquisitions from foreign players**.
- Recently, **People's Bank of China made a portfolio investment** through the stock market into the housing finance company **HDFC** and now holds a **1.01% stake in the company**.

### Details:

- In the light of **threat of opportunistic takeovers/acquisitions** of Indian companies due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, the government has revised the FDI policy.
- Under the revised FDI policy, **prior government approval is mandatory for FDI from countries which share a land border with India**. The new policy states that when an entity of a country, which shares land border with India or where the beneficial owner of an investment into India is situated in or is a citizen of any such country, can invest only under the Government route.
  - India shares land borders with **Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar**.
- **As per the changed FDI policy**, the transfer of ownership of any existing or future FDI in an Indian entity to those in the restricted countries would also need government approval.
- **Investors from countries not covered by the new policy only have to inform the RBI after a transaction** rather than asking for prior permission from the relevant government department.
- This move will help **restrict Chinese investments** in India and also help monitor the investments.

## Operation Twist

### Why in News?

The Reserve Bank of India decided to conduct its version of 'Operation Twist' through simultaneous purchase and sale of government securities under Open Market Operations (OMOs) for Rs 10,000 crore each.

### What is Operation Twist?

- Operation Twist is the name given to a **US Federal Reserve monetary policy operation**.
- It involves the purchase and sale of government securities to boost the economy by bringing down long-term interest rates.
- It normally leads to lower longer-term yields, which will help boost the economy by making loans less expensive for those looking to buy homes, cars and finance projects.
- But saving becomes less desirable because it doesn't pay as much interest.

### What is the US experience?

- In 1961, the John F Kennedy administration proposed a solution to revive the weak economy through lower longer-term interest rates while keeping short-term interest rates unchanged.
- This initiative is now known as 'Operation Twist' which was employed by the US Fed.
- The Fed then implemented it again in late 2011 and 2012 to stimulate the economy hit by the global financial crisis.
- In December 2012, the Fed ended the programme and replaced it with another policy of "quantitative easing".
- This policy seeks to lower long-term rates by making open-market purchases of longer-dated Treasuries and mortgage-backed securities.

### Why Operation Twist now?

- The RBI slashed repo rate by **135 points to 5.15%** this year but banks passed on only part of it.
- The one-year median Marginal Cost of funds based Lending Rate (MCLR) has declined only 49 basis points (bps).
- The RBI says the decision follows a review of the current liquidity and market situation and an assessment of the evolving financial conditions.
- It is keen that long-term rates are brought down to kick start investment and revive the economy.
- The idea is that business investment and housing demand were primarily determined by longer-term interest rates.

### What the RBI plans on December 23, 2019?

- The central bank has decided to purchase Rs 10,000 crore worth of one security - the **6.45% GS 2029. This is a long term 10-year bond**.
- When the RBI purchases 6.45% bond on December 23, demand is expected to rise, leading to lower long-term yield.
- On the sell side, it has proposed to sell four short term securities which will mature in 2020 for a total of **Rs 10,000 crore - 6.65% GS 2020, 7.80% GS 2020, 8.27% GS 2020 and 8.12% GS 2020**.
- The sale of short-term securities will push up the short-term rate.
- However, bankers say 'Operation Twist' is likely to put an end to the interest rate cut expectations.

### What are Open Market Operations?

- **Open market Operations (OMOs) are the market operations conducted by the RBI by way of sale and purchase of G-Secs to and from the market.**
- OMOs are done with an objective to **adjust the rupee liquidity conditions in the market on a durable basis**.
- With this monetary tool the RBI manages and controls the liquidity, rupee strength and monetary management through purchase and sale of **government securities (G-Secs)**.
- When the RBI feels that there is excess liquidity in the market, it resorts to sale of securities thereby sucking out the rupee liquidity.
- Similarly, when the liquidity conditions are tight, the RBI may buy securities from the market, thereby releasing liquidity into the market.
- On Friday, the yield on 10-year benchmark bonds fell by 13 bps to 6.60%, following the RBI announcement.

## Strategic Petroleum Reserves

### Why in News?

Recently, India has decided to fill its strategic petroleum reserves in view of the **slump in crude prices**.

- **This will help on two fronts:** India will get cheap oil for its reserves and it will also help in resolving the storage problem for refiners.

### Key Points

- Strategic petroleum reserves are **huge stockpiles of crude oil to deal with any crude oil-related crisis** like the risk of supply disruption from natural disasters, war or other calamities.
- According to the agreement on an International Energy Programme (I.E.P.), each International Energy Agency (IEA) country has an obligation to **hold emergency oil stocks equivalent to at least 90 days of net oil imports**.
- In case of a severe oil supply disruption, IEA members may decide to release these stocks to the market as part of a collective action.
- **India became an associate member of the International Energy Agency in 2017.**
- India's strategic crude oil storages are currently located at **Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh), Mangaluru (Karnataka), and Padur (Karnataka)**.
- The government has also given approval for setting up of two additional facilities at **Chandikhol (Odisha) and Padur (Karnataka)**.
- **The concept of dedicated strategic reserves was first mooted in 1973 in the US**, after the OPEC oil crisis.
- **Underground storage is**, by far the most economic method of storing petroleum products because the underground facility rules out the requirement of large swathes of land, ensures less evaporation and, since the caverns are built much below the sea level, it is easy to discharge crude into them from ships.
- The construction of the Strategic Crude Oil Storage facilities in India is being managed by **Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL)**.
- **ISPRL is a wholly owned subsidiary of Oil Industry Development Board (OIDB)** under the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas.

## RBI's Liquidity Offer for Mutual Funds

### Why in news?

The RBI recently announced a special liquidity window of **Rs 50, 000 crore** to bail out mutual funds hit by the crisis in the debt fund segment.

### How does the liquidity window work?

- Under the **special liquidity facility for mutual funds (SLF-MF)**, the RBI will conduct repo operations of **90 days tenor at the fixed repo rate**.
- **The SLF-MF is on-tap (on demand, anytime) and open-ended.**
- Banks can submit their bids to avail the funding **till May 11, 2020** or up to utilization of the allocated amount, whichever is earlier.
- Funds availed **under the SLF-MF will be used by banks exclusively for meeting the liquidity requirements of MFs.**

### What are the features of the offer?

- The RBI says exposures under this facility will not be reckoned under the Large Exposure Framework (LEF).
- It thus gives greater comfort for banks to borrow under this window.
- The face value of securities acquired under the SLF-MF and kept in the HTM category will not be counted for adjusted non-food bank credit (ANBC) for determining priority sector targets or sub-targets.
- The support extended to MFs under the SLF-MF will be exempted from banks' capital market exposure limits.

### What will banks do with this money?

- Banks can extend loans to mutual funds.
- They can undertake the outright purchase of and/or repos.
- This can be offered against the collateral of investment grade corporate bonds, commercial papers (CPs), debentures and certificates of Deposit (CDs) held by MFs.

### Why is the offer now?

- There is heightened volatility in capital markets in reaction to Covid-19 pandemic.
- This has imposed liquidity strains on mutual funds.
- The stress is however confined to the high-risk debt funds segment.
- The debt segment has witnessed outflows of Rs 1.94 lakh crore in the month of March 2020.



- The credit risk fund category, notably, has assets of over Rs 55,000 crore.
- The condition has intensified more in the wake of redemption pressures related to closure of six debt schemes of Franklin Templeton.
- The RBI's liquidity offer is thus expected to bring some degree of comfort in the debt market, given such huge redemption pressure.

### **ADB APPROVES \$1.5 BILLION LOAN TO INDIA TO FIGHT COVID-19**

#### **Why in News?**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) said it has approved \$1.5 billion loan to India to help fund its Fight against Coronavirus Pandemic.

#### **Key Points:**

- The loan has been sanctioned to **support immediate priorities such as disease containment and prevention**, as well as **social protection for the poor and economically vulnerable sections**.
- "The quick-disbursing fund is part of a larger package of support that ADB will provide in close coordination with the Government and Other Development Partners.

#### **About Asian Development Bank (ADB):**

- It is a **regional development bank** established on **19 December 1966** headquartered at **Manila, Philippines** being **India** as one of the founding member. It is also official United Nations Observer.
- **The bank admits the members of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP**, formerly the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East or ECAFE) and non-regional developed countries.
- ADB now has **67 members**, of which **48 are from within Asia and the Pacific** and **19 outside**.
- **It is modeled closely on the World Bank**, and has a similar weighted voting system where votes are distributed in proportion with members' capital subscriptions.
- **Japan holds the largest share in ADB with 15.677%**, followed by U.S.A (15.567%), China (6.473%), and India (5.812%).
- ADB defines itself as a **social development organization** that is dedicated to reducing poverty in Asia and the Pacific through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration.
- **This is carried out through investments** – in the form of loans, grants and information sharing – in infrastructure, health care services, financial and public administration systems, helping nations prepare for the impact of climate change or better manage their natural resources, as well as other areas.

#### **ADB's Mission:**

**Strategy 2030 sets the course for the Asian Development Bank (ADB)** to respond effectively to the region's changing needs. Under Strategy 2030, ADB will sustain its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and expand its vision to achieve a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific.

#### **Other recent development between ADB and India:**

- ADB and India have signed a loan of **\$206 million to strengthen urban services in 5 Tamil Nadu cities**.
- Asian Development Bank (ADB) has listed its **10-year masala bonds worth Rs 850 crore on the global debt listing platform of India INX**.
- Asian Development Bank (ADB) had prepared a **Conceptual Development Plan (CDP) for Vizag-Chennai Industrial Corridor (VCIC)**.

## India and World

### **Diplomatic Relations between India and China**

#### **Why in News?**

India and China celebrate 70 years of Diplomatic Relations (1950-2020).

#### **Background:**

- On April 1, 1950, China and India established diplomatic relations.
- India was the first non-socialist country to establish relations with the People's Republic of China.

- In 1954, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai visited India. China and India signed the Joint Statement and jointly advocated the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.
- In the same year, Indian Prime Minister Nehru visited China. He was the first head of government of a non-socialist country who visited China since the founding of the People's Republic of China.
- In 1955, Premier Zhou Enlai and Prime Minister Nehru attended the Asian-African Conference in which 29 countries participated in Bandung, Indonesia and jointly advocated the Bandung Spirit of solidarity, friendship and cooperation.
- In 1962, the border conflict led to a serious setback in bilateral relations.
- In 1976, China and India restored ambassadorial relations and bilateral ties improved gradually.

### Key Points:

- Year 2020 marks the **70th anniversary** of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and India.
- It is also **China-India Year of Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges**.
- The two sides agreed to hold **70 celebratory activities** to demonstrate the historic connection between the two civilizations as well as their growing bilateral relationship over the years and further deepen people-to-people exchanges between the two countries at all levels.

### Facts and Figures on China-India Cooperation

#### Political and Diplomatic Relations

- **The Communist Party of China (CPC)** has maintained friendly exchanges with 9 major Indian political parties including the BJP, Congress and left-wing parties for a long time.
- **20 Inter-parliamentary friendship groups** have been set up by China and India.
- **There are 50 dialogue mechanisms between China and India** for exchanging views on various topics of bilateral, regional and global concern.

#### Economy and Trade

- Since the beginning of the 21st century, trade between China and India has grown from less than **\$3 billion to nearly \$100 billion**, an increase of about 32 times.
- In 2019, **the trade volume between China and India was \$92.68 billion**.
- With a combined market of **over 2.7 billion people and a GDP of 20% of the world's total**, China and India enjoy huge potential and broad prospects for economic and trade cooperation.

#### Science and Technology

- Both nations have held **Joint Research workshops on Science and Technology Innovation**.
- Indian companies have set up **IT corridors in China, which help promote China-India cooperation in information technology and high technology**.

#### Defense

- **'Hand-in-Hand' joint anti-terrorist exercises** to enhance mutual understanding and trust, exchange training experiences and jointly improve anti-terrorism capabilities.
- **China-India defense and security consultation** to strengthen exchanges and cooperation in the defense field.

#### People-to-People Exchanges

- Both nations have held meetings of **China-India High-Level People-to-People and Cultural Exchanges Mechanism**. The two sides have made new progress on exchanges and cooperation in the fields of art, publishing, media, film and television, museum, sports, youth, tourism, locality, traditional medicine, yoga, education and think tanks.
- Sessions of China-India High Level Media Forum and **China-India Think Tank Forum** were held to strengthen exchanges and cooperation in the field of media and think tanks.
- The two countries have **established pairs of sister cities and provinces**. For example, sister provinces and cities between Fujian Province and Tamil Nadu State, Quanzhou City and Chennai City.
- **The number of Indian pilgrims to Xizang Autonomous Region of China** has surged from several hundred in the 1980s to more than **20,000 in 2019**.

#### Way Forward

- Today's achievements of India-China relations embodied the great efforts of several generations.
- Both nations **need to master the four keys of:**

- **Leading:** It means to reach consensus and guide the direction of the development of bilateral relations under the guidance of leaders from both nations.
- **Transmitting:** It means to transmit the leaders' consensus to all levels and translate it into tangible cooperation and outcomes.
- **Shaping:** It means to go beyond the mode of managing differences, shape bilateral relations actively and accumulate positive momentum.
- **Integrating:** It means to strengthen exchanges and cooperation, promote convergence of interests and achieve common development.

At this moment, it is particularly important to revisit the original aspiration of establishing diplomatic relations 70 years ago and carry forward the spirit of good neighborliness and friendship, unity and cooperation.

### COVID-19 and the crumbling world order

#### Why in News?

- COVID-19 will fundamentally transform the world as we know it: **the world order, its balance of power, traditional conceptions of national security, and the future of globalisation.**
- The **lethal combination of an interconnected world and a deadly virus without a cure is taking humanity into uncharted waters.** When we emerge from the lockdown, we must be ready to confront new political and social realities.

#### CRUMBLING WORLD ORDER:

- The rampant spread of COVID-19 is also a **failure of the contemporary world order and its institutions.**
- **The contemporary global order**, whatever remains of the institutions created by the victors of World War II, was a hegemonic exercise meant to deal with isolated political and military crises and not serve humanity at large.
- **COVID-19 has exposed** this as well as the worst nativist tendencies of the global leadership in the face of a major crisis. That the United Nations Security Council took so long to meet (that too inconclusively) to discuss the pandemic is a ringing testimony to the UN's insignificance.

#### REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS:

- **Regional institutions haven't fared any better.** Prime Minister Narendra Modi's SAARC initiative, curiously resurrecting a practically dead institution, was short-lived.
- **The EU**, the most progressive post-national regional arrangement, stood clueless when the virus spread like wildfire in Europe. Its member states turned inward for solutions: self-help, not regional coordination, was their first instinct. Brussels is the loser.
- **All this is indicative of a deeper malaise:** the global institutional framework is unrepresentative, a pawn in the hands of the great powers, cash-strapped, and its agenda is focused on high-table security issues.
- **The global institutional architecture of the 1940s cannot help humanity face the challenges of the 2020s.** Nothing less than a new social contract between states and the international system can save our future.

#### CHINA:

- **One country that is likely to come out stronger from this crisis is China.** Reports indicate that China has now managed the outbreak of COVID-19, and its industrial production is recovering even as that of every other country is taking a hit.
- **The oil price slump will make its recovery even faster.** When the greatest military power found itself in denial mode and the members of the EU were looking after their own interests, China appeared to use its manufacturing power to its geopolitical advantage.
- **Beijing has offered medical aid and expertise to those in need;** it has increased cooperation with its arch-rival Japan; and President Xi Jinping spoke to the UN Secretary General on how the international community can fight the virus.
- **Its richest man, Jack Ma, has spearheaded the private sector's fight against COVID-19.** The Chinese propaganda machinery will magnify this. Chinese actions are a smart economic investment for geopolitical gains.
- **This will aid Beijing's claims to global leadership,** push Huawei 5G trials as a side bargain, and showcase how the Belt and Road Initiative is the future of global connectivity. COVID-19 will further push the international system into a world with Chinese characteristics.

#### NEOLIBERAL ECONOMIC GLOBALISATION:

- Neoliberal economic globalisation will have taken a major beating in the wake of the pandemic. **Economists are warning of a global recession.** Even as the virus is pushing back the 'successes' of neoliberal globalisation, globalisation's political counterpart is found wanting in dealing with the situation.
- **The first instinct of every major economy was to close borders, look inwards and localise.** The pre-existing structural weakness of the global order and the COVID-19 shock will further feed states' protectionist tendencies fueled by hypernationalism.
- **A more inclusive global political and economic order is unlikely any time soon,** if ever. Instead, as former National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon warns, "we are headed for a poorer, meaner, and smaller world."
- **The ability of big corporations** to dictate the production, stocks, supply chains and backup plans will be limited by increased state intervention to avoid unpredictable supply sources, avoid geopolitically sensitive zones, and national demands for emergency reserves.
- **The profits of big corporations will reduce, and the demand for stability will increase.**

### RETREAT FROM HYPERGLOBALISATION:

- Some would gladly argue all this could **potentially mean a retreat from hyperglobalisation** and its attendant flaws. **However, the assumption that COVID-19 will bring about a more balanced and inclusive form of economic and political globalisation is perhaps misplaced.**
- **State intervention in economic matters and protectionism are the easy way out,** and that's precisely what states will do once the crisis is over. It would be return of the 'Licence Raj' through the backdoor, not a push for inclusive and responsible globalisation with its associated political benefits.
- **The state has failed in its inability to save us from the pandemic notwithstanding its tall claims about national security preparedness.** And yet, the state has returned, with more power, legitimacy and surveillance technologies.
- In fact, **the nervous citizenry will want the state to be omnipresent and omnipotent, no matter the consequences.** The state, which was losing its influence to global economic forces, will return as the last refuge of the people in the coming age of mass disruption.
- With the severe beating that globalisation has taken, **state-led models of globalisation and economic development would be preferred over (big) corporates-led globalisation.** Will this enable some positive controls over the inherent deficiencies of globalisation?
- **We will have to wait and see.** But the more important question is whether the state has any incentive to take on big capital.
- Given the symbiotic relationship between the state and big capital, states have become used to protecting the interests of their corporations, often at the cost of the general public.
- **Consider, for instance,** that the first response of many Western states was to protect their capital markets than be concerned about public health.

### NEW-AGE RACISM:

- Yet another undesirable outcome of the pandemic would be a **spike in various forms of discrimination.** Globally, societies could become **more self-seeking and inward-looking** leading to further pushback against liberal policies regarding migration and refugees.
- **New questions are likely to be asked about the source of goods.** More stringent imposition of **phytosanitary measures by advanced states on products emanating from the less developed countries** might become the new normal.
- **Lockdowns and travel restrictions could potentially legitimize** the rhetoric around border walls in more conservative countries. Tragically, therefore, while one answer to global pandemics is political globalisation, COVID-19 might further limit it.
- The instances of **attack on African people in china, halt in international passenger flights and United States of America decision to temporarily hold all emigration** are glimpses of post pandemic world.

### CONCLUSION:

- Within India too, **there could be a trend towards discrimination,** with 'social distancing' producing undesirable social practices. **That a Manipuri woman was spat on in Delhi by a man who called her "coronavirus", and gated communities have discriminated against those in COVID-19 quarantine, indicate a new age of discrimination.**



- **Puritan claims based on birth and class** and the associated declarations about hygiene could become sharper. The more the virus persists, the deeper such practices would get. We already know what these practices feel like; it can only get worse from here.

### World could face a food crisis: UN, WTO

#### What's in News?

The heads of three global agencies, **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)**, **World Health Organisation (WHO)** and **World Trade Organisation (WTO)** have warned of the risk of a worldwide “**food shortage**” if authorities fail to manage the ongoing COVID-19 crisis properly.

- Many governments around the world have put their populations on lockdown causing **severe slow-downs in international trade and food supply chains**.
- **Panic buying by people** going into confinement has already demonstrated the **fragility of supply chains**.
- Uncertainty about food availability can spark a wave of **export restrictions**, creating a shortage on the global market.

#### Way forward:

- Every effort must be made to ensure that **trade flows as freely as possible, specially to avoid food shortage(s) from developing**, the heads of the three global agencies said in their statement.
- It was added that, **while acting to protect the health and well-being of their citizens, countries should ensure that any trade-related measures do not disrupt the food supply chain**.

### Operation Sanjeevani

#### Why in News?

An Indian Air Force (IAF) C-130J transport aircraft delivered **6.2 tonne** of essential medicines and hospital consumables to **Maldives under Operation Sanjeevani**.

#### Operation Sanjeevani

- At the request of the **govt. of Maldives**, the IAF aircraft activated Operation Sanjeevani and lifted these medicines from airports in New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Madurai before flying to the Maldives.
- Among other things, **these medicines include influenza vaccines, anti-viral drugs such as lopinavir and ritonavir** which have been used to treat patients with COVID-19 in other countries.
- The flights are being operated on commercial basis following demands from pharmaceutical companies and their intermediaries and will carry cargo on inbound as well as outbound flights.
- The cargo operations will help the airline earn some revenue at a time there is a ban on passenger flights and the entire fleet is grounded.

### Corona Bonds

#### Why in News?

Recently, the Italian Prime Minister has proposed Corona bonds to be issued by **European Union (EU)** to deal with the situation created by **Covid-19**.

#### Key Points

- Corona bonds are **joint debt issued to member states of the EU**.
- This would be mutualised debt, taken collectively by all member states of the EU.
- The funds would come from the European Investment Bank.
- **Countries like Italy, Spain which have suffered huge deaths due to Covid-19 are demanding such kind of economic measures** from the EU to meet the extraordinary situation.
- However, Germany, Netherlands, Austria and Finland, also known as the “**Frugal Four**”, the fiscally conservative EU states have opposed such type of idea.

### Talks for Dollar Swap Agreement

**India is working with the United States** to secure a dollar swap line that would help in providing an additional comfort in an event of any abrupt outflow of funds.

#### Dollar Swap

- Dollar swap is a **kind of currency swap**. The word swap means exchange.
- A currency swap between the two countries is an agreement to **exchange currencies with predetermined terms and conditions**.

- In a dollar swap arrangement, **the US Federal Reserve will provide dollars to a foreign central bank. At the same time, the foreign central bank provides the equivalent amount of funds in its currency to the Fed**, based on the market exchange rate at the time of the transaction.
- **The parties agree to swap back these quantities of their two currencies at a specified date in the future**, which is the next day or as far ahead as three months, using the same exchange rate as in the first transaction.
- These swap **operations carry no exchange rate or other market risks as transaction terms are set in advance**.
- Central banks and Governments engage in currency swaps with foreign counterparts to **meet short term foreign exchange liquidity requirements** or to ensure adequate foreign currency to avoid Balance of Payments (BOP) crisis till longer arrangements can be made.

### Need of dollar swap:

- India will **liquidate its foreign currency assets like investment in US treasury etc. to stabilise the rupee which has been under pressure of late**.
- Concerns on the economic effects of COVID-19 **is hitting investor sentiment**.
- **Falling rupee value:** India liquidated its forex assets to stabilise the rupee which recently fell below the 76 level against the dollar. India's foreign currency assets had declined by around \$7.50 billion in two weeks to \$ 439.66 billion as on March 27.
- **Risk-averse financial markets worldwide:** Due to the spread of COVID-19 infections, compounded by the slump in international crude prices and a decline in bond yields in advanced economies.
- As per the NSDL (National Securities Depository Limited) data, **foreign investors have pulled out foreign capital worth Rs 33,164 crore** in local debt and equity since the start of March.

### Dollar Swap arrangement:

- The US Federal Reserve **provides dollars to a foreign central bank. At the same time, the foreign central bank provides the equivalent amount of funds in its currency to the Fed**, based on the market exchange rate at the time of the transaction.
- **The parties agree to swap back these quantities of their two currencies at a specified date in the future**, which is the next day or as far ahead as three months, using the same exchange rate as in the first transaction.

### Advantage of dollar swap:

- It will add to the **RBI's arsenal in managing external accounts and excessive volatility in currency markets**.
- India has enough foreign exchange reserves now and the external sector is not facing any problem. Dollar swap will provide additional comfort in case of further outflows from the Indian markets.
- These swap operations **carry no exchange rate or other market risks as transaction terms are set in advance**.

### Why The Need For A Swap ?

- RBI might have felt that more OMOs will leave the banks with insufficient bond holdings for repo operations and their regulatory commitments.
- But, evidence suggests otherwise. Banks exceed the Statutory Liquidity Ratio of **19.5% of bond holdings** to 27.9%.

### There are three other reasons for the move by the RBI.

- **Reason 1:** Large purchase of government bonds through OMOs by the RBI has the potential to distort the yield curves which are benchmarks for interest rates for loans of various maturities. Also, OMOs will make the borrowing costs of government artificially low that might affect fiscal discipline.
- **Reason 2:** By supplying large amount forwards, RBI might be looking to pull down the premium of forwards which have already fallen down by one-third since the RBI's announcement of the swap. This incentives the foreign currency borrowers to hedge against any risk of rupee downfall. Also, a low premium will attract more foreign investments into the country. It thus appears that the RBI wants a stable flow of dollars in the medium to the long run with low risks and ensure that there is no capital starvation in the economy.
- **Reason 3:** The final reason might be RBI's concern over appreciating rupee. Here, the assumption is that RBI by buying dollars in one shot will arrest the appreciation of rupee. But, evidence shows otherwise as

rupee appreciated since the announcement by the RBI. It is partly due to banks bringing in offshore dollars to the auction which they are allowed to.

### IMF Cancels Debt Payments

#### Why in News?

Recently, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a \$500 million grant to cancel six months of debt payments for 25 of the world's most impoverished countries.

#### Key Highlights:

- It will provide grants to the poorest and most vulnerable member countries to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic.
- These countries will be able to channel more of their scarce financial resources towards vital emergency medical and other relief efforts.
- The money will come from the IMF's revamped **Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust (CCRT)** which will use recent pledges of **185 million from the United Kingdom and 100 million from Japan**. It urged other donors to help replenish the trust's resources, which also approved the immediate debt service relief for 19 African countries including Afghanistan, Haiti, Nepal, Solomon Islands, Tajikistan and Yemen.

#### About Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust (CCRT):

- It was established in **February 2015 during the Ebola outbreak and modified in March 2020** in response to the **Covid-19 pandemic**.
- **It allows the IMF to provide grants** for debt relief for the poorest and most vulnerable countries hit by catastrophic natural disasters or public health disasters.
- **The relief on debt service payments frees up additional resources** to meet exceptional balance of payments needs created by the disaster and for containment and Recovery.

#### About International Monetary Fund (IMF):

- **It came into existence after the UN conference in Bretton Woods in 1944**. The 44 countries at that conference sought to build a framework for economic cooperation to avoid a repetition of the competitive devaluations that had contributed to the Great Depression of the 1930s.
- **It currently has 189 member countries**, each of which has representation on the IMF's executive board in proportion to its financial importance.
- **The most powerful countries in the global economy have the most voting power**.
- Its main objectives are **foster global monetary cooperation, secure financial stability, facilitate international trade, promote high employment and sustainable economic growth and reduce poverty around the world**.

#### About the Functions of IMF:

- **To provide financial assistance to member countries with balance of payments problems**. Countries must embark on structural adjustment policies monitored by the IMF.
- **It oversees the international monetary system and monitors the economic and financial policies of its 189 member countries**. As part of this process, which takes place both at the Global Level and in Individual Countries, the IMF highlights possible risks to stability and advises on needed policy adjustments.
- It provides **technical assistance and training to central banks, finance ministries, tax authorities, and other economic institutions**.
- **It helps the countries to raise public revenues, modernize banking systems, develop strong legal frameworks, improve governance, and enhance the reporting of macroeconomic and financial data**.
- It also helps countries to make progress towards the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

### US Halted Funding WHO

#### Why in news?

US President halted its funds to the World Health Organization (WHO), saying it **mismanaged the spread**.

#### Will there be any impact due to this halt?

- The US contributes almost **15% of the WHO's total funding and almost 31% of the member states' donations**.
- The halt of this fund comes when the global caseload of COVID-19 approaches 2 million, with the most cases in the US.

- For the WHO, **the loss of about 15%** of its total funding is bound to have an impact the world over.
- However, unless other countries do the same as the US, the move may not severely restrict the WHO operations.

### From where does WHO get its funds?

- There are **4 kinds of contributions** that make up funding for the WHO.
- **Assessed contributions** are the dues countries pay in order to be a member of the Organization.
- **Voluntary contributions** come from Member States (in addition to their assessed contribution) or from other partners.
- **Core voluntary contributions** allow less well-funded activities to benefit from a better flow of resources.
- **PIP Contributions Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Contributions was started in 2011.**
- It will improve and strengthen the sharing of influenza viruses with human pandemic potential.
- In recent years, **assessed contributions to the WHO have declined**, and now account for less than one-fourth of its funding.
- **Voluntary contributions make up for most of the remaining funding.**

### What does the WHO do with its funds?

- The WHO is involved in **various programmes**.
- In 2018-19, **19.36% was spent on polio eradication, 4.36% on prevention and control of outbreaks, etc.**
- WHO South East Asia Region (including India) **received \$375 mn.**
- The Americas received **\$62.2 mn for WHO projects.**
- That is where most of WHO funding comes from and the least of it goes.

### How does WHO prioritise spending?

- The Annual Programme of Work is passed by the World Health Assembly (WHA), the WHO's decision-making body.
- Delegates from all member states attend the WHA, held annually.
- It focuses on a specific health agenda prepared by the Executive Board.
- The main functions of the Assembly are to determine the WHO policies and supervise financial policies.
- It also reviews and approves the proposed programme budget.
- The decision on which country gets how much depends on the situation in the countries.

### How involved is WHO in India?

- India became a party to the WHO Constitution on **January 12, 1948.**
- **In 1948, the first session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia was held in the office of India's Health Minister.**
- The Health Ministry and the WHO India country office developed the **WHO India Country Cooperation Strategy (CCS) 2019-2023 jointly.**
- One of the CCS's priorities is to enhance India's global health leadership.
- On the ground, the WHO has been a key partner in the **immunisation and nutrition programmes**, tackling neglected diseases, etc.
- However, the credit for the success of a programme is always of the country; the WHO plays a supportive role.

### How WHO and India worked together in the COVID-19 pandemic?

- The WHO has been working closely with Health Ministry and various state governments on preparedness and response measures for Covid-19.
- However, **India has largely built its own strategy.**
- It is reluctant to test broadly for COVID-19; it has imposed early travel restrictions to and from China and then the lockdown.
- While India imposed a lockdown when cases were just 341 (March 22), its resistance to mass testing is akin to the US's strategy.
- India has also taken a call on universal use of masks when the WHO maintained that masks are not mandatory.

### What is the criticism the WHO faces from various countries?

- When most countries closed down air travel at the first stage, the **WHO took a long time stand against travel and trade restrictions on China.**



- On January 30, the International Health Regulations (2005) Emergency Committee urged countries to be prepared.
- However, **the Committee does not recommend any travel or trade restriction** based on the current information available.
- In January, the cases were piling up in China.
- During this time, **in a Delhi meeting, the WHO officials brushed aside government concern of human-to-human transmission.**

### China names disputed islands

#### Why in News?

China has defended its naming of 80 islands and other geographical features in the **South China Sea**.

#### Concerns:

- This move by China is likely to anger neighbours as the country asserts its territorial claims.

#### Key points:

- A joint announcement of the names came from the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ministry of Civil Affairs, a day after China established new administrative districts for the contested **Spratly and Paracel island chains**.
- The notice listed the Chinese names and coordinates of 80 islands, reefs, seamounts, shoals and ridges, 55 of them submerged in water.
- Vietnam claimed the move **"seriously violated"** its territorial sovereignty.

### China says Indian trade curbs are against WTO principles

#### Why in News?

Recently, China has accused India of violating the **World Trade Organization WTO's** "principle of non-discrimination" after the India tweaked its **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** policy to make its approval mandatory for firms in neighbouring countries to invest in Indian companies.

**India tweaked its FDI policy**, 2017 days after China's central bank, the People's Bank of China (PBoC), raised its shareholding in **Housing Development Finance Corporation (HDFC)** to over 1% during the recent stock market slump.

#### Key Points:

- The Government of India recently reviewed the extant Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy for curbing **opportunistic takeovers/acquisitions of Indian companies** due to the current COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has imposed restrictions saying companies from countries that share borders with India can invest **"only under the government route"**.

#### The spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy has raised concerns saying that:

- The additional barriers set by the Indian side for investors from **specific countries violate the WTO's principle of non-discrimination**, and **go against the general trend of liberalisation** and facilitation of trade and investment.
- They do not conform to **the consensus of the G20 leaders** and Trade Ministers to realise a free, fair, non-discriminatory, transparent, predictable and stable trade and investment environment, and to keep the markets open.
- The official pointed at the Chinese investments in various sectors of the Indian economy. He said China's overall investment as of **December 2019 was above \$ 8 billion** and it had driven key sectors like telecom, infrastructure, automobile and household goods in India.
- The Chinese spokesperson invoked the **principle of free market economy** and said, "Companies make choices based on market principles. We hope India would revise relevant discriminatory practices, treat investments from different countries equally, and foster an open, fair and equitable business environment".
- The statement said the new policy was clearly going to **impact future investment from China**.

#### Foreign direct investment (FDI)

- It is an investment from a party in one country into a business or corporation in another country with the intention of establishing a lasting interest.
- Lasting interest differentiates **FDI from foreign portfolio investments**, where investors passively hold securities from a foreign country.
- Foreign direct investment can be made by expanding one's business into a foreign country or by

becoming the owner of a company in another country.

### China's FDI in India

- China's FDI has grown **five-fold since 2014 and, as of December 2019**, its cumulative investment in India has exceeded \$8 billion.
- A Brookings India paper pegs the total current and planned Chinese investment in India as being over **\$26 billion**.

### World Trade Organization

- The World Trade Organization (WTO) is the **only global international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations**.
- **The Uruguay Round of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)**, conducted from 1987 to 1994 culminated in the Marrakesh agreement, which established the WTO.
- **The WTO has 164 members** (including European Union) and 23 observer governments (like Iran, Iraq, Bhutan, Libya etc).
- The WTO's global system lowers trade barriers through negotiation and operates under the principle of non-discrimination.

## UNGA Resolution on Covid-19

### Why in news?

- The United Nations General Assembly has unanimously adopted a resolution, co-sponsored by 188 nations including India, on COVID-19, calling for intensified international cooperation to defeat the pandemic that is causing severe disruption to societies and economies.
- The resolution titled Global solidarity to fight the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)' was the first such document on the global pandemic to be adopted by the world organisation.
- The UN Security Council is yet to discuss the coronavirus outbreak, even as the total number of coronavirus cases across the world crossed one million.

### Key Highlights:

- The resolution said the **193-member General Assembly** notes with great concern the threat to human health, safety and well-being caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, which continues to spread globally.
- **It recognises the "unprecedented effects of the pandemic, including** the severe disruption to societies and economies, as well as to global travel and commerce, and the devastating impact on the livelihood of people".
- **The resolution called for** intensified international cooperation to contain, mitigate and defeat the pandemic, including by exchanging information, scientific knowledge and best practices and by applying the relevant guidelines recommended by the World Health Organization.
- **It also emphasised the need for full respect for human rights**, and stressed that there is no place for any form of discrimination, racism and xenophobia in the response to the pandemic.

### United Nations General Assembly

- The General Assembly is the main deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the UN.
- All **193 Member** States of the UN are represented in the General Assembly, making it the only UN body with universal representation.
- **Each year, in September**, the full UN membership meets in the General Assembly Hall in New York for the annual General Assembly session, and general debate, which many heads of state attend and address.
- Decisions on important questions, such as those on peace and security, admission of new members and budgetary matters, **require a two-thirds majority of the General Assembly**.
  - **Decisions on other questions are by simple majority.**
  - **Headquarter:** New york United states
  - **The secretary-general of the United Nations :** António Guterres
- **The President** of the General Assembly is elected each year by assembly to serve a one-year term of office.

## Noor: Iran's First Military Satellite

### Why in News?

Iran has launched its first military satellite called **Noor** (meaning light) into orbit.

- The satellite reached an **orbit of 425km** after being carried by a **three-stage Ghased launcher**.
- This was a successful launch after months of failures. However, there was no immediate independent confirmation of the launch of the satellite.

### Key Points

#### Launch by the Paramilitary Force

- The Satellite was launched by **Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)**. The IRGC, which operates its own military infrastructure in parallel to Iran's regular armed forces, is a hard-line force answerable only to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.
- **Previously unheard 'Ghased' or "Messenger" satellite launcher was used to put the device into space.** It described the system as using both liquid and solid fuel.

**Concern:** Despite the fact that Iran has been one of the worst-affected in terms of the **Covid-19** cases, it has been engaged in serious strategic competition heightening the tensions in the region.

## BRICS Foreign Ministers Meet

### Why in News?

Recently, the External Affairs Minister of India attended the BRICS Foreign Ministers meet **through video conferencing**.

- This meeting was **convened by Russia** to discuss the **impact of the coronavirus pandemic**.

### Key Points

- BRICS nations have set up a **"special loan instrument" of \$15 billion fund for member nations to revive the economy amid Covid-19 pandemic**
- BRICS nations exchanged views on possible **joint measures to be taken by the member states to counter Covid-19 and overcome the financial, trade, economic and social consequences of the pandemic.**
- India showcased its **pharmaceutical support to around 85 countries to deal with the viral infection.** It also highlighted the need for **reforms in the multilateral bodies like the United Nations.**

### BRICS

**BRICS is an acronym** for the grouping of the world's leading emerging economies, namely **Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.**

- **In 2001, the British Economist Jim O'Neill coined the term BRIC** to describe the four emerging economies of **Brazil, Russia, India, and China.**
- The grouping was **formalised** during the first meeting of **BRIC Foreign Ministers in 2006.**
- **South Africa was invited to join BRIC in December 2010,** after which the group adopted the acronym BRICS.
- It comprises **42% of the world's population,** has **23% of the global GDP** and around **17% of the world trade.**
- **The chairmanship of the forum is rotated annually among the members,** in accordance with the acronym **B-R-I-C-S.**
- The **BRICS Leaders' Summit is convened annually.**
- During the **Sixth BRICS Summit in Fortaleza (2014)** the leaders signed the **Agreement establishing the New Development Bank (NDB).** They also signed the **BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement.**

## Environment

### Green impact assessment not needed for bulk drug makers

To expedite clearances to manufacturers of bulk drugs and intermediates meant for treating **COVID-19**, the Environment Ministry has exempted such projects from **Environment Impact Assessment (EIA)** till **September 30** as an interim measure.

### What is the move?

- All proposals for projects or activities in respect of **Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API), received up to the 30th September 2020, shall be appraised as Category 'B2' projects,** provided that any subsequent

amendment or expansion or change in product mix, after the 30th September 2020, shall be considered as per the provisions in force at that time.

- **Rules notified under the Environment Protection Act (1986)** classify projects into **three categories**.
- **Projects under Category A are appraised by the Ministry, and those under category B by states.**
- **Projects exempted from EIA and public hearings are classified under Category B2.**

### **Environment Protection Act, 1986**

Environment Protection Act, 1986 is an Act of the Parliament of India. **In the wake of the Bhopal Tragedy**, the Government of India enacted the **Environment Protection Act of 1986 under Article 253 of the Constitution**. Passed in March 1986, it came into force on **19 November 1986**. It has **26 sections and 4 chapters**.

**The purpose of the Act is to** implement the decisions of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. They relate to the protection and improvement of the human environment and the prevention of hazards to human beings, other living creatures, plants and property. The Act is an “umbrella” legislation designed to provide a framework for central government coordination of the activities of various central and state authorities established under previous laws, such as the Water Act and the Air Act

### **Article 253:**

Parliament has power to make any law for the whole or any part of the territory of India for implementing any treaty, agreement or convention with any other country or countries or any decision made at any international conference, association or other body

### **Environment Impact Assessment**

- An EIA is an assessment of the likely human environmental health impact, risk to ecological health, and changes to nature's services that a project may have.
- The purpose of the assessment is **to ensure that decision-makers consider environmental impacts before deciding whether to proceed with new projects.**
- Currently, **The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEFCC) uses Environmental Impact Assessment Notification 2006 as a major tool for minimizing the adverse impact of rapid industrialization on environment.**

### **Models of EIA in India:**

- **There are two types of EIA models** – statutory model which makes the assessment of impact compulsory under an enacted law.
- Administrative model under which an administration exercises its discretion to find out whether an impact study is necessary.

### **Stages of the EIA Process:**

- **Identifying and Defining the Project or Activity:** Although this step may seem relatively simple, defining a “project” for the purposes of an EIA can become complex and even controversial if a mining project is large, has several phases, or involves multiple sites.
- **Screening:** The screening process determines whether a particular project warrants preparation of an EIA.
- **Scoping:** Scoping is a stage, usually involving the public and other interested parties, that identifies the key environmental issues that should be addressed in an EIA.
- **Preparing Terms of Reference:** The Terms of Reference serve as a roadmap for EIA preparation and should ideally encompass the issues and impacts that have been identified during the scoping process.
- **Preparing Draft EIA:** A draft EIA is prepared in accordance with the Terms of Reference and/ or the range of issues identified during the scoping process.
- **Public Participation:** Best EIA practice involves and engages the public at numerous points throughout the process with a two-way exchange of information and views.



- **Preparing Final EIA:** This step produces a final impact assessment report that addresses the viewpoints and comments of the parties that reviewed the draft EIA.
- **Decision:** A decision to approve or reject a mining project is generally based on the final EIA, but in some instances, an environmental clearance may be just one step in the mine permitting process.
- **Administrative or Judicial Review:** Depending on the jurisdiction, there may be opportunities for a party to seek administrative and/or judicial review of the final decision and the EIA process.
- **Project Implementation:** Provided all regulatory requirements are met and permits are obtained, mine development will proceed following the project decision and once opportunities for administrative and/or judicial review are exhausted.
- **Monitoring:** Monitoring is an important part of project implementation.

### Benefits of EIA:

- Reduced cost and time of project implementation
- Cost-saving modifications in project design
- Increased project acceptance
- Avoided impacts and violations of laws and regulations
- Improved project performance
- Avoided treatment/clean-up costs
- A healthier local environment
- Improved human health
- Maintenance of biodiversity
- Decreased resource use
- Fewer conflicts over natural resource use.

### Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP)

#### In News:

- The Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme of Telangana is a multi-purpose irrigation project on the **Godavari River in Kaleshwaram, Bhupalpally, Telangana.**
- The project starts at the confluence point of **Pranahita River and Godavari River.**
- **Originally called Pranahita-Chevella project in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh,** it was redesigned, extended and renamed as **Kaleshwaram project in Telangana in 2014.**

#### What is Lift irrigation?

- **When the main source is at the lower level than the supply level, then water cannot be transported by natural flow.**
- So when water is supplied through some **mechanical means, then it is known as lift irrigation.**
- Pumps are used to lift the water from canals or rivers at lower level to the area at higher level for irrigation purpose.

#### What is Kaleshwaram project?

- **In 2007,** when Andhra Pradesh was not divided **Pranahitha-Chevella** Lift Irrigation Scheme taken up to utilise the water of **Pranhita tributary of Godavari river.**
- **After the formation of Telangana in 2014,** the present government redesigned the project.
- The reason they stated for doing it was that the original plan had too many environmental obstacles and had very low water storage provision.
- After **conducting Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) survey,** the government separated the project into two.
- The original component serving the **Adilabad area was called the Pranahitha project.**
- **The rest was renamed as Kaleshwaram** by redesigning the head works, storage capacity and the canal system.
- The Kaleshwaram project has provision for the storage of about **148 tmc ft with plans of utilising 180 tmc ft by lifting at least 2 tmc ft water every day for 90 flood days.**

#### Why it is important?

- It has the longest tunnel to carry water in Asia - **81 km between the Yellampally barrage and the Mallannasagar reservoir.**
- It has the estimated cost of **Rs.80,500 crore,** the costliest irrigation project to be taken up by any State.
- The project is designed to **irrigate around 7.4 lakh hectares lands.**

## What are the problems?

- The project requires a total of **32,000 hectares**.
- A section of farmers have been opposing the land acquisition.
- Also it needs **various clearances and permissions simultaneously** from the **Union Ministry of Environment and Forest** and the **Central Water Commission**.

## Petersberg Climate Dialogue

### Why in News?

India, along with 30 countries, deliberates on issues of Climate Change in the first ever virtual Petersberg Climate Dialogue.

### About the Petersberg Climate Dialogue:

- **The first virtual Climate Dialogue**, was the eleventh session of the Petersberg Climate Dialogue.
- This has been **hosted by Germany since 2010** to provide a forum for informal high-level political discussions, focusing both on international climate negotiations and the advancement of climate action.
- **The virtual XI Petersberg Climate Dialogue was co-chaired by Germany and the United Kingdom**, the incoming Presidency of the 26th Conference of Parties (COP 26) to **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**.
- The dialogue saw participation from ministers and representatives of about 30 countries.
- The Climate Dialogue was **originally an initiative of German Chancellor Angela Merkel**.
- It is hosted by the **German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety**.

### India's Contributions in the Dialogue:

- India expressed solidarity with the world as it **combats the Covid-19 pandemic** and **emphasised on adopting more sustainable consumption patterns** in line with the **requirement of sustainable lifestyles**.
- India suggested having climate technology as an **open source available** to all countries at affordable prices.
- India stressed on **climate finance** and urged to plan for **1 trillion USD in grants to the developing world immediately**.
- India highlighted its **Nationally Determined Contributions** spanning a ten-year time frame and in compliance with the **temperature goal of the Paris Agreement**.
- India focused on the **opportunity to accelerate renewable energy deployment and create new green jobs in the renewable energy and energy efficiency sector**.

### Paris Agreement 2015

- Parties to UNFCCC agreed to strive to limit the rise in global warming to well **under 2 degrees Celsius**, over pre-industrial levels, **by 2100**, under Paris Agreement 2015.
- **Nationally determined contributions (NDCs) were conceived at the Paris summit** which require each Party to prepare, communicate and maintain successive NDCs that it intends to achieve.
- Parties shall pursue domestic mitigation measures, with the aim of achieving the objectives of such contributions.
- Paris Agreement replaced earlier agreement to deal with **climate change, Kyoto Protocol**.

### Kyoto Protocol

- **It was an international agreement linked to the UNFCCC**, which committed its parties by setting **internationally binding emission reduction targets**.
- It was adopted in Kyoto, **Japan in 1997** and **entered into force in 2005**.
- **It recognized that developed countries are principally responsible** for the current **high levels of greenhouse gases (GHG)** emissions in the atmosphere as a result of more than 150 years of industrial activity.
- The detailed rules for the implementation of the Protocol were adopted at **COP-7 in Marrakesh, in 2001 and are referred to as the Marrakesh Accords**.
  - **Kyoto Protocol Phase-1 (2005-12)** gave the target of cutting down emissions by 5%.
  - **Phase-2 (2013-20)** gave the target of reducing emissions by at least 18% by the industrialized countries.

### Zoom not a safe platform, says MHA

#### Why in News?

- Recently, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has issued an advisory that Zoom video conference is not a safe platform.

#### Key Highlights:

- U.S. based Zoom video communication** has seen an exponential rise in usage in **India** as **office-goers** remain at home owing to the present lockdown.
- The software used in the online platform** is said to be **made in China** and some **calls were being routed through servers in China**.
- The Cyber Coordination Centre of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** issued a set of guidelines for its safe usage.

### AI-based Voice Tool to Detect Covid-19

#### Why in News?

A University in Rome (Italy) is conducting a pilot run for a patented Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based tool developed by students and a professor from Mumbai, which they claim can test Covid-19 through voice-based diagnosis using a smartphone.

#### Key Points

- The tool has already been tested on **300 individuals** and has detected Covid-19 patients with **98% accuracy**.
- The tool is based on a **voice-based diagnosis through an app**. It can find coronavirus from the tone of the voice.
- As someone speaks to **the microphone on the app**, the tool breaks down the voice in multiple parameters such as frequency and noise distortion.
- These values are then compared to a normal person's values and the patented technique then determines if the patient is positive or not.
- Each human voice has 6,300 parameters**, and only a few units, less than a dozen, specifically characterise individuals. The human ear, apart from colds, is not able to distinguish them, but artificial intelligence does.
- Each one of an individual's internal organs is sort of a resonator, so if anyone has a problem with lungs or heart, this will be reflected in his/her voice.
- The current novel coronavirus cases could be detected this way.

#### Benefits of the voice-based diagnosis tool

- This tool can be of great impact in doing the first level of screening to identify positives and only those who tested positive can go for the lab tests.
- This can reduce the current bottleneck on the medical infrastructure**, and help the government to identify hotspot regions in advance.
- It is possibly the best way to reach out to the remotest part of India by testing through a smartphone**, without the risk of exposure, both to the patient and the lab personnel.
- This voice-based diagnosis will fetch zero cost testing to the patient and no wait time.**

### Chitra GeneLAMP-N Test Kit

#### Why in News?

Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology (SCTIMST), Trivandrum (Kerala), has developed a diagnostic test kit that can **confirm Covid-19 in 2 hours at low cost**.

#### Key Highlights:

- The kit has been developed by Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology, Trivandrum, an Institute of National Importance, of the Department of Science and Technology (DST).
- The confirmatory diagnostic test detects the **N Gene of SARS- COV2** using reverse transcriptase loop-mediated amplification of viral nucleic acid (RT-LAMP).
- It will be one of the world's first few** if not the first of its kinds in the world.

- The test kit has been **funded by the Department of Science & Technology** and is called Chitra GeneLAMP-N.
- It is highly specific for SARS-CoV-2 N-gene and can detect two regions of the gene, which will ensure that the test does not fail even if one region of the viral gene undergoes mutation during its current spread.
- **As per ICMR, Chitra GeneLAMP- N has 100% accuracy** and match with test results using RT-PCR.

### How is it different from present Detection Kits?

- Current PCR kits in India enable **detection of E gene for screening and RdRp gene for confirmation**. Chitra GeneLAMP-N gene testing will allow confirmation in one test without the need for a screening test and at much lower costs.
- **The detection time is 10 minutes, and the sample to result time (from RNA extraction in swab to RT-LAMP detection time) will be less than 2 hours**. A total of **30 samples can be tested in a single batch in a single machine allowing a large number of samples to be tested each day**.

## The COVID-19 virus and its polyproteins

### Why in News?

COVID-19 pandemic and drug development efforts.

### Key Highlights:

Difference between Coronavirus and bacterium:

Bacterium	Coronavirus
Bacteria are living even outside a host body.	The viruses are basically inactive outside a host organism.
Each bacterial cell has its own machinery to reproduce itself.	Viruses would be unable to renew and grow by themselves.
The genes in the Bacterial cells are made up of DNA molecules.	The Coronavirus does not have DNA as their genome, but instead has RNA. (Some viruses also have DNA as their genetic material)
The information contained in this DNA is transcribed as a message to the messenger molecules called RNA. This message is translated into action molecules called proteins which help in the growth and multiplication of the bacterium.	The Corona viruses can only translate and not transcribe. The viruses infect the 'host cells' which they bind to, and multiply.

### Drug strategy:

- Upon infection, **the entire RNA of the Virus with its 33,000 bases is translated into a long tape of amino acid sequences**. Since this long chain contains several proteins within it, it is called a **"polyprotein" sequence**.
- **COVID19 has RNA-based genomes and subgenomes in its polyprotein sequence**, that code for the spike protein (S), the membrane protein (M), the envelope protein (E), and the nucleocapsid protein (N, which covers the viral cell nuclear material) – all of which are needed for the architecture of the virus.
- In addition to these, there are special structural and accessory proteins, **called non-structural proteins (NSP), indeed 16 of them**, which serve specific purposes for infection and viral multiplication.
- **A detailed understanding of these proteins can help the scientific community find relevant proteins** and understand their effect on Virus functioning and infection.
- **These proteins in the virus can be targeted by a number of potential molecules and drugs** which can interfere and stop the production of the viral proteins.

### PRACRITI IIT Delhi



## Why in news?

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology in Delhi have developed a web-based dashboard for predicting the spread of COVID-19 in India.

### About PRACRITI:

- PRACRITI (**P**Rediction and **A**ssessment of **C**oRona **I**nfections and **T**ransmission in **I**ndia) gives **detailed State-wise and district-wise predictions of COVID-19 cases in India for a three-week period**, which is updated on a weekly basis.
- The institute said that researchers believe that **such a platform will be highly useful for healthcare organisations as well as local and central authorities** to efficiently plan for different future scenarios and resource allocation.
- PRACRITI **provides the R0 values of each district and State based on data available** from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, National Disaster Management Authority, and the World Health Organization.

## Aero India

### Why in News?

Recently, the Ministry of Defence has announced that the **13th edition of Aero India** will be held from **February 3 to 7, 2021 at Air Force Station Yelahanka (Karnataka)**.

### Key Points

- Aero India is a **biennial international military and civil airshow**.
- It is a premier event that **draws international and Indian military and civil aircraft makers**, their support industries, military brass and government dignitaries, and business visitors.
- **The Yelahanka air base, about 30 km from the city centre Bangluru has been hosting the air show in February since it was started in 1996.**
- The 2021 Aero India will be organised by the **Defence Exhibition Organisation**, Ministry of Defence.
- **In 2019 it was organised by Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL).**

### Defence Exhibition Organisation

- It is an **autonomous organisation** of the Indian Government established in **1981**.
- The organisation was established to promote **export potential of the Indian defence industry**.
- The agency is responsible for organising international exhibitions such as **DEFEXPO and Indian participation at overseas exhibitions**.

## Hydroxychloroquine combination allowed

### Why in News?

The Union Health Ministry has **allowed the use of Hydroxy chloroquine in combination with Azithromycin under close monitoring for patients with severe disease and requiring ICU management** as per the revised Guidelines on Clinical Management of COVID-19.

### Key Highlights:

- Hydroxy chloroquine was previously under testing and was allowed to be administered **only to doctors and caregivers in direct contact with COVID-19 positive cases**.
- The Health Ministry has noted that no specific antiviral has been proven to be effective as per currently available data. However, based on the available information (uncontrolled clinical trials), **Hydroxy chloroquine may be considered**.
  - Its usage in some patients has shown a significantly reduced viral load in nasal swabs.
  - Hydroxychloroquine is known to have a variety of side-effects, and can in some cases harm the heart.
- It has been cautioned that the **medication is presently not recommended for children less than 12 years, pregnant and lactating women**.

## Covid-19 and the Orphan Drug Act

### Why in News?

Recently, **the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the Covid-19 outbreak a pandemic**. However, **the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) declared Covid-19 an orphan disease, or a rare disease**.

### Key Points

- The FDA granted Gilead Sciences orphan drug status for its antiviral drug, **Remdesivir, on March 23, 2020**.

- **Originally developed to treat Ebola**, the drug is now being tested for treating COVID-19. Clinical trials are already in Phase III.
- But on March **25 Gilead announced that it had submitted a request to the FDA to remove its orphan drug designation for Remdesivir.**
  - Earlier, Gilead had sought the orphan status to the **Remdesivir drug** to expedite approval of the drug. However, advocates for global access to medicines, rejected the company's argument.
  - **Gilead's exorbitant pricing** of its drug to treat hepatitis C and its drug to treat HIV also attracted attention in the past.
- In recent years, drug companies have been accused of exploiting the law to reap profits, in sales.

### Orphan Drug Act, 1983

- **Rare diseases became known as orphan diseases** because drug companies were not interested in adopting them to develop treatments.
- In the U.S., **under the Orphan Drug Act, companies are provided incentives to develop therapies, or orphan drugs, for rare diseases.**
- **The Act allows seven years of market exclusivity and financial incentives to innovators of these drugs.** As a result, orphan drugs are often exorbitantly priced.
- **Privileges under the Act may be conferred to companies for drugs to treat a disease that affect less than 200,000 people in the U.S.,** or for a disease that affects more than 200,000 people but for which there is no hope of recovering R & D costs.
  - The idea is that without these incentives, companies would find it difficult to recover their R&D costs given the small number of people suffering from the rare disease.

### Issues

- **Covid-19 not a Rare Disease:** The Orphan Drug Act applies to a potential drug for COVID-19, which is anything but a rare disease, with 800,049 confirmed cases across the world.
- **Paradox:** The U.S. FDA conferred the status of an orphan drug on Remdesivir proposed to treat COVID-19 a pandemic.

### Impact

- **Had Gilead not sought that orphan drug status be rescinded, generic manufacturers would not have been able to market a drug to treat COVID-19** with the same active ingredient till the seven-year period of market exclusivity had ended.
- This would have given Gilead **free rein on pricing and licensing** which would have had disastrous consequences on the healthcare system.
- However, orphan drug status of **Remdesivir** would have no impact on India as Gilead Sciences holds patents in India and patents are open to challenge.
- As far as its patent rights are concerned, Indian law permits the government to issue a **compulsory licence in certain circumstances of a public health crisis under Section 92 of the Patents Act.**
- **This would allow third parties to manufacture a patented drug without permission of the patent holder.**

### Rare Diseases

- A rare disease is a health condition of low prevalence that affects a small number of people compared with other prevalent diseases in the general population.
  - There is no universally accepted definition of rare diseases and the definitions usually vary across different countries.
- Though rare diseases are of low prevalence and individually rare, collectively they affect a considerable proportion of the population.
- **80% of rare diseases are genetic in origin and hence disproportionately impact children.**
- In India there are **56-72 million people affected by rare diseases.**
- There is also a demand for the reformulation of National Policy for Treatment of Rare Diseases, 2017.

### Cytokine

#### Why in news?

Evidence is emerging that a subset of **the infected patients develop severe COVID-19 because of an overreaction of their immune systems, which triggers what is known as a "cytokine storm syndrome" (CSS).**

**Who are vulnerable?**

- Various studies have shown that the disease has more severe consequences for those **above the age of 60 years**, and especially those with existing co-morbidities such as heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, chronic respiratory disease and cancer.
- Some countries have also reported deaths of younger people, including teenagers, after catching the infection.

### What is the Immune system and how does it work?

- The immune systems in **our bodies protect us from bacteria, viruses, and parasites by removing them from our systems.**
- The immune system gets **activated by things that the body does not recognise as its own.**
- These things are called **antigens, and include bacteria, fungi and viruses.**
- An effective immune system response involves inflammation, an important and indispensable part of the process.
- **This is visible when, for example,** you hurt your knee or ankle — the area of this external injury becomes red and swollen, and the immune system in response deploys white blood cells to the injured area to begin work on repairs.
- **Without such an immune response, injuries would not heal, and infections would become deadly.**
- Inflammation has an important protective function.
- The release of inflammatory mediators increases the blood flow to the area, which allows larger numbers of immune system cells to be carried to the injured tissue, thereby aiding the repairing process.

### What is the role of cytokines in the immune system?

- **Cytokines are signalling proteins that are released by cells at local high concentrations** — a cytokine storm or CSS is characterised by the overproduction of immune cells and the cytokines themselves because of a dysregulation in the process.
- **A severe immune reaction, leading to the secretion of too many cytokines in the bloodstream,** can be harmful since an excess of immune cells can attack healthy tissue as well.

### What causes the severe immune reaction in the first place?

- The United States National Cancer Institute (NCI) says on its website that a **cytokine storm can occur due to an infection, auto-immune condition, or other diseases. Signs and symptoms include high fever, inflammation (redness and swelling), severe fatigue, and nausea.**
- **Cytokine storms are not exclusive to coronavirus patients.** It is an immune reaction that can occur during other infectious and non-infectious diseases as well.

### How does CSS impact a COVID-19 patient?

- **In the case of any flu infection, a cytokine storm is associated with** a surge of activated immune cells into the lungs, which, instead of fighting off the antigen, leads to lung inflammation and fluid build-up, and respiratory distress.
- **CSS is seen as a likely major cause of mortality in both the 1918-20 Spanish Flu that killed more than 50 million people worldwide, and the H1N1 (swine flu) and H5N1 (bird flu) outbreaks in recent years.**
- Increased pro-inflammatory cytokine responses against human coronaviruses such as SARS-CoV-1 (which caused SARS), SARS-CoV-2 (which is responsible for the current COVID-19 pandemic), and MERS can result in acute lung injury and acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS).
- If the clinical features of CSS are not recognised and adequate treatment is not promptly instituted, multiple organ failure can result. Researchers writing in The Lancet have suggested that all severe COVID-19 patients should be screened for hyper inflammation.

## SAMADHAN Challenge

### Why in News?

Recently, a mega online challenge, SAMADHAN has been launched to test the ability of students to innovate.

- **The Innovation Cell of the Ministry of Human Resources Development and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) has launched it in collaboration with Forge and InnovatioCuris (an organisation on healthcare expertise).**

### Key Points

- Under the challenge, the participating students will search and develop measures against **Coronavirus.**
- The challenge will inspire students and faculty for novel experiments and discoveries providing a strong baseline of experimentation.

- The newly developed measures can be made available to the government agencies, health services, hospitals and other services for the quick solution of such **epidemics**.
- The challenge will also create awareness among citizens and motivate them to face challenges, prevent crises and help them get livelihood.
- The success of this program depends on the effectiveness of the ideas of participating contestants with ability to find solutions, technically and commercially.

### Kerala Gets Nod for Trial of Plasma Therapy

#### Why in News?

Recently, Kerala has got the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) approval for the clinical protocol exploring the feasibility of convalescent plasma transfusion which may be administered to severe Covid-19 patients.

#### Details:

- **Convalescent plasma therapy is not new** and has been used by doctors to treat critically ill patients during earlier **epidemics like H1N1, SARS and Ebola**.
- It may be noted that **plasma from the blood of previously infected yet healthy individuals had been transferred to five critically ill patients in China** and their condition had steadily improved and were subsequently discharged from hospitals.
- **The proposal submitted to the ICMR says that** the Transfusion Medicine Department of Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology would help the State Health Department in exploring the feasibility of plasma therapy for COVID-19 treatment.

#### Convalescent Plasma Therapy:

Convalescent Plasma therapy involves transfusing certain components from the blood of people who have recovered from a virus attack into people who are very sick with the virus or people who are at high risk of getting the virus.

#### How does it work?

- As people fight the virus, they produce antibodies that attack it. Those antibodies, proteins that are secreted by immune cells known as B Lymphocytes, are found in plasma or the liquid part of blood that helps the blood to clot and supports immunity.
- Once a person recovers, that person has developed antibodies that will stay in their blood waiting to fight the same virus. Those antibodies, when injected into another person with the disease, recognise the virus as something to attack.
- In the case of coronavirus disease, scientists say antibodies attack the spikes on the outside of the virus, blocking the virus from penetrating human cells.

### Operation SHIELD

#### Why in News?

Recently Delhi administration has announced Operation SHIELD to fight COVID-19

#### SHIELD stands for:

- **S - Sealing** of the immediate area or surroundings after geographical marking.
- **H - Home quarantine** of all the people living in the area.
- **I - Isolation** and tracing of people who have been first and second contacts.
- **E- Essential** supply of commodities is ensured.
- **L- Local sanitation** of the area by authorities.
- **D – Door to door health checks** of everyone living in the area.

It will be implemented in all covid-19 hotspots areas identified as containment zones in Delhi.

### Swachhata App

#### Why in News?

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) has launched a revised version of the existing Swachhata-MoHUA App to handle queries specific to **Covid-19**.

#### Key Points

- Swachhata-MoHUA is the official platform for **Swachh Bharat Mission** built in **partnership with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs**.



- The app enables a citizen to **post a civic-related issue** (eg; a garbage dump, public toilets not cleaned, etc.) which is then forwarded to the city corporation concerned and thereafter assigned to the sanitary inspector of the particular ward.
- It serves as an **effective digital tool (e-governance) enabling citizens to play an active role in the Swachhata of their cities and increase accountability on the part of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).**
- **The revised version includes Covid-19 related support requests including** fogging/sanitation, food, shelter and reporting violation of quarantine/lockdown, suspected cases of Infection.

### Swachh Bharat Mission

- Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is one of the most popular and significant missions in the History of India. This campaign was introduced by the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi and was launched on **2nd October 2014** to honor **Mahatma Gandhi's vision of a Clean country.**
- Initially, this Swachh Bharat Abhiyan campaign was run on a national level in **all the towns, rural and urban areas.**

### Objectives:

- The major objective of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is to **spread the awareness of cleanliness** and the importance of it.
- The concept of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is to provide the **basic sanitation facilities like toilets, solid and liquid waste disposal systems, village cleanliness and safe and adequate drinking water supply** to each and every person.

## SATYAM: Yoga Against Viruses

### Why in News?

Recently, the **Department of Science and Technology (DST)** has initiated the **Science and Technology of Yoga and Meditation (SATYAM)** programme. Under SATYAM, **DST has invited proposals to study appropriate intervention of yoga and meditation in fighting Covid-19 and similar kinds of viruses.**

### Key objective:

- To provide assistance to society in today's critical condition arising due to pandemic Covid-19.
- This is a need-based call, therefore, proposed work should be completed within 6-12 months.

**Dimensions of Covid:** Covid-19 usually has three dimensions, related to:

- Stress (worry, sitting at home).
- Respiratory.
- Immune system.

**Scientific Investigation:** The effects of yoga and meditation on the life of a person during such stressful times have to be scientifically investigated.

- Sometimes, there is an empirical correlation in the actions and the outcome, but it needs to be understood scientifically.

**Modern Tools:** All the participants are expected to work together using the modern tools of life science and bio-sciences to understand what works and what does not.

- If something works then what is the efficacy and in what conditions does it work.

**Holistic Target:** The project may address improving immunity, improving respiratory systems and interventions to overcome respiratory disorders and other dimensions like stress, anxiety and depression-related issues due to isolation, uncertainty and disruption in normal life.

### Science and Technology of Yoga and Meditation Programme

It was conceptualized in 2015 by the DST under its **Cognitive Science Research Initiative (CSRI).**

**Aims:** To foster scientific research on the effects of yoga and meditation on physical & mental health and on cognitive functioning in healthy people as well as in patients with disorders.

### Themes:

- Investigations on the effect of Yoga and Meditation on physical and mental health and well being.
- Investigations on the effect of Yoga and Meditation on the body, brain, and mind in terms of basic processes and mechanisms.

### Eligibility:

- Scientists/academicians with research background in 'Yoga and Meditation' and having regular positions are invited to participate in this initiative.
- Practitioners actively involved in yoga and meditation practices are also encouraged to apply in collaboration with academic and research institutions of repute.

**Project Duration:** The project is tenable for a maximum period of **three years**.

### **Cognitive Science Research Initiative**

- DST initiated this as a highly focused programme in **2008 during the 11th Five year plan**.
- **The DSRI facilitates a platform to the scientific community to work for better solutions of challenges related with cognitive disorders and social issues through various psychological tools & batteries, early diagnosis & better therapies, intervention technologies and rehabilitation programmes.**

### **Aim:**

To foster scientific research in the interdisciplinary field of Cognitive Science for better understanding of Indian mind sets, languages and cognitive disorders etc.

### **CSRI revolutionizes research in various fields, such as:**

- Nature and origins of mental disorders, of physiological, social and neuro-chemical origins.
- Design of better learning tools and educational paradigm.
- Design of better software technologies and artificial intelligence devices. Streamlining of social policy formulation and analysis.

### **Activities Supported under CSRI:**

- Individual R&D Projects.
- Multi-centric Mega Projects.
- Post-Doctoral Fellowship.
- Support for Schools, Training, Workshops, Conferences, etc.

## **EBOLA DEATH IN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO**

### **Why in News?**

World Health Organization (WHO) has announced that the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has recently recorded a second Ebola death in days following more than seven weeks without a new case.

### **Key Points:**

- The Ebola outbreak in DRC has killed more than 2000 people since 2018. (Almost killed about two thirds of those it infected).
- The cases appear when the Democratic Republic of Congo had been due to mark an end to the second-deadliest outbreak of the virus on record.
- Flare-ups or one-off transmissions (sudden outburst) are common towards the end of Ebola outbreaks, and a new case does not necessarily mean that the virus will spread out of control again.
- It is not yet clear how the new cases emerged. Neither there was any contact with other Ebola patients, nor the patient was a survivor of the virus which could have relapsed.

## **Ebola Virus Disease**

### **In News:**

Ebola virus disease, formerly known as **Ebola haemorrhagic fever** was **first discovered in 1976 near the Ebola River in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo**. Since then, the virus has been infecting people from time to time, leading to outbreaks in several African countries.

### **Transmission:** **Fruit bats of the Pteropodidae family are natural Ebola virus hosts.**

- **Animal to human transmission:** Ebola is introduced into the human population through close contact with the blood, secretions, organs or other bodily fluids of infected animals such as fruit bats, chimpanzees, gorillas, monkeys, forest antelope or porcupines found ill or dead or in the rainforest.
- **Human-to-human transmission:** Ebola spreads via direct contact (through broken skin or mucous membranes) with:
  - **Blood or body fluids** of a person who is sick with or has died from Ebola.
  - Objects that have been contaminated with body fluids (like blood, feces, vomit) from a person sick with Ebola or the body of a person who died from Ebola.

**Incubation Period:** The incubation period, that is, the time interval from infection with the virus to onset of symptoms, is from 2 to 21 days.

- A person infected with Ebola cannot spread the disease until they develop symptoms.

**Symptoms:** Symptoms of Ebola can be sudden and include:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Symptoms of impaired kidney and liver function
- In some cases, both internal and external bleeding

**Diagnosis:** It can be difficult to clinically distinguish Ebola from other infectious diseases such as malaria, typhoid fever, and meningitis but confirmation that symptoms are caused by Ebola virus infection are made using the following diagnostic methods:

- **Antibody-capture Enzyme-linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA).** It also tests **Acute Encephalitis Syndrome** and **Kyasanur Forest Disease**.
- Antigen-capture detection tests
- Serum neutralization test
- Reverse Transcriptase Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) assay
- Electron microscopy
- Virus isolation by cell culture.

**Vaccines:** An experimental Ebola vaccine, called **rVSV-ZEBOV** proved highly protective against EVD in a major trial in Guinea in 2015.

- **The rVSV-ZEBOV** vaccine is being used in the ongoing **2018-2019 Ebola outbreak in DRC**. Pregnant and breastfeeding women should have access to the vaccine under the same conditions as for the general population.
- The public mistrust and militia attacks have prevented health workers from reaching some hard-hit areas for administering the vaccines.

## ICMR Advises 'Pool Testing' of Covid-19

### Why in News?

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has advised the feasibility of **using pooled samples for molecular testing of Covid-19** citing the rise of cases in India.

- The advisory also stated that it is important to increase the number of tests being done in laboratories in India.

### About pool Testing

- A pooled testing algorithm involves the **PCR screening of a specimen pool comprising multiple individual patient specimens, followed by individual testing (pool de-convolution) only if a pool screens positive.**
- **As all individual samples in a negative pool are regarded as negative**, it results in substantial cost savings when a large proportion of pools tests negative.

### What the ICMR has recommended?

- As per ICMR, **preferable number of samples to be pooled is five**, though more than two samples can be pooled, but **considering higher possibility of missing positive samples with low viral load, it is strongly discouraged to pool more than five samples**, except in research mode.
- Also, the study has recommended that it should be used only in **areas with low prevalence of COVID-19** (initially using proxy of low positivity of less than 2% from the existing data).
- In areas with positivity of **2-5%**, **sample pooling** for PCR screening may be considered only in community survey or surveillance among asymptomatic individuals, strictly excluding pooling samples of individuals with known contact with confirmed cases and health care workers (in direct contact with care of COVID-19 patients).
- Sample from such individuals should be directly tested without pooling.

### Why we need pool testing?

- This will reduce the total test kits used to examine patients and treat them.
- It is also expected to trim the work at the laboratories testing these samples.
- International researchers suggest that pooling test samples is cost effective, especially for the countries with limited resources.
- It can be used to prevent community spread of the disease.

### Green Zone State

#### Why in News?

Union government announced the criteria for classifying districts into three zones depending on the level of outbreak in each district and relax restrictions post 20 April.

**According to this states will be demarcated into three zones**

1. **Red Zones** - The districts which will have to be classified as red zones include the “highest case load districts contributing to more than 80 per cent of cases in India” or the “highest case load districts contributing to more than 80 per cent of cases for each state in India” or “districts with doubling rate less than 4 days (calculated every Monday for last 7 days, to be determined by the state government)”.
2. **Orange Zone** - The areas with limited number of cases in the past and with no surge in positive cases recently would be included under the orange zone. Only restricted activities such as limited public transport and farm product harvesting is expected to be allowed in coronavirus
3. **Green Zone** - Any district which has not reported a new case for 28 days will be classified as “Green Zones”.
  - Goa recently became the first zero COVID-19 State in the country with the last seven positive cases also turning negative.
  - This makes **Goa the first green State in the country with no case of coronavirus being reported from April 3.**

### e-Raktkosh Portal

#### Why in News?

Recently, the Union Health minister urged the use of the **e-Raktkosh portal** as a single point for maintaining **real-time information on the status of stocks of each blood group**.

- The Health Minister has termed the availability of blood in blood banks as 'essential'.
- In several blood disorders like **thalassemia and haemophilia regular transfusion of the blood is necessary**.

#### Key Points

- e-Raktkosh portal is a **Centralized Blood Bank Management System**.
- **It is a comprehensive IT solution** to standardize and streamline the standard operating procedures, guidelines and workflow of blood banks across the nation.
- It was inaugurated on **7th April 2016** by then Minister of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW)
- **It enforces Drug & Cosmetic Act**, National blood policy standards and guidelines ensuring proper management of blood.
- e-Rakt Kosh has components for management of the blood donation life cycle **which includes** :
  - The biometric Donor Management System
  - Blood grouping,
  - TTI screening,
  - antibody screening,
  - A centralized Blood Inventory Management System
  - Bio-Medical Waste Management System for disposal of discarded blood

### Blood Disorder

- A blood disorder is any condition that **impacts one or more parts of the blood**, usually interfering with its ability to work correctly.
- Blood disorder can be categorised as **Common Blood Disorder like anaemia and Rare Blood Disorder like thalassemia**.

### Types of Blood Disorder

- **Blood Disorders Affecting Red Blood Cells like Anemia**, Pernicious anemia (B12 deficiency), Aplastic anemia, Autoimmune hemolytic anemia etc.



- Blood disorders that affect White Blood Cells like Lymphoma, Leukemia, Multiple myeloma.
- Blood Disorders Affecting Blood Plasma like **hemophilia**
- Blood Disorders Affecting Platelets like **thrombocytopenia**.

### Classical Swine Fever (CSF)

#### Why in News?

Recently, **few districts of eastern Assam** have reported **the death of more than 1,300 pigs** within a week due to the **classical swine fever (CSF)**.

#### About Classical Swine Fever:

- Classical swine fever (CSF), also known as **hog cholera**, is a **contagious viral disease of domestic and wild swine**.
- It is caused by a **virus of the genus Pestivirus of the family Flaviviridae**, which is closely related to the viruses that cause bovine viral diarrhoea in cattle and border disease in sheep.
- **Clinical signs:** The virus that causes CSF varies in virulence. Some strains are highly virulent and cause acute (i.e. rapid) serious disease. Some strains are of low virulence and cause chronic (i.e. long-lasting) disease, others are intermediate causing sub-acute disease.
- There is **only one serotype of CSF virus (CSFV)**.
- CSF is a disease listed by the **OIE World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) Terrestrial Animal Health Code and must be reported to the OIE (OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code)**.

#### Important Science & Tech Affairs

- Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) developed a bio-suit for the safety of the paramedical, medical, and other personnel engaged in combating COVID-19 safe from the deadly virus.
- Indian Institute of Science (IISc) scientists have developed a high-quality indigenous ventilator.
- MSME Technology Centres in India have provided masks, medical gowns, ventilators, sanitizers, components of Corona Testing Kits, etc. to combat Coronavirus.
- A scientist from the Pune-based Centre for Materials for Electronics Technology (C-MET) has developed a low- cost indigenous prototype of polymer swab.
- IIT-Roorkee has developed a low-cost portable ventilator called 'Prana-Vayu' in association with AIIMS- Rishikesh, which can be manufactured for just Rs25,000.
- Bengaluru based startup Bione, a genetic and microbiome testing firm has launched India's 1st home screening test kit for COVID-19 & is approved by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).
- The University Grants Commission (UGC) has directed all universities and colleges to set up mental health helplines to address psychosocial concerns of students during the lockdown imposed to combat Corona virus.
- Indian Smart Cities namely Bengaluru, Pune, Surat, and Tumakuru are using the integrated data dashboards to provide up-to-date information about the status of coronavirus in different administrative zones of their cities.
- The American space agency NASA has announced that it is working on the Artemis program.
- In view of increasing cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) infection in the country, Aerobiosys Innovations Private Limited, a start-up incubated at The Center for Healthcare Entrepreneurship (CfHE) in the Indian Institute of Technology-Hyderabad (IIT-H)– Telangana, has designed a low cost portable emergency ventilator called 'Jeevan Light'.
- Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB) of the Department of Science and Technology (DST) is to support and fund a technology by the Department of Biosciences and Bioengineering (DBB), IIT-Bombay to capture and inactivate novel coronavirus
- Scientists at Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology (SCTIMST) have designed and developed a disinfected barrier-examination booth to examine COVID-19 patients.
- FastSense Diagnostics announced that it is currently developing two modules for the detection of COVID-19.
- Centre for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad and Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB), New Delhi began research on the whole genome sequencing of novel coronavirus for the first time.

## JOKTA ACADEMY

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- Scientists at Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology (SCTIMST) have designed and developed the "Chitra Acrylosorb Secretion Solidification System," a highly efficient superabsorbent material for liquid respiratory and other body fluid solidification.
- The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), under the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions, is to launch "iGOT platform," a learning platform to combat COVID-19 for all front-line workers.
- CSIR-Central Electrochemical Research Institute (CECRI) at Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu, has developed a series of lab-made Personal protective equipment (PPEs) to fight COVID-19 pandemic.
- Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has released a new strategy for COVID-19 testing in India, hotspots, cluster, large migration gatherings or evacuees centres.
- Google has announced the launch of a virtual Braille keyboard for Android users with low vision or blindness.
- After the launch of Aarogya Setu app to tackle COVID-19 impact, now Central government, Department of Telecommunication(DoT) in partnership with Tamil Nadu (TN) government and Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras has launched its complementary initiative named "Aarogya Setu Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS)".
- Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology (SCTIMST), under the Department of Science and Technology (DST), is to explore convalescent-plasma therapy for COVID-19.
- Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) has developed a cost-effective solution for isolation wards, Fumigation Chamber, Hand sanitizers and face masks as a measure to fight against COVID-19 pandemic.
- Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) approved the bioassay laboratory of the Department of Biotechnology's (DBT) Faridabad-based Translational Health Science and Technology Institute (THSTI) as an extension of diagnostic facility of Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) Medical College and Hospital.
- CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) based in Hyderabad is currently employing several tools and approaches in the countries to fight against COVID-19.
- Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) has developed a double-layered Khadi mask to contain the spread of COVID-19. It has procured orders for supplying it in large quantities.
- The Indian Institute of Technology Ropar (IIT-Ropar) has developed a trunk-shaped device fitted with ultraviolet (UV) germicidal irradiation technology.
- Google and Apple collaborate to fight against COVID-19 through contact tracing technology.
- UPSCGuide e-learning portal has been launched to help UPSC aspirants to study from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) stated that over 40 vaccines are under various stages of development.
- CovidGyan, a Science-based website, was launched.
- IIT-Bombay has developed a digital stethoscope called "AyuSynk" to check patients who are infected with COVID-19.
- The University Grants Commission (UGC) has constituted 2 expert committees to look after the examinations & academic calendar, and to promote online learning amidst the lockdown due to COVID-19.
- Defence Research & Development Laboratory (DRDL), Hyderabad of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has developed COVID-19 Sample Collection Kiosk (COVSACK) to combat COVID-19.
- A team of researchers from National Institute of Technology-Karnataka (NIT-K) at Surathkal, has designed a disinfection chamber called 'ZERO-COV' to disinfect personal protective equipment (PPE) tools, surgical masks, vegetables, packaged food items, currency notes and other day-to-day items within 15 minutes.
- Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) developed Automatic Mist Based Sanitiser Dispensing Unit and UV Sanitisation Box and Hand-held UV device to fight against COVID-19.
- Indian Council of Medical Research recently issued an advisory mentioning the protocol for using Rapid Antibody Test kits in COVID-19 hotspot areas across states to use these kits in the affected areas.

## JOKTA ACADEMY

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- National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) on April 17 announced that it will launch astronauts Bob Behnken and Doug Hurley to International Space Station (ISS) on May 27, 2020.
- Scientists from the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (CSIR-IGIB) have developed 'Feluda', a low-cost coronavirus test for detection of the pathogen. It will not require any expensive machines.
- Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology (IIIT-Delhi) has developed a mobile app named 'WashKaro'.
- Researchers from Faridabad-based Regional Centre for Biotechnology (RCB) has initiated a study to engineer virucidal coatings to prevent the COVID-19 Transmission.
- Researchers at the Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES) Nainital, under the Department of Science and Technology (DST) found that SN 2010kd, a super-luminous supernova stands out with the amount of mass and Nickel ejected during explosion.
  
- Department of Science and Technology (DST), Ministry of Science and Technology has approved support for upscaling antiviral nano-coatings as part of Nano Mission program.
- Raksha Mantri, Rajnath Singh has launched India's 1st COVID-19 sample collection mobile Lab launched through video conference.
- An IIT-Roorkee professor, Kamal Jain, has claimed to have developed a software that can help detect COVID-19 within five seconds using an X-ray scan of the suspected patient.
- Shilpa Medicare launched its generic version of cancer drug Dasatinib.
- Union Human Resource Development (HRD) Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' felicitated the team of scientists from IIT-Delhi who are involved in the development of COVID-19 probe free Real-time Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) Diagnostic Kit. COVID-19 Testing kit made by IIT-Delhi is in line with the Make in India initiative.
- The Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) and the Institute of Genetics and Integrated Biology (IGIB), along with a few other institutions is currently developing digital and molecular surveillance of the spread of novel coronavirus to understand the biology, epidemiology and disease impact.
- The US space agency NASA engineers have developed "VITAL", a new high-pressure ventilator tailored specifically to treat COVID-19 patients.
- Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology (SCTIMST) has developed Chitra Magna, an innovative RNA extraction kit, innovative technology for isolating RNA from swabs for COVID-19 tests.
- Scientists at CSIR-National Botanical Research Institute (NBRI), Lucknow, have developed a herbal decongestant spray.
- Researchers at the Institute of Nano Science and Technology (INST) have developed carbon nitride quantum dots (g-CNQDs), a low-cost metal-free nanomaterial for visible light microbial disinfection.
- A team from the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT)-Bombay, NIT Srinagar and Islamic University of Science & Technology (IUST), Awantipora, Pulwama, Jammu and Kashmir has developed "Ruhdaar," a low-cost ventilator using locally available materials.
- Littlemore Innovation Labs, a pioneer in paperless digital exams, announced the launch of PEXA Lite, an extended offering on its flagship PEXA platform.
- IIT-Bhubaneswar has designed a safe and multi-surface sanitizer using UV light for the disinfection of devices in the combat against COVID-19.
- A multi-disciplinary expert group COVIDActionCollab (CAC) is developing a protocol to test sewage for COVID-19 traces in selected densely populated urban residential areas of Bengaluru and Kolkata.
- A low-cost robotic device named as "Hospital Care Assistive Robotic Device (H-CARD)" has been developed by CSIR-Central Mechanical Engineering Research Institute (CMERI), Durgapur
- ITI Cuttack has designed two robots for monitoring and serving essentials to patients at Covid hospitals.
- The Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (IIT Delhi) have developed a web-based dashboard named 'PRACRITI' which can predict the district and state wise transmission rate of COVID-19.
- Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati is collaborating with Hester Biosciences Limited, a pharmaceutical company based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, to work on the vaccine development against COVID-19.

- IIT Jammu has developed a face-shield that will be handed over to the police for trial amid the COVID-19 pandemic.
- New academic session for freshers to begin in universities from September and for already enrolled students in August informed University Grants Commission.
- Scientists from Jawaharlal Nehru Centre For Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR) have modified the structure of Berberine into Ber-D to use as an Alzheimer's inhibitor.

### HIMACHAL PRADESH CURRENT AFFAIRS

## Industrial houses to be facilitated to start their operations

### Why in News?

Nationwide Lockdown due to Covid 19 Pandemic has affected the operation of Industrial houses across the states. Hence, the Government of the state is taking steps to **facilitate smooth functioning of Industrial houses** particularly in **Baddi, Barotiwala and Nalagarh** area would be facilitated to start their operations.

#### Steps taken by the Government:

- The State Government would take all necessary steps for **smooth movement of workforce besides strengthening the supply chain of raw material and furnished goods** from the industries.
- Sufficient number of **trucks would be provided to facilitate transportation** of goods from the industries.
- Since textile industries in the area were employing a huge chunk of workforce they should explore the option of **deploying local labourers** to ensure their smooth operation.
- All the industrial units would be provided **auto extension of various approvals to facilitate** the industrial houses.
- The State Government would also **take up the matter with the Government of India for providing salary to the employees registered under ESI.**

#### Steps taken by Industrial house

- Pharma industry has **resumed production in majority of their units** and it will help in providing critical medicines and other components to fight against Covid-19.
- The efforts of the Association for their **Community Social Responsibility** by providing dry and cooked ration to the workers stranded in Baddi, Barotiwala and Nalagarh area is appreciable.

## Fake News Monitoring Unit

### Why in News?

The State Government has constituted 'Fake News Monitoring Unit' for checking circulation of fake news, related to Coronavirus and taking appropriate remedial measures in the wake of the orders of the Supreme Court of India.

#### Supreme court Order:

- The Court directed **"In particular the media (Print, Electronic or Social) to maintain a strong sense of responsibility and ensure that unverified news capable of causing panic is not disseminated.**
- **A daily bulletin by the Government of India** through all media avenues including social media and forum to clear the doubts of people would be made active within a period of 24 hours as submitted by the Solicitor General of India.
- The Court does not intend to **interfere with the free discussion about the pandemic**, but direct the media refer to and publish the official version about the developments".

#### About Fake News Monitoring Unit:

- The "Fake News Monitoring Unit" **would supervise and check the circulation of fake**, false and incorrect news besides sharing of anonymous data related to Coronavirus in Print, Electronic and Digital/Social Media.
- The Unit will **recommend for corrective measures and appropriate action** as per provision of the Law to the concerned Authorities/Agencies.
- The Fake News Monitoring Unit would **start functioning with immediate effect.**
- The Fake News Monitoring Unit would be **chaired by Director Information and Public Relations, Harbans Singh Brascon.**

#### Guidelines issued by FNMU to Social media Platforms :



- As per the provision of **Information Technology Act, 2000** all Social Media platforms were required to **inform their users not to host, display, upload, modify, publish, transmit, update or share any information** that may affect public order and unlawful in anyway.
- The social media platforms are required to **initiate awareness campaigns on their platforms for the users not to upload or circulate any false news or misinformation concerning coronavirus** which are likely to create panic amongst the public and disturb the public order and social tranquility.
- Social media platforms should **take immediate action to disable or remove such content hosted on their platforms on priority basis** and promote dissemination of authentic information related to coronavirus as far as possible.

### COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund by Transport Minister

#### In News:

Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur was presented a **cheque of rupees one crore towards 'HP COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund'** by Transport Minister Govind Thakur on behalf of officers and officials of Himachal Road Transport Corporation.

**Rs. 1 crore for PPE and N95 masks for police personnel**

#### In News:

- Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur today sanctioned rupees **one crore (Rs. 50 lakhs from HP COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund and Rs. 50 lakhs from State Disaster Response Fund)** to Police Department for purchase of high risk Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits and N-95 masks for police personnel of the State in the wake of pandemic COVID-19.
- Chief Minister said that State Government is committed to provide all necessary safety equipment's to the officers and officials of the state government on duty for protection from coronavirus.

### Violators of Disaster Management Act will be penalized

#### Why in News?

The nationwide lockdown of 21 days, which started from **24th March**, is enforced as per directives of **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** and **National Executive Committee (NEC)** under provision of **Disaster Management Act with exemptions wherever required.**

#### Offences and Penalties Under Disaster Management Act

- There is a provision of offences and penalties **under Sections 51 to 60 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005.**
- which includes **obstructing a government employee or National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA) or District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) authorized person in performing his duties, refusing to comply with any direction given by government or NDMA, SDMA or DDMA, making false claims for obtaining assistance etc. from the government, misappropriation of money meant for providing relief during disaster, making false warnings leading to panic.**
- As per Disaster Management Act, **court may take cognizance of an offence under Section 60 of the Act.**
- Further, **under section 188 of the Indian Penal Code, anyone found guilty of disobeying the orders or directions issued by public servant in general interest shall be punishable under law.**

#### Steps taken by state Government:

- All Deputy Commissioners and Superintendents of Police have been directed to **ensure to enforce the directions of National Disaster Management Authority and National Executive Committee.**
- Anyone found guilty of breaching National Disaster Act will be penalized under law.
- **Anyone disseminating false alarms or any misinformation in any form can face imprisonment up to one year or a fine under section 54 of Disaster Management Act 2005.**

**Supreme Court has also reminded on March 31 that Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act** can be used to punish those who makes or circulates a false alarm or warning as to disaster or its severity or magnitude, leading to panic.

### Active Case Finding Campaign (ACFC)

#### Why in News?

Himachal Pradesh government will launch Active Case Finding Campaign for COVID 19 patients.

## About ACFC:

- Under this campaign, **health workers would provide information regarding symptoms of Covid-19 to the people at their doorsteps.**
- Under **the Active Case Finding Campaign, every ASHA worker with two person's team will visit every house** in the village and gather health information of every person and would share it with the department through **Google form.**
- The timing for gathering information would start from **9 AM to 4 PM** every day and the suspected persons would be investigated accordingly.
- The Chief Minister Jairam Thakur said **elected representatives of Panchayt Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies must be involved to identify persons in their respective areas who have intra or even interstate traveling history.**

## PMUY beneficiaries to get free LPG cylinders

### In News:

- Keeping in view of **COVID-19 Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package (PMGKY)** was announced by Central Government to provide certain facilities for the poor and needy.
- Under the package **eight crore families would be given three free gas cylinders for three months from April to June, 2020.**
- As many as **1.36 lakh** beneficiaries of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) in the state would get benefit from this initiative.
- The cylinder refill amount of one month will be transferred to bank accounts of beneficiaries of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana by the government.
- **The beneficiary of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana has to make full payment while taking the cylinder as the amount was already deposited in their account.**

## Covid-19 and Self Help Groups

### Why in News?

More than 50 Self Help Groups (SHGs) in the State were preparing and producing about 15000 masks everyday to give a helping hand in the fight against COVID-19.

### More about the activities of the SHG's in fight against Covid-19:

- **2000 women** are involved in this task through various SHGs.
- **About one lakh masks have been provided to various departments and organisations.** The task of producing masks was being done on war footing,
- **3000 women farmers were being encouraged to develop kitchen gardens by utilizing minimum land, so that fresh vegetables could be produced.**
- **11 young professionals have been given responsibility for guiding these women farmers and to ensure marketing of their produce,** so that they could get fair price.
- **SHG in Sirmaur district has successfully prepared a sanitizer,** which costs **Rupees one hundred per 200 milliliter.**
- **Personal Protection Equipment kit prepared by SHGs would cost a mere amount of Rs. 700 and three SHGs had been trained so far with a capacity of 100 kits per day.**

## Web portal for checking Fake News

### Why in News?

Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur launched a web portal for uploading information of fake and unverified news related to COVID-19 so that appropriate action could be taken to check such news. Web portal could be accessed at <http://fakenews.hp.gov.in>.

### More about the News:

- The person providing information in this regard would be **kept confidential.** Provision of many security features like OTP etc. has been made in this web portal to ensure that such information is not provided by any anonymous person,
- People can give information about fake and unverified information circulating in media related to COVID-19 on **e-mail: fakenews-unit@hp.gov.in or whatsapp number 9816323469.**

- The public is also requested to **bring the information of the fake news being telecast or broadcast or circulated by any media platform related to COVID-19 to the notice of the Fake News Monitoring Unit** constituted by the Government so that necessary action could be taken.
- Newspapers, television news channels and digital/social media were making significant contribution in dissemination of factual information related to COVID-19. Due to this, the people of the state are getting correct information about this epidemic,
- News media, especially some social media platforms, were circulating unverified information related to COVID-19, thus creating panic in the public.

### **Registered workers of HPBOCWFB to get Rs. 2000 each for March and April in HP**

#### **In News:**

- The State Government has decided to pay **rupees two thousand for the month of March and rupees two thousand for April, to registered workers of HP Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board (HPBOCWFB) Board, through Direct Benefit Transfer.**
- **Rs. 11.31 crores** have been transferred to the bank accounts of **56,552 workers registered with the Board.**

### **Ordinance to regulate salaries and allowances**

#### **Why in News?**

The Governor of Himachal Pradesh has promulgated an ordinance '**The Himachal Pradesh Regulation of Salaries and Allowances of different categories in Certain Exigencies Ordinance, 2020**' to regulate the salaries of different categories in certain exigencies arising out of coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

#### **About The Ordinance:**

- This ordinance has been promulgated for **reduction of salaries and allowances of Ministers, Speaker and Members of Legislative Assembly by 30 percent for a period of one year commencing from 1st April, 2020.**
- The salaries and allowances of other dignitaries viz: **Chairman, Vice-Chairman or any other political appointee shall also be reduced by 30 percent for a period of one year commencing from 1st April, 2020.**
- Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has necessitated the importance of expeditious relief and assistance and therefore, it is expedient to take certain emergent measures to prevent and contain the spread of said pandemic.
- To manage and control burgeoning situation, it has become necessary to raise resources by reduction of salaries and allowances of the above categories.

### **One day's salary of employees to be deducted for Solidarity Response Fund**

#### **In News:**

**All the Drawing and Disbursing Officers of various Departments, Public Sector Undertakings, Autonomous bodies under the government of Himachal Pradesh will deduct one day's salary/ emoluments of each employee working on regular and contract basis and will deposit in the 'H.P. COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund.**

#### **Jal Jeevan Mission**

#### **About:**

- Indian Prime Minister on independence day announced that the government will launch a **Jal Jeevan Mission to bring piped water to households and resolved to spend more than 3.5 lakh crore** in the coming years.
- **Jal Jeevan Mission**, the government envisages renewed efforts to **provide water supply to every household by 2024.**
- The Jal Jeevan Mission is set to be **based on various water conservation efforts like point recharge, desilting of minor irrigation tanks, use of greywater for agriculture and source sustainability.**
- The Jal Jeevan Mission will converge with other **Central and State Government Schemes to achieve its objectives of sustainable water supply management across the country.**
- **The Prime Minister appealed to all states to generate maximum community participation** in the form of 'Jan Andolan' to achieve the target of functional household tap connection by 2024.

#### **Jal Jeevan Mission in Himachal Pradesh**

- The State had coverage of about **57 percent at the time of launch of the Jal Jeevan Mission** in the State.
- The Jal Jeevan Mission, a **flagship programme of Government not only seeks to provide functional household tap connections to all but also intends to promote the holistic management of local water resources.**
- The focus of the scheme was the development of **pipd water supply infrastructure for tapped water, development of reliable drinking water resources and effective water management.** He said that this scheme envisages providing tapped water to all the 16,68,523 households by 31st August, 2022.

### **State Government determined to strengthen rural economy**

#### **Why in News?**

It is utmost important for **ensuring economic revival at village household level during the post COVID-19 pandemic** in which Rural Development Department has a vital role to play. This was stated by Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur while presiding over the presentation made by Director Rural Development Lalit Jain on '**Economic Stimulus Package to Help Rural Poor**'.

#### **Key Highlights of Government Initiatives:**

- **The Himachal Pradesh State Rural Livelihood Mission** has taken initiative to **help corona warriors by manufacturing about five lakh masks and about 1000 Personal Protective Equipment kits.** In addition to this over **1250 litres hand sanitizer** was also produced under the Mission.
- Several initiatives have been proposed under **The Himachal Pradesh State Rural Livelihood Mission** which would not **only revive the rural economy in post corona pandemic but also provide economic stability to the rural population.**
- **Mahila Kisans' would be trained to develop Backyard Kitchen Garden** in nearly one bigha of land for which they would be **provided seasonal vegetable seed kits and fruits tree sapling by Agriculture and Horticulture Departments.** Similarly **10 boxes of beehives would be provided to trained women Self Help Groups and honey produced would be sold through Him Ira Shops.**
- **One Cow Scheme'** Indian breed cows would be provided to poor **Mahila Kisans of SHG women** at highly subsidies rates. This scheme would be started in convergence with the Animal Husbandry Department.
- State Government was also contemplating the **State Rural Livelihood Mission to tie up with Education Department to supply school uniforms.** These uniforms could be **stitched by women Self Help Groups** for which trained tailoring teachers would be provided to these SHGs.
- New initiatives would also be taken under **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).** Under the **UNNATI Project** **atleast one member from the families of such persons who have completed 100 days employment under MGNREGS would be provided necessary training to upscale their skill.**

### **Three pronged strategy to tackle COVID-19 menace**

#### **Why in News?**

The State Government would adopt three pronged strategy to tackle the menace of coronavirus effectively in the State. This was stated by Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur while presiding over a review meeting of Health and Family Welfare and Ayurveda Departments in the wake of coronavirus in the country as well as State.

#### **Three pronged strategy:**

1. The State Government would increase capacity of investigation of samples of coronavirus so that maximum people could be examined.
2. Government would be identifying the three types of institutions where treatment of COVID-19 of people could be done.
3. Asymptomatic people would be kept in COVID care centres, Moderate symptomatic people would be kept in COVID Health Centres and severe symptomatic would be kept in COVID Hospitals.

### **50 lakh Ex-Gratia for frontline workers fighting against COVID-19**

#### **Why in News?**

The State Government has decided to provide financial assistance to all those frontline workers fighting the pandemic in different capacities, who might be exposed to the COVID-19.

#### **Key Points:**

- There was a need to provide financial security to all such employees and frontline workers who are involved in response, relief and containment measures of COVID-19.
- A sum of **Rs. 50 lakh would be paid as Ex-Gratia out of HPSDMA COVID-19 State Disaster Response Fund** to the **next of kin of those officers and officials working in the State Government** (except health



workers) i.e. **regular, outsourced, contractual, daily wagers and employees of SEHB Society of Municipal Corporation Shimla engaged in sanitation activities and working in different capacities for response, relief and containment measures of COVID-19, in case of their death due to COVID-19 pandemic.**

- **Ministry of Health, GoI** has already announced insurance scheme for **health workers fighting COVID-19.**

### **Relief camps set up for migrant labourers in Kinnaur**

#### **In News:**

- District Administration of tribal district of Kinnaur is making concerted efforts to provide relief to the migrant labourers stranded in the district in wake of curfew imposed in the state due to COVID-19 pandemic.
- Such migrant labourers are being identified and every possible help is being extended to them.
- The administration is making proper arrangements of food, shelter and other essential items for these labourers and relief camps have also been set up for them at **Government Senior Secondary School, Kalpa and Ralli.**

### **Prime Minister appreciates CM for effectively undertaking ACF Campaign.**

#### **Why in News?**

While presiding over the Video Conference with the Chief Ministers of the States, Prime Minister Narendra Modi appreciated the efforts of the Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur for effectively undertaking **Active Case Finding (ACF)** Campaign in Himachal Pradesh which has helped in screening of whole population of the State for any Influenza Like Illness symptoms.

- **He also urged all the States to follow Himachal Pradesh** in this initiative to combat the pandemic of Coronavirus.

#### **About Active Case Finding (ACF):**

- Under this campaign, **health workers would provide information regarding symptoms of Covid-19 to the people at their doorsteps.**
- Under the **Active Case Finding Campaign, every ASHA worker with two person's team will visit every house** in the village and gather health information of every person and would share it with the department through **Google form.**
- The timing for gathering information would start from **9 AM to 4 PM** every day and the suspected persons would be investigated accordingly.
- The Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur said **elected representatives of Panchayat Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies must be involved to identify persons in their respective areas who have intra or even interstate traveling history.**

### **The Governor appreciates the efforts of 'The Akshay Patra Foundation'**

#### **Why in News?**

Governor Bandaru Dattatraya has appreciated various social organizations for their efforts in the social service sector during Coronavirus epidemic. One such organization, 'The Akshay Patra Foundation', has set an example of humanitarian service by providing cooked food to about two crore people across the country.

- The Governor has praised the Foundation for its efforts and asked to start services in Himachal Pradesh.

#### **About The Akshay Patra Foundation:**

- The Akshaya Patra Foundation is **an NGO in India headquartered in Bengaluru.**
- **It strives to eliminate classroom hunger by implementing the Mid-Day Meal Scheme in the government schools and government-aided schools.**
- Alongside, **Akshaya Patra also aims at countering malnutrition and supporting the right to education of socio-economically disadvantaged children.**
- Since 2000, Akshaya Patra has been concerting all its efforts towards providing fresh and nutritious meals to children on every single school day.
- It is continuously leveraging technology to multiply our reach.
- **The state-of-the-art kitchens have become a subject of study** and have attracted curious visitors from around the world.

### **Chief Minister urges the Union Government for according sanction of Rs. 536 crore for 27 projects**

#### **Why in News?**

Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur urged the Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari for according time bound sanction of **Rs. 536 crore for 27 projects, which includes 17 roads and 10 bridges project under the Central Road Infrastructure Fund for the State**, keeping in view the geo-graphical conditions of the State.

#### **Key projects related Demand:**

- In view the density of **vehicular traffic on Shimla-Matour and Pathankot-Mandi National Highways**, it was essential that **periodic renewal and maintenance of these roads be ensured**. He urged for providing adequate funds for this to the National Highways Authority of India.
- **97 kms Sainj-Aut National Highway-305 including Jalori tunnel** must be included under the **World Bank Green National Highways Project**.
- Chief Minister thanked the Union Minister for sanctioning of **1486 crore Paonta Sahib-Gumma-Fadus Pul road and Rs. 1112 crore for Hamirpur-Mandi roads under World Bank Green National Highways Projects**. He also thanked Union Government for handing over **205 kms. Samdho-Kaza-Gramphu National Highway-505 to State Government for development and maintenance**.
- Jai Ram Thakur urged the Union Minister for early clearance of **69 highways of the State so that work could be started at the earliest**. He thanked him for according in principle approval to **25 National Highways to the State**.
- **Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown thereafter work has been restarted on 11 projects on National Highways by following the guidelines of social distancing and disinfection of the Government of India**.
- National Highways Authority of India has also **restarted seven projects** in the State whereas about 200 workers were engaged.
- Jai Ram Thakur also felt the **need to strengthen the office of National Highways Authority of India** in the State to expedite the work on various projects being executed by NHAI in the State. **He also urged the Union Minister to rationalize toll barrier at Manali as this was causing great inconvenience to the commuters**.

### **CM urges Prime Minister for bringing a special ordinance to provide financial assistance to unorgani**

#### **Why in News?**

Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi for bringing a **special ordinance by the Union Government to provide financial assistance to the unorganized and other workers**, so that the **funds available with the Building and Other Workers Welfare Board can also be used for their welfare**.

#### **Why such Demand?**

- Under the Building and Other Construction Workers Act, 1996 and Cess Act, there is a provision to use this amount for the welfare of buildings and other workers.
- **But it can only be used for registered workers, which is also the order of Supreme Court**.
- The Chief Minister said that about **Rs. 582 crore** is available with the Himachal Pradesh Building and Construction Welfare Board.
- The number of migrant and unorganized workers in the state is very high and in view of the **economic condition of the state government, a lack is being felt to provide help to poor labourers**.

### **Helpline Service for delivery of medicines at doorsteps proves boon to patients**

#### **Why in News?**

Curfew was imposed in Himachal Pradesh from **24th March, 2020 in the wake of COVID-19**. Although some relaxations were given to chemists during curfew, but still the general public and patients were facing difficulties in procuring the medicines.

#### **About Helpline Service for delivery of medicines at doorsteps:**

- The helpline at State Level with **two landline numbers 0177-2626076 and 0177-2626077 and toll free number 1070 on 4th April, 2020**.

- Any person requiring medicine can place his request on these numbers and medicines would be made available at chemist shop nearer to his home where he can make payments after getting the medicines.
- This service has proven boon for more than 948 patients with drugs inspectors acting as bridge between the patients and chemists and have ensured delivery of medicines to needy patients during the curfew.

### SPORTS

## Mirabai Chanu and Jeremy Lalrinnunga qualifies for Tokyo Olympics confirmed by IWF

### Why in News?

On 19th April 2020, the President of **Weightlifting Federation of India (WFI) Shadev Yadav** confirmed that **Mirabai Chanu and Jeremy Lalrinnunga** have been qualified to participate in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games due to their current International rank.

### Key points:

1. In the Olympic qualification process, for each weight class **14 lifters** will be qualified with a maximum of **one lifter per country per category** apart from **the top 8 lifters in the IWF ranking list** and the highest rank lifter in each continent will also qualify.
2. **Jeremy placed 22nd in the 67kg** category in the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) ranking list and **he is the top rank lifer in Asia** and **Mirabai ranked 4th in the 49kg category**.
3. In the video conference of Executive board of IWF on **17-18 March** recommended that to close the qualification process since the **five continental championships were cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic** and the selections were made with the current world rankings.
4. **Mirabai took part in five events out of six mandated in the qualification** rules and since she is in the **3rd spot** in the world rankings she automatically qualifies to the Olympic Games.



### About IWF:

The international governing body of the Olympic Weightlifting, a permanent non-profit organization composed of 192 affiliated National Federations worldwide. The IWF is the world controlling body for weightlifting

**Headquarters**– Budapest, Hungary

**President**– Ursula Papandrea

**Founded**– 1905

### About International Olympic Committee:

The International Olympic Committee is a non-governmental sports organisation founded by Pierre de Coubertin and Demetrios Vikelas on 23rd June 1894.

**Headquarters**– Lausanne, Switzerland

**President**– Thomas Bach

**Director General**– Christophe De Kepper

### World Games 2022 Birmingham

In April 23, 2020, The 11th edition of World Games which is to be held in **Birmingham, Alabama, US (United States)**, unveiled an updated logo and title after being delayed a year because of the Coronavirus pandemic. The World Games 2021 Birmingham has been renamed to World Games 2022 Birmingham

### Key Points:

1. The World Games was **initially scheduled for July 2021, but it will now be held from July 7 to 17, 2022** to accommodate the one-year postponement of the 2020 Summer Olympics.
2. The organizing committee has also unveiled a new website.
3. The International Olympic Committee postponed the **Summer Olympics to 2021, it agreed to retain the name "Tokyo 2020"**. However, the Birmingham Organising Committee (BOC) and the International World Games Association



# JOKTA ACADEMY

(IWGA) decided to adopt a new moniker.

## About World Games:

- The World Games will be held **every 4 years, one year after the Summer Olympic Games**.
- The World Games are organised and governed by the **International World Games Association (IWGA)**, recognized by the **International Olympic Committee (IOC)**.
- The first event of World Games was held in **1981 in Santa Clara, California, United States (US)**.
- So after Santa Clara 1981, the inaugural edition, the World Games will return to the US. Birmingham is the largest city in Alabama and it will be the first time that the city hosts an international multi-sport event.
- Some of the sports that are held at the World Games are **acrobatic gymnastics, ultimate, orienteering, karate, powerlifting, finswimming, squash, korfball, billiards, water skiing, and dance sport**.

## About International World Games Association:

**Headquarters**– Lausanne, Switzerland.

**President**– José PerurenaLópez.

**Chief Executive Officer (CEO)**– Joachim Gossow.

**India lost hosting rights of 2021 Men's World Boxing Championships to Serbia: AIBA**

On April 28, 2020, the **International Boxing Association (AIBA)** terminated an agreement with India, signed in 2017, which resulted in losing of hosting rights of 2021 men's world boxing championship by the latter to Serbia.

- The reason behind termination is **the inability of Boxing Federation of India (BFI) to pay the host fees of USD 4 million due on December 2, 2019**. Now, India would have to pay a cancellation penalty of USD 500.

## Key Points:

- It should be noted that this event had to happen for the **first time in India** which will now be held in Belgrade, Serbia.
- This is the second time for Serbia as a host after the tournament of 1978 in Yugoslavia.
- **Static Point:** Serbia is in the Grey List of Financial Action Task Force (FATF countries), and Indian Banks do not send money to Serbia.



## About BFI:

**Headquarter**– New Delhi

**President**– Ajay Singh

**Secretary-General**– Jay Kowli

## About AIBA:

**Headquarters**– Lausanne, Switzerland

**Interim President**– Mohamed Moustahsane

## 7th Commonwealth youth games

On May 1, 2020, **Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF)**, the organisation responsible for the control of the Commonwealth Games, has **postponed the proposed 7th season of Commonwealth Youth Games 2021 to 2023 following a clash with Tokyo Olympic 2020 dates postponed by a year due to the coronavirus (Covid-19) epidemic**.

- It is to be noted that Commonwealth Youth Games were scheduled to take place from August 1 – 7 2021 in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. It is expected to participate around 1000 athletes in this games, which consists of 8 sports events.

## Key Points:

The 32nd edition of Tokyo Olympics was scheduled to be held from July 23 to August 8, 2020 in Tokyo, Japan with the motto "United by Emotion". But it was postponed for a year to July 23 – August 8, 2021 by the IOC (International Olympic Committee) and the Japanese organisers of Tokyo Olympic & Paralympic games headed by Yoshiro Mori, due to pandemic.

## About Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF):

**Headquarters**– London, England

**Membership**– 72 Commonwealth Games Associations

**President**– Dame Louise Martin

It is currently branded as **Commonwealth Sport**

**Important Sports Affairs**

## JOKTA ACADEMY

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- **China is to host the third edition of the Asian Youth Games (AYG)** in Shantou in November 2021.
- UEFA has postponed all the international matches that had been pushed back to June to further notice.
- The International Olympic Committee (IOC) announced that 29 June 2021 has been set as the new deadline for the qualification period of the Tokyo Olympics.
- FIFA Under-17 Women's World Cup was scheduled to be played in India between November 2nd and 21st postponed due to the Coronavirus pandemic.
- Hockey India donated an additional Rs 75 lakhs towards the PM-CARES Fund to take its total contribution to Rs 1 crore to tackle worsening COVID-19 pandemic in the country.
- The late Kobe Bryant has been selected as a member of the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame.
- The Independent Member Federation Sanctions Panel (IMFSP) of the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) has banned the Malaysia & Thailand weightlifters from competing in Tokyo Olympics 2020.
- England's all-rounder Ben Stokes has been named as the leading cricketer in the world 2020 by Wisden.
- According to the FIFA (Federation Internationale de Football Association)/Coca-Cola World Ranking 2020, released on April 09, 2020, Indian football team retained its 108th position with 1187 points.
- According to the Boxing Federation of India's (BFI) Executive Director R K Sacheti, India will host the Women's and Men's Asian Boxing Championships 2020 in November-December as he expressed confidence that by then the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic would have been completely under control. However, the host city will be decided by BFI after things return to normal.
- Ferrari's Charles Leclerc wins the Formula One Esports Chinese Virtual Grand Prix championship.
- World Badminton Champion, P V Sindhu has been selected as one of the ambassadors for Badminton World Federation (BWF)'s "I am badminton" awareness campaign.
- The 11th edition of World Games which is to be held in Birmingham, Alabama, US (United States) has unveiled an updated logo and title after being delayed a year because of the Coronavirus pandemic.
- 16-year-old Iranian refugee, Alireza Firouzja beats World Chess Champion Magnus Carlsen in the final of the Banter Blitz Cup 2020 and to claim the \$14,000 prize.
- Former Pakistan skipper and Women Cricket team Captain, Sana Mir announced her retirement from international cricket at the age of 34, ending her 15 year career currently ranking 9th in ICC's ODI and 41st in T20I bowlers list.
- Mathias Boe, 39 years old, badminton doubles player from Denmark announced retirement from international badminton.
- The Pakistan Cricket Board has banned Pakistan batsman Umar Akmal from all forms of cricket for a period of three years.
- Indian middle-distance runner, Jhuma Khatun was banned for 4 years for using banned substances (Steroids) by the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) for the doping case from 2018.
- India lost the hosting rights of the men's World boxing championship 2021 to Serbia.
- Deepak Agarwal has been banned by the International Cricket Council (ICC) from all cricket for a period of 2 years.

### DEFENCE

- Ministry of Defence (MoD) has received foreign direct investment (FDI) of \$8.82 million (around Rs.51.93 crore) during the period April 2000 and December 2019.
- The Naval Dockyard at Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh has designed 'Portable Multi-feed Oxygen Manifold (MOM)'.
- The Indian Air Force (IAF) has launched 'Operation Sanjeevani' and air-lifted 6.2 tonnes of essential medical supplies to the Maldives via transport aircraft C-130J as assistance in the fight against the COVID 19.
- The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) is to provide COVID-19 protective gear and healthcare paraphernalia for its over 40,000 personnel.
- Ministry of Defence (MoD) has allowed temporary employment of National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets under 'Exercise NCC Yogdan'.
- Indian Air Force (IAF) has rendered continuous support in the fight against Coronavirus by providing medical supplies to all the states in the country. Medical supplies are transported to equip the state



## JOKTA ACADEMY

governments/Union Territories (UTs) and supporting agencies to combat the contagion effectively and efficiently.

- Amid 21-days nationwide lockdown in India, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has been using scientific endeavours to develop products in an accelerated manner to combat COVID-19 pandemic.
- The US military has requested an additional \$20 billion fund to strengthen naval, airborne and ground-based operations in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Union Home Minister Amit Shah has directed the Border Security Force (BSF) to enhance vigil along the Indian borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh, especially in the non-fenced areas of India.
- Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) has launched an e-office application named 'e-karyalay'.
- Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) report titled "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2019" stated that India has become the third-largest military spender in the world, after the US and China.

### BOOKS & AUTHORS:

- The Pulitzer Prize-winning American reporter for The Washington Post, **Mary Jordan** has written a book titled '**The Art of Her Deal: The Untold Story of Melania Trump**'.
- The book '**The Wizenard Series: Season One**' is created by American Basket baller **Kobe Bryant & authored by Wesley King** tops the **New York Times** middle-grade hardcover list, which is to be released on April 19, 2020. It is published by Kobe Bryant's Granity Studios (April 1, 2020).
- Canadian American comedian & actor **Jim Carrey** and writer **Dana Vachon** authored a novel "**Memoirs and Misinformation**" a fearless and semi-autobiographical novel about the reconstruction of personality.
- A book titled "**Shuttling to the Top: The Story of P V Sindhu**" authored by **Krishnaswamy V** was published by HarperCollins in Amazon digital platform along with other two books, amid the lockdown due to Coronavirus.
- A book titled "**How the Onion Got Its Layers**" authored by **Sudha Murty** was published by Puffin.
- **Uma Balasubramaniam** has authored a biography on "**Sayajirao Gaekwad III**" titled '**Sayajirao Gaekwad III: The Maharaja of Baroda**'.

### RANKS AND INDICES:

- The Asian Development Bank has released its annual economic publication "Asian Development Outlook 2020". In its annual flagship economic publication "Asian Development Outlook 2020", the Asian Development Bank has projected India's growth to slow down to 4% in the current fiscal year i.e. 2020-2021.
- Forbes has launched the 34th annual world's billionaires list named as "The Richest in 2020".
- Doordarshan has emerged among the highest watched channel in India for week ended 3rd April.
- The "Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker" has identified India's response to Covid-19 as one of the most stringent in the world.
- Global Network Against Food Crises report officially released by the UN World Food program.
- World Press Freedom Index 2020 murders of journalists in India in 2019, as against six in the year 2018 and the security situation for the country's media might seem on the face.
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) published satellite data that shows decreased air pollution in north India.
- The second edition of the Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings, was released. In the 2020 THE Impact Rankings, 766 universities from 85 countries have been included.
- In a progressive move, the chemical & petrochemical industry became the Indian top exporting sector for FY 2019-20 as the export of chemicals increased by 7.43% to Rs 2.68 lakh crore during the April-January period of FY 2019-20 in comparison to the corresponding period of 2018-19.
- National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC) under National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) assessment states that India's critical sectors may fall prey to inimical forces that

could use relaxations in geofencing restrictions granted to employees working from home to make cyber attacks.

- UNESCO has published its most recent figures for out-of-school children, as schools reopen progressively across the globe.
- According to a CRISIL Research report, Karnataka retained its 1st position in terms of total installed renewable capacity in FY20 followed by Tamil Nadu(2nd) & Gujarat(3rd).
- Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) released its Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID) 2020

### Agreements and MoUs

- An online delivery platform, Dunzo has partnered with packaged foods company Britannia Industries to deliver range of products to its consumers.
- Vaccine manufacturer Indian Immunologicals (IIL) partnered with Australia's Griffith University to do research and develop a vaccine for COVID-19.
- CSIR-National Chemical Laboratory (NCL) Pune, Maharashtra has designed and developed Digital IR Thermometer to help in the mitigation of the Coronavirus outbreak.
- Larsen & Toubro (L&T) signs agreement with the Indian Army for setting up an advanced IT-enabled system to operate the Armed Forces network under the Network of Spectrum (NFS).
- The Competition Commission of India (CCI) approved the proposed acquisition of 80.1% share capital of ABB Management Holding AG by Hitachi Limited from ABB Ltd, where ABB Management will hold the entire power grid business of ABB.
- Hindustan Unilever has partnered with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to support India to combat COVID-19.
- Domino's Pizza has partnered with ITC Foods to launch "Domino's Essentials".
- Flipkart Private Limited inks partnership with ICICI Lombard General Insurance Company Limited & Go Digit General Insurance to launch two health insurance policies.
- Bharat Biotech in tie-up with the US-based company FluGen and University of Wisconsin Madison to develop a vaccine named "Coro-Flu" to fight against COVID-19.
- The Board of the Investment Manager of IndiGrid, India's first Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT) in the power sector, has approved the acquisition of Gurgaon-Palwal Transmission Limited (GPTL), Sterlite power with a value of Rs 1,080 crore.
- United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN), has inked an memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS), a non-profit organisation based in Jaipur, Rajasthan, to promote consumers to contribute to the global development agenda as well as support their respective governments in times of global crisis like coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.
- YES Bank has announced the extension of its strategic bancassurance relationship with the Max Life Insurance.
- Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) in partnership with the State Bank of India (SBI) has launched a Unified Payments Interface (UPI) based payment platform, Bharat InstaPay to enable all types of channel partners of BSNL to digitize their payment transactions on a round the clock basis/ real-time basis.
- Central Drug Research Institute has inked an MoU with King George's Medical University, Lucknow to sequence the virus strains obtained from COVID-19 patients in Uttar Pradesh.
- The Aditya Birla group's Hindalco Industries Ltd. has acquired Aleris Corporation through its wholly owned subsidiary Novelis Inc. for an enterprise value of \$2.8 billion (Rs 21,295 crores). Hindalco is now one of the world's largest aluminium makers.
- Tata Consultancy Services, a leading global IT services, consulting, and business solutions organization, and Amway, a global leader in direct selling, have entered into a strategic partnership to transform the latter's global technology operations.
- Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) inks partnership with Mastercard to issue virtual and physical debit cards.
- Tech Mahindra Limited, an Indian multinational subsidiary of the Mahindra Group, has entered into the partnership with US (United States) based IBM (International Business Machines Corporation) to establish

## JOKTA ACADEMY

innovation centres with the aim to boost digital transformation & encourage adoption of more hybrid cloud-based technologies among its global customers.

- NIIT (National Institute of Information Technology) Limited announced that its US (United States) subsidiary has signed a managed service agreement with a US-based education technology (EdTech) company to provide virtual services to education providers.
- The Federal Bank's board has approved its purchase to acquire an additional stake of up to 4% in the equity capital of IDBI Federal Life Insurance Company Limited (IFLIC) from Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) Bank, increasing the total shareholding in the life insurance joint venture to 30% from 26%.
- Vodafone idea ties up with Paytm have launched the 'Recharge Saathi' program.
- Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT), Hyderabad, has collaborated with Hyderabad-based integrated pharmaceutical company, LAXAI Life Sciences, to develop and manufacture Active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) and drug intermediates.
- The Prudential Mutual Fund Bharat-22 ETF of ICICI picked up share of value Rs.59 Crore in the National Aluminium Company (NALCO) through the open market transaction.
- To raise public awareness on the novel coronavirus, the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) has partnered with Amazon India, to launch the "Fight Against COVID-19 #AwareIndiaSafeIndia; Digital Campaign".
- Nutanix, a leader in enterprise cloud computing, and Wipro Limited, a leading global information technology, consulting and business process services company announced the launch of Wipro's Digital Database Services (DDS) powered by Nutanix Era and Nutanix HCI software.

### Appointments

#### Appointments:

Name	Appointed as	Other Info
Pravin Rao	Chairman of Nasscom	
Anurag Srivastava	Spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs	succeeding Mr Raveesh Kumar.
Shafali Verma	Pepsico Brand Ambassador	
Parag Raja	MD & CEO of Bharti AXA Life Insurance	
Anamika Roy Rashtrawar	IFFCO Tokio General Insurance MD & CEO	Succeeding Warendra Sinha
Sanjay Agarwal	MD & CEO of AU Small finance Bank	
Tammanah Bhatia	Brand Ambassador of Mobile Premier League	
Mahabaleswara MS	Karnataka Bank MD & CEO	
Birupaksha Mishra	Executive Director of Union Bank of India	
Sara Ali Khan	Brand Ambassador of James Bullough Lansing (JBL)'s campaign -"Live it Real, Live it Raw"	
Ajay Mahajan	MD & CEO of CARE Ratings	replace Rajesh Mokashi
Vineet Arora	MD & CEO of Paytm General Insurance Ltd	Prior to this, he has served as managing director and chief executive officer of Aegon Life Insurance Company.

## JOKTA ACADEMY

MS Dhoni	Brand Ambassador of Pokerstars India	Replaced Nawazuddin Siddiqui
Justice Dipankar Datta	Bombay High Court Chief Justice	Replaced Justice BP Dharmadhikari
Justice Biswanath Somadder	Meghalaya CJI	Replaced Justice Mohammad Rafiq.
Justice Mohammad Rafiq	Orissa CJI	Replaced Justice Sanju Panda
Rana Ashutosh Kumar Singh	Deputy Managing Director of SBI	
N Kamakodi	MD & CEO of City Union Bank of India	
David Li	Chief Executive Officer of Huawei Telecommunications India.	Replaced Jay Chen
Noel Quinn	CEO of HSBC	
Rakesh Sharma	International Motorcycle Manufacturers Association (IMMA)	
Sanjay Kothari	Chief Vigilance Commissioner	
Shiv Das Meena	chairman and managing director of Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO)	
TS Tirumurti	India's new Ambassador/Permanent Representative to the UN	
Namrata S Kumar	Indian Ambassador to Slovenia	
Jaideep Mazumdar	Indian Ambassador to Austria	
Deepak Mittal	Indian Ambassador to Qatar	
Piyush Srivastava	Indian Ambassador to Bahrain	
Rajiv Kumar	chairperson of the Public Enterprises Selection Board (PESB)	
Suresh N. Patel	Vigilance Commssioner	
J. Arunkumar	head coach of the USA (United States of America)men's national team.	successor of interim coach James Pamment.

### AWARDS:

Name	Awarded as
Naveen Patnaik	Hero to Animals Award by PETA
Bob Weighton	World's oldest man by Guinness World Record
Abdelouahab Aissaoui	13th International Arab fiction prize 2020.

## JOKTA ACADEMY

Tata Power	Edison Award for social innovation.
UST Global	2020 most innovative AI application award for societal impact from Microsoft.
Adam Higginbotham	William E. Colby Award.

### IMPORTANT DAYS & THEMES

Day	Celebrated as	Aim/ Theme
April 1	Utkal Diwas	
April 2	World Autism Awareness Day	Theme: The theme of the 2020 World Autism Awareness Day is "The transition of adulthood."
April 4	International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance	
April 5	International Day of Conscience	The day aims to promote a culture of peace with love and conscience.
April 5	National Maritime Day	The theme for the 57th National Maritime Day is "Sustainable shipping for a sustainable planet."
April 6	Mahavir Jayanti	
April 6	International Day of Sport for Development and Peace.	
April 7	International Day of Reflection	
April 7	World Health Day	Theme: Support Nurses And Midwives.
April 10	World Homeopathy Day	Theme: "Linking research with education and clinical practice: Advancing scientific collaborations".
April 11	National Safe Motherhood Day	The day aims to raise awareness about the proper healthcare of
		women and maternity facilities to pregnant and lactating women.
April 11	National Pet Day	
April 12	International Day of Human Space Flight	
April 14	World Chagas Disease day	The day aims to raise the visibility and public awareness of people with Chagas Disease and the



## JOKTA ACADEMY

		resources needed for the prevention, control and elimination of the disease.
April 14	Ambedkar Jayanti	
April 18	World Heritage Day	The theme of World Heritage Day 2020 is "Shared Culture", 'Shared heritage' and 'Shared responsibility'.
April 21	Civil Services Day	The Civil Services Day celebrates all the civil servants who dedicated their lives to the cause of citizens.
April 21	World Creativity and Innovation Day	The main objective of the day is to encourage people to use new ideas, make new decisions, and do creative thinking.
April 21	Secretarys Day	The day aims to celebrate the administrative professionals who work as the glue in keeping a business together.
April 22	World Earth Day	'Climate Action'
April 23	English Language Day	
April 23	World Book and Copyright Day	Slogan for 2020: KL Baca –Caring through Reading
April 23	International Girls in ICT Day	
April 24	National Panchayati Raj Day	
April 24	International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy	
April 25	World Malaria Day	Theme: Zero Malaria Starts with me
April 25	International Delegates Day	
April 25	World Veterinary Day	The theme for 2020 World Veterinary Day is "Environmental protection for improving animal and human health."
April 26	Basava Jayanti	
April 26	World Intellectual Property Day	The World Intellectual Property Day 2020 carves a pathway to a green future. Hence, WIPO organizes a campaign "Innovate for a green future" that aims to create awareness about the need to preserve the environment.

## JOKTA ACADEMY

April 26	International Chernobyl Disaster Remembrance Day	
April 28	Workers' Memorial Day	'Stop the Pandemic in the Workplace.'
April 28	World Day for Safety and Health at Work	
April 29	International Dance Day	
April 29	International Guide Dog Day	
April 30	Ayushman Bharat Diwas	The day aims to promote affordable medical facilities in remote areas of the country based on the Socio-Economic Caste Census database
April 30	International Jazz Day	

### OBITUARY:

Name	Profession	Location
Gita Ramjee	Virologist	South Africa
Bill Withers	Songwriter, Singer & Guitarist	United States
Jock Edwards	Cricketer	New Zealand
Mahmud Jibril	Prime Minister	Libya
MK Arjunan	Music Composer	Kerala
Forrest Compton	Actor	
Kalinga Sasi	Actor	Kerala
Prakash	Kannada Comic Actor	Karnataka
Brahm Kanchibotla	Journalist	
Radomir Antic	Real Madrid Coach	Serbia
Honor Blackman	Actress	
Hazarilal Raguwanshi	Politician	Madhya Pradesh
John Prine	Folk Singer	
Ramkrishna Dwivedi	Politician	
Donato Sabia	Sports	Italy
Shanti Hiranand Chawla	Hindustani Classical Singer	
Jackie du Preez	Cricketer	Zimbabwe
Peter Boneti	Goalkeeper	UK
Sir Stirling Moss	Motor Race Driver	
Tim Brooke Taylor	Comedian	UK
MV Rajasekharan	Politician	
Ashok Desai	Former Attorney General of India	
Rifat Chadirji	Father of modern Iraqi architecture	
Ranjit Chowdhry	Actor	
Gene Deitch	Actor	
Rudratej Singh	BMW India CEO	
Laisenia Qarase	Former FIJI Prime Minister	FIJI

## JOKTA ACADEMY

Abba Kyari	The Chief of Staff to Nigeria's president Muhammadu Buhari	
Usha Ganguly	Eminent theatre director, actor and activist	West Bengal
Basanta Das	Former Rajya Sabha member	Odisha
Graeme Watson	cricketer	Australia
Ronny' Roy	Photo Journalist	
Devanand Konwar	Former Governor of Tripura and Bihar	
James M. Beggs	Ex-NASA Administrator	
Bijay Mishra	Noted Odia Dramatist & playwriters	
Irfan Khan	Actor	Jaipur
Michael Robinson	Former Liverpool striker	
Troy Sneed	Singer	
Rishi Kapoor	Actor	Mumbai

### STATES MISCELLANEOUS AFFAIRS

- The Andhra Pradesh government has started distributing pensions at the doorstep to 58,44,240 beneficiaries.
- India COVID-19 patients chart Tamil Nadu tops with 411 cases as 102 people tested positive.
- Bihar Government has decided to undertake to screen of over one lakh eighty thousand people again who had come from outside after 22nd of March.
- Odisha government, in collaboration with the UNICEF, launched an online cultural competition among children to keep them engaged at home during the lockdown period.
- 'V Safe Tunnel' has been installed in Telangana to sanitize people.
- Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar has announced that all school students from class 1 to 8 in the state will be promoted to the next academic session without final examination as the schools are closed due to Coronavirus lockdown.
- Sikkim Governor Ganga Prasad committed to donate 30 per cent of his salary over the next one year to PM CARES Fund in view of the country's collective battle against COVID-19.
- West Bengal state government has asked the Centre to release Rs.5,013 crore as the revenue deficit grant to the state.
- With the closure of educational institutions and suspension of annual examinations due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Odisha government has planned to start online classes for Class 10th students of government schools.
- Bihar government has transferred one thousand rupees each to the bank accounts of over one lakh migrant workers stranded in other parts of the country due to nationwide lockdown.
- In Ladakh, the UT administration has started the process of the establishment of first ever COVID-19 Testing Laboratory.
- Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has announced a 5T plan to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus.
- Andhra Pradesh state government has placed an order for 3 lakh rapid testing kits for COVID-19.
- The Chhattisgarh police developed the app 'Rakhsa Sarv', with the help of Noida-based startup Mobcoder.
- The government of Telangana invested swiftly to deploy India's first automated "COVID-19 Monitoring System App" by Vera Smart Healthcare.
- In Karnataka, the Primary and Secondary Education department has come out with a unique idea to start a You Tube channel that can invoke in children a passion for learning and creative activities during the lockdown period.
- Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh had announced to provide Rs. 2000 each to those Manipuri who are stranded outside due to the nationwide lockdown.
- In Madhya Pradesh, the State Government announced an insurance cover of 50 lakh rupees for police personnel and other government employees engaged in the fight against Corona virus.

## JOKTA ACADEMY

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- In Assam, the state Cabinet has decided to deduct 30 percent of the monthly salaries of the Chief Minister, Ministers and all MLAs for one year.
- Kendriya Bhandar that functions under the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has taken the unique initiative of providing "Essentials Kits" to needy families in Delhi due to the COVID-19 crisis.
- Arunachal Pradesh government has launched an app called "COVIDCARE".
- Odisha has become the first state to extend the 21-day lockdown till April 30.
- The Haryana State Government has set up a 24x7 Toll-free helpline facility for procurement during Rabi Season 2020 and also ensuring social distancing norms.
- The Delhi government launched 'Operation SHIELD' in 21 containment zones in the state.
- Haryana state government has announced that it is to double the salary of Doctors, Nurses and other medical professionals dealing with COVID-19 patients.
- The West Central Railway's Coach Rehabilitation Workshop (CRWS) in Madhya Pradesh's (MP) Bhopal city, has created a mobile doctor booth called "CHARAK" to eliminate the possibility of physical contact between the doctor and the coronavirus (COVID-19) infected patient.
- J&K government released Rs.183 crore to the beneficiaries under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).
- Government of Manipur starts a new initiative titled 'Food Bank' in view of the threat of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19).
- Under Western Railway, Ahmedabad railway station at Kalupur, Gujarat becomes the 1st station of Indian Railways (IR) to install a "Walk Through Mass Sanitizing Tunnel".
- The has been set up in India by All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Rishikesh along with Bharat Heavy Electronics Limited (BHEL), a Government of India Navratna company in the defence sector.
- Kerala becomes the 1st state of India to start clinical trial plasma therapy for COVID-19 treatment.
- Jim Corbett National Park, the India's oldest forested wildlife sanctuary located in the Nainital district of Uttarakhand, has become the India's 1st quarantine centre for animals with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19).
- Uttar Pradesh (UP) Government has launched two portals namely the Annapurna portal and the Supply Mitra portals for the convenience of the food needs for the people of the state during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Andhra Pradesh (AP) Chief Minister (CM) Jagan Mohan Reddy launches 'YSR Nirman' an online platform to help various departments of the State to procure cement from suppliers for government works such as Polavaram irrigation project, housing and roads & also display availability of cement demand and supply on a real-time basis.
- The Delhi Government has launched 'Assess Koro Na' mobile application.
- In Madhya Pradesh, the state government has decided that the health workers who are directly engaged in the treatment of Corona patients will be given a service amount of Rs 10 thousand every month as honorarium.
- Chandigarh city uses Vehicle tracking applications and GPS (Global Positioning System) enabled smartwatches for waste collection drivers in its fight against COVID-19 pandemic.
- Border Roads Organisation (BRO) constructed bridge over Subansiri river in Arunachal Pradesh in a record span of just 27 days.
- Sikkim State Cooperative Supply and Marketing Federation Ltd (SIMFED) today launched a mobile ration van in Gangtok, for doorstep delivery of essential commodities and food.
- In order to provide health services in the wake of COVID-19 Pandemic, the Himachal Pradesh Health Department has come up with a unique idea of providing free online medical consultation to sick people at their residence through e-sanjeevani-opd.
- The Assorted Condiments kit scheme of the Tamil Nadu State Government was inaugurated by the State Cooperative department Minister Shri Sellu K Raju in Madurai.
- Border Roads Organisation (BRO) constructed the Daporijo bridge over the Subansiri river.
- Uttar Pradesh government ordered complete sealing of the Delhi-Noida border till further orders as a precautionary measure to contain the spread of COVID-19 infection in Gautam Budhha Nagar district.
- Pune Municipal Corporation under Smart Cities Mission (SCM) has launched a mobile application named "Saiyam".
- Uttar Pradesh government decides to move forward on plasma therapy to treat the patients of COVID 19 and will increase pool testing of the samples.

## JOKTA ACADEMY

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- TCS iON, an strategic business unit of Tata Consultancy Services a leading global IT services, consulting and business solutions organization, has partnered with the Telangana State Council of Higher Education (TSCHE), a statutory body of the Government of Telangana State, to prepare college students in the state for future job readiness.
- The state government of Rajasthan has partnered with healthcare startup MedCords to launch 'Aayu & Sehat Sathi' app to fight against COVID-19.
- Karnataka chief minister BS Yediyurappa launched a pilot project for people to order essential goods either by calling over the phone or using WhatsApp during the lockdown put in place to break the chain of coronavirus infect
- Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar announced that an assistance of Rs 1,000 will be provided to all families that do not have ration cards but were identified by self-help groups of 'Jeevika' in the state
- The government of Gujarat has given the approval of the third edition of his government's 'Sujalam Sufalam Jal Sanchay Abhiyan' amid Coronavirus lockdown.
- The Administration of Pathanamthitta district in Kerala has launched a vehicle called 'Tiranga' (Total India Remote Analysis Nirogya Abhiyaan) for rapid screening of COVID-19 symptoms.
- Indian herpetologists have discovered a new species of viper family in Pakke Tiger Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh, and the green pit viper species was discovered by a team led by Zeeshan Mirza.
- The Karnataka State government launched the "Apthamitra" helpline.
- Unique and first of its kind facility in the country, a Mobile Virology Diagnostics and Research Laboratory has been inaugurated in Hyderabad at the ESI medical college.
- Himachal Pradesh government has started eSanjeevaniOPD through which free online medical consultation & general health advice will be provided to the people at their residence throughout the state from doctors of different medical colleges from 9:30 AM to 4:00 PM on all working days.
- Jammu and Kashmir State Legal Services Authority (JKLSA) has launched a helpline under 'Serve-the-Seniors Initiative'.
- Uttar Pradesh has become the 1st state with a software-based in-house facility of virtual courts, where requisite infrastructure in Allahabad High Court and all its courts for hearing cases through video conferencing.
- Assam government has launched a new scheme named Dhanwantari.
- A government hospital in Ernakulam here has deployed a robot to serve food and medicines to coronavirus patients with an aim to reduce risk of infections for doctors and health workers.
- Andhra Pradesh (AP) Chief Minister (CM) Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy re-launched zero interest loan scheme for Women Self-Help Groups (SHGs) by releasing a sum of Rs 1,400 crores to 8.78 lakh SHGs (to benefit about 91 lakh members) for the welfare of women.
- Madhya Pradesh government has launched the "Jivan Shakti Yojana" for women and aims at providing home-based employment for women.
- The King George Medical University in Uttar Pradesh became the first government hospital to launch plasma therapy to treat COVID-19. The first dose of plasma therapy was given to a 58-year old patient.
- Minister of State for the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) Jitendra Singh announced that five out of the eight states in the North-East are corona-free now.
- The Andhra Pradesh government has decided to come up with a special package to ensure that not even a single employee out of the nine lakh workforce in Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) is sacked.
- Uttar Pradesh government has banned all public functions till the 30th of June.
- The Assam government announced Rs 50 lakh insurance cover for journalists reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic in the state.
- Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that in this time of Corona crisis it is necessary that every person has good immunity power, so that this virus does not affect us.
- In Gujarat, the government has banned all social and religious gathering and all kinds of public functions in view of Covid 19 pandemic.
- In Madhya Pradesh, a fine of Rs.1000 will be imposed now for spitting in public places in the state.
- Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Y. S.Jaganmohan Reddy has launched the 'Jagananna Vidya Deevena' Scheme today at Tedepalli, in Guntur District in AP.



- Gujarat State Government has launched a unique initiative called 'Umbare Aanganwadi (means doorstep Aanganwadi) under ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) programme to reach out to children during the lockdown.
- The Medical and Health Department of Andhra Pradesh (AP) has launched 'Covid Pharma', a mobile application(app) to keep a track of people buying medicines over-the-counter (OTC) for cough, cold and fever from medical stores across the state.
- AIR Guwahati is broadcasting radio classes for 9th and 10th Standard students in association with Secondary Education Board of Assam.
- In Madhya Pradesh, the state government has decided to set up Deendayal committees at the ward and Panchayat levels to ensure benefits of welfare schemes reach people during the ongoing coronavirus crisis.
- The West Bengal Government has announced more relaxations in 8 Green zone Districts during the ongoing lockdown.
- Pratirodhi Bondhu are working as volunteers in creating awareness including social distancing across Assam.
- Maharashtra's Kalyan Dombivli Municipal Corporation (KDMC) has recently launched a dashboard about the COVID-19 situation in the KDMC area.
- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a USD 346 million (around Rs 2,616 crore) loan to Maharashtra state government to provide reliable power connections in rural areas of Maharashtra.
- In Uttar Pradesh, Agra Smart City has created a GIS dashboard which will show various hotspots, heat map, positive cases, and recovered cases.
- In Gujarat, the government today appointed nodal officers for various states to bring back stranded students, travellers, pilgrims and working professionals.
- Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) converted one of its buses into a Mobile Fever Clinic in Mangaluru amid COVID-19 pandemic.
- Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has announced that state government offices, including the secretariat, will resume work with 30% staff.