

CURRENT AFFAIR

JULY 2020

HIMACHAL PRADESH
INTERNATIONAL
NATIONAL



JOKTA ACADEMY

INDEX

SR. NO.	TOPICS	PAGE NO.
1	POLITY AND GOVERNANCE	2-22
2	ECONOMICS	22-33
3	INDIA AND WORLD	34-42
4	ENVIRONMENT	42-51
5	SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY	51-57
6	HEALTH	57-61
7	DEFENSE	61-64
8	HIMACHAL PRADESH CURRENT AFFAIRS	65-71
9	SPORTS	71-73
10	BOOK AND AUTHORS	73-73
11	SUMMITS AND CONFERENCES	73-74
12	RANK AND INDICES	74-75
13	AGREEMENTS AND MOU	75-78
14	APPOINTMENTS	78-80
15	AWARDS AND HONORS	81-82
16	DAYS AND THEMES	82-85
17	OBITUARY	85-87
18	STATES MISCELLANEOUS	87-91

Polity and Governance

State of the World Population 2020: UNFPA

Why in News?

Recently, the **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)** has released the **State of the World Population 2020** report, titled '**Against my will: defying the practices that harm women and girls and undermine equality**'.

Key Highlights:

The report highlights the **19 human rights violation against the women** – ranging from breast ironing to virginity testing, which further, deteriorate the living conditions & status of the women in society.

Worldwide Prospects-

The number of “**missing women**” in the world has more than **doubled over the past 50 years** – from 61 million in 1970 to a cumulative 142.6 million in 2020.

- In Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan excess female mortality of girls below 5 years of age was under 3 per cent.
- Every year, millions of girls globally are subjected to practices that harm them physically and emotionally, with the full knowledge and consent of their families, friends and communities.

India Specific Data:

- One in three girls missing globally due to sex selection, both pre- and post-natal, is from India, i.e. 46 million out of the total 142 million.
- India has the **highest rate of excess female deaths at 13.5 per 1,000** female births or one in nine deaths of females below the age of 5 due to postnatal sex selection.
- In India, around 460,000 girls went missing at birth, which means they were not born due to sex-selection biases, each year between 2013 and 2017.
- India (40%) along with China (50%) account for around 90% of the estimated 1.2 million girls lost annually to female foeticide.

Female Genital Mutilation:

- **It involves the partial or total removal of external female genitalia** or other injuries to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

- The practise has no health benefits for girls and women and can cause severe bleeding, problems in urinating, cysts, infections, as well as complications in childbirth and increased risk of newborn deaths.
- An estimated **4.1 million girls** will be subjected to female genital mutilation in 2020.

Extreme Bias against Daughters, in favour of sons:

- An extreme and continuing preference for sons over daughters in some countries has fuelled gender-biased sex selection or extreme neglect which leads to girls' death as children, resulting in missing females.
 - The report examines the issue of missing women by studying sex ratio imbalances at birth as a result of **gender-biased sex selection** as well as excess female mortality.
- The advent of technology and increased **access to ultrasound imaging allow parents to terminate a foetus** after knowing its gender.
 - Due to this, the number of girls missing due to female foeticide exceed those that are missing because of postnatal sex selection.
- These skewed numbers change the population proportions and result in '**marriage squeeze**'.
 - **Marriage squeeze:** It happens when prospective grooms far outnumber prospective brides, which further results in **human trafficking** for marriage as well as child marriages.
- These violations result in fewer choices for females and putting them under the sexual, economic and legal control of men, curbing their human rights.

Child Marriage:

- Every day, around **33,000 girls under age 18** are forced into marriage, usually to much older men.
- In India, child marriage is directly linked to poverty, poor education and geographic location and the rural and urban divide.

Covid-19 Induced Challenges:

- The economic disruptions and income-loss because of the **Covid-19 pandemic** are likely to **increase violence against girls and women** due to intensified unwantedness of daughters and gender discrimination.
- The Covid-19 pandemic threatens to **reverse the progress made in ending some harmful practices worldwide**.
- In India, Covid-19 has reduced **access to contraception and abortion services**, which is likely to lead to an increase in **unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions**.

Initiatives Appreciated:

- The report pointed out that successful education-related interventions include the provision of cash transfers conditional on school attendance or support to cover the costs of school fees, books, uniforms and supplies.
- The report took note of the successful cash-transfer initiative such as '**Apni Beti Apna Dhan**' in India.

Way Forward:

- we need a societal shift in attitudes which hold a different yardstick for women and this is only possible through targeted social and behaviour change communication interventions.
- We have to scale up efforts to keep girls in school longer and teach them life skills and to engage men and boys in social change.

About United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA):

- It was created in **1969**, the same year the United Nations General Assembly declared “parents have the exclusive right to determine freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children.
- It calls for the realization of reproductive rights for all and supports access to a wide range of sexual and reproductive health services including voluntary family planning, maternal health care and comprehensive sexuality education.
- **Its mission is to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person’s potential is fulfilled.**

Committee on Criminal Law Reform

Why in news?

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has constituted a national level ‘Committee for the Reform of Criminal Laws’.

Key Points

Committee For Reform In Criminal Law:

- The committee has been constituted under **Ranbir Singh** and several other members.
- The committee would be gathering opinions online by consulting with experts and collating material for their report to the government.
- The consultation exercise would start on **4th July 2020** and go on for the next three months.

Background of Criminal Justice System:

- **The codification of criminal laws in India** was done during the **British rule**, which more or less remains the same even in the 21st century.
- **Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay** is said to be the chief architect of codifications of criminal laws in India.
- Criminal law in India is governed by **Indian Penal Code, 1860, Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, and Indian Evidence Act, 1872, etc.**

Need for Reforms:

- **Colonial Era Laws:** The criminal justice system is a replica of the British colonial jurisprudence, which was designed with the purpose of ruling the nation and not serving the citizens.
- **Ineffectiveness:** The purpose of the criminal justice system was to protect the rights of the innocents and punish the guilty, but nowadays the system has become a tool of harassment of common people.
- **Pendency of Cases:** According to **Economic Survey 2018-19** there are about 3.5 crore cases pending in the judicial system, especially in district and subordinate courts, which leads to actualisation of the maxim **“Justice delayed is justice denied.”**
- **Huge Undertrials:** India has one of the world’s largest number of undertrial prisoners.
 - **According to NCRB -Prison Statistics India (2015), 67.2% of our total prison population comprises undertrial prisoners**
- **Investigation:** Corruption, huge workload and accountability of police is a major hurdle in speedy and transparent delivery of justice.

- **Madhav Menon Committee:** It submitted its report in 2007, suggesting various recommendations on reforms in the CJSI.
- **Malimath Committee Report:** It submitted its report in 2003 on the Criminal Justice System of India (CJSI).
 - The Committee had opined that the existing system “weighed in favour of the accused and did not adequately focus on justice to the victims of crime.”
 - It has provided various recommendations to be made in the CJSI, which were not implemented.

Suggestions for Reforms

Criminal law is considered to be the most apparent expression of the **relationship between a state and its citizens**. Therefore, any revision to the CJSI needs to be done while keeping several principles in mind, which are:

- **The reason for victimization ought to be given** a major thrust in reforming laws to identify the rights of crime victims.
 - **For Example:** Launch of victim and **witness protection schemes** use of victim impact statements, increased victim participation in criminal trials, enhanced access of victims to compensation and restitution.
- **The construction of new offences** and reworking of the existing classification of offences must be guided by the principles of criminal jurisprudence which have substantially altered in the past four decades.
 - **For Example:** Criminal liability could be graded better to assign the degree of punishments. New types of punishments like community service orders, restitution orders, and other aspects of restorative and reformatory justice could also be brought in its fold.
- **The classification of offences** must be done in a manner conducive to management of crimes in the future.
 - Many chapters of the IPC are overloaded at several places. The chapters on offences against public servants, contempt of authority, public tranquility, and trespass can be redefined and narrowed.
- **Guiding principles need to be developed** after sufficient debate before criminalising an act as a crime.
 - **Unprincipled criminalisation** not only leads to the creation of new offences on unscientific grounds, but also arbitrariness in the criminal justice system.
- The discretion of judges in deciding the quantum and nature of sentence differently for crimes of the same nature should be based on principles of judicial precedent.

What are the concerns?

- **Timeframe** - Comprehensive legal reform requires careful consideration and a good deal of deliberation.
- An apparently short timeframe and limited scope for public consultation has thus been raised as concerns.
- This has caused considerable disquiet among jurists, lawyers and those concerned with the state of criminal justice in the country.
- **Timing** - The Committee has begun its work in the midst of a pandemic.
- This may not be the ideal time for wide consultations.
- Activists and lawyers functioning in the hinterland may be at a particular disadvantage in formulating their opinions.
- **Mandate** - The panel's mandate is also vague and open to multiple interpretations.

- It is also not clear why the Law Commission has not been vested with this task.
- **Members** - The committee being an all-male, Delhi-based one has led to concerns of lack of diversity.

What is the way ahead?

- Reform is best achieved through a cautious and inclusive approach.
- If at all criminal law is to be reformed, there should be a genuine attempt to reach wide consensus.
- The priorities should be on ways to speed up trials, protect witnesses, address the travails of victims, improve investigative mechanisms and, most importantly, eliminate torture.

MGNREAG and Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan

What is the issue?

- With the lockdown in place, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is proving to be a lifeline for the working poor in rural India.
- In this regard, **the attempt at diluting it in the name of the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan should be reconsidered.**

What is the post-lockdown role of MGNREGA?

- In April and part of May 2020, it was the absence of MGNREGA which accentuated rural distress.
- The Central government revised lockdown guidelines to allow **MGNREGA work only from April 20, 2020.**
- This was nearly a month after the nationwide lockdown was imposed.
- The governments released funds for it belatedly.
- But once the money reached the States, the results became evident.
- The number of households who got work under MGNREGA in April 2020 was the lowest in several years at 95 lakh.
- However, in May 2020, the number went up to 3.05 crore.
- Till the third week of June 2020, 2.84 crore households had got work.
- This is much higher when compared to the same months last year.
- With an average 23 days of work and a daily wage of Rs. 200, households who got work earned an average of Rs. 1,500 a month.
- Even though this is meagre, it shows the potential of MGNREGA to bring work and relief, provided it is further expanded.

How will the future of MGNREGA utilisation be?

- The Central government released Rs. **38,000 crore for MGNREGA work, of which 70% has already been utilised.**
- Most of the migrant workers have returned to their home States.
- Also, substantial numbers among them have completed the quarantine period.
- **So, the demand for work under MGNREGA is bound to increase.**

Is enough work being provided?

- In the post-lockdown phase, **as many as 1.82 crore workers** who demanded work were turned back.
- **Of the 8.07 crore workers who demanded work, work was provided only to 6.25 crore workers.**
- In particular, in U.P., one third of the over 1 crore workers who had applied for work under MGNREGA were turned back.

- Bihar is another state that also has a large number of returning migrant workers.
- There, 12 lakh workers of the 41 lakh workers who applied were turned back.
- In spite of a legal provision of unemployment allowance, not a single rupee in compensation has been paid.
- Now that the summer monsoons have set in, this issue becomes all the more relevant.
- During the rainy season, even though demand is high, work provision is low.
- It is thus essential for the Centre to ensure that States are provided with the funds to pay unemployment allowance to all workers demanding work.

What is Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan and what are the concerns with it?

- **In the context of the need to strengthen MGNREGA, the Central government has announced a “new” scheme, the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan.**
- This is to provide work to migrant workers in **116 selected districts.**
- **The criteria for selection are unclear.**
- E.g. the States of West Bengal and Chhattisgarh are omitted when reverse migration is particularly high in these States
- Of the Rs. 4,794 crore spent between June 20 and June 28, 2020, Bihar received more than 50% of the fund.
- But, Bihar has had a poor record of implementation of MGNREGA.
- [The elections are round the corner in Bihar and this fact cannot be totally ignored.]
- Secondly, the new scheme has listed 25 kinds of work.
- But it is clear that almost every single one of them is already covered under the convergence programmes of MGNREGA.
- Also, there is no new “skill mapping” required for this as stated, since this work is already covered under MGNREGA.
- The nature of the work is manual, mainly construction and earth work including laying cables for Internet connections in rural areas.
- It is unstated but clear that this will benefit private telecom companies.
- Most importantly, there are apprehensions about the new scheme’s impact on the MGNREGA work in these selected districts.
- There is no clarity on this critical issue in the set of guidelines issued by the Ministry of Rural Development, the nodal Ministry for this scheme.
- Last year, under MGNREGA, in these 116 districts taken together, an average of just 43.7 workdays were created.
- This was lower than the national average of 50 days.
- This poor record of provision of work may have been one of the reasons for the higher rates of migration from these districts.
- So, instead of new schemes, MGNREGA could be expanded to give work to all workers.
- This is a legal right, whereas the **Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan has no such legal binding on the administration.**
- Also, **the scheme is primarily meant for migrant workers in those districts where their numbers are 25,000 or more.**
- **That means in these selected districts women who comprise a smaller percentage of migrant workers will be largely excluded.**
- However, women in these districts had a high demand for work.
- This is reflected in the fact that the average of women working in MGNREGA in these districts last year was 53.5%.
- This was higher than the average for the rest of India.

- So unless this work in 116 districts is in addition to MGNREGA, women will suffer.

What should the future measures be?

- MGNREGA should not be diluted in the name of the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan.
- The potential for MGNREGA to provide relief to the suffering of rural India should be utilised to its fullest capacity.
- This will also require a removal of the restriction of only one person per household to make every individual eligible.
- **The cap of 100 days should be removed to expand it to at least 200 days.**
- Unemployment allowance should be guaranteed for all those turned away from work.
- The Rs. 8,000 crore fund available to the States is clearly insufficient.
- It is therefore essential for the Central government to release the next set of funds without delay.

Need for 'One Nation One Voter ID' - Re-enfranchising Migrant Voters

Why in news?

- Migrant workers have, for long, been forgotten voters, given their conditions of work.
- Given this, there must be the political will to usher in a 'One Nation One Voter ID' to ensure ballot portability.

What are the recent changes made by the ECI?

- In response to the pandemic, the **Election Commission of India (ECI) has made it possible for senior citizens above the age of 65 to vote by postal ballot.**
- This is given the fact that they are at greater risk from exposure to the novel coronavirus.
- [Until now, this option was available only to disabled citizens and those above 80 years.]
- The same empowering approach could be extended to the migrants who evidently face difficulties in exercising their franchise.

How significant are the migrant workers?

- Internal migrant workers constitute about **13.9 crore as in the Economic Survey of 2017.**
- This is nearly a third of India's labour force.
- They travel across India in search of an economic livelihood.
- They engage in the construction sector, as domestic work, in brick kilns, mines, transportation, security, agriculture, etc.

What is the present scenario?

- With COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown, the country witnessed the magnitude of internal migration.
- The hardships that migrant workers endured in their quest for livelihoods were also apparent.
- The humiliation they faced showed how politically powerless they were perceived to be.

Why are they called the forgotten voters?

- Most of the **migrant workers never intend to settle down in their locations of work.**

- They only wish to return to their native villages and towns once their work is completed or the working season ends.
- Often they toil in exploitative low-wage jobs, lacking identity and proper living conditions.
- **So, they often go without access to welfare.**
- Internal migrant workers do not enrol as voters in their place of employment.
- This is because they find it hard to provide proof of residence.
- They also cannot afford to return home on election day to vote.
- Thus, migrant workers become quasi-disenfranchised, and forgotten voters.
- It is perhaps this group does not constitute a vote bank worthy of attention.
- Also, since they do not have a vote where they work, their concerns are easy to ignore in their host State.
- Sometimes, they are targeted for allegedly taking jobs away from the local population.

What do the voters turn out show?

- It is indeed a matter of pride that **India currently has over 91.05 crore registered voters.**
- In the 2019 general election, a record 67.4% cast their vote.
- The ECI would do well to focus attention on the one-third, **a substantial 29.68 crore**, who did not cast their vote.
- National Election Study surveys have shown that about 10% of registered voters refrain from voting due to a lack of interest in politics.
- That leaves approximately 20 crore voters who want to vote but are unable to do so.
- Of these there are about 3 crore Non Resident Indians (NRIs).
- Only about 1 lakh NRIs have registered to vote, presumably because voting requires their physical presence in India.
- Of them, about 25,000 voted in the 2019 elections.
- To enable NRIs to exercise their franchise, the government brought in legislation in the previous Lok Sabha to enable voting through authorised proxies.
- The legislation lapsed.
- However, it is interesting to contrast the concern for NRIs with the lack thereof for poor migrant workers.

What are the models in place for voter portability?

- Service voters (government employees) posted away from home can vote through the Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS).
- Classified service voters (e.g., military personnel) can do so through their proxies.
- The ECI has said that it is testing an Aadhaar-linked voter-ID based solution.
- This is to enable electors to cast their votes digitally from anywhere in the country.
- It will be some time in the future before this becomes a functional reality.

What is the way forward?

- **Ensuring that every Indian who is eligible to vote can do so** must be a central mission for the ECI.
- Voting must be viewed not just as a civic duty but also as a civic right.
- In developing the **Aadhaar-linked voter-ID based solution**, it must be ensured that the linkage does not result in the exclusion of eligible individuals.
- Meanwhile, the existing forms of voter portability can be utilised for re-enfranchising migrant workers as well.

- To facilitate migrant workers voting, the **ECI could undertake substantial outreach measures using the network of District Collectorates.**
- Migrants should be able to physically vote in their city of work, based on the address on their existing voter IDs and duration of their temporary stay.
- The COVID-19 crisis has mobilised governments and NGOs to set up registers and portals to reach out to migrant workers.
- **So, in the lines of the ‘One Nation One Ration Card’, a ‘One Nation One Voter ID’ will ensure native ballot portability and empower the forgotten migrant voters.**
- **Ensuring that every Indian voter can participate in elections is imperative to ensure a democratically inclusive India.**

Aids to Navigation Bill 2020

Why in News?

The Ministry of Shipping has issued the draft of Aids to Navigation Bill, 2020 for suggestions from the stakeholders and general public.

Key Points:

- The new bill is in accordance with the government’s vision for **augmenting people’s participation and transparency in the governance.**
- The suggestions from the public and stakeholders will strengthen the provisions of the legislation.

Need for the new law:

Changing role of authorities with changing technology:

- With the advent of modern technologically improved aids to maritime navigation, the role of authorities regulating and operating maritime navigation has changed drastically.
- Therefore the **new law encompasses a major shift from lighthouses to modern aids of navigation.**

Aids to Navigation Bill, 2020:

- The draft bill is proposed to **replace the almost nine decades old Lighthouse Act, 1927**, to incorporate the global best practices, technological developments and India's International obligations in the field of Aids to Marine Navigation.
 - The 1927 Act aims to consolidate and amend the law relating to the provision, maintenance and control of lighthouses by the Government in India.

Salient features of the draft:

- The bill **aims to regulate state-of-the-art technologies of marine navigation** which was earlier used to tangle in statutory provisions of Lighthouse Act, 1927.
- The draft bill provides for **empowering Directorate General of Lighthouses and Lightships (DGLL) with additional power and functions such as**
 - Vessel Traffic Service,
 - Wreck flagging,
 - Training and certification,

- Implementation of other obligations under International Conventions, where India is a signatory.
- It also provides for **identification and development of heritage lighthouses.**

The draft bill comprises a **new schedule of offences, along with commensurate penalties for obstructing and damaging the aids to navigation**, and non-compliance with directives issued by the Central Government and other bodies under the draft bill.

ASEEM Portal

Why in News?

In an endeavour to **improve the information flow and bridge the demand-supply gap in the skilled workforce market**, the **Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE)** has launched '**Aatamanirbhar Skilled Employee Employer Mapping (ASEEM)**' portal to help skilled people find sustainable livelihood opportunities.

Key Points

- ASEEM is **developed and managed by National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) in collaboration with Bengaluru-based company Betterplace, specialising in blue collar employee management.** It aims at supporting decision and policymaking via trends and analytics generated by the system for programmatic purposes.
- The initiative also **aims to accelerate India's journey towards recovery by mapping skilled workforce and connecting them with relevant livelihood opportunities in their local communities** especially in the post COVID era.
- It shall help in **providing real-time data analytics to NSDC and its Sector Skill Councils** about the demand and supply patterns including - industry requirements, skill gap analysis, demand per district/ state/cluster, key workforce suppliers, key consumers, migration patterns and multiple potential career prospects for candidates.
- **The portal consists of three IT based interfaces** - (Employer Portal – Employer on boarding, Demand Aggregation, candidate selection. (Dashboard – Reports, Trends, analytics, and highlight gaps. (Candidate Application – Create & Track candidate profile, share job suggestion.
- The portal and App will have provision for registration and data upload for workers across job roles, sectors and geographies.

Significance of ASEEM

- **ASEEM is a Skill Management Information System.** ASEEM will be used as a match-making engine to map skilled workers with the jobs available.
- The **skilled workforce can register their profiles on the app and can search for employment opportunities in their neighbourhood.** Through ASEEM, employers, agencies and job aggregators looking for skilled workforce in specific sectors will also have the required details at their fingertips. It will also enable policymakers take more objective view of various sectors.
- Besides identifying major skills gap in the sectors and providing review of global best practices, **ASEEM will provide employers a platform to assess the availability of skilled workforce and formulate their hiring plans.**
- ASEEM refers to all the data, trends and analytics which describe the workforce market and map demand of skilled workforce to supply.
- **4. Benefits for Stakeholders**
- **Skilled Candidates** (Optical Character (OCR) based automated profile building, It helps to find jobs best matched with skillset & interests (Linking jobs essentials like bank a/c, vehicle & other benefits while finding work etc.

- **Employers, Agencies & Aggregators** (Helps to assess demand creation based on role, location, skills etc (Data Sorting: access, search, filter & save curated candidates, Campaign management to hire select candidates (End to end fulfilment at scale at disruptive pricing.
- **Training Partners** (Provides assured placements for their skilled candidates, Clear demand visibility to train candidates right (Training centres becoming mini-experience centres, A significantly higher potential to earn and grow.

National Skill Development Corporation

- **NSDC is a not-for-profit public limited company incorporated in 2008 under section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956 (corresponding to section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013).**
- It was set up by the **Ministry of Finance as a Public Private Partnership (PPP) model.**
 - The Government of India through the **Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) holds 49% of the share capital** of NSDC, while the **private sector has the balance 51% of the share capital.**
- It aims to promote skill development by catalyzing creation of large, quality and for-profit vocational institutions.
- **Its mandate is also to enable a support system** which focuses on quality assurance, information systems and train the trainer academies either directly or through partnerships.
- **Skill India Portal** is an initiative by the NSDC.

MoU between NATGRID and NCRB

Why in News?

Recently, **the National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID)** has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with **the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)** to access the **centralised online database on FIRs and stolen vehicles.**

- NATGRID which seeks to become the one-stop destination for security and intelligence agencies will be operational by **31st December 2020.**

About NATGRID

- NATGRID initially started in 2009 is an online database for collating scattered pieces of information and putting them together on one platform.
- **It links at least 10 Central government Intelligence and investigation agencies**, such as the Intelligence Bureau, Research and Analysis Wing and others have access to the data on a secured platform.
- **NATGRID is exempted from the Right to Information Act, 2005 under sub-section (2) of Section 24.**

National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)

- The **NCRB is a government agency** responsible for **collecting and analysing crime data**
- NCRB is headquartered in **New Delhi** and is part of the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).**
- **NCRB was set-up in 1986** to function as a repository of information on crime and criminals so as to assist the investigators in linking crime to the perpetrators.

Uses of NATGRID

- **The NATGRID enables multiple security and intelligence agencies to access a database related to immigration entry and exit, banking and telephone details, among others, from a common platform.**
- **The 10 user agencies** will be linked independently with certain databases which will be procured **from 21 providing organisations** including telecom, tax records, bank, immigration etc. to generate intelligence inputs.

Crime and Criminal Tracking Networks and Systems (CCTNS)

- The CCTNS is a project for creating a comprehensive and integrated system for effective policing through e-Governance.
- **The concept was first conceived in the year 2008** by the then Home Minister in the aftermath of the 2008 Mumbai attacks.
- **The system includes a nationwide online tracking system** by integrating more than 14,000 police stations across the country.
- **The project is implemented by NCRB.**

SC/ST Quota Benefits to the Disabled

Why in news?

- **The Supreme Court has confirmed that persons suffering from disabilities are also socially backward.**
- With this, they become **entitled to the same benefits of relaxation as Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe candidates in public employment and education.**

What is the case about?

- The present decision came on **a petition filed by Aryan Raj, a special needs person, against the Government College of Arts, Chandigarh.**
- [It is an appeal against a Punjab and Haryana High Court order.]
- The college denied Mr. Raj relaxation in minimum qualifying marks in the Painting and Applied Art course.
- The college insisted that disabled persons too need to meet the **general qualifying standard of 40%** in the aptitude test.
- Notably, **the SC/ST candidates were given a relaxation to 35%.**
- Setting aside the college decision, the Supreme Court said that the same 35% shall apply so far as the disabled are concerned in future.
- The apex court allowed Mr. Raj to apply afresh for the current year.
- The Court said that it is 'following' the principle laid down in an earlier Delhi High Court judgment.

What was the 2012 HC Judgement?

- It relates to the Anamol Bhandari (Minor) through his father/Natural Guardian v. Delhi Technological University 2012 case.
- The **Delhi Technological University prospectus provided 10% of concession of marks in the minimum eligibility requirements for SC/ST candidates.**
- But **relaxation of only 5% was permissible for People with Disabilities.**
- On a petition against this, the Delhi HC ruled against this differential treatment, terming it discriminatory.
- It held that people suffering from disabilities are also socially backward.
- It observed that **reservation for the disabled is called horizontal reservation.**

- So this cuts across all vertical categories such as SC, ST, OBC & General.
- Therefore, at the very least, it said, they are entitled to the same benefits as given to the SC/ST candidates.
- A three-judge Bench of the Supreme Court has now upheld this 2012 judgment.
- The public sector employers and colleges / universities will now have to allow the same relaxations to the disabled as to SC / ST candidates.

What is the clarity offered?

- The Supreme Court also cited the following from the High Court judgment.
- **Intellectually/mentally challenged persons have certain limitations**, which are not there in physically challenged persons.
- The subject experts would thus be well advised to examine the feasibility of creating a course, which caters to the specific needs of such persons.
- They may also examine increasing the number of seats in the discipline of Painting and Applied Art with a view to accommodating such students.

Why is this a welcome move?

- The **judgement recognises the difficulties faced by the disabled in accessing education or employment, regardless of their social status.**
- Even though drawn from all sections of society, the disabled have always been an under-privileged and under-represented section.
- **The larger principle is that without imparting proper education to the disabled, there cannot be any meaningful enforcement of their rights.**

Can physical/mental and social disabilities be equated?

- **A question arises if 'physical or mental disability' could really be equated with the 'social disability'** and experience of untouchability suffered by marginalised sections for centuries.
- For instance, the social background of disabled persons from a traditionally privileged community may give them an advantage.
- This stands in contrast with a similar kind of a person suffering from historical social disability as well.
- However, as per the court's view this may not always be the case.
- Evidently, the Delhi High Court had cited the abysmally low literacy and employment rates among persons with disabilities.
- **Indicators** - The 2001 Census put the illiteracy rate among the disabled at 51%.
- This is much higher than the general population figure.
- The share of disabled children out of school was quite higher than other major social categories.
- There was similar evidence of their inadequate representation in employment too.

What is the way forward?

- **It can only be more applicable now that a fresh law that aims for a greater transformative effect, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, is in place.**
- The 2016 law sought to address the above gap by raising the quota for the disabled from 3% to 5%.
- It also envisaged incentives for the private sector to hire them.

- It is vital that this is fully given effect to, so that this significant segment of the population is not left out of social and economic advancement.

Draft Report on Regulating Non-Personal Data

Why in news?

The draft report by the **Committee of Experts on Non-Personal Data Governance Framework** was released recently, inviting feedbacks.

What is the committee on?

- The committee was set up in **2019**.
- It is a **nine-member panel, headed by former Infosys vice-chairman Kris Gopalakrishnan**.
- It was tasked to **study the issues on non-personal data**.
- The draft report makes suggestions for consideration of regulation of such data.
- It has defined non-personal data, concept of community data and rights and privileges over such data.
- It has delved into crucial subjects such as ownership of data, undertaking a data business and data sharing.
- It has also recommended mechanisms for data sharing while defining its purpose.
- These include sovereign rights, core public interest, and economic purposes.

What are the key highlights of the report?

- **Non-personal data refers to information that is not related to an identified or identifiable natural person.**
- This would include data on weather conditions, from sensors installed on industrial machines, from public infrastructure, and so on.
- It also includes data which was initially personal, but were later made anonymous, according to the draft definition.
- It is to be noted that **the Personal Data Protection (PDP) Bill 2019** is still in process.
- The Gopalakrishnan-led panel in its report has defined non-personal data as information which is not personal as defined in the above bill.
- **Potential of data** - The report has collated information from various studies in this regard.
- **It has shown that companies with the largest data pools have "outsized, unbeatable techno-economic advantages".**
- A few startups from the 1990s and 2000s have gone on to become USD 1 trillion market capitalisation multinational corporations.
- This is mainly because of their ability to collect and analyse data of users.
- Reportedly, **Google and Facebook together control about 60% of the Internet advertising market in the USA.**
- **Amazon had a 37% share of the online e-commerce market in the USA in 2019.**

What has the committee called for?

- There is a need to **create a data-sharing framework**.
- It thus calls for **sharing non-personal data collected by both government and private organizations with citizens**.
- This is to ensure that community data is available for social, public and economic value creation.
- Also, it simultaneously addresses privacy concerns and prevents collective harms arising from processing of non-personal data.

- This is likely to lead to increased transparency, better quality services, improved efficiencies, and more innovation.
- **The shared Non-Personal Data may be useful for Indian entrepreneurs.**
- It would help them develop new and innovative services and products from which citizens may benefit.
- The report puts forward useful suggestions on the need to set up a 'non-personal data regulatory authority.'
- This is to manage India's vast and emerging data space, while nurturing a creative and egalitarian technology architecture.

What are the concerns?

- **Definition** - A major concern with the new report is the lack of clarity on how it defines non-personal data.
- For instance, the report mentions on data that are aggregated and to which "certain data transformation techniques" are applied.
- The 'transformation' is to the extent that the individual or specific events related to them are no longer identifiable.
- This would be qualified as anonymous data, according to the report.
- But the data transformation techniques (that can be used to "anonymise" personal data) are not clearly defined.
- Possibly, vested interests can exploit the situation.
- **Powers** - The panel's suggestions would lead to offering the State immense powers to define and determine non-personal data and use that for its interests.
- This does not augur well for a democracy, besides hurting business interests.
- This could possibly lead to a new form of digital control raj.
- **Authority** - Another potentially controversial idea is the suggestion to create a Non-Personal Data Authority.
- The panel suggests that data can be classified into three categories — public, community and private non-personal data.
- This is based on their ownership and origin of creation.
- Again, there is little clarity on who owns what kind of data as reflected in the way the report defines and identifies stakeholders.
- [The stakeholders include data principal, data custodian, data trustee and data trust.]
- The roles of these parties are still not delineated.
- **These issues need to be addressed to avoid unethical practices**, especially in a country like India which is witnessing a data economy explosion.
- Bringing transparency into the data debate is the need of the hour.

Anti-Defection Law

Why in News?

- Political hustlers over the years have evolved a **new practice to bring down the government**.
- They have displayed an **uncanny flair to subvert the Anti-Defection law** to their advantage.

What is the new practice?

- **It is now no longer necessary for the party in opposition to bring down a government by splitting the ruling party.**
- **This was a practice that this law had effectively curbed** by mandating that two-thirds of the legislators have to leave in order for it to be a legitimate split.

- **The new-age hustlers circumvent this provision by getting the required number of ruling party legislators to resign.**
- This shrinks the size of the House to the extent that the opposing party numbers form the majority.

What is an example?

- **In Karnataka**, last year 17 MLAs from Congress, JD (S) and one provincial party resigned.
- This adequately shrank the size of the House for the BJP party to gain majority.
- Of 17 MLAs who toppled the Congress-JD (S) coalition government, 14 were re-elected to the Legislative Assembly on a BJP ticket.
- The Speaker disqualified the MLAs under the 10th Schedule, barring them from seeking re-election for the entire term of the Assembly.

What did the SC rule on the Karnataka crisis?

- **The Supreme Court (SC) had rejected the ruling of the Speaker of the Karnataka Assembly.**
- **Indeed, the Speaker had exceeded his ambit here as the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951 does not provide for such disqualification.**
- But the Supreme Court can create the law here if it so chooses.

What did the SC do previously?

- The SC has effectively amended the RPA law earlier in an attempt to reform the political arena.
- **In Lily Thomas case (2013)**, it had ruled that a member of any legislature who is convicted of a crime involving 2 years imprisonment, loses membership of the House.

What could be done?

- **Barring the legislators from seeking re-election for an entire term of the Assembly** would check smartly engineered defections.
- There is a need for a **legal solution to the political cynicism of the day.**

Consumer Protection Act, 2019

Why in News?

The new **Consumer Protection Act, 2019** came into force on **20th July 2020** and it will empower consumers and help them in protecting their rights through its various notified rules and provisions.

- The new act will be swift and less time consuming compared to the older **Consumer Protection Act, 1986** in which single-point access to justice was given making it a time-consuming exercise.
- The old act provided for a three-tier consumer dispute redressal machinery at the National (**National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission**), State and District levels.

Consumer Protection Act, 2019: Key Features

1) Definition of consumer

- A consumer is defined as a person who buys any good or avails a service for a consideration.
- It does not include a person who obtains a good for resale or a good or service for commercial purpose.
- It covers transactions through all modes including offline, and online through electronic means, teleshopping, multi-level marketing or direct selling.

2) Rights of consumers

The following consumer rights have been defined in the Act, including the right to:

- be protected against marketing of goods and services which are hazardous to life and property;
- be informed of the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of goods or services;
- be assured of access to a variety of goods or services at competitive prices; and
- seek redressal against unfair or restrictive trade practices.

3) Establishment of Central Consumer Protection Authority

- The central government will set up a CCPA to promote, protect and enforce the rights of consumers.
- It will regulate matters related to violation of consumer rights, unfair trade practices, and misleading advertisements.
- The CCPA will have an investigation wing, headed by a Director-General, which may conduct inquiry or investigation into such violations.

4) Penalties for misleading advertisement

- The CCPA may impose a penalty on a manufacturer or an endorser of up to Rs 10 lakh and imprisonment for up to two years for a false or misleading advertisement.
- In case of a subsequent offence, the fine may extend to Rs 50 lakh and imprisonment of up to five years.
- CCPA can also prohibit the endorser of a misleading advertisement from endorsing that particular product or service for a period of up to one year.
- For every subsequent offence, the period of prohibition may extend to three years.

5) Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission

CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT 1986	PROVISIONS	CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT 2019
No separate regulator	Regulator	Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) to be formed
Complaint could be filed in a consumer court where the seller's (defendant) office is located	Consumer court	Complaint can be filed in a consumer court where the complainant resides or works
No provision. Consumer could approach a civil court but not consumer court	Product liability	Consumer can seek compensation for harm caused by a product or service
District: up to ₹20 lakh State: ₹20 lakh to ₹1 cr National: above ₹1 cr	Pecuniary jurisdiction	District: up to ₹1 cr State: ₹1 cr to ₹10 cr National: Above ₹10 cr
No provision	E-commerce	All rules of direct selling extended to e-commerce
No legal provision	Mediation cells	Court can refer settlement through mediation

- CDRCs will be set up at the district, state, and national levels.
- A consumer can file a complaint with CDRCs in relation to: unfair or restrictive trade practices; defective goods or services etc.
- Complaints against an unfair contract can be filed with only the State and National. Appeals from a District CDRC will be heard by the State CDRC.
- Appeals from the State CDRC will be heard by the National CDRC. Final appeal will lie before the Supreme Court.

6) Jurisdiction of CDRCs

- The District CDRC will entertain complaints where value of goods and services does not exceed Rs one crore.
- The State CDRC will entertain complaints when the value is more than Rs one crore but does not exceed Rs 10 crore.
- Complaints with value of goods and services over Rs 10 crore will be entertained by the National CDRC.

7) Product liability

- Product liability means the liability of a product manufacturer, service provider or seller to compensate a consumer for any harm or injury caused by a defective good or deficient service.
- To claim compensation, a consumer has to prove any one of the conditions for defect or deficiency, as given in the Act.

New Education Policy 2020

Why in news?

Recently, the Union Cabinet has approved the new **National Education Policy (NEP), 2020** with an **aim to introduce several changes in the Indian education system - from the school to college level.**

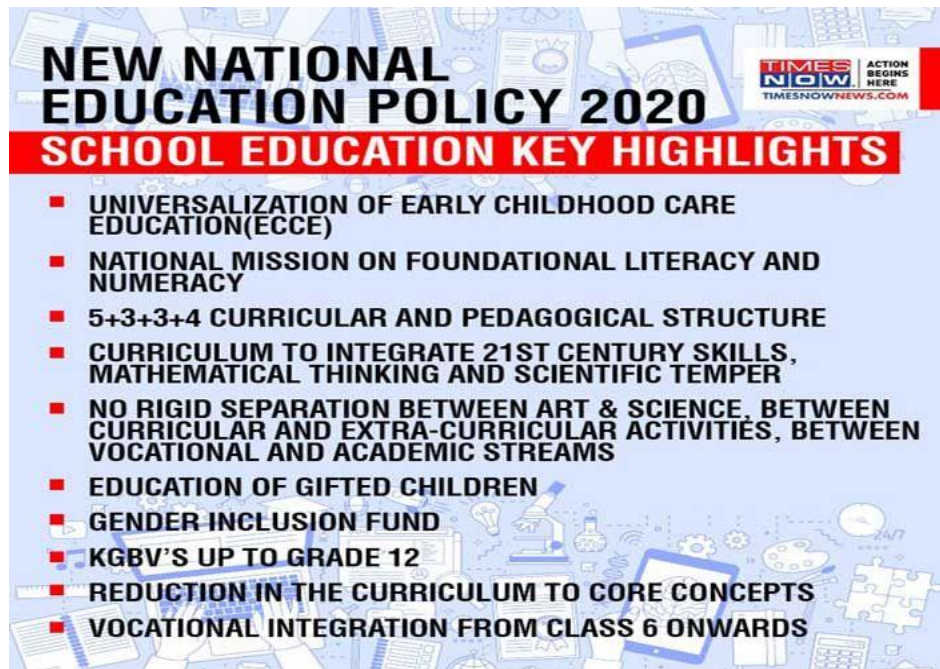
- The NEP 2020 aims at making “**India a global knowledge superpower**”.
- The Cabinet has also approved the **renaming of the Ministry of Human Resource Development to the Ministry of Education.**

What purpose does an NEP serve?

- **Purpose** - An NEP is a comprehensive framework to guide the development of education in the country.
- In 1964, Kothari Commission was constituted to draft a national and coordinated policy on education.
- Based on the suggestions of this Commission, Parliament passed the first NEP in 1968.
- **NEPs till now** - In 1968, the first NEP came under the Prime Ministership of Indira Gandhi.
- In 1986, the second NEP came under Rajiv Gandhi (Revised in 1992).
- The third one is the NEP 2020 under Narendra Modi.

Key Highlights

- **School education** - The new NEP focuses on overhauling the curriculum and easier Board exams.
- It also focused on a reduction in the syllabus to retain core essentials and thrust on experiential learning and critical thinking.
- It pitches for a “**5+3+3+4**” design of school education in the place of a “**10+2**” structure.
- **This design will be corresponding to age groups 3-8 years (foundational stage), 8-11 (preparatory), 11-14 (middle), and 14-18 (secondary).**



- This brings early childhood education (pre-school education for children of ages 3 to 5) under the ambit of formal schooling.
- **The mid-day meal programme will be extended to pre-school children.**
- The NEP says students until Class 5 should be taught in their mother tongue or regional language.
- **Higher education** - The NEP proposes to open up Indian higher education to foreign universities.
- It proposes to dismantle the UGC and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE).
- It proposes to introduce a **4-year multidisciplinary UG programme with multiple exit options, and discontinuation of the M Phil programme.**
- It also proposes phasing out of all institutions offering single streams.
- It says that all universities and colleges must aim to become multidisciplinary by 2040.

How will these reforms be implemented?

- The NEP only provides a **broad direction and is not mandatory to follow.**
- **Since education is a concurrent subject, the reforms proposed can only be implemented collaboratively by the Centre and the states.**
- The government has set a **target of 2040 to implement the entire policy.**
- The government plans to set up subject-wise committees with members from relevant ministries at both the central and state levels.
- These committees will help in developing implementation plans for each aspect of the NEP.
- Planning will be followed by a yearly joint review of progress against targets set.

What does the emphasis on mother tongue/regional language mean?

- **Such an emphasis is not new:** Most government schools in the country are doing this already.
- As for private schools, it is unlikely that they will be asked to change their medium of instruction.
- The provision on mother tongue as medium of instruction was not compulsory for states.
- As education is concurrent subject, the policy clearly states that kids will be taught in their mother tongue/regional language wherever possible.

What about the children of multilingual parents?

- The NEP said that the teachers will be encouraged to use a bilingual approach.
- This approach will help those students whose home language may be different from the medium of instruction.

How will the higher education be opened to foreign players?

- The document states universities from among the top 100 in the world will be able to set up campuses in India.
- But the document doesn't elaborate the parameters to define the top 100.
- The government may use the 'QS World University Rankings'.
- However, the HRD Ministry needs to bring in a new law that includes details of how foreign universities will operate in India.
- It is not clear if a new law would enthrone the best universities abroad to set up campuses in India.

How will the 4-year multidisciplinary bachelor's programme work?

- Under this proposed 4-year programme, students can exit,
 - After one year with a certificate,
 - After two years with a diploma, and
 - After three years with a bachelor's degree.
- **Four-year bachelor's programmes generally include a certain amount of research work.**
- Therefore, the student will get deeper knowledge in the subject s/he decides to major in.
- After four years, a UG student could enter a research degree programme directly depending on how well s/he has performed.
- However, master's degree programmes will continue to function as they do, following which student may do a PhD.

What impact will doing away with the M Phil programme have?

- This would not affect the higher education trajectory at all.
- In normal course, after a master's degree a student can register for a PhD programme.
- This is the current practice almost all over the world.
- In most universities, M Phil was a middle research degree between a master's and a PhD.
- MPhil degrees have slowly been phased out in favour of a direct PhD programme.

Social Stock Exchange

Why in news?

Social Stock Exchange (SSE) would be established by the SEBI as a structure within the existing stock market ecosystem.

What would be the purpose?

- SSE would enable the social enterprises and voluntary organisations to raise funds.
- **India's rank is 129 among the 189 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI).**
- [HDI tracks the progress made in education, health and income]
- So, there is indeed a pressing need to do more for the social sector.

What is the problem?

- **Successive governments are under-investing in the social sectors.**
- So, the onus has mostly fallen on private entities, that are constantly starved for funds.

How would SSE help to overcome this problem?

- **Funds from individual philanthropists have been quite strong in India, amounting to ₹70,000 crore in 2018.**
- There is an opportunity to help these entities tap other sources of funding such as international philanthropy, domestic CSR, and so on.
- The SSE can play a role here as a platform that brings these funds and causes together.

How do global social exchanges operate?

- **The SEBI is complicating matters by allowing both the non-profit organisations and for-profit entities on the SSE.**
- Many of the global social exchanges cater only to NPOs.
- They act as an intermediary that screens and certifies them and helps them find eligible donors.
- SEBI can follow this model for SSE, in order to keep things simple.
- According to government estimates, there were 31 lakh NPOs in India and these entities are in more urgent need for funds.

What is a provision that would be misused?

- A self-declaration by FPEs is needed about being a social enterprise.
- This is likely to be misused, in the absence of agencies that can do independent verification of the declarations made by these FPEs.
- The regulator should first establish the mechanism for verifying these claims.

What are the other provisions?

- **Eco-system** - A welcomed suggestion is to build an eco-system, which includes,
 - Establishing a self-regulatory organisation,
 - Bringing together the information repositories on NPOs,
 - Standardising the reporting standards for social impact, governance, etc.,
- With regard to fund-raising, the **SEBI recommends that NPOs can raise zero coupon zero capital bonds on the SSE that will be akin to donation.**
- **Instruments** - The SEBI suggests listing of equity and debt of NPOs.
- It suggests raising social and development impact bonds.
- It also suggests using social venture funds and mutual funds to channel money into charitable causes.
- These instruments can help worthy causes.
- But liquidity in these instruments is likely to be scant, even if market makers are established in every counter.
- The investors participating on this platform have to be mature enough to understand that they are not playing for returns.

What could be done?

- It would be best to allow foreign philanthropic funds to put money in this platform.

- Indian companies should be allowed to invest their CSR money in entities listed on a social stock exchange.

Economics

Impact of Covid-19 on GST

Why in news?

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime may face its toughest test in 2020-2021.

How is the GST performing?

- Faced with a high benchmark of **14% compound annual growth rate (CAGR)**, **GST was very productive in the first 2 years.**
- However, with the economy slowing down in 2019, GST could not remain insulated.
- **Barring April 2019, no other month witnessed double-digit growth over.**
- Moreover, the **months of September, October and March 2019 saw negative figures.**

What is the challenge now?

- In 2020-21, the toughest challenge for the GST Council would be to devise ways to compensate the states.
- The usual compensation cycle was delayed.
- The situation is not likely to improve anytime soon.
- **The collection for the first two months of the current fiscal is at just 46% of 2019-20 levels.**
- Clearly, it is time to take measures to prevent the states from slipping into a serious financial crisis.

How this challenge could be overcome?

- **Borrowing** - It would simply be deferring the crisis instead of solving it.
- **Tweaking GST rates** - GST was introduced with rates about 20% lower than the effective tax burden (all existing central and state levies).
- With a tax base of around Rs 60 lakh crore, a 1% increase in the tax rates would yield additional revenue of Rs 60,000 crore.
- **Re-arranging the GST rate structure** - This idea may be considered along with the rate hike, or even independently.
- The current GST rate structure is that 60% or 65% of the total tax on a commodity is the state component and the remaining is the centre's.
- For instance, the 18% GST rate could be 11% SGST and 7% CGST.
- The adjustments in the GST rates would yield additional revenue to the states, thereby bringing down the compensation burden..

Privatization of Railways

Why in news?

Recently, the Ministry of Railways has taken the first step towards **privatisation of railways by inviting Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to private players** for operation of passenger train services.

Background

- The Indian Railways is among the **world's 3rd largest rail networks**. The Government of India has focused on investing on railway infrastructure by making investor-friendly policies.
- It has moved quickly to **enable Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in railways** to improve infrastructure for freight and high-speed trains.
- At present, several domestic and foreign companies are also looking to invest in Indian rail projects.
- So far, the private sector's participation in railways has been very less in India, compared to sectors like ports, telecom, electricity, airports and roads.
- Several attempts have been made in the past to involve the private sector in various arenas like wagon procurement and leasing, freight trains and container operations, terminals and warehousing facilities, catering services, and other rail infrastructure through schemes framed by the ministry.
- But problems like policy uncertainty, absence of a regulator to create a level playing field, the lack of incentives for investors and procedural or operational issues have significantly restricted private sector participation.
- There are some major factories like **Chennai-based Integral Coach Factory (ICF)**, which is owned by government from which Indian Railways procures trains and coaches.
- It has also produced the coaches of luxury to high-speed trains including Rajdhani Express, Shatabdi Express and the recently-inducted Vande Bharat Express (Train 18).

Reasons of Privatising Indian Railways

- The Indian Railways is one of the few government-owned enterprises which is **incurring losses year-after-year**.
- Indian Railways has **not been able to keep pace with modernisation of its infrastructure and services** and has not been able to expand at the pace and coverage that a country like India needs.
- **Almost all arms of the railways require modernisation of equipment, processes and training**, all of which are still continuing as they have been, through the decades. The result is that the railways continue to be a drain on the exchequer, while continuing to provide vital services inefficiently.
- **Freight fares in railways are kept high to cross-subsidize the passenger segment**. Rail Development Authority has been approved to determine rail fares to enhance affordability and utilize capacity in an efficient manner.
- The perception is that almost **all customer facing services like ticketing, ticket checking, porter services, catering and coach maintenance are not meeting people's expectations and standards** as they should be and this is the main reason for public resentment and dissatisfaction with the railways.
- **On the technical side**, the railways lacks in providing proper services like track laying and maintenance, signal and transmission, engine & coach design and manufacture, engine and coach maintenance etc. All these services must all be given out to private companies that specialise in these.
- Railways owns large tracts of land along its tracks, in various parts of the country and this can be optimally monetised by inviting private players to invest, build and manage properties that may be developed on these lands.
- In this regard, **Bibek Debroy Committee** was constituted on September 22, 2014 to prepare a blueprint for reforming Indian Railways.

Bibek Debroy Committee

- The Railway Board had constituted a Committee for mobilization of resources for major railway projects and restructuring of Railway Ministry and Railway Board (Chair: Mr. Bibek Debroy).
- The Committee submitted its final report in June 2015, which has **favoured privatisation of rolling stock: Wagons and Coaches.**
- Committee has looked at the railway restructuring experiences from multiple countries, including Japan, the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, Australia and USA.
- It focussed on the British experiment to achieve two main aims: **changing the institutional structure between the government and the Indian Railways and increasing competition.**
- It has also recommended **amending the Indian Railways Act to allow the private operators to levy tariff.**
- Committee adds that in case the infrastructure becomes profitable, there is no bar on the government to have its own operator in the interest of competition.

Arguments in Favor of Privatization of Indian Railways

Improved Infrastructure

- A strong argument in favour of privatization is that it will lead to better infrastructure which in turn would lead to improved amenities for travellers.
- As opposed to mismanagement in form of stinking washrooms, lack of water supply and dirty platforms, it is expected that a private company will ensure better amenities.
- This would enable the Railways to procure the right global technology available.

Balancing Quality of Service with High Fares

- Probably the most persistent complaint regarding Indian Railways is that the quality of services provided hardly matches up to the phenomenal charges paid by the travellers.
- Protagonists of privatisation feel that this problem will be solved when private players are allowed to enter the sector since the move would foster competition and hence lead to overall betterment in the quality of services.

Lesser Accidents

- Any train-related mishap is like a nightmare come true for travellers and authorities alike courtesy of the physical, mental and financial trauma that ensues.
- Because private ownership is synonymous with better maintenance, supporters of privatisation feel that it will reduce the number of accidents, thus resulting in safe travel and higher monetary savings in the long run.
- Improved efficiency
- The main argument for privatisation is that private companies have a profit incentive to cut costs and be more efficient. If you work for a government run industry, managers do not usually share in any profits.
- However, a private firm is interested in making a profit, and so it is more likely to cut costs and be efficient.

Shareholders

- It is argued that a private firm has pressure from shareholders to perform efficiently. If the firm is inefficient then the firm could be subject to a takeover.
- A state-owned firm doesn't have this pressure and so it is easier for them to be inefficient.

Increased competition

- Often privatisation of state-owned monopolies occurs alongside deregulation – i.e. policies to allow more firms to enter the industry and increase the competitiveness of the market.
- It is this increase in competition that can be the greatest spur to improvements in efficiency. For example, there is now more competition in telecoms and distribution of gas and electricity.
- However, privatisation doesn't necessarily increase competition; it depends on the nature of the market. E.g. there is no competition in tap water because it is a natural monopoly. There is also very little competition within the rail industry.

Arguments Against Privatization of Indian Railways

Coverage Limited to Lucrative Sectors

- An advantage of Indian Railways being government- owned is that it provides nation-wide connectivity irrespective of profit.
- This would not be possible with privatisation since routes which are less popular will be eliminated, thus having a negative impact on connectivity.

Fares

- Given that a private enterprise runs on profit, it is but natural to assume that the easiest way of accruing profits in Indian Railways would be to hike fares, thus rendering the service out of reach for lower income groups.
- This will defeat the entire purpose of the system which is meant to serve the entire population of the country irrespective of the level of income.

Accountability

- The recent spat in the Tata boardroom is testimony to the fact that private companies are unpredictable in their dealings and do not share their governance secrets with the world at large.
- In such a scenario it would be difficult to pin the accountability on a particular entity, should there be a discrepancy.

Unemployment

- This move would render thousands of railway employees in production and ancillary units jobless in the long run.

Problem of regulating private monopolies

- Privatisation creates private monopolies and thus, it needs regulations to prevent abuse of monopoly power.

Short-termism of firms

- To please shareholders, the private players may seek to increase short term profits and avoid investing in long term projects.
- For example, the UK is suffering from a lack of investment in new energy sources; the privatised companies are trying to make use of existing plants rather than invest in new ones.

Concerns of a common man

- In the long-run, privatisation of railways may no longer be a low-cost common man's mode of transport and will be more on the lines of privatised services.

Challenges to privatisation

- The debate on privatization of Indian Railway services pertains to two aspects. One is the need to bring in private capital and the other is to privatize certain aspects of operation and services.
- The government needs to take bold steps on both accounts and this call for serious and proactive engagement with trade unions and political parties, to come to a common agreement.
- The trade unions have been resisting privatisation of existing operations and are also suspicious of any attempt to involve private capital.
- While this could be a welcome step, a change in thinking by the unions is the need of the day, otherwise the railways will continue to continue to bleed funds.
- Over the years, no political party has shown the political will to address this issue. As a result, the Indian Railways continues to remain a large and inefficient organisation, executing one of the most important tasks for the nation.

Way Forward:

- **In order to sustain growth, modernisation and efficiency, the Indian Railways must redefine its role and responsibility.** It has to completely reposition its operating role from being a direct service provider to being a supervisor of services
- There is only one **flip side to the privatisation of railways in India** – and probably the **most important one i.e., subsidised fares.**
- In order to keep Indian Railways affordable for the lower strata of the society (post privatisation), the government must offer subsidies and tax incentives to companies that would provide low cost services, similar to low cost airlines, to these very pocket of population.
- **This in the long run would not only make IR the largest but also the most efficient railway network** in the World along with materialising the very objective and essence of Indian Railways — '**Lifeline to the Nation**'.
- Railways need to remain affordable as an infrastructure for daily commuters more than anything else. Instead of speed and privatization, efficiency and affordability should be the primary focus.

Banking Regulation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020 - Co-operative Banks

Why in news?

- The Centre recently passed the Banking Regulation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020.
- It gives the RBI more regulatory powers over urban co-operative banks (UCBs) and multi-State co-operative societies.

What does the amendment mean in practice?

- The Ordinance amends the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 as applicable to cooperative banks.
- With respect to UCBs and multi-State co-operative societies, the RBI will now have powers to -
 - **supersede boards**
 - **restructure managements**
 - **formulate resolution plans**
- The change will subject 1,544 co-operative banks to greater RBI supervision.
- It will also partly address the problem of dual regulation by registrars of co-operative societies.

- Notably, the dual regulation is often cited as the reason for the string of co-operative bank failures.
- The Centre has expressed hope that this decision would reassure the 8.6 crore depositors in these banks about the safety of their money.

What are the concerns though?

RBI - The RBI already has enough responsibilities in monitoring regulatory compliance by the following under its watch:

- 86 scheduled commercial banks
- 10 small finance banks
- 53 regional rural banks
- thousands of NBFCs
- housing finance companies (recently been added)
- So, the addition of over 1,500 new constituents is unlikely to make its task easier.
- **Role of UCBs** - The UCBs were originally conceptualised to further financial inclusion.
- But it is questionable if the UCBs are faithfully fulfilling this mandate.
- A 2014 study in this regard shed some light.
- It finds that smaller, unscheduled UCBs were indeed focussed on sub-Rs.10-lakh loans
- The larger scheduled UCBs actually make up for the bulk of the deposit and asset base of the co-operative banking sector.
- But these have stayed quite far from their original mandates.
- These were actively vying with commercial banks in extending non-priority sector loans to commercial borrowers.
- In the process, they have availed themselves of numerous regulatory concessions.
- **UCBs do cater to smaller depositors ignored by commercial banks.**
- But the failure of players such as **PMC Bank** shows that their lax lending practices can put depositors' money at risk.
- **Approach** - Banking correspondents, Mudra loans and Jan Dhan accounts, apart from microfinance NBFCs and small finance banks are active in the banking landscape.
- Given this, the UCBs seem less relevant.
- There are better alternatives to balance macro financial inclusion objectives with depositor interests.
- It is perhaps for this reason that the RBI has refrained from granting new UCB licences in recent years.

How has RBI dealt with it?

- RBI has tried to implement the recommendations that UCBs be actively encouraged to convert into small finance banks.
- By doing so, the regulatory arbitrage can be bridged.
- Since the PMC Bank failure, the RBI has ushered in several new rules to tighten governance structures at UCBs.
- It has sought more disclosures of loan books and constituted new boards of management.
- However, given the deep-rooted issues at many UCBs, it is doubtful if they will be able to manage the transition.

Coal Mine Auctions

Why in news?

The Central government has launched the auction of **41 coal blocks** for commercial mining.

What is the decision?

- The decision was part of the announcements made by the Centre under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.
- The **private players will be allowed to mine coal for commercial mining purposes, without any end-use restrictions.**
- Successful bidders will obtain leasing rights from State governments to mine a coal block for a certain period.
- A **revenue-sharing basis is opted for payment as against the current method of paying fixed rupee per tonne.**
- **In the revenue-sharing basis, a percentage of revenue share (final bid) has to be paid to the government on the sale of coal.**
- The **operational efficiency parameters have been liberalised.**

Why mining was nationalised previously?

- India has a long history of commercial mining, starting from **1774.**
- In second half of 20th century, the private players could not make adequate capital investments to meet the energy needs of India.
- Some private miners were found to be using **unscientific coal mining practices and providing poor working conditions for labour.**
- This led to the Central Government to **nationalise private coalmines.**
- **The nationalisation was done in two phases, from 1971-1973.**
- **The Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Act, 1973** was enacted for this purpose.
- **This Act restricted coal mining operations mainly to government entities.**

Does India import coal?

- India imports around **240 million tonnes (mt) of coal a year** valued at about ₹1.7 lakh crore.
- The 41 mines opened for auction now can hit a peak production of 225 mt in 2025-26, saving foreign exchange.
- **A High Powered Expert Committee (2017) recommended a shift from the allocation of coal blocks for own consumption to commercial mining.**
- Commercial mining would help tap the locally available reserves.
- It would also increase the availability of coal in the Indian market at a cheaper price making India less dependent on imports.

What is the significance of the decision?

- The private sector involvement would help realise **₹33,000 crore of capital investment** in the next five years.
- It can give a leg up to the economic activity within the country.
- It would play an **important role in job and income creation.**
- Higher production and **surplus availability of coal may lead to fall in its prices.**
- This, in turn, may **reduce the cost of electricity consumed by the households and industries.**
- Currently, coal-fired plants generate about **70% of India's electricity.**
- However, **there needs to be a fine balance between short-term cost savings and long-term environmental impact.**

Mahajobs Portal: Maharashtra

Why in News?

The Maharashtra Government has launched a portal named '**Mahajobs**' for **job seekers and employers**, owing to the economic situation caused by Covid-19 pandemic.

Key Points

Aim: To make local manpower available to companies and employment opportunities to workers.

Functioning:

- The **job seekers and providers/industrial units can register** themselves on the Portal.
- The Portal has identified **17 sectors** including engineering, logistics, and chemicals, and provides for selecting jobs across **950 trades** mainly for local youth who would need to produce domicile certificates.
- There would be **regular reviews of the jobs provided**. There would be a study on the kind of problems faced by employers as well as youth seeking employment.

Developed by: Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC).

Corresponding Initiative at the National Level: **National Career Service Project** implemented by the Ministry of Labour & Employment, works towards bridging the gap between job seekers and employers.

National Logistics Policy

Why in News?

Union Minister of Commerce and Industry of the policy reviewed the draft National Logistics Policy and proposed action plan for implementation prepared by the Department of Logistics, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Key Highlights:

The draft National Logistics Policy has been prepared in consultation with the Ministries of Railways, Road Transport and Highways, Shipping and Civil Aviation and forty-six Partnering Government Agencies (PGAs).

- **Objective:** To streamline rules, address supply-side constraints, lower logistics costs and ensure greater competitiveness for Indian products worldwide.
- **National Logistics e-marketplace:** A National Logistics e-marketplace will be created as a one stop marketplace.
 - It will involve simplification of documentation for exports/imports and drive transparency through digitization of processes involving Customs, PGAs etc in regulatory, certification and compliance services.
- **Institutional Framework for policy:** For purpose of the new logistics framework, four committees/councils will be constituted:
 - **National Council for Logistics**, chaired by the Prime Minister.
 - **Apex inter-ministerial Committee**, chaired by the Minister of Commerce and Industry.
 - **India Logistics Forum** chaired by the Commerce Secretary with representation from key industry/business stakeholders and academia.
 - **Empowered task force on logistics** will be created, as a standing committee chaired by the head of the Logistics Wing.

Need for National Logistics Policy

- **Unregulated and fragmented logistics sector:** India's logistics sector has remained fragmented and unregulated, despite its centrality to economic growth.

- **Complex sector:** The sector is very complex with more than 20 government agencies, 40 PGAs, 37 export promotion councils, 500 certifications, 10000 commodities, 160 billion market sizes along with 12 million employment base.
 - The national logistics policy will clarify the roles of the Union government, state governments and key regulators
- **High cost:** The cost of logistics for India is about 14 per cent of its GDP and it is far higher as compared to other countries.
- **Lack of adequate infrastructure:** Almost 25-30% of fruits and vegetables produced in India are wasted due to lack of cold chain infrastructure

The draft National Logistics Policy

- **Optimise modal mix:** The draft policy has sought to optimize the modal mix (road-60%, rail-31%, water-9%) to global benchmarks (road - 25-30%, rail - 50-55%, water - 20-25%) and promote the development of multi-modal infrastructure.
- **Logistics Wing:** The policy recommends setting up a Logistics Wing that will be the nodal agency tasked to identify key projects for driving first mile and last mile connectivity and to optimize the modal mix to identify commodity and corridor for the most cost-effective mode of transport.
- **Logistics centre of Excellence:** Encourage industry, academia and government to come together to create a logistics Centre of Excellence, and drive innovation in the logistics sector.

Objectives of the Logistics Policy

- **Providing an impetus to trade and hence economic growth** by driving competitiveness in exports.
- Doubling employment in the logistics sector by generating additional 10-15 million jobs and focus on enhancing skills in the sector and encouraging gender diversity.
- **Improve India's ranking in the Logistics Performance Index.**
- **Strengthening the warehousing sector in India** by improving the quality of storage infrastructure including specialized warehouses across the country.
- **Reducing losses due to agro-wastage** to less than 5% through effective agro-logistics.
- **Providing impetus to MSME sector** in the country through a cost-effective logistics network.
- **Promoting cross regional trade on e-commerce platforms** by enabling a seamless flow of goods.
- Encouraging adoption of **green logistics** in the country.

Benefits

- **Impetus to employment and growth:** The Indian logistics sector provides livelihood to more than **22 million** people and improving the sector will facilitate **10% decrease** in indirect logistics cost, leading to a **growth of 5 to 8% in exports**.
- **Growth potential in logistics sector:** Further, it is estimated that the worth of **Indian logistics market will be around \$215 billion in the next two years, compared to about \$160 billion at present**.

Way Forward

The development of multi-modal logistics parks and rules to do with motor vehicle movement, come under the ambit of state governments. So, there is need of alignment between the Centre and states, for better implementation and coordination of this policy.

Draft Rules for Code on Wages Act 2019

Why in News?

Recently, the **Ministry of Labour and Employment** has published the draft rules framed for the implementation of the **Code on Wages Act, 2019**.

Key Points

The latest draft rules are similar to the preliminary draft published in November 2019 with one major change.

- The Ministry has **changed the work requirement for eligibility for minimum wages** and other benefits **from nine hours to eight**.
- The latest draft clarified the issue as the **nine hours mentioned earlier included one hour of rest**, which has now been mentioned separately from the eight working hours.

Code on Wages Act 2019

- **Aims to transform the old and obsolete labour laws into more accountable and transparent ones** and seeks to pave the way for the introduction of minimum wages and labour reforms in the country.
- **Removes the multiplicity of wage definitions**, which can significantly reduce litigation as well as compliance cost for employers.
- **Regulates the wages and bonus payments in all employments** where any industry, trade, business, or manufacturing is being carried out.
- **Links minimum wage across the country to the skills** of the employee and the place of employment.
 - It simplifies the methodology to fix minimum wage by doing away with the 'type of employment'.
- It seeks to **universalise the provisions of minimum wages** and timely payment of wages to all employees irrespective of the sector and wage ceiling.
 - It seeks to ensure '**Right to Sustenance**' for every worker and intends to increase the legislative protection of minimum wage.
 - Employees getting monthly salary shall get the salary by 7th of next month, those working on a weekly basis shall get the salary on the last day of the week and daily wagers should get it on the same day.
- The Central Government is empowered to fix the floor wages by taking into account the living standards of workers. It may set different floor wages for different geographical areas.
 - The minimum wages decided by the central or state governments must be higher than the floor wage.
 - Under the Constitution of India, **labour is a subject in the Concurrent List of the Seventh Schedule** where both the Central and State Governments are competent to enact legislation.

Calculation of Minimum Wage:

- According to the draft rules, the basis for calculating the minimum wage would be a **standard working-class family of one earning worker, a spouse and two children, a net intake of 2,700 calories per day each, 66 metres of cloth per year, rent expenditure equal to 10% of the food and clothing expenditure, fuel, electricity and other miscellaneous expenses of 20% of minimum wage and expenditure on children's education, medical care, recreation and contingencies amounting to 25% of the minimum wage**.

It subsumes the following four labour laws:

- The Payment of Wages Act, 1936.
- The Minimum Wages Act, 1948.
- The Payment of Bonus Act, 1965.
- The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976.

The Centre shall constitute a technical committee which would advise on the skill categories, while an advisory board may recommend the minimum wage.

USA: India's Top Trading Partner

Why in News?

As per the data from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the **USA remained India's top trading partner for the second consecutive fiscal year in 2019-20.**

- This indicates increasing economic ties between the two countries.

Key Points

Trade with the USA:

- In 2019-20, the bilateral trade between the USA and India stood at **USD 88.75 billion** as against USD 87.96 billion in 2018-19.
- The USA is one of the few countries **with which India has a trade surplus**.
 - **India's trade surplus with the USA** increased to **USD 17.42 billion in 2019-20** from **USD 16.86 billion in 2018-19**.
- In 2018-19, **the USA surpassed China to become India's top trading partner**.

Trade with China:

- The bilateral trade between India and China has dipped to **USD 81.87 billion** in 2019-20 from USD 87.08 billion in 2018-19.
- **Trade deficit between the two neighbours has declined to USD 48.66 billion** in 2019-20 from USD 53.57 billion in the previous fiscal.
- China was India's top trading partner from 2013-14 till 2017-18.
 - **Before China, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was the country's largest trading nation.**
- Further, India is considering certain steps like framing technical regulations and quality control orders for host of items with a view to cut import dependence on China and boost domestic manufacturing.
- Recently, **India banned 59 Chinese apps** and made **government approval mandatory for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from neighbouring countries**.
- The app ban decision came **amid tensions on the border**.

India and World

China's Security Law Impact on Hong Kong

Why in news?

China's national security law **gave it a wide-range of powers over Hong Kong.**

What is the history?

- Hong Kong was **under British rule until 1997.**
- Then, **the territory was given to China under the condition that it retains some autonomy, including its economic system, for 50 years.**
- **As the Chinese firewall took hold,** several technology companies were shut out, including Google and Facebook.
- But with the **quasi-independence afforded by “one country, two systems”,** Hong Kong was integrated into the global Internet.
- Global tech companies were able to operate close to China without being subject to the country's laws.

What is the new national security law?

- The law was put into effect **without the involvement of the local institutions.**
- **It criminalises activities like secession, subversion and, organization and perpetration of terrorist activities.**
- **It also criminalises collusion with a foreign country** or with external elements to endanger national security.
- **Some specific offences include** damaging government buildings and lobbying against the Chinese government.
- The law also allows a **National Security Committee to investigate and prosecute violators.**

What are the provisions of the law on the tech front?

- On the technology front, **the new surveillance and censorship rules could subsume the territory into China's Great Firewall.**
- **The Hong Kong Police are given extensive new controls to censor Internet content, track people online, and seize electronic records.**
- They can **investigate Internet platforms** and their data as well as order its deletion.
- Penalties for the companies include fines up to nearly \$13,000 and six months jail time.

How have tech companies reacted?

- Major tech companies have **suspended their responses to Hong Kong government requests.**
- They said that they would first reassess the law's new controls.
- **They have to decide on whether to accept the new data-sharing and censorship requirements of the law or leave the territory altogether.**
- Their decisions will have significant weight on Hong Kong's future as an international business hub, and on digital free speech as a whole.

What is the key takeaway?

- This marks yet another step of national border disputes erecting new virtual walls between territories.
- These government decisions may lead to the creation of a **“splinternet”.**

- [Splinternet is a characterization of the Internet as dividing due to various factors, such as technology, commerce, politics, nationalism, religion, and interests.]

Global Response to China's Security Law on Hong Kong

United Kingdom's Response:

- It has described the security law as a clear and **serious violation of the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration** under which it handed back its colony to China in 1997.
 - **Under the Joint Declaration**, China had promised to maintain Hong Kong's capitalist and more open political system for 50 years under "one country, two systems".
 - Since the handover, **Hong Kong residents have accused China of overstepping its authority.**
 - **The Umbrella Movement was a series of protests in 2014 that called for more transparent elections for the city's chief executive.**
 - **In 2019 protests erupted in Hong Kong over a proposed bill to allow extradition to mainland China.**
- It has decided to offer **British citizenship to around three million residents** of Hong Kong.
- It is also **rethinking its provisional decision to allow Huawei** (China's Company) to be involved in the development of Britain's 5G infrastructure.

Taiwan's Response:

- It has opened the **Taiwan-Hong Kong Services and Exchange Office** in order to help facilitate asylum for people fleeing Hong Kong.
- **Taiwan was the first state which pledged to support Hong Kong residents seeking asylum, in May 2020.**
 - China also claims Taiwan to be part of China and threatens to use force to take over the island.
 - **China has proposed to Taiwan that it follow the "one country, two systems" model to unite with China.** But the Taiwanese reject any idea of uniting with mainland China.

Other Country's Response:

- The USA has passed a **Bipartisan Bill to sanction Chinese officials who violate Hong Kong's freedoms.**
 - It is also planning to bring the **Hong Kong Safe Harbor Act**, which would open up a route for asylum for Hong Kong's frontline activists in immediate danger.
- **Australia is considering offering Hong Kong residents temporary protection visas** that will allow refugees to live in the country for up to three years.
- **Japan** said that it is seriously concerned about China's decision toward Hong Kong.
- **India** has been keeping a close watch on recent developments in Hong Kong.

Chinese Reaction to Global Response:

- It has said that the **security law issue is purely China's internal affairs**, and no foreign country has the right to interfere.
- It has **condemned the UK's citizenship offer** to Hong Kongers and warned the UK for serious consequences.
 - It considers all residents living in Hong Kong, including those with British National Overseas passports, as Chinese nationals.
 - It has said that the UK's U-turn on its Huawei decision would damage the UK's image as an open, business-friendly environment.

- It has **accused Taiwan administration of nurturing a separatist plot in Hong Kong** and warned for a military response.

Open Sky Agreement

Why in News?

Recently, the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** has expressed interest to have an **Open Sky Agreement with India**.

India's Open Sky Policy:

- The **National Civil Aviation Policy (2016)** allows the government to **enter into an 'open sky' air services agreement on a reciprocal basis with South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) nations as well as countries beyond a 5,000 kilometre radius** from New Delhi.
- It implies that nations within 5,000 kilometer of distance need to enter into a bilateral agreement and mutually determine the number of flights that their airlines can operate between the two countries.
- **India has open sky agreements with Greece, Jamaica, Guyana, Finland, USA, Japan, etc.**

Significance of the Open Sky Agreement:

- Open Sky Agreements are **bilateral agreements** that the two countries negotiate to provide rights for airlines to offer international passenger and cargo services. It expands international passenger and cargo flights.
- India has **Air Service Agreements (ASA) with 109 countries including UAE** covering aspects relating to the number of flights, seats, landing points and code-share. But does not allow unlimited number of flights between two countries.
- Open skies between India and UAE will **allow unlimited number of flights to the selected cities** of each other's countries.

What does the agreement mean?

- Airlines from India, Japan can add many more flights between both countries
- It could reduce air fares on routes between countries

Japanese flights can land on 6 airports: Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Bengaluru

India recently signed such agreements with Greece, Jamaica, Guyana, the Czech Republic, Finland, Spain and Sri Lanka

New Civil Aviation Policy

- Allows such pacts with all Saarc nations and countries beyond a 5,000-km radius
- Auctioning bilateral rights for foreign carriers seek flights beyond existing quota, awaiting govt nod

Mandates 80% utilisation of bilateral seat rights by Indian carriers

Chabahar Port Project

What is the issue?

- India should not lose the Chabahar port project in Iran, as it has a geostrategic importance.
- India's loss in failing to develop the project might be China's gain.

What is the concern?

- After many appeals to India, Iran decided to go on its own now.
- It began to lay tracks for the line connecting Chabahar to Afghanistan and Turkmenistan.
- **Iran claims it will fund the railway using its own resources.**

- But, it seems to have embarked on the Chabahar-Zahedan project with a confidence borne from an imminent deal with China.
- This deal with China is a 25-year, \$400 billion strategic partnership on infrastructure, connectivity and energy projects.

What is the project about?

- The Chabahar port project was signed in **2003**.
- It has been a symbol of traditionally important India-Iran ties.
- Connected by **sea-lanes to ports on India's west coast, Chabahar would form the fulcrum of India's outreach to Russia and Central Asia.**
- This enhances the connectivity, energy supplies and trade.

Why did India sign the 2016 agreement?

- **Pakistan had blocked Indian aid to Afghanistan and all trade over land.**
- But, **Chabahar provided India an alternative to bypass Pakistan.**
- As a result, the government had fast-tracked plans for the project.
- In 2016, India signed a trilateral trade and transit agreement with Iran and Afghanistan.
- **According to the agreement,**
 - India was granted a **10-year lease to develop and operate two terminals and five berths**, access to the Chabahar free trade zone.
 - **India got the opportunity to build the 628 km rail line from Chabahar to Zahedan**, just across the border from Afghanistan.

How did India implement this 2016 agreement?

- The government acted quickly to develop Chabahar port facilities.
- Through this port, India sent exports to Afghanistan in 2018.
- It has also moved over half-a-million tonnes of cargo for Afghanistan.
- However, the rail line has never taken off despite a commitment from state-owned IRCON, to undertake its construction at \$1.6 billion.

What were the hurdles?

- **There were contract changes by the Iranian side.**
- There were delayed responses from the Indian side.
- The main hurdle has been the fear of American penalties.
- However, India was able to negotiate a sanctions waiver for the Chabahar port and rail line from the U.S.

How Iran's recent decision should be viewed?

- Regardless of the reasons for India's inability to join the railway project, the decision can only be seen as an opportunity lost.
- **The impression that India wavered due to U.S. pressure also questions New Delhi's commitment to strategic autonomy.**

What could be done?

- In a world where connectivity is seen as the new currency, India's loss could well become China's gain.
- New Delhi must watch this space, created by its exit, closely.

USA Ends Hong Kong's Special Status

Why in News?

Recently, **the President of the USA has issued an order to end Hong Kong's special status** and signed the **Hong Kong Autonomy Act**, a legislation that would sanction banks doing business with Chinese officials.

Reasons Behind the Move:

- China's imposition of **national security law** in Hong Kong.
- USA's blame on China for mishandling the **Covid-19 pandemic** and not informing the world about its severity.
- **China's military buildup in the South China Sea** and its treatment of **Uighur Muslims**.

Ending the Special Status:

- **Hong Kong will now be treated the same as mainland China** without any special privileges, special economic treatment or exports of sensitive technologies.
 - **Under the USA's Hong Kong Policy Act of 1992, the USA treats Hong Kong, a semi-autonomous part of China** with its own legal and economic system, differently than the Chinese mainland in trade, commerce and other areas.

Sanctions on Banks:

- The legislation would **penalize banks doing business with Chinese officials** involved in the national security law which China has imposed on Hong Kong.
 - Under the legislation, **banks are granted a kind of year-long grace period to stop doing business with entities and individuals** (primary offenders) undermining Hong Kong's autonomy.
 - After that period, a variety of penalties will be imposed like seizing their assets, barring top executives from entering the USA and restricting the ability to engage in USA dollar-denominated transactions.

Possible Outcomes:

- The new law will force all but provincial Chinese banks to choose between assisting Beijing's efforts in Hong Kong or being able to conduct transactions in USA dollars and operate in the world's largest economy.
- **It will have a devastating impact on Hong Kong as the financial gateway to Western markets.**
- **Completely ending Hong Kong's special treatment could prove self-defeating for the USA** because it was the source of the largest bilateral US goods trade surplus last year, at USD 26.1 billion.
- **Hong Kong is a major destination for USA's legal and accounting services.** Around 85,000 USA citizens lived in Hong Kong in 2018 and more than 1,300 USA companies operate there, including nearly every major financial firm.

China's Response:

- China has held that the **Hong Kong Autonomy Act "maliciously slanders"** its legislation in Hong Kong and has vowed to retaliate.

- It will make necessary responses to **protect its legitimate interests** and impose sanctions on relevant USA personnel and entities.

Azad Pattan: PoK Hydel Project

Why in News?

Recently, **Pakistan and China have signed an agreement for the 700 MW Azad Pattan hydel power project on the Jhelum river in Sudhnoti district of Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK).**

- The 1.5-billion USD project is under the **China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).**

About Azad Pattan project:

- **It is one of five hydropower schemes on the Jhelum, the other four are Mahl, Kohala, Chakothi Hattian and Karot projects.** All projects are being developed **under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).**
- It is a run-of-the-river project with a reservoir located near Muslimabad village, 7 km upstream from the Azad Pattan bridge, in district Sudhnoti, one of the eight districts of PoK.
- **It will be commissioned by 2024** and will comprise a 90-metre-high dam, with a 3.8 sq km reservoir.
- It will be developed on the **‘Build, Own, Operate, Transfer (BOOT)’ model** and will be transferred to the government of Pakistan after 30 years.

Other projects in PoK:

- **Kohala project:** It is a 1,124 MW hydel project that will come upon the Jhelum near Muzaffarabad. This project is one of the biggest investments by China in PoK.
- **The Karot Hydropower station:** it is the third project being executed by China on the Jhelum is on the boundaries of Kotli district in PoK and Rawalpindi district in Pakistan’s Punjab province.
- Two more hydel projects are planned in Gilgit **Baltistan** namely **Phandar Hydro Power, and Gilgit KIU.** On the CPEC site, both are listed as “under review”.

Concerns for India:

- **India has strongly protested the construction of dams and other infrastructure in PoK and Gilgit Baltistan,** as India claims these territories as part of Jammu & Kashmir.
- With the commission of these projects, **China will have a dominant presence in the PoK region** which may further escalate the tensions between China and India.
- **These projects do not follow the principles of openness, transparency and financial responsibility** given by the International agencies.
- Recently, **Iran drops India From Chabahar Railway Project Citing Delay In Funding** and this move Coincides with its Strategic Deal With China.



About China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC):

- The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a **3,218-km route consisting of highways, railways and pipelines that will connect Gwadar port to Xinjiang in China**. The CPEC is crucial for **China's 'One Belt, One Road' initiative** that aims to connect China to Europe and Asia.
- **The Gwadar port is the showpiece of the ChinaPakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project**, which Beijing sees as a crucial link that will help it in its drive to become a world power.
- **India's concerns-** India has boycotted the OBOR and the CPEC organised by China citing sovereignty and security issues.
- **The construction work by China in the disputed area includes security issues for India.**
- **China's maritime presence in Gwadar Port** can be highly detrimental to India's maritime and economic strategy because India also imports oil from the same region.

E.U. – India summit

Why in News?

India and the European Union (EU) will soon hold the annual summit and are set to agree on a **“High-level Dialogue on Trade and Investment”** to restart negotiations.

- **The annual summit will resume after a gap of 2 years and talks on a free trade agreement after a gap of 7 years.**

More on the news:

- Tackling COVID-19 and its impact on the economy and the global order will be high on the agenda.
- The medical developments on testing vaccines and treating the coronavirus will be discussed along with the withdrawal of the U.S. from multilateral organisations (like the World Health Organisation). The 'assertive' nature of China will be on the agenda too.
- India and the E.U. are **expected to conclude several agreements including a roadmap for cooperation, an agreement on civil nuclear cooperation and launch a maritime security dialogue as well as negotiations between Europol and the CBI.**
- There will be a **trade and investment dialogue**, which is expected to give a kickstart to negotiations on the Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) as the EU-India FTA is known, which have failed to be resumed despite several commitments by the leaders, including at the last E.U.-India summit in 2017.
- Both sides are expected to officially adopt the **'EU-India Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025'**, which will seek to enhance strategic and security ties between both sides.

Reservations of EU:

- It stated that there is a trend in India that goes towards the protectionist side. The Make in India programme was accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis and recent pronouncements that India wants to go 'Self-reliant', didn't help the situation.
- **Bilateral trade with India formed under 3% of the E.U.'s global trade, which is “far below” what was expected of the relationship.**
- It stated that India maintains a quiet protectionist stance when it comes to offering us tariff relaxations.”
- It has reservations about the model **“Bilateral Investment Treaty” (BIT)** that India has proposed, especially on dispute mechanisms in Indian courts.

Deadlock in Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA):

- India and the European Union continue to struggle to conclude a bilateral Free Trade Agreement even a decade after the negotiations were first launched in 2007.
- The BTIA negotiations have remained deadlocked over growing differences regarding greater market access sought by both sides for merchandise exports.

What is BTIA?

- **In 2007, India and the EU began negotiations on a broad-based Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA).**
- These negotiations are in consonance with the commitment made by leaders of both sides at the 7th India-EU Summit held in 2006 to move towards negotiations for a broad-based trade and investment agreement on the basis of the report of India-EU High-Level Technical Group.
- Through its implementation, India and the EU expect to promote bilateral trade by removing barriers to trade in goods and services and investment across all sectors of the economy.

European Union:

- It is a group of **27 countries** that operate as a **cohesive economic and political block**.
- **It was formed in 1993** and came into force after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty by 27 countries.
- Its objectives are to increase political cooperation, to enhance economic integration by creating a single currency the EURO, unified security and foreign policy, common citizenship Rights, enhanced cooperation in the areas of judiciary, immigration and asylum.
- **19 of these countries use the EURO as their official currency.** 8 EU members (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Sweden,) do not use the euro.
- **It was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2012.**

New Supreme Court Building of Mauritius

Why in News?

Indian PM along with his Mauritius counterpart inaugurated the New Supreme Court building in Mauritius through video conferencing.

Key Highlights:

- The project has been completed with **an assistance of \$ 28.12 million from the Indian Government** which comes without any hidden conditions for jeopardizing the sovereignty of Mauritius.
- The building equipped with the latest technology will help the Mauritius judiciary in making justice more efficient, accessible and inclusive.
- The project was completed on time at below initial level costs, signifying India's commitment towards the neighbourhood countries.
- The assistance is in line with India's vision of '**SAGAR – Security and Growth for All in the Region**' and is a testimony to the enhanced closeness between the Indian Ocean countries.
- The cooperation between two neighbours is based on core values of '**Respect**', '**Diversity**', '**Care for the Future**', and '**Sustainable Development**'.

SAGAR:

- In 2015, Indian PM unveiled India's strategic vision for the Indian Ocean: Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR).
- It is **"consultative, democratic and equitable"** in nature.
- It has both distinct and inter-related elements – such as -
 - deepening economic and security cooperation in the littorals,
 - enhancing capacities to safeguard land and maritime territories,
 - working towards sustainable regional development and blue Economy,
 - promoting collective action to deal with non-traditional threats like natural disasters, piracy, terrorism etc.
- It therefore has an inclusive vision with **politico-economic-security cooperation and respect for international maritime laws at its centre.**

Environment

Rajaji National Park

Why in News?

Recently, a clash took place between Van Gujjars and the Uttarakhand forest officials in the Rajaji National Park.

Key Points

- **Location:** Haridwar (Uttarakhand), along the foothills of the Shivalik range, spans 820 square kilometres.
- **Background:** Three sanctuaries in the Uttarakhand i.e. **Rajaji, Motichur and Chila were amalgamated into a large protected area and named Rajaji National Park in the year 1983 after the famous freedom fighter C. Rajgopalachari; popularly known as "Rajaji".**

Features:

- This area is the North Western Limit of habitat of **Asian elephants**.
- **Forest types include** sal forests, riverine forests, broad-leaved mixed forests, scrubland and grassy.
- It possesses as many as **23 species of mammals and 315 bird species** such as elephants, tigers, leopards, deers and ghorals, etc.
- It was declared a **Tiger Reserve in 2015**.
- It is home to the **Van Gujjars in the winters**.

Van Gujjars:

- It is one of the few **forest-dwelling nomadic communities** in the country.
- Usually, **they migrate to the bugyals (grasslands)** located in the upper Himalayas with their buffaloes and return only at the end of monsoons to their makeshift huts, deras, in the foothills. They inhabit the foothills of Himalayan states like Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand.
- **They traditionally practice buffalo husbandry;** a family owns up to 25 heads of buffaloes. They rely on buffaloes for milk, which gets them a good price in Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh markets.

New Species of Butterfly

Striped Hairstreak:

- **Scientific Name:** Yamamotozephyrus kwangtugensis
- **Discovery:** It is found in **Vijaynagar village of Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh**, bordering Myanmar.
- It was a subject of interest for the lepidopterists as **its genus is diversified into several genera** (i.e. sub-divisions) and thus, difficult to trace.



Habitat:

- It was **first recorded in Hainan province of China**.
- It is also found in **North America**, from the Rocky Mountains

Elusive Prince:

- **Scientific Name:** Rohana tonkiniana
- **Discovery:** It is found in **Miao subdivision** situated on the periphery of the **Namdapha National Park**.
- In India **only a male specimen of the Elusive Prince** was found.
- Initially it was considered as a variant of the Black Prince, but the study revealed that **it is different and not recorded in India before**.

Habitat: It was first recorded in Tonkin in north Vietnam.

- The Rohana Genus: It has been represented in India by **two species — the Black Prince** (Rohana parisatis) and **the Brown Prince** (Rohana parvata).



Globba andersonii

Why in News?

A team of researchers have **“rediscovered” a rare plant species called Globba andersonii from the Sikkim Himalayas**.

- The species has been found near the **Teesta river valley region** after a gap of nearly **136 years**.

Key Points

Features:

- The plant, known commonly as ‘**dancing ladies**’ or ‘**swan flowers**’ was thought to have been extinct until its “re-collection”, for the first time since **1875**.
- *Globba andersonii* are characterised by **white flowers and non-attached anthers** (the part of a stamen that contains the pollen).
- The species has been listed as “**Endangered**” on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.



Habitat:

- It is also termed as “**narrowly endemic**” as the **species is restricted mainly to the Teesta River Valley region** which includes the Sikkim Himalayas and Darjeeling hill ranges.
- The plant usually grows in a **dense colony as a lithophyte** (plant growing on a bare rock or stone) on **rocky slopes in the outskirts of evergreen forests**.
- It is especially **prevalent near small waterfalls along the roadside leading to these hill forests, which are 400-800 m. above sea level**.

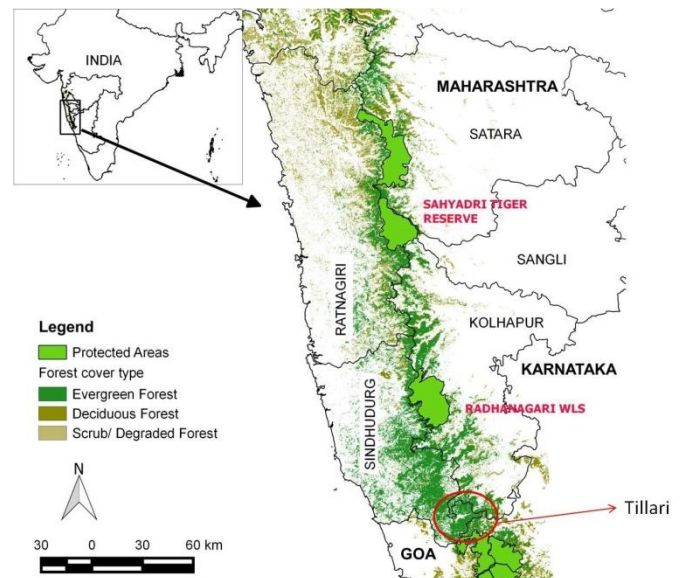
Tillari Conservation Reserve

Why in News?

The **Maharashtra state’s forest department** has declared **29.53 sq. km area of Dodamarg forest range in Sindhudurg district as ‘Tillari Conservation Reserve’**.

Tillari Conservation Reserve

- This area is known to serve as a corridor and even as a **habitat for the population of tigers and elephants** moving between the **three states of Goa, Karnataka and Maharashtra**.
- The 38-km-long Dodamarg wildlife corridor that connects Radhanagari Wildlife Sanctuary in Maharashtra to Bhimgad Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka frequently witnesses elephant and tiger movement.
- **Tillari will be the seventh corridor** in the state to be declared as a ‘conservation reserve’.



What are Conservation Reserves?

- They denote protected areas which typically act as buffer zones to or connectors and migration corridors between established national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and reserved and protected forests.
- Such areas are designated if they are uninhabited and completely owned by the Government of India but used for subsistence by communities if part of the lands is privately owned.

- **Administration of such reserves would be through local people and local agencies** like the gram panchayat, as in the case of communal forests.

What are Community Reserves?

- They are the **first instances of private land being accorded protection under the legislature.**
- It opens up the possibility of communally owned for-profit wildlife resorts, and also causes privately held areas under non-profit organizations like land trusts to be given protection.
- **These protected area categories were first introduced in the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act of 2002 – the amendment to the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972.**
- These categories were added because of reduced protection in and around existing or proposed protected areas due to private ownership of land, and land use.

Golden Birdwing

Why in News?

Recently, a **Himalayan butterfly known as Golden Birdwing (Troides aeacus)** has been **discovered as India's largest butterfly after 88 years.**

- It has replaced an unknown specimen which a **british army officer Brigadier Evans had recorded in 1932.**

Key Points

Discovery:

- The female was recorded from **Didihat in Uttarakhand**, the **male was from the Wankhar Butterfly Museum in Shillong, Meghalaya.**



Characteristics:

- With a **wingspan of 194 mm**, the female of the species is marginally larger than the Southern Birdwing (190 mm).
 - Earlier, the largest Indian butterfly that was recorded in 1932 was an individual of the Southern Birdwing (Troides minos), which was then treated as a subspecies of the Common Birdwing (Troides helena).
 - However, the specimen that Evans measured was unknown and no other butterfly measured as much as the 190 mm that he recorded.
- **The male Golden Birdwing is much smaller at 106 mm.**

Measurement: The only measurement used in the study of Lepidoptera is wingspan in which butterflies are measured from the wing base to the tip.

Rewa Solar Project

Why in News?

Recently, the Prime Minister inaugurated **Asia's largest solar project in Rewa** district of Madhya Pradesh.

Objectives & Significance:

- The solar plant will provide **electricity to the industries in Rewa and also to the metro rail in Delhi**. This is the first solar project in the country to break the “grid parity barrier”.
- It is a cheap & clean energy source which will help poor, middle-class families, tribals and farmers of the state.
- It is expected to **reduce carbon emission equivalent to around 15 lakh tons of CO2 per year**.
- It exemplifies the commitment of the nation to achieve the **175 GW target of installed renewable energy capacity by 2022**. This includes 100 GW of solar installed capacity.
- It has been acknowledged for its robust project structuring and innovations.

Key facts:

Developed by- The solar project was developed by **Rewa Ultra Mega Solar Limited (RUMSL)**. The company is a joint venture of Solar Energy Corporation of India and Madhya Pradesh Urja Vikas Nigam Limited (MPUVN).

- It consists of three solar generating units of 250 MW each located on a 500-hectare plot of land situated inside a Solar Park having a total area of 1500 hectare. It is one of the largest single-site solar plants in the world.
- The Rewa Solar Power project has **received the World Bank Group President’s Award for innovation and excellence and was included in the book ‘A Book of Innovation: New Beginnings’**.
- **24% of energy** from the project will be supplied to **Delhi Metro** and the remaining **76% will be supplied to the State DISCOMs of Madhya Pradesh**.

Dehing Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary

Why in News?

The **Assam government** has decided to **upgrade Dehing Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary into a National Park**.

- The announcement comes just months after the **National Board of Wildlife (NBWL)** gave **conditional clearance to a coal mining project by Coal India Limited (CIL)** in the Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve.
- As a national park, **its importance will increase and new rules will bring increased vigilance to the area**. While the first proposal to accord national park status to the region dates back to 1995, **Dehing Patkai was declared a wildlife sanctuary in 2004**.

About the Sanctuary:

- The Dehing Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary, also known as the **Jeypore Rainforest** is a part of **Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve**.
- It is located in the districts of **Dibrugarh and Tinsukia**.
- Dehing Patkai is a deciduous rainforest interspersed with semi-evergreen and lush green flora, the only patch of virgin rainforest in Assam.
- It comprises of **Jeypore, Upper Dehing and Dirok**.

Fauna: Rare fauna found in the region include **Chinese pangolin**, flying fox, wild pig, sambar, barking deer, gaur, serow and Malayan giant squirrels.

- It is the **only sanctuary in India** which is home to **seven different species of wild cats - tiger, leopard, clouded leopard, leopard cat, golden cat, jungle cat and marbled cat.**
- **Assamese macaque**, a primate found in the forest, is in the red list of Near Threatened species.
- It has the highest concentration of the rare endangered **White Winged Wood Duck.**

Flora: Dehing Patkai is a **deciduous rainforest** interspersed with **semi-evergreen and lush green flora.**

National Parks	Wildlife Sanctuaries
➤ National Park implies an area that is exclusively designated by the government for the conservation of wildlife and biodiversity due to its natural, cultural and historical significance.	➤ Wildlife sanctuaries refer to an area which provides protection and favourable living conditions to the wild animals.
➤ National parks are highly restricted areas, which are not open to all the people.	➤ Wildlife sanctuaries have lesser restrictions than national parks.
➤ For example: To visit national parks, official permission is to be taken from the requisite authorities.	➤ In contrast, no official permission is to be taken to visit a wildlife sanctuary.
➤ Human activities are strictly prohibited in the National parks.	➤ Human activities are allowed to a limited extent in the wildlife sanctuaries.
➤ The national parks have clearly marked boundaries (fixed by legislation).	➤ Boundaries of wildlife sanctuaries are not sacrosanct.
➤ The International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has declared National Parks in Category II of the protected areas.	➤ Wildlife sanctuaries are grouped in Category IV of protected areas.
➤ Most of the national parks were initially wildlife sanctuaries, which were then upgraded to national parks.	➤ A national park cannot be downgraded to a Wildlife Sanctuary.
➤ Tourism is allowed in both of them.	

Tiger Census 2018: Guinness Book of World Records

Why in News?

Recently, **India's 2018 Tiger Census entered into the Guinness Book of World Records** for being **the world's largest camera trapping wildlife survey.**

All India Tiger Estimation:

- The tiger count is prepared after **every four years by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)** provides details on the number of tigers in the 18 tiger reign states with 50 tiger reserves.
- This time, the census also included data collected from the rough terrains of north-eastern states which were not possible due to logistic constraints before.
- The entire exercise spanned over four years is considered to be **the world's largest wildlife survey** effort in terms of coverage and intensity of sampling.
- **Over 15, 000 cameras were installed at various strategic points** to capture the movement of tigers. This was supported by extensive data collected by field personnel and satellite mapping.

Highlights of the 2018 estimation:

- India has **2,967 tigers**, a third more than in 2014, according to results of a tiger census.
- **India has achieved the target of doubling tiger population** four years before the 2022 deadline.
- According to the census, **Madhya Pradesh saw the highest number of tigers at 526, closely followed by Karnataka at 524 and Uttarakhand at number 3 with 442 tigers.**
- While **Pench Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh recorded the highest number of tigers**, Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu registered the “maximum improvement” since 2014.
- **Chhattisgarh and Mizoram saw a decline in their tiger numbers** while tiger numbers in Odisha remained constant. All other states witnessed a positive trend.

About tiger census:

- **Since 2006**, the government of India has been conducting the census in every four years led by the **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)** and the **Wildlife Institute of India (WII)** with cooperation from various **state forest departments and conservation NGOs.**
- The exercise aims at arriving at a nationwide assessment into the country's population and habitat of tigers (*Panthera tigris Tigris*).
- The data was collected using an **Android-based application- M-STRIPES** (Monitoring system for Tigers' Intensive Protection and Ecological Status).

What is Project Tiger Initiative?

- Project Tiger initiative was launched **in 1973.**
- **The aim of the project** is to ensure that the population of Bengal tigers is well-maintained in their natural habitats, damages done to these habitats should be repaired so that the ecosystem is balanced and Maintaining viable tiger population.
- **Under the project**, the government has also set up a tiger protecting force that ensures there is no poaching of any kind or any human-tiger conflict.

About Guinness World Records:

- **In 1955** the Guinness Book of Records was published.
- **It is a reference book published annually**, listing world records both human achievements and the extremes of the natural world.

India's Solar Plan

Why in news?

The Prime Minister inaugurated the '**Asia's largest solar power project**' in Rewa, Madhya Pradesh.

What is the significance?

- This project inauguration sends a signal that India remains serious about clean energy.
- **India's solar installed capacity** is at about **40 GW today**.
- **This is in short of its goal of achieving 100 GW by 2022.**

Why the pace of capacity additions has slowed?

- This happened after the imposition of safeguard duty on solar cells and modules from China and Vietnam with effect from August 2018.
- The two-year period for which this duty was imposed ends in a few days.
- Amidst a policy of Atmanirbharat, reports suggest that this levy may be continued in the form of a regular tariff.

Why costs are higher now?

- Notably, **China accounted for over 75% of India's cell and panel imports** at least before the imposition of safeguard duties.
- The remaining gap was plugged by Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.
- **A 'manufacturing-linked tender' given by the Solar Energy Corporation of India in January was based on a tariff of ₹2.92/kWh.**
- This tender is more than contracts awarded sometime ago, based on a tariff of about ₹2.50/kWh.
- **This new tariff has made the India's costs are higher now.**
- It is not yet clear to what extent the cells and wafers will be indigenously sourced in such cases.
- **Domestically produced modules are 33% more expensive than their Chinese counterparts are.**
- The cost of the raw materials is estimated to account for a major share of the cost difference.

What is India's capacity?

- At present, India is estimated to have a **module manufacturing capacity of 9 GW and a cell making capacity of 3 GW.**
- Ironically, **the indigenous manufacture of Photo Voltaic (PV) modules calls for a reliable supply of electricity.**
- While China leads the world in PVs, making two-thirds of the world's modules, the EU is trying to make a comeback.

What should India do?

- India has a long road to traverse if it is to be both cost-effective and self-reliant in this sector.
- Given the ecological obligations, **India should shift to non-hydro renewable soon.**
- It is a sobering thought that solar power accounts for just 3.6% of India's electricity generated, and 9.8% of the total installed capacity.
- India should take a leaf out of China's policy book, and create the right demand and supply ecosystem.
- **The PM-KUSUM scheme is a notable step in this respect.**

Draft EIA Notification

Why in news?

The Union Ministry of Environment has introduced a new Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification.

Background

- India is a signatory to the Stockholm Declaration (1972) on Environment.
- We enacted laws to control water (1974) and air (1981) pollution soon after.
- But it was only after the Bhopal gas leak disaster in 1984 we legislated an umbrella Act for environmental protection in 1986.
- Under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, India notified its first EIA norms in 1994.
- It set in place a legal framework for regulating activities that access, utilise, and affect (pollute) natural resources.
- Every development project has been required to go through the EIA process for obtaining prior environmental clearance ever since.
- The 1994 EIA notification was replaced with a modified draft in 2006.

Problems in existing mechanism?

- Though established to safeguard the environment, the EIA process, often achieved the opposite.
- It had a facade of legal paperwork for a range of de facto concessions enjoyed by industries.
- Lack of administrative capacity to ensure compliance often renders long lists of clearance conditions meaningless.
- Then there are periodic amendments exempting one category of industries or the other from scrutiny.

Key changes in 2020 notification?

- It seeks to replace the existing EIA notification of 2006.
- It proposed to reduce or even remove public participation, and by extension independent expert opinion, from the process of granting environmental clearances.
- **Section 26** - It provides a list of projects that would not attract environmental clearance or permission, including coal mining and seismic surveys for oil, methane and shale gas on some lands.
- **Strategic projects** - Projects concerning national defence and security are naturally considered strategic.
- But the government also gets to decide on the “strategic” tag for other projects.
- The 2020 draft says no information on “such projects shall be placed in the public domain”.
- **Section 14** - All inland waterways projects and expansion/widening of national highways will be exempt from prior clearance.
- It also limits the scope of public involvement to the districts concerned, in the case of national parks and sanctuaries where pipeline infrastructure will pass.
- These include roads that cut through forests and dredging of major rivers.
- Further, it retains the clause that if a public agency or authority considers the local situation not conducive to participation by citizens, the public consultation need not include a public hearing.
- The Centre has also displayed unseemly haste to get them in place.
- The deadline to August 11, only after Delhi High Court order to extend it.

Indian Bullfrog

- **Scientific Name:** *Hoplobatrachus tigerinus*.
- **Common Names:** Bullfrog, Golden Frog, Green Frog, Tiger Frog etc.
- **IUCN Red List:** Least Concern.
- **Indian Wildlife Act 1972:** Schedule IV.
 - **Schedule IV along with Schedule III provide protection with lesser penalties.**
- **It is native to the Indian subcontinent** (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan) and is the largest frog in India.
- **These are prolific breeders** (producing many offspring), have short breeding seasons, and each egg clutch can contain up to 5,750 eggs.
 - Indian bullfrog tadpoles are carnivorous and **eat other tadpoles** (including their own species).
 - The tadpoles grow to be the largest (around 20 millimetres) and also grow the fastest.
- Adult bullfrogs pose a threat to small endemic vertebrates because they can eat everything which fits into their mouths like centipedes, leeches, native frogs, lizards, small snakes and even chicks and ducklings.
 - Bullfrogs eat the native frogs as well and their diets overlap, indicating a possibility of competition.
- It is **one of the invasive species on the islands of Andaman and Nicobar**.
 - An invasive species is a species that is **accidentally or artificially introduced** into a biosphere where it is not normally found.
 - **In the absence of a natural predator, as it generally happens, the invasive species thrive and causes economic and environmental damage** due to the imbalance created by its introduction.



Science and Technology

CogX 2020: Festival of AI & Emerging Technology

Why in News?

Recently **MyGov Corona Helpdesk Chatbot** has **bagged two awards** under categories **(1) “Best Innovation for Covid-19 – Society”** and **(2) “People’s Choice Covid-19 Overall Winner”** at the recently held CogX 2020.

What is MyGov?

- MyGov is the **world’s largest citizen engagement platform**, which facilitates two-ways communication between the Government and Citizen and facilitates participatory governance in India.
- In the fight against Covid-19, **MyGov, JioHaptik Technologies Limited and WhatsApp team collaborated to develop AI enabled MyGov Corona Helpdesk** in the record time of five days including weekend.
- AI enabled MyGov Corona Helpdesk bagged two awards under categories of Best Innovation for Covid-19 – Society and People’s Choice Covid-19 Overall Winner.

What is CogX?

- It is a renowned **Global Leadership Summit and Festival of AI & Emerging Technology** held annually in London.

- The **CogX Awards** are given out to the best-of-the-best in AI and emerging technologies across the world.
- After a rigorous evaluation, Indian chatbot ‘MyGov Corona Helpdesk’ was chosen among hundreds of entries that made a difference to society during the pandemic.

Scope of AI in India in different areas

In the field of education

- Educational software can be adapted to student needs
- Artificial intelligence can automate basic activities in education, like grading
- It can point out places where courses need to improve
- Students could get additional support from AI tutors
- AI-driven programs can give students and educators helpful feedback
- Data powered by AI can change how schools find, teach, and support students
- It is altering how we find and interact with information

Language understanding – The ability to “understand” and respond to the natural language. To translate from spoken language to a written form and to translate from one natural language to another natural language.

- Speech Understanding
- Semantic Information Processing (Computational Linguistics)
- Question Answering Information Retrieval 5. Language Translation

Learning and adaptive systems – The ability to adapt behavior based on previous experience, and to develop general rules concerning the world based on such experience.

- Cybernetics
- Concept Formation

Problem solving – Ability to formulate a problem in a suitable representation, to plan for its solution and to know when new information is needed and how to obtain it.

- Inference (Resolution-Based Theorem Proving, Plausible Inference and Inductive Inference)
- Interactive Problem Solving
- Automatic Program Writing
- Heuristic Search

Robots: A combination of most or all of the above abilities with the ability to move over terrain and manipulate objects.

- Exploration
- Transportation/Navigation
- Industrial Automation (e.g., Process Control, Assembly Tasks, Executive Tasks)
- Security 5. Other (Agriculture, Fishing, Mining, Sanitation, Construction, etc.)
- Military

Games – The ability to accept a formal set of rules for games such as

- Chess,
- Go, Kalah,
- Checkers, etc., and to translate these rules into a representation or structure which allows problem solving and learning abilities to be used in reaching an adequate level of performance.

For emergency services – When we allow handling emergency to A.I then it is more beneficial for us. Because when some emergency come like

Fire and Flood: – then we can send metal or silicon firefighters to save people because they have no danger to loss life, machines can also defy higher temperatures and can tolerate smoke easily and can search easily in close-quarters by using lasers and radar where as people may not be able to see

For Entertainment- We can apply artificial intelligence to the world of music, can make artificial director which see the real world and can generate the stories.

For providing services to customers – Now a day’s, for providing services to the customer artificial intelligence is using

in place of human being. When any person does calculation like preparing bill, handling account information he can do calculation error but machine do calculation properly and no mistake is done by the machine.

Searching techniques in artificial intelligence – The main characteristics expert system is to collect information from many sources and collect at one place.

Use of Winter Diesel in Ladakh

Why in News?

Recently, the **Indian Oil Corporation (IOC)** has sought approval from the **Directorate General of Quality Assurance (DGQA)** for the use of winter diesel by armed forces for operations in **high altitude areas such as Ladakh**.

- The winter diesel was introduced as a technological solution by the **IOC in 2019 in high-altitude sectors** like Ladakh, Kargil, Kaza and Keylong, which face the **problem of freezing of diesel** in their vehicles in extreme weather conditions.

Winter Diesel:

- It is a specialised fuel specifically for high altitude regions and low-temperature regions such as Ladakh, where ordinary diesel can become unusable.
- It also meets the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) specification of **BS-VI grade**.

Characteristics:

- **Low Viscosity:** It contains additives to maintain lower viscosity by enabling the fuel to remain fluid in such conditions.
- Regular diesel fuel contains **paraffin wax which is added for improving viscosity and lubrication**. At low temperatures, the paraffin wax thickens or “gels” and hinders the flow of the fuel in the car engine.
- **The viscosity of a fluid is a measure of its resistance** (due to internal friction) to deformation thereby maintaining the state of being thick and semi-fluid in consistency.
- **Paraffin wax is a soft colourless solid derived from petroleum, coal or shale oil that consists of a mixture of hydrocarbon molecules.**
- **Low Pour Point:** It has a low pour point (as low as minus 30-degree Celsius). It is the temperature below which the liquid loses its flow characteristics.
- The flow characteristics of regular diesel change at low temperatures and using it may be detrimental to vehicles.
- Earlier, **the IOCL provided the Diesel High sulphur Pour Point (DHPP -W) to armed forces, which also has a pour point of -30°C.**
- **Higher Cetane Rating:** It has a higher cetane rating — which is an indicator of the combustion speed of diesel and compression needed for ignition.
- **Lower Sulphur Content:** It would lead to lower chemical deposits in engines and better performance.

Significance:

- **Border Tensions with China in Ladakh:** It is expected that demand for the winter fuel may rise due to the border tensions in the Galwan valley in Ladakh for the patrolling purposes.
- **Boost to Local Economy:** Supply of the special fuel to Ladakh would reduce the hardships faced by the local people for transportation and mobility during winter months, therefore facilitate the local economy and tourism.
- **Curb in Air Pollution:** Before the launch of winter diesel, consumers in such areas were using kerosene to dilute diesel to make it usable, which leads to more air pollution.
- Now use of winter diesel would replace use of Kerosene therefore helping in the reduction of air pollution.

India Bans Chinese Apps

Why in News?

- The Centre has officially banned 59 Chinese apps.
- This ban has brought to the fore the 'national security versus digital rights' question.

Why did India ban these apps?

- This ban came after **clashes erupted between the Chinese and Indian troops in Galwan valley in Ladakh.**
- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) said that it has received complaints that these **apps misuse user data.**
- There are reports that these **apps transmit users' data in an unauthorised manner** to servers that have locations outside India.
- The MeitY said that many citizens have shared their concerns regarding the data security and risk to privacy relating to operation of certain apps.

How did India block these apps?

- The MeitY invoked its power under the **Section 69A of the Information Technology (I-T) Act.**
- The MeitY said that, using this Act, it blocked these apps to safeguard the sovereignty and integrity of India.

Why the usage of Section 69A of the I-T Act criticized?

- It is criticised that **the Act isn't designed for data protection compliance.**
- It is also argued that Section 69A is set for violations that are more specific rather than broad general violations.
- The 'security of the state' ground is what the Union as well as many State governments have unfortunately taken very wide views of.
- However, data protection is not one of the grounds.
- More importantly, Section 69A is a censorship power, which is not well designed to protect people's rights.

What are the other criticisms?

- **The concerns around national security or other geopolitical concerns have intervened to result in this censorship administrative action.**
- Banning of the apps is seen as a proxy for a larger geopolitical battle.
- The test of proportionate restriction may have not been met.
- The government didn't follow the three-part test while taking such steps that may intrude upon people's fundamental rights and freedoms.

- [Three-part test - That requires action that is very clear; that could not have been done by a less intrusive means; and that follows standards of necessity and proportionality.]

What was the problem with the process followed by India?

- India should have **first investigated the entities**.
- It should have then seen whether other **mechanisms like orders, fines, etc., could be followed**.
- Instead, the Centre has done an emergency blocking order.
- Then, it has said that these platforms should perhaps come to them and make a case as to why they should be unblocked.
- The Centre has said that, only after such a case, these interim orders could be overridden.

How India sees digital rights?

- **India is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.**
- So, it has a basic understanding that regulating the Internet by governments has to respect basic human rights standards.
- In India, it is very clear that our fundamental right to free speech and expression applies to online content too.

How the trade-off could be resolved?

- **Section 69A of the I-T Act is not a new power that the government is commandeering during a time of national security emergency.**
- But, the necessity of blocking the app must be very clearly made out by the government.
- In this way, we can resolve the question of where we can draw the line between this trade-off between national security and rights.

What could be done to make the system fairer?

- Currently, when the Government issues blocking orders under Section 69A of the I-T Act, it asserts secrecy and confidentiality in those orders.
- The government should immediately stop asserting that privilege, so that the public knows what is being blocked and for what reason.
- It can also undertake broader reforms.
- **It can review the Section 69A of the I-T Act itself.**
- **National security agencies must be brought under a legal framework where people can understand what everybody's powers are.**
- **If these agencies have overstepped their bounds, there must be consequences as there are consequences for everyone else..**

Digital India Atmanirbhar Bharat Innovate Challenge

Why in News?

Recently, the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and the Atal Innovation Mission** (initiative by NITI Aayog) have launched the Digital India Atmanirbhar Bharat Innovate Challenge.

- This move comes after the Central government's decision to **ban 59 Chinese apps**.
- Further, the **Covid-19 pandemic** has brought about a big disruption in the day-to-day lives, which is being tackled through the use of technology.

Key Points

- The challenge would encourage Indian application developers and innovators and facilitate their ideas and products.
- It will be jointly hosted by the government and members of the tech community to make it more holistic.

Objectives:

- To help create an Atmanirbhar (self-reliant) app ecosystem.
- To give better visibility and clarity to existing apps to achieve their goals.
- To create tech products helpful in finding solutions to tech problems, with the help of mentorship, tech support and guidance during the entire life-cycle.

The challenge will run in two tracks:

Track-01: Promotion of existing apps.

- For the **promotion of existing apps and platforms across the categories of e-learning, work-from-home, gaming, business, entertainment, office utilities and social networking, the government will provide mentoring, hand-holding and support.**
- It will work in mission mode for identifying good quality apps for the leader board and will be completed in around a month.

Track-02: Development of new apps.

- For incubating new apps and platforms, the initiative will work to help **create new champions in India by providing support in ideation, incubation, prototyping, roll out and market access.**

Kuaizhou-11 Rocket

Why in News?

The Chinese rocket named **Kuaizhou-11 failed due to malfunction during the flight**, losing both the satellites it was carrying.

About the Kuaizhou-11

- Kuaizhou, meaning “**fast ship**” in Chinese, was operated by the **commercial launch firm Expace** and was originally scheduled for 2018 after being developed three years earlier.
- Also known as KZ-11, it had a lift-off mass of 70.8 tonnes, and was designed to launch low-Earth and Sun-synchronous orbit satellites.
- **It was carrying two satellites** — the first being a remote sensing satellite that would provide data to clients on a commercial basis for forecasting and managing geological disasters.

- It would also provide the information required for natural resource exploration. The second was part of a series of satellites for low-Earth orbit navigation.
- **Both satellites were built by Changguang Satellite Co. Ltd.**, a commercial entity born out of the state-owned firms.

BlackRock Android Malware

Why in News?

Recently, a security firm has alerted about a **new malware called BlackRock which targets social, communication, and dating apps.**

Key Points

- **BlackRock is a banking Trojan** and said to be an enhanced version of existing Xerxes malware which itself is a variant of the **LokiBot Android trojan.**
 - **A trojan** is any type of malicious program disguised as a legitimate one. Often, they are designed to steal sensitive information (login credentials, account numbers, financial information, credit card information, and the like) from users.
 - Banking trojans are a specific kind of trojan malware. Once installed onto a client machine, banking trojans use a variety of techniques to create botnets, steal credentials, inject malicious code into browsers, or steal money.
- **Functioning:** It collects user information by abusing the Accessibility Service of Android and overlaying a fake screen on top of a genuine app. It uses Android DPC (Device Policy Controller) to provide access to other permissions.

Concerns:

- It surfaces as a **google update.**
- The malware is said to have the design to **overlay attacks, send, spam, and steal SMS messages as well as lock the victim in the launcher activity. It can also act as a keylogger** (i.e. track the keys struck on a keyboard), which essentially could help a hacker to acquire financial information.
- Despite being a banking Trojan, BlackRock is said to target **non-financial apps.**
- It targets a total of 337 apps, which is significantly higher than any of the already known malicious code.
- **It makes antivirus applications useless.**

Health

G4 Flu Virus

Why in News?

Recently, scientists have identified a “**newly emerged**” strain of influenza virus that is **infecting Chinese pigs** and that has the **potential of triggering a pandemic.**

- Named G4, scientists believe that it has descended from the **H1N1 strain** that was responsible for the 2009 swine flu pandemic.
- A Pandemic happens if a new strain emerges that can **easily spread from person to person**.

About G4 Flu Virus

- Named G4, **the swine flu strain has genes similar to those in the virus that caused the 2009 flu pandemic**.
- The scientists identified the virus through surveillance of influenza viruses in pigs that they carried out from 2011 to 2018 in ten provinces of China.
- They also found that the **G4 strain has the capability of binding to human-type receptors** (like, the SARS-CoV-2 virus binds to ACE2 receptors in humans).
- **The virus was able to copy itself in human airway epithelial cells**, and it showed effective infectivity and aerosol transmission.

2009 Swine Flu Pandemic:

- The 2009 pandemic was caused by a strain of the swine flu called the H1N1 virus, which was transmitted from human to human.
 - **Swine flu** is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses i.e. H1N1. It is called swine flu because it was known in the past to occur in people who had been in the vicinity of pigs.
 - While humans typically do not get infected by such a virus that circulates among pigs, when they do, it is called “variant influenza virus”.
- The **World Health Organisation (WHO)** declared the outbreak of type A H1N1 influenza virus a pandemic in 2009 when there were around 30,000 cases globally.
- **Transmission:** The virus is transmitted by short-distance airborne transmission, particularly in crowded enclosed spaces. Hand contamination and direct contact are other possible sources of transmission.
- **Symptoms of swine flu** include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headaches, chills and fatigue.
- The treatment includes antiviral therapy with medicines like **Oseltamivir (Tamiflu)**, **peramivir (Rapivab)**.

UN Report on Zoonotic Diseases

Why in news?

The United Nation Environment Program (UNEP) and the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) report says:

- Climate change can particularly affect diseases transmitted by insects.
- 75 per cent of all emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic.

Details of Climate Change and Transmission of Diseases

- **Warmer temperatures can increase the vector population size and distribution**, along with the season duration when infectious vector species are present in the environment.
- **Erratic weather events have an impact in the transmission of diseases as well**. For examples: in Africa, an outbreak of Rift Valley fever, a mosquito-borne zoonotic disease, occurred with higher than average seasonal rainfall.
- The thawing of permafrost in the Arctic and sub-arctic region can significantly transforms soil structures, vegetation and habitats.

Details of Increased Zoonotic Disease

- **About 60 per cent of known infectious diseases in humans and 75 per cent of all emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic.**
- **Zoonosis or zoonotic disease is a disease that has passed into the human population from an animal source directly or through an intermediary species.**
- Zoonotic infections can be **bacterial, viral, or parasitic in nature**, with animals playing a vital role in maintaining such infections.
- Examples of zoonoses include **HIV-AIDS, Ebola, Lyme Disease, malaria, rabies, West Nile fever, and the current novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) disease.**

Anthropogenic factors and Zoonotic Diseases

The report identified seven anthropogenic driving factors leading to the emergence of zoonotic diseases:

- Increased demand for animal protein;
- Rise in intense and unsustainable farming;
- The increased use and exploitation of wildlife;
- Unsustainable utilisation of natural resources;
- Travel and transportation
- Changes in food supply chains
- The climate change crisis.

The growing demand for **animal-derived food has encouraged the intensification and industrialisation of animal production**, wherein a large number of genetically similar animals are bred in for higher productivity and disease resistance.

- **Intensive farm settings cause them to be raised in close proximity to each other**, in less ideal conditions characterised by limited biosecurity and animal husbandry, poor waste management and use of antimicrobials as substitute for these conditions. This makes them more vulnerable to infections, which can further lead to emergence of zoonotic diseases.
- **Loss of forest cover for agricultural purposes such as growing of soy, used as a key constituent of animal feed**, is also influencing the emergence of zoonotic diseases by increasing human access to wildlife.
- **High use of antimicrobials in such farm settings** is also contributing to the burden of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), which itself is a chronic pandemic of high cumulative damage threatening public global public health.
- **The increased use and exploitation of wildlife** can bring humans in closer contact with wild animals, thus increasing the risk of zoonotic disease emergence.

Recommendations based on One Health Approach

The report made **ten recommendations based on the One Health approach** that could aid a coordinated multi-sectoral response to future pandemics. These included:

- Raising awareness of zoonotic diseases;
- Investing in interdisciplinary approaches, including One Health;
- Expanding scientific enquiry into zoonotic diseases;
- Improving cost-benefit analyses of interventions to include full-cost accounting of societal impacts of disease;
- Strengthening monitoring and regulation practices associated with zoonotic diseases, including food systems;

- Incentivising sustainable land management practices and developing alternatives for food security and livelihoods that do not rely on the destruction of habitats and biodiversity;
- Improving biosecurity and control, identifying key drivers of emerging diseases in animal husbandry and encouraging proven management and zoonotic disease control measures;
- Supporting the sustainable management of landscapes and seascapes that enhance sustainable co-existence of agriculture and wildlife;
- Strengthening capacities among health stakeholders in all countries; and
- Operationalising the One Health approach in land-use and sustainable development planning, implementation and monitoring, among other fields.

Clinical Trial of Covid-19 Vaccine: ZyCoV-D

Why in News?

Recently, India has started phase I/II clinical trials of **Covid-19 vaccine - ZyCoV-D, designed and developed by Zydus (a pharmaceutical company) with support from the Department of Biotechnology (DBT).**

- The adaptive phase I/II clinical trials will assess the safety, tolerability and immunogenicity of the vaccine.
- The other indigenously developed vaccine - **Covaxin - produced by Hyderabad based Bharat Biotech is also underway to start clinical trials.**

Key Points

- **Description: ZyCoV-D, a plasmid DNA vaccine**, comes under the Vaccine Discovery Programme supported by the Department of Biotechnology under the **National Biopharma Mission**.
 - Plasmids are circular deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) vectors that can be used as vaccines to prevent various types of diseases.
- **Pre-Clinical Phase:** It was found to initiate a strong immune response in multiple animal species like mice, rats, guinea pigs and rabbits.
 - The **antibodies** produced by the vaccine were able to neutralize the wild type virus indicating the protective potential of the vaccine candidate.
 - **No safety concerns were observed in repeat dose** by both intramuscular (directly into muscles) and intradermal (superficial injection into skin) routes of administration.
- **DNA Vaccine Platform:** The development of ZyCov-D has established the DNA vaccine platform in the country which is simple to deploy, temperature stable, and consistently manufacturable- thus lowering costs and enhancing the effectiveness of a vaccine.
 - It provides ease of manufacturing the vaccine with **minimal biosafety requirements**.
 - It has shown much improved vaccine stability and lower cold chain requirements making it easy for transportation to remote regions of the country.
 - Furthermore, the platform can be rapidly used to modify the vaccine in a couple of weeks in case the virus mutates.

Emergence of Epidemics

What is the issue?

- Scientists believe that the loss of biodiversity, and wildlife trade, have strong linkages with the emergence of epidemics.
- Pandemic is an opportunity to explore the consequences of its unscientific actions on nature and prepare for behavioural change.

Is there a link between loss of biodiversity and epidemics?

- Dangerous infectious diseases (Ebola, SARS, Nipah, etc.) have been transferred from wild animals to humans.
- In order to clear land for agriculture and development, forests and habitats have been destroyed.
- In the process, several species are lost.
- Human-induced environmental changes reduce biodiversity resulting in new conditions that host vectors and/or pathogens.
- It is not yet fully understood which species have contributed to the transmission of COVID-19 and how.
- However, according to experts, there is strong evidence that it spread from a wildlife market in Wuhan, China.

Is there a link between illegal wildlife trade and epidemics?

- **Organised crime** - Trafficking in wild plants and animals and wildlife products has become one of the largest forms of organised crime.
- By deliberately pursuing and hunting certain species or by establishing monocultures, habitats and ecosystems are being damaged or destroyed.
- **Threat to India** - Illegal wildlife smuggling is an emerging threat to India's unique wildlife heritage.
- India shelters a number of vulnerable and threatened species.
- Body parts of animals like pangolins, rhinos, etc., are being traded illegally to countries such as China, Vietnam, etc,
- Species are being wiped out for manufacturing traditional Chinese medicines by organised trade networks.
- People extensively encroach natural habitats; hence biodiversity is declining significantly.
- By disturbing the delicate balance of nature, ideal conditions for the spread of viruses from animals to humans has been created.

What could be done?

- There is a need to revisit our relationship with nature and rebuild an environmentally responsible world.
- Nations should work towards **realising the 2050 vision for biodiversity**, 'Living in Harmony with Nature'.
- **One health approach must be followed**, which considers the health of people, wild and domesticated animals, and the environment.
- The high-risk wildlife markets should be strictly regulated.
- There is a need to promote green jobs and work towards achieving carbon-neutral economies.
- India should strictly enforce,
 - **The Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972**, which prohibits the trade of 1,800 species of wild animals/plants and their derivatives;
 - **The Biological Diversity Act of 2002;**
 - Strategies and action plans like the **National Biodiversity Targets;**
 - **The National Biodiversity Mission.**
- The mainstreaming of biodiversity is needed in India's post-COVID-19 development programme.
- Mass biodiversity literacy should be a mission.

- Ecosystem integrity will regulate diseases and restrict the transmission of pathogens from one species to another.

Defense

New Defense Weapons Approved

Why in News?

Recently, the **Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)** approved several proposals that will boost the combat capabilities of all three services—Army, Navy and the Air Force.

Pinaka Ammunition:

- It is an **all-weather, indirect fire, free flight artillery rocket system** developed by **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)**.
- The Pinaka weapon system consists of Rocket, Multi Barrel Rocket launcher, Battery Command Post, Loader cum Replenishment Vehicle, Replenishment Vehicle and Digicora MET Radar.



Astra Missiles:

- **Astra missile** is developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- It is a **Beyond Visual Range (BVR) class of Air-to-Air Missile (AAM) system designed to be mounted on fighter aircraft**. It has capability to destroy the enemy targets which are **beyond their visual range**.
- The missile has all weather day and night capability and will serve as a force multiplier and immensely add to the strike capability of the Navy and Air Force.



Long-Range Land Attack Cruise Missile Systems:

- It is developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- It is aimed at **enhancing the firing range of the Brahmos missile from 400-500 km to 1000 km**.
- Its features include aerodynamic configuration, vertical launch using solid booster, thrust vector control system, booster separation, in-flight wing deployment, in-flight engine start and long range way-point navigation system”.
- The proposed development of fully indigenous long-range land attack cruise missiles can greatly enhance the operational capability of services.



MIG 29 Fighter jets:



- It is a **twin-engine, multirole fighter jet**, developed by the Soviet Russia in the 1970s.

Su-30 MKI Fighter jets:

- The Sukhoi Su-30 is a **twin-engine, two-seat supermaneuverable fighter aircraft developed by Russia's Sukhoi Aviation Corporation.**
- It is a **multirole fighter for all-weather, air-to-air and air-to-surface deep prohibition missions Aircraft.**



Permanent Commission to Women Officers in Army

Why in news?

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has issued the formal Government Sanction Letter for grant of Permanent Commission (PC) to women officers in the Army.

What is a Permanent Commission?

- **A Permanent Commission (PC) means a career in the army until one retires.**
- If one gets selected through PC, one has the option to serve the country up to the full age of retirement.

What is the government's order?

- The government's order specifies the grant of PC to Short Service Commissioned (SSC) women officers in all the 10 streams of the Army in which they presently serve.
- The same procedure for male SSC officers will be followed for women to give PC.
- The order follows a Supreme Court verdict in February 2020.

What was the Supreme Court verdict?

- About 322 women officers had approached the apex court on the issue of PC.
- **The court directed the government to ensure that women officers, irrespective of their years of service, are granted PC in the army.**
- The issue of command postings came up in the discussion on subsequent avenues after the grant of PC.
- In its appeal, **the government cited “physical” and “physiological limitations” in granting command positions to women offers.**
- To this, the Supreme Court said there was need for administrative will and **“change of mindset”** in this regard.
- The court thus added that the woman officers would be eligible for command posting.
- The SC bench observed that there could not be absolute exclusion of women officers for command assignments, and that they should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Why is this significant?

- The Army is often seen as the preserve of men.
- But enough women have fought heroic battles to bust that myth.
- From **Rani of Jhansi in the past to Squadron Leader Minty Agarwal of the Indian Air Force, there are many to cite.**
- [Minty Agarwal, in 2019, was part of the team that guided Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman during the Balakot airstrike carried out by the IAF.]
- But the battle to break a gender stereotype and provide equal opportunities for women in the Army had to be fought right up to the Supreme Court.
- The government initially did not take serious a Delhi High Court ruling in the litigants' favour 10 years ago.
- Then in the Supreme Court, the litigants concerns were evident with the views expressed by the government.
- The government pointed at **"physiological limitations" of women officers.**
- These were cited as great challenges for women officers to meet the exigencies of service.
- But this misogyny was called out by the Supreme Court, which directed for equal treatment.
- Given this past, the present decision will go a long way in ending a prejudice associated with the Army.

What is the way forward?

- Elsewhere in the world, **in countries such as the US and Israel, women are allowed in active combat.**
- In India, the Supreme Court had to forcefully nudge the government to make women's role in the Army more inclusive.
- Of the 40,825 officers serving in the Army, a mere 1,653 are women.
- The overall percentage of women at all levels of the armed forces needs to be increased.
- To usher in a change in a regressive mindset prevalent in the society, a lot more must be done on gender sensitisation.
- A gender barrier may have fallen, but the war against inequity has a long way to go.

Defense One-liner

- The Ministry of Defence (MoD) cleared the purchase of 21 MiG-29 and 12 Sukhoi-30 MKI fighter aircraft along with 248 indigenous long-range air to air missiles, Astra, among others on 2 July 2020.
- The Indian and Japanese navies conducted a small **exercise PASSEX** (passing exercise), towards the Malacca Strait in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- **Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL)** has signed **License Agreement and Transfer of Technology (ToT) with Defence Research and Development Organisation–Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDO– DRDL)** for **Akash Missile Weapon System** (Indian Army Variant).
- „Security and Growth for All in the Region“ Following this vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Indian Navy began „**Mission Sagar**“ to extend India's helping hand across the Indian Ocean.
- „**Samudra Setu**“ meaning „Sea Bridge“, In an effort to repatriate Indian Citizens from overseas, the Operation Samudra Setu was launched on 5th May 2020 by the Indian Navy.
- On 9th July 2020, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has **e-Inaugurated 6 strategic bridges** in sensitive border areas of Jammu & Kashmir.
- Indian Navy conducted major Naval exercises in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands led by Sanjay Vatsayan, Chief Rear Admiral of Eastern naval fleet as a display of strategic intents against China amid the current military conflicts in the Northeastern borders in Ladakh.

- The **US Navy carrier USS Nimitz conducted maritime drills with Indian warships** in the Middle East.
- Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has provided drones named „**Bharat**“ to the Indian Army.
- The Indian armed forces successfully test-fired the **helicopter-launched Nag Missile Dhruvastra anti-tank guided missile**, erstwhile called **Helina**, indirect and top attack mode.
- The Ministry of Defence has signed **Rs 557 crore** contract with **Bharat Earth Movers Limited (BEML) for procurement of 1,512 mine plough (MP) for the Indian Army.**
- **Largest Solar Power Plant at Indian Naval Academy, Ezhimala** has been commissioned by the Vice Admiral Anil Kumar Chawla.
- United States (US) based Aerospace Company Boeing, has delivered the last **5 AH-64E Apache attack helicopters** to Indian Air Force (IAF) at the Air Force Station, Hindan, Uttar Pradesh.
- The Indian army is to acquire **hand-launched, remotely controlled unmanned aerial vehicle Raven from the US and state-of-the-art Israeli Spike Firefly.**

Himachal Pradesh Current Affairs

Lt Gen Raj Mohan Vohra passed away at 88 due to COVID-19

Why in News?

On June 14, 2020 Maha Vir Chakra(MVC) awardee, Lieutenant general (Lt Gen) Raj Mohan Vohra passed away at 88 due to **COVID-19**. He was born in **1932 in Shimla**.He received the MVC in 1972 for his role in the **Battle of Basantar(Part of 1971 India-Pakistan war)**. He also received the **Param Vishisht Seva Medal**.

About Raj Mohan Vohra:

- Raj Mohan Vohra was **Commissioned into the Army in 1952 & retired in 1990**. He also fought in the Punjab sector during the Indo-Pak War of 1965.
- In his initial years of his career he served in the **Scinde Horse regiment & later commanded the 4th Horse (Hodson's Horse- a unit of the Indian Army which originated as part of the British Indian Army)** in the Shakargarh Sector during the Indo-Pak War of 1971.
- He was part of the **1st batch of the National Defense Academy**, then the joint services wing of the Indian Military Academy, which started its training in 1949.
- He was the **alumnus of the Defense Services Staff College, Wellington**. Few prestigious appointments: General officer commanding in Chief (GOC-in-C) Eastern Command and GOC 31 Armoured Division.

About Maha Vir Chakra:

MVC is awarded for **acts of conspicuous gallantry in the presence of the enemy whether on land, at sea or in the air**. It is the **second highest military decoration in India**, after the **Param Vir Chakra**.

IIT Mandi Develops Herbal Infusion Technology to Help Farmers in the Mid-Himalayan Region

Why in News?

On June 19, 2020 Researchers of **Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Mandi** have **developed a herbal infusion technology**, as a **source of income for local marginal farmers in the mid-Himalayas**.

Key Highlights

- The Researchers from the **institute's Botanical Garden and Medicinal Plant Lab** have analysed a **variety of herbs growing in the mid-Himalayan region in & around the villages around IIT Mandi, Kamand** region to create value added products in the form of herbal infusions **known for their health benefits** (mainly rich in antioxidants).
- The technology is ready to **license industries interested in working with Enabling Women of Kamand (EWOK)- a rural incubator at IIT Mandi**, in the interest of empowering the Kamand Valley farmers.
- At present the researchers have successfully formulated **9 different herbal infusions with constituents such as tulsi, mint, rose, amla, bayleaf, turmeric, rhododendron and lemongrass**.
- The researchers aim to **create 100 Kamand Valley Infusion formulations** and also establish a farmer-academia-industry-Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) network for the purpose of buying-back and sustainable market linkages.
- The vacuum drying process is optimized for each herb to maintain quality.
- **The lab is training local farmers in collaboration with EWOK** with regards to farming of herbals, processing, packaging and marketing of the infusions.

Key Points

EWOK has also received funding from NABARD to establish 3 farmer producer companies (FPCs). Among 3, one FPC focuses on the aromatic and medicinal plant farming, value-addition and market linkages.

Note– IIT Mandi & EWOK have signed a tripartite pact with the National Bank for Agriculture And Rural Development (NABARD) to set up 3 Farmer Producer Organisations(FPOs) in Himachal Pradesh's Mandi district. Where NABARD has sanctioned an amount of Rs 35 lakhs to IIT Mandi and EWOK for this establishment in the next 3 years.

About IIT Mandi:

Chairperson– Subodh Bhargava

Director– Prof. Timothy A Gonsalves

Himachal Pradesh Plans to Provide 100 percent FHTC to all Rural Households by August 2022

Why in News?

On 4th July 2020, during a video conferencing with the Union Minister of Jal Shakti regarding the implementation of Jal Jeevan Mission in Himachal Pradesh, the Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh Jairam Thakur has stated that the State Government of Himachal Pradesh is planning to provide **100 percent coverage of Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) to all rural households in the state by August 2022**.

- **If the State Government achieves this target then it will be well ahead of the National Goal** set by the Government of India to provide FHTC to every rural household in the country by 2024.

Status of FHTC in Rural Households of Himachal Pradesh

- Total number of rural households in Himachal Pradesh: **17.04 lakh**.

- Rural households already provided with FHTC: **9.52 lakh**.
- **Rural households without FHTC (as on 4th July 2020) in the state: 7.52 lakh** The State Government of Himachal Pradesh has set a target to provide **2.44 lakh rural households with FHTC during the current Financial Year 2020-21 out of the remaining 7.52 lakh**.

Jal Jeevan Mission

- The Jal Jeevan Mission was launched by the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi during his address to the nation on the occasion of the **73rd Independence Day of India on 15th August 2019**.
- With the target set by the Prime Minister to provide every rural household in the country with FHTC by 2024, in the period of the next 7 months from September 2019 to March 2020, 84 lakh households in the country were provided with tap water connection.
- During the first quarter of FY 2020-21 (April to June 2020), 19 lakh rural households were provided with FHTC.

Estimated Expenditure for Providing Every Rural Household FHTC

For achieving the target of providing every rural household in the country with an FHTC by 2024, **Rs 3.5 lakh crore will be spent; this was announced by Prime Minister in September 2019**. For the **FY 2020-21, Rs 8050 crore has been announced under the scheme**.

Annual TB Report 2020

Why in News?

On June 24, 2020, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's (MoHFW) Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan and its Minister of State (MoS), Ashwini Kumar Choubey launched the **Annual "India TB (Tuberculosis) Report 2020"** through a virtual event which is released by Central TB Division (CTD), MoHFW. The salient feature of 2020 report is that for the first time CTD introduced a quarterly ranking on TB elimination efforts by all the states and UTs.

- In accordance with the report, **there were around 24.04 lakh TB patients in 2019, a 14% increase in as compared to the year 2018**.
- It should be noted that the **sustainable goal of eradicating TB globally is 2030**, but the **Indian government is committed to achieve this target in the country by 2025**.
- In this regard, the programme has been **renamed from the Revised National Tuberculosis Control Program (RNTCP) to National Tuberculosis Elimination Program (NTEP)**. **14 committees have been constituted** at national level to provide technical guidance for programme implementation.
- The Minister also released a Joint Monitoring Mission report, a manual on Direct Benefit Transfer to TB patients under NIKSHAY system, a Training Module, and the quarterly newsletter NIKSHAY Patrika.

The best performing states and UTs as per report:

Larger states with more than 50 lakh population

1 Gujarat

2 Andhra Pradesh

3 Himachal Pradesh

Smaller states with less than 50 lakh population

1 Tripura

2 Nagaland

Union Territory

1 Dadra and Nagar Haveli

2 Daman & Diu

Key achievements listed in the report:

- There has been a **reduction in the number of missing cases to 2.9 lakh cases as against more than 10 lakhs in 2017**. Private sector notifications increased by 35% with 6.78 lakh TB patients notified.
- Due to easy availability of molecular diagnostics, the proportion of children diagnosed with TB increased to 8 percent in 2019 compared to 6 percent in 2018.
- **Provision of HIV testing for all notified TB patients increased from 67 percent in 2018 to 81 percent in 2019**. Expansion of treatment services has resulted in a 12% improvement in the treatment success rate of notified patients. For 2019 it is 81% compared to 69% in 2018.
- **More than 4.5 lakh DOT (Directly observed treatment) Centers provide treatment covering almost every village across the country.**
- Near-complete on-line notification of TB patients have been achieved through the NIKSHAY system. NIKSHAY also expanded the provision of four Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT) schemes of the programme:

Nikshay Poshan Yojana (NPY) to TB patients

- The incentive to Treatment Supporters
- An incentive to Private Providers and
- Transport incentive to TB patients in the notified tribal areas

About NIKSHAY

- **NI-KSHAY-(Ni=End, Kshay=TB), a web enabled patient management system for TB control** under the NTEP is developed and maintained by the **CTD in collaboration with the National Informatics Centre (NIC), and the World Health Organization (WHO)** Country office for India.
- It is used by health functionaries at various levels across the country both in the public and private sector, to register cases.
- **It also functions as the National TB Surveillance System** and enables reporting of various surveillance data to the Government of India.

Transport Nagar to be established at Hamirpur

In News:

- Jai Ram Thakur said that a Transport Nagar would be established at Hamirpur.
- This centre would have various facilities such as driving test track, driving training centres, traffic park and vehicle maintenance park etc.
- Drive testing and training in this Nagar would be managed by Original Equipment Manufacturers.

Swaran Jayanti Gyanodaya Cluster Sreshtha Vidyalaya Yojna

Why in News?

Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur directed the officers to give topmost priority for time bound fulfillment of budget assurances so that fruits of the schemes could be percolated down to the targeted groups.

Key Highlights

- Under this scheme 100 Schools of the State would be improved by bringing them qualitative changes and also pupil teacher ratio would be ensured in the State.
- Rs. 15 crore would be spent under this scheme.
- Bachelor of Vocational courses had been started in 12 colleges of the State and this year such courses would also be started in six more colleges of the State.
- This year under Swaran Jayanti Super 100 scheme 100 toppers of class 10th would be provided assistance of Rs. one lakh each for undergoing training to compete in various entrance examinations.

Floral and Avifaunal Diversity of Himachal Pradesh

In News?

Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur has released a booklet on 'Floral and Avifaunal Diversity of Himachal Pradesh' brought out by Himachal Pradesh Council for Science Technology and Environment (HIMCOSTE).

- The booklet contains **detailed pictorial description and scientific information regarding Avifauna of the State.**

Nadaun Police Station

Why in News?

Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur has congratulated the State Police in general and **Nadaun Police Station of district Hamirpur in particular for being ranked as one of the best Police Stations of the country and the best Police Station of the State.**

Key Points:

- The ranking of police stations is **carried out by Ministry of Home Affairs**, Government of India and the same was released by the Union Home Minister in a ceremony during **DGPs Conference**.
- **The Certificate of Excellence** was provided to this **Police Station by Union Home Minister Amit Shah**

Projects worth Rs. 73 crore for Tikkar area

In News:

Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur inaugurated and laid foundation stones of developmental projects worth about Rs. 73 crore in **Tikkar area of Jubbal-Kotkhai Vidhan Sabha area of Shimla district**

Suresh Kashyap

In News:

Suresh Kashyap has been **appointed as President of Bharatiya Janta Party Himachal Pradesh**. He is a **Member of Parliament from Shimla Parliamentary constituency**.

Martyr Memorial in Mandi district In News:

The Chief Minister inaugurated Martyr Memorial built at **Indira Market in Mandi at a cost of Rs. 15 lakh**. This memorial is **dedicated to the martyr's of 1962, 1965 and 1971 and Kargil war of 1999**. The names of all the martyrs are inscribed on this monument.

Online Prasad Chhinmastika Bhog of Mata Chintpurni temple

Why in News?

Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur launched the '**Online Prasad Chhinmastika Bhog**' of Mata Chintpurni temple in Una district.

Why Online Portal for Prasad?

- The **Covid-19 pandemic** has forced the State Government to close all the temples and religious shrines of the State to avoid social gathering and spread of the virus.
- Most of the shrines in the State were providing online 'Darshan' facility to the devotees but it was for the first time that facility of providing 'Prasad' to the devotees has been launched with cooperation of the Postal Department.
- Devotees to apply online for Prasad at www.matashrichintpurni.com/online-prasad

Kanwar Hari Singh

In News:

Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur has expressed grief over the demise of **founder of Himotkarsh Sanstha Una Kanwar Hari Singh who passed away at Una. He was 81.**

- He Was a social activist and journalist who was committed for welfare of the society.
- Kanwar Hari Singh served the society selflessly especially towards empowerment of the women.

Projects worth Rs. 145 crore in Nahan Vidhan Sabha area

In News:

Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur inaugurated and laid foundation stones of developmental projects worth about Rs. 145 crore in Nahan Vidhan Sabha area of **Sirmaur district**.

Cabinet sub-committee meeting on Education

Why In News?

Presiding over a Cabinet sub-committee meeting here today, he said the 'Vision Document' of the state government was based on the general public opinion to meet the aspirations of Himachal residents.

Key Highlights:

- **Education Minister Suresh Bhardwaj** has directed the Education Department to prepare '**Vidyarthi Credit Card Scheme**' for affordable and simplified Education loan to eligible students.
- A proposal for amendments to the **Himachal Pradesh Private Educational Institutions (Regulation) Act, 1997**, was made at the meeting.
- A committee directed to **start yoga, chess and music classes in government schools**.
- It directed the authorities to prepare a policy for the **conservation of dialects**, which were on the verge of extinction, such as Baghati, Handuri, Kulluvi, Kinnauri, Pangvalli, Sirmauri and Spiti. **Cultural centres to preserve Kangri, Gaddi, Tibetan and Pahari cultures** had also been proposed.

Sports

Khelo India Youth Games in 2021

Why in News?

On July 25, 2020 The **Minister of State of Youth Affairs and Sports, Kiren Rijiju** and **Haryana Chief Minister, Manohar Lal Khattar** announced that **Haryana will host the 4th edition of Khelo India Youth Games(KIYG) in 2021** through video conference. The Games will be held in **Panchkula** in Haryana.

- Star Sports will be the Official Broadcast Partner like the previous year.
- The games will take place after the 2021 Tokyo Olympics.

Key facts

- Haryana came second in KIYG 2019 and 2020 editions (200 medals in 2020 and 159 medals in 2019).
- They won the KIYG 2018 edition with 102 medals. Maharashtra came first in the 2020 edition with 256 medals.

Khelo India:

- The Khelo India programme has been **introduced to revive the sports culture in India** at the **grass-root level**.
- The **Talented players identified in priority sports disciplines at various levels by the High-Powered Committee will be provided annual financial assistance of Rs 5 lakh per annum for 8 years**.

Sports One-liner

- Indian umpire **Nitin Menon** has been inducted into **International Cricket Council's Elite Panel of Umpires**.
- The presence of Grandmaster P. Harikrishna is sure to see a major spike in Indian interest in the million-dollar Magnus Carlsen Chess Tour that continues with the \$150,000 Chessable Masters.
- Former **Germany footballer Mario Gomez** has announced his retirement from the sport.
- India all-rounder **Ravindra Jadeja** was named as the **country's „Most Valuable Player“ (MVP)** of the 21st century by **Wisden**.
- In order to groom young athletes in the country for the upcoming Olympics of 2024 (Paris) and 2028 (Los Angeles), the Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports will launch- **Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)** for the junior athletes.

- Former world number one badminton player and the two-times Olympic badminton champion from China, **Lin Dan has announced his retirement** from the sport.
- **Lt Col Bharat Pannu**, a serving Indian Army Officer has created history by successfully securing a podium place at the first edition of the Virtual Race Across America (vRAAM) 2020.
- **Valtteri Bottas** (Mercedes-Finland) has won the **Austrian Grand Prix 2020**.
- The 23 year-old G. Akash from Chennai, Tamil Nadu becomes the country's 66th Grandmaster with rating of 2495.
- Rising tennis star **Sumit Nagal** has become the first Indian to win an international tournament in the Covid-19 era after he lifted the PSD Bank Nord Open trophy, a locally organised clay court tournament in Germany.
- **Manipur's, Gyanendro Ningombam** named as the **new Officiating President of Hockey India**.
- The 2020 edition of the **Asia Cup Cricket tournament has been postponed till June 2021** by the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) due to ongoing increase in COVID-19 cases in the region.
- World's top-ranked women's squash player, **Raneem El Welily from Egypt** has announced her retirement on 9 July 2020.
- Indian boxer and World Championship silver medallist **Amit Panghal** has climbed up the leaderboard to the **first spot in the rankings** released by **Amateur International Boxing Association (AIBA)**, after a gap of almost 18 months.
- The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) adopted a new branding and visual identity, including an institutional and a commercial logo, to celebrate a century of participation of the country's athletes at the Summer Olympics.
- **Lewis Hamilton** (Mercedes-Great Britain) has won the **Styrian Grand Prix 2020**, held on 12 July 2020 in Spielberg, Austria.
- **West Indies won the first international cricket match** since the **sport's return after the coronavirus** outbreak by defeating England.
- Former Socceroos captain Mile Jedinak has announced his retirement from the sport. Socceroos is the official nickname of the Australia national soccer team that represents Australia in international men's soccer.
- The Federation Internationale de Football Association announced that the 2022 World Cup is to be held in Qatar.
- The **Youth Olympic Games in Dakar will be celebrated in 2026** after Senegal and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) "mutually agreed" to postpone the Games from 2022.
- Spanish professional football club, **Real Madrid has been crowned La Liga Champions** for the 34th time after defeating Villarreal 2–1 at Estadio Alfredo Di Stefano in Madrid, with one match remaining.
- The Germany forward player & World Cup winner, **Andre Schurrle** has announced retirement from the sport.
- **Lewis Hamilton** (Mercedes – Great Britain) won the **2020 Formula 1 Hungarian Grand Prix** held on 19 July 2020.
- International Cricket Council's (ICC's) announced, the **T20 Men's World Cup, scheduled to be played in Australia in October-November 2020**, has formally been **postponed to 2022 due to COVID-19**.
- Sahitya Akademi Award winner, Baldev Singh Sadaknama has authored a book „**Suraj Kade Marda Nahi**“ (sun never dies).
- Sri Lankan bowling allrounder, Sripali Weerakkody has announced her retirement from International Cricket with immediate effect.
- **Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson** has been named the **Football Writers' Association (FWA) Footballer of the Year for the 2019-20** Premier League season. executive officer for three years.
- Veteran Indian domestic allrounder, Rajat Bhatia has announced his retirement from all forms of cricket.
- World Athletics has approved the new dates on July 30 for the World Athletics Race Walking Team Championships Minsk 2020 and World U20 Championship Nairobi 2020.

- **Stuart Broad** joined one of cricket's most exclusive clubs when he took his **500th Test wicket** as England completed a series-clinching win over the West Indies at Old Trafford.
- **Juventus** has been crowned **SERIS-A Title**.
- **Liverpool** has been crowned **Premier League Title**.

Books & Authors

- Best-selling author and the Director of the Nehru Centre in London, **Amish Tripathi**, has released his new book of fiction titled „**Legend of Suheldev: The King Who Saved India**“.
- Hindi literature writer **Priyamvad** to release his new book, „**Bharatiya Loktanktra Ka Koras: Kuch Bisari Bikhari Dhvaniyan**“ in 2021.
- Vice President of India, M Venkaiah Naidu has virtually released a book titled „**Future of Higher Education – Nine Mega Trends**“. The book is authored by **CA V Patabhi Ram**. The Virtual event was hosted by ICT Academy.
- Former RBI governor, **Urjit Patel** has written a book titled „**Overdraft: Saving the Indian Saver**“ will be releasing later this month.
- The Chairman of Maruti Suzuki, **RC Bhargava** has authored the book „**Getting Competitive: A Practitioner's Guide for India**“ from his experience as a policymaker and a leading industrialist.
- The book, titled „**Mahaveer: The Soldier who never died**“ is authored by award winning author **A.K. Srikumar and his wife, Rupa Srikumar**.
- A book titled „**His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama: An Illustrated Biography**“ is authored by one of the Dalai Lama's closest aides and advisor of over 40 year, **Tenzin Geyche Tethong**.
- The book titled „**A Song of India**“ authored by **Ruskin Bond** to be released on July 20, 2020, which will mark the 70th year of the author's literary career.
- A new book titled „**If It Bleeds**“, a collection of four stories, authored by **Stephen King** has been released.
- Crime writer, **S Hussain Zaidi** has penned a new novel „**The Endgame**“ which talks of politics, betrayal, and unimaginable terror.

Summits and Conferences

- **Shri Piyush Goyal**, Commerce & Industry Minister and President of NPC Governing Council **chaired the 49th Governing Council Meeting of National Productivity Council (NPC)**.
- **India's foreign exchange reserves**, which currently stand at more than **USD 500 billion**, are the **fifth largest in the world after China, Japan, Switzerland and Russia**, as per the International Monetary Fund.
- The fourth edition of the virtual **Ministerial on Climate Action** was **co-chaired by European Union, China and Canada**.
- The **15th meeting of the India-European Union Summit** will be held in virtual mode.
- NITI Aayog presented India's second **Voluntary National Review (VNR)** at the United Nations High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development 2020.
- On July 15, 2020, the 15th India-European Union Summit was held through video conferencing. The summit aims to strengthen ties between India and European Union.
- The Union Minister of State for Defence **Shri Shripad Naik** inaugurated the conference on Defence Manufacturing Technologies and Aerospace.
- On July 15, 2020, the Union Minister of Food Processing Industries **Harsimrat Kaur Badal** inaugurated the Digital Indo-Italian Business mission on Food Processing.

- India and China hold discussions through established military and diplomatic channels to address the prevailing situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- A High-Level Segment of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) session is to be held on **17 July 2020**.
- The **Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)** will organise a virtual Tea Conclave from **1st September to 30th November**.
- Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi deliver a keynote address virtually at the valedictory session of High-Level Segment of **UN ECOSOC (United Nations Economic and Social Council)** on **July 17 in New York**, on the eve of 75th anniversary of the United Nations.
- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman participated in third G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors meet.
- India Business Council will host the **45th India Ideas Summit 2020** on **July 22nd**.
- The three-day long Air Force Commanders' Conference conducted with the theme is "**Indian Air Force in the Next Decade**".
- The Air Force Commanders' Conference (AFCC) was inaugurated by the Union Minister of Defence Rajnath Singh on 22 July 2020 at Air Headquarters, **Vayu Bhawan, New Delhi**.
- Union Minister of Information Technology Ravi Shankar Prasad is to address the **G20 Digital Minister's meeting on 22 July 2020**.
- The 75th United Nations General Assembly is to be conducted virtually in 2020 for the first time in its history.
- Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda today inaugurated an e-Symposium on Handicrafts organized by Dr.
- A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Centre for Policy Research and Analysis, Indian Institute of Management, Shillong.
- Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Dr. Harsh Vardhan, virtually participated in the **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Health Minister's Digital Meet on 24th July**.
- Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS) has organised "2nd Empathy e-Conclave" in collaboration with Airport Authority of India (AAI).
- **Telangana's capital Hyderabad** has found a place among the **top 50 CCTV-surveilled cities in the world**.
- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman attended the 5th Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) through video conference in New Delhi.

Ranks and Indices

- As per the data for the month of June 2020 released by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), the unemployment rate in June 2020 was 10.9 percent in India (Urban-12.02 % and Rural- 10.52%).
- The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) published the report, COVID-19 and Tourism: Assessing the Economic Consequences stating that the **World Tourism sector could lose around 1.2trillion USD or 1.5% of the Global Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** because of the 4months lockdown due to global pandemic situation.
- In accordance with the "**INFORM Report 2020: Shared evidence for managing crises and disasters**" released by research centre INFORM, operating under European Commission (EU), **India has ranked at 31st place** with an inform risk of 5.4, means risk of humanitarian crises and disasters.
- India's Global Real Estate Transparency Index ranking has improved by one notch to 34 on the back of regulatory reforms, better market data and green initiatives, according to property consultant JLL. India was ranked 35th in the index during 2018 bi-annual survey, while the country was at 36th position in 2016 and 39th in 2014.
- Wrestler-turned-actor, **Dwayne „The Rock“ Johnson** has been named **Instagram's highest-paid celebrity**.
- India has been ranked at **117th position** in the **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Index 2020**, released on 30 June 2020.

- From 61st position last year, the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Bangalore has broken into the global top 50 Executive MBA (EMBA) Rankings by QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) this year at 36th position.
- Environmental Groups has launched an Online Tool on 9th July 2020 as per which India's Capital New Delhi has the most Economic Impact (based on Per Capita) in the World from Air Pollution during the first half of the year 2020.
- Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray e-inaugurated **Asia's largest certified tier IV data centre** near Mumbai. Located in Panvel, the Yotta NM1 data centre building, is the largest of its kind in India, as well as the second largest in the world
- The Union Minister of Home Affairs announced the Annual Ranking of Police Stations for 2019 prepared by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India in the Director General of Police's (DGP's) conference. Nadaan Police Station of Hamirpur District in Himachal Pradesh is ranked as one of the best Police Stations of India.
- The fourth cycle of the All India Tiger Estimation 2018 has entered the Guinness World Record for being the world's largest camera trap wildlife survey.
- As per the data from the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the **United States remains as the top trading partner of India during the Financial Year 2019-20.**
- The Bloomberg Billionaires Index has ranked **Mukesh Ambani**, chairman of Reliance Industries Ltd(RIL) as the **World's 6th richest man** with a worth USD 72.4 billion.
- As per the annual „State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World“ report, by United Nations, almost 690 million people (8.9% of overall population) went hungry in 2019.
- India has emerged as the top tenth nation in the ranking of the total (resident and abroad) Intellectual Property (IP) filing activity, as per World Intellectual Property Indicators-2019 Report.
- India is the third top-most country among 48 nations, in the 2020 Global Manufacturing Risk Index (MRI), for having the most-suitable locations for global manufacturing in terms of cost competitiveness and operating conditions.
- About **273 million Indians were lifted out of multidimensional poverty**, a period of **10 years**, between 2005-2006 and 2015-2016, according to a study conducted by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme.
- The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has released its Global Rights Index for the year 2020, which ranks countries on the degree of respect for workers' rights.
- HDFC Bank Managing Director **Aditya Puri** has emerged as the **highest paid banker** among the top lenders for FY 2019-20, with a 38 per cent jump in salary and prerequisites to Rs 18.92 crore.
- The United Nations Environment Programme and the International Energy Agency released a report on “Cooling Emissions and Policy Synthesis”
- India has been ranked third among **the top 10 countries that have gained in forest areas in the last decade (2010-2020)** as per the latest Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) released by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).
- Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar released the All India Tiger Estimation Report-2018.
- Union Minister for Human Resource Development (HRD) Ramesh Pokhriyal „Nishank“ virtually launched "India Report on Digital Education, 2020".
- **Reliance Industries** has entered **the list of 50 most valued companies in the world.**
- **Reliance Industries has overtaken ExxonMobil** to become the **world's second most valuable energy firm** with market capitalization scaled to a record high of over Rs 14 trillion.
- With a brand value of \$241.2 billion (a 17% increase year-over-year), Apple has topped the Forbes' annual list of the World's Most Valuable Brands, which looked at the top 100 companies from the fiscal year 2019.

Agreements and MoUs Signed

- **SOLV, a B2B (business to business)** digital platform for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), has launched a tailor-made credit card in partnership with **Standard Chartered Bank, India**.
- Government of India, Government of Tamil Nadu and the World Bank signed an agreement to help low- income groups in Tamil Nadu State to get access to affordable housing.
- India and Bhutan signed the **first Indo-Bhutan joint venture hydroelectric project on 29 June 2020**.
- A Memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed on Waste to Energy plant at Okhla, Delhi, between Indian Oil, NTPC Ltd and South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) on 30 June 2020.
- The State-owned Indian Oil Corp (IOC) and Bangladesh's Beximco LPG have entered into an agreement for the formation of a 50:50 Joint Venture Company (JVC) for importing liquefied petroleum gas in Bangladesh.
- **ICICI Bank in partnership with Computer Age Management Services(CAMS) launched „Insta Loans against Mutual Funds“**, a facility for retail customers to avail loans upto Rs 1 crore instantly by pledging their holdings in both debt and equity Mutual Funds(MFs).
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed virtually on 4th July 2020 between the non-profit organization UKIBC- UK India Business Council and the MIDC-Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation. MIDC is the Maharashtra Government's premier agency for industrial infrastructure development.
- A Navratna Company of Government of India- NLC India Limited has signed an agreement with a Maharatna Company- Coal India Limited to form a Joint Venture Company (JVC) for developing Solar and Thermal power assets.
- The **Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)** has partnered with social media giant **Facebook** to launch free and comprehensive training program in virtual mode for teachers and students of its affiliated schools.
- The Indian Railways and **RailTel signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** for installation of an IP- based video surveillance system at 6,049 railway stations across the country.
- In Afghanistan's Capital City Kabul, on 5th July 2020, 5 Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) were signed under the High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP) programme.
- **Indian Railway** in collaboration with **Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL)** has set up a **1.7 Megawatt solar power plant at Bina, Madhya Pradesh**.
- National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB) under the AYUSH Ministry signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) - National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR) under Department of Agricultural Research and Education on 6 July 2020.
- The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and Bakamla RI (Indonesian Coast Guard) have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on „Maritime Safety and Security“ to boost maritime relations.
- **Microsoft has partnered with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)** to offer digital skills to India's youth in the next 12 months amid the COVID-19 crisis.
- Mobility platform Ola has entered into a partnership with digital payments platform PhonePe to expand payment options for riders.
- Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for data exchange between the two organizations.
- **The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) and US Agency for International Development (USAID)** have partnered on 7th July 2020 to increase India- US collaboration for clean energy development.
- On 8th July 2020, an agreement has been signed between the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research- Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (CSIR-IGIB) and IIT Alumni Council.
- **Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad (IITH)** is tie-up with a multinational technology company, **NVIDIA** to establish **India's 1st „NVIDIA AI Technology Centre“ (NVAITC)**.
- Manila based Asian Development Bank (ADB) has renewed its 3-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2017 with the Paris based International Energy Agency (IEA).

- Flipkart and the Department of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) and Mines of Government of Karnataka signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).
- Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) inked an agreement with the New Okhla Industrial Development Authority (NOIDA) to install public Electric Vehicle (EV) charging stations & related infrastructure in order to promote the usage of electric vehicles.
- **Karur Vysya Bank (KVB)** entered into an arrangement with **Tata Motors to fund buyers of Tata passenger vehicles.**
- Indian e-commerce payment system **Paytm & QorQ Pvt. Ltd.**, a Healthcare startup company with majority shareholding of Paytm founder Vijay Shekhar Sharma, is set to acquire Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based private sector general insurer Raheja QBE General Insurance Company Limited in a deal worth around \$76 million (or Rs 570 crore).
- **Jharkhand** government signed Memorandum of Understanding(MoU) with **HDFC Bank** to provide digital payment solutions to the state"s transport department.
- National Medicinal Plants Board, NMPB and ICAR-National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources signed an MoU to to conserve the Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Genetic Resources
- UNICEF INDIA has tied-up with Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry"s (FICCI), Socio-Economic Development Foundation (SEDF) to jointly develop UNICEF"s #Reimagine Campaign.
- The BSE has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with IIT Alumni Council to encourage listing culture for startups and develop a „high investor depth" startups platform.
- Google has announced its partnership with CBSE to help 1 million teachers conduct classes online by the end of the year.
- The Airports Authority of India (AAI) and Defence Public Sector Unit (PSU) Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).
- On World Youth Skills Day, UNICEF India today announced its partnership with SAP India to provide career counselling to young people in the country that will improve their employability skills in a COVID and post COVID era.
- NTPC Ltd, a central PSU under the Ministry of Power and Country"s largest power generation company, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) on 16 July 2020.
- **India and Israel** signed an agreement on July 15 to expand collaboration in dealing with **cyber threats.**
- Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL) has signed a contract with ASKO Maritime AS, Norway for the construction and supply of the two autonomous electric ferries along with an option to build two more identical vessels.
- On July, 17, 2020, India and United States signed Memorandum of Understanding to begin discussions on storing petroleum reserves in the US soil.
- The United States-based Multinational Corporation-**Qualcomm has informed on 12th July 2020 that it has invested Rs 730 crore in Reliance Industries" subsidiary company- Jio Platforms.**
- **Reliance Jio has raised \$4.5 billion** (Rs 33,737 crore) from the search giant, **Google for a 7.77% stake.**
- The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has approved acquisition by Aceso Company Pte. Ltd. (Aceso) in HealthCare Global Enterprises Limited (HCG).
- The Virtual Ministerial meeting of Indo-US Strategic Energy Partnership was held on July 17, 2020.
- The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has integrated a new Artificial Intelligence (AI) course for class XI and XII in the current academic year (2020-2021).
- Ministry of Defence has signed a contract with Bharat Earth Movers Limited (BEML) for procurement of 1,512 Mine Plough (MP) for Tank T-90 S/SK.

- The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Government of India (MoMSME) and the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has signed a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on 20 July 2020.
- The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports have partnered with UNICEF to strengthen the youth volunteers in the country to achieve Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.
- India and Maldives have signed an agreement for the establishment of „Emergency Medical Services“ in Male, Maldives.
- Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) and the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 21 July 2020 with immediate effect.
- **The Punjab government** has signed an agreement with the **Indian Institute of Technology**, Ropar, in the area of skill development.
- Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) and Union Bank of India, after its amalgamation with Corporation Bank and Andhra Bank, have announced a corporate agency agreement to distribute LIC policies.
- Airtel Payments Bank Ltd and National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) have collaborated in order to train and skill young people in rural areas on financial services and helping them in finding jobs and become entrepreneurs in the sector.
- Digital payments major, **Amazon Pay has launched vehicle insurance in partnership with Bengaluru-based startup Acko General Insurance.**
- Global private equity firm KKR is set to back Mumbai-based InCred Finance, a retail and MSME-focused non-banking finance company (NBFC).
- A tripartite MoU signed between CSIR, UBA-IIT Delhi & Vijnana Bharati to offer access to CSIR rural technologies for UBA.
- Power Finance Corporation (PFC) has signed an agreement with the Indian Institute of Technology- Kanpur for Training, Research, and Entrepreneurship Development in Smart Grid Technology.
- **The Union Cabinet today gave ex-post facto approval to Memorandum of Understanding signed between India and Zimbabwe on Cooperation in the field of Traditional Systems of Medicine and Homeopathy**

Appointments

Name	Appointed as	Other Info
Ramnath Krishnan	President of Ratings.	
Indra Mani Pandey	Ambassador and Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations and other International Organisations in Geneva.	Mr Pandey, a 1990 batch IFS officer is presently additional secretary in the External Affairs ministry.
Ravinder Bhakar	Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Central Board of Films Certification (CBFC)	He succeeds Anurag Srivastava.
Sanjay Dwivedi	Director General of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC).	He is presently serving as the Registrar of Makhn Lal Chaturvedi National University of Journalism and Communication, Bhopal.
Shrikant Madhav Vaidya	chairman of Indian Oil Corporation (IOC).	He will replace Sanjiv Singh

Nuka Srinivasulu	Director (Finance) of Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), Hyderabad	
Parminder Chopra	Director of Finance in the Government-owned Power Finance Corporation (PFC)	She will replace Shri N.B. Gupta
V Suryanarayanan	New MD of Chola MS General Insurance	
Rajeeva Swarup	Additional Chief Secretary (Home) as the new Chief Secretary (CS) of Rajasthan	replacing D.B. Gupta
Injeti Srinivas	1st Chairman of the International Financial Services Centre Authority (IFSCA)	Injeti Srinivas has retired as the Secretary of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs on 31st May 2020.
Sukhbir Singh	brand ambassador of Luxury Ride	
Gyanendro Ningombam	Officiating President of Hockey India.	Ningombam had served as the CEO of Manipur Hockey between 2009 to 2014, He has also served as the vice president of the sports governing body till 2018.
Dr. Vidhu P. Nair	Ambassador of India to Turkmenistan.	Dr Nair, who is a 2002 batch IFS officer, is presently Director in the External Affairs Ministry.
Rudrendra Tandon	Ambassador of India to Afghanistan.	He will replace Vinay Kumar
Hemang Amin	interim CEO of BCCI	He will replace Rahul Johri
Vikram Doraiswami	Ambassador of India to Bangladesh	He will succeed Riva Ganguly Das
Ashok Lavasa	Vice president of Asian Development Bank	He has now been appointed as Vice President of ADB for Public-Private Partnerships and Private Sector Operations.
Brett Lee	Brand ambassador of SportsAdda	
Chandrikapersad „Chan“ Santokhi	President of South American country “Suriname”.	He will succeed Desi Bouterse
Roshni Nadar	Chairperson of HCL Tech	succeeds Shiv Nadar

Priyanka Chopra Jonas	Ambassador of the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) 2020.	
Shyam Srinivasan	Managing director and chief executive officer (MD & CEO) of Federal Bank	
P Praveen Siddharth	Personal secretary to the President of India	He will replace Vikram Singh
Ashwini Kumar Tewari	Managing director (MD) and chief executive officer (CEO) of the SBI Cards & Payment Services	Replace Hardayal Prasad
Kulmeet Bawa	Managing Director for SAP Indian Subcontinent.	He will replace the incumbent Deb Deep Sengupta
Ramesh Babu Boddu	Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer of Karur Vysya bank.	He will succeed PR Seshadri
Sumit Deb	Chairman and Managing Director (CMD) of National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC)	He will succeed N Baijendra Kumar
Prakash Chandra Kandpal	Managing director and chief executive officer of the Non-life insurer SBI General Insurance	He will replace Pushan Mahapatra
Arun Kumar	Vice-Chairman of UIC (Union Internationale Des Chemins/International Union of Railways)	
Riva Ganguly Das	Secretary East, in the Ministry of External Affairs.	
Alok Misra	Chief Executive Officer & Director of Microfinance Institutions Network (MFIN)	
Partha Pratim Sengupta	Managing Director (MD) & Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Indian Overseas Bank (IOB)	He will replace Karnam Sekar
Rajesh Bhushan	Health Secretary in the Union Health Ministry.	He will succeed Preeti Sudan

Anandiben Patel	Governor of Madhya Pradesh.	Presently, she is also the Governor of Uttar Pradesh.
Naveen Tahilyani	MD & CEO of Tata AIA Life Insurance	Tahilyani will take over from current Chief Executive Officer, Rishi Srivastav
MA Hampiholi	Commandant, Indian Naval Academy (INA).	
Varun Sridhar	CEO of Paytm Money	He will replace former MD and CEO Pravin Jadhav
Hardik Satishchandra Shah	Private Secretary (PS) to Prime Minister Narendra Modi	
N Sivaraman	Managing director and group chief executive officer of ICRA	He succeeds former MD and Group CEO Naresh Takkar.

Awards and Honours

Name	Award
Chakravarthi Rangarajan	Prof. P C Mahalanobis Award in Official Statistics for lifetime achievements.
MyGov Corona Helpdesk	CogX 2020 award
Ratnakar Matkari	Natvarya Prabhakar Panshikar award for lifetime contribution to theatre by the Maharashtra government.
Freya Thakral	2020 Diana Award for her “Recycler App”.
International Olympic Committee (IOC)	2020 US Green Building Council (USGBC) Leadership Award.
NTPC Ltd	CII-ITC Sustainability Award 2019
Kezang D Thongdok	Dada Saheb Phalke Award 2020
Institute for Human Development (IHD)	„Development Marketplace Award 2020:Innovations to Address Gender-Based Violence“
Kailasavadivoo Sivan	Von Karman Award 2020

Chhattisgarh	"Elites Excellence Awards-2020"
Edappadi K Palaniswami	Paul Harris Fellow recognition
Hockey legend Gurbux Singh and former first-class cricketer Palash Nandy	Mohun Bagan Ratna Award 2020
Ved Parkash Dudeja	„Infra Business Leader of the Year“ award for 2020.
Natarajan Chandrasekaran & Jim Taiclet	US-India Business Council (USIBC) Global Leadership Award 2020.
Arnab Chaudhuri	„Legend of Animation“ award
Greta Thunberg	Gulbenkian Prize for Humanity
Kannan C S Warriar	National Award of Excellence for Outstanding Research in Forestry for the year 2019
Jordan Henderson	Football Writers“ Association (FWA) Footballer of the Year for the 2019-20 Premier League season
Aditya -India“s first solar-powered ferry	Gustave Trouve Award for Excellence in Electric Boats and Boating
Sunil ydv SS	“Karamveer Chakra Award” instituted by United Nations and International Confederation of NGO (iCONGO).
Professor Ashok Sahni	Life Time Excellence Award
Shakuntala Devi	Guinness World Records for „fastest human computation“
Avni Doshi	2020 Booker Prize

Days and Themes

Day	Celebrated as	Aim / Theme
July 1	National Doctors“ Day	The theme of 2020 Doctors Day is“Lessen the mortality of COVID 19”.
July 1	National Chartered Accountants Day or	

	CA Day	
July 1	National Postal Worker Day	
July 2	World UFO Day	WUD aims to raise awareness about the existence of UFOs and encouraging people to think about the possibility of us not being alone in the Universe.
July 2	World Sports Journalists Day	
July 3	International Plastic Bag Free Day	
June 28 to July 4	World Allergy Week	The theme of World Allergy Week 2020 is "Allergy care does not stop with Covid-19"
July 6	World Zoonoses Day	
July 7	World Chocolate Day (also known as International Chocolate Day)	
July 10	"National Fish Farmers Day".	To honor the fish farmers, aquapreneurs & fisher folks in recognition of their accomplishments in the field and their contribution in the growth of the fisheries sector in the country.
July 11	World Population Day	Theme: Putting the brakes on COVID-19: Safeguarding the health and rights of women and girls.
July 12	Malala Day	
July 15	World Youth Skills Day	The theme of World Youth Skills Day 2020 is "Skills for a Resilient Youth".
July 17	World Emoji Day	

July 17	World Day for International Justice	The day marks the anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute on July 17, 1998, the treaty that created the International Criminal Court.
July 18	Nelson Mandela International Day	In 2020, the essence of Mandela Day take action, inspire change, and make every day a Mandela Day – is more important than ever before.
July 20	World Chess Day	The day marks the date of the establishment of the International Chess Federation (FIDE) in Paris in 1924.
July 20	Science Exploration Day (also called Moon Day)	It was on this day in 1969 that Neil Armstrong and Edwin „Buzz“ Aldrin became the first humans to land on the Moon's surface.
July 23	“National Broadcasting Day”	On this day in 1927, the first ever radio broadcast in the country went on the air from the Bombay Station under the Indian Broadcasting Company. On 8th of June, 1936, the Indian State Broadcasting Service became All India Radio.
July 26	Kargil Vijay Diwas	The day is dedicated to our Kargil War's Heroes and is named after the successful Operation Vijay.
July 26	International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem (or World Mangrove Day)	The day was adopted by the General Conference of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2015.
July 28	World Hepatitis Day	Theme of World Hepatitis Day 2020: „Find the Missing Millions“.

July 28	World Nature Conservation Day	World Conservation Day is celebrated internationally to increase awareness about the best practices to protect our natural resources.
July 29	International Tiger Day	The Slogan for 2020 International Tiger Day celebration is “Their survival is in our hands”.
July 30	World Day Against Trafficking in Persons.	The 2020 theme for the World Day Against Trafficking: “Committed to the Cause – Working on the Frontline to End Human Trafficking”.
July 30	International Day of Friendship	The day also advocates the role that friendship plays in promoting peace in several cultures across the world.

Obituary

Name	Profession	Location
Geetha Nagabhushan	Writer	Karnataka
Bhupinder Singh Slathia	Senior advocate and former president of Jammu and Kashmir High Court Bar Association	Jammu and Kashmir
Carl Reiner	writer, comedian, director and actor.	United States
Upa Rokamlova	former speaker of the state legislative assembly	Mizoram
Everton Weekes	Cricketer	West Indies
Saroj Khan	Bollywood choreographer	Mumbai

Ennio Morricone	film composer	Italy
Pokuri Rama Rao	film producer	Hyderabad
Susheel Gowda	TV actor	Karnataka
Jagdeep	Bollywood actor-comedian	Madhya Pradesh
Earl Cameron	British film and TV actor	United Kingdom
Dr Suresh Amonkar	former health minister of Goa	Goa
Charlie Daniels	Musician	United States
Amadou Gon Coulibaly	Prime Minister of Ivory Coast	Ivory Coast
Vasudeva Maiya	former Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Sri Guru Raghavendra Cooperative Bank Ltd	
Nagindas Sanghvi	Gujarati journalist, columnist, writer and political analyst	Gujarat
Ranjan Sehgal	Punjabi and Hindi film and television actor	Punjab
Avad Bin Hassan Jami	cartoonist of Gujarat	Gujarat
Divya Chouksey	Actress, model and singer	Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh
Jack Charlton	Footballer	United Kingdom
Jyotsna Bhatt	ceramic artist	Gujarat
Wim Suurbier	Dutch Football legend	Netherlands
Brahm Vasudeva	Hawkins Cookers Chairman	
Neela Satyanarayan	former IAS officer and the first woman election commissioner of Maharashtra	Maharashtra
Suresh Amonka	Former Goa health minister	Goa
Purushottam Priyadasji Swamishree	Incumbent Acharya of Shree Swaminarayan Gadi	
Ramesh Tikaram	Para-athlete, and para-badminton	

	player	
Cordy Tindell Vivian	Civil rights leader	United States
C S Seshadri	Indian mathematician	Tamilnadu
Rajat Mukherjee	Filmmaker	Rajasthan
John Lewis	Civil Rights pioneer	
Lalji Tandon	Madhya Pradesh Governor	Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh
Barry Jarman	Wicketkeeper and ex-International Cricket Council match referee	Australia
Bijay Mohanty	Actor	Odisha
Juan Marse	Novelist	Spain
Viktor Chizhikov	Creator of the brown bear mascot “Misha”	Moscow
Annie Ross	Legendary Jazz Singer	England
Amala Shankar	Eminent danseuse and choreographer	Bangladesh
Nusrat Zaheer	Urdu writer and translator	Uttar Pradesh
Mohammad Shamshuddin	Urdu poet	Maharashtra
Achyuta Rao	Child-rights activist	
Benjamin Mkapa	Tanzania’s Former President	Tanzania
Olivia de Havilland	Actress	Tokyo, Japan
Kumkum Zaibunnissa	Bollywood actor	Bihar
John Saxon	Actor	New York, US
Parvez Khan	Bollywood action director	Mumbai
Bhaskarrao Avhad	Senior advocate and author	Maharashtra
Ashutosh Bhakre	Actor	Maharashtra
Anil Murali	Actor	Kerala
Sonam Tshering Lepcha	Folk musician	

States Miscellaneous

- Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has unveiled a scheme titled „YSR Kapu Nestham“ for the welfare of the women from Kapu community.
- The Chhattisgarh government, led by Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel has launched „Godhan Nyay Yojana“ in the state to make animal husbandry commercially profitable, prevent open grazing by cattle, solve the problem of stray animals on roads and for environment conservation.
- Arunachal Pradesh state government is to implement Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in the State.
- Madhya Pradesh government will launch a 'Kill Corona' campaign from July 1 to control the spread of coronavirus in the state.
- In Jammu & Kashmir, a massive search operation was launched in several villages near the Line of Control in Kalsiyan area of Nowshera today after reports of some suspicious movement.
- Bhupesh Baghel, Chief Minister of 7 announced the launch of “Godhan Nyay Yojana” through an online press conference to promote animal husbandry and make it a commercially profitable practice and to procure the cow dung from the farmers at a fixed rate.
- Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray launched the world's largest plasma therapy trials for the COVID-19 "Project Platina".
- In a bid to attract fresh industrial investments in Maharashtra, the state government announced a new plan called „Maha Parwana“, which will offer several incentives and offer a single-window clearance system for project execution
- The Delhi government is all set to establish India’s first plasma bank in the national capital to fight the novel coronavirus.
- The State Government of Andhra Pradesh will take up the construction of 3 Million (30 lakh) houses under the YSR Jagananna Colonies project after distributing the house sites to the beneficiaries on 8th July 2020.
- Uttarakhand forest department has developed India’s first lichen park in Kumaon’s Munsiyari, Pithoragarh district. Lichens are found in the Himalayas up to 5000 metres are important species as they are the best bioindicators of the pollution levels.
- Madhya Pradesh government has launched “Hamara Ghar-Hamara Vidyalaya” over a virtual platform to take care of academic regularity of the students during the Lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic.
- Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath today launched the ambitious piped water project "Har Ghar Jal" that means water to every house for Bundelkhand region.
- Char Dham Yatra begins today in Uttarakhand with restrictions.
- In Mizoram, the 34th anniversary of Mizo peace accord is being celebrated today on 1st July.
- The Kerala government has announced “Dream Kerala Project” to tap the potential and experience of those returning from abroad and other states after losing their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Tamil Nadu Government has decided to establish piped oxygen supply to the beds in 59 state-run hospitals.
- A mega tree plantation drive has been announced by the Delhi Government on 2nd July 2020
- The Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Prakash Javadekar along with CAG Rajiv Mehri inaugurated the dense urban forest.
- The Government of India has declared the entire Nagaland as “disturbed area”.
- Tamil Nadu government on July 2 announced a monthly stipend of Rs. 3000 for the lawyers for the time period of two years.
- Odisha government decided to implement a new initiative „Sabuja Odisha“.
- Delhi Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal inaugurated the 1000-bedded Sardar Patel Covid Care Centre and Hospital (SPCCCH) at Radha Soami Satsang Beas in Chhatarpur area, located at Air Force land near airport in Delhi.

- The Administration of the Union Territory of Ladakh launched the Ladakh Food Security Scheme (LFSS) and the Mufti Mohammad Sayeed Food Entitlement Scheme (MMSFES) of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) was discontinued.
- In order to attract tourists in the state, the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board has started a social media campaign.
- Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) has launched Dhanvantri Rath to take Non-COVID healthcare services to peoples' doorsteps amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
- Odisha government has launched „Balaram Yojana“ to provide crop loans to landless farmers. Under the new scheme, the landless cultivators will get loans through joint liability groups (JLGs).
- The Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Adityanath has inaugurated a programme under which the State Government of Uttar Pradesh has set a target to plant more than 25 crore sapling across the state.
- Karnataka Chief Minister B. S. Yediyurappa launched Weavers Sammaan Yojana today. Under this scheme, 19,744 handloom weavers in the state will get annual financial assistance of two thousand rupees through Direct Benefit Transfer.
- All households in the state of Himachal Pradesh have access to LPG Gas Connection, making Himachal Pradesh the first state in the country to achieve the goal set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the launch of Ujjwala Yojana for providing a cooking gas connection to every household in the country.
- The Karnataka government has set up a toll-free round-the-clock helpline to lodge complaints about hospitals refusing to accept suspected coronavirus cases.
- All households in the state of Himachal Pradesh have access to LPG Gas Connection, making Himachal Pradesh the first state in the country to achieve the goal set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the launch of Ujjwala Yojana for providing a cooking gas connection to every household in the the country.
- The Chief Minister of Karnataka B.S. Yediyurappa has launched a scheme for the weaver's community in the state of Karnataka on 6th July 2020.
- Plasma Bank for the treatment of COVID-19 positive patients has been established at the oldest medical college of India- Kolkata Medical College and Hospital.
- Haryana Cabinet on 6th July 2020 has approved a proposal for drafting an Ordinance under which 75 percent of the jobs with a salary of less than Rs 50,000 per month will be reserved for the locals of Haryana in the state.
- The Chief Minister of Maharashtra Uddhav Thackeray has launched a portal on 6th July 2020 that will bridge the gap between the Industrial Units/Employers and the Workers (Domiciled: Skilled, Semi-Skilled and Unskilled).
- Over the period of next six financial year (2020-21 to 2025-26), an amount of Rs 23,848 crore for the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in the state of Odisha has been recommended by the 5th State Finance Commission of Odisha on 7th July 2020.
- The Jharkhand health department has launched a major campaign to immunize the deprived children.
- The Delhi government will set up a „COVID-19 War Room“, which will 24x7 monitor the city's fight against the novel coronavirus, and suggest measures to effectively deal with the prevailing situation.
- The birth anniversary of Former and the 14th Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh Y.S Rajasekhara Reddy is celebrated as Rythu Dinotsavam meaning Farmer's Day.
- Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik unveiled Bhubaneswar Land Use Intelligence System (BLUIS) which would monitor changes in all government lands in Odisha by leveraging high-resolution satellite imagery.
- In Uttar Pradesh, Guru Purnima is being celebrated across the state. This is the festival of showing respect by disciples to their mentors.
- The State Cabinet of the Uttar Pradesh Government has given its approval to an independent and comprehensive „Startup Policy 2020“ on 8th July 2020.
- The Rajasthan state government has launched a week-long campaign "Pure for Sure" to ensure purity of milk and its products.

- Chhattisgarh government has organised the first e-Lok Adalat of India amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The virtual hearings were conducted through video conferencing under the e-Lok Adalat along with its live streaming.
- MP government will now run a Roko -Toko means stop and campaign for those who do not wear masks.
- The Nagaland government has banned the import and sale of dog meat in the State.
- In Uttar Pradesh, Swarms of Locusts have caused severe damage to crops at various places in the state.
- In Jammu and Kashmir, District Development Commissioner Anantnag KK Sidha inaugurated "One Nation One Ration Card" at Food Civil Supplies & Consumer and Public Distribution (FCS & CAPD) sale outlet at Nai Basti in Anantnag
- The first-ever Bus Service in history was started on 10th July 2020 for the people of Swabhimani Anchal (located in Malkangiri district of Odisha).
- Haryana Chief Minister, Manohar Lal has accorded approval to set up 3 new medical colleges in the State and also to start DM Cardiology course at Pt. B.D Sharma Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences (PGIMS), Rohtak.
- Lieutenant Governor of J&K, Girish Chandra Murmu e-inaugurated 10 power projects worth Rs. 19.51 crore and laid foundation stones for 07 others costing Rs. 30.35 crore to boost power sector in Kashmir.
- Lieutenant Governor of J&K, Girish Chandra Murmu has e-inaugurated 15 important infrastructural projects of School Education Department to boost education sector.
- Uttar Pradesh government has expanded the ambit of the emergency police helpline number 112, and linked fire, ambulance, railway police and disaster relief services with it.
- A Comprehensive exercise for mapping of crops under each of the Rythu Bharosa Kendra (RBK) in the state has begun in Andhra Pradesh from 13th July 2020.
- 13th July 2020 marks the 206th Birth Anniversary of Bhanubhakta Acharya, he was the first writer to translate the Great Epic of Ancient India- Ramayan from Sanskrit to Nepali. Bhanu Jayanti is also celebrated across the state of Nepal on 13th July every year.
- Madhya Pradesh has topped in implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Street Vendors Atma Nirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) by sanctioning an interest-free loan of around Rs 15.50 crore to 15,500 street vendors in the state.
- Trying to facilitate learning among public school children amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Madhya Pradesh government has started Mera Ghar Mera Vidyalaya Scheme.
- The Minister of State for Shipping Shri Manasukh Mandaviya reviewed the development activities of Vallarpadam terminal at Cochin.
- The Uttarakhand government has decided to convert waste generated in the state to electricity under an initiative titled 'Waste to Energy'.
- Assam Chief Minister, Sarbananda Sonowal has announced, Poba Reserve Forest in Dhemaji district would be upgraded to a wildlife sanctuary.
- Gujarat, Chief Minister Vijay Rupani inaugurated various tourism and pilgrimage project worth 126 Crore rupees during the e-launching event organized in Gandhinagar.
- Human Resources and Development Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank launched the first on-line NISHTHA programme for one thousand 200 Key Resources Persons of Andhra Pradesh.
- The Women Safety Wing, Telangana State Police has launched the "CybHer" campaign in association with the Legal Aid Centre, Symbiosis Law School, Hyderabad.
- Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on July 15 inaugurated the first plasma bank for the treatment of serious COVID-19 patients at SCB Medical College.
- Maharashtra government has initiated a measure "HEALTHCARE SERVICE AT YOUR DOORSTEP" in Nashik.
- Odisha Government announced that transgenders are to be included under Madhu Babu Pension Yojana.

- Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat inaugurated „Smriti Van“ at Asthal village of Dehradun district in memory of late Jeet Singh Negi, famous folk singer of the state on the occasion of Harela festival.
- The Delhi government has extended the ban on manufacture, storage, sale and distribution of gutkha and pan masala for one more year.
- Jammu and Kashmir administration announced life insurance cover of Rs 25 lakhs to all elected members of urban local bodies and panchayati raj institutions.
- The State Government of Andhra Pradesh announced the Andhra Pradesh Renewable Energy Export Policy 2020, which permits the sale of power to the other states of India.
- The Union Minister for Food Processing Harsimrat Kaur Badal today made a virtual inauguration of the Zoram Mega Food Park, set up at Khamrang in Kolasib district of Mizoram.
- In Chhattisgarh, first of its kind scheme of the country- Godhan Nyay Yojana commenced on 20th July.
- Delhi government approved a scheme for door step delivery of ration in the state.
- In a first, the Maharashtra State Electricity Transmission Company (MSETCL) has started using drones for inspection of power lines and transmission towers.
- Karnataka State Government approved the formation of the Karnataka Digital Economy Mission.
- Ahmedabad Railway Division has successfully introduced a unique concept of Baggage Sanitization and Wrapping at Ahmedabad Railway Station.
- Rajasthan Government is to set up the first plasma bank of the state in Jaipur.
- Lieutenant Governor, Girish Chandra Murmu has announced the launch of a „Macadamisation Program“ for the improvement of roads across Jammu and Kashmir.
- The Himachal Pradesh government is according to high priority to enhance green cover and environmental protection.
- In Madhya Pradesh, state-wide online training is being provided by the Department of Panchayat and Rural Development regarding the role of Panchayats and community in prevention, control and management of Covid-19. This series of division-wise training will run till August 7.
- In Bihar, Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO) will set up two temporary hospitals of five hundred bed to treat Corona patients.
- The Karnataka government will soon lay the foundation stone for a life sciences park
- In a move to intensify surveillance, Assam deployed a Surveillance Quadcopter (Drone) and an anti- depredation quick response vehicle.
- The Tamil Nadu government signed MoUs with 16 companies that would bring an investment of Rs. 5,137 crore and provide employment to 6,555 persons.
- The Tamil Nadu government has passed an order to rename three metro rail stations in Chennai after three late Chief Ministers of the State.
- Jammu and Kashmir Government has established 12 AMRIT Pharmacies across the Union Territory to reduce Out of Pocket Expenditure for consumers.
- The Indian Railways has recently installed automatic lighting systems at three railways stations in Madhya Pradesh.