

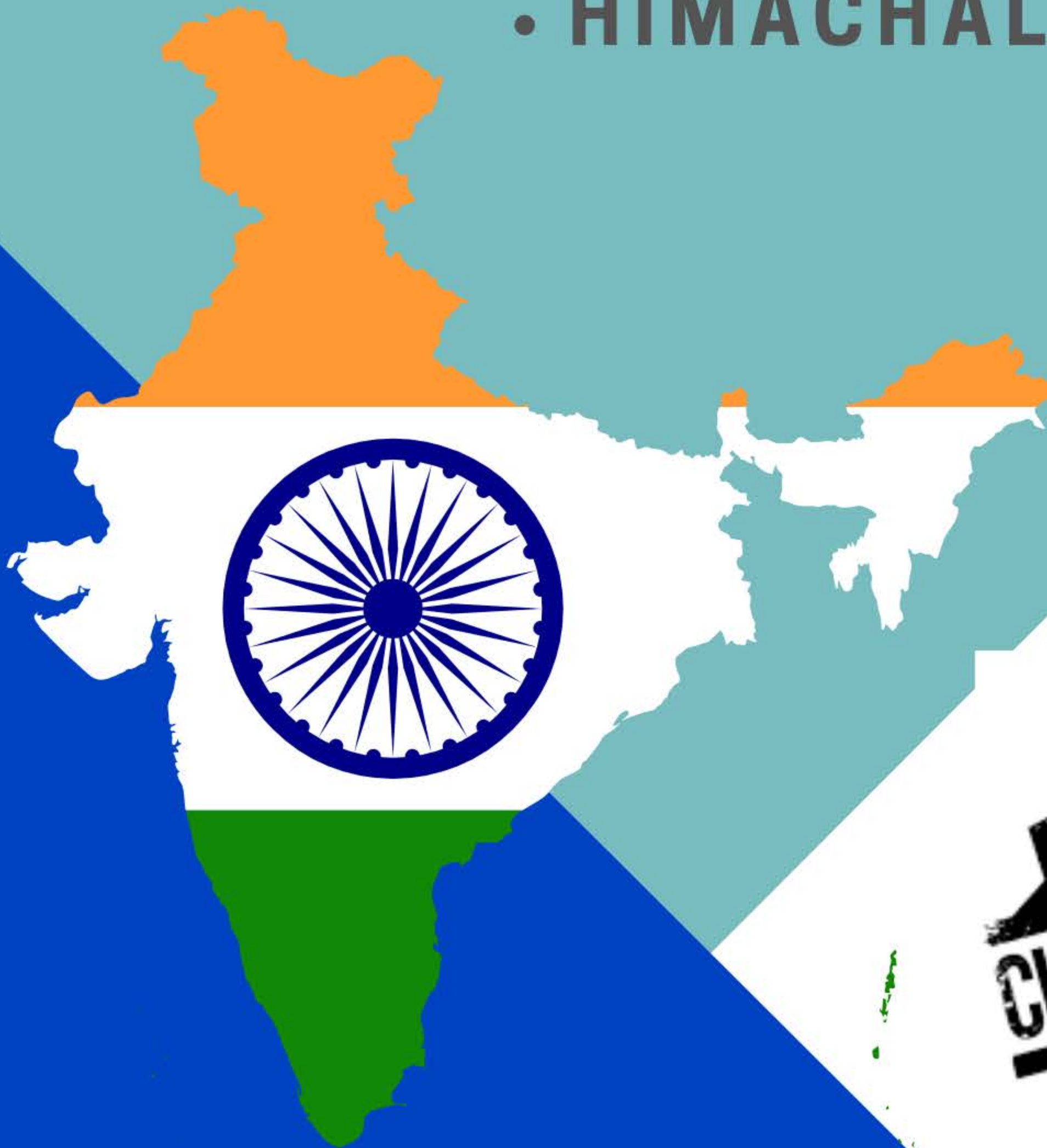
JOKTA ACADEMY

Current Affairs

MAY 2020



- NATIONAL
- INTERNATIONAL
- HIMACHAL PRADESH



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Polity and Governance

J&K and Article 54

Why in News?

Recently, in a reply to a **Right to Information (RTI)** query “if the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir will be part of the Electoral College for the **election of the President of India**”, the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** has asked to refer to **Article 54** of the Constitution of India.

What is Article 54 of the Constitution?

- Under Article 54, the President is elected by an **Electoral College**, which consists of the **elected members of both Houses of Parliament and the elected members of the Legislative Assemblies of all the States and also of NCT of Delhi and the UT of Puducherry**.
- The art. 54, thus, only specifically mentions NCT of Delhi and Puducherry as eligible to be part of the Electoral College.
- There is **no word about the newly-formed UTs of J&K and Ladakh**.

Ambiguity over J&K

- The J&K Reorganization Act, which came into existence from **5th August 2019**, does not specify anything about whether the legislature of J&K would be able to vote in the election for a President.
- A passing mention is made in **Section 13 of the 2019 Act**, which claims that **J&K Legislature would have the same powers as its Puducherry counterpart**.
- The astonishing thing to note is that not a single MP in the parliamentary debate has pointed out this fact yet.

A constitutional amendment is required

- Inclusion of new members in the Electoral College in Article 54** would require a Constitutional Amendment to be carried out through two-thirds majority in Parliament and ratification by over 50% of the States.
- This matter involves principles of federalism**, hence constitutional amendment is a must.
- Delhi and Puducherry were included as Electoral College members under Article 54 through the **Constitution (Seventieth) Amendment Act of 1992**.
- Before that, Article 54 consisted of only the elected Members of Parliament as well as the Legislative Assemblies of the States.

Election Commission of India

- The Election Commission of India is an autonomous constitutional authority responsible for administering Union and State election processes in India.
- The body administers elections to the **Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and State Legislative Assemblies in India, and the offices of the President and Vice President** in the country.

Background

- Part XV** of the Indian constitution deals with elections, and establishes a commission for these matters.
- The Election Commission was established in accordance with the Constitution on **25th January 1950**.

I am thankful to Suresh Jolota Sir whose guidance has an important role to play in my success. Sir, your knowledge, experience and active support has been of great help, especially for the personality test. Your influence has extended well into my future. Thank you so much!

— Girija Mankotia



GIRIJA MANKOTIA | D.T.O

I must admit with sincere honesty that Jolota Sir's books and various compilations for Budget and Economic Survey really helped me tremendously to streamline my preparation for HPS Exam. My engagement with the Academy and precisely Jolota Sir benefitted me immensely to clear the Exam.

Somil Gautam
Rank-3 in HPS-2016



SOMIL GAUTAM | HPAS Rank-3 | SDM (2016-17)

- **Article 324 to 329** of the constitution deals with powers, function, tenure, eligibility, etc of the commission and the member.

Articles related to Elections

| | |
|-----|--|
| 324 | Superintendence, direction and control of elections to be vested in an Election Commission. |
| 325 | No person to be ineligible for inclusion in, or to claim to be included in a special, electoral roll on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex. |
| 326 | Elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assemblies of States to be on the basis of adult suffrage. |
| 327 | Power of Parliament to make provision with respect to elections to Legislatures. |
| 328 | Power of Legislature of a State to make provision with respect to elections to such Legislature. |
| 329 | Bar to interference by courts in electoral matters. |

Structure of the Commission

- Originally the commission had only **one election commissioner** but after the **Election Commissioner Amendment Act 1989, it has been made a multi-member body.**
- The commission consists of **one Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners.**
- The secretariat of the commission is located in New Delhi.
- **At the state level** election commission is helped by Chief Electoral Officer who is an IAS rank Officer.
- The President appoints Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners.
- They have a **fixed tenure of six years, or up to the age of 65 years**, whichever is earlier.
- They enjoy the **same status and receive salary and perks as available to Judges of the Supreme Court of India.**
- The Chief Election Commissioner can be removed from office only through a **process of removal similar to that of a Supreme Court judge for by Parliament.**

Procedure of Removal

- **Judges of High Courts and Supreme Court, CEC, Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) may be Removed from office through a motion adopted by Parliament on grounds of 'Proven misbehavior or incapacity'.**
- Removal requires special majority of **2/3rd** members present and voting supported by more than **50%** of the total strength of the house.
- **The Constitution does not use the word 'impeachment'**, for the removal of the judges, CAG, CEC.
- **The term 'Impeachment' is only used for removing the President** which requires the special majority of 2/3rd members of the total strength of both the houses which is not used elsewhere.

Functions

- Election Commission of India **superintendents, direct and control the entire process of conducting elections** to Parliament and Legislature of every State and to the offices of President and Vice-President of India.
- The most important function of the commission is to **decide the election schedules for the conduct of periodic and timely elections**, whether general or bye-elections.
- It prepares electoral roll, issues Electronic Photo Identity Card (EPIC).
- It decides on the location polling stations, assignment of voters to the polling stations, location of counting centers, arrangements to be made in and around polling stations and counting centers and all allied matters.
- **It grants recognition to political parties & allot election symbols to them along with settling disputes related to it.**
- The Commission also has **advisory jurisdiction in the matter of post-election disqualification of sitting members of Parliament and State Legislatures.**
- **It issues the Model Code of Conduct in election** for political parties and candidates so that the no one indulges in unfair practice or there is no arbitrary abuse of powers by those in power.
- **It sets limits of campaign expenditure per candidate to all the political parties, and also monitors the same.**

GI Tags to Two Products

Why in News?

Recently, **Chak-Hao, the black rice of Manipur and the Gorakhpur (Uttar Pradesh) terracotta** have bagged the Geographical Indication (GI) tag.

Key Points

Chak-Hao:

- Chak-Hao is a **scented glutinous (sticky) rice** which has been in cultivation in Manipur over centuries, and is characterised by its special aroma.
- **The rice is black in colour** and takes the **longest cooking time of 40-45 minutes** due to the presence of a **fibrous bran layer and higher crude fibre content**.
- It is normally eaten during community feasts and is served as **Chak-Hao kheer**.
- Chak-Hao has also been used by **traditional medical practitioners as part of traditional medicine**.



Gorakhpur terracotta:

- The terracotta work of Gorakhpur is a centuries-old traditional art form.
- The **entire work is done with bare hands**.
- The clay used in the terracotta products is '**Kabis**' clay which is found in the **ponds of Aurangabad, Bharwalia and Budhadih village areas**.
 - Also, such clay is found only in the months of **May and June**, as for the rest of the year, the ponds are filled with water.
- **The potters do not use any colour**, they only dip the clay structure in a mixture of soda and mango tree barks, and bake it.
- **The red colour of terracotta does not fade for years**.
- Major products of craftsmanship include the **Hauda elephants, Mahawatdar horse, deer, camel, five-faced Ganesha, single-faced Ganesha, elephant table, chandeliers, hanging bells etc.**



Kashmir Saffron got GI Tag

Why in News?

Recently, the Kashmir saffron got Geographical Indication (GI) tag status.

About Kashmir saffron

- It is cultivated and harvested in the **Karewa (highlands)** in some regions of Kashmir, including Pulwama, Budgam, Kishtwar and Srinagar.
- It is a very precious and costly product. **Iran is the largest producer of saffron** and **India is a close competitor**.
- It rejuvenates health and is used in cosmetics and for medicinal purposes.
- It has been associated with **traditional Kashmiri cuisine** and represents the rich cultural heritage of the region.
- Saffron cultivation is believed to have been **introduced in Kashmir by Central Asian immigrants around 1st Century BCE**. In ancient Sanskrit literature, saffron is referred to as '**bahukam**'.

3 Types

- '**Lachha Saffron**', with stigmas just separated from the flowers and dried without further processing;
- '**Mongra Saffron**', in which stigmas are detached from the flower, dried in the sun and processed traditionally; and
- '**Guchhi Saffron**', which is the same as Lachha, except that the latter's dried stigmas are packed loosely in air-tight containers while the former has stigmas joined together in a bundle tied with a cloth thread

Whats' so special about Kashmir Saffron?

The unique characteristics of Kashmir saffron are **its longer and thicker stigmas, natural deep-red colour, high aroma, bitter flavour, chemical-free processing, and high quantity of crocin (colouring strength), safranal (flavour) and picrocrocin (bitterness)**.

- It is the only saffron in the world grown at an altitude of 1,600 m to 1,800 m AMSL (above mean sea level), which adds to its uniqueness and differentiates it from other saffron varieties available the world over.

Epidemic Disease Act, 1897

Why in news?

Recently, the Centre amended the Epidemic Disease Act, 1897.

What has changed?

- Through an ordinance, the Cabinet amended the 1897 Act.
- **The amendment made commission or abetment of acts of violence against healthcare workers a cognisable, non-bailable offence.**
- The offenders will be **imprisoned for a term of three months to five years, and with fine of Rs 50,000 to Rs 2 lakh.**
- **In case of causing grievous hurt**, imprisonment shall be for a term of six months to seven years and with fine of Rs1 lakh to Rs 5 lakh.

Why did the Centre invoke the 1897 Act now?

- **In March 2020, this Act was invoked to fight the Covid-19 outbreak.**
- The Act empowers the state governments to take special measures and prescribe regulations in an epidemic.
- It defines penalties for disobedience of these regulations, and provides for immunity for actions taken under the Act.

Why the Act was enacted?

- In January 1897, Council member **J Woodburn** tabled the Epidemic Diseases Bill during bubonic plague outbreak in Bombay.
- The Bill was tabled as a measure to contain the plague before it attains large proportions elsewhere in the country.
- It noted that the powers of the municipal bodies and other local governments were inadequate to deal with such situations.
- It called for special powers for governments of Indian provinces and local bodies, including to check passengers of trains and sea routes.
- It said existing laws were insufficient to enable municipal officers to deal with matters related to overcrowded houses, sanitation, etc.

How was it passed?

- The Bill was referred to a Select Committee, which submitted its report on 4th February 1897.
- The Bill was passed the same day, after a brief discussion.
- It was passed amid concerns of the disease spreading, with crowds from Bombay having reached places all over India.
- The government was particularly worried about Calcutta, then the Indian capital.
- Among the members, Rahimtula Muhammad Sayani and Maharaja of Darbhanga said that the Bill was passed hurriedly.

What were the challenges discussed?

- Babu Joy Gobind Law suggested that steps be taken with regard to **Muslims' pilgrimage** to Mecca.
- But Alexander Mackenzie, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, clarified that his government was unwilling to interfere with religious practices.
- Sayani said that the persons desirous of performing the pilgrimage could be persuaded to put off their intention until the danger has passed.
- It was discussed that **isolating women was particularly difficult**.
- Woodburn told that the whole town could not run the risk of plague infection merely because its source is a woman.

Vande Bharat Mission

Why in News?

India has launched a massive evacuation operation Vande Bharat Mission, to bring back Indians stranded in different parts of the world due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Key Points:

- Under Vande Bharat Mission, **Air India flights** will ferry out passengers stranded in India and on the return journey, these flights will **bring back** Indians, stuck overseas.
- Under the operation **State-run carrier Air India will operate special flights from New Delhi, Cochin and Kozhikode to Singapore, Abu Dhabi and Dubai respectively**.
- A total of **2,300 passengers will be brought back in the first phase**.
- The highest number of passengers - **300 - are coming back from the United States**, followed by 250 each from the UK, Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines, and 200 each from Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Riyadh, Doha and Dhaka.
- **Union Ministry of Home Affairs stated that** a person who has an OCI card, or held the citizenship of a foreign country, or held a valid visa of more than one year of that country, or had the green card of that country, can travel on the repatriation flight leaving India under the Vande Bharat mission.
- The Mission is claimed to be the **biggest repatriation exercise ever**.

Operation Samudra Setu

- The program named **Samudra Setu by Indian navy** entails to bring back around two thousand Indians in two ships during the first phase of evacuation.
- **INS Jalashwa and INS Magar** are being operated as part of efforts to repatriate Indian nationals from foreign shores.

Army's Proposal of 3 year Tenure for Civilians

Why in News?

Recently, the Army has proposed 3 years of voluntary **Tour of Duty (ToD)** for civilians on a trial basis.

Key Points

Proposal:

- **The Army plans to take civilians on a three- year 'Tour of Duty' (ToD)** or 'Three-year Short Service' on a trial basis to serve in the force as both officers and Other Ranks (ORs).
- The proposal suggests several measures to incentivise this scheme like a **tax-free income for three years** and a **token lump sum at the end of three years of about Rs.5-6 lakh for officers and Rs.2-3 lakh for ORs**.
- However, there will be **no severance packages, resettlement courses, professional encashment training leave, ex-Servicemen status, ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS) for the ToD officers and other ranks**.
- The proposal is a **shift from the concept of permanent service/job in the Armed Forces**, towards internship/temporary experience for three years.
- **If approved it will be a voluntary engagement** and there will be **no dilution in selection criteria**.
- The Army hopes that this would attract individuals from the best colleges, including the Indian Institute of Technology.

Rationale behind the Proposal:

- There is a "**resurgence of nationalism and patriotism**" in the country and the proposal attempts to tap the feeling of the youths who do not want to join the Army as a profession but wish to experience military life for a temporary duration.

Expected Benefits to the Army:

- **Reduction of Financial Burden:** The cost of a three-year service per officer will be a fraction of the cost incurred on Short Service Commission (SSC) officers, which includes cost of pre-commission training, pay, allowances, gratuity, leave encashment among others.
- **Modernisation of Army:** The reduced financial burden will shift the focus towards modernisation of the army in terms of training, arms and equipment.

Expected Benefits to the Youth:

- **It will not only provide a job with higher salary but also ensures a placement in corporate sectors** after retirement as the corporate sector will prefer to hire such youths rather than fresh graduates.
- It has been seen that **corporates favour individuals who have been trained by the military at 26 or 27 years of age**.

Benefits to the Nation:

- It will help to **channelise the youth energy into positive utilisation of their potential**.
- **Rigorous military training and habits inculcation** will lead to **healthy citizenry**.
- **The entire nation will benefit from** trained, disciplined, confident, diligent and committed young men or women who have done the three-year service.

Integrated Battle Groups

Why in News?

The Army's new concept of **agile Integrated Battle Groups (IBG)** as part of the overall force transformation will be operationalised very soon, confirmed Army Chief.

What are IBGs?

- IBGs are **brigade-sized, agile, self-sufficient combat formations**, which can swiftly launch strikes against an adversary in case of hostilities.
- **Each IBG would be tailor-made based on Threat, Terrain and Task and resources will be allotted based on the three Ts.**
- They need to be light so they will be low on logistics and they will be able to mobilise within **12-48 hrs** based on the location.
- An IBG operating in a desert needs to be constituted differently from an IBG operating in the mountains.
- The key corps of the Army is likely to be reorganized into **1-3 IBGs**.

Objective of IBG

Holistic integration to enhance the **operational and functional efficiency, optimize budget expenditure, facilitate force modernization and address aspirations**

Structure

- While a command is the largest static formation of the Army spread across defined geography, a corps is the largest mobile formation.
- Typically each corps has about three brigades.
- The idea is to reorganise them into IBGs which are brigade-sized units but have all the essential elements like infantry, armoured, artillery and air defence embedded together based on the three Ts.
- The IBGs will also be defensive and offensive. While the offensive IBGs would quickly mobilise and make a thrust into enemy territory for strikes, defensive IBGs would hold ground at vulnerable points or where enemy action is expected.

Why need IBGs?

- **After the terrorist attack on the Parliament**, the Indian military undertook massive mobilization but the Army's formations which deep inside took weeks to mobilise losing the element of surprise.
- Following this, the **Army formulated a proactive doctrine known as 'Cold Start' to launch swift offensive but its existence was consistently denied in the past.**
- Its existence was acknowledged for the first time by Gen Rawat in January 2017.

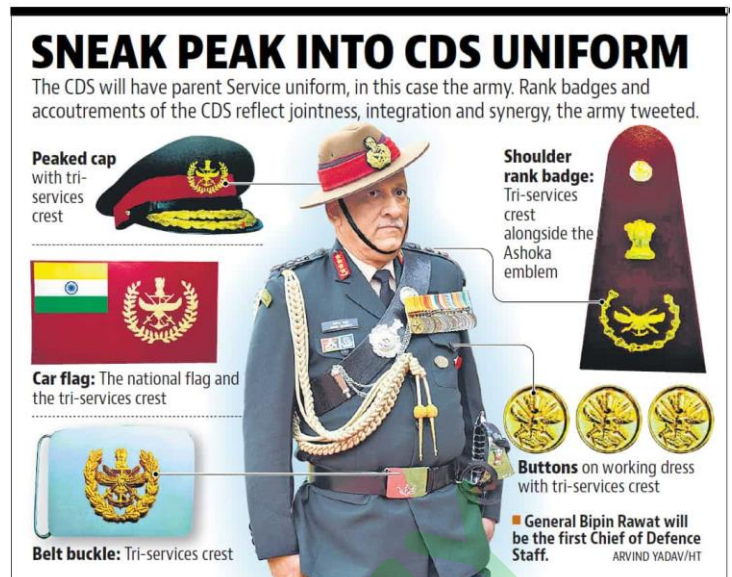
Defence Testing Infrastructure Scheme

Why in News?

In order to give a boost to domestic defence and aerospace manufacturing, Raksha Mantri has approved the launch of the Defence Testing Infrastructure Scheme (DTIS).

Defence Testing Infrastructure Scheme (DTIS)

- **The DTIS would run for the duration of five years** and envisages set up **six to eight new test facilities** in partnership with private industry.
- The scheme has been allocated with an outlay of **Rs 400 crore** for creating a state of the art testing infrastructure for this sector.
- This will facilitate **indigenous defence production, consequently, reduce imports of military equipment** and help make the country **self-reliant**.
- While the majority of test facilities are expected to come up in the **two Defence Industrial Corridors (DICs)**, the Scheme is not limited to setting up Test Facilities in the DICs only.



Funding pattern

- The projects under the Scheme will be provided with **up to 75 per cent government funding in the form of 'Grant-in-Aid'**.
- The remaining **25 per cent of the project cost will have to be borne by the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)** whose constituents will be Indian private entities and State Governments.
- The SPVs under the Scheme will be registered under **Companies Act 2013** and shall also operate and maintain all assets under the Scheme, in a self-sustainable manner by collecting user charges.

GOAL Programme

Why in News?

Recently, the Union Minister for Tribal Affairs launched **"GOAL (Going Online As Leaders)" programme** at a webinar in New Delhi.

- GOAL is a **joint initiative of Facebook and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.**

Key Points

- The GOAL programme is designed to **provide mentorship to tribal youth through digital mode.**
- The program will focus on **three core areas** - Digital Literacy, Life Skills and Leadership and Entrepreneurship.
- The program intends to **upskill and empower 5,000 tribal youths in the current phase** to harness the full potential of digital platforms and tools to learn new ways of doing business, explore and connect with domestic and international markets.
- The programme has been designed with a **long term vision to develop the potential of tribal youth and women to help them acquire skills and knowledge through mentorship in various sectors including horticulture, food processing, bee keeping, tribal art and culture, medicinal herbs, entrepreneurship among others.**
- The program aims to enable **Scheduled Tribe (ST)** youth in remote areas to use digital platforms for sharing their aspirations, dreams and talent with their mentors.
- All the mentees will be provided with smartphones and Internet access (for one year) by Facebook along with exposure to various external forums that will give opportunity to the participants to showcase their entrepreneurial skills and leadership abilities.
- The program will also create awareness amongst tribal beneficiaries about various schemes initiated by Central and State Governments for welfare of STs as well as their fundamental duties.

Domicile Certificates in J&K

Why in News?

Recently, the Jammu and Kashmir administration notified the J&K Grant of Domicile Certificate (Procedure) Rules 2020.

- It amended the rules for **issuing domicile certificates** in the Union territory.
- The new rules provide a **simple time-bound and transparent procedure for issuance of domicile certificates.**

Key Points

J&K Grant of Domicile Certificate (Procedure) Rules 2020:

- It would provide the basis for issuing domicile certificates to those **who meet the conditions as stated in the Centre's gazette notification that introduced the domicile clause through an amendment to the Jammu And Kashmir Civil Services (Decentralisation And Recruitment) Act, 2010.**
- Domicile certificates have now been made a basic eligibility condition for appointment to any post under the Union Territory of J&K.

- **Under the amended rules, eligible non-locals can also apply for the certificate.** The new process will allow West Pakistan refugees, safai karamcharis and children of women who married non-locals to apply for jobs.

Domicile: Under Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Adaptation of State Laws) Order 2020, **domicile is defined as any person who has resided for a period of 15 years in the UT of J&K or has studied for a period of seven years and appeared in class 10th and 12th examination in an educational institution located in the UT of J&K.** It also has provisions related to migrants and government officials.

Time Stipulated under the Rules:

- It sets a fast track process in motion to issue the certificates within a **stipulated time of 15 days.**
- If the certificate is not issued within the stipulated time, the applicant shall be free to approach an appellate authority.
- The decision of the appellate authority shall be binding upon the issuing authority and the **orders to be complied within 7 days**, failing which the defaulting officer has to face a penalty of **Rs. 50,000, to be recovered from his/her salary.**

Eligibility:

- **Permanent Residents:** All Permanent Resident Certificate holders and their children living outside J&K can apply for the certificates.
 - **Migrants:** Kashmiri migrants living in or outside J&K can get domicile certificates by producing their Permanent Residence Certificate (PRC), ration card copy, voter card or any other valid document.
 - **Government Officials:** Central government officials, All India Service Officers, officials of Public Sector Undertakings, Autonomous bodies of the Central Government, Public Sector Banks, Statutory bodies, Central Universities and recognised research institutes of the Central Government, who have served in the **Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir for a total period of ten years**, are eligible for the certificate.

Electricity Amendment Bill, 2020

Why in News?

- The Electricity Amendment Bill 2020, recently drafted by the Union power ministry will amend the Electricity Act 2003.
- Due to this Bill, **a big challenge lies ahead for Punjab that provides free power to the agriculture sector.**

What does the Bill propose to do?

- The new bill has **proposed providing subsidy on power to farmers through Direct Benefit of Transfer (DBT).**
- This would be **different from the prevailing 'free power' system.**
- Experts and farmers say that under the garb of DBT, it is a move to stop the free power supply to them.

What is the current system of power subsidy for farmers in Punjab?

- At present, Punjab is supplying free power to **14.16 lakh electricity-run tube wells of the agriculture sector.**
- These tube wells are getting power through **5,900 Agricultural Pump set Feeders (APFs).**
- These APFs are metered and **the Punjab State Power Corporation charges the state government Rs 5.26 per unit for consumed units recorded in metered APFs.**
- **There are no individual meters installed on every tube well in Punjab**, which is among the first states to separate agriculture sector feeders.
- Farmers are getting power supply for their **Kharif and Rabi crops from these feeders as per the recommendations of the Punjab Agriculture University (PAU).**
- It is supplied for around **8 hours every day in Kharif season and 4 hours on alternate days during Rabi crop season.**
- **Punjab government pays Rs 6,000 crore power subsidy bill to Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (PSPCL) every year under its 'free power scheme' to the farming sector.**

What would change under the DBT allowed under the 2020 Bill?

- Under DBT, **farmers will have to pay the bill for the power consumed for agriculture purposes.**
- After that, they will get the subsidy in their bank accounts through DBT.
- **A meter would be installed** on every individual tube well.
- In Punjab, the consumption per tube well, having motors with power rating **between 7.5 and 12 horse power (HP)**, is **8,000-9,000 units.**
- So the annual power bill will come to around Rs 46,000 to Rs 48,000, and farmers are required to pay a bill of Rs 4,000 per month.
- **In Punjab, 67% farmers come under the small and marginal categories with 1-2 hectares land.**
- Paying bills in advance is not possible for them due to debt.
- If farmers don't pay their bills, the department will disconnect their connection.
- This could lead to several clashes in Punjab between PSPCL employees and farmers' unions as well as power theft.

Can it work like DBT on LPG gas cylinders?

- It may or may not, only time will tell, said experts.
- The bill suggests the subsidy be paid directly to consumers in cash on the pattern of LPG subsidy.
- This proposal should be tried in a pilot project and if results are encouraging, only then it should be included in the amendment bill.
- In the agriculture sector, **free or subsidised power is being provided on the basis of a load of pump sets to consumers in every state without any provision of meter on the basis of fixed charges.**
- It is impractical to provide meters on every pump set up across India and then give cash subsidy every month after the consumer has paid the bill.

How will it affect PSPCL?

- Currently, PSPCL is maintaining only **5,900 power meters installed on feeders.**
- But as per the new bill, PSPCL needs to installed electricity meters on every tubewell.
- This will require at least **Rs 1,200 crore along with 10% recurring charges on these annually.**
- PSPCL needs to appoint more manpower to maintain it.
- It will be a huge burden on PSPCL too.

What do farmers' organisations think of this?

- **Protest** - Farmers' organisations say that if the Punjab government agrees to this bill, they will fight it tooth and nail.
- They ask, from where will poor farmers pay such heavy bills when they get income after six months following the sale of their crop.
- Farmers' organisations have planned to hold massive protests opposing the bill.
- **Data discrepancy** - Punjab government seems to be in favour of the bill when it says it will benefit 26 lakh farmers against the 10 lakh currently who own tubewells.
- According to PAU, there are around 12.50 lakh farming households in Punjab.
- Even if the division has taken place among the brothers, they share the water of the same tubewell connections, which are installed in their joint properties.

Economics

Lifeline Udan Initiative

Why in News?

A total of 415 flights have been operated under the 'Lifeline Udan' initiative by various air carriers.

- The cargo transported till date is around 779.86 tons and aerial distance covered by Lifeline Udan flights is over 4 lakh kilometres.

Key Points:

- Under this initiative flights are being operated for the movement of essential and medical supplies across the nation.
- **The cargo of Lifeline Udan includes** COVID-19 related medical equipment, reagents, enzymes, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), testing kits, masks, gloves as well as other accessories required by Corona Warriors.
- The carriers involved in this initiative include Alliance Air, Air India, Indian Air Force (IAF) and Pawan Hans. Moreover, flights on a commercial basis, private carriers such as Spicejet, IndiGo and Blue Dart are operating medical cargo.
- **The flights under Lifeline Udan are planned using a hub and spoke model.** Cargo hubs have been set up at Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Hyderabad and Bangalore. The flights connect these hubs and therefrom to different parts of India.
- **Special focus has been on the North East Region (NER), island territories and the hill states.** MoCA, Air India and IAF have collaborated closely for last mile deliveries to **Ladakh, Dimapur, Imphal, Guwahati and Port Blair.**

UDAN

- Ude Desh Ka Aam Naagrik (UDAN) was launched as a regional connectivity scheme under the Ministry of Civil Aviation in 2016.
- It is an innovative scheme to **develop the regional aviation market.**
- **It aims to create affordable yet economically viable and profitable flights** on regional routes so that flying becomes affordable to the common man even in small towns.

Kisan Sabha App

Why in News?

The CSIR-Central Road Research Institute (CSIR-CRRI), New Delhi has developed the **Kisan Sabha App** to connect farmers to the supply chain and freight transportation management system.

- The app also intends to **provide a robust supply chain management** required to facilitate the timely delivery of the products at the best possible prices during the present situation of Covid-19.

About Kisan Sabha App

- Kisan Sabha aims to provide the **most economical and timely logistics support to the farmers and increase their profit margins by minimizing the interference of middlemen** and directly connecting with the institutional buyers.
- It will also help in providing the **best market rates of crops by comparing nearest mandis, booking of freight vehicle at the cheapest cost thereby giving maximum benefit to the farmers.**
- **The portal connects the farmers,** transporters, Service providers (like pesticides/ fertilizer/ dealers, cold store and warehouse owner), mandi dealers, customers and other related entities for a timely and effective solution.
- The app has **6 major modules** taking care of Farmers/Mandi Dealers/Transporters/Mandi Board Members/ Service Providers/Consumers.

Facilities provided by the app

- The portal acts as a **single stop for every entity related to agriculture**, be they a farmer who needs better price for the crops or mandi dealer who wants to connect to more farmers or truckers who invariably go empty from the mandis.
- It provides a **platform for people who want to buy directly from the farmers**.
- It would also **prove to be useful for those associated with cold store(s) or godown(s)**.

RBI Cancels License of CKP Co-op Bank

Why in News?

Recently, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has cancelled the licence of **Mumbai-based CKP Co-operative Bank**.

Key Points

RBI has cancelled the licence of the bank as the financial position of the bank was highly adverse and unsustainable.

- The bank is not in a position to pay its present and future depositors.
- The bank failed to meet the regulatory requirement of maintaining a minimum capital adequacy ratio of 9% and reserves.
- RBI has asked the Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Maharashtra to start the process of winding up operations of CKP Co-operative bank and appoint a liquidator.
- On liquidation, every depositor of the bank is entitled to get up to **Rs 5 lakh from the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation**.

In September last year, RBI had imposed restrictions on **Punjab and Maharashtra Co-operative (PMC) Bank** not to do any business for six months after it found major irregularities, which included financial irregularities, complete failure of internal control and systems, and wrongdoing and under-reporting of its lending exposure.

Capital Adequacy Ratio

- Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) is **the ratio of a bank's capital in relation to its risk weighted assets and current liabilities**. It is also known as **Capital-to-Risk Weighted Asset Ratio (CRAR)**.
- It is decided by central banks to prevent commercial banks from taking excess leverage and becoming insolvent in the process.
- The **Basel III norms** stipulated a capital to risk weighted assets of **8%**.
- However, as per **RBI norms**, Indian scheduled commercial banks are required to maintain a **CAR of 9%**.

Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation

DICGC came into existence in 1978 after the merger of Deposit Insurance Corporation (DIC) and Credit Guarantee Corporation of India Ltd. (CGCI) under the **Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation Act, 1961**.

- It serves as a deposit insurance and credit guarantee for banks in India.
- It is a fully owned subsidiary of and is governed by the **Reserve Bank of India**.
- **DICGC charges 10 paise per 100 of deposits held by a bank**. The premium paid by the insured banks to the Corporation is paid by the banks and is not to be passed on to depositors.
- DICGC last revised the deposit insurance cover to **5 lakh in Feb, 2020, raising it from 1 lakh since 1993**. The protection cover of deposits in Indian banks through insurance is among the lowest in the world.
- **The Damodaran Committee on 'Customer Services in Banks' (2011) had recommended a five-time increase in the cap to 5 lakh due to rising income levels and increasing size of individual bank deposits**.

Banks, including regional rural banks, local area banks, foreign banks with branches in India, and cooperative banks, are mandated to take deposit insurance cover with the DICGC.

MSMEs and Economic Lockdown

Why in News?

The Covid-19 pandemic has left its impact on all sectors of the economy including the **Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises (MSMEs)** sector.

- Earlier the government had declared the relief package namely, the **PM Garib Kalyan Yojana** for the poor to help them fight the battle against **Coronavirus (Covid-19)** the second package is expected to primarily focus on the MSME sector.

What comprises the MSME sector?

- MSME sector form the **second-biggest employer** in the country with a **31% share in India's GDP**.
- Section 7 of the MSMEs Development Act, 2006 specifies the size of the MSMEs on the basis of investment.
- Among manufacturing units, **micro enterprises** are those that have invested up to **Rs 25 lakh** in plant and machinery.
- The comparable figure for **small units** is **Rs 25 lakh-Rs 5 crore** and for **medium units**, **Rs 5 crore-Rs 10 crore**.
- For services, the investment thresholds are lower - up to **Rs 10 lakh**, **Rs 10 lakh-Rs 2 crore** and **Rs 2 crore-Rs 5 crore** respectively for the categories.

Why do they need more attention now?

- Unlike big industries, the **MSMEs' resilience during the current crisis is lower**.
- **Many of the MSMEs are probably eating into their capital to stay afloat**.
- The RBI has already asked banks to offer a **three-month moratorium on loan repayments** by such units.
- Beside, the **RBI has arranged for opening a window from where banks can borrow money and lend to the sector**.
- However, banks are afraid of loans given to these units turning bad.

How has the credit support been?

- A recent study shows that the MSMEs' exposure to the financial system in **December 2019 was Rs 11.04 trillion**.
- Of these, the share of very small businesses (up to Rs 10 lakh exposure) is Rs 54,000 crore.
- In December, in commercial credit (excluding agriculture and retail), the share of MSMEs (up to Rs 50 crore exposure) was a little less than 28%.
- The maximum loans were in the Rs 1 crore-Rs 15 crore basket (Rs 8.74 trillion), followed by Rs 15 crore-Rs 50 crore (Rs 4.68 trillion).
- Notably, the corpus of less than Rs 10 lakh loans was the smallest, at Rs 93,000 crore.
- **Maharashtra has the maximum share of MSME credit, 17.36%, followed by Tamil Nadu (10.77%), Gujarat (8.85%), Delhi (7.13%) and UP (6.5%).**

How creditworthy are MSMEs?

- Loans to the MSME segment had grown **4.7% between December 2018 and December 2019**.
- Indeed, the **bad loans** in the segment have been on the rise over the past few years and reached **12.6% in December 2019**.
- The study keeps the Rs 2.32 trillion MSME exposure of banks in the highest risk bracket (of this, the micro units' share is just about Rs 13,600 crore).
- But there are millions of creditworthy borrowers outside this.
- The study has found that **74% of the close to 8.9 million MSMEs is creditworthy**.
- The banks must grab this opportunity to fuel growth in the economy as well as their loan books.

What are the other hurdles in financing MSMEs?

- **The banking system is the main source of money for the MSME segment**.
- Added to this, **the microfinance institutions (MFIs)** meet the credit needs of retail borrowers at the so-called bottom of the pyramid.

- Notably, **there is not much stress in the portfolio of micro loans offered by the MFIs and NBFCs** (non-banking financial companies).
- So, presently, they are not suffering from risk aversion but most of them do not have the money to lend.
- Initially, the banks were reluctant to offer moratorium to the MFIs and NBFCs on their repayment of loans to the banks.
- They had felt that it was meant for the loans given for productive purposes and not to financial intermediaries.
- Now, **most banks are offering the moratorium to MFIs too.**
- But the **Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) and Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency Ltd (MUDRA) are not that liberal.**
- Notably, these two government agencies have around Rs 3,000 crore of exposure to the MFIs.
- Apparently, the NBFCs and MFIs borrow primarily from banks and on-lend to their customers.
- If the banks close the outlet, then NBFCs and MFIs cannot survive, which could in turn hamper the economy; this needs intervention.

Insurance Claims amid Covid-19 Outbreak

Why in News?

Companies that suffered business interruption losses due to the Covid-19 outbreak and lockdown are likely to bat for the **“loss of profit”** clause in their insurance contracts.

- **Many companies had taken insurance policies to cover loss arising due to certain unforeseen circumstances** but the question has risen whether Covid-19 outbreak is covered by such policies.
- The net result is that they may not get any insurance claim from the insurance companies under the Standard Fire and Special Perils Policy, commonly known as property policy.

Note:

Corporations usually take two types of insurance policies -Material damage policy and Business interruption policy.

- **Material damage policy** is triggered if there is loss of property due to fire or flood or machine breakdown.
- **Business interruption**, on the other hand, only comes into force if loss of profit has happened due to the clauses mentioned under the material damages policy.

Key Points

Provisions of Property Policy:

- **If the insured plant or office is shut down due to any damage or fire**, the company is eligible for claims.
- Also the Policy specifies if the building insured or containing the insured property becomes unoccupied and so remains for a period of more than 30 days (not applicable for dwellings), the insurance claims may not be applicable.
 - For claim, **before** the occurrence of any loss or damage to the property, the continuation of the coverage needs to be ensured.

Relaxation from Policy Lapse:

- **The insurers have given relief to corporates, which shut their units for more than a month.** Their policies will be allowed to be operational despite the clause that if a unit is shut for 30 days continuously, the policy cover will lapse.
- **The above relief is applicable for the “unoccupied properties”** for more than one month till May 3 under the property policy.
- It means companies can claim insurance if the property is damaged due to fire or any other loss even if the factory or unit is not operational during the period till May 3.

Force Majeure, or “Act of God” Clause :

- Most insurers will also use the **Force Majeure, or “Act of God” clause** but again there is no concrete conclusion or clause stating that loss of profit due to Covid-19 is Force Majeure.
- Force majeure is a common clause in contracts that essentially frees both parties from liability or obligation when an extraordinary event or circumstance beyond the control of the parties occurs. It prevents one or both parties from fulfilling their obligations under the contract.

Labour Laws Diluted

Why in News?

Amid the coronavirus-induced lockdown, an increasing number of states that include **Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat have pushed through changes to their labour laws by way of ordinances or executive orders.**

- Since labour is a **concurrent subject** under the Constitution of India, states can frame their own laws but need the approval of the Central government.

Key Points

The Uttar Pradesh government has approved an **Ordinance exempting businesses from the purview of all the labour laws except few for the next three years.**

- The labour laws related to settling industrial disputes, occupational safety, health and working conditions of workers, and those related to trade unions, contract workers, and migrant labourers will become defunct.
- However, laws related to bonded labour, deployment of women and children and timely payment of salaries will not be relaxed.
- The changes in the labour laws will apply to **both the existing businesses and the new factories** being set up in the state.
- Similarly, the **Madhya Pradesh government** has also **suspended many labour laws for the next 1000 days.** Few important amendments are:
 - Employers can increase working hours in factories from 8 to 12 hours and are also allowed up to 72 hours a week in overtime, subject to the will of employees.
 - The factory registration now will be done in a day, instead of 30 days. And the licence should be renewed after 10 years, instead of a year. There is also the provision of penalty on officials not complying with the deadline.

Industrial Units will be exempted from majority of the provisions of the **Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.**

- Organisations will be able to keep workers in service at their convenience.
- The Labour Department or the labour court will not interfere in the action taken by industries.
- **Contractors employing less than 50 workers will be able to work without registration under the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970.**
- **Major relaxations to new industrial units are:**
 - Exempted from provisions on ‘**right of workers**’, which includes obtaining details of their health and safety at work, to get a better work environment which include drinking water, ventilation, crèches, weekly holidays and interval of rest, etc.
 - Exempted from the requirement of **keeping registers and inspections** and can change shifts at their convenience.
 - Employers are exempt from **penalties in case of violation of labour laws.**

Rationale Behind the Changes in Labour Laws

- States have begun easing labour laws to **attract investment** and encourage industrial activity.
- To protect the existing employment, and to provide employment to workers who have migrated back to their respective states.

- **Bring about transparency in the administrative procedures** and convert the challenges of a distressed economy into opportunities.
- To increase the revenue of states which have fallen due to closure of industrial units during Covid-19 lockdown.
- **Labour reform has been a demand of Industries for a long time.** The changes became necessary as investors were stuck in a web of laws and red-tapism.

Issues Involved

- The labour law changes will allow more factories to operate without following safety and health norms and give a free hand to new companies to **“keep labourers in service as per their convenience”**.
- **Denying the rights of workers** is a violation of human and fundamental rights.
- It may **create insecurity** among the workers.
- The changes may lead to **desperate conditions for workers**.

AIIB Approves \$500-mn Loan to India

Why in News?

The Indian government and AIIB signed a **COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health Preparedness Project**.

Key Points:

- To fight against COVID-19, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has approved \$500 million loan support to India for COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health Preparedness Project..
- The **AIIB is headquartered at Beijing and the project is the first-ever health sector support to India.** The project is co-financed by the World Bank.
- **The National Health Mission (NHM), National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), the Indian Council of Medical Research** together will work on this project.
- The project will cover all the **States and Union Territories**.
- The project supports the needs of the infected people, at-risk population, medical and emergency personnel and service providers, medical and testing facilities and national and animal health agencies.
- The project will also provide immediate support to enhance disease detection capacities, oxygen delivery systems and medicines among others.
- The project will enable the government to slow and limit the spread of COVID-19 in India.

AIIB

- The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is a development **multilateral bank**.
- It is established by the AIIB Articles of Agreement and is headquartered in Beijing.
- The mission is to **improve social and economic outcomes in Asia**.
- The operations of the bank started in **January 2016 and have 102 approved members worldwide**.
- **China is the largest contributor to the bank, contributing USD50 million and India is the second-largest contributor country with a contribution of USD 8.4 billion.**
- AIIB has created a **COVID-19 Crisis Recovery Facility**.
- To support the AIIB members from economic, financial and public health pressures and recovery from the crisis, the bank has funded USD5-USD10 billion.
- India is one of the largest beneficiaries of AIIB. The AIIB approved five projects with total loan support of USD 1.074billion.
- The five projects are Bangalore Metro Rail Project, Andhra Pradesh 24x7 power supply, Transmission system strengthening project, Gujarat Rural Road Project and India Infrastructure Fund.

National Health Mission

- Launched in the year **2013**, National Health Mission is an **amalgamation of National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)** and the National Urban Health Mission (NUHM).
- **The objective of the programme is to strengthen health systems in rural and urban areas, especially in reproductive, maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health (RMNCH+A) and communicable and non-communicable diseases.**

Helicopter Money

Why in News?

Recently, the **Telangana Chief Minister** suggested that the **helicopter money** can help states to come out of the economic chaos created by **Covid-19 pandemic**.

Key Points

Helicopter money:

- It is an **unconventional monetary policy tool**, which involves **printing large sums of money and distributing it to the public, to stimulate the economy during a recession** (decline in general economic activity) or when interest rates fall to zero.
- Under such a policy, a **central bank "directly increases the money supply and, via the government, distribute the new cash to the population with the aim of boosting demand and inflation."**
- The term was coined by **American economist Milton Friedman**. It basically denotes a helicopter dropping money from the sky.

Difference between helicopter money and quantitative easing:

- **Helicopter money should not be confused with quantitative easing**, because both aim to boost consumer spending and increase inflation.
- In case of helicopter money, **currency is distributed to the public and there is no repayment liability**.
- **Whereas in case of quantitative easing, it involves** the use of printed money by central banks to buy government bonds. Here the government has to pay back for the assets that the central bank buys.

Benefits of helicopter money:

- It does not rely on increased borrowing to fuel the economy, which means that it doesn't create more debt.
- It boosts spending and **economic growth** more effectively than quantitative easing because it increases aggregate demand – the demand for goods and services – immediately.

Issues with helicopter money:

- **It does not involve repayment liability**, therefore many people argue that it's not a feasible solution to revive the economy.
- It may lead to **over-inflation**.
- It may **devalue the currency** in the foreign exchange market.

Consol Bond - COVID-19 Financial Stimulus

Why in News?

With rising COVID-19 cases, urgent attention needs to be paid to the economy that is on a weakening trend. In this context, a **Consol Bond issue is a more convincing solution for the government**, to go beyond current revenue receipts to fund the complete stimulus.

What is the deficit scenario?

- In the Budget (2020) before the pandemic, India projected a deficit of **Rs.7.96-lakh crore**.
- However, even then there were concerns around -
 - off balance sheet borrowings of **1% of GDP**
 - an overly excessive target of **Rs. 2.1 lakh crore through disinvestments**
- The financial deficit number is set to grow by a wide margin due to revenue shrinkage from the coming depression.
- This will most certainly be accompanied by a lack of appetite for disinvestment.

Is the stimulus announced so far sufficient?

- In addition to the expenditure that was planned, the government has to **spend Rs. 5-6 lakh crore as stimulus**.
- The Finance Ministry is optimistic at this front and has suggested that the **government will not exceed the borrowing limits indicated in the Budget**.
- However, the stimulus provided so far and recent announcements by the RBI leave much to be desired given the ground reality.
- All the RBI's schemes are dependent on the **availability of risk capital**, the market for which has completely collapsed.
- RBI has been encouraging banks to lend to **below investment grade micro, small and medium enterprises**, but the results are not welcoming.
- **The 60% increase in ways and means limits for States is a welcome move.**
- But many **States have already asked for double the limits** due to the shortages in indirect taxation collections from GST, fuel and liquor.
- The government and the RBI need to understand that half measures will do more harm than good, giving a false sense of security.

What is the Consol Bond?

- The COVID-19-led condition is termed as a war-like condition.
- Given this, it is fitting to look at **war-time methods of raising finance**.
- **One such method that has been used as early as the First World War is the Consol Bond.**
- **Consol bond is a form of British government bond that has no maturity and that pays a fixed coupon.**
- The value of a console bond was equivalent to its **face value**.
- The bonds, which paid out an interest of **5%, were issued in 1917** to raise more money to finance the ongoing cost of the First World War.
- The British government, in 2014, a century after the start of the First World War, paid out just 10% of the total outstanding Consol bond debt.

How will such a bond help India?

- For India, **such bonds now** would be a better option than the donations to PM-CARES Fund.
- Unlike PM-CARES, the proceeds of the bonds could be used for everything from PPE for doctors to a stimulus for small and medium-sized enterprises.
- Furthermore, with the fall of real estate and the lack of safe havens outside of gold, the bond would offer a dual benefit.
- It would be a risk-free investment for retail investors.
- Notably, most of the Consol bonds in the UK are owned by small investors, with over 70% holding less than £1,000.
- When instrumented, it would be issued by the central government on a perpetual basis with a right to call it back when it seems fit.
- An attractive coupon rate for the bond or tax rebates could also be an incentive for investors.
- The government can consider a phased redemption of these bonds after the economy is put back on a path of high growth.

New Road to Kailash Mansarovar

Why in News?

Recently, the Defence Minister of India has inaugurated a new **80-km road in Uttarakhand** connecting the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** and opening a **new route for Kailash Mansarovar yatra via Lipulekh Pass (China border)**.

- It is scheduled to be completed by December 2022 and will significantly reduce the travel time for pilgrims.

Key Points

- The Link Road is named as the Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra Route under which the **Border Roads Organisation (BRO)** achieved road connectivity **from Dharchula (Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand) to Lipulekh**.
 - Lipulekh Pass also known as **Lipu-Lekh Pass/Qiangla or Tri-Corner** is a high altitude mountain pass situated in the western Himalayas with a height of **5,334 metre or 17,500 feet**.
 - It is an **International mountain pass between India, China and Nepal**.
- The road was made under directions of the **China Study Group (CSG)** and is funded by **Indo-China Border Road (ICBR)**.
- It was approved by the **Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS)** in 2005.
- **The last 5-km of the road could not be finished due to a temporary ban placed on the last-mile connectivity in 2016 by the Director General Military Operations**, which is yet to be lifted.

Advantages:

- It is the shortest and cheapest route with just **one-fifth distance of road travel** as compared to other old routes. The **other route is via Sikkim**.
- There is no air travel involved and the majority of the travel **(84%) is in India and only 16% in China compared to other routes where 80% road travel is in China**.
- Except for a **5-km trek**, whole travel will be on vehicles reducing the **5-day trek to 2- days road travel**.

Kailash Mansarovar

- To Hindus it is the earthly embodiment of the **dominant mountain of heaven, Meru, and the residence of Lord Shiva and his consort Goddess Parvati**.
- The Kailash range's supreme peak lies in the Chinese-occupied Tibet at the height of **6,675 meters**.
- **The pilgrimage to Kailash and to the sacred Mansarovar lake that lies 30 km to its south, is run exclusively by a government organization, the Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam (KMVN)**.
 - The organization works in collaboration with the Government of India's Ministry of External Affairs and the Government of China.

Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan - Approach

What is the issue?

With the announcement of the final tranche of Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, a pattern to the government's approach is visible. Here is an assessment of it.

What is the approach adopted?

The measures taken up are largely in line of -

- giving a strong **supply-side push** by boosting availability of capital on easy terms
- keeping **income and wage support schemes** to the minimum
- **empowering constituencies** ranging from farmers and workers to businesses
- Above all, the government seems to be keen on keeping the damage to the fisc as low as possible.
- The fiscal impact of the **Rs. 20-lakh crore package is estimated by economists at between 2-3% of GDP**.
- This includes withdrawals from provisions already made in the Budget for this fiscal.

What is the idea behind?

- The pillar on which the package rests is **liquidity support so that businesses can be revived**.
- This, in turn, is expected to set the **economic cycle back in motion**.
- The option of a demand-side stimulus through a **resort to deficit financing seems to be reserved for a future date**.
- This could be in case if the infection does not subside or a second wave begins prompting another lockdown.

What is the concern with this?

- The problem with this approach is that there is now a desperate need for demand stimulus; the government has focussed on supply-side push.
- A strategy to drive consumption may have worked better under prevailing conditions.
- The options could have been suspending GST for a couple of months or at least cutting rates temporarily, combined with a liquidity boost.
- The Centre's problem is that its revenues are a fraction of what it would have been in a normal situation.
- But despite this shortfall, a fiscal stimulus could have been fitted into the overall package.

What are the welcome moves though?

- The government has done well in increasing the budget for MGNREGA by two-thirds, adding another **Rs. 40,000 crore**.
- With migrants now returning to their villages, **MGNREGA can be leveraged to keep them occupied with meaningful work**.
- The demand of States for higher borrowings limit has also been granted but with clear reform milestones that they have to meet.
- The government has also used the opportunity to unleash some much-needed reforms in agriculture marketing.

The measures also include -

- opening up more sectors for private participation
- enhancing foreign direct investment in defence
- corporatizing the monolith Ordnance Factory Board, and so on

What lied ahead?

- In sum, the package has several notable features not all of which are **COVID-19 relief**.
- But, the government has clearly refused to borrow and spend more on boosting demand.
- If the strategy of boosting supply works, it is fine.
- However, if it does not work on expected lines, the government will be faced with a bigger problem down the line.
- **The strategy of promoting supply without helping boost demand may force a relook later.**

Aatma Nirbhar Bharat

Why in News?

- A Special economic and comprehensive package of **Rs 20 lakh crores - equivalent to 10% of India's GDP**.
- Call for Self-Reliant India Movement with five pillars of **Aatma nirbhar Bharat - Economy, Infrastructure, System, Vibrant Demography and Demand**.

Economic Front

For MSME Sector

Rs 3 lakh crore Emergency Working Capital Facility for Businesses, including MSMEs

- To provide relief to the business, additional working capital finance of **20% of the outstanding credit as on 29 February 2020, in the form of a Term Loan at a concessional rate** of interest will be provided.
- This will be available to units with upto **Rs 25 crore outstanding and turnover of up to Rs 100 crore** whose accounts are standard, any guarantee or collateral of their own is not required.
- The amount will be **100% guaranteed by the Government of India providing a total liquidity of Rs. 3.0 lakh crores** to more than 45 lakh MSMEs.

Rs 20,000 crore Subordinate Debt for Stressed MSMEs

- Provision made for **Rs. 20,000 cr subordinate debt for two lakh MSMEs** which are NPA or are stressed.
- Government will support them with Rs. 4,000 Cr. to Credit Guarantee Trust for Micro and Small enterprises (CGTMSE).
- Banks are expected to provide the **subordinate-debt to promoters of such MSMEs equal to 15% of his existing stake in the unit subject to a maximum of Rs 75 lakhs.**

Rs 50,000 crore equity infusion through MSME Fund of Funds

- Govt will set up a **Fund of Funds with a corpus of Rs 10,000 crore** that will provide **equity funding support for MSMEs.**
- The Fund of Funds shall be operated through a **Mother and a few Daughter funds.**
- It is expected that with leverage of **1:4** at the level of daughter funds, the Fund of Funds will be able to mobilize equity of about **Rs 50,000 crores.**

New Definition of MSME and other Measures for MSME

- Previously, an enterprise with investment up to **Rs 25 lakh was called a micro unit**, Under the Investment definition, a firm upto **investment of Rs 1 crore is to be called Micro unit**, of **Rs 10 crore is to be called as small unit and investment greater than Rs 20 crore will be called as medium unit.**
- Under the Turn-over definition a firm with turnover of **Rs 5 crore is to be called a micro unit**, of **Rs 50 crore will be called as small unit and turn over greater than Rs 100 crore is to be called as Medium unit.**
- It is to be noted that for an enterprise to come under the category of MSME it has to fulfill both investment and turn over conditions.
- Also, under the new definition, the differentiation between the manufacturing and service based MSMEs are being removed.

No Global tenders for Government tenders of upto Rs 200 crore

- General Financial Rules (GFR) of the Government will be amended to disallow global tender enquiries in procurement of Goods and Services of value of less than Rs 200 crores.

2% Interest Subvention for 12 months for Shishu MUDRA loanes- Relief of Rs. 1,500 crore

- Government of India will provide **Interest subvention of 2% for prompt payees for a period of 12 months to MUDRA Shishu loanes**, who have loans below Rs 50,000.
- The current **portfolio of MUDRA Shishu loans is around Rs 1.62 Lakh crore.**
- This will provide **relief of about Rs 1,500 crore to Shishu MUDRA loanee.**

On Employee's Provident Fund

- EPF Contribution to be reduced for **Employers and Employees for 3 months to 10% from 12%** for all establishments covered by EPFO **for next 3 months.**

For NBFCs

Rs. 30,000 crore Special Liquidity Scheme for NBFC/HFC/MFIs

- Government will launch **Rs 30,000 crore Special Liquidity Scheme**, liquidity being provided by RBI.

- Investment will be made in primary and secondary market transactions in investment grade debt paper of NBFCs, HFCs and MFIs.
- This will be **100 percent guaranteed by the Government of India.**

Rs. 45,000 crore Partial credit guarantee Scheme 2.0 for Liabilities of NBFCs/MFIs

- Existing Partial Credit Guarantee scheme is being revamped and now will be extended to cover the borrowings of lower rated NBFCs, HFCs and other Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs).
- Government of India will provide 20 percent first loss sovereign guarantee to Public Sector Banks.

Tax related measures

- **Reduction in Rates of 'Tax Deduction at Source' and 'Tax Collected at Source'** - The TDS rates for all non-salaried payment to residents, and tax collected at source rate will be **reduced by 25 percent** of the specified rates for the remaining period of FY 20-21. This will provide liquidity to the tune of Rs 50,000 Crore.
- The due date of all Income Tax Returns for Assessment Year **2020-21 will be extended to 30 November, 2020, tax audit due date will be extended to 31 October 2020.**
- The date for making payment without additional amount under the **"Vivad Se Vishwas" scheme will be extended to 31 December, 2020.**

For Real Estate

RERA

- State Governments are being advised to **invoke the Force Majeure clause under RERA.**
- The registration and completion date for all registered projects will be **extended up to 6 months** and may be further extended **by another 3 months** based on the State's situation.
- Various statutory compliances under RERA will also be extended concurrently.

Boost to housing sector

- The Credit Linked Subsidy Scheme for **Middle Income Group (annual income between Rs 6 and 18 lakhs)** will be extended up to March 2021.
- This will benefit **2.5 lakhs middle income families during 2020-21** and will lead to investment of over Rs 70,000 crore in housing sector.
- This will create significant number of jobs by giving boost to Housing sector and will stimulate demand for steel, cement, transport and other construction materials.

Affordable Rental Housing Complexes for Migrant Workers

- Central Government will launch a scheme for migrant workers and urban poor to provide ease of living at affordable rent.
- Converting government funded houses in the cities into **Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHC) under PPP mode through concessionaire; manufacturing units, industries, institutions, associations to develop Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHC)** on their private land and operate; and Incentivizing State Govt agencies/Central Government Organizations on similar lines to develop Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHC) and operate.
- The exact details of the scheme will be released by the Ministry/Department.

Agriculture Front

For farmers through NABARD

- NABARD will extend additional re-finance support of **Rs 30,000 crore for meeting crop loan requirement of Rural Cooperative Banks and RRBs.** This refinance will be front-loaded and available on tap.
- This is over and above **Rs 90,000 crore that will be provided by NABARD** to this sector in the normal course.

- This will benefit around 3 crore farmers, mostly small and marginal and it will meet their post-harvest Rabi and current Kharif requirements.

Credit boost under Kisan Credit Card Scheme

- A special drive to provide concessional credit to **PM-KISAN beneficiaries** through Kisan Credit Cards.
- **Fisherman and Animal Husbandry Farmers will also be included in this drive.**
- This will inject additional liquidity of **Rs 2 lakh crore in the farm sector. 2.5 crore farmers will be covered.**

Agri Infrastructure Fund

- Financing facility of **Rs. 1,00,000 crore** will be provided for funding Agriculture Infrastructure Projects at farm-gate & aggregation points (Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies, Farmers Producer Organizations, Agriculture entrepreneurs, Start-ups, etc.).
- Impetus for development of **farm-gate & aggregation point, affordable and financially viable Post Harvest Management infrastructure.**
- Fund will be created immediately.

Formalisation of Micro Food Enterprises (MFE)

- **'Vocal for Local with Global outreach'** will be launched to help **2 lakh MFEs who need technical upgradation to attain FSSAI food standards, build brands and marketing.**
- Existing micro food enterprises, Farmer Producer Organisations, Self Help Groups and Cooperatives to be supported.
- The focus will be on **women and SC/ST owned units and those in Aspirational districts and a Cluster based approach** (e.g. Mango in UP, Tomato in Karnataka, Chilli in Andhra Pradesh, Orange in Maharashtra etc.) will be followed.

Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)

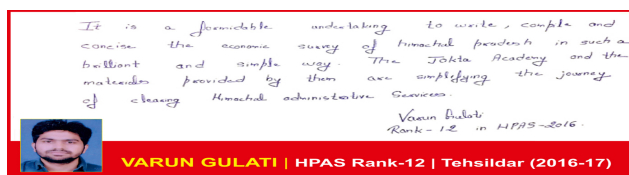
- The Government will launch the **PMMSY for integrated, sustainable, inclusive development of marine and inland fisheries. Rs 11,000 crore for activities in Marine, Inland fisheries and Aquaculture and Rs. 9000 crore for Infrastructure - Fishing Harbors, Cold chain, Markets etc shall be provided.**
- Cage Culture, Seaweed farming, Ornamental Fisheries as well as New Fishing Vessels, Traceability, Laboratory Network etc. will be key activities.
- There will be provisions of **Ban Period Support** to fishermen (during the period fishing is not permitted), **Personal & Boat Insurance.**
- The focus will be on Islands, Himalayan States, North-east and Aspirational Districts.

Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund

- An Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund of **Rs. 15,000 crore** will be set up, with an aim to support private investment in Dairy Processing, value addition and cattle feed infrastructure.
- Incentives will be given for establishing plants for export of niche products.

Promotion of Herbal Cultivation

- **The National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB) has supported 2.25 lakh hectare area under cultivation of medicinal plants. 10,00,000 hectare will be covered under Herbal cultivation in next two years with outlay of Rs. 4,000 crore.**
- This will lead to **Rs. 5,000 crore income generation for farmers.**
- NMPB will bring 800-hectare area by developing a corridor of medicinal plants along the banks of Ganga.



Beekeeping Initiatives

- Scheme for Infrastructure development related to Integrated Beekeeping Development Centers, Collection, Marketing and Storage Centers, Post-Harvest & value Addition facilities etc;
- Capacity building with thrust on women, and Development of quality nucleus stock and bee breeders.
- This will lead to increase in income for **2 lakh beekeepers** and quality honey to consumers.

Extension of Operation Greens

- **“Operation Greens” run by Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MOFPI)** will be extended from tomatoes, onion and potatoes to ALL fruit and vegetables.
- **The Scheme would provide 50% subsidy on transportation from surplus to deficient markets, 50% subsidy on storage, including cold storages and will be launched as pilot for the next 6 months** and will be extended and expanded.
- This will lead to better price realization to farmers, reduced wastages, and affordability of products for consumers.

Amendments to Essential Commodities Act

- The Government will amend Essential Commodities Act. Agriculture food stuffs including cereals, edible oils, oilseeds, pulses, onions and potato shall be deregulated.
- Stock limit will be imposed under very exceptional circumstances like national calamities, famine with surge in prices.
- Further, No such stock limit shall apply to processors or value chain participant, subject to their installed capacity or to any exporter subject to the export demand.

Agriculture Produce Pricing and Quality Assurance

- The Government will **finalize a facilitative legal framework to enable farmers to engage with processors, aggregators, large retailers, exporters etc. in a fair and transparent manner.**
- Risk mitigation for farmers, assured returns and quality standardization shall form integral part of the framework.

Measures for supporting the poor

Free food grains supply to migrants for 2 months

- **For the migrant labour, additional food grain to all the States/UTs at the rate of 5 kg per migrant laborer and 1 kg Chana per family per month for two months** i.e. May and June, 2020 free of cost shall be allocated. Migrant laborers not covered under National Food Security Act or without a ration card in the State/UT in which they are stranded at present will be eligible.
- States/UTs shall be advised to put a mechanism for targeted distribution as envisaged in the scheme. **8 Lakh MT of food-grain and 50,000 MT of Chana shall be allocated.**
- The entire outlay of **Rs. 3500 crore** will be borne by Government of India.

Rs 5,000 crore Credit facility for Street Vendors

- A special scheme will be launched within a month to facilitate easy access to credit to Street vendors, who are amongst the most adversely impacted by the present situation for enabling them to restart their businesses.
- Under this scheme, bank credit facility for initial working capital up to **Rs. 10,000** for each enterprise will be extended.
- This scheme will cover urban as well as rural vendors doing business in the adjoining urban areas.

Employment using CAMPA funds

- Approximately **Rs 6,000 crore of funds under Compensatory Afforestation Management & Planning Authority (CAMPA)** will be used for Afforestation and Plantation works, including in urban areas, Artificial regeneration, assisted natural regeneration, Forest management, soil & moisture conservation works, Forest protection, forest and wildlife related infrastructure development, wildlife protection and management etc.
- **This will create job opportunities** in urban, semi-urban and rural areas and also for Tribals (Adivashis).

Other Sector Wise Reforms

Coal Sector

Commercial Mining

Introduction of competition, transparency and private sector participation in the Coal Sector through:

- **A revenue sharing mechanism instead of regime of fixed Rupee/tonne.** Any party can bid for a coal block and sell in the open market.
- There will be exploration-cum-production regime for partially explored blocks against earlier provision of auction of fully explored coal blocks. This will allow private sector participation in exploration.

Diversified Opportunities in Coal Sector

- Coal Gasification / Liquefaction will be incentivised through rebate in revenue share.
- This will result in significantly lower environment impact and also assist India in switching to a gas-based economy.

Liberalised Regime in Coal Sector

- **Coal Bed Methane (CBM) extraction rights will be auctioned from Coal India Limited's (CIL) coal mines.**
- Ease of Doing Business measures, such as Mining Plan simplification, will be taken.
- This will allow for automatic **40% increase in annual production.**

Mineral Sector

Enhancing Private Investments

- Introduction of a seamless composite exploration-cum-mining-cum-production regime.
- **500 mining blocks would be offered through an open and transparent auction process.**
- Joint Auction of Bauxite and Coal mineral blocks to enhance Aluminum Industry's competitiveness will be introduced to help Aluminum industry reduce electricity costs.

Policy reforms in Mineral Sector

- The distinction between captive and non-captive mines to allow transfer of mining leases and sale of surplus unused minerals, leading to better efficiency in mining and production shall be removed.
- Ministry of Mines is in the process of developing a Mineral Index for different minerals.
- There will be rationalization of stamp duty payable at the time of award of mining leases.

Defence Sector

Enhancing Self Reliance in Defence Production

- 'Make in India' for Self-Reliance in **Defence Production will be promoted by notifying a list of weapons/platforms for ban on import with year wise timelines, Indigenization of imported spares, and separate budget provisioning for domestic capital procurement.**
- This will help reduce huge Defence import bill.
- **Improve autonomy, accountability and efficiency in Ordnance Supplies by Corporatisation of Ordnance Factory Board.**

Policy Reforms in Defence Production

- **FDI limit in the Defence manufacturing under automatic route will be raised from 49% to 74%.**
- There will be time-bound defence procurement process and faster decision making will be ushered in by setting up of a Project Management Unit (PMU) to support contract management.

- Realistic setting of General Staff Qualitative Requirements (GSQRs) of weapons/platforms and overhauling Trial and testing procedures.

Civil Aviation Sector

Efficient Airspace Management for Civil Aviation

- Restrictions on utilization of the Indian Air Space will be eased so that civilian flying becomes more efficient.
- This will bring a total benefit of about **Rs 1,000 crore per year for the aviation sector**.
- This will lead to optimal utilization of airspace; reduction in fuel use, time and will have positive environmental impact.

More World-Class Airports through PPP

- **6 more airports have been identified for 2nd round bidding** for Operation and Maintenance on Public-Private Partnership (PPP) basis.
- Additional Investment by private players in 12 airports in 1st and 2nd rounds is expected to **bring around Rs. 13,000 crore**.
- **Another 6 airports will be put out for the third round of bidding.**

Global hub for Aircraft Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO)

- Tax regime for MRO ecosystem has been rationalized. **Aircraft component repairs and airframe maintenance** to increase from **Rs 800 crore to Rs 2,000 crore in three years**.
- It is expected that major engine manufacturers in the world would set up engine repair facilities in India in the coming year.
- Convergence between Defence sector and the civil MROs will be established to create economies of scale, this will lead to maintenance cost of airlines to come down.

Power Sector

Rs 90,000 crore Liquidity Injection for DISCOMs

- Power Finance Corporation and Rural Electrification Corporation will infuse liquidity in the DISCOMs to the extent of **Rs 90000 crores in two equal instalments**.
- This amount will be used by DISCOMs to pay their dues to Transmission and Generation companies.
- Further, CPSE GENCOs will give a rebate to DISCOMs on the condition that the same is passed on to the final consumers as a relief towards their fixed charges.

Tariff Policy Reform

Consumer Rights

- DISCOM inefficiencies not to burden consumers
- Standards of Service and associated penalties for DISCOMs
- DISCOMs to ensure adequate power; load-shedding to be penalized

Promote Industry

- Progressive reduction in cross subsidies
- Time bound grant of open access
- Generation and transmission project developers to be selected competitively.

Sustainability of Sector

- No Regulatory Assets

- Timely payment of Gencos
- DBT for subsidy; Smart prepaid meters

Privatization of Distribution in UTs

- Power Departments / Utilities in Union Territories will be privatised.
- This will lead to better service to consumers and improvement in operational and financial efficiency in Distribution.
- This will also provide a model for emulation by other Utilities across the country.

Space Sector

- Private sector will be allowed to use ISRO facilities and other relevant assets to improve their capacities.
- Future projects for planetary exploration, outer space travel etc shall also be open for private sector.
- There will be liberal geo-spatial data policy for providing remote-sensing data to tech-entrepreneurs.

Atomic Energy

- **Research reactor in PPP mode** for production of medical isotopes shall be established to promote welfare of humanity through affordable treatment for cancer and other diseases.
- **Facilities in PPP mode to use irradiation technology for food preservation** – to compliment agricultural reforms and assist farmers shall also be established.
- **India's robust start-up ecosystem will be linked to nuclear sector** and for this, Technology Development-cum-Incubation Centres will be set up for fostering synergy between research facilities and tech-entrepreneurs.

Agri-marketing Reforms - Rationale

Why in News?

- The government announced some agricultural marketing reforms as part of the **Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan**.
- The reforms can be viewed essentially as already pending work that will be pursued now.

What are the key reforms?

The three legal reforms in agricultural marketing announced as part of the Rs 20-trillion package for the economy are:

- amending the **outmoded Essential Commodities Act (ECA), 1955**
- **enacting a new Central statute** (bypassing the APMC regime) to enable farmers to get remunerative prices by selling their produce anywhere in the country
- **passing a contract farming law** to legalise agreements between producers and end-users of farm products

What is the long pending reform with APMCs?

- Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) is a marketing board established by a state government to regulate prices and protect farmers' interests.
- Agricultural marketing is basically a **state subject**.
- So, efforts have for long been afoot to push reforms with the cooperation of states.
- But the response from states has been poor.
- Most states have amended their marketing laws.
- But they were not as strict as suggested in the model APMC law circulated by the Centre.

Why are States not cooperating in this?

- States, obviously, **do not wish to give up control over agricultural markets**.
- Notably, agricultural markets are a **key source of revenue**.

- Moreover, the market committees that run the **APMC mandis** enjoy considerable political status.
- They can therefore **influence the rural vote bank**, which is valued by political parties in the states.
- So, most states have only trimmed the monopoly of the APMCs over agricultural trade but without erasing it completely.
- Nor did they allow adequate privatisation of farm mandis.
- But, notably, this is **vital in expanding the marketing infrastructure** that has failed to keep pace with growth in agricultural output.
- Even the setting up of the electronic National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) **could not serve the desired purpose in the initial years.**
- This was because the business had to be transacted through the APMCs.

What is the Centre's move now?

- Given the above reality, the **only option left for the Centre to carry out the unfinished reforms agenda is to go in for Central legislation.**
- This would override the state statutes.
- **It would, hopefully, help realise the longstanding goal of having a barrier-free single national market for the agricultural produce.**

What is the case with contract farming?

- Similar hurdles have been impeding legalisation on contract farming too.
- These reforms are deemed essential **to link farmers directly with the processors, exporters, retailers, and consumers of agricultural products.**
- Such a network allows the **farmers to produce the products conforming to the quality standards required by the end-users.**
- Only some states have imparted legal sanctity to the **pre-production contracts between seller and buyer** under their amended APMC laws.
- This allows any party to retract from honouring the contract if the prices at the time of delivery do not suit them.
- Most other states are reluctant in bringing this reform.
- The NITI Aayog has already drafted a model contract farming legislation, but without much progress thereafter.
- All that the Centre needs to do now is to turn it into a Central statute.

What is the rationale for ECA amendment?

- The **ECA is a Central law** that has outlived its utility.
- It was enacted when shortages of essential goods were rampant and black-marketing and profiteering was usual.
- But the situation has since changed.
- The supplies of most commodities now exceed demand.
- The ECA's draconian provisions, which are no longer required, include –
 - **preventive detention**
 - **confiscating vehicles**
 - **attaching properties on suspicion of hoarding and black-marketing**
- The government's moves are thus largely the reforms that were much needed.

One Nation, One Ration Card System

Why in news?

Finance Minister recently announced the national rollout of a 'One Nation, One Ration Card' system in all states and UTs by **March 2021.**

What is the current practice?

- Under the National Food Security Act, 2013, about **81 crore persons** are entitled to buy subsidized foodgrains -
 - **rice at Rs 3/kg**
 - **wheat at Rs 2/kg**
 - **coarse grains at Re 1/kg**
- This is receivable from their designated Fair Price Shops (FPS) of the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).
- Currently, about **23 crore ration cards have been issued to nearly 80 crore beneficiaries of NFSA** in all states and UTs.
- In the present system, a ration cardholder can buy food grains only from an FPS that has been assigned to her in the locality in which she lives.

What is the 'One Nation, One Ration Card' system?

- Under this, **a beneficiary will be able to buy subsidised foodgrains from any FPS across the country.**
- **Based on a technological solution**, a beneficiary will be identified through biometric authentication.
- This will be done with the **electronic Point of Sale (ePoS)** devices installed at the FPSs.
- The person can purchase the quantity of food grains to which **she is entitled under the NFSA.**

How will 'ration card portability' work?

- Ration card portability is aimed at providing **intra-state as well as inter-state portability of ration cards.**
- **The Integrated Management of PDS (IM-PDS) portal** would provide the technological platform for the inter-state portability of ration cards.
- This would enable a **migrant worker** to buy food grains from any **FPS across the country.**
- The other portal (**annavitran.nic.in**) hosts the data of distribution of foodgrains through E-PoS devices within a state.
- **The Annavitran portal enables a migrant worker or his family to avail the benefits of PDS outside their district but within their state.**
- A person can buy her share of foodgrains as per her entitlement under the NFSA, wherever she is based.
- And, the rest of her family members can purchase subsidised foodgrains from their ration dealer back home.

How did the system evolve?

- The PDS system had some inefficiencies leading to leakages in the system.
- To plug the leakages and make the system better, the government started the reform process.
- For this purpose, it used a technological solution involving the use of Aadhaar to identify beneficiaries.
- Under the scheme, the seeding of ration cards with Aadhaar is being done.
- Simultaneously, PoS machines are being installed at all FPSs across the country.
- **Once 100% of Aadhaar seeding and 100% installation of PoS devices is achieved, the national portability of ration cards will become a reality.**
- It was initially proposed to nationally rollout the 'One Nation, One Ration Card' scheme by June 1, 2020.

What is the experience so far?

- **The facility of inter-state ration card portability** is available in **20 states as of now.**
- But the number of transactions done through using this facility has been low so far.
- However, the number of transactions in intra-state ration card portability is quite high.

Reviving Economy and Livelihoods - Fiscal Options

Why in News?

With the announcement of Lockdown 4.0, here are some implementable steps the Centre can take in fiscal terms to revive the economy and support livelihoods.

How crucial are food and cash transfers?

- **To those rendered incomeless**, the immediate need is **free food and cash transfers**.
- Every household could be provided with Rs. **7,000 per month for a period of 3 months**.
- Every individual could be provided with **10 kg of free foodgrains per month for a period of 6 months**.
- **Feasibility** - This is likely to cost around 3% of the GDP (assuming 20% voluntary dropout).
- This could be financed immediately through **larger borrowing by the Centre from the RBI**.
- The required cash and food have to be handed over to State governments to make the actual transfers.
- **Releasing the outstanding GST compensation to states should also be done**.
- Foodgrains are plentiful too, as the Food Corporation of India had **77 million tonnes**. Also, rabi procurement could add **40 million tonnes**.
- Given the lockdown restrictions, there is no as much demand as in normal times.
- Cash transfers in most cases will only enable current demand to continue and not create any fresh demand.
(This is given the expenses on payment of house rent to continue occupancy.)
- **Putting money in the hands of the poor is the best stimulus to economic revival**, once economic activity is resumed.

How will revamping MGNREGA work help?

- Millions of migrant workers have moved back to their home states.
- **They are unlikely to return to towns in the near future**.
- So, employment has to be provided to them where they are.
- For this, the MGNREGS must be expanded greatly and revamped with wage arrears paid immediately.
- **The 100-day limit per household has to go, and work has to be provided on demand without any limit to all adults**.
- **Permissible work should include not just agricultural and construction work, but work in rural enterprises and in care activities too**.
- The revamped MGNREGS could cover wage bills of rural enterprises started by panchayats, along with those of existing rural enterprises.
- Public banks could provide credit to such **panchayat-owned enterprises** until they become self-sufficient.

Why should the domestic market be revived?

- There is apparent unsustainability of the earlier globalisation.
- This means that growth in India in the coming days will have to be sustained by the home market.
- Being the most important determinant of growth of the home market, agricultural growth must be urgently boosted.
- The MGNREGS can be used for this, paying wages for land development and farm work for small and medium farmers.
- Other government support measures may include -
 - **remunerative procurement prices**
 - **subsidised institutional credit**
 - **other input subsidies**
 - **redistribution of unused land with plantations**
- Agricultural growth in turn can promote rural enterprises and in turn, generate substantial rural employment.
- It can both create a demand for their products and provide inputs for them to process.

What does the urban economy call for?

- In urban areas, it is absolutely essential to **revive the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)**.
- Also, **the workers who have remained in towns have to be provided with employment and income** after the proposed cash transfers run out.
- **Introducing an Urban Employment Guarantee Programme** would help here.
- This is to serve diverse groups of the urban unemployed, including the educated unemployed.
- Urban local bodies must take charge of this programme, and would need to be revamped for this purpose.
- **"Permissible" work should include work in the MSMEs too**.
- This would ensure **labour supply for the MSMEs**.

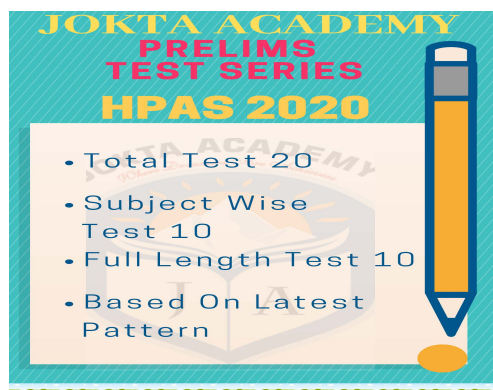
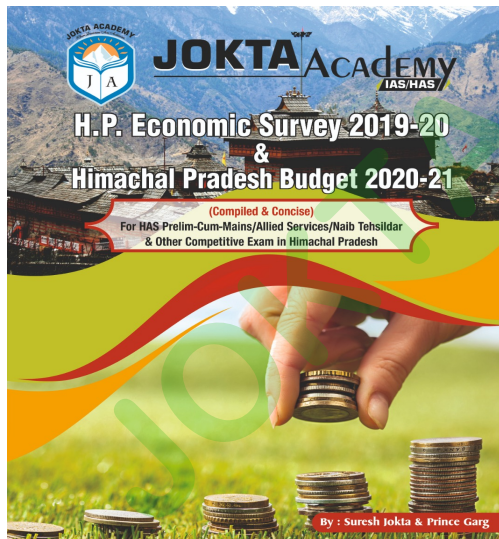
- It would also cover their wage bills at the central government's expense until they re-acquire strength.
- The programme should also **cover care work, educational activities, and ensuring public services in slums.**
- The humanitarian crisis of the lockdown only calls for more, and not less, labour protection.
- **Relaxing labour laws** to attract private investors would only reduce employment and further reduce domestic demand.

What is the significance of the 'care' economy?

- **The pandemic has underscored** the extreme importance of a **public health-care system**, and the **folly of privatisation of essential services.**
- The post-pandemic period must see significant increases in public expenditure on education and health.
- **The "care economy" provides** immense scope for **increasing employment.**
- **Anganwadi and ASHA/workers** who provide essential services to the population, including during the COVID-19 pandemic, **are paid low.**
- Improving their status and treating them as regular government employees are essential.

How important is public revenue?

- In the **medium term**, **public revenues must be increased.**
- Since **much unutilised capacity exists in the economy**, the **shortage is not of real resources.**
- The government has to just get command over the resources.
- To garner substantial public revenue, the following could be mandated:
 - **wealth and inheritance taxation**
 - **getting multinational companies to pay the same effective rate as local companies through a system of unitary taxation**
- Also, a **fresh issue of special drawing rights by the IMF** (which India has opposed along with the U.S.) would provide additional external resources.
- With all these additional resources, the broken economy must be rebuilt in ways to ensure a life of dignity to all.



India and World

Taiwan's COVID-19 Strategy and WHO

Why in news?

With nations having a tough fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, here is how Taiwan has appreciably contained the spread and handled the outbreak.

- [Notably, Taiwan is not a member of the World Health Organisation (WHO).]

What was Taiwan's COVID-19 strategy?

- It is 17 years since Taiwan was hit hard by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak of 2003.
- Given this history, **Taiwan has been in a state of constant readiness to the threat of emerging infectious diseases.**
- When information on COVID-19 outbreak was first confirmed on **December 31, 2019**, Taiwan began implementing onboard quarantine of direct flights from Wuhan that very same day.
- On January 2, 2020, Taiwan established a response team for the disease.
- It activated the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC) on January 20 as a level 3 government entity.
- This was upgraded to level 2 and level 1 on January 23 and February 27, respectively.
- The CECC effectively integrates resources from various ministries and invest itself fully in the containment of the epidemic.
- Taiwan undertook rigorous testing. As of April 9, it had tested a total of 42,315 persons showing 380 confirmed cases.
- Despite its proximity to China, Taiwan ranked 123 among 183 countries in terms of confirmed cases per million people.

What were the specific measures?

- **Quarantine** - Taiwan has implemented dynamic plans concerning border quarantine measures.
- These included onboard quarantine, fever screening, health declarations.
- A 14-day home quarantine for passengers arriving from nations it has listed under the Level 3 Warning was part of the plan.
- **Monitoring and Support** - Taiwan has established an electronic system for entry quarantine.
- This allows passengers with a local mobile phone number to fill in health information using a mobile phone.
- A health declaration pass will then be sent to them as a text message.
- This is connected to the community care support management system.
- The system, in turn, allows government agencies to provide care services and medical assistance.
- The travel history of individuals is now stored on the National Health Insurance (NHI) card to alert physicians to possible cases and prevent community transmission.
- For those undergoing home quarantine or isolation, the government is working with telecom operators to allow GPS tracking of their locations.
- Quarantine offenders are subject to fines or mandatory placement according to relevant laws and regulations.
- **Testing** - Taiwan has increased its laboratory testing capacity.
- It expanded the scope of its surveillance and inspections based on trends of the disease.
- It also retested people with higher risk who had already tested negative.
- Meanwhile, it has designated 50 regional hospitals and medical centres and 167 community hospitals and clinics to create a tiered system for testing.
- **Precaution** - The above hospitals and clinics are also required to set up special wards or areas.
- In principle, COVID-19 patients are isolated and treated individually in these wards and areas to prevent nosocomial infections.
- [A nosocomial infection refers to a hospital-acquired infection (HAI).]
- Moreover, **Taiwan has banned the export of surgical masks since January 24, 2020.**
- It arranged for masks, and expanded domestic mask production to more effectively allocate masks.

- It launched a name-based rationing system for mask purchases at NHI-contracted pharmacies and local public health agencies.
- An ordering system for masks was brought in which allows people to order online and pick up masks at convenience stores.

Why is a connected global effort crucial?

- Infectious diseases know no borders.
- Pandemics can spread rapidly around the world because of the ease of international transportation.
- Among the most salient examples are:
 - the Spanish flu of 1918
 - the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak of 2003
 - the H1N1 influenza of 2009
- Intermittently, serious regional epidemics have also occurred.
- These include the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in 2012, Ebola in West Africa in 2014, and the Zika virus in Central and South America in 2015-16.
- Certainly, global health security requires the efforts of every person to ensure an optimal response to public health threats and challenges.
- Taiwan, though not a member of WHO, cannot stand alone and must be included in the fight against such threats and challenges.

Can Taiwan rightfully claim this?

- **Taiwan has long been excluded from WHO due to political considerations.**
- But Taiwan has fulfilled its **responsibilities as a global citizen.**
- It has abided by the International Health Regulations 2005 (IHR 2005) in notifying WHO of confirmed COVID-19 cases.
- It has also communicated with other countries on confirmed cases, travel and contact histories, and border control measures.
- **Taiwan has uploaded the genetic sequence of COVID-19 to the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID) Initiative.**

How will Taiwan's inclusion help?

- Taiwan could now share much with the world given its renowned public health experience and system, the NHI, etc.
- Its ability to perform rapid testing as well as research and manufacture vaccines and drugs against COVID-19 has much to offer.
- It can also share its methods for analysing the virus.
- If WHO's mission is to ensure the highest attainable standard of health for every person, then WHO needs Taiwan just as Taiwan needs WHO.

China to Launch Official Digital Currency

Why in News?

Recently, China has started testing its official digital currency which is unofficially called **"Digital Currency Electronic Payment, DC/EP"**.

Key Points:

- The digital currency of China has **not been officially released** but internal pilot tests are being carried out in four cities of China.
- China is expected to officially make the sovereign digital currency available to the public later in 2020.
- It could be considered the **world's first Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC)** if it is officially issued by state bank People's Bank of China.

- The total size of China's digital currency could reach **one trillion yuan (\$140 billion)**, equivalent to about one-eighth of China's cash.

Digital Currency

- Digital currency is a payment method which exists **only in electronic form and is not tangible**.
- Digital currency can be transferred between entities or users with the help of technology like computers, smartphones and the internet.
- Although it is similar to physical currencies, digital money allows borderless transfer of ownership as well as instantaneous transactions.
- Digital currency is also known as digital money and cybercash.
- E.g. **Cryptocurrency**

Cryptocurrency

- A cryptocurrency is a digital or virtual currency that uses cryptography for security.
- Cryptocurrencies **use decentralized technology** to let users make secure payments and store money without the need to use their name or go through a bank.
- They run on a distributed public ledger **called blockchain** which is a record of all transactions updated and held by currency holders.
- The most common cryptocurrencies are **Bitcoin, Libra, Ethereum, Ripple, and Litecoin**.

India's Stand on Digital Currency

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had **banned cryptocurrencies in 2018**.
RBI had considered cryptocurrencies as a poor unit of account and also demonstrated by their frequent and high fluctuation in value.
- RBI also stated that it pose several risks, including anti-money laundering and terrorism financing concerns (AML/CFT) for the state and liquidity, credit, and operational risks for users.
- It had also said that it would **seriously consider developing a sovereign digital currency** when the time is appropriate

Subsequently, **the Supreme Court has struck down a circular of the RBI, which bans financial institutions from enabling deals in digital or cryptocurrencies.**

- The ban was challenged by the **Internet & Mobile Association of India (IAMA)** sighting that dealing and trading in cryptocurrency was a legitimate business activity and that the RBI did not have jurisdiction over it as these assets could be classified as commodities rather than currency.

Virtual NAM Summit

Why in News?

The virtual Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Contact Group Summit on "United against Covid-19" through video conferencing was held recently.

- The meeting was convened at the initiative of **President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan**, in his capacity as chair of the Non Aligned Movement.
- Moreover 30 Heads of State and other leaders had joined the Summit. The Summit was also addressed by the **UN General Assembly president and World Health Organisation (WHO) chief**.
- It was the **first time that Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated in a NAM Summit** since he assumed the office in 2014.
 - **Prime Minister Narendra Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to skip the NAM Summit in 2016 and in 2019.**

Highlights of the online summit

- The online NAM Contact Group Summit on “United against COVID-19” was hosted by current NAM Chairman and Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev.
- The NAM leaders announced the **creation of a task force** to identify requirements of member countries through a common database reflecting their basic medical, social and humanitarian needs in the fight against COVID-19.

What is the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)?

- The NAM is a forum of **120 developing world states** that are not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc.
- **The group was started in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1961.**
- **After the UN, it is the largest grouping of states worldwide.**

Its formation

- NAM emerged in the context of the wave of decolonization that followed World War II.
- **It was created by Yugoslavia’s President, Josip Broz Tito, India’s first PM, Jawaharlal Nehru, Egypt’s second President Gamal Abdel Nasser, Ghana’s first president Kwame Nkrumah, and Indonesia’s first President, Sukarno.**
- All five leaders believed that developing countries should not help either the Western or Eastern blocs in the Cold War.
- As a condition for membership, the states of the **NAM cannot be part of a multilateral military alliance** (such as the NATO) or have signed a bilateral military agreement with one of the “big powers” involved in Great Power conflicts.
- However, its idea does not signify that a state ought to remain passive or even neutral in international politics.

Terms of summits

- Unlike the UN or the Organization of American States, the **NAM has no formal constitution or permanent secretariat.**
- **All members of the NAM have equal weight** within its organization.
- The movement’s positions are reached by consensus in the Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government, which usually convenes **every three years.**
- The administration of the organization is the responsibility of the country holding the chair, a position that **rotates at every summit.**
- **The ministers of foreign affairs of the member states meet more regularly in order to discuss common challenges,** notably at the opening of each regular session of the UN General Assembly.

Its relevance today

- **One of the challenges of the NAM in the 21st century** has been to reassess its identity and purpose in the post-Cold War era.
- **The movement has continued to advocate** for international cooperation, multilateralism, and national self-determination, but it has also been increasingly vocal against the inequities of the world economic order.
- On the contrary, from the founding of the NAM, its stated aim has been to give a voice to developing countries and to encourage their concerted action in world affairs.

Face-off Between India and China

Why in News?

Recently, Indian and Chinese troops engaged in a temporary and short duration face-off along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) at **Naku La (Sikkim) and near Pangong Tso Lake (Eastern Ladakh).**

Naku La

- Naku La sector is a pass at a height of more than 5,000 metres above Mean Sea Level (MSL) in the state of Sikkim.
 - It is located ahead of **Muguthang or Cho Lhamu (source of River Teesta).**
- At Muguthang, the road on the Chinese side is motorable, and on the Indian side, it is a remote area.

- The other passes located in the state of Sikkim are **Nathu La Pass and Jelep La Pass.**

Pangong Tso Lake

- Pangong Lake is located in the **Union Territory of Ladakh.**
- It is situated at a height of almost **4,350m and is the world's highest saltwater lake.**
- Extending to almost 160km, **one-third of the Pangong Lake lies in India and the other two-thirds in China.**

Key Highlights

- The temporary and brief face-offs occur because the **unresolved and undemarcated boundary issues.**
 - The India-China border shares the **3,488-km-long Line of Actual Control.**
- Both countries have differing perceptions owing to the **undemarcated boundary**, which lead to transgressions and face-offs as each side patrols up to the areas.
- Any such issue is resolved through the **mutually established protocols to maintain peace and tranquillity** on the border. The resolving mechanism also involves the **local Border Personnel Meeting (BPM).**
 - These protocols with China have been established to resolve issues amicably at the local formation commander level.
- The recent clash happened three years after **the Doklam stand-off between India and China (2017)**, which was also experienced across the border in Sikkim.
 - Doklam, or Donglang in Chinese, is an area spread over less than a **100 sq km comprising a plateau and a valley at the trijunction between India, Bhutan and China.**
 - The Doklam issue was discussed in the **Wuhan Summit (2018)** and two nations decided to issue "strategic guidance" to their militaries to strengthen communications so that they can build trust and understanding.

| McMahon Line | Line of Actual Control |
|---|---|
| The 890-km McMahon Line separating British India and Tibet was drawn by Sir Henry McMahon at the China-Tibet-Britain Simla Convention (1914). | The Line of Actual Control (LAC) is the effective border between India and China. |
| The line marked out previously unclaimed/undefined borders between Britain and Tibet. Also the Line put Tawang (a region of the present Arunachal Pradesh) in the British empire. | LAC was supposed to divide areas under Indian and Chinese control since the end of the Sino-Indian War of 1962. |
| The line was forgotten until the British government published the documents in 1937. Subsequently, China refused to accept the line. | Unlike the LoC (between India and Pakistan), the LAC was not mutually agreed upon. This was because the war ended with a unilateral ceasefire by China. |

Global Examples of Aggressive Diplomacy by China

Covid-19 Origin:

- China has been engaged in aggressive diplomacy with western countries, which have sought clarity on the origins of the **Covid-19 pandemic** that has crippled the world economy, and led to almost four million people across the globe falling ill.

South China Sea:

- It has also reported that China has established new administrative districts for the **Spratly and Paracel archipelagos in the South China Sea.**
- **China has also named 80 islands and other geographical features in the sea,** claiming sovereignty over underwater features in the contested region.

India-Nepal - Kalapani Territorial Issue

Why in news?

There is renewed tension between India and Nepal over the **Kalapani territorial issue.**

What is the Kalapani territorial issue?

- Kalapani lies on the easternmost corner of **Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district**, between Nepal and India.
- **Both India and Nepal lay claim to Kalapani.**
- The dispute was revived in November 2019 when India published a **revised political map** showing the newly created UTs of J&K and Ladakh.
- **The map showed Kalapani as part of Pithoragarh district.**
- Nepal protested immediately and drew attention to the issue.
- Very recently, India inaugurated the **Darchula-Lipulekh pass link road, cutting across the disputed Kalapani area.**
- The road is used by **Indian pilgrims to Kailash Mansarovar.**
- Nepal hit back by summoning the Indian Ambassador to Nepal, Vinay Mohan Kwatra, to convey a formal protest.



What are Nepal's claims based on?

- The Kalapani region derives its name from the **river Kali. Nepal's claims to the region are based on this river.**
- **The River became the marker of the boundary of the kingdom of Nepal** following the **Treaty of Sugauli.**
- This was signed between the Gurkha rulers of Kathmandu and the East India Company after the Gurkha War/Anglo-Nepal War (1814-16).
- According to the treaty, Nepal lost the regions **of Kumaon-Garhwal in the west and Sikkim in the east.**
- **The King of Nepal gave up his claims over** the region west of the river Kali which originates in the High Himalayas and flows into the great plains of the Indian subcontinent.
- According to the treaty, the British rulers recognised Nepal's right to the region that fell to the east of the river Kali.
- Here lies the historic origin of the dispute.
- **According to Nepal's experts,** the east of the Kali river should begin at the source of the river.
- **The source according to them is in the mountains near Limpiyadhura,** which is higher in altitude than the rest of the river's flow.

- Nepal claims that a land mass, high in the mountains that falls to the east of the entire stretch starting from Limpiyadhura downwards, is theirs.
- India on the other hand says the **border begins at Kalapani which India says is where the river begins.**
- The dispute is mainly because of the varying interpretation of the origin of the river and its various tributaries that slice through the mountains.

Is the road new?

- For India, the **Lipulekh pass** has always been part of the **road to Tibet.**
- Since 1981, when China re-opened the Kailash-Mansarovar pilgrimage route for Indians, they have also used the pass to walk into Tibet.
- It was mentioned as one of the **border passes for trade in a 1954 agreement with China.**
- India's part was also reaffirmed in another trade agreement in 2015.
- The road built now follows the same alignment, and would essentially cut down their travel time by 3 days each way.
- [But India and China were in clear violation of Nepal's concerns during the 2015 Lipulekh agreement that renewed India's Mansarovar pilgrimage connection.
- Neither side consulted Nepal or sought its opinion before that agreement that boosted pilgrimage and trade to Tibet.]

What is the tussle now?

- Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli took New Delhi by surprise with an aggressive posture on the Kalapani territorial issue.
- **India has been even angered by Nepal's strong protests**, followed by fiery speeches by Mr. Oli and Nepal's Foreign Minister.
- The Nepali cabinet also decided to **adopt a new political map.**
- That reportedly claims not only Lipulekh but also other areas that are in Indian territory that have been claimed by Nepal.
- **Nepal claims this by invoking the 1816 Sugauli treaty with the British.**
- The move was described by India's MEA as **"artificial", "unilateral" and "unacceptable".**
- But, the struggle within the ruling Nepal Communist Party has probably spurred Mr. Oli's more combative posture.

How is it being dealt with?

- Boundary disputes are common ground for countries that have an ancient history and shared borders.
- The Kalapani issue is one such dispute that India and Nepal have resolved to sort out.
- Unfortunately, the respective Foreign Secretaries, tasked by the PMs in 2014 to discuss the matter, have failed to find an acceptable date for a meeting since then.
- Sadly, India was **delaying in responding** to this.
- Even recently, when tensions prevailed in Kathmandu, the MEA said that it would convene the meeting after the pandemic had been dealt with.
- This was unnecessarily dismissive of an issue important to Kathmandu.
- Mr. Oli's government had raised it in November 2019 as well; its offer to send a political envoy to New Delhi was refused.

What is the way forward?

- **Given the importance of ties with Nepal**, India must not delay dealing with the matter.
- Amidst a pandemic situation as well as a faceoff with China in Ladakh and Sikkim, India must do all to put off the tensions with Nepal.
- The crisis appears to threaten the very basis of the two countries' special relationship which has notably nurtured open borders and free movement of people.
- India and Nepal must not let their differences grow into a full-blown diplomatic crisis.

Kali River

- It is also known as **Sharda river or Kali Ganga in Uttarakhand**.
- It joins **Ghagra river in Uttar Pradesh**, which is a tributary of Ganga.
- River Projects: **Tanakpur hydro-electric project, Chameliya hydro-electric project, Sharda Barrage.**

Lipulekh Pass

- It is also known as **Lipu-Lekh Pass/Qiangla or Tri-Corner** is a high altitude mountain pass situated in the western Himalayas with a height of 5,334 metre or 17,500 feet.
- It is an International mountain pass between **India, China and Nepal**.

Treaty of Sugauli

The Treaty of Sugauli (also spelled Sugowlee, Sagauli, Soogoulee and Segqulee), the treaty that **established the boundary line of Nepal, was signed on 2 December 1815 and ratified by 4 March 1816 between the East India Company and Raj Guru Gajraj Mishra with Chandra Shekhar Upadhaya for Nepal following the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814-16.** The treaty represented a Nepali surrender to the British and contained the cession of Nepal's western territory to the British East India Company.

Travel Bubble

Why in news?

The **Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania** have opened their borders to one another, **creating a coronavirus "travel bubble"** with an improvised idea to boost travel into their countries.

Baltic Travel Bubble

- The 'Baltic travel bubble' aims to **facilitate the citizens of these three countries to travel within the region without hassles.**
- However, those who are coming from any other than these three countries would be required to follow self-isolation guidelines and stay in quarantine for exactly 14 days.
- During the epidemic, Estonia and Lithuania closed their borders to non-citizens and all three nations placed mandatory quarantines for those entering for reasons related to non-work activities.
- The region has been part of the European Union since 2004 and since 2007 has been a member of the European Schengen Free Travel Area.

Significance of the travel ease

- The **Baltic nations** have shown trust in each other's healthcare system and have concluded that they have been able to tackle the **coronavirus** outbreak efficiently.
- **For Asian countries** including India, these developments can provide interesting pointers when lockdown relaxations pertaining to **travel** and flights are being considered.

Baltic Countries

- Baltic countries, the **northeastern region of Europe, include the countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania**, on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea.
- The Baltic states are bounded on the west and north by the Baltic Sea, which gives the region its name, on the east by Russia, on the southeast by Belarus and on the southwest by Poland and an exclave of Russia.
- **In 1991, their then popularly elected governments declared independence from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) with overwhelming support.**
- All three of them are **members of the European Union (EU)** and are sparsely populated (Lithuania-28 lakh, Latvia-19.2 lakh, Estonia-13.3 lakh people).
- **India and Baltic countries have historical connect and common linguistic roots.** The cutting edge technology and innovation ecosystems of the Baltic countries complement India's huge market and appetite for these technologies.

G-7 Summit

Why in News?

Recently, the **President of the USA** made an announcement to host the 46th G7 summit in-person instead of remotely by videoconference.

- Originally, the annual G7 summit was scheduled to be held on **June 10 to June 12, 2020** in **Camp David, United States**.

Group of Seven (G-7)

Description:

- G-7 is a bloc of **industrialized democracies** i.e. **France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Japan, the United States, and Canada**.
 - The world's biggest population and second-biggest economy, **China has relatively low levels of wealth per head of population**. Thus it is not considered as an advanced economy like other G7 members.
Hence China is not a member of G7.
- It is an intergovernmental organisation that was formed in **1975**.
- The bloc **meets annually** to discuss issues of common interest like **global economic governance, international security and energy policy**.
- The **G7 was known as the 'G8'** for several years after the original seven were joined by Russia in 1997.
 - The Group returned to being called G7 after **Russia was expelled as a member in 2014** following the latter's **annexation of the Crimea region of Ukraine**.



Summit Participation:

- Summits are held annually and hosted on a rotation basis by the group's members.
- The host country not only holds the G7 presidency but also sets the agenda for the year.
- The groundwork for the Summit, including matters to be discussed and follow-up meetings, is done by the **sherpas**, who are generally personal representatives or members of diplomatic staff such as ambassadors.
- **The leaders of important international organizations** like **European Union, IMF, World Bank and the United Nations** are also invited.

Challenges and Concerns:

- Internally the G7 has a number of disagreements, e.g. **clash of the USA with other members over taxes on imports and action on climate change**.
- The organisation has also been **criticised for not reflecting the current state of global politics or economics**.
- There are **no G7 members from Africa, Latin America or the southern hemisphere**.
- It is also **facing a challenge from fast-growing emerging economies**, like **India and Brazil** are not members of the G7.

India and G-7

- The participation of India at the **45th summit in Biarritz, France**, is a reflection of deepening strategic partnership and recognition of India as a major economic power.
- While India has found the **European Union** a difficult jurisdiction to navigate diplomatically, a better relationship between India and European Union is emerging as a policy priority under G-7.
- India's ability to safeguard its **core sovereign concerns** such as **trade, Kashmir issue and India's relations with Russia and Iran** can be discussed with G7 members.

- India raised issues on **climate change and at meetings which signaled India's growing willingness to lead on issues** that are points of contention for countries like **China and the USA**.

Way Forward

- G-7 must focus on the **key international issues like terrorism, climate change, trade and internal conflicts** between the countries.
- As a platform it must reflect the solutions for the pressing issues and global concerns like elimination of poverty and diseases.
- **It should support the economies at the global level** and help to establish the **equal levels for each country**.

China-Hong Kong Relationship

Why in news?

China has pushed for an **"improvement"** in the **Basic Law, which is the mini-constitution that defines ties between Hong Kong and Beijing**.

What does this push mean?

- This push for improvement signals a fundamental change in the way the **highly autonomous city-state is being ran**.
- The remarks came a day before the opening of the Chinese parliament.
- **In the Chinese parliament, a controversial national security law for Hong Kong is being mooted.**
- The new law is being described as the most sweeping step at curbing dissent so far.
- **This law seeks to ban "treason, secession, sedition and subversion".**
- This law could be passed without consulting the Hong Kong legislature.

What is Hong Kong's 'Basic Law'?

- **A former British colony, Hong Kong was handed over to mainland China in 1997, becoming one of its Special Administrative Regions.**
- It is governed by a **mini-constitution called the Basic Law, which affirms the principle of "one country, two systems"**.
- The constitutional document is a product of the **1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration**.
- **Under this Declaration, China promised to honour Hong Kong's liberal policies, system of governance, independent judiciary, and individual freedoms for a period of 50 years from 1997.**
- Since the handover, Hong Kong residents have repeatedly protested to protect their Basic Law freedoms, with the first major pro-democracy protest taking place in 2003.
- **In 2014, over one lakh city residents took part in the 'Umbrella Revolution' to protest against China's denial of democratic reforms.**

What is the impact of the 2019 protests?

- The largest protests since the 1997 handover took place in 2019.
- Several Hong Kongers agitated against a **proposed extradition law**.
- **They continued with pro-democracy marches** even after the legislation was withdrawn.
- The large-scale protests were seen as an insult by mainland China.
- Therefore, China has increasingly adopted a more hard line approach to foreign policy and internal security issues in recent years.
- **The Hong Kong unrest has left its mark on Taiwan, another prickly issue for Beijing, which considers the island state as its own.**
- **In presidential election 2020, Taiwanese voters brought to power the Democratic Progressive Party, which openly opposes joining China.**

What is the proposed national security law?

Article 23 - Under Article 23 of the Basic Law, Hong Kong has to enact a national security law, which should

- **Prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government, or theft of state secrets,**
- **Prohibit foreign political organizations or bodies from conducting political activities in the Region, and**
- **Prohibit political organizations or bodies of the Region from establishing ties with foreign political organizations or bodies.**
- When the Hong Kong government first tried to enact the law in 2003, the issue became a rallying point for the citywide protests that occurred that year.
- Since then, the government has steered clear of introducing the legislation again.
- **Annex III - Beijing could make the law applicable to Hong Kong by inserting the legislation in Annex III of the Basic Law.**
- **Under Article 18, national laws can be applied in Hong Kong if they are placed in Annex III.**
- These laws must be confined to those relating to defence and foreign affairs, and other matters outside the limits of the Region's autonomy.
- Once listed in Annex III, national laws can be enforced in the city by way of promulgation— meaning automatically being put into effect— or by legislating locally in the Special Administrative Region.
- Towards the end of May 2020, the Chinese parliament may vote on a resolution that will make way for the new law.
- This law could be promulgated in Hong Kong by end of June, 2020.

What could happen if such a law takes effect?

- The new law would **ban seditious activities** that target mainland Chinese rule, as well as punish external interference in Hong Kong affairs.
- Many expect a revival of the protests that rocked the city last year.
- A major blow to Hong Kong's freedoms, **the law could effectively bring the city under full control of mainland China.**
- The move could also **undermine Hong Kong's position as an East Asian trading hub**, and invite global disapproval for China.

Open Skies Treaty

Why in news?

The United States administration said that it would withdraw from the Open Skies Treaty (OST).

What is the Open Skies Treaty?

- In 1955, the former **US President Dwight Eisenhower** first proposed it as a means to deescalate tensions during the Cold War.
- The treaty was eventually **signed in 1992 between NATO members and former Warsaw Pact countries following the demise of the Soviet Union.**
- It went into effect in 2002 and currently has **35 signatories** along with one non-ratifying member (Kyrgyzstan).
- The OST aims at building confidence among members through mutual openness, thus reducing the chances of accidental war.
- Under the treaty, **a member state can spy on any part of the host nation**, with the latter's consent.
- A country can undertake **aerial imaging over the host state after giving notice 72 hours before, and sharing its exact flight path 24 hours before.**
- The data gathered, such as on troop movements, military exercises and missile deployments, has to be shared with all member states.
- Only approved imaging equipment is permitted on the surveillance flights, and officials from the host state can stay on board throughout the planned journey.

Why the US wants to withdraw from the OST?

- While it was envisaged as a **key arms control agreement**, many in US had for over a decade accused Russia of **non-compliance with OST protocols**.
- Russia was blamed for **obstructing surveillance flights on its territory**, while misusing its own missions for gathering key tactical data.
- The U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo **accused Russia of violating the Treaty openly and continuously** in various ways for years.
- So the U.S. President Trump's administration has now chosen to withdraw from the pact.
- **Russia has denied the allegations**, and has called U.S.'s exit as very regrettable.

What is the significance of the OST?

- **The OST was signed in 1992, much before the advent of advanced satellite imaging technology, which is currently the preferred mode for intelligence gathering.**
- Yet, surveillance aircraft provide key information that still cannot be gathered by satellite sensors, such as thermal imaging data.
- Also, **since only the US has an extensive military satellite infrastructure, other NATO members would have to rely on US to obtain classified satellite data.**
- **This satellite data would be more difficult to obtain compared to OST surveillance records** that have to be shared with all members as a treaty obligation.
- Notably, the OST's utility for U.S. is that since 2002, it has flown 201 surveillance missions over Russia and its ally Belarus.
- A former Trump official had also hailed OST data gathered during the 2014 Russia-Ukraine conflict.

What US departure could mean for the treaty?

- Pompeo said that the US would reconsider its decision to withdraw if Russia demonstrates a return to full compliance.
- This approach is reminiscent from last year when Trump had suspended US participation in the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.
- **[INF Treaty - A security agreement that had been credited with curtailing the arms race in Europe towards the end of the Cold War]**
- Then too, the USA had said that it would re-engage with Russia if it sought a new treaty – a possibility that never materialised.
- Experts believe that the same could happen with the OST, with Russia using USA's exit as a pretext for leaving the treaty itself.
- Russia's departure could adversely impact USA's European allies that rely on OST data to track Russian troop movements in the Baltic region.
- Pulling out of the OST, an important multilateral arms control agreement would be yet another gift from the US to Russia.

What is the concern?

- The OST exit is only the recent example in the list of important pacts that US has stepped away from during the Trump presidency.
- The US has already stepped away from pacts such as the **Paris Agreement** and **the Iran nuclear deal**.
- Experts are now contemplating the fate of the **US-Russia 'New START'** nuclear arms control agreement, which will expire in February 2021.
- Trump has already said that his administration would not renew the treaty unless China joins.
- Many see this as improbable, given the already heightened tensions between USA and China over the pandemic.

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)

- NATO was founded in **1949** as a **defence alliance**.
- It was meant to ensure **collective protection** for its members against the threat of possible post-War **communist expansion and aggression by the Soviet Union**.
- The key member States included the **United States, Canada, and American allies in Europe**.

Warsaw Pact

- In **1955**, the Warsaw Pact was signed as a **counterbalance to NATO**.
- This pact was a **defence and political alliance of the Soviet Union with the Eastern European nations**.

This alliance was **disbanded after the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991**

India-Nepal Relationship

What is the issue?

- Due to the **Kalapani issue**, there is a tension between India and Nepal.
- The relation between the two countries needs a fundamental reset.

Where is Kalapani?

- It is a **patch of land** near the **India-Nepal border**.
- It is so close to the **Lipulekh Pass on the India-China border**.
- [Lipulekh pass is one of the approved points for border trade and the route for the **Kailash-Mansarovar yatra** in Tibet]

What is the Kalapani dispute?

- India inherited the boundary with Nepal, established between Nepal and the East India Company in the **Treaty of Sugauli in 1816**.
- **The territory to the east of the Kali River was decided as Nepal.**
- The dispute relates to the origin of Kali.
- **Near Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district**, there is a confluence of streams coming from **Kalapani (north-east)** and **Limpjadhura (north-west)**.
- During British period - The early British survey maps identified the **north-west stream, Kuti Yangti, from Limpjadhura as the origin**.
- **But after 1857**, it changed the alignment to **Lipu Gad**, and in 1879 to **Pankha Gad**, the north-east streams.
- Thus, the British survey maps defined the origin as just below Kalapani.
- Nepal accepted the change and India inherited this boundary in 1947.
- **After Indian independence - The Maoist revolution in China in 1949, followed by the takeover of Tibet, created deep misgivings in Nepal.**
- India was invited to set up 18 border posts along the Nepal-Tibet border.
- The westernmost post was at Tinkar Pass, about 6 km east of Lipulekh.
- **By 1969, India had withdrawn its border posts from Nepali territory.**
- The base camp for **Lipulekh** remained at **Kalapani**.
- In their respective maps, both countries showed Kalapani as the origin of Kali river and as part of their territory.
- **The issue of the origin of Kali river was first raised in 1997.**
- **Boundary Committee** - The matter was referred to the Joint Technical Level Boundary Committee that had been set up in 1981.



- In 2008, the Committee clarified 98% of the boundary, leaving behind the unresolved issues of Kalapani and Susta (in the Terai).
- It was subsequently agreed that the matter would be discussed at the Foreign Secretary level.
- Meanwhile, the project to convert the 80-km track from Ghatibagar to Lipulekh into a road began in 2009 without any objections from Nepal.

What is the issue with the maps?

- **India's map** - India issued a political map (8th edition) on November 2, 2019, to reflect the change in the status of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Nepal registered a protest though the map in no way had changed the boundary between India and Nepal.
- However, on November 8, the ninth edition was issued.
- The delineation remained identical but the name Kali river had been deleted.
- This led to stronger protests, with Nepal invoking Foreign Secretary-level talks to resolve issues.
- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh did a virtual inauguration of the 80-km road on May 8, 2020, which re-erupted the Kalapani controversy.
- This re-eruption provided Mr. Oli with a political lifeline.
- **Nepal's map** - Nepali Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli is using the Nepali nationalism card, the flip side of which is anti-Indianism.
- A new map of Nepal was notified on May 20, which was based on the older British survey.
- This map reflects Kali river originating from Limpiyadhura in the north-west of Garbyang.
- The new alignment adds 335 sq km to Nepali territory.

What is the reality?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has often spoken of the “**neighbourhood first**” policy.
- He started with a highly successful visit to Nepal in August 2014.
- But the relationship took a nosedive in 2015 when India first got blamed for interfering in **the Constitution-drafting in Nepal**.
- **It reinforced the notion that Nepali nationalism and anti-Indianism** were two sides of the same coin that Mr. Oli exploited successfully.
- The reality is that India has ignored the **changing** political narrative in Nepal for far too long.
- India remained content that its interests were safeguarded by quiet diplomacy even when Nepali leaders adopted anti-Indian postures.
- For too long India has invoked a “**special relationship**”, **based on shared culture, language and religion, to anchor its ties with Nepal**.
- Today, this term carries a negative connotation - that of a paternalistic India that is often insensitive.

What is needed?

- The complexity underlying India-Nepal issues cannot be solved by **unilateral map-making exercises**.
- **Political maturity is needed** to find creative solutions that can be mutually acceptable.
- The urgent need is to **pause the rhetoric on territorial nationalism**.
- **A quiet dialogue is needed**, where both sides need to display sensitivity as they explore the terms of a reset of the “special relationship”.
- A normal relationship where India can be a generous partner will be a better foundation for “**neighbourhood first**” in the 21st century.



Environment

Erosion in Ladakh and Zaskar

Why in News?

The scientists and students from the **Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (WIHG)** have explored the **Zaskar catchment area**.

- The study was conducted to understand the landform evolution in transitional climatic zones, using **morphostratigraphy, Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) dating and provenance analysis of landforms like valley fill terraces and alluvial fans**.
- **Valley Fill Terrace:** The fill terrace is created either a stream or river starts to incise into the material that it deposited in the valley. Once this occurs benches composed completely of alluvium form on the sides of the valley. The upper most benches are the fill terraces.
- **Alluvial Fans:** Triangle-shaped deposit of gravel, sand and even smaller pieces of sediment, such as silt.

WHIG is an autonomous institute under the **Department of Science & Technology, Government of India**.

Erosion hotspot: Ladakh region

- The Ladakh Himalaya forms a high altitude desert between Greater Himalayan ranges and Karakoram Ranges.
- The Indus and its tributaries are major rivers flowing through the terrain.
- The Zaskar River is one of the largest tributaries of the upper Indus catchment, draining orthogonally through highly deformed Zaskar ranges.

Zaskar: A major river in Ladakh

- Two prominent tributaries of Zaskar River are the Doda and Tsrup Lingti Chu, which confluence at Padam village in the upper valley to form the Zaskar River.
- Zaskar catchment was explored to understand the landform evolution in the transitional climatic zone, using morphostratigraphy and study of landforms like valley fill terraces, alluvial fans (triangle-shaped deposit of gravel, sand, and even smaller pieces of sediment, such as silt).

Zaskar Padam

- Zaskar river makes a deep gorge in its lower reaches with the headwaters in upper Zaskar makes wide basin called as **Padam**.
- The basin stores large amount of sediments in form of fans and river terrace deposits
- **The research suggested that** the wide valley of Padam, with an area of 48 square km, in the upper Zaskar, has stored a vast amount of sediments in these landforms.
- Thus **Padam valley is a hotspot of sediment buffering in the Zaskar**.



Sediment study reveals the erosion

- **The study suggested that** most sediments were derived from Higher Himalayan crystalline that lies in the headwater region of Zaskar.
- **It was found out that** dominant factors responsible for sediment erosion were deglaciation and Indian Summer Monsoon derived precipitation in the headwaters despite the presence of a geomorphic barrier (the deep, narrow gorge).

Significance of the study

- The scientists have traced where the **rivers draining Himalaya and its foreland erode the most and identify the zones that receive these eroded sediments and fill up.**
- The study will help **understand river-borne erosion and sedimentation**, which are the main drivers that make large riverine plains, terraces, and deltas that eventually become the cradle to evolving civilizations.
- It will also help **study the dynamics of devastating floods** created by these Himalayan rivers in recent times.
- Thus, the understanding of water and sediment routing becomes crucial while developing infrastructure and for other development works in the river catchment area.

Vizag Gas Leak

Why in news?

A gas leak from the **electronics giant LG's styrene plant** has claimed lives in Vizag, Andhra Pradesh.

What is styrene?

- Styrene is a **flammable liquid.**
- It is used in the manufacturing of **polystyrene plastics, fibreglass, rubber, and latex.**
- It is also found in **vehicle exhaust, cigarette smoke, and in natural foods like fruits and vegetables.**

What happens when exposed to styrene?

- **Short-term exposure** to the substance can result in respiratory problems, and irritation in the eyes and mucous membrane.
- It will also cause gastrointestinal issues.
- **Long-term exposure** could drastically affect the central nervous system and lead to related problems like peripheral neuropathy.
- It could also lead to cancer and depression in some cases.

What are the symptoms?

- Symptoms include **headache, hearing loss, fatigue, weakness, difficulty in concentrating etc.**
- Animal studies have reported effects on the **CNS, liver, kidney, and eye and nasal irritation from inhalation exposure to styrene.**

How bad is the situation in Vizag?

- It is unclear whether the deaths are due to direct exposure to styrene gas or one of its by-products.
- Vizag Police has maintained that the gas is **"non-poisonous"** and is only fatal when exposed for longer durations.
- However, hundreds of people were admitted to hospitals.
- The cases are high as the gas leak was detected early in the morning.
- Several crucial hours have been lost till safety precautions were taken, and the gas was allowed to spread while people were fast asleep.
- Officials immediately began making announcements over speakers.
- But many have already become **unconscious as police had to break open doors to shift people.**

What caused the leak?

- LG Polymers said that **stagnation and changes in temperature inside the storage tank** could have resulted in auto polymerization.
- This in turn resulted in vapourisation.
- There was 1,800 tonnes of styrene stored at the plant during the leak.

Is the leak under control?

- The leak has been plugged.
- NDRF teams moved into the five affected villages and have started opening the houses to find out if anyone was stranded inside.
- Officials said that the Covid-19 preparedness helped a lot as dozens of ambulances with oxygen cylinders and ventilators were readily available.
- The spread of the gas depends on wind speeds.
- So far it is estimated that areas within a five kilometre radius have been affected.

Black Panther in Netravali Sanctuary

Why in News?

A black panther was spotted in **Goa's Netravali Sanctuary**.

- While the area is a **known habitat of tigers**, this is for the **first time a black panther has been captured** on camera in the sanctuary.

About Black Panther

- Black Panther or Black Leopard is a color variant of spotted Indian leopards, reported from densely forested areas of south India, mostly from the state of Karnataka.
- A black panther is the **melanistic colour variant of any Panthera, particularly of the leopard (P. pardus) in Asia and Africa, and the jaguar (P. onca) in the Americas.**
- They are also known as the **ghost of the forest**.

About Netravali Wildlife Sanctuary

- Netravali Wildlife Sanctuary is located in **South-Eastern Goa, India.**
- It constitutes one of the vital corridors of the **Western Ghats** and covers an area of **about 211 sq.km.**
- **Netravali or Neturli is an important tributary of River Zuari, which originates in the sanctuary.**
- Forests mostly consist of **moist deciduous vegetation** interspersed with evergreen and semi-evergreen habitat; there are also two all-season waterfalls in the sanctuary.
- **The Gaur or Indian Bison, Malabar giant squirrel, four-horned antelope or chousingha, leopard, black sloth bear along with a host of other predators and herbivores** find home in the sanctuary.



Locusts

Why in news?

Last month, the Locust Warning Organisation (LWO) observed desert locusts in western part of India.

What is LWO?

- It is a part of the Union Agriculture Ministry's directorate of plant protection, quarantine & storage.
- It has a field headquarters at Jodhpur in Rajasthan.

Why these locusts are a concern?

- These desert locusts are the destructive migratory pests currently devouring acres of crops in East Africa.

- While locusts are seen in India as well, that is normally only during July-October and mostly as solitary insects or in small isolated groups.
- This year, their being spotted along the India-Pakistan border before mid-April has raised the alarm bells.
- They have damaged the growing rabi crops along western Rajasthan and parts of northern Gujarat during December-January.

What exactly are locusts?

- The desert locust (*Schistocerca gregaria*) is a short-horned grasshopper.
- **Solitary phase** - In "solitary phase", these winged insects are safe.
- They become dangerous only when their populations build up rapidly.
- Close contact in crowded conditions trigger behavioural changes.
- **Gregarious phase** - They enter the "gregarious phase", by grouping themselves into bands and forming swarms.
- They travel great distances (up to 150 km daily), while eating up every bit of vegetation on the way.
- If not controlled at the right time, these insect swarms can threaten the food security of countries.

How the LWO's first sighting of the locusts should be viewed?

- **No worries, for now** - The rabi crops has already been harvested and kharif crops are yet to be planted.
- The LWO has detected "gregarious" hopper groups, including in Punjab adjoining the Pakistan border.
- But no breeding or swarm movement has also been seen so far.
- **Timing, a concern** - Their normal breeding season in India is July-October. But this year, they have been sighted by mid-April.
- Last year, too, they were seen towards end-May as isolated grasshoppers.
- But, they could breed to high enough populations for forming swarming and wreaking havoc during the rabi season in Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- The longer time to breed is more conducive for build-up of gregarious insect swarms, as opposed to solitary hoppers.

What kind of damage can they cause?

- Locusts are **polyphagous** i.e., they can feed on a wide variety of crops.
- Locusts can **multiply rapidly**, a single female desert locust lays 60-80 eggs thrice during its roughly 90-day life cycle.
- The damage potential of locusts has been limited in India, as India hosts only one breeding season.
- [In Pakistan, Iran and East Africa, they also multiply during January-June.]

What is the genesis of the present locust upsurge?

- It lies in the **Mekunu and Luban cyclonic storms** of May and October 2018 that struck Oman and Yemen, respectively.
- These turned large desert areas in remote parts of the southern Arabian Peninsula into lakes.
- This allowed the insects to breed undetected across multiple generations.
- The swarms attacking crops in East Africa reached peak populations from November onwards.
- They build up since the start of this year in southern Iran and Pakistan.
- Widespread rains in East Africa in late March and April have enabled further breeding.

What is the prediction?

- A part of the new generation of swarms forming in late-June/July may migrate from the Horn of Africa across to the desert areas along India-Pakistan border.
- During May-June, the locusts from spring breeding areas of southwest Pakistan and southern Iran would arrive in Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- They would, then, breed with the onset of the southwest monsoon rains and continue doing so through the kharif cropping season.

What should be done?

- If the monsoon is good, and in the absence of control operations, the magnitude of attack could be worse than in the 2019-20 rabi season.
- In 2019-20, Rajasthan and Gujarat had to treat over 4.30 lakh hectares of infested areas with sprayers mounted on tractors and other vehicles.
- Old generation organophosphate insecticides such as Malathion (96% ultra-low volume aerial application) are effective against locusts.
- About one litre of the chemical is necessary to treat a hectare of their breeding areas, including trees where they halt for the night.
- There is ample stock of pesticides to control any swarms.
- Control operations require procurement of equipment, training of field teams, prepositioning of supplies in key breeding areas and updating contingency plans.

A Study on Sal Forest Tortoise

Why in News?

A recent study by ecologists in the Wildlife Institute of India (Dehradun), finds that **over 90% of the potential distribution of the Sal forest tortoise falls outside the current protected area's network.**

Key Points:

- The study covers parts of India with **Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal.**
- The Study found that in northeast India, the representation of the **sal forest tortoise in protected areas (such as reserves, sanctuaries, etc.) is least.**
- The study also found that **29% of the predicted distribution of the species falls within high occurrence fire zones.**
 - The species experience jhum fire in northeast India, which is a suitable habitat for the species.
 - Such an intervention may not only directly kill the animals but result in loss of habitat.
- According to the IUCN, the population of the species may have fallen by **about 80%** in the last three generations (90 years).

Sal Forest Tortoise

- Sal Forest Tortoise is also known as the elongated tortoise (*Indotestudo elongata*).
- **Habitat:** It is widely distributed over eastern as well as northern India and Southeast Asia.
- **IUCN Red List:** Critically Endangered.
- **CITES:** Appendix II
- **Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972:** Schedule IV
- **Threat:** Hunted for food, local use such as decorative masks and international wildlife trade.



Cyclone Amphan

Why in News?

Recently, the **National Crisis Management Committee** reviewed the preparedness for the impending cyclone Amphan.

- At the national level, Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) and National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC) are the key committees involved in the top-level decision-making related to Disaster Management.

Key Points

- Cyclone Amphan (pronounced as UM-PUN) is a **tropical cyclone** formed over Bay of Bengal that has intensified and likely to turn into a “super cyclonic storm (maximum wind speed is 120 knots)”.
- According to the **India Meteorological Department** forecast, it will make landfall as a very severe cyclone between the Sagar islands of West Bengal and the Hatiya islands of Bangladesh.
- **It has been named by Thailand.**
- **Affected Regions:** West Bengal, Odisha and Bangladesh.
- Amphan is the second pre-monsoon cyclone to form in the Bay of Bengal in two years. **The first one was Cyclone Fani.**
 - **The pre-monsoon period** is generally considered to be **unsupportive for the formation of tropical cyclones.**

Super Cyclone Amphan and its threats

Why in News?

The storm system in the Bay of Bengal, Amphan, developed into a super cyclone and is expected to landfall along the West Bengal-Bangladesh coast.

Super Cyclone Amphan

- Cyclone Amphan is a tropical cyclone formed over the Bay of Bengal that has intensified and likely to turn into a “super cyclonic storm (maximum wind speed is 224 kmph)”.
- It has been **named by Thailand.**
- Amphan is the equivalent of a **Category 5 hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale.**
- By the time it makes landfall in West Bengal, Amphan is expected to tone down into a category 4 Extremely Severe Cyclonic (ESC) storm with a wind speed of 165-175 kmph and gusting to 195 kmph.

What makes it a nightmare?

- **This is the first super cyclone to form in the Bay of Bengal after the 1999 super cyclone that hit Odisha and claimed more than 10,000 lives.**
- It is the third super cyclone to occur in the North Indian Ocean region after 1999 which comprises of the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea and the northern part of the Indian Ocean.
- The other two super cyclones were **Cyclone Kyarr in 2019 and Cyclone Gonu in 2007.**

Recent cyclones in the region

- **From 1965 to 2017**, the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea collectively registered **46 ‘severe cyclonic storms’**.
- More than half of them occurred between October and December.
- Seven of them occurred in May and only two (in 1966 and 1976) were recorded in April, according to data from the IMDs cyclone statistics unit.
- **Cyclone Phailin in 2013 and the super cyclone of 1999** — both of which hit coastal Odisha — have been the most powerful cyclones in the Bay of Bengal in the past two decades in terms of wind speed.
- **Last year, Fani**, which was an ESC made landfall in Odisha and ravaged the State, claiming at least 40 lives.

Tropical Cyclones

- Cyclones are formed over **slightly warm ocean waters.**
- The temperature of the top layer of the sea, up to a depth of about **60 metres**, need to be at least **28°C** to support the formation of a cyclone.
- **This explains why the April-May and October-December periods are conducive for cyclones.**
- Then, the low level of air above the waters needs to have an ‘anticlockwise’ rotation (in the northern hemisphere; clockwise in the southern hemisphere).

- During these periods, there is an ITCZ in the Bay of Bengal whose southern boundary experiences winds from west to east, while the northern boundary has winds flowing east to west.
- This induces the anticlockwise rotation of the air.
- Once formed, **cyclones in this area usually move northwest**. As it travels over the sea, the cyclone gathers more moist air from the warm sea and adds to its heft.

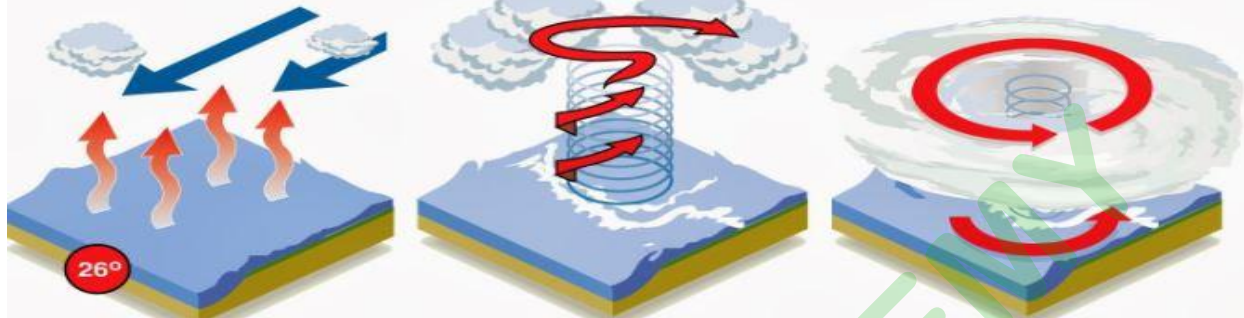
How tropical storms are formed

High humidity and ocean temperatures of over 26°C are major contributing factors

Water evaporates from the ocean surface and comes into contact with a **mass of cold air**, forming clouds

A **column of low pressure** develops at the centre. **Winds form** around the column

As pressure in the central column (the eye) weakens, the **speed of the wind around it increases**



What strengthens them?

- A thumb rule for cyclones is that the **more time they spend over the seas, the stronger they become**.
- Hurricanes around the US, which originate in the vast open Pacific Ocean, are usually much stronger than the tropical cyclones in the Bay of Bengal, a relatively narrow and enclosed region.
- The cyclones originating here, after hitting the landmass, decay rapidly due to friction and absence of moisture.

Grading of Cyclones

- Tropical cyclones in the Bay of Bengal are graded according to maximum wind speeds at their centre.
- At the lower end are depressions that generate wind speeds of 30 to 60 km per hour, followed by:
 1. **cyclonic storms** (61 to 88 kmph)
 2. **severe cyclonic storms** (89 to 117 kmph)
 3. **very severe cyclonic storms** (118 to 166 kmph)
 4. **extremely severe cyclonic storms** (167 to 221 kmph) and
 5. **super cyclones** (222 kmph or higher)

Puntius Sanctus: New Freshwater Fish

Why in News?

Recently, **Puntius Sanctus**, a **new freshwater fish**, has been **found in Velankanni, Tamil Nadu**. It has been found in a **small waterbody**.

About Puntius Sanctus:

- The silver-hued fish has been named **Puntius Sanctus** — ‘**Sanctus**’ is Latin for **holy** — after the popular pilgrim town.
- Encountered in a small **waterbody in Venlankanni**, **Puntius Sanctus** is **small, it grows to a length of 7 cm**.
- It found to use **both as food and as an aquarium draw**.
- “The Puntius species are **known locally as ‘Paral’** in Kerala and ‘**Kende**’ in Tamil Nadu.



Puntius sanctus, a new species of freshwater fish found in Velankanni.

Science & Tech. + Health

ATULYA

Why in News?

Recently, the **Defence Institute of Advanced Technology [DIAT]** has developed a **microwave steriliser** named as '**Atulya**' to disintegrate Covid-19 virus.

Key Points:

- **DIAT is a deemed university** supported by the **Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO)**.
- The microwave sterilizer has been named ATULYA a cost-effective solution to disintegrate corona virus.
- This microwave sterilizer can be operated in portable or fixed installations and helps in disintegrating the virus by **differential heating in the range of 56 to 60 Celsius temperatures**.
- This system was tested for human/operator safety and has been found to be safe.
- **The sterilization time can range from 30 to 60 seconds** depending on the size and shape of objects.
- **Weighing three kilos, it can be used for sterilizing non-metallic objects only.**



Janaushadhi Sugam Mobile App

Why in News?

Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers launched a mobile application "Janaushadhi Sugam".

Key Points:

- The minister announced that "**Jan Aushadhi Suvidha Oxo-Biodegradable Sanitary Napkin**" will now be available at only One Rupee per pad.
- **Janaushadhi Sugam app will enable people to search for Janaushadhi generic medicines** and the stores at the tip of their fingers.
- About 28 million girls are reported to be leaving education because of lack of availability of good quality Sanitary Napkin" pads at a reasonable cost.
- The Government of India launched "**Jan Aushadhi Suvidha Oxo-Biodegradable Sanitary Napkin**" at Rs 2.50 per pad on the eve of the **World Environment Day**
- **Jan Aushadhi Suvidha comes with a special additive, which makes it biodegradable** when it comes in contact with oxygen after being discarded.
- This is an important step in ensuring the health security for the section of Indian women who still use unhygienic aids during menstrual period due to non-affordability of sanitary pads available in the market.
- This will ensure '**Swachhta, Swasthya and Suvidha**' for the underprivileged women of the country. This step was taken by the Department of Pharmaceuticals.
- "**Janaushadhi Sugam**" app would have user-friendly options like- to locate nearby stores, direction guidance for the location through Google Map.
- The app will also enable to search Janaushadhi generic medicines, analyse product comparison of Generic vs Branded medicine in form of MRP & overall Savings, etc.

Antibody Testing Vs Rapid Test for COVID-19

- In the COVID-19 fight, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) had advised States to use antibody testing for surveillance and reiterated that the focus has always been on **real time RT-PCR** (or real-time reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction) tests for diagnosis.
- **The rapid testing kits** that State governments had been using to detect antibodies to the novel coronavirus were throwing up unreliable results.
- There are two ways to detect the presence of a virus, directly or indirectly.

| Antibody Tests (Rapid Test) | RT-PCR Tests |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antibody tests, also called serological tests, have usually been the time-tested approach to finding out the presence of a virus in the body. • They do so by detecting the presence and quantity of antibodies that are produced by the immune system to battle an infection. • It is an indirect test because it cannot find the virus, but it can determine if the immune system has encountered it. • Antibodies can show up between nine to 28 days after an infection has set in; by that time, an infected person, if not isolated, can spread the disease. • Sometimes the antibodies may be produced in response to a closely-related pathogen and sometimes they may not be the right kind to counter the infection. • These are the factors that can make an antibody test erroneous. • Antibody tests are fast and relatively inexpensive. • Antibody tests are portable, can be administered on-site, conducted en masse and give quick answers. • Antibody tests can be used to gauge the extent of infection in a community or a large group of people who may have had exposure to the virus. • Two kinds of antibodies result from an infection: Immunoglobulin M and Immunoglobulin G (IgM and IgG). • In response to an infection, the IgM is first produced within a week of infection. • Two weeks later, the levels of IgM reduce and are replaced by IgG. • The latter is a longer-lasting antibody and, depending on the infectious agent involved, can offer different durations of immunity. • Rapid antibody tests can also play a role in determining the degree of “herd immunity” in a population. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In an RT-PCR test, a nasal or throat swab is taken from a patient suspected of having the disease. • The test involves extracting RNA or ribonucleic acid, the genetic material of the virus, and checking if it shares the same genetic sequence as the SARS-CoV-2 virus. • If it is a match, the sample is deemed positive. • The only way such tests turn negative is if the actual sample does not have the virus or the swab was not properly administered and too little of the virus was gleaned. • The RT-PCR tests began to be followed as the ‘gold standard’ in detecting the virus. • The current RT-PCR technology requires RNA extracting machines, a specialized laboratory, and trained technicians. • And at least a minimum of 30 samples are needed to make the process economically viable. • The tests are done in batches and it can take up to four hours to confidently test for the presence of a virus from a batch. |

Covid-19: Vaccine Development

Why in News?

The development of vaccine for the Covid-19 is a need of the time. However, the governments should continue with routine immunisation as well as robust health measures for Covid-19.

How far are we from developing a COVID-19 vaccine?

- Developing vaccines is a **time-consuming and resource intensive process**.
- **It takes up to 10-15 years** from the discovery of a novel way to produce a vaccine to the licensure of a vaccine for commercial use.
- There are unprecedented levels of data sharing and global collaboration for the development of a coronavirus vaccine.
- Therefore, **with a full push, a coronavirus vaccine (at least an investigational one) can be developed within 18 months to 2 years.**

Will discovering a vaccine end the Covid-19 fight?

- With more than 100 candidate vaccines already in development, the response from the scientific community and industry is unprecedented.
- But, vaccine development on its own isn't enough.
- There is no global system to oversee the allocation of vaccine supply.
- Many countries with the capacity to manufacture at the required scale will face pressure to supply them first to their own population.
- Before a vaccine is developed, **global access agreements are needed.**
- There will need to be some type of **agreement on priority use.**
- The health workers should probably be the most important, followed by high risk and finally, the general population.

Will the Covid-19 fight disrupt routine immunisation programmes?

- The Covid-19 outbreak is a reminder that infectious diseases know no borders.
- The importance of preparedness and early detection cannot be overemphasized.
- **Investing in strong primary healthcare and immunisation systems** is the **first line of defence** against threats to global health security.
- **The number of people missing out vaccines is likely to rise substantially.**

How can countries mitigate such risks?

- The governments should continue with their **routine immunisation** as well as robust public health measures for Covid-19.
- **Without routine immunisation, the outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases will overwhelm the health system on top of Covid-19 challenge.**
- Strong routine immunisation ensures people are protected against the spread of infectious disease.
- **Beyond routine immunisation, procuring emergency stockpiles** are an important aspect of global epidemic preparedness.
- These stockpiles are a **last-resort insurance policy that guarantees vaccines will always be available** for rapid delivery when needed.

Demo-2 Mission by SpaceX

Why in News?

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and SpaceX are all set for the Demo-2 mission which is scheduled for **27th May, 2020** from the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, USA.

- **Demo-2 Mission will send astronauts to the International Space Station (ISS).**

About Demo-D mission:

- The Demo-2 mission is **part of NASA's Commercial Crew Program** with the **aim of developing reliable and cost-effective access to and from the ISS.**
- Essentially, the lift-off is a flight test to certify if SpaceX's crew transportation system can be used to ferry crew to and from the space station regularly.
- After its launch, the Crew Dragon will perform a series of phasing manoeuvres to gradually approach and autonomously dock with the ISS.
- After docking, the two astronauts will go aboard the ISS. They will perform tests of the Crew Dragon and conduct research with Expedition 63, the space station crew currently in residence at ISS.

About the Commercial Crew Program

- The main objective of this program is to **make access to space easier in terms of its cost, so that cargo and crew can be easily transported to and from the ISS**, enabling greater scientific research.
- Secondly, by **encouraging private companies such as Boeing and SpaceX to provide crew transportation NASA wants to focus on building spacecraft and rockets meant for deep space exploration missions.**
- Boeing and SpaceX were selected by NASA in September 2014 to develop transportation systems meant to transfer crew from the US to the ISS.

SpaceX

- Space Exploration Technologies Corp., trading as SpaceX, is a private American aerospace manufacturer and space transportation Services Company headquartered in Hawthorne, California.
- It was **founded in 2002 by Elon Musk** with the goal of reducing space transportation costs to enable the colonization of Mars.
- SpaceX has developed several **launch vehicles and the Dragon spacecraft.**

Hypoxia

Why in News?

Recently medical practitioners have reported a condition called silent or happy hypoxia, in which Covid-19 patients have extremely low blood oxygen levels, yet they do not show signs of breathlessness.

Key points:

- It is a condition wherein there is **not enough oxygen available to the blood and body tissues.**
- Hypoxia can either be generalized, affecting the whole body, or local, affecting a region of the body.
- Normal arterial oxygen is approximately 75 to 100 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg) and normal pulse oximeter readings usually range from 95 to 100%, Values under 90% are considered low.
- When levels fall below 90%, patients could begin experiencing lethargy, confusion or mental disruptions because of insufficient quantities of oxygen reaching the brain.
- **Levels below 80% can result in damage to vital organs.**
- **Silent Hypoxia is a form of oxygen deprivation** that is harder to detect than regular hypoxia because patients appear to be less in distress.
- In many cases, **Covid-19 patients with silent hypoxia did not exhibit symptoms such as shortness of breath or coughing until their oxygen fell to acutely low levels**, at which point there was a risk of acute respiratory distress (ARDS) and organ failure.
- The reason why people are left feeling breathless is not because of the fall in oxygen levels itself but due to the rise in carbon dioxide levels that occur at the same time, when lungs are not able to expel this gas efficiently.
- **A medical device called a pulse oximeter can be used in the early detection of silent hypoxia.**

UV Blaster

Why in News?

Recently, the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)** has developed an Ultra Violet (UV) Disinfection Tower for rapid and chemical free disinfection of high infection prone areas.

- The equipment named **"UV blaster"** is designed and developed by **Laser Science & Technology Centre (LASTEC)** with the help of M/s New Age Instruments and Materials Private Limited, Gurugram
 - LASTEC is the Delhi based premier laboratory of DRDO.

Key Points

- The **UV blaster** is a **UV based area sanitiser** useful for high tech surfaces like electronic equipment, computers and other gadgets in laboratories and offices that are not suitable for disinfection with chemical methods.
- The product is also effective for areas with large flow of people such as **airports, shopping malls, metros, hotels, factories, offices, etc.**
- The UV based area sanitiser may be used by remote operation through **laptop/mobile phone using wifi link.**
- The sanitiser switches off on accidental opening of room or human intervention.
- It is also being considered as the key to arm operation.



AYUSH Sanjivani App

Why in News?

Recently, the government has launched the 'AYUSH Sanjivani' App.

Key Points

- It is developed by the **Ministry of AYUSH and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY).**
- It targets to reach out to **50 lakh** people in the country.
- The app intends to generate data on usage of **AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-rigpa and Homoeopathy)** advocacies and measures among the population and its impact in prevention of **Covid-19.**
- The data collected through this app will be analyzed to find out usage of AYUSH interventions and its efficacy in maintaining health by enhancing immunity.

Aarogya Setu

Why in news?

The **Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY)** has issued a data-sharing and knowledge-sharing protocol for the Aarogya Setu app.

Why these guidelines are issued?

- The **MeitY** has laid down guidelines for sharing data with government agencies and third parties.
- Prior to this, the only legal shield around the mechanism was the **app's privacy policy.**
- The executive order issued came amid concerns expressed by a number of experts over the efficacy and safety of the app.
- The order says that in order to formulate appropriate health responses for addressing the Covid-19, data pertaining to individuals is required.

- These guidelines are issued to ensure that **data collected from the app is gathered, processed and shared in an appropriate way.**

What data can be collected and shared by Aarogya Setu?

- The data collected by the Aarogya Setu app is broadly divided into four categories which is collectively called response data.
- **Demographic data** includes information such as name, mobile number, age, gender, profession and travel history.
- **Contact data** is about any other individual that a given individual has come in close proximity with and the geographical location at which the contact occurred.
- **Self-assessment data** means the responses provided by that individual to the self-assessment test administered within the app.
- **Location data** comprises the geographical position of an individual in latitude and longitude.

What entities will be able to access this data?

- According to the protocol, the response data may be shared by the app's developer (National Informatics Centre) with the,
 - Ministries and departments of Central/State/Union Territory/local governments,
 - National and State Disaster Management Authorities,
 - Public health institutions of the governments and
 - Other third parties
- The data can be shared only if it is strictly needed to directly formulate or implement appropriate health responses.
- For research purposes, the data can be shared with Indian universities or research institutions and research entities registered in India.
- The guidelines also empower universities and research entities to share the data with other such institutions.
- These entities can share only if such sharing is in furtherance of the same purpose for which it has sought approval to access such data.

What are the checks and balances?

- The protocol says the response data that can be shared has to be in de-identified form.
- Except for demographic data, the data must be stripped of information that may make it possible to identify the individual personally.
- These data must be assigned a randomly generated ID.
- To an extent, the NIC shall document the sharing of any data and maintain a list of the agencies with which data has been shared.
- The protocol also calls for any entity with which the data has been shared to not retain the data beyond **180 days** from the day it was collected.
- The protocol reads back to the **Disaster Management Act, 2005** to establish the penalties in case of violation of the protocol.
- **It also has a sunset clause**, which calls for the empowered group to review the protocol after 6 months.
- Unless extended, the protocol will be in force only for **6 months** from the date of issue.

How does the protocol disincentivise reversal of de-identification?

- Any entity which accesses anonymised response data shall not reverse anonymise such data or re-identify individuals in any manner.
- If any person takes any action which has the effect of such data no longer remaining anonymised,
 - Any rights granted to them shall stand terminated, and
 - They shall be liable for penalties under applicable laws for the time being in force.

What are the concerns?

- Legal experts have stressed the need for a **personal data protection law to back the government's decision to make the app mandatory for everyone.**
- The data being shared with third parties is a big concern.
- The third parties with which the data can be shared should have been listed to avoid possibility of misuse.
- The process of de-identifying the data should have been detailed, given that reversing de-identification was not difficult.

ELISA Antibody Kits

Why in News?

Recently, the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** has approved the first batch of antibody testing kits called "**Covid KAVACH ELISA**" manufactured by **Zydus-Cadila** to be used in sero-survey.

Key Points

- Covid KAVACH ELISA has been developed at the **National Institute of Virology, Pune**, by isolating the virus from patients in India.
 - **Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA)** is a test that detects and measures antibodies in blood.
 - The test can be used to determine antibodies related to certain infectious conditions.
 - It can be used to diagnose **HIV, which causes AIDS, Zika virus etc.**
- The ELISA kits will be used in the new nationwide "**sero-survey**" of the Ministry of Health.
 - Sero-survey is meant to detect the prevalence of antibodies that appear after a patient has recovered.
 - The ICMR will lead the testing of 24,000 individuals in 69 districts at household level as part of this sero-survey.
- **According to the ICMR**, real-time Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) is still the frontline test for clinical diagnosis of Covid-19 but the antibody tests are critical for surveillance to understand the proportion of population exposed to infection.
 - The antibody test for **Covid-19** acts as a screening process that gives quick results in a few hours.
 - **The antibody test detects the body's response to the virus.** It gives an indication that a person has been exposed to the virus.
 - If the test is positive, the **swab is collected and an Ribonucleic Acid (RNA)** test is done using the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) kit.
- ELISA antibody tests are different from the rapid antibody tests previously used by Indian authorities.
 - **ELISA kits are more reliable and cheaper than rapid antibody testing kits.**
 - The ELISA kit has a **sensitivity of 98.7% and a specificity of 100%.**
 - Sensitivity signifies accurate positive test results, whereas specificity signifies accurate negative test results.
 - According to the **World Health Organisation (WHO)** the kits are suitable for "for testing large numbers of samples per day, as well as in blood banks or for surveillance studies".
- **ELISA has minimal biosafety and biosecurity requirements as compared to the real-time RT-PCR test.**
- Moreover, **ELISA-based testing is easily possible even at the district level as the test kit has inactivated virus.**

India to Chair WHO Executive Board

Why in News?

Recently, India has been elected to the World Health Organisation (WHO)'s Executive Board. It will also be holding a Chairmanship of the Executive Board for the **next one year (from May 2020- May 2021)**

- Currently, the chairmanship of the WHO Executive Board is being held by **Japan.**

Key Points:

- The proposal to appoint India's nominee to the executive board was signed by the **194-nation at the 73rd World Health Assembly between 18-19 May, 2020.**
- In 2019, **WHO's South-East Asia group had unanimously decided that India would be elected to the executive board for a three-year-term beginning from May, 2020.**
 - WHO Member States are grouped into **6 WHO regions namely, African Region, Region of the Americas, South-East Asia Region, European Region, Eastern Mediterranean Region, and Western Pacific Region.**
- **India has been elected along with 10 other countries including Botswana, Colombia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Oman, Republic of Korea, Russia, and the United Kingdom.**

WHO Executive Board

- **Composition:** The Executive Board is composed of 34 individuals technically qualified in the field of health, each one designated by a member state elected to do so by the World Health Assembly.
 - Member States are elected for three-year terms.
- **Chairman:** The chairman's post is held by rotation for one year among regional groups.
 - It is not a full time assignment and the chairman is just required to chair the Executive Board's meetings.
- **Meeting:** The Board meets at least twice a year.
- **Functions:** The main functions of the Executive Board are to give effect to the decisions and policies of the World Health Assembly, to advise it and generally to facilitate its work.

World Health Assembly

- The World Health Assembly is the decision-making body of WHO.
- It is attended by delegations from all WHO Member States and focuses on a specific health agenda prepared by the Executive Board.
- The main functions of the World Health Assembly are to determine the policies of the Organization, appoint the Director-General, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the proposed programme budget.
- The Health Assembly is held annually in Geneva, Switzerland.

Tianwen-1: China's Mars Mission

Why in News?

China's space program is now slated to achieve a new milestone. **In July, the country will launch its first Mars mission, the 'Tianwen-1', which is expected to land on the Red Planet's surface in the first quarter of 2021.**

About Tianwen-1 Mission

- The mission is named after the **ancient Chinese poem 'Questions to Heaven', the Tianwen-1.**
- **It is an all-in-one orbiter; lander and rover will search the Martian surface for water, ice, investigate soil characteristics, and study the atmosphere, among completing other objectives.**
- **It will carry 13 payloads** (seven orbiters and six rovers) that will explore the planet.
- It will be the first to place ground-penetrating radar on the Martian surface, which will be able to study local geology, as well as rock, ice, and dirt distribution.
- China's previous **'Yinghuo-1' Mars mission**, which had piggybacked on a Russian spacecraft, had failed after it could not leave the Earth's orbit and disintegrated over the Pacific Ocean in 2012.

Why all are curious about Mars exploration?

- After the Moon, the most number of space missions in the Solar System has been to Mars.
- Despite being starkly different in many ways, the **Red Planet has several Earth-like features**— such as clouds, polar ice caps, canyons, volcanoes, and seasonal weather patterns.
- For ages, scientists have wondered **whether Mars can support life.**

- In the past few years, Mars missions have been able to discover the possible presence of liquid water on the planet, either in the subsurface today or at some point in its past.
- This has made space explorers more curious about whether the planet can sustain life.
- **Newer NASA missions have since transitioned from their earlier strategy of “Follow the Water” to “Seek Signs of Life”.**

UN Award to Indian Army Officer

Why in News?

Major Suman Gawani, an **Indian Army officer** who served as a **peacekeeper with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)** in 2019, has won the prestigious **“United Nations Military Gender Advocate of the year Award”**.

- She received the award during an online ceremony being organised at the **United Nations (UN) Headquarters, New York (USA)** on the occasion of the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers.

Key Points

United Nations Military Gender Advocate of the year Award: It recognises the dedication and effort of an individual peacekeeper in promoting the principles within the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325.

- This resolution affirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction.

United Nations Mission in South Sudan: It was established by the Security Council in 2011.

- UNMISS objective is to consolidate peace and security, and help establish conditions for development in the Republic of South Sudan, with a view to strengthening the capacity of the Government of South Sudan to govern effectively and democratically and establish good relations with its neighbours.
- South Sudan gained independence from Sudan on 9th July, 2011 as the outcome of a 2005 agreement that ended Africa's longest-running civil war.

International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers is observed on **29th May** every year to pay tribute to all the men and women who have served and continue to serve in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

- **2020 Theme** - Women in Peacekeeping: A key to Peace
- UN peacekeepers provide security and the political and peacebuilding support to help countries make the difficult, early transition from conflict to peace.



Himachal Pradesh current Affairs

Tea, Immunity & Coronavirus

Why in News?

During a webinar organised on the occasion of **International Tea Day** the Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology (IHBT), **Himachal Pradesh** has claimed that **tea chemicals can boost immunity and block coronavirus activity better than anti-HIV drugs**.

- **IHBT, Palampur, Himachal Pradesh is a constituent of Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).**

Key Points

- There was a **special focus on polyphenols** (bioactive chemicals) **that could bind to a specific viral protein more efficiently than commercially available anti-HIV drugs approved for treating Covid-19 patients**.
 - These chemicals can further **block the activity of the viral protein that helps the virus to thrive inside human cells**.
- A combination of anti-HIV drugs **Lopinavir and Ritonavir** is being used in many countries to treat Covid-19.
- The findings on Kangra tea comes days after an earlier research study where **Indian and Japanese scientists** claimed that **Ashwagandha - a popular herb in Ayurveda - may hold an efficient anti-Covid-19 drug**.

Polyphenols

- Polyphenols are a category of compounds naturally found in plant foods, such as fruits, vegetables, herbs, spices, tea, dark chocolate, and wine.
- They have **antioxidant properties** that can protect against various diseases. They can be subdivided into flavonoids, phenolic acid, polyphenolic amides, and other polyphenols.
- **Polyphenols may help prevent** blood clots, reduce blood sugar levels, and lower heart disease risk. They may also promote brain function, improve digestion, and offer some protection against cancer.

Kangra Tea

- Kangra tea is grown in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh.
- It is well known for its **unique colour and flavour**.
- Kangra tea has got the **Geographical Indication (GI) tag**.
- It is loaded with **antioxidants like catechins and polyphenols**, and said to offer these **health benefits: promotes weight loss, builds immunity, improves oral health and mental alertness, etc.**
- It is also used in **making sentizers, soap, vinegar, wine etc.**

Chardham Pariyojana

Why in News?

The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has **completed construction of a 440 m long tunnel below the Chamba town on the Rishikesh-Dharasu road highway (National Highway - 94)**.

- The construction of the tunnel is a part of the **Chardham Pariyojana**.

Key Points

- It is a programme taken up by the **Ministry of Road Transport and Highways** for connectivity improvement for Chardham (**Kedarnath, Badrinath, Yamunotri and Gangotri**) in **Uttrakhand**.
- The cost of the project is around **Rs. 12,000 Crore**.

- It envisages improvement as well as development of **889 km length of national highways**.
- **Implementing Agencies:** Uttarakhand State Public Works Department (PWD), BRO and the National Highway & Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL).
- **Project Mode:** The work under the programme is being implemented on Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) mode.
 - Under the EPC mode, **the project cost is completely borne by the government**.
 - However, **the contractor is directly responsible for ensuring quality of the work as well as rectification of defects and maintenance of the project stretch for a period of 4 years after completion of construction**.

Border Roads Organisation

- It was conceived and raised in **1960 by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru** for coordinating the speedy development of a network of roads in the North and the North Eastern border regions of the country.
- It works under the **administrative control of the Ministry of Defence**.
- It has diversified into a large spectrum of construction and development works comprising airfields, building projects, defence works and tunneling and has endeared itself to the people.

World Bank approved Rs. 615 Crore loan for State:

World Bank had approved Rs. 615 crore under **H.P. State Road Transformation Project-II for building H.P. Transport Institutions and resilience, improving selected roads stimulating Horticulture and overall economic growth and enhancing road safety in the State**.

Information Technology playing a key role to facilitate people during lockdown in Himachal

Why in News?

In the wake of COVID-19 and to ensure social distancing in public, **the Department of Information Technology has been playing a vital role by developing and implementing various IT applications**. These Apps have been developed to provide contactless services to the people and to maintain social distancing even within the government offices and officials.

Key Initiatives of Department of information Techonology:

- To provide efficient and digitized facilities to the people, the Department has developed **COVID Curfew ePass application**, available on <http://covidepass.hp.gov.in> portal.
- In order to **facilitate interstate movement of the stranded people of Himachal Pradesh in other state and likewise people of other states in Himachal**, such persons can also apply on <http://covidepass.hp.gov.in>. COVID Curfew ePass has proved a boon to the large number of persons stranded in different parts of the country.
- **Corona Mukht Himachal Mobile App** to be installed on the mobile phone of quarantine person. It has the facility of locking the **quarantine location**, so that alerts are generated in case of violations.
- **To provide a common place for all Government Orders, Advisories and Media Bulletins** to avoid any misinformation or rumor, the Department has developed 'COVID Government Orders' available on <http://covidorders.hp.gov.in>
- **'Law & Order Monitoring & Reporting System'** provides facility to Superintendents of Police and Police Stations for uploading Law and Order related information, as desired by Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India and consolidate the same on the portal and make the same available to State Government, Director General of Police, Superintendents of Police and SHOs.
- **various applications and online portals** developed by IT department are **proving boon for people stranded in state as well as other parts of the country** especially in prevailing lockdown situation.

Amendments in Section-1 of the Contract Labour (R&A) Act, 1970:

- In order to provide **more employment opportunities** and to **facilitate employers of tiny and small units and petty contractors**, the Cabinet gave its approval to make necessary amendments in **Section-1 of the Contract Labour (R&A) Act, 1970 (37 of 1970)** in its application to the State of Himachal Pradesh in **Sub Section-4**.

- The amendment proposes to **enhance the threshold limit for contract employment from 20 to 30 workmen.**
- This would also help in increasing industrial investment, production and ease of doing business in the State.

Rs. 268.40 crore for providing relief to people during lockdown

Why in News?

The state government has spent Rs. 268.40 crore for protecting the common people from coronavirus and providing relief material and other essential commodities under various schemes during the lockdown period. This amount was spent in the month of April, 2020 through various welfare schemes.

Key info:

- **Rs. 217.85 crore have been releases as social security pension** to about 5,69,058 pensioners during the lockdown period. Three months advance pension has been given to old age pensioners, widow pensioners, disabled and leprosy pensioners where as six months advance pension has been given to the social security pensioners of the tribal areas.
- The state government has spent more than **35 crore rupees on providing essential commodities** in the month of April itself. The state government under National Food Security Act (NFSA) has distributed 19,400 metric tonnes of wheat flour and 14,350 metric tonnes of rice in the month of April 2020
- **The labourers from other states** who are stranded in Himachal Pradesh, have been **distributed five kilograms each of wheat and rice by issuing temporary permits.**
- **An ex-gratia of Rs. 50 lakh has been fixed for the health and sanitary workers and other employees** engaged in concerned services during the COVID-19 crisis. Besides, all health and sanitary workers have been brought under the ambit of Rs. 50 lakh insurance cover under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana.
- The state government has also come forward to **compensate the loss suffered by the Himachal Pradesh Road Transport Corporation due to non-plying of buses** during this period by releasing a grant of Rs. 60 crore in the month of April.
- **Every labourer has been provided Rs. 2000 through HP Building and other Construction Workers Welfare Board** in the month of April. As many as 75,601 workers have been benefited with decision by spending Rs. 15.12 crore.

Amendments in the Factories Act, 1948:

Why In News?

The state government has make changes in factory act 1948, bring flexibility in conduct of **manufacturing activities by small units in the State**, and attract investment, to create job in the state.

Key Highlights:

- The Cabinet gave its nod for amendment in **Section-2 (m)(i), 2(m)(ii), Section-65 (3)(iv), Section-85(1)(i) and insertion of New Section 106 (b) for compounding of offences in the Factories Act, 1948** to increase the manufacturing activities by small units in the State by enhancing the existing threshold limits of ten and twenty workers to 20 and 40 respectively.
- This amendment will encourage the establishment of small manufacturing units resulting in creating more employment opportunities for workers.
- Similarly, presently a worker may work overtime for a maximum of 75 hours in any quarter.
- But the amendment in **clause (IV) 3 of Section 65** proposes to **increase this limit to 115 hours** subject to the condition that the overtime will have to be paid twice the rate of ordinary wages, so that the workers may get more opportunities to earn.

“Nigah” Scheme to be launched by Himachal Pradesh Government

Why in News?

The Himachal Pradesh Government is to launch a new programme called “Nigah”. The programme aims at educating family members that are coming from other parts of the country.

Highlights

The Nigah Programme is to deploy ASHA, anganwadi and health workers to create awareness about maintaining social distancing during home quarantine. Under the programme the health workers will sensitize the members of the family that are arriving from other states.

Significance:

- The GoI had recently launched train and bus facilities for the migrants stranded in different states to reach their home town.
- Disinfectants were sprayed on them during their stay in quarantine camps. Also, strict social distancing was followed during their stay. However, they were not tested for COVID-19 infections.
- Therefore, programme like Nigah will help to keep the family members of these migrated workers till they are tested for the infection. Also, these measures will help save the family members from possible infections.

ASHA

- ASHA is Accredited Social Health Activist. ASHA workers are trained female community health activist. These women are selected from the community where they are to be employed.
- The ASHA scheme is presently implemented in 33 states except Goa, Puducherry and Chandigarh. ASHA workers are deployed in both rural and urban areas. The ASHA worker should have at least completed Class X.

Mukhya Mantri Shahari Rojgar Guarantee Yojna:

- To revive the economy in the State in the wake of corona pandemic, **120 days assured employment** would be provided to the urban populace **under a new Mukhya Mantri Shahari Rojgar Guarantee Yojna**.
- For this, if required, adequate training would be provided for their **skill upgradation**.

Building and Other Construction Workers Board:

- The State Government had provided **Rs.2000 each to about one lakh workers** registered under Building and Other Construction Workers Board and for this Rs. 20 crore had been spent.
- Now the government decided to provide another Rs. 2000 each to these workers.

Approval to grant petroleum exploration license under Open Acreage Licensing Policy:

The Cabinet gave its approval to grant a petroleum exploration license under **Open Acreage Licensing Policy-Bid Round I** in favour of **M/s Vedanta Limited** for petroleum exploration in **Bali Chowki, Chachiot, Sarkaghat and Mandi area of Mandi district and Ghumarwin area of Bilaspur district**.

Oyster (Dhingri) Mushroom to add to the economy of Tribal's of Spiti

Why in News?

The growth and cultivation of **‘Oyster (Dhingri) Mushroom**, botanically referred to as **‘Pleurotus ostreatus’** is all set to strengthen the economy of the farmers of the **tribal region of Lahaul & Spiti** of Himachal Pradesh.

Key points:

- Spiti, the abode of lamas and also an attraction for the tourists from around the Globe for its age old Buddhists monasteries, its scenic splendour, snow covered peaks, is now ready to **'make its mark' in production and export of the Oyster Mushroom to other parts of the country.**
- As of now **50 farmers have been given training for growing the oyster mushroom** and have been **distributed spawned bags of the 'Dhingri' mushroom** to be incubated under room temperature.

About oyster mushroom:

- The oyster mushroom is one of the **most suitable fungal organisms for producing protein rich food from various agro-wastes without composting having medicinal value as well.**
- It is quite rich in **vitamin C and B complex, with protein contents varying between 1.6 to 2.5%.** It has most of the mineral salts required by the human body such as potassium, sodium, phosphorus, iron and calcium. It also has antibiotic properties and also reduces the bad cholesterol and is suitable for sugar patients as well.
- The Oyster mushroom is **grown in subtropical mountain regions with temperature ranging from 10 to 24 degree centigrade and relative humidity between 55-75%, for a period of 6 to 8 months in a year.**

Use of oyster mushroom

The mushroom can be utilised for **pickles, mushroom powder, for medicines** etc, and also providing direct source of **employment to the women folk** at their doorsteps.

'Saja Nahi, Bachav Hai Quarantine

- **Governor Bandaru Dattatraya** has released the book **'Saja Nahi, Bachav Hai Quarantine'** of Himachal unit of **Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti**, prepared in view of Corona pandemic.
- This book is written and compiled by **Dr. Om Prakash Bhuretta.**
- **The major source** of this book are **World Health Organisation, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, and under the various guidance of the National Health Mission Himachal Pradesh government.**
- Various steps of the spread of the virus and the **effects of home quarantine** have been explained in a simplified manner in this book.

Mukhya Mantri Shahri Ajeevika Guarantee Yojna (MMSAGY)

Why in News?

As many as **1.40 lakh people have already come back since 25th April, 2020** to the state and many more are still coming. State Government has **decided to tap potential of these professional people** which will boost the working force of the state. Given the confusion and uncertainty in these times of curfew, the State Government is adding valuable insights in the preparation of sustaining through the crisis by presenting a more beneficial scheme for the people.

- **Mukhya Mantri Shahri Ajeevika Guarantee Yojna (MMSAGY)** was launched to enhance livelihood security in urban areas by providing **120 days** of guaranteed wage employment to every household in this financial year.

About MMSAGY:

- Mukhya Mantri Shahri Ajeevika Guarantee Yojna (MMSAGY) scheme will be **implemented in all the Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and Cantonment Boards (CBs)** in Himachal Pradesh. State Government is providing this scheme for people as a powerful incentive in the crisis.
- MMSAGY will also **facilitate skill enhancement of persons engaged in waged labour jobs** to provide them better livelihood opportunities, to set up their own enterprises by imparting entrepreneurship trainings as well as subsidy linked credit linkages and to strengthen urban infrastructure and provisioning of quality civic amenities in the ULBs.

- **All adult members** of the household can register and **are eligible to work**
- **Equal wages are to be paid to both male and female workers.** Wages will be directly deposited in the bank account of eligible beneficiaries by the ULBs on fortnightly basis not later than seven days after completion of 15 days employment
- The beneficiaries will be **employed in any ongoing or new admissible work under any state government and centre government scheme** for which funds are available with ULB, in any admissible work under 15th Finance Commission or 5th State Finance Commission for which grant-in-aid provided to the ULBs and sanitation works and services as admissible under Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016 and Swachh Bharat Mission.
- The scheme for **loans for working capital requirements with interest subvention** for the tourism sector will also be prepared by the Tourism Department.

Sanskrit now second language Of the State

The State Government has given the **status of the second language** to Sanskrit and **now efforts should be made to make it more practical and simple** so that it could be popularized amongst the masses.

Atal Adarsh Vidyalayas:

The Cabinet decided to open **15 Atal Adarsh Vidyalayas** in various parts of the State to facilitate the students in getting a quality education.

Ayush University to be set up in Chamba:

- Ayush University along with facilities of **homeopathy, naturopathy, and Indian systems of medicine** would also be established in District Chamba and **special encouragement would be given to Yoga.**
- Medical tourism will be promoted by the development of **health resorts, yoga, panchakarma, and Ayurveda centers.**

Sports

COVID-19 impact: CGF postpones 7th season of 2021 Commonwealth youth games to 2023

Why in News?

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

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

Key Points:

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

About Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF):

Headquarters– London, United Kingdom



Membership– 71 Commonwealth Games Associations

President– Dame Louise Martin

It is currently branded as Commonwealth Sport,

About International Olympics Committee (IOC):

Headquarters– Lausanne, Switzerland.

President– Thomas Bach.

FIFA U-17 World Cup to be held in India from 17 Feb 2021

Why in News?

On May 12, 2020, **The All India Football Federation (AIFF) and the Local Organising Committee (LOC)** for the FIFA (Federation Internationale de Football Association) **U-17 Women's World Cup confirmed that the tournament will be held from February 17 till March 7, 2021.**

Key Points:

FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup was scheduled to be held in India from November **2 to 21, 2020 across 5 venues (five host cities – Navi Mumbai, Guwahati, Ahmedabad, Kolkata and Bhubaneswar)** and has been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Eligibility:** FIFA announced that the tournament will keep original eligibility criteria despite the postponement: players born on or after 1 January 2003 and on or before 31 December 2005 will be eligible to compete.
- The Local Organising Committee also added that the dates were confirmed after taking into account the time needed to complete the UEFA (Union of European Football Association), CONCACAF (Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football), CAF (Confederation of African Football), OFC (Oceania Football Confederation), and CONMEBOL (South American Football Confederation) qualification tournaments as well as the best possible conditions in the country to host a successful FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup.
- **The U-17 Women's World Cup was originally scheduled to be played across 5 host cities – Navi Mumbai, Guwahati, Ahmedabad, Kolkata and Bhubaneswar.**
- **The new dates for the FIFA Under-20 Women's World Cup were also announced.** It will now be held between 20 January and 6 February 2021 in Panama and Costa Rica.
- **FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup:** It is an international association football tournament for female players under the age of 17. It is organized by Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA).
- The tournament is held in even-numbered years, starting in 2008. The current champion is Spain, which won its first title at the 2018 tournament in Uruguay.

About FIFA:

Headquarters– Zurich, Switzerland.

Motto– For the Game. For the World.

President– Gianni Infantino.

NADA provisionally suspends Savita Kumari, Ankit Shishodia for violating anti-doping rules

Why in News?

On May 18, 2020, **The National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA)** provisionally suspended **powerlifters Savita Kumari and Ankit Shishodia for violating anti-doping rules.** Athletes were given an opportunity to present themselves before the Anti-Doping Disciplinary Panel (ADDP) and explain their cases on the date and time fixed by the panel for a hearing.

Key Points:

- However, due to COVID 19, followed by lockdown in the country no sitting of the panel could take place in April 2020.

- **Dope Control Officers (DOC)**, who are front-line medical workers in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic, will not be sent for sample collection, as they have worked in hospitals and need to quarantine themselves.
- NADA is gearing up for vigorous resumption of sample collection and testing after the home ministry allowed sports complexes and stadiums to open but without spectators.
- **The elaborate guidelines have been prepared by the NADA and is now waiting for the sports ministry's order to start sample collection.**
- NADA has been conducting **anti-doping awareness workshops, educational and awareness seminars** about the **prohibited drugs or substances and methods in sports** across the country for sportspersons, young athletes, coaches and support staff.
- In the month of April 2020, due to outbreak of COVID19, **NADA has encouraged the Olympic qualified sportspersons (85) and elite athletes (110) coming under NADA's Registered Testing Pool (RTP)** to gather **online anti-doping information available on NADA and WADA** (World-Anti Doping Agency) website.

About NADA:

Headquarters– New Delhi.

Director-General– Navin Agarwal.

Sports in Short:

- Fédération Internationale de Football Association(FIFA) has launched a campaign called “#WeWillWin”.
- India lost the top spot in the ICC Test rankings to Australia on 1 May. It lost the rank because of the 2016-17 record was eliminated from the annual update as per rules.
- Australia restricts the use of saliva & sweat to shine ball under COVID-19 guidelines. Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) in consultation with doctors has come up with guidelines, restricting the utilization of saliva and sweat to shine the ball.
- Former World Snooker Champion Peter Ebdon has announced his retirement from professional snooker.
- New Zealand Cricket has announced the Annual New Zealand Cricket Awards.
- Discus thrower Sandeep Kumari has been banned for 4 years by WADA's Athletics Integrity Unit for flunking a dope test.
- Swimming world governing body, Federation Internationale de Natation(FINA) rescheduled the 2021 Fukuoka aquatics world championships to May 2022 to avoid a clash with the postponed Tokyo Olympics.
- Egyptian professional tennis player Youssef Hossam has been banned from professional tennis for life for match- fixing, as per the official notification by the Tennis Integrity Unit on 4 May 2020.
- Former Sri Lanka skipper Kumar Sangakkara is set to serve his second term as the president of Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC).
- The Sports Authority of India (SAI) has formed a six-membered committee that will prepare Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the phased resumption of training of sports after the lockdown due to COVID-19 is lifted.
- International Hockey Federation (FIH) has extended the term of Narinder Batra as President of FIH until May 2021.
- Para-athlete Deepa Malik has announced her retirement from Paralympics games to hold her post as the president of the Paralympic Committee of India.
- The FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup has been rescheduled between 17 February and 7 March 2021.
- French cyclist Remy Di Gregorio has been banned for 4 years by the International Cycling Union (UCI) for using a form of banned blood-boosting hormone EPO (Erythropoietin).
- China has won the first edition of FIDE Chess.com Online Nations Cup against USA.
- Japanese tennis player Naomi Osaka has become the world's highest-paid female athlete.
- Spanish football player and Athletic Bilbao striker Aritz Aduriz has announced his retirement citing medical reasons.
- Sports Authority of India (SAI) has deposited 30,000 rupees each as out of pocket allowance in accounts of 2,749 Khelo India athletes.
- Italy has won UEFA eEURO 2020, beating Serbia in the final to clinch the inaugural virtual European Championship.
- American tennis player and former world number 24 Jamie Hampton has officially announced her retirement from professional tennis, bringing a sudden halt to her career.
- Sri Lankan fast bowler, Shehan Madushanka has been suspended from all forms of cricket with immediate effect for alleged possession of heroin.

- Cricket Australia has announced the dates for India's tour to Australia starting October this year for an assignment comprising four Tests, ODIs as well as T20 Internationals.
- The 36th National Games, planned for October-November in Goa, was deferred indefinitely due to the COVID- 19 pandemic.
- Indian Olympic Association (IOA) president Narinder Batra has been designated as a member from the Olympic Channel Commission.
- India's long-distance runner, Kiranjeet Kaur has been handed a four-year ban by World Athletics' anti-doping body for testing positive for a banned substance (Enobosarm).
- The Bundesliga primary football league of Germany becomes the world's first major sports event to resume after COVID-19 lockdown. The Bundesliga games began with empty stadium though the stadium had the capacity to hold more than 80,000 players. Bundesliga means "Federal League".
- India's largest mobile gaming platform Mobile Premier League (MPL) has partnered with Mumbai-based game developer Lifelike Studios to launch Rogue Heist.
- Haryana Government announced, under the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs for containment of COVID-19, all Sports Complexes and Stadiums in the state have been permitted to open.
- Two Indian Powerlifters namely Savita Kumari & Ankit Shishodia have been provisionally suspended by the National Anti Doping Agency (NADA).
- Institute of Advanced Study in Science and Technology (IASST), Guwahati, developed an electrochemical sensing platform.
- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has announced that it is to replace hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) with Kangra tea to improve immunity and possibly reduce viral replication, in the revised protocol.
- Indian Institute of Madras (IIT-M) developed 'Parabolic Trough Collector', a new trough collector equipped with enhanced energy to serve industries.
- Researchers at Centre for Nano and Soft Matter Sciences (CeNS), Bangalore developed a cup-shaped design mask that helps to create enough space in front of the mouth while speaking to tackle COVID-19.

Defence

- The Indian Navy will hold a salutation ceremony in Mumbai and Goa on Sunday to honour the efforts of coronavirus warriors in curbing the spread of COVID-19.
- Civil Aviation Ministry and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) have launched the Government Authorisation for Relief Using Drones (GARUD) portal.
- Indian Navy launched Operation Samudra Setu, meaning Sea Bridge, as a part of a national effort to repatriate Indian citizens from overseas.
- Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh has approved the proposal of Engineer-in-Chief of Military Engineering Services (MES) for optimisation of more than 9,300 posts in the basic and industrial workforce. It is in line with the recommendations of the Committee of Experts, headed by Lt General Shekatkar, which had recommended measures to enhance combat capability and rebalance defence expenditure of the Armed Forces
- Indian Navy recently designed and produced Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated the road link from Dharchula (Uttarakhand) to Lipulekh (China Border) on 8 May.
- Ministry of Defence (MoD) signed a contract with M/s Tata Power SED (TPSED) for Modernisation of Air Field Infrastructure (MAFI) of 37 airfields for the Indian Air Force (IAF), Indian Navy (IN) and Indian Coast Guard (ICG) on 8 May.
- As part of Samudrasetu mission, INS Magar of Indian navy will reach Kochi today bringing back 202 Indian nationals from Maldives.
- Intellectual Property Facilitation Cell (IPFC) of Ministry of Defence, in association with National Research Development Corporation (NRDC), has filed a patent for the low-cost Medical Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) developed by Indian Navy.
- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh commissioned Indian Coast Guard Ship (ICGS) Sachet and two interceptor boats (IBs) C-450 and C-451 in Goa through video conferencing from Delhi on 15 May.

- The Indian Air Force Chief RKS Bhadauria announced that it will shelve three main projects of worth Rs 8,000 crores.
- Ministry of Defence approved procurement of 26 defence items to boost "Make in India" initiative. This was done through the amendment of Public.
- The Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh chaired the E-Conclave of Defence MSME (Micro Small and Medium Enterprises).
- Indian Navy made "NavRakshak" PPE kit made with innovative breathable fabric material, to provide comfort to healthcare workers working against COVID-19 pandemic wearing multi-layered coverall PPE treating patients in the hot and humid condition for more than 12 hours.
- The Indian Association Uganda (IAU) and Indian Military Advisory and Training Team for Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF) have jointly set up military war game centre called 'INDIA' at the Uganda Senior Command and Staff College in Kimaka in Jinja District of Uganda with a cost of over 1 billion Ugandan shillings or \$2,65,000.
- The Indian Air Force (IAF) is to operationalize its No.18 Squadron at Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu on 27 May. IAF chief, Air Chief Marshal RKS Bhadauria is expected to operationalize the squadron "Flying Bullets" at the Sulur Air Force Station near Coimbatore, TN.
- The Army Commanders' Conference, an apex level biannual event which was scheduled for April 2020 and postponed due to COVID-19 pandemic, will now be organised in two phases.
- Foundation Stone for a Missile Park "AGNEEPRASTHA" was laid at INS Kalinga by Cmde Rajesh Debnath, Commanding Officer, in the presence of Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, FOC-in-C (East) on 28 May 20.

Books & Authors

- Union Culture Minister Shri Prahlad Singh Patel released an e-book "Prof B.B. Lal -**India Rediscovered**" on 2 May on the occasion of the centenary year of great archaeologist Professor B. B. Lal.
- Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan has launched a multimedia guide on the Covid-19 disease named '**COVID Katha**'.
- The biography of **Captain Vijayant Thapar**, a fourth-generation army officer, who was martyred in the Kargil war in 1999 at the age of just 22, is soon to be released on 15 May 2020.
- A book titled "**Fear of God**" has been authored by Bommadevara Sai Chandravadhan. He is popularly known as Vadhan.
- The biography of Britain's Prince Harry and wife Meghan Markle "**Finding Freedom: Harry and Meghan and the Making of A Modern Royal Family**" by royal reporters Omid Scobie and Carolyn Durand has been scheduled to be released worldwide on 11 August.
- The national award winning publishing group in the global publishing of Hindi Literature, Vani Prakashan Group announces its newest acquisition of renowned author Alka Saraogi's latest novel '**Kulbhushan ka naam darj kijiye**'.
- The book titled as "**Wuhan Diary: Dispatches from a Quarantined City**" authored by Chinese literary writer **Fang Fang** is a compilation of online diary entries and social media posts that document 60 days of lockdown during COVID-19, captures the challenges of daily life and the changing moods and emotions of being quarantined without reliable information & is a remarkable record of the extraordinary time.
- Union HRD (Human Resource Development) Minister Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank e-Launched print as well as e-editions of the set of 7 titles on "**Psycho-Social Impact of pandemic & lockdown and how to Cope With**" under the corona studies series published by National Book Trust (NBT), India.
- Ruskin Bond's new book titled '**Hop On: My Adventures on Boats, Trains and Planes**' was released on his 86th Birthday in an e-book format.
- Sri Adhikari Brothers opens up for audiences yet another classic hit show -'GaltiKiski' -based on the book '**What Went Wrong and Why?**', written by super cop & the current Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry - Kiran Bedi.
- Foundation Stone for a Missile Park "AGNEEPRASTHA" was laid at INS Kalinga by Cmde Rajesh Debnath, Commanding Officer, in the presence of Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, FOC-in-C (East) on 28 May 20.
- British author J.K. Rowling released first two chapters of her new Children's book "**The Ickabog**".

Ranks and Indices

- According to the 7th edition of '**Open Budget Survey 2019**' conducted by International Budget Partnership (IBP), **India has been ranked at 53rd position among 117 nations** in terms of budget transparency and accountability with the score of 49 out of 100.
- India's epic mythological saga of the 1980s, '**Ramayan**' has created the **world record of Highest Viewed Entertainment Programme Globally**.
- The National Science and Technology Management Information (NSTMIS), Department of Science and Technology (DST), has conducted a survey on Research and Development (R&D) Statistics and Indicators 2019- 20.
- The Global Network against Food Crisis released the Global Report on Food Crisis (GRFC) 2020.
- Centre for Monitoring of Indian Economy (CMIE) data stated that the unemployment rate in India has climbed to a staggering **27.1% as of 3 May 2020**.
- **Amazon has topped the BrandZ Top 75 Most Valuable Global Retail Brands 2020 ranking**. BrandZ ranking was unveiled by WPP and Kantar.
- UNICEF released a report titled "**Lost At Home**" on 5 May.
- Delhi has emerged as the **top most state with the highest Internet penetration** rate among all the other states of India, according to a study titled 'Digital in India' by Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI).
- In accordance with the Paris-based International Energy Agency (IEA), "**Global Energy Review 2020**-The impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on global energy demand and CO2 emissions" India's energy demand has faced a 30% decrease due to 40 days lockdown to contain COVID-19.
- Data released by the Registrar General of India stated that **India's infant mortality rate (IMR) has improved very marginally from 33 per 1,000 live births in 2017 to 32 in 2018**.
- The International Energy Agency (IEA) released the Global Energy Review in 2020.
- **The Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB) has been ranked among the Top 50 global schools providing executive education (open plus custom programmes), in the Financial Times (FT) Executive Education 2020 Rankings released on 11 May 2020**.
- Two scientific papers of India on child survival by the State-Level Disease Burden Initiative stated that the under- 5 **Mortality Rate in India has dropped by 49% since 2000**.
- World Health Organization (WHO) in partnership with the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and Nursing Now has released the first "**The State of the World's Nursing 2020**" report amid COVID19 pandemic.
- According to the study conducted by Centre for Research on **Energy and Clean Air (CREA)**, the Carbon dioxide Emissions in India has declined the least in four decades.
- Researchers have found that **men seem to be more vulnerable to COVID-19 than women**.
- As per the **World Economic Forum (WEF) annual rankings**, India has secured the **74th position** on the global Energy Transition Index (ETI). In the previous year, **India ranked 76th**.
- The World Health Organization released Global Nutrition Report, 2020.
- Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal participated in the second **G-20 Virtual Trade and Investment Ministers Meeting**.
- **The pair of Indian-origin siblings, Reuben and the Hinduja brothers**, shares the second spot in the Britain's annual rich list, with a **fortune of 16 billion pounds each**.
- Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry today announced the results of star rating of garbage free cities. Centre has declared **Ambikapur, Rajkot, Surat, Mysore, Indore and Navi Mumbai as five-star garbage free cities**.
- The Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) reported that the export from India is expected to fall by 20%, around \$50-\$60 billion, in the current fiscal year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It also suggested a decline in imports.
- **India became the second largest producer of Personal Protective Equipment in the world**. China is the leading producer of PPE in the world.
- The United Nations listed the **KHUDOL initiative** of Manipur as one of the top 10 global initiatives to fight against COVID-19.
- The World Steel Association released the World Steel Report. According to the report, the crude steel report of India declined by 65%.
- Uttarakhand state has identified total 1145 plant species ranging from state flower Brahmkamal to mythological 'Sanjivni Booti'.

- India's unemployment rate was a tad higher at **24.3%** for the week ended May 24 compared to 24% in the preceding week
- Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan announced that **Aarogya Setu has become world's largest contact tracing app** reaching over 11 crore 40 lakh people in 40 days.
- The World Gold Council released its report on Retail Gold Insights: India Jewellery Report.

Agreements and MoU signed

- The University of Oxford has today announced an agreement with the UK-based global biopharmaceutical company AstraZeneca for the further development, large-scale manufacture and potential distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine candidate currently being trialled by the University.
- Facebook has launched a home-to-home fundraiser concert, 'I For India'. 100% proceeds from the fundraiser concert will go to the India COVID Response Fund managed by GiveIndia.
- Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar has joined hands with Central Public Works Department (CPWD) to launch a series of welfare measures for the benefit of migrant laborers working in the construction projects at the Institute.
- Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), a defence Public Sector Undertaking (PSU), has signed an MoU NOCCA Robotics, an incubated start-up of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kanpur for the large-scale manufacturing of ventilators.
- Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), a defence Public Sector Undertaking (PSU), has signed an MoU NOCCA Robotics, an incubated start-up of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kanpur for the large-scale manufacturing of ventilators.
- CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (CSIR-IGIB) and TATA Sons signed an MoU for licensing of KNOWHOW for FNCAS9 Editor Linked Uniform Detection Assay (FELUDA) for rapid diagnosis of COVID-19.
- Punjab National Bank Housing Finance Limited (PNBHFL) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi to support the research and development of a unique prototype material to be used in the manufacture of washable and reusable Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) surgical gowns and masks by using Jacquard knitting technology (machine knitting with a jacquard attachment that makes patterns by the use of colored yarns).
- Coir Board signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Indian Institute of Technology-Madras, to establish a "Centre of Excellence (CoE) for the application of Coir exclusively or in combination with other natural fibres".
- Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Art Of Living Foundation (AOL) to help the needy tribes India artisans amid COVID-19 pandemic.
- Coal India signed MOUs with two Russian entities within the areas of coking coal mining within the Russian Far East and therefore the Arctic Region.
- Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has entered into a tie-up with the India Post for delivery of its coronavirus COVID-19 testing kits.
- Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) partners with Bharat Biotech International Limited (BBIL) for developing indigenous Covid 19 vaccine.
- Indian Institute of Technology Madras Civil Engineering Department has collaborated with Chengalpattu Medical College and Hospital (CMCH) in Tamil Nadu to design and develop 'Doffing Unit' to enable healthcare professionals to safely and effectively remove their Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati (IIT-Guwahati) and the Duke-NUS Medical School, Singapore have partnered and used data science models to analyze and predict the total number of infected people for different States in India in the next 30 days.
- Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare stated that India's foodgrain production has been estimated to touch a record of 295.67 million tonnes (MT) in the 2019-20 crop year.
- According to the latest data of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) the international tourism could decline by 60-80% in 2020 when compared with 2019 figures, due to COVID-19 pandemic outbreak which will result in loss of USD 910 billion to USD 1.2 trillion and places millions of livelihoods at risk and threatens to curtail the progress made in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Union Minister for Tribal Affairs Arjun Munda launched the "Going Online As Leaders (GOAL) programme" of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) in partnership with Facebook at a Webinar in New Delhi on 15 May.

- MoneyGram Payment System, a subsidiary of MoneyGram International, global leader in P2P payments tied up with Federal Bank Limited, a private bank in India to provide the customers a cost-effective way to receive deposits directly in their bank accounts in India.
- Indian Institute of Technology Madras is collaborating with industry bodies to understand the impact of COVID- 19 crisis on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Tamil Nadu.
- National Restaurants Association of India (NRAI) has partnered with fintech start-up DotPe to build its own tech platform.
- Godrej East Africa Holdings Ltd, a subsidiary of FMCG (Fast-moving consumer goods) firm Godrej Consumer Products Ltd (GCPL), has acquired the balance 25% stake in Kenya-based Canon Chemicals Ltd for an undisclosed sum.
- Flipkart partnered with Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Company(BAGIC) to offer digital motor insurance policy to customers of e-commerce major.
- Directorate General Defence Estates(DGDE), Ministry of Defence & eGov Foundation has signed Memorandum of Understanding(MoU) on May 8 through video conference to implement a cloud-based platform to deliver various citizen services under the program e-Chhawani & to drive e-governance and improved citizen services across all 62 cantonment boards in the country.
- NTPC Ltd., the PSU under Ministry of Power, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC), the PSU under Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas on 22 May.
- India & Bangladesh signed the 2nd Addendum to the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade in Dhaka.
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) partnered with Bharti Airtel's Africa Arm to support the school children in the coronavirus affected areas and provide them access to remote learning and financial assistance to their families through mobile cash transfer.
- Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) announced today, the extension of its collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to support the delivery of essential hygiene products to tea-plantation workers based in the state of Assam in India, in the response to COVID 19.
- IBM (International Business Machines) ties up with the Intellect Design Arena Limited, a full spectrum banking and insurance products company, has launched iTurmeric FinCloud platform through IBM public cloud targeting financial institutions which are looking to switch to the latest tools and technologies.
- State-owned Ircon International Limited (IRCON) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with RZD International L.L.C. (Limited Liability Company), a subsidiary of government-owned Russian Railways Company, to explore opportunities for joint development of railways and other infrastructure projects in Asia, Africa and Latin America.
- Sports Authority Gujarat signed an MoU with the Times Centre for Learning Limited (TCLL) to impart training for personality and skill development for aspiring athletes in the state.
- India-based Fintech startup Zaggie has partnered with payments technology major Visa to launch innovative payment solutions for SMEs and startups in the country.
- The Department of Posts, Government of India and Department of Horticulture, Government of Bihar has partnered to supply "Shahi Litchi" of Muzaffarpur & "Zardalu Mango" of Bhagalpur at the doorstep of people.
- Central Public Sector Undertaking, REC Limited, is spearheading the mission to feed medical staff in key government hospitals as well as poor daily wage labourers across the nation.
- Power Finance Corporation (PFC), the central PSU under Ministry of Power has signed an MoU with Narmada Basin Projects Company Ltd. (NBPCL), a wholly-owned company of Govt. of Madhya Pradesh, to fund various power projects to be executed in the State of Madhya Pradesh.
- As part of COVID-19 mitigation mission of Country, CSIR has strategized its R&D to develop, integrate, scale- up, and deploy necessary technological interventions for combating Coronavirus pandemic in the country.
- India's leading web-based business commercial centre Flipkart has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Karnataka State Mango Department and Marketing Corporation, to empower mango farmers to sell their produce online.
- The Power Finance Corporation (PFC), a central PSU under Ministry of Power and India's leading NBFC has entered into an agreement with Narmada Basin Projects Company Ltd. (NBPCL), a wholly-owned company of Govt. of Madhya Pradesh, to fund projects worth Rs.22,000 crore for 225 MW hydro-electric projects & multipurpose projects in Madhya Pradesh.
- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of India today signed a 177 million dollar loan to upgrade 450 kilometers of state highways and major district roads in Maharashtra

- Coca-Cola in India has partnered with United Way Mumbai to augment healthcare initiatives in 48 public hospitals across eight states in the country.
- Vakrangee Limited (VL), a technology company based in Mumbai (Maharashtra), has entered into the Corporate Agency (Registration Code CA0249) partnership with Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) .
- India and Sri Lanka have reaffirmed commitment to further strengthen bilateral relations exploring new avenues of cooperation.
- IIT Alumni Council announced that it will partner Mumbai University in the MegaLab Mumbai initiative that will have a capacity of 10 million tests per month.
- Infrastructure consultancy and engineering company RITES (Rail India Technical and Economic Service) has signed an agreement for acquiring 24% stake in Indian Railway Stations Development Corporation (IRSDC) for Rs 48 crore.
- ITC Limited entered into a Share Purchase Agreement(SPA) to acquire 100% of the equity share capital of Sunrise Foods Private Ltd(SFPL), which is primarily engaged in spices under the trademark 'Sunrise'.
- Ola Electric acquired the Netherlands-based Etergo BV, an innovative electric scooter company for an undisclosed sum, as the former has planned to set its own line of premium electric two-wheelers, both globally and nationally.
- Infosys Limited, a global leader in next-generation digital services and consulting, has entered into the partnership with Avaloq, a Swiss company that develops and provides software for core banking, to offer end-to-end (e2e) products and services as Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) across the world to its clients.

Appointments

| Name | Appointed As | Other Info |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| Shikha Sharma | Advisor of Google Pay India | Former Axis Bank CEO |
| Shri Ajay Tirkey | Secretary, Ministry of Women & Child Development | succeeds Shri Rabindra Panwar |
| Maneesh Menda | Head of HR, Royal Bank of Scotland India | |
| Arvind Kumar Sharma | Secretary, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises | Prior to this appointment, Shri Sharma was serving as Additional Secretary, Prime Minister's Office (PMO). |
| Giridhar Aramane | Secretary, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways | Shri Aramane was earlier serving as Additional Secretary in the Cabinet Secretariat. He has also been a Jt Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas during 2012-14. |
| Bollampalli Vijaysen Reddy | Telangana High Court judge | |
| Neeraj Dhawan | Yes Bank - Chief Risk Officer | Replaced Ashish Agarwal |
| Ramesh Babu | NTPC director operations | Successor of Prakash Tiwari |

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| Lt Gen Raj Shukla | Command of the Army Training Command (ARTRAC) | |
| Tarun Bajaj | director on the Central Board of Reserve Bank of India (RBI). | |
| Adhir Ranjan Chowdhary | Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) | |
| Krishnan Ramachandran | Managing Director (MD) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Max Bupa Health Insurance | succeeds Ashish Mehrotra. |
| D P S Negi | Director General (DG) of Labour Bureau in the Ministry of Labour and Employment | replacing B N Nanda. |
| Dia Mirza | Goodwill Ambassador of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) | |
| NeerajDhawan | Chief Risk Officer(CRO) of Yes Bank | replacing AshishAgarwal |
| | | |
| Abidali Z Neemuchwala | Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Managing Director of Wipro Limited | |
| Ajinkya Madhukar Rahane | brand ambassador for India, Middle East, ANZ (Australia & New Zealand) and SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation). | |
| Indu Shekhar Chaturvedi | Secretary, Ministry of New & Renewable Energy | |
| Manoj Ahuja | chairman of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). | replace Anita Karwal |
| V. Vidyavathi | Director-General of Archaeological Survey of India(ASI) | |
| Zubair Iqbal | Managing Director (MD) of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) Bank | |
| Rajesh Goel | director-general (DG) of the Realtors body National Real Estate Development Council (NAREDCO). | Prior to this, he was serving as the chairman and managing director, Hindustan Prefab Ltd. |
| Harsh Vardhan | Chairman of the World Health Organization (WHO) Executive Board | |
| Dilip Oommen | President of Indian Steel Association (ISA) | |

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|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Govinda Rajulu Chintala | Chairman of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). | Presently, Dr. Harsh Kumar Bhanwala is serving as the Chairman of NABARD. |
| Carmen Reinhart | Chief Economist of World Bank Group | |
| B R Sharma | Chairman Public Service Commission for the UT of J&K. | |
| Ms. Jahnabi Phookan | National President of FICCI Ladies Organization (FLO) | |
| Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen | 2020 Presidential election | |
| Marcos Troyjo | President of New Development Bank (NDB). | |
| SN Rajeswari | Chairman and MD of the Oriental Insurance Company (OIC) | |
| Thierry Delaporte | Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Managing Director (MD) of Wipro | |
| R Sreelekha | woman Director General of Police in Kerala | |
| Leo Puri | chairman of JP Morgan, South and Southeast Asia | |
| Aiman Ezzat | Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of French technology major Capgemini Group. | |
| Bjorn Ulvaeus | President of CISAC | |
| Sandip Pradhan | Director General of the Sports Authority of India (SAI) | |
| Venkataramani Sumantran | Independent director of airline company IndiGo. | |
| Deepak M Satwalekar | Independent Director of Wipro | |

Awards

| Name | Awarded As |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Thangjam Dhabali Singh | 'Order of Rising Sun' by Japan |

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| Thalappil Pradeep | Nikkei Asia Prize 2020 |
| Saurabh Lodha | Young Career Award in Nano Science & Technology for the year 2020. |
| Joseph J Landsberg (Australia), Richard H Waring (USA) and Nicholas C Coops (Canada) | 2020 Marcus Wallenberg Prize |
| Kempegowda International Airport, Bengaluru | SKYTRAX Award for Best Regional Airport in India and Central Asia. |
| Anunta | VMware 2020 Regional Partner of the Year Award for the Services Excellence category. |
| Lieutenant Commander Akshay Kumar | Vice Admiral G.M. Hiranandani Memorial Rolling Trophy for the year 2020. |
| Siddharth Varadarajan | Deutsche Welle Freedom of Speech Award |
| Sania Mirza | Fed Cup Heart Award 2020 for Asia/Oceania zone. |
| Vinay Badhwar | 2019 Alexander Dalrymple Award, by United Kingdom Hydrographic Office (UKHO). |
| Major Suman Gawani | UN Military Gender Advocate of the Year 2019. |
| Rajiv Joshi | NYIPLA "Inventor of the Year award" for the year 2020. |

Important Days & Themes

| Day | Celebrated As | Theme / Aim |
|-------|--|--|
| May 1 | International Labour Day or Worker's day | The day aims to celebrate labourers and the working class. The day promotes international labour associations. |
| May 2 | World Tuna Day | This day is established by the United Nations (UN) to raise awareness about the importance of tuna fish |
| May 3 | World Press Freedom Day | The theme of 2020 World Press Freedom Day is "Journalism Without Fear or Favour." |
| May 3 | World Laughter Day | The World Laughter Day is observed every year on first Sunday of May to raise awareness about laughter and its healing benefits. |
| May 4 | International Firefighters' Day | |

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| May 5 | World Asthma Day | The theme of the 2020 World Asthma Day is "Enough Asthma Deaths." |
| May 5 | International Day of the Midwife | The theme for 2020 International Day of the Midwife is Midwives with women: celebrate, demonstrate, mobilise, unite – our time is NOW!. |
| May 5 | World Hand Hygiene Day | The theme for 2020 is 'Save Lives: Clean Your Hands'. |
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| May 6 | International No Diet Day | |
| May 7 | Vesak Day | |
| May 7 | World Athletics Day | |
| May 8 | World Red Cross Day | |
| May 8 | World Thalassaemia Day | Theme for 2020 World Thalassaemia Day is "The dawning of a new era for thalassemia: Time for a global effort to make novel therapies accessible and affordable to patients." |
| May 9 | World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) | The theme of 2020 World Migratory Bird Day is "Birds Connect Our World." |
| May 11 | National Technology Day | |
| May 12 | International Nurses Day (IND) | The theme for 2020 International Nurses Day is "Nurses: A Voice to Lead – Nursing the World to Health." |
| May 15 | International Day of Families | Theme: Families in Development |
| May 15 | Endangered Species Day | |
| May 16 | International Day of Light | |
| May 16 | National Dengue Day | |
| May 16 | International Day of Living Together | |
| May 17 | World Hypertension Day | Measure your Blood Pressure, Control it, Live Longer |
| May 17 | World Telecommunication Day | Theme: Connect 2030: ICTs for the Sustainable Development Goals |
| May 18 | International Museum Day | Theme: Museums for Equality : Diversity and Inclusion |
| May 18 | World AIDS Vaccine Day | |

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| May 18 | International Museum Day | Theme of International Museum Day 2020: "Museums for Equality: Diversity and Inclusion". |
| May 20 | World Bee Day | Theme : "Bee Engaged". |
| May 20 | World Metrology Day | Theme: World Metrology Day: Measurements for global trade |
| May 21 | National Anti-Terrorism Day | |
| May 21 | World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development | |
| May 21 | International Tea Day | The purpose of International Tea Day is to try to improve the condition of tea producers and tea workers. |
| | | |
| May 22 | International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB) | The theme for 2020 International Day for Biological Diversity is "Our solutions are in nature". |
| May 23 | International Day to End Obstetric Fistula (IDEOF) | The theme for 2020 IDEOF is "End gender inequality! End health inequities! End Fistula now!". |
| May 25 | International Missing Children's Day (IMCD) | to commemorate the missing children who have found their way home, remember those who have been victims of crime, and continue efforts to find those who are still missing. |
| May 25 | World Thyroid Day | to promote awareness and understanding of thyroid health and the advances made in treating thyroid diseases. |
| May 28 | World Hunger Day | |
| May 28 | International Day of Action for Women's Health | The main purpose of this day is to promote the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of all women all over the world. |
| May 28 | World Menstrual Hygiene (MH) Day | Theme of MH day, 2020: "Periods in Pandemic – it is time to take action!" |
| May 29 | International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers | 2020 Theme: Women in Peacekeeping: A Key to Peace. |
| May 29 | World Digestive Health Day (WDHD) | The theme of WDHD 2020 is "Gut Microbiome – A Global Perspective" |
| May 29 | International Everest Day | |

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| May 31 | World No Tobacco Day | Theme for 2020: Protecting Youth |
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Obituary

| Name | Profession | Location |
|------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Gandhian Hema Bharali | Freedom fighter | Assam |
| Chuni Goswami | Former Indian Football captain | |
| Denis Goldberg | South African anti-apartheid activist | South Africa |
| Ronald Vivian Smith | Eminent historian, author and columnist | Agra |
| Ajay Kumar Tripathi | Former Chief Justice of Chhattisgarh High Court | |
| K S Nisar Ahmed | Renowned Kannada poet | Devanahalli, Karnataka |
| Dalit Ezhilamalai | Former Union Minister | |
| Rob Gibbs | Director, story artist and writer | |
| Pandanda Kuttappa | Founder of Kodava Family Hockey Tournament | |
| Hari Shankar Vasudevan | Historian | |

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|----------------|
| Little Richard | Founding father of Rock 'n' roll | |
| Raja Rangappa Naik | Former Lok Sabha MP and senior Janta Dal(S) leader | |
| Shafique Ansari | Actor | |
| Betty Wright | Singer | |
| Sai Gundewar | Actor | |
| Anisuzzaman | educationist and national Professor | Bangladesh |
| Debesh Roy | Bengali author | |
| Ratnakar Matkari | Marathi dramatist, litterateur, theatre personality | Mumbai |
| Arthur Summons | Former Australian rugby league captain | |
| Manmeet Singh Walia | Former national table tennis champion | |
| Jerry Stiller | US comedian | |
| Dev Prabhakar Shastri | spiritual leader | Madhya Pradesh |
| Fred Willard | actor-comedian | |
| Shyamala G Bhave | Vocalist | |
| Mohit Baghel | Bollywood actor | |
| R Shanmugam | Former Tamil Nadu football player and coach | Tamil Nadu |

| | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| Balbir Singh Dosanjh | Former Indian hockey player | |
| Ashley Cooper | Australian tennis player | |
| Hana Kimura | Japanese professional wrestler | Japan |
| Gigi Simoni | Former Inter Milan coach | |
| Mujtaba Hussain | Urdu author, humorist and satirist | |
| Ajit Jogi | first Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh | Chhattisgarh |
| M.P. Veerendra Kumar | Rajya Sabha member | Kerala |
| Bejan Daruwalla | Astrologer | |
| Yogesh Gaur | Lyricist | |

State

- The Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan has launched a unique scheme named 'Jeevan Amrit Yojana', to help in boosting immunity system of citizens of the state in order to fight the deadly coronavirus.
- Chhattisgarh has topped the list of states in providing employment to unskilled labourers under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).
- Chief Minister Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan today transferred Rs 42 lakh honorarium of the month of April to the bank accounts of 2 lakh 10 thousand cooks of the state under the mid day meal programme from Mantralaya through single click.
- Black rice of Manipur, also called the Chak-Hao, Gorakhpur Terracotta and Kadalai Mittai of Kovilpatti bagged Geographical Indication tag.
- The Smart City Operations Centre (COC) of Visakhapatnam operates 24x7 in three shifts to manage COVID-19.
- Election Commission of India (ECI) has decided to conduct Biennial Election to the Maharashtra Legislative Councils (MLCs) by the members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) on 21 May 2020.
- The State Anand Sansthan has decided to hold 5-Day Alp-Viram session through online conferencing. Individuals interested in taking part in this programme can apply on the website of the sansthan <https://www.anandsansthanmp/>.

- Chief Minister Shri Jai Ram Thakur launching Madhuyastiadi Kashay (Kada), Ayurvedic medicine prepared by the State Aryurveda Department at Shimla on 1 May 2020.
- The Minister for Public Health, Family Welfare and Home Dr. Narottam Mishra launched Corona Helpline and Corona E-Paramarsh Seva to tackle Corona pandemic at Mantralaya
- Post-Lockdown the state government had been preparing the database of close to one million migrant labourers of Jharkhand who were stuck in different parts of the country.
- Karnataka state Government has launched an online application system for workers desiring to leave or return to Karnataka.
- Madhya Pradesh has become the first state in the country to provide mid-day meal ration.
- Tripura government has announced the launch of an agro-based entrepreneurship facilitation desk in a bid to boost primary sectors, such as agriculture, after nationwide lockdown restrictions.
- Uttar Pradesh state government has made it compulsory to download the Arogya Setu app for those living in hotspot areas of the state.
- Kashmiri saffron received a Geographical Indication (GI) tag.
- The Maharashtra government has announced the inclusion of state's whole population under the Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Jan Aarogya Yojana.
- The Himachal Pradesh government will launch Mukhya Mantri Shahari Rojgar Guarantee Yojna under which 120 days' assured employment will be provided to people living in urban areas.
- A newly developed android based mobile app named "CHDCOVID" has been launched by the Government of Chandigarh, to provide all information related to COVID-19 in Chandigarh.
- the government of Bihar led by Chief Minister (CM) Nitish Kumar presented Rs 2,11,761 crore state budget for 2020-21 with a special emphasis on education, health and infrastructure.
- Assam government has restricted the movement of individuals between 6 PM and 6 AM throughout the state across all zones from .
- The Delhi state government imposed a 'Special Corona Fee' on liquor.
- The West Bengal government launched an app for people from other states who are stranded in the state due to the lockdown and want to return to their native place,.
- Delhi Government has increased Value-Added Tax on Auto fuels.
- Uttar Pradesh state government unveiled the Ayush Kavach app that will provide health-related tips and information about ayurvedic medicines amid the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Himachal Pradesh State Government is to launch the "Nigah" Scheme to properly sensitize and educate family members of people coming from other states so that social distancing is effectively maintained.
- Rajasthan State Health Minister Raghu Sharma formally launched COVID-19 treatment with plasma therapy at the city's SMS Medical College through video conferencing on 6 May.
- Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa announced Rs.1,610 crore package for farmers, construction workers, weavers, auto and taxi drivers on 6 May.
- The Jharkhand Government has launched three mega employment schemes for its people, especially the migrant labourers who are returning home from various states, in order to boost the rural economy of the state.
- The West Bengal Government has decided to notify Calcutta Medical College and Hospital as full-fledged COVID hospital in the State.
- In Andhra Pradesh, Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has launched a mobile app CMAPP (Comprehensive Monitoring of Agriculture, Price, and Procurement) to monitor the agriculture needs of farmers.
- The Andaman & Nicobar Administration has provided three months quota of rice and pulses to the poor and needy persons under PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana amid COVID-19 out break.
- In Tripura, Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb has launched an online portal scholarships.gov.in under 'Mukhyamantri Yuba Yogayog Yojana' at the state secretariat on Wednesday.
- In Mizoram, all private schools have decided to reduce the school fees from the students by 50% during the lockdown period.
- A new initiative for supplying hygienic masks, using machines similar to the popular ATMs has been started in the Thuthukudi Municipal Corporation of Tamilnadu.
- Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma inaugurated the biggest 250 bedded Corona Care Centre in the State at Indian Institute of Management, Umsawli, Shillong

- Uttar Pradesh State government passed an ordinance 'Uttar Pradesh Temporary Exemption from Certain Labour Laws Ordinance, 2020' to suspend labour laws for the next three years.
- Smart City Nashik takes several measures and initiatives to fight COVID-19.
- Madhya Pradesh has become the 1st state in the country to provide mid-day meal ration. Distribution of the mid- day Meal ration with the help of Anganwadi workers, Panchayat representatives and local teachers was taken in sending ration to the students at their home after the school closing in April.
- In Tamil Nadu, the retirement age of the government staff, teachers and those in public sector units has been raised by a year to 59.
- Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has announced relief of Rs 5 lakh to the families of each person who died in the train tragedy in Aurangabad.
- Sanjeevani, a unique vehicle developed at the local level in the initiative of Rajnagar administration of Chhatarpur district, Madhya Pradesh to help the healthcare workers.
- The Jharkhand government has banned 11 brands of Pan Masala for one year in the state.
- Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb has launched an online Scholarship portal on 06 May 2020.
- The Uttar Pradesh government under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, has launched an app named 'Pravasi Rahat Mitra'.
- The Tamil Nadu government has constituted a high-Level Committee to assess the overall immediate and medium-term impact of COVID-19 on the state's economy.
- Uttar Pradesh has become the first state in India to install ventilator-beds in all the government-run district hospitals in all 75 districts of the state.
- In Madhya Pradesh, the state government is preparing to create huge self-employment opportunities in the state through small and cottage industries.
- The Sikkim Legislative Assembly with a 32-member state legislature passed the budget of Rs 9,100 crores for the fiscal 2020-21 comprising Rs. 7343.60 as revenue expenditure, and Rs. 1756.40 as capital expenditure in the 2nd Session of 10th Assembly (Budget Session 2020-21) on March 24.
- In Tamil Nadu, the popular and efficient Anganwadi scheme under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) of the Government of India has devised novel solutions to overcome challenges posed by the COVID-19 lockdown.
- Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, who also holds the charge of the finance portfolio, presented a state budget of Rs. 21049.87 crore for the fiscal 2020-21.
- The Bengaluru city corporation, Karnataka has launched Pranavayu programme to create awareness on the need to self examine the respiratory health for the city people.
- Madhya Pradesh state government launched FIR Aapke Dwar Yojana 11 May in Bhopal.
- Tamil Nadu becomes the first state in India to announce a large-scale state-wide partnership with the learning platform.
- Arunachal Pradesh Health Minister Alo Libang today inaugurated the second COVID-19 testing lab at Intermediate Reference Laboratory at Naharlagun, near Itanagar.
- In a major relief to patients facing difficulties in routine medical checkups, the OPD services in Government Medical College and its associated hospitals in Jammu resumed today after 48 days.
- Jammu and Kashmir announced that it will provide a tap water connection to all rural households by December 2022 under the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM).
- The Gujarat government has mandated the digital payment for all home delivery services in Ahmedabad.
- The Sohrai Khovar painting of Jharkhand and Telia Ruma of Telangana have received the Geographical Indication (GI) tag from the Geographical Indications Registry
- Postal department in Uttar Pradesh has made a record of reaching maximum number of persons in a single day to provide cash at their doorstep.
- Haryana is geared to provide tap water connection to all rural households by December, 2022. The State provided 1.05 lakh tap connections during 2019-20 under the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM).
- Jammu & Kashmir Government has launched a web portal <http://jkmonitoring.nic.in/> to facilitate its residents stranded in other parts of the country.
- Gujarat-based Macpower unveiled indigenous hot air seam sealing machines for PPE kits.
- Chief Minister Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan transferred a sum of Rs. 44 crore 60 lakh 77 thousand to the bank accounts of 2 lakh 26 thousand 362 women belonging to Sahria, Baiga and Bharia primitive tribes from Mantralay
- Delhi Police launched Thermal Corona Combat Gear (TCCH) through which police personnel will be able to detect the temperature of a large number of people from a distance of 10-15 metres.
- Bhagalpur Smart City Limited (BSCL) has taken several measures to combat COVID-19 using various initiatives.

- Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat has launched a portal named 'HOPE' – Helping Out People Everywhere, aimed at creating employment opportunities for the trained youths of the state.
- In the wake of COVID-19 pandemic the Himachal Pradesh state government has provided special relief to more than 5 lakh social security pension beneficiaries by making advance payment of Rs 217.86 crore.
- Uttar Pradesh government has decided to give 50 percent subsidy on PPE kits to those nursing homes and registered hospitals who will provide treatment to the patients on the rates decided under Ayushman Bharat scheme.
- Gujarat state government is to implement a sensor-based service delivery monitoring system in the rural drinking water sector under the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM).
- The West Bengal government under Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has launched "Matir Smristi" to utilise 50,000 acres of barren land in six districts of the states, for income-generating activities like horticulture and pisciculture.
- Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa announced a financial package of 500 crore rupees to benefit 10 lakh maize growers in state.
- Kerala launched Mission Grand Care to take care of their elderly people, as the COVID-19 preventive measures enters next stage in the state
- Himachal CM inaugurated the e-udyan portal and IHSMS application developed under World Bank funded Himachal Pradesh Horticulture Development Project for providing services of Department of Horticulture.
- In Madhya Pradesh, in a first of its kind of initiative, Charan Paduka campaign has been started for the migrant labourers passing through the state.
- The Andhra Pradesh (AP) state government has formed a 5-member high-powered committee led by Neerabh Kumar Prasad (special chief secretary of environment, forests, science and technology) to probe into the causes behind the leakage of styrene gas from the LG Polymers India Ltd located at RR Venkatapuram in Visakhapatnam.
- Karnataka's Centre of Excellence in Cyber Security (CS-CoE) launched the first cyber security accelerator for startups in India, Hack is an Accelerator for Cyber Security in Karnataka (H.A.C.K) inaugurated on 16th May 2020 by Additional Chief Secretary in Charge of Department of IT, BT and S&T, EV Ramana Reddy.
- Uttar Pradesh Government will ensure safe, secure and dignified return of those migrant workers who are stranded at the border areas of state.
- In Himachal Pradesh, Disaster Management Cell, Kullu has been at the forefront of fulfilling its obligation to the emergency services with full responsibility during the global COVID-19 pandemic.
- Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee has started "Langar on wheels" (community kitchen) at around 10 location on Delhi Borders and NCR areas like Noida, Ghaziabad, Seelam puri, Sahadra areas etc
- In Bihar, public mode of transport including auto rickshaw, e- rickshaw and private cabs have resumed operation on an odd - even basis with immediate effect.
- Jharkhand government has come out with three-way retail sale of liquor in the state from today with an additional Special Excise Duty fee of 10 percent to be levied over MRP to cope up with the revenue deficits due to Corona.
- The Union Territory, Ladakh has become corona virus free as the region have not reported any fresh case since 3rd May 2020.
- In Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), the Union territory (UT) administration has initiated a slew of measures under "Samagra Shiksha programme" to facilitate students with complete access to education through technological interventions and other viable means in wake of COVID-19 lockdown.
- Finance Minister Suresh Kumar Khanna presented the Uttar Pradesh(UP) government's largest ever budget of Rs 5,12,860.72 crores for FY 2020-21 in the presence of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in the state assembly.
- In order to spread awareness about psychological impact of lockdown and measures to be adopted to overcome them, Department of Information and Public Relations, J&K has started an initiative 'SUKOON' - COVID-19 Beat the Stress".
- "Didi Vehicle Service" has been launched by the women of Rural Livelihood Mission in the tribal-dominated Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh.
- "Mee Annapurna" initiative has been launched in Maharashtra by an IRDA licensed insurance intermediary "Integrated Risk Insurance".
- the Ranchi district launched the "Tatpar" program to help the migrant workers to get back to their native places on bus instead of tiresome travel by foot.
- The administration in the Union Territory (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir issued a new set of rules named "Jammu and Kashmir Grant of Domicile Certificate Rules 2020" which defines the rules for issuing domicile certificates in the UT.
- Uttar Pradesh government has launched the 'Uttar Pradesh Startup Fund' to encourage the youth of the state for entrepreneurship.

- Madhya Pradesh State Government is to launch Everybody will get employment scheme.
- The Chhattisgarh government has launched the Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyay Yojana, a scheme to ensure “minimum income availability” to farmers of the state through direct bank transfer.
- Gujarat State Government announced some more relaxations in order to normalize the public life during the lockdown 4.
- On the first day of resumption of intra-district bus service in Maharashtra yesterday, only 11,151 passengers traveled by the buses of the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC).
- Sikkim government has decided to reopen schools for classes IX to XIIth and colleges from 15th June.
- Rajasthan State Road Transport Corporation has started operation of buses today on 55 important routes of state, providing great relief to the people.
- The 1345th Birth Anniversary of Mannar Perumpidigu Mutharaiyar is being celebrated on behalf of the Tamil nadu government in Trichy
- Arunachal Pradesh government is in the process of reviving the tourism industry in the state which is one of the most affected sectors due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.
- In Andhra Pradesh, Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has announced Rs 1,110 crore ReSTART package for MSMEs to strengthen the sector during this emergency situation as well as create employment.
- The state government of Chhattisgarh will observe May 25, 2020 as ‘Jhiram Shraddhanjali Diwas’ or ‘Jhiram Tribute Diwas’.
- The Mizoram State Government has recently provided industrial status to Sports.
- The Tamil Nadu government has started preliminary works for implementing the unique Solar Fence Farmland Protection Programme, under the Central Agriculture Improvement Scheme
- The State Government of Uttar Pradesh has decided to set up a Migration Commission for the welfare of migrant labourers returning to UP from different corners of the country.
- In Maharashtra, Jagjivan Ram Hospital (JRH) at Mumbai Central, a 361-bedded tertiary care hospital of the Western Railways has been converted into 172-bed COVID Hospital
- In Uttar Pradesh, the government is giving relaxation in some industrial and economic activities.
- Delhi government has directed private hospitals and nursing homes with a capacity of 50 beds or more to reserve 20 per cent of their total bed strength for COVID-19 patients.
- In West Bengal Inter-District Government bus services have begun
- In Madhya Pradesh, to provide assured employment to the labourers, who have returned from other states, a survey is being conducted in the state.
- In the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, the Annual Kheer Bhawani Mela on 30th May this year in Tulmulla village of Ganderbal district has been cancelled by the Dharmarth Trust of Jammu and Kashmir because of outbreak of Coronavirus pandemic.
- Rehabilitation package for the “Cyclone Amphan” hit West Bengal & Odisha was announced by the Government of India, after Prime Minister Narendra Modi undertakes aerial survey of the affected states.
- Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat presented the surplus annual budget of Rs 53,526.97 crore for FY20-21

