

# OFFICERS' Pulse

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## Coverage.

The Hindu

PIB

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## At a Glance & In Depth.

Polity and Social Issues

Economy

International Relations

Environment

Science and Tech

Culture

**CURRENT AFFAIRS**  
**WEEKLY**

THE PULSE OF UPSC AT  
YOUR FINGER TIPS.



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# News @ a glance

## POLITY

### 1) Labour Laws in India

#### What are Indian labour laws?

- In India there is no set definition of “labour laws” in the country. There are over 200 state laws and close to 50 central laws. Broadly speaking, they can be divided into four categories:
  - a. Conditions of Work
  - b. Wages and Remuneration
  - c. Social Security
  - d. Employment Security and Industrial Relations



#### CHART 1: TYPES OF LABOUR LAWS

##### CONDITIONS OF WORK

- **Factories Act, 1948**
- **The Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act, 1970**
- **Shops and Commercial Establishments Act**

##### WAGES & REMUNERATION

- **The Minimum Wages Act, 1948**
- **Payment of Wages Act, 1936**

##### SOCIAL SECURITY

- **Employees' Provident Fund Act, 1952**
- **Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923**
- **Employees State Insurance Act, 1948**

##### EMPLOYMENT SECURITY & INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

- **The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947**
- **Industrial Establishments (Standing Orders) Act, 1946**

#### Few important Acts include:

- **Factories Act** are to ensure safety measures on factory premises, and promote health and welfare of workers.
  - The **Shops and Commercial Establishments Act**, on the other hand, aims to regulate hours of work, payment, overtime, weekly day off with pay, other holidays with pay, annual leave, employment of children and young persons, and employment of women.
  - The **Minimum Wages Act 1948** is an Act of Parliament concerning Indian labour law that sets the minimum wages that must be paid to skilled and unskilled labours.
  - The **Industrial Disputes Act, 1947** relates to terms of service such as layoff, retrenchment, and closure of industrial enterprises and strikes and lockouts.
  - Under the Constitution of India, **Labour is a subject in the Concurrent List** where both the Central & State Governments are competent to enact legislation subject to certain matters being reserved for the Centre.
- #### Why in News?
- Recently, several state governments made changes in the labour laws dealing with the maximum working hours and other provisions.
  - These changes have been made through notifications issued by the State governments and will be applicable for the next three months.
- #### News in Detail:
- Uttarakhand has increased the daily limit to 11 hours with overtime limited to 18 hours a week. Haryana has allowed work for 12 hours a day, and up to 60 hours a week, with overtime pay. Madhya Pradesh has made similar changes.
  - M.P. has also suspended most provisions of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1946 (except those related to retrenchment and

layoffs) for 1,000 days for State undertakings.

- In addition, M.P. issued an ordinance to amend two laws.
- The M.P. Industrial Employment Standing Orders Act will apply to establishments with more than 100 workmen (up from the existing threshold of 50), in line with the Central Act.
- The ordinance also enables the government to exempt establishments from the provision of another Act that provided for a labour welfare fund.
- The Uttar Pradesh government has approved an ordinance that exempts establishments from all labour laws for three years with some exceptions (safety and security of workers, provisions related to employing women and children, payment of wages on time and above prescribed minimum wages, and no bonded labour).

#### What is the concern?

- As these changes will override provisions of some Central laws, it will require the assent of the President or, in effect, the assent of the Central government.
- The main concern is whether there was sufficient consultation before all these changes were made.

#### Constitutional provisions :

- As per the Constitution, the legislature has the authority to make laws.
- Such laws could delegate powers to the government which are in the nature of detailing some requirements.
- For example, the Factories Act allows State governments to exempt factories from the provisions of the Act **during public emergencies for a maximum period of three months.**

▪ A public emergency is defined as a grave emergency whereby the security of India or any part is threatened by war, external aggression or internal disturbance.

- The Constitution **also permits Central and State governments to make laws through the issuance of an ordinance when the legislature is not in session.**
- Such a law needs to be ratified by the legislature within six weeks of the beginning of the next session.

## 2) Tour of Duty (ToD)

### About:

- 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.**
- It is planning it initially for a limited number of vacancies and then expanded later.
- 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.

### Benefits to the Youth

- Individuals who opted for ToD would get a much higher salary than their peers on an average who started a career in the corporate sector and would also have an edge after leaving the Service and going to the corporate sector.
- It has been seen that corporate favour individuals who have been trained by the military at 26 or 27 years of age.

### Benefits to the Army

- The overall purpose of the ToD concept is 'internship/temporary experience'
- So there will be no requirement of attractive severance packages, resettlement courses, professional encashment training leave, ex-Servicemen status, ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS) for the ToD officers and other ranks.
- Analysing the cost of training incurred on each personnel compared to the limited employment of the manpower for three years, the proposal states that the cumulative approximate cost of pre-commission training, pay, allowances, gratuity, proposed severance packages, leave encasement and other costs paves to the reduction in Financial Burden.
- The reduced financial burden will shift the focus towards modernisation of the army in terms of training, arms and equipment.

### Why in News?

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

to result in significant reduction in pay and pensions and free up funds for the Army's modernisation.

### 3) One Nation One Ration Card

#### What is a ration card?

- A ration card is issued to the head of the family, depending on the number of members in a family and the financial status of the applicant.
- It is used by households to get essential food grains at subsidised prices from designated ration shops (also called fair price shops) under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).
- The responsibility of identifying eligible families and issuing ration cards to them rests with the state/UT government.

#### Background:

- PDS was started in India in 1947 to distribute food items to the poor at subsidised rates. Later in 2013, it was revamped and strengthened with the enactment of the **National Food Security Act, (NFSA) 2013**.
- Under NFSA, the government is obliged to give subsidised food grains every month to the beneficiaries identified by each state government on the basis of the **economic status of households**.
- Implemented in **all states and Union Territories**, PDS is currently covering about 81.35 crore persons identified by each state government via more than 5 Lakh ration shops across the country, as per the estimates of the Department of Food and Public Distribution.

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

- 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.
- If a beneficiary were to shift to another state, he/she would need to apply for a new ration card in the second state.
- However, the **migration** of the poor from rural areas to urban locations is more commonplace.
- Thus, geographical location being one of the hindrances that migrant workers face in order to claim their quota of grains and subsequently get denied their right to food.

- To address the state of food security in the country and combat the problem of hunger, the government has started the 'One Nation, One Ration Card' facility.

#### Benefits of One Nation, One Ration Card

- The ONORC scheme attempts to address this gap in TPDS delivery.
- The scheme has been launched keeping in mind the **internal migration of our country**, since people keep moving to different states in search of better job opportunities and higher standards of living.
- As per Census 2011, 4.1 crore people were inter-state migrants and 1.4 crore people migrated (inter and intra-state) for employment.
- The new system, based on a technological solution, will identify a beneficiary through biometric authentication on electronic Point of Sale (ePoS) devices installed at the FPSs, and enable that person to purchase the quantity of foodgrains to which she is entitled under the NFSA.

#### Challenges Ahead:

- Mandating Aadhar linking under the system can be problematic. This is because everyone may not have Aadhaar cards and also sometimes, the fingerprints of people engaged in construction labour and domestic work may change or fade and may not match with the ones entered in Aadhar. In case of a mismatch of the bio-metrics, there can be deny foodgrains to the beneficiaries.
- An FPS receives the monthly quota of products strictly in accordance with the number of people assigned to it. The ONORC, when fully operational, would disrupt this practice, as some FPSs may have to cater to more numbers of cards even as others cater to less, owing to migration of people.
- All fair price shops would need ePoS devices for seamless biometric authentication. Additionally, getting the current location of the migrant worker to avoid duplication is another challenge.
- For the scheme to be seamless, the government will have to allocate foodgrain quota to each state on a dynamic basis based on the offtake volumes.

- The government will have to make fresh estimates for foodgrain required to meet the demand due to seasonal migration and fluctuation in demand based on movement of labourers.

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

- The Finance Minister announced the national rollout of a 'One Nation, One Ration Card' system in all states and

Union Territories by March 2021. As of now, about 20 states have come on board to implement the inter-state ration card portability.

- This system will enable migrant workers and their family members to access PDS benefits from any Fair Price Shop in the country.

# ENVIRONMENT

## 1) Sal Forest tortoise

### About:

- The sal forest tortoise is widely distributed over eastern and northern India and Southeast Asia.
- Also known as the elongated tortoise, the sal forest tortoise, is a **critically endangered species** as per IUCN status.
- It is heavily hunted for food, decorative masks, and international wildlife trade.

### Why in the news?

- A recent study by ecologists in the Wildlife Institute of India, over 90% of the potential distribution of the sal forest tortoise species falls outside the current protected area's network.
- This makes them vulnerable to the forest fires.
- The study points out that protected areas are designated in a largely mammal-centric way like tiger-centric.
- Many reptiles and amphibians which are equally threatened live outside protected areas where exploitation risk is more.



## 2) Environment related organisations

### National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)



### About:

- The National Tiger Conservation Authority is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change constituted under enabling provisions of the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**, as amended in 2006, for strengthening tiger conservation, as per powers and functions assigned to it under the said Act.
- It is an overall authority which looks upon 'Project Tiger' and tiger conservation in India.
- '**Project Tiger**' (started in 1973) is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** of the Environment, Forests and Climate Change, providing funding support to tiger range States, for **in-situ conservation** of tigers in designated tiger reserves, and has put the endangered tiger on an assured path of recovery by saving it from extinction, as revealed by the recent findings of the All India tiger estimation using the refined methodology.

### Objectives of NTCA

- Providing statutory authority to Project Tiger so that compliance of its directives become legal.
- Fostering accountability of Center-State in management of Tiger Reserves, by providing a basis for MoU with States within our federal structure.
- Providing for an oversight by Parliament.
- Addressing livelihood interests of local people in areas surrounding Tiger Reserves

### Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB)



### About

- Wildlife Crime Control Bureau is a **statutory** multi-disciplinary body established by the Government of India



under the Ministry of Environment and Forests, to combat organized wildlife crime in the country.

- The Bureau has its headquarter in New Delhi and five regional offices at Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai and Jabalpur.
- Under Section 38 (Z) of the **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972**, it is mandated to
  1. Collect and collate intelligence related to organized wildlife crime activities and to disseminate the same to State and other enforcement agencies for immediate action so as to apprehend the criminals;
  2. To establish a centralized wildlife crime data bank;
  3. Coordinate actions by various agencies in connection with the enforcement of the provisions of the Act;
  4. Assist foreign authorities and international organization concerned to facilitate coordination and universal action for wildlife crime control;
  5. Capacity building of the wildlife crime enforcement agencies for scientific and professional investigation into wildlife crimes and assist State Governments to ensure success in prosecutions related to wildlife crimes;
  6. Advise the Government of India on issues relating to wildlife crimes having national and international ramifications, relevant policy and laws.
  7. Assist and advise the Customs authorities in inspection of the consignments of flora & fauna as per the provisions of Wild Life Protection Act, CITES and EXIM Policy governing such an item.

#### Central Zoo Authority (CZA)



#### About

- CZA is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment and Forests, constituted in 1992. The authority

contains a Chairman, ten members and a Member secretary.

- It derives its power from Wildlife protection act (1972), and tries to fulfil its obligations of conserving the fauna under National Zoo Policy 1998.

#### Functions:

- specify the minimum standards for housing, upkeep and veterinary care of the animals kept in zoos;
- evaluate and assess the functioning of the zoos with respect to the prescribed standards or norms;
- To recognize or derecognize zoos;
- To identify endangered species of wild animals for purposes of captive breeding and assigning responsibility in this regard to a zoo;
- To coordinate the acquisition, exchange and loaning of animals for breeding purpose;
- To ensure maintenance of studbooks of endangered species of wild animals bred in captivity;
- To identify priorities and themes with regard to display of captive animals in zoos;
- To coordinate training of zoo personnel in India and outside India;
- To coordinate research in captive breeding and educational programmes for the purposes of zoos;
- To provide technical and other assistance to zoos for their proper management and development on scientific lines;
- To perform such other functions as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of this Act with regard to zoos.

#### Forest Survey of India



- Forest Survey of India (FSI), is a premier national organization under the union Ministry of Environment and Forests,

established on June 1,1981, responsible for assessment and monitoring of the forest resources of the country regularly.

- In addition, it is also engaged in providing the services of training, research and extension.
- The Forest Survey of India succeeded the "Pre Investment Survey of Forest Resources" (PISFR), a project initiated in 1965 by the Government of India with the sponsorship of FAO and UNDP.
- **India State of Forest Report (ISFR)** is a biennial publication of Forest Survey of India (FSI) providing assessment of latest forest cover in the country and monitoring changes in these.

#### Why in the news?

- The Ministry of Environment and Forests is moving an reorganisation plan to merge its 10 regional offices and 19 centres of its statutory bodies of FSI, NTCA, WCCB and CZA.
- This reorganisation is being done to ensure coordination and efficiency.

### 3) The Forest Advisory Committee

#### About:

- The Forest Advisory Committee, the apex body of the Environment Ministry tasked with deciding whether forest land can be diverted for industrial projects or any other non-forest use.
- Its role is Advisory.
- It is constituted under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 following an amendment in 2003.
- The Forest Advisory Committee shall be composed of the following members, namely :-
  1. the Director General of Forests, Ministry of Environment and Forests – **Chairperson.**
  2. The Additional Director General of Forests, Ministry of Environment and Forests.
  3. the Additional Commissioner (Soil Conservation), Ministry of Agriculture.
  4. three non-official members who shall be experts one each in Mining, Civil Engineering and Development Economics.

5. the Inspector General of Forests (Forest Conservation), Ministry of Environment and Forests – **Member Secretary.**

#### Why in the news?

- The forest Advisory Committee has postponed its decision on the Dibang valley hydropower project.

#### News in detail:



- The 3,097 mw Etalin Hydropower project, in Arunachal Pradesh's Dibang Valley, has been delayed for over six years.
- This is because it **required diverting 1,165 hectares of forest** in a region of rich biodiversity.
- If allowed, 2,78,038 trees of subtropical evergreen broad-leaved and subtropical rainforest will be felled for the project which is a huge ecological damage for the valley and its biodiversity.
- The proposed project location is at the junction of the Paleo-arctic, Indo-Chinese, and Indo-Malayan bio-geographic regions having luxuriant forests and a plethora of flora and fauna.
- A Wildlife Institute of India (WII) study has documented 413 plant species, 159 butterflies species, 113 spider species, 14 amphibian species, 31 reptile species, 230 bird species and 21 mammalian species within the project area. The WII has recommended a plan to prevent loss of animals and birds there, and the

development of butterfly and reptile parks, nest boxes, habitat restoration etc.

- No tiger presence has been documented at the project site through camera trapping. But Dibang Wildlife Sanctuary 12 km away has recorded tiger presence in the vicinity.
- It has also seen massive protests among the people of Arunachal Pradesh.



# ECONOMY

## 1) e-NAM

### About e-NAM

- The National Agricultural Market (e-NAM) is a pan-India electronic trading portal which targets to connect almost 7,000 existing mandis run by Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMC) to create a **unified national market for agricultural commodities**.
- e-NAM is completely funded by the Central Government and implemented by **Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC)**.

### Benefits of the portal

- e-NAM platform promotes better marketing opportunities for the farmers to sell their produce through an online competitive and transparent **price**

### discovery system and online payment facility.

- It also promotes prices commensurate with quality of produce.
- The e-NAM portal provides **single window services** for all APMC related information and services. This includes commodity arrivals, quality & prices, buy & sell offers & e-payment settlement directly into farmers' account, among other services.
- Farmers can access the information on e-NAM easily through their **mobile phones from anywhere**. This online trading platform aims at reducing transaction costs, bridging information asymmetry and helps in expanding the market access for farmers.

### Potential of e-NAM

The screenshot shows the e-NAM website interface. At the top, there is a header with the Government of India logo, the Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) details, and the National Agriculture Market logo. Below the header is a navigation bar with links for Home, Stakeholders, Aspirational Districts, eLearning Videos, Resources, eNam Mandis, Dashboard, Events Gallery, eNAM-Logistics, Kisan Rath, and Contact Us. The main content area is divided into three sections: a sidebar on the left with links for Commodity, State Unified License, Mobile App, Price Details, Incentives, and Success Stories; a central 'eNAM Process Flow' diagram illustrating the steps from Farmer Registration to Gate Exit; and a 'What's New' section on the right featuring a recent workshop announcement.

- e-NAM was launched in 2016 but progress was slow, as most farmers were not part of the cooperatives that would help aggregate the bulk quantity of produce needed to interest online buyers and most mandis did not possess the infrastructure to make the most of the platform.
- By January 2019, when the **first inter-State trade** took place, there were only 585 mandis connected to the platform.
- As the nation went into lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic and hundreds of mandis shut their physical gates, the central government recognised the potential of e-NAM in overcoming some of the hurdles of the lockdown, and

introduced some important new features in April:

- a trading module allowing Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) to **trade produce directly from their collection centres** without bringing it to mandis,
- a warehouse-based trading module and a logistics module offering users **trackable transport facilities** through aggregators with access to 11 lakh trucks.

#### Why in News?

- According to the latest data, the number of mandis connected with the e-NAM portal has increased 65% since the lockdown.
- Till now, 962 mandis have been connected with the platform throughout the country, giving farmers and traders another option at a time when transport disruptions and social distancing requirements have made physical mandi trade more difficult.

## 2) Index of Industrial Production

### About IIP

- Index of Industrial Production (IIP) details out the growth of various sectors in an economy such as mineral mining, electricity and manufacturing.
- It is compiled and published every month by the **Central Statistics Office (CSO)** of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- The current base year is **2011-2012**.
- The Eight Core Industries (Coal, Crude Oil, Natural Gas, Refinery Products, Fertilizers, Steel, Cement and Electricity) comprise 40.27 per cent of the weight of items included in the IIP.

#### Why in News?

- According to the latest Index of Industrial Production data, India's factory output contracted 16.7%, reflecting the drastic impact of the countrywide lockdown that began on March 25.

## 3) Balance of Payments

### Components of BoP

- The Balance of Payments (BoP) records all economic transactions between residents of a country and the rest of the world. The BoP account mainly consists of the **current account** and the **capital account**.

- The current account includes the transaction of goods (Merchandise Transactions or Visible Trade) and invisibles (which comprise import and export of services, grants, gifts, remittances).
- The capital account mainly comprises foreign investment, loans and banking capital.

#### Why in News?

- With the global trade coming to a near halt due to the COVID-19 pandemic, India's merchandise exports dipped over 60% in April to \$10.36 billion from \$26.07 billion in April 2019.
- Merchandise imports in April 2020 stood at USD 17.12 billion, 58.65% lower than imports of USD 41.40 billion in April 2019.

#### Trade surplus

- Taking merchandise and services together, overall trade surplus for April 2020 is estimated at \$0.16 billion as compared to the deficit of \$8.67 billion in April 2019.
- *A country that imports more goods and services than it exports in terms of value has a trade deficit while a country that exports more goods and services than it imports has a trade surplus.*

## 4) Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan

### What's in the news?

- Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a Rs 20-lakh crore economic relief package titled Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (Self Reliant India Campaign) which is almost equal to 10 percent of India's GDP.

#### Five pillars of a self-reliant India

- **Economy**, which brings in quantum jump and not incremental change;
- **Infrastructure**, which should become the identity of India;
- **System**, based on 21st century technology driven arrangements;
- **Demography**, which is our source of energy for a self-reliant India; and
- **Demand**, whereby the strength of our demand and supply chain should be utilized to full capacity

#### Highlights of the package



#### MSMEs sector

- **Collateral-free loans**
- The government has proposed to offer collateral-free loans to MSMEs which will be fully guaranteed by the Centre. A total of Rs 3-lakh crore has been allocated for this.
- This will act as initial seed money for these small enterprises hit by zero cash flow due to the national lockdown.
- Banks have been unwilling to lend to this category of borrowers as they fear that the money will not be repaid. Banks are now expected to be more comfortable in assisting this category of borrowers because the risk is zero (since the loans are guaranteed by the central government).
- **Formalisation of Micro Food Enterprises**
- The government also allocated Rs 10,000 crore scheme for the formalisation of

Micro Food Enterprises (MFE). This will help nearly 2 lakh MFEs to achieve technical up-gradation to attain FSSAI food standards, build brands and marketing.

- Such units would promote vocal for local with global outreach with a cluster-based approach. Produces such as Makhana in Bihar, Mango in UP, Kesar in J&K, Bamboo shoots in North-East, Chilli in Andhra Pradesh, Tapioca in Tamil Nadu etc. will get support for the domestic and global market.

#### Discoms

- Power distribution companies (discoms) are in a huge liquidity crisis and unable to pay their dues to electricity generation companies. Their cash flow and revenues have been hit due to low demand from industrial consumers for power during the lockdown.
- The government, through Power Finance Corporation and Rural Electrification

Corporation (PFC-REC), will infuse liquidity of Rs 90,000 crore to discoms against their *receivables* (refers to debts owed to a company, usually from sales on credit) for which guarantees will be given by respective states.

- This emergency liquidity infusion will avert a crisis where generation and transmission companies stop supplies to discoms that are in default.

#### EPF Contribution

- In March, when the first relief package called the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana was announced, the government offered to pay the 24% provident fund contribution (employer+employee) for those earning up to Rs 15,000 a month as salary and working in units that employ less than 100 workers for three months.
- This has now been extended for another three months up to August.
- The statutory PF contribution for those employed in the private sector (and not in the category of establishments above) has been reduced to 10% (from 12% now) for the next three months in order to increase liquidity in their hands.

#### Farm sector

- A **Rs 1-lakh crore agriculture infrastructure fund** run by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) to help create affordable and financially viable post-harvest management infrastructure at the farm gate and aggregation points has been announced.
- It would bring better infrastructure and logistics support to fish workers, dairy and other livestock farmers, beekeepers and vegetable and medicinal plant growers.
- NABARD will extend an additional refinance support of Rs 30,000 crore for crop loan requirement of rural cooperative banks and regional rural banks to ease credit for small farmers.

#### Fishing industry

- Finance Minister informed allocation of Rs 20,000 crore for fishermen through **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)** for developing fishing Harbours, cold chain, markets etc.
- A special credit facility with liquidity of up to Rs 5,000 crore has been announced for

street vendors through a special scheme that will facilitate easy credit.

- In addition, the government has disallowed global companies from **participating in tenders up to Rs 200 crore**, earmarking that space exclusively for Indian companies.

#### Related information

- **About PMMSY**
- The scheme aims to address critical infrastructure gaps in the fisheries sector.
- Under the scheme the **Department of Fisheries** will establish a robust fisheries management framework.
- It will address critical gaps in the value chain, including infrastructure, modernisation, traceability, production, productivity, post-harvest management, and quality control.

### 5) Essential Commodities Act

#### About ECA

- The Essential Commodities Act (ECA) was enacted by the Central Government in 1955 to control and regulate trade and prices of commodities declared essential under the Act.
- The Act empowers the **Central and state governments** concurrently to control production, supply and distribution of certain commodities in view of rising prices and to prevent Black marketing.
- The measures that can be taken under the provisions of the Act include licensing, distribution and imposing stock limits. The governments also have the power to fix price limits, and selling the particular commodities above the limit will attract penalties.
- Some of the major commodities that are covered under the act:
  1. Petroleum and its products
  2. Food stuff, including edible oil and seeds, vanaspati, pulses, sugarcane
  3. Drugs- prices of essential drugs
  4. Fertilisers

#### Why in News?

- The central government announced that it will **deregulate the sale of six types of agricultural produce**, including cereals, edible oils, oilseeds, pulses, onions and potatoes, by amending the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.

- Stock limits on these commodities will not be imposed except in times of a national calamity or a famine, and will not be imposed at all on **food processors or value chain participants**, which/who will be allowed to store as much as allowed by their installed capacity. **Exporters** will also be exempted.

#### **Rationale for the move**

- Traders have long complained of harassment under the Act on the suspicion of hoarding, black marketing and speculation, while food processors and exporters have also pointed out that they may need to stock commodities for longer periods of time. The Act has disincentive construction of storage capacity and hindered farm exports.
- It is hoped that the amendment will bring more private investment into warehouses and post-harvest agricultural infrastructure, including processors, mills and cold chain storage.
- It could help farmers sell their produce at more competitive rates if there is no fear of government intervention to artificially suppress market prices, and is likely to give a boost to farm exports.

### **6) New classification of MSMEs**

#### **What's in the news?**

- The government has decided to change the **basic definition of MSME** and also **end the difference between the manufacturing and services sector.**

- Till now, MSMEs are categorised based only on the investment in machinery or equipment. The new classification has **raised the investment limit** and included **annual turnover** as an additional criteria.

1. Accordingly, units having investment less than Rs 1 crore and turnover less than Rs 5 crore will be called Micro units.
2. Investment between Rs 1 and Rs 10 crore and turnover of Rs 5 crore to Rs 50 crore will be categorised as Small Enterprises.
3. Units having investment between Rs 10 crore but up to Rs 20 crore and turnover between Rs 50 crore and Rs 100 crore will now be known as Medium Enterprises.

#### **Rationale for the move**

- It has been a long-standing demand from industry to hike the investment limits, as with inflation, units often cross the threshold that will bring them benefits. To prevent this, they either run their operations at a reduced level or incorporate multiple units so that turnover is distributed in a way that they remain within the threshold that will give them the benefits.
- With the revised definitions of MSMEs, they will not have to worry about growing their size and can still avail benefits.
- Analysts said that the new classification will bring a large number of MSMEs under the micro segment.



# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

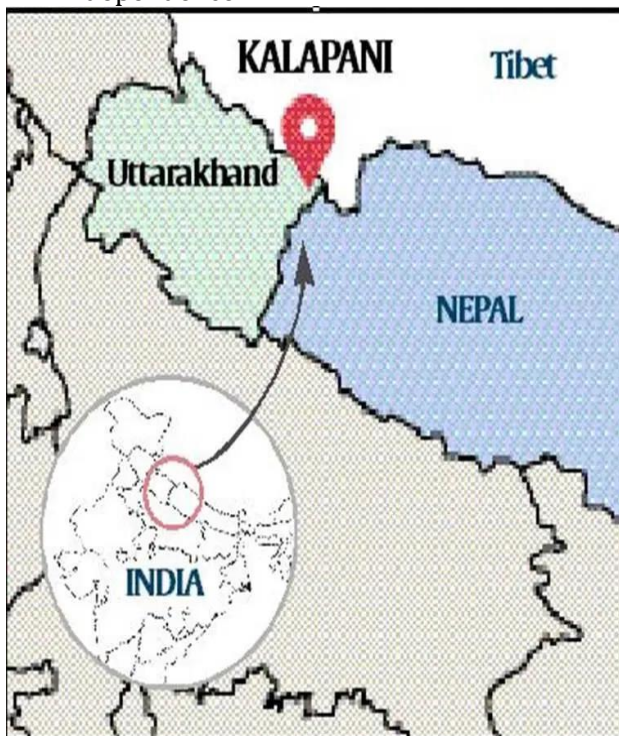
## 1) Kalapani

### About Kalapani

- The Kalapani territory is an area **disputed between India and Nepal**, but under Indian administration as part of Pithoragarh district in the Uttarakhand state.
- The valley of Kalapani, with the **Lipulekh Pass** at the top, forms the Indian route to Kailash-Mansarovar, a revered Hindu pilgrimage site in the Tibetan plateau.
- It is also the traditional trading route to Tibet for the **Bhotiyas** of Uttarakhand.

### Treaty of Sugauli

- The Treaty of Sugauli signed by **Nepal and British East India Company** in **1816** defines the **Kali River** as Nepal's western boundary with India.
- However, what is meant by "Kali River" in the upper reaches is unclear because many mountain streams come to join and form the river.
- From 1879 onwards, the survey maps show the stream that flows down from the Lipulekh Pass as the Kali River.
- This stream has served as the border between India and Nepal until India's independence.



What is the issue?

- However, the discrepancy in locating the source of the river led to boundary disputes between India and Nepal, with each country producing maps supporting their own claims.
- Kalapani has been controlled by India's **Indo-Tibetan Border Police** since the Sino-Indian War with China in 1962.

### Why in News?

- Recently, Minister of Defence Rajnath Singh inaugurated a 80-kilometre road via Lipulekh Himalayan Pass, which will serve as the shortest route between New Delhi and Kailash-Mansarovar.
- Nepal has protested against India's inauguration of the Himalayan link road as it falls in the disputed territory of Kalapani.

## 2) International Court of Justice

### About ICJ

- The International Court of Justice is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations.
- It was established in June 1945 by the **Charter of the United Nations**.
- The Court's role is to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States and to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies.
- Unlike most other organs of international organizations, the Court is **not composed of representatives** of governments. Members of the Court are **independent** judges.
- The Court is composed of 15 judges, who are elected for terms of office of nine years by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council.
- All members of the UN are **automatic** parties to the statute, but this does not automatically give the ICJ jurisdiction over disputes involving them. The ICJ gets jurisdiction **only on the basis of consent of both parties**.

### Difference between ICC and ICJ

S.	International	International Court

	<b>Criminal Court (ICC)</b>	<b>of Justice (ICJ)</b>
1	Independent judicial body distinct from the UN	Principal judicial organ of the UN
2	Handles prosecutions of individuals	Hears disputes between sovereign states
3	Established by the Rome Statute in 2002	Established in 1945 by the San Francisco Conference, which also created the UN
4	Only those who ratified the Rome Statute are parties to ICC	All members of the UN are parties to the statute of the ICJ, and non-members may also become parties
5	The judges are elected by the Assembly of States Parties, the court's governing body.	The judges are elected by the UN General Assembly and the Security Council
6	Headquarters of both the courts are situated at The Hague, Netherlands.	

#### Why in News?

- Pakistan said that it has fully complied with the ICJ's judgment in the Kulbhushan Jadhav case, days after India asserted that it might be able to persuade Pakistan through back channel to release the Indian death-row convict.

#### Why was he arrested?

- Mr. Jadhav, a retired Indian Navy officer, was sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court on charges of "espionage and terrorism" in April 2017. Weeks later, India approached the ICJ against Pakistan

for denial of consular access to Mr. Jadhav and challenging the death sentence.

- The court ruled in July last year that Pakistan must undertake an "effective review and reconsideration" of the conviction and sentence of Mr. Jadhav and also grant consular access to India without further delay.

### 3) International Labour Organisation

#### About ILO

- ILO was created in 1919, as part of the **Treaty of Versailles** that ended World War I.
- It became the **first specialized agency of the UN** in 1946.
- ILO is the **only tripartite U.N. agency** which brings together governments, employers and workers of 187 member States, to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men.
- India is a **founder member** of the ILO.
- It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.

#### Why in News?

- Recently, the Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh governments announced an exemption for establishments from the employer's obligations under several labour laws for three years.
- Calling the move retrograde and anti-worker, several trade unions said they were considering lodging a complaint with the International Labour Organisation against the changes in the labour laws.
- They allege that the changes are in violation with several ILO conventions such as the **Right to Freedom of Association [ILO Convention 87]**, **Rights to Collective Bargaining [ILO Convention 98]**, and also the internationally accepted norm of eight hour working day – espoused by core conventions of ILO.
- They also allege that the exemptions undermined the **ILO Convention 144 on tripartism** which requires ILO members to undertake effective consultations on matters pertaining to ILO activities

between representatives of the government, employers and workers.

#### 4) 'One China' policy

- **China-Taiwan Relations**
- Taiwan, officially known as the **Republic of China (ROC)**, is an island off the southern coast of China that has been governed independently from mainland China since 1949.
- China and Taiwan sharply disagree on the island's status. While Taiwan's government claims it is an independent country, the **People's Republic of China (PRC)** asserts that there is only "**one China**" and that Taiwan is an inalienable part of it.



#### Background

- The China-Taiwan Relations can be traced back to 1949 and the end of the Chinese civil war.
- The defeated Nationalists, also known as the Kuomintang, retreated to Taiwan and made it their seat of government while the victorious Communists began ruling the mainland as the People's Republic of China.
- The island has since been run as a separate entity from mainland China, though Beijing never gave up its claim over Taiwan.

#### 'One China' policy

- It is the diplomatic acknowledgement of China's position that there is **only one Chinese government**. It acknowledges Taiwan being part of China and the PRC as the sole legitimate government of China.
- Any country that wants diplomatic relations with mainland China **must**

**break official ties with Taiwan.** This has resulted in Taiwan's diplomatic isolation from the international community.

- **India** is among the 179 of the 193 member states of the UN that do not maintain any diplomatic ties with Taiwan.

#### Why in News?

- The U.S. has conveyed its support to confer observer status on Taiwan at the World Health Assembly (WHA) of the WHO.
- However, China opposed the U.S.' stance claiming Taiwan as its province with no right to its own diplomatic representation on the global stage and in international organizations, although Taiwan participated in the WHA as an observer from 2009 to 2016.
- The WHO recognised the People's Republic of China as the "one legitimate representative of China", in keeping with U.N. policy since 1971.
- **Taiwan is not a member of the WHO.**
- Taiwan's inclusion in the WHA will require a **simple majority** from member states.

#### World Health Assembly

- The World Health Assembly is the **decision-making body of WHO**. It is attended by delegations from all WHO Member States.
- 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.
- India is among the 179 of the 193 member states of the UN that do not maintain any diplomatic ties with Taiwan.

#### 5) World Health Organization

##### About WHO

- The World Health Organization is a **specialized agency** of the United Nations (UN) established in 1948 to further international cooperation for improved public health conditions.
- It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.

- Working with 194 Member States (including India), its stated goal is to ensure "**the highest attainable level of health for all people**".

#### Where does WHO get its funding from?

- It is funded by a large number of countries, philanthropic organisations, United Nations organisations etc.
- **Voluntary donations** from member states contribute 35.41%, **assessed contributions** (dues countries pay in order to be a member of WHO) are 15.66%, **philanthropic organisations** account for 9.33%, **UN organisations** contribute about 8.1%; the rest comes from myriad sources.
- Countries decide how much they pay and may also choose not to.

- The US contributes almost 15% of the WHO's total funding and almost 31% of the member states' donations. India contributes 1% of member states' donations.

#### Why in News?

- As new coronavirus clusters have surfaced around the world and nations struggle to balance reopening economies and preventing a second wave of infections, the WHO has warned that COVID-19 could be around for a long time.
- It warned that without a vaccine, it could take years for the global population to build up sufficient levels of immunity.

# SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

## 1) ELISA test

### What is an ELISA test?

- An **Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay**, also called ELISA or EIA, is a test that detects and measures antibodies in the **blood**.
- This test can be used to **determine the presence of antibodies** related to certain infectious conditions.
- Antibodies are proteins that your body produces in response to harmful substances called antigens.
- An ELISA test may be used to diagnose: HIV (AIDS), rotavirus, Zika virus, varicella-zoster virus which causes chickenpox and shingles, etc.
- ELISA is often used as a **screening tool** before more in-depth tests are ordered.
- As ELISAs require **sophisticated equipment and skilled technicians** to perform the tests, their **use is limited** to certain circumstances.

### Why in News

- The Pune-based **National Institute of Virology (NIV)** has developed an immunological assay — enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) — to detect antibodies that the body develops in response to infection by the SARS-CoV-2.

### More in the news

- The test will detect **IgG antibodies** present in blood samples.
- This is the first time India has developed an indigenous ELISA test for coronavirus.

### Better to detect past infections

- The ELISA test will be used to screen 30,000 samples from 75 hotspot districts to understand the extent of spread of the virus in the community.
- Since the ELISA test is based on detection of antibodies, it can only help in knowing if the person has been previously infected by coronavirus.
- Since it detects antibodies, even people who have remained symptom-free (asymptomatic) during the entire course of the infection will test positive.
- While the RT-PCR, which detects the RNA of the coronavirus, enables detection of

current infection, it will not be useful if the testing is carried out days after the infection clears as the virus will no longer be present.

- However, antibodies developed in response to the coronavirus infection will be present in the blood for a longer duration and hence the ELISA test can help detect past infection.
- The maximum time the antibodies will be present in the body is not known for coronavirus.

### Timelines to test

- It takes **one-three weeks for the antibodies to develop** in response to infection.
- So, if a person who has been recently infected by the virus is tested during the window period (the time taken to develop antibodies) the result will turn out to be negative.
- But a repeat test after a couple of weeks will indicate the true infection status.

## 2) Central Drugs Standard Control Organization

### About CDSCO

- The Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) is the Central Drug Authority for discharging functions assigned to the Central Government under the **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940**.

### Major functions of CDSCO

- Regulatory control over the **approval** of new drugs and clinical trials.
- Laying down the **standards** for Drugs and control over the **quality of imported Drugs**.
- Meetings of Drugs Consultative Committee (DCC) and Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB).
- Approval of certain licenses as **Central License Approving Authority** is exercised by the CDSCO headquarters.
- Coordination of the activities of State Drug Control Organisations and providing expert advice with a view to bring about uniformity in the enforcement of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.

### About DCGI

- Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) is the **head** of the CDSCO.
- DCGI is responsible for **approval of licenses of specified categories of Drugs** such as blood and blood products, I. V. Fluids, Vaccine and Sera.
- **Dr.V.G.Somani** is the current DCGI.

### Why in News?

- Phase-3 clinical trials on **Favipiravir** for COVID-19 patients, an **antiviral** tablet, have been initiated in India after being approved by DCGI.

### About Favipiravir

- Favipiravir is a **generic version of Avigan** of a Japanese drug maker.
- Favipiravir has demonstrated activity against influenza viruses and has been approved in Japan for the treatment of novel influenza virus infections.
- The molecule, if commercialised, will be marketed under the brand name **'FabiFlu'** in India.

## 3) Concerns about Arogya Setu mobile App

### About the App

- Aarogya Setu is a mobile app launched by the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology** to help citizens identify their risk of contracting Covid-19.
- Aarogya Setu is designed to keep an user informed in case s/he has crossed paths with someone who has tested positive.
- The tracking is done through a **Bluetooth** & location-generated social graph, which can show user's interaction with anyone who has tested positive.
- The user will be alerted if someone you came in close proximity with, unknowingly, tests positive.
- The app alerts are accompanied by instructions on how to self-isolate and what to do in case you develop symptoms.

### Concerns regarding the App

#### Absence of legal framework

- Critics argue that the app should have a legal sanction since it allows the government continuous access to an individual's location and demographic data.
- By making the installation of the App compulsory for certain sections of people

through only an executive order, the government did not comply with the orders of the Supreme Court vis-a-vis the need for legislation.

### Liability against data theft

- It is not clear who will be held accountable for data theft.
- The app's Terms of Service (TOS) confer blanket limited liability on the government.
- Government needs to ensure safeguards against data theft and other breaches.

### Need for open source code

- The **source code** (software programming code) of the App has not been made public so far.
- The closed source architecture of the app violates transparency principles and this government's own policies.
- An open source code allows researchers and experts to test the architecture and suggest measures to correct vulnerabilities.
- For instance, **Singapore's TraceTogether app** was made open source.

### Right to be forgotten

- Under the TOS, the government is obligated to delete certain personal data after a 30-day time period.
- However, there exists **no framework to check compliance** of the same.
- If users have no control over their data, it is a complete violation of their right to informational self-determination and the right to be forgotten.

### Potential misuse

- The ways in which the App or its data could be misused should be analysed beforehand and preventive steps need to be taken.

### Not an inclusive approach

- Considering the low penetration of smartphones and internet usage, the App should only be a supplementary for contact tracing done by on-field data collection.

### Government response

- The app fetches users' location and stores on the server in a **secure, encrypted, anonymised manner**.
- This is uploaded to the app's servers - controlled by the government- only if a user tests positive.

- The government underscored that no personal information of any user was at risk and said they were **continuously testing and upgrading their systems**.
- The government also reiterated that the data acquired from the app is used only for health-related purposes and will not be used for any surveillance purpose.

#### Data sharing protocol

- The **Aarogya Setu Data Access and Knowledge Sharing Protocol** was developed and released by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).
- The personal data of the app's user, which includes contacts and location, must be permanently deleted after 180 days "from the date on which it is collected".
- Such data can only be used strictly for the purpose of formulating or implementing appropriate health responses.
- The new protocol will allow the government to hold on to the data beyond 180 days if "a specific recommendation is made" by an empowered group.
- The new protocol also allows an individual to request for deleting demographic data, which must be abided by in 30 days.

#### Anonymisation of data

- The new norms lay emphasis on **anonymisation** of the data collected.
- The protocol says the response data that can be shared with ministries, government departments and other administrative agencies has to be in de-identified form.
- This means that, except for demographic data, the response data must be stripped of information that may make it possible to identify the individual personally; it must be assigned a randomly generated ID.

#### Role of NIC

- The **National Informatics Centre (NIC)** developed the App.
- It is responsible for collecting, processing and managing all the data collected by Aarogya Setu.
- NIC shall maintain a list of agencies with which the data is being shared.

#### About NIC

- National Informatics Centre (NIC) was established in 1976, as an attached office under MeitY.
- It has rich experience in providing ICT and eGovernance support to the Government for the last 4 decades and bridge the digital divide.
- It has emerged as a promoter of digital opportunities for sustainable development.

### 4) Chitra GeneLAMP-N: new Covid-19 diagnostic test

#### About real-time PCR

- A real-time polymerase chain reaction (real-time PCR), also known as **quantitative polymerase chain reaction (qPCR)**, is a laboratory technique of molecular biology based on the polymerase chain reaction (PCR).
- It monitors the **amplification of a targeted DNA molecule** during the PCR (i.e., in real time), not at its end, as in conventional PCR.

#### Applications

- It is commonly used for both **diagnostic and basic research**.
- Uses of the technique in industry include the quantification of **microbial load in foods** or on vegetable matter, the **detection of GMOs** (Genetically modified organisms) and the quantification and **genotyping of human viral pathogens**.
- Diagnostic qualitative PCR is applied to rapidly detect nucleic acids that are diagnostic of, for example, **infectious diseases, cancer and genetic abnormalities**.
- It is the most reliable diagnostic test available for Covid-19.

#### Why in News?

- Chitra GeneLAMP-N, a promising technology developed by a Department of Science and Technology-funded laboratory to accelerate coronavirus (COVID-19) testing in India may be delayed for several more weeks.

#### More about Chitra GeneLAMP-N

- The Chitra GeneLAMP-N is being developed by the Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology (SCTIMST), Thiruvananthapuram.

- The Chitra technology uses a method called **Loop mediated isothermal amplification (LAMP)**.
- The objective, like that of the gold-standard RT-PCR tests, is the same: to detect the presence of viral RNA.
- The LAMP method is said to be **faster** but is a **relatively newer technology**, more complicated in its design and has not been tested extensively for COVID-19 detection.
- The Chitra test could potentially **speed up the testing** of a batch of suspected COVID-19 samples by **15 times** and **cut costs by two-thirds**.

## 5) Patent rights

### What is a patent?

- It is an **exclusive right** granted for an **invention** that provides a new way of doing something, or offers a new technical solution to a problem.
- It is a **statutory right** granted for a **limited period of time** to the person by the Government for an invention, in exchange for full disclosure of his invention and excluding others from making, processing, using, selling the patented product without his consent.
- Through this the patent owner maintains a monopoly for a limited period of time on the use and development of an invention.

### Patenting in India

- The **Indian Patent Office** grants patents which are governed by the **Indian Patents Act, 1970**.
- The Act was amended in 2000s bringing a major change of complying with the **Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)**, of WTO.
- The Indian Patent Office is administered by the **Office of the Controller General of Patents, Designs & TradeMarks (CGPDTM)**, under the Department for **Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)**, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

### Criteria for patenting

- For an invention to be patentable it should meet the following criteria –
- i) **Novelty** i.e. some part of it has a new development and has not been published

in India or elsewhere before the date of filing of patent application in India.

- ii) **Inventive Step**: If someone who was skilled in that particular field would consider the invention to be an unexpected or surprising development on the invention date
- iii) **Industrial Applicability**: Invention should be useful, such that it can be used in an industry.

### Why in News?

- Low-cost personal protective equipment (PPE) for healthcare workers, designed and produced by the **Navy**, has received a patent.
- The patent was successfully filed by the Intellectual Property Facilitation Cell (IPFC) of the Defence Ministry in association with the NRDC.

### About National Research Development Corporation (NRDC)

- NRDC, established in **1953** by the Government of India, its primary objective is to promote, develop and commercialise the technologies / know-how / inventions / patents / processes emanating from various national R&D institutions / Universities.
- It is presently working under the administrative control of the **Dept. of Scientific & Industrial Research, Ministry of Science & Technology**.
- NRDC has also successfully exported technologies and services to both developed as well as the developing countries.

## 6) New ship and boats for Indian Coast Guard (ICG)

### About ICGS Sachet

- Ship ICGS Sachet is the first in a series of five **offshore patrol vessels (OPVs)** being built by the **Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL)**.
- The ship is also capable of carrying limited **pollution response equipment** to undertake oil spill pollution response at sea.

### About the Interceptor Boats

- The IBs, C-450 and C-451, are designed & built by the Larsen & Toubro Shipyard, Hazira.
- The 30-metre long boats are capable of achieving speeds in excess of 45 knots



and designed for high-speed interception, close patrol and low intensity maritime operations.

#### Why in News?

- A ship, **ICGS Sachet**, and two **Interceptor Boats (IB)**, **C-450** and **C-451**, were commissioned into the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) in Goa.
- This marks a landmark for the ICG: it now has 150 ships and boats and 62 aircraft.

## 7) Landing Craft Utility (LCU) L57

#### Why in News?

- The **Navy** formally inducted **Landing Craft Utility (LCU) L57** into service at Port Blair.

#### More about L57



- This is the seventh LCU in the series of eight MK-IV class that has been indigenously designed and built by the **Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata**.
- The LCU MK-IV ship, is **an amphibious vessel** with a designated primary role of transporting and deploying Main Battle Tanks, Armoured Vehicles, troops and equipment from ship to shore.

- The ship can be deployed for multirole activities like beaching operations, humanitarian and disaster relief operations and evacuation from distant islands.

#### What is an amphibious vessel?



- Amphibious vessels fall into two broad categories - those that roll onto the beach and those (typically much larger) that carry landing crafts or hovercrafts in their belly which in turn are disgorged onto the beach.

# HEALTH

## 1) Infant Mortality Rate, Birth Rate and Death Rate

### About:

#### Infant Mortality Rate:

- The probability that a **child born in a specific year or period will die before reaching the age of 1 year**, if subject to age-specific mortality rates of that period, expressed as a rate **per 1000 live births**.
- The infant mortality rate is, strictly speaking, not a rate (i.e. the number of deaths divided by the number of population at risk during a certain period of time) but a probability.

#### Birth rate:

- The Birth Rate is expressed as the **number of live births in a year per thousand of population**.

#### Death rate:

- The **ratio of deaths to the population of a particular area** or during a particular period of time, usually calculated as the number of deaths **per one thousand people per year**.

### Why in the news?

- As per the latest Sample Registration System (SRS) data, **India's infant mortality rate (IMR) has improved very marginally from 33 per 1,000 live births in 2017 to 32 in 2018**.
- While **India's birth rate stood at 20, the death rate was 6.2**.

### News in detail

#### Declining trend of IMR, BR and DR

- The present figure of **IMR being 32** is about one-fourth as compared to **1971 (129)**.
- The IMR at an all-India level has declined from 50 to 32 in the last decade.
- Birth rate is a crude measure of fertility of a population and a crucial determinant of population growth.
- India's **birth rate** has declined drastically over the last four decades from **36.9 in 1971 to 20.0 in 2018**.
- There has been about an 11 per cent decline in birth rate in the last decade, from 22.5 in 2009 to 20.0 in 2018.
- Mortality is one of the basic components of population change and the related data

is essential for demographic studies and public health administration.

- The **death rate** of India has witnessed a significant decline over the last four decades from **14.9 in 1971 to 6.2 in 2018**. In the last decade, death rate at an all-India level has declined from 7.3 to 6.2.

#### Rural urban difference

- In the last 10 years, IMR has witnessed a decline of about 35 per cent in rural areas and about 32 per cent in urban areas.
- The birth rate has continued to be higher in rural areas compared to urban areas in the last four decades.
- The decline in death rate has been steeper in rural areas

#### States's count

- **Madhya Pradesh** continues to have the **worst IMR** in the country at 48 while Nagaland has the best at 4.
- Among **large states, Kerala is the best performer** with an IMR in single digits at 7, is the only state which has now achieved the United Nations' sustainable development goal for IMR reduction, set at eight for the year 2020.
- The **largest decline in IMR has been registered by Mizoram** with a decline from 15 to 5.
- Undivided Jammu and Kashmir has also seen a decline and is at 22, well below the national average of 32.
- **Tamil Nadu's** IMR has dropped by one point, from **16 to 15**.

#### About Sample Registration System

- The **Sample Registration System (SRS)** is a large-scale **demographic survey** for providing reliable annual estimates of **Infant mortality rate, birth rate, death rate and other fertility & mortality indicators** at the national and subnational levels.
- Initiated on a pilot basis by the **Registrar General of India** in a few states in 1964-65, it became **fully operational during 1969-70**.
- The field investigation consists of **continuous enumeration of births and deaths in selected sample units** by resident part time enumerators, generally

anganwadi workers & teachers, and an **independent survey every six months** by SRS supervisors.

- The data obtained by these two independent functionaries are matched. The unmatched and partially matched events are re-verified in the field and thereafter an unduplicated count of births and deaths is obtained.

## 2) Indian Council of Medical Research

### About:

- The **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** in **New Delhi** is the **apex body for the formulation, coordination and promotion of biomedical research**, in India
- It is one of the oldest medical research bodies in the world.

### Background:

- In 1911, the Government of India set up the **Indian Research Fund Association (IRFA)** with the specific objective of sponsoring and coordinating medical research in the country.
- After independence, several important changes were made in the organisation and the activities of the IRFA.
- It was **redesignated in 1949** as the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) with a considerably expanded scope of functions.

### Funded by:

- The ICMR is **funded by the Government of India** through the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.

### Research priorities:

- The Council's **research priorities coincide with the National health priorities**, such as:

1. control and management of communicable diseases,
2. fertility control,
3. maternal and child health,
4. control of nutritional disorders,
5. developing alternative strategies for health care delivery,
6. containment within safety limits of environmental and occupational health problems;
7. research on major non-communicable diseases like cancer, cardiovascular diseases, blindness, diabetes and other metabolic and haematological disorders; and
8. mental health research and drug research (including traditional remedies).

- All these efforts are undertaken with a view **to reduce the total burden of disease** and to promote health and well-being of the population.

- In addition to research activities, the **ICMR encourages human resource development in biomedical research** through various fellowship programmes.

### Why in the news?

- ICMR has given approval to conduct a multicentric phase-2 trial using convalescent plasma on COVID-19 patients.
- For information about convalescent plasma therapy *refer pulse*

# ART & CULTURE

## 1) Channapatna toys

### About

- Channapatna toys are a particular form of **wooden toys** (and dolls) that are manufactured in the town of **Channapatna** in the Ramanagara district of **Karnataka**.



- This traditional craft is protected as a **geographical indication (GI)** under the World Trade Organization, administered by the Government of Karnataka.
- As a result of the popularity of these toys, Channapatna is known as **Gombegala Ooru (toy-town)** of Karnataka.
- Channapatna toys have a 200 year old history and are made out of wood — soft ivory wood, teak, rubber, cedar or neem — and lacquered with vibrant, natural dyes.

### Why in News?

- The toy makers of Channapatna have suffered loss of livelihood due to the ban on sale of non-essential goods due to Covid-19 pandemic.

## 2) GI tag for Thanjavur Netti Works, Arumbavur Wood Carvings

### What is a geographical indication?

- A geographical indication (GI) is a sign used on products that have a **specific geographical origin** and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin.

- The tag conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness, which is essentially attributable to the geographical origin of the product.

### What rights does a GI provide?

- The owner of the GI tag has exclusive rights over the product
- For example, in the jurisdictions in which the Darjeeling geographical indication is protected, producers of Darjeeling tea can exclude use of the term “Darjeeling” for tea not grown in their tea gardens.
- However, a protected geographical indication does not enable the holder to prevent someone from making the product using the same techniques as those set out in the standards for that indication.
- Individuals cannot hold GI certificates. Only an association of producers or an authority established under law can apply for GI registration.

### For what type of products can GI be used?

- Geographical indications are typically used for **agricultural products, foodstuffs, wine and spirit drinks, handicrafts, and industrial products**.
- The registration of a geographical indication is **valid for a period of 10 years** after which it can be renewed for another 10 years.

### Legal framework

- The **Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999** seeks to provide for the registration and better protection of geographical indications relating to goods in India.
- The Act would be administered by the **Controller General of Patents, Designs and TradeMarks**- who is the Registrar of Geographical Indications.
- The **Geographical Indications Registry** is located at **Chennai**.

### Why in News?

- The **Thanjavur Netti Works** and **Arumbavur wood carvings** from **Tamilnadu** have been given Geographical Indication (GI) tag by the Geographical Indications Registry.

### About Thanjavur Netti

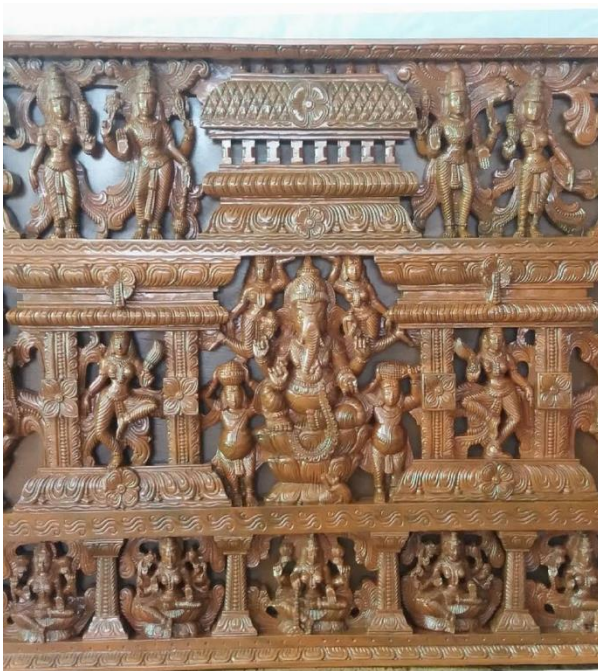
- Thanjavur Netti Works (Thanjavur Pith Work) is made from pith.
- The pith is obtained from netti, a **hydrophyte plant called as Aeschynomene aspera**.
- The artisans are skilled in this particular craft and this art is traditionally transferred from their forefathers.



- The notable works from Thanjavur Netti Works include models of the Brihadeeshwara Temple, Hindu idols, garlands, door hangings and show pieces used for decoration.

#### About Arumbavur Wood Carving

- Arumbavur Wood Carving is done at Arumbavur of Perambalur district, **Tamilnadu**.



- The wood carvings are primarily made out of wooden logs of Indian siris (Poo

Vaagai, Albizia lebbeck), mango (Mangifera indica), lingam tree (Mavilangam), Indian ash tree (Othiyana – Odina wodier), rosewood, neem tree (Vembu – Azadirachta indica).

- The carvings in Arambavur Wood Carvings are often inspired by architectural details

### 3) GI tag for Jharkhand's Sohrai Khovar painting, Telangana's Telia Rumal

#### Why in News?

- **Jharkhand's Sohrai Khovar painting and Telangana's Telia Rumal** were given the Geographical Indication (GI) tag by the **Geographical Indications Registry** headquartered in **Chennai**.

#### About Jharkhand's Sohrai Khovar painting

- The Sohrai Khovar painting is a **traditional and ritualistic mural art** being practised by **local tribal women** during local harvest and marriage seasons.
- They are made using local, **naturally available soils of different colours** in the area of **Hazaribagh** district of Jharkhand.
- Traditionally painted on the **walls** of mud houses, they are now seen on **other surfaces** also.



- The style features a profusion of lines, dots, animal figures and plants, often representing religious iconography.

#### About Telangana's Telia Rumal

- **Telia Rumal cloth** involves intricate **handmade** work with **cotton loom** displaying a variety of designs and motifs in three particular colours — red, black and white.



- Telia Rumal can only be created using the traditional handloom process and not by any other mechanical means as otherwise, the very quality of the Rumal would be lost.
- It was patronised by **Hyderabad Nizam** and other nobles of that period.
- Telia Rumals were worn as a turban cloth by **Arabs** in the Middle East.
- Telia Rumals are offered at the dargah of Ajmer Sharif in Rajasthan.

#### 4) Yakshagana

- Yaksha-gana literally means the song (gana) of a Yaksha.
- Yakshas were an exotic tribe mentioned in the Sanskrit literature of ancient India.
- The theater form was originally called **Bayalata** (open place play) or simply Ata (play).
- Yakshagana is a **traditional dance drama** popular in the coastal districts and adjacent areas of the state of **Karnataka**.



- Yakshagana is popular in the districts of Uttara Kannada, Shimoga, Udupi, Dakshina Kannada and the *Kasaragod district of Kerala*.
- Yakshagana combines dance, music, spoken word, elaborate costumes and makeup, and stage technique with a distinct style and form.
- It is generally regarded as a form of **folk theater**, but possesses strong classical connections.
- Yakshagana arose from the **Vaishnava bhakti movement** as a means of entertaining and educating the common people, and was well-established by the sixteenth century.
- A performance usually depicts a story from the **Hindu epics** of Ramayana and Mahabharata and the mythology of the puranas.

# PIB ANALYSIS

## 1) Mission Sagar

### About the SAGAR Programme (Security and Growth for All in the Region):

- SAGAR is a term coined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015 during his Mauritius visit with a focus on the blue economy.
- It is a maritime initiative which gives priority to the Indian Ocean region (IOR) for ensuring peace, stability and prosperity of India in the Indian Ocean region.
- It is in line with the principles of the **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**.
- Through SAGAR, India seeks to deepen economic and security cooperation with its maritime neighbours and assist in building their maritime security capabilities.



### Why in News?

- Indian Naval Ship Kesari has departed for Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar and Comoros, to provide Food Items, COVID-19 related Medicines including Hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) Tablets and Special Ayurvedic Medicines with Medical Assistance.

### About Mission SAGAR:

- Mission Sagar' is inspired by Prime Minister's vision of Security and Growth for All in the Region('SAGAR') and highlights the importance accorded by India to relations with her neighbouring

countries and strengthens the existing bond.

- This mission is in line with India's role as the first responder in the region and builds excellent relations amongst these countries to battle the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The operation is being progressed in close coordination with the Ministries of Defence and External Affairs, and other agencies of the Government of India.

### About Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)

- The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is a dynamic **inter-governmental organisation** aimed at strengthening **regional cooperation and sustainable development within the Indian Ocean region** through its **22 Member States and 10 Dialogue Partners**.
- Promoting sustained growth and balanced development within the Indian Ocean region, IORA strengthens cooperation and dialogue with Member States namely:
- Commonwealth of Australia, People's Republic of Bangladesh, Union of Comoros, **Republic of India**, Republic of Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Kenya, Republic of Madagascar, Malaysia, Republic of Maldives, Republic of Mauritius, Republic of Mozambique, Sultanate of Oman, Republic of Seychelles, Republic of Singapore, Federal Republic of Somalia, Republic of South Africa, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, United Republic of Tanzania, Kingdom of Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Republic of Yemen.
- **All sovereign States of the Indian Ocean Rim are eligible for membership of the Association.**

## 2) National Technology Day

### About National Technology Day

- Every year since 1999, May 11 is celebrated as National Technology Day to mark the day on which India successfully test-fired its first nuclear bombs in 1998.
- The first successful Shakti-I nuclear missile.
- The missile was tested in the Indian Army Pokhran Test Range, Rajasthan. The

operation was called “**Operation Shakti**”. After the testing of the Shakti-I nuclear missile, India also successfully tested two nuclear weapons.

- The code name of the first phase of Operation Shakti was “**Smiling Buddha**”.
- The second nuclear test, the phase II of Operation Shakti, conducted in 1998 was also called Pokhran II and was a series of 5 tests of nuclear bombs.
- It was led by the late President Dr Shri APJ Abdul Kalam.
- After Pokhran-II, Vajpayee had declared India a nuclear state — then the sixth country in the world to join as Nuclear Weapon State.

### Focus of the Year 2020

- A high-level digital conference, on Rebooting the Economy through Science, Technology and Research Translations titled **RESTART** will be organised by Technology Development Board (TDB) a statutory body of the Department of Science & Technology (DST) and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) this year, to celebrate the National Technology Day.

### Why in News?

- The Prime Minister paid tribute to all the scientists in the country who are using science and technology to bring a positive difference in the lives of others.

## 3) Atal Pension Yojana’ (APY)

### About APY

- Atal Pension Yojana (APY) addresses the old age income security of the working poor and the longevity risks among the workers in the **unorganised sector**.
- It encourages the workers in the **unorganised sector to voluntarily save for their retirement**. The Government had launched the scheme with effect from **1st June, 2015**.
- The scheme **replaces the Swavalamban Yojana / NPS Lite scheme**.

### Eligibility:

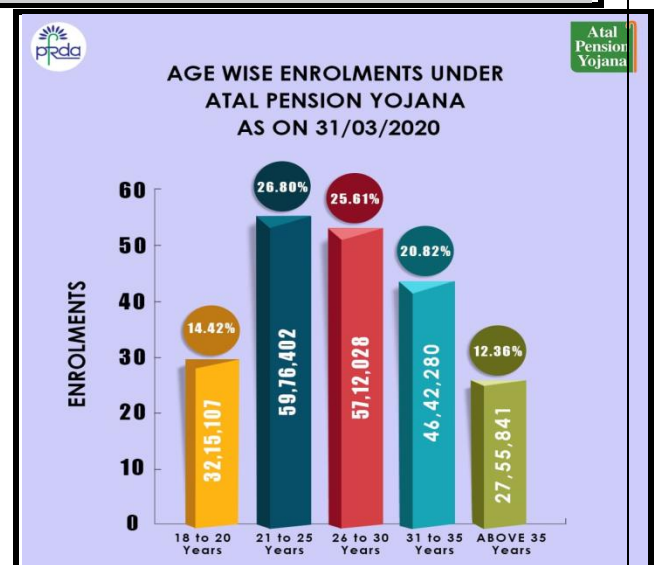
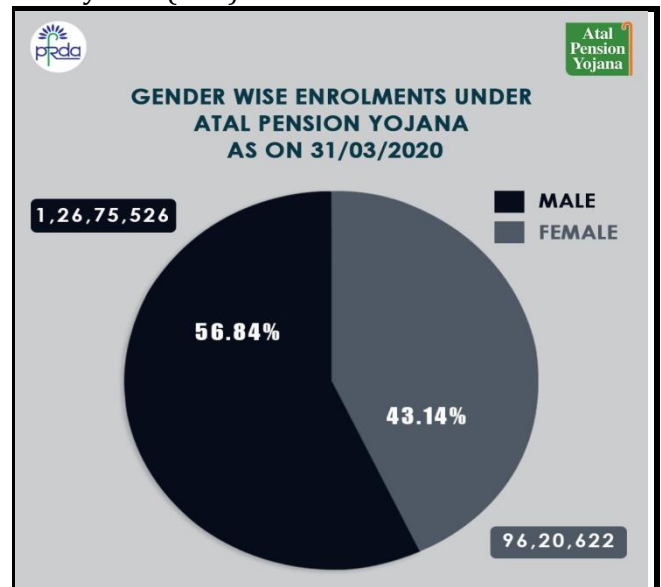
- Any citizen of India can join the APY scheme. The age of the subscriber should be between 18-40 years. The contribution levels would vary and would be low if a subscriber joins early and increases if she joins late.

### Features of APY

- Fixed pension for the subscribers ranging between **Rs.1000 to Rs. 5000**, if s/he joins and contributes **between the age of 18 years and 40 years**.
- The same pension is payable to Spouse after death of Subscriber.
- Return of indicative pension wealth to nominees after death of spouse.

### Why in News?

- The flagship social security scheme of the Government of India - ‘Atal Pension Yojana’ (APY) - has completed five years of implementation with over 2.2 crore subscribers. It is administered by Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority through National Pension System (NPS).





### Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority

- Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) is the statutory Authority established by an enactment of the Parliament, to regulate, promote and ensure orderly growth of the National Pension System (NPS).
- It works under the Department of Financial Services under the Ministry of Finance.

### National Pension System

- NPS is a government-sponsored pension scheme. It was launched in 2004 for government employees.
- NPS was extended to all Indian citizens (resident/non-resident/overseas) on a voluntary basis and to corporates for its employees.

## 4) Jal Jeevan Mission

### About Jal Jeevan Mission

- Jal Jeevan Mission is envisioned to provide **safe and adequate drinking water** through **individual household tap connections by 2024 to all households in rural India.**

- The goal of JJM is to provide functional household tap connection to every household with service level at the rate of **55 litres per capita per day (lpcd).**

- The programme will also implement source sustainability measures as mandatory elements, such as recharge and reuse through grey water management, water conservation, rain water harvesting. The Jal Jeevan Mission will be based on a community approach to water.

### Key Objectives of the Mission are:

- To provide Functional Tap Connection (FHTC) to every rural household.
- To prioritize provision of FHTCs in quality affected areas, villages in drought prone and desert areas, Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY) villages, etc.
- To provide functional tap connection to Schools, Anganwadi centres, GP buildings, Health centres, wellness centres and community buildings.
- To monitor functionality of tap connections.

- To promote and ensure voluntary ownership among the local community by way of contribution in cash, kind and/ or labour and voluntary labour (shramdaan).
- To bring awareness on various aspects and significance of safe drinking water.

### The institutional mechanism under JJM:

▪ National level	▪ National Jal Jeevan Mission
▪ State level	▪ State Water and Sanitation Mission (SWSM)
▪ District level	▪ District Water and Sanitation Mission (DWSM)
▪ Gram Panchayat level	▪ Paani Samiti/ Village Water & Sanitation Committee (VWSC)/ User group

### Funding Pattern under JJM:

- The fund sharing pattern between Centre and State is **90:10 for Himalayan and North-Eastern States, 100 percent for UTs and 50:50 for rest of the States.**

### Positive Outcomes of JJM:

- JJM would ensure functional household tap connection to every rural household where there is a demand and people aspire for household piped water supply.
- It will significantly **improve quality of life**, particularly of women and children.
- It will assist in ODF-sustainability as water is important to sustain Swachh Bharat Mission's gains.
- In the rural areas, for developing in-village water supply infrastructure, water resource management, source strengthening/ augmentation, distribution network, treatment plants, etc., unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled human resources will be required.
- Further there will be procurement of various materials for water supply systems. This will **generate employment and boost the economy.**

### Why in News?

- Jammu and Kashmir plans to provide tap water connection to all rural households by December, 2022 under the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM).

## 5) SAMARTH

### About:

- SAMARTH, is an **e-Governance platform**, is an Open Standard Open Source Architecture Automation Engine for Universities and Higher Educational Institutions.
- It caters to faculty, students and staff at a University/Higher Educational Institutions.
- It has been developed under the **National Mission of Education in Information and Communication Technology**

**Scheme (NMEICT)** of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD).

- This initiative will enhance the productivity through better information management in the institutes by seamless access to information, and its utilization for various purposes.

### Why in News003F

- NIT Kurukshetra has implemented Enterprises Resource Planning (ERP), SAMARTH to enhance productivity through better information management and automating the process in the institute.

# News in Depth

## THE HINDU EDITORIALS

### 1) The trends shaping the post-COVID-19 world

- COVID-19 Pandemic which initially emerged as a **global health crisis** has now **triggered a global economic crisis** since most of the nations responded to it with a lockdown.
- COVID-19 has brought the already noticeable changes in the geopolitical trend lines into sharper focus, **defining the contours of the emerging global order.**

#### Six geopolitical lines which will define the contours of the emerging global order

##### Ascending Asia

- Asian countries have **demonstrated greater swiftness** in tackling the pandemic compared to the United States and Europe.
- A large number of Asian states have shown **greater responsiveness and more effective state capacity.** As a result, **Asian economies will recover faster than those in the West.**
- Also economic forecasts indicate that out of the G-20 countries, only China and India are likely to register economic growth during 2020.
- **Similar instance in the past:**
- The 2008 global financial crisis showed the resilience of the Asian economies.

##### Waning US

- From the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations after World War I or the creation of the United Nations and Bretton Woods institutions after World War II, to leadership of the western world during the Cold War, moulding global responses to threats posed by terrorism or climate change, the **U.S. played a decisive role.**
- As countries were **losing trust in the U.S. leadership** due to 'America first' policy ,

its incompetent response to the pandemic indicates that countries are also **losing trust in the U.S.'s competence.**

- The U.S. still remains the largest economy and the largest military power but has **lost the will and ability to lead.**
- Thus the **retreat of the U.S.** after a century of being in the forefront of shaping the global order is the next trend.
- Given that the U.S. is among the countries badly affected by this pandemic, together with existing uncertainties affecting its financial markets, the U.S. can be expected to step back even further from one of **assertion to neutrality in global affairs.**

##### Intra- European fission

- Continuing **preoccupation with internal challenges** in the European Union is the third trend in contouring global order.
- **Reasons for existing internal challenges**
  - 1) Expansion of membership to include East European states
  - 2) Impact of the financial crisis among the Eurozone members
  - 3) Ongoing Brexit negotiations
  - 4) The trans-Atlantic divide aggravating an intra-European rift
  - 5) North-South divide within the Eurozone.

##### Add ons during pandemic

1. **Italy was denied medical equipment by its EU neighbours** who introduced export controls, which led Italy to airlift medical teams and critical supplies from China.
2. **Schengen visa or free-border movement** which has already been a victim of pandemic.

##### Schengen Visa and Schengen area

- A Schengen visa is a short-stay visa that allows a person to travel to any member of the Schengen Area, per stay up to 90 days for tourism or business purposes.

- Schengen Area, signifies a zone where 26 European countries, abolished their internal borders, for the free and unrestricted movement of people, in harmony with common rules for controlling external borders and fighting criminality by strengthening the common judicial system and police cooperation.
- The Schengen Area covers most of the EU countries, except Ireland and the countries that are soon to be part of: Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia and Cyprus.
- Although not members of the EU, countries like: Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Lichtenstein are also part of the Schengen zone.

### Rising China

- A fourth trend is the **emergence of a stronger and more assertive China.**
- Chinese assertiveness has raised concerns, in its neighbourhood, and in the U.S.
- In recent years, the **U.S.-China relationship** moved from **cooperation to competition** and now with trade and technology wars, it is moving steadily to **confrontation.**
- **For example,**
  - The **Belt and Road Initiative** which seeks to connect China to Eurasia and Africa through both maritime and land routes by investing trillions of dollars in infrastructure building is a kind of bidding move against any U.S. attempts at containment.
- The **pandemic has seen increasing persuasion on both sides.**

### Fading Organisations

- COVID-19 being a **Global problem demands global response.** But most of the multilateral institutions were always subjected to **big power politics.**
- **For example,**
  1. The **World Health Organisation (WHO)** which needs to lead global efforts against the health crisis has become a victim of politics.
  2. WHO have lost autonomy over decades as their regular budgets shrank, forcing them to increasingly rely on voluntary contributions sourced largely from western countries and foundations.

3. U.S. leadership strengthened the **Bretton Woods institutions** in recent decades because the U.S.'s voting power gives it a blocking veto. (The World Bank spends 250% of WHO's budget on global health)
  - Thus the **absence of a multilateral response** today highlights the long-felt **need for reform of these bodies** but this cannot happen without collective global leadership.

### Energy factor

- Growing interest in renewable and green technologies on account of climate change concerns, and the U.S. emerging as a major energy producer were **fundamentally altering the energy markets.**
- An **emerging economic recession and depressed oil prices** will exacerbate **internal tensions in West Asian countries** which are solely dependent on oil revenues.
- Long-standing rivalries in the region have often led to **local conflicts** but can now **create political instability** in countries where regime structures are fragile.
- **Though vaccines may help to deal with the global health crisis, settling the crisis arising out of this changing global order still remains doubtful.**

## 2) Fiscal stimulus- need of the hour

### Context:

- The impact of COVID-19 will be debilitating for the global as well as the Indian economies.
- Varying growth projections, deepening economic crisis and growth prospects of various sectors clearly indicate that not only reducing government expenditure but also fiscal stimulus is needed the most.

### Growth projections

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has projected India's growth at 1.9%, China's at 1.2% and the global growth at (-) 3.0%.
  - However the actual growth outcome for India would depend on
    1. the speed at which the economy is opened up
    2. the time it takes to contain the spread of virus

3. the government's policy support.

### Growth prospects

- In 2019-20 GVA growth of India is projected to be about 4.4%. Various sectors and their varying growth prospects due to COVID-19 are as follows,
- As agriculture and allied sectors, and public administration, defence and other services suffered only limited disruption, it may be possible for these sectors to achieve 90% of the 2019-20 growth performance.
- Sectors like mining and quarrying, electricity, gas, water supply and other utility services, construction, and financial, real estate and professional services, 50% of 2019-20 growth performance is expected.
- Trade, Hotels, Transport, Storage and Communications sectors may be able to show 30% of 2019-20 growth performance.
- Manufacturing has suffered significant growth erosion in 2019-20 and hence this sector must be stimulated by supporting demand.

### Calibrating policy support

- **Monetary measures**
- Monetary policy initiatives undertaken so far by Reserve Bank of India include a
- reduction in the repo rate to 4.4%,
- reduction in the reverse repo rate to 3.75%, and
- reduction in the cash reserve ratio to 3%.

### Fiscal measures

- **Expenditure reducing measures**
  - Centre's fiscal deficit may increase to 6.0% of GDP.
  - To keep fiscal deficit under control cash-constrained central and State governments have taken expenditure reducing measures by
1. freezing of enhancements of dearness allowance and dearness relief
  2. reducing non-salary defence expenditure.
  3. fertilizer and petroleum subsidies may be reduced.

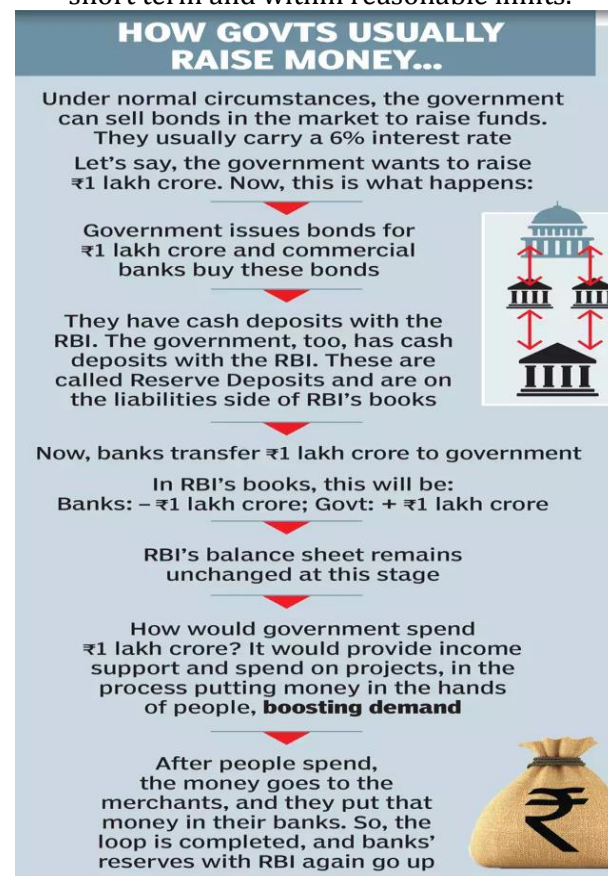
### Fiscal stimulus

- Though monetary measures have been taken by RBI, these measures need to be supplemented by an appropriate fiscal stimulus to reap the very purpose of the measures.
- Fiscal stimulus can be of three types:

1. relief expenditure for protecting the poor and the marginalised
2. demand-supporting expenditure for increasing personal disposable incomes or government's purchases of goods and services, including expanded health-care expenditure imposed by the novel coronavirus
3. bailouts for industry and financial institutions.

### Challenge ahead:

- Financing of the fiscal deficit poses a major challenge.
- To fund a bigger public spending programme, the government can either
- ask the RBI to print more money (monetise the deficit) or
- it can issue new bonds to be subscribed by the banks (raise money through borrowing).
- Former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan explained how the two paths work and why 'monetisation' is a good option in the short term and within reasonable limits.



## ...BUT THESE ARE ABNORMAL TIMES

What if the government comes out with a ₹1 lakh crore bond issue, but commercial banks are not keen on subscribing?

The government can ask the RBI to directly purchase them (this type of transaction is prohibited in normal times). The RBI can directly buy bonds and deposit money in the government's account. This is 'monetisation', or what Rajan calls 'reserve creation'

RBI's assets have grown (it now owns ₹1 lakh crore of government bonds), and its liabilities are up proportionate

At this stage, the same story plays out. The government, richer by ₹1 lakh crore, spends that on salaries and projects, **boosting demand**. And the money eventually makes it into the accounts of commercial banks



Under normal circumstances, banks would use these excess reserves to lend more money – to businesses, for example – and further expand their customers' deposits with banks

But since there is no demand for credit right now, banks won't lend money to businesses and instead might try to lend money to other banks. But other banks aren't likely to want to borrow this money, so it ultimately ends up redeposited with the RBI at a reverse repo rate – currently 3.75% – which is lower than 6%

So, even when the government spending is funded directly by the RBI, the central bank ends up financing it through commercial banks at the reverse repo rate of 3.75%



### What will constitute a "good stimulus"?

- 'Stimulating' an economy cannot happen during a supply-side lockdown and hence any 'good stimulus' can only come into effect post lockdown.
- Government revenues will be seriously hit with the effective fiscal deficit reaching around 7.5 %. This should be kept in mind while announcing for a stimulus.
- Inflation may occur with fiscal stimulus which results in downgrading of credit rating agencies that in turn may lead to higher fiscal deficit.

- In spite of high liquidity in the economy, lending is limited. Hence if banks are incentivised to lend it will lead to bogus companies overnight to grab the stimulus.
- Thus lifting the lockdown will be the first step towards a good stimulus.

- However, it is to be noted that from 1947 to 1997, the Central government always routinely monetised its deficit, without leading to high rates of inflation.
- Also while countries like Japan (>200%) and U.S. (125%) have huge debt-to-GDP ratios India has a minor slippage with 70% debt-GDP ratio.

### 3) A plan to revive a broken economy

#### Context:

- Revival of the economy requires ideas, a plan, and effective implementation. There are clear, implementable steps the Centre can take in fiscal terms to revive the economy and support livelihoods. Let us discuss what the government ought to do.

#### Ways out to revive the economy:

- **Food and cash transfers**
- Putting money in the hands of the poor is the best stimulus to economic revival, as it creates effective demand. Thus the immediate need is to provide free food and cash transfers to those rendered incomeless.
- **What can be done?**
- Providing every household with ₹7,000 per month for a period of three months and every individual with 10 kg of free food grains per month for a period of six months is likely to cost around 3% of our GDP (assuming 20% voluntary dropout).
- This could be financed immediately through larger borrowing by the Centre from the Reserve Bank of India.
- The required cash and food have to be handed over to State governments to make the actual transfers, along with outstanding Goods and Services Tax compensation.
- **Is this doable?**
- Yes this is easily doable for several reasons which are
- Foodgrains are plentiful (The Food Corporation of India had 77 million

tonnes, and rabi procurement could add 40 million tonnes)

- Cash transfers in many spheres will only enable current demand to continue (such as payment of house rent to continue occupancy) and not create any fresh demand.
- Output could expand because of resumed economic activity.

## 2) Revamp MGNREGA work

- Employment has to be provided to the migrant labourers (who are unlikely to return from home towns) where they are, for which the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) must be expanded greatly and revamped.

1. Wage arrears to be paid immediately.
2. Work has to be provided on demand without any limit to all adults.
3. Work must include not just agricultural and construction work, but work in rural enterprises and in care activities too.
  - Growth in India in the coming days will have to be sustained by the home market.
  - Since the most important determinant of growth of the home market is agricultural growth, this must be urgently boosted which can be done with MGNREGA by
1. Paying wages for land development and farm work for small and medium farmers, apart from government support through remunerative procurement prices,
  2. subsidised institutional credit,
  3. other input subsidies, and
  4. Redistribution of unused land with plantations.
- Agricultural growth in turn can promote rural enterprises, both by creating a demand for their products and by providing inputs for them to process, this would generate substantial rural employment.

## Revive MSME

- To revive the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) is an absolutely essential need of the hour.
- The best way to overcome the problems of employment and income, post lockdown would be to introduce an Urban Employment Guarantee Programme.
- It aims 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.
- By including work in the MSMEs as “Permissible” work under this programme, would ensure labour supply for the MSMEs and also cover their wage bills at the central government’s expense until they re-acquire robustness.

## The ‘care’ economy

- The “care economy” provides immense scope for increasing employment.

### Care economy:

- Care economy is a system that consists of activities and relationships involved in meeting the physical, emotional, and psychological aspects of care, remains an integral but undervalued component of economies all over the world, ensuring the welfare of communities.

### What to be done?

- Vacancies in public employment, especially in care work activities, must be immediately filled.
- The status of Anganwadi and Accredited Social Health Activists/workers who provide essential services to the population during this pandemic, must be improved
- Treat them as regular government employees and give them proper remuneration and associated benefits, and greatly expand their coverage in settlements of the urban poor.

### How can these be achieved?

- **By Printing money**
- **By generating revenue**
- A combination of wealth and inheritance taxation and getting multinational companies to pay the same effective rate as local companies through a system of unitary taxation will generate substantial public revenue.
- For example, a 2% wealth tax on the top 1% of the population, together with a 33% inheritance tax on the wealth they leave every year to their progeny, could finance an increase in government expenditure to nearly 10% of GDP.
- **By issuing SDR**
- A fresh issue of special drawing rights by the International Monetary Fund would provide additional external resources.

## Outcomes

- These additional resources would be adequate to finance the institution of five universal, justifiable, fundamental economic rights:
  1. the right to food,
  2. the right to employment,
  3. the right to free public health care,
  4. the right to free public education and
  5. the right to a living old-age pension and disability benefits.
- Thus the broken economy must be rebuilt in ways to ensure a life of dignity to the most disadvantaged citizen.

## 4) Indian Federalism in context of COVID-19

### Context:

- India's success in defeating Covid-19 actively rests upon Centre-State collaboration. However some recent developments have revealed fissures in Centre-State cooperation.

### Cooperative federalism:

- Federalism according to K.C. Wheare, traditionally signifies the **independence of the Union and State governments of a country, in their own spheres.**
- **'Cooperative federalism'** according to AH Birch is defined by administrative cooperation between the Centre and the States, and a **partial dependence of the States upon payments from the Centre.**
- Accordingly, Indian constitutional law expert Granville Austin remarks that despite a strong Centre, cooperative federalism doesn't necessarily result in weaker States, rather the progress of the Republic rests upon active cooperation between the two.

### Federal issues during pandemic:

- **As it is the States which act as first responders to the pandemic, supplying them with adequate funds becomes a prerequisite in effectively tackling the crisis. But the following things remain as a blow to the states.**

### Bearing the worst part of the pandemic's impact.

- State consultation is a legislative mandate cast upon the Centre under the Disaster Management Act of 2005 under which

binding COVID-19 guidelines are being issued by the Centre to the States.

### What does the act say?

- The Act envisages the creation of a 'National Plan' under Section 11, as well as issuance of binding guidelines by the Centre to States under Section 6(2), in furtherance of the 'National Plan'.
- Section 11(2) of the Act mandates State consultations before formulating a 'National Plan', and to that extent, when the binding guidelines are ultimately issued under it, they are expected to represent the views of the States.
- However, the Centre has not formulated the 'National Plan', and has chosen instead to respond to COVID-19 through ad hoc binding guidelines issued to States, thereby circumventing the legislative mandate of State consultations.

### Lost the powers to raise their own sales tax revenues and not being helped with additional resources

- GST forced the States to surrender their powers to raise resources independently through local State taxes and place them entirely in the hands of the Centre for most of their financial needs.
- **Pre GST era:**
- Most States raise resources through a combination of their own taxes and a share in the Centre's taxes.
- For richer States such as Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Delhi, Karnataka, Punjab, Haryana and Kerala, 70% or more of their revenue comes from taxes generated within their State boundaries.
- Nearly half of these were from the sale of goods and services within the State and the remaining half, from a combination of excise duties on petrol, electricity, alcohol, land registration fees, etc.
- Before GST, States were free to charge sales taxes as legislated by their State legislatures.
- If a State had a natural disaster, they could raise additional resources for rehabilitation by raising sales tax rates on goods and services.
- **How would the States have handled this crisis in the pre-GST era?**



- They would have had the funds raised through sales taxes to themselves and not dependent on the centre to release funds.
- They would have raised taxes on select essential goods sold in their States (say, mangoes or coconut oil) in accordance with their norms.
- **Ways left out to generate revenue:**
- The other available options for States to raise funds are through taxes on sale of petroleum products, alcohol, lottery tickets, electricity, land or vehicle registration.
- During this extreme lockdown, demand for petroleum products, electricity, land and vehicles has reduced substantially.
- So, the only option left for most States is to raise funds through the sale of alcohol.
- For the large, richer States, alcohol sales account for more than one-third of their State tax revenues.

**Not being paid what they are owed**

- Under GST, States are legally entitled to their share of tax revenues collected in their State and States were also

guaranteed minimum tax revenue every year for a period of five years.

- In the midst of the current pandemic, the Centre has not kept up both these promises since they are now reliant on the Centre to release these funds to them periodically.

**Not being able to raise borrowing without centre's nod**

- States need the Centre's approval to raise their borrowing limit or to stand as guarantors.
- Since States do not have clear revenue visibility, the rates at which they can borrow are very high and their ability to borrow is severely undermined.
- They are once again dependent on the Centre to borrow funds from the market and then release them to the States.
- Thus centre should view the States as equals, and strengthen their capabilities, instead of increasing their dependence upon itself.

# INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED

## 1) Direct seeding - an alternative to paddy transplanting

### Context:

- In the prevailing situation of lockdown over many states to prevent the spread of COVID-19 farmers are being encouraged

to use direct seeding of Rice instead of conventional paddy transplantation to cope up with labor shortage.

### Direct Seeding of Rice Vs Conventional transplanting

	Conventional transplanting	Direct Seeding of Rice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Method of transplanting paddy</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Farmers prepare nurseries where the paddy seeds are first sown and raised into young plants.</li> <li>▪ These seedlings are then uprooted and replanted 25-35 days later in the main field.</li> <li>▪ The nursery seed bed is 5-10% of the area to be transplanted.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no nursery preparation or transplantation.</li> <li>▪ The seeds are instead directly drilled into the field by a tractor-powered machine.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Irrigation frequency</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ For the first three weeks after transplanting, the plants have to be irrigated almost daily (if there are no rains) to maintain a water depth of 4-5 cm.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Farmers have to only level their land and give one pre-sowing irrigation.</li> <li>▪ Irrigation (apart from the pre-sowing irrigation) is necessary only 21 days after sowing.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Herbicide</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Water acts as a herbicide for paddy.</li> </ul> <p><b>Underlying Principle:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Paddy growth is compromised by weeds that compete for nutrition, sunlight and water.</li> <li>▪ Water prevents growth of weeds by denying them oxygen in the submerged stage, whereas the soft 'aerenchyma tissues' in paddy plants allow air to penetrate through their roots.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Water is replaced by real chemical herbicides.</li> </ul> <p><b>About herbicides:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Two kinds of herbicides are used.</li> <li>▪ Pre-emergent - applied before germination.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Eg. Pendimethalin</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Post-emergent, - sprayed 20-25 days after sowing, depending upon the type of weeds appearing.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Eg. Bispyribac-sodium</li> <li>▪ Fenoxaprop-p-ethyl</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### Advantages of DSR:

- **Less water requirement**
- Unlike in transplanted paddy, where watering has to be done daily to ensure

submerged/flooded conditions in the first three weeks, the first irrigation (apart from the pre-sowing rauni) under DSR is necessary only 21 days after sowing.

- **Helps overcome labour shortage**
- In the present context of COVID-19 lockdown, the two granary states of Punjab and Haryana could face a shortage of an estimated 10 lakh labourers, mainly seasonal migrants from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, to undertake transplantation of paddy in the upcoming kharif season.
- About three labourers are required to transplant one acre of paddy in a single day.
- This problem can be overcome with the use of Direct seeding technique.
- **Herbicide cost still less than labour cost**
- Though the purchase of herbicide incurs some cost, this is still lower than the cost paid out for labours.

#### **Drawbacks of DSR:**

- The seed requirement for DSR is higher, at 8-10 kg/acre, compared to 4-5 kg in transplanting.
- It is doubtful that the demand for herbicides will be met.
- Laser land levelling, costs Rs 1,000/acre which is mandatory for DSR.
- Though DSR has certain disadvantages, it can be considered as an effective alternative in the current scenario.

## **2) Naming of tropical cyclones**

### **What are tropical cyclones?**

- Tropical cyclones is an intense circular storm that originates over warm tropical oceans and is characterized by low atmospheric pressure, high winds, and heavy rain.

### **Who names tropical cyclones?**

- Cyclones that form in every ocean basin across the world are named by the **regional specialised meteorological centres (RSMCs) and Tropical Cyclone Warning Centres (TCWCs)**.
- There are six RSMCs in the world, including the India Meteorological Department (IMD), and five TCWCs.

### **IMD names cyclones of which region?**

- As an RSMC, the IMD names the cyclones developing over the north Indian Ocean,

including the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea, after following a standard procedure.

- The IMD is also mandated to issue advisories to 12 other countries in the region on the development of cyclones and storms.

### **How are the cyclones named?**

- In 2000, a group of nations called WMO/ESCAP (World Meteorological Organisation/United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific), which comprised Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand, decided to start naming cyclones in the region.
- After each country sent in suggestions, the WMO/ESCAP Panel on Tropical Cyclones (PTC) finalized the list.
- The WMO/ESCAP expanded to include five more countries in 2018 — Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

### **Why is it important to name cyclones?**

- Adopting names for cyclones makes it easier for people to remember, as opposed to numbers and technical terms.
- Apart from the general public, it also helps the scientific community, the media, disaster managers etc.
- With a name, it is easy to identify individual cyclones, create awareness of its development, rapidly disseminate warnings to increased community preparedness and remove confusion where there are multiple cyclonic systems over a region.

### **What are the guidelines to adopt names of cyclones?**

- While picking names for cyclones, here are some of the rules that countries need to follow. If these guidelines are followed, the name is accepted by the panel on tropical cyclones (PTC) that finalizes the selection:
- The proposed name should be neutral to (a) politics and political figures (b) religious beliefs, (c) cultures and (d) gender
- Name should be chosen in such a way that it does not hurt the sentiments of any group of population over the globe
- It should not be very rude and cruel in nature

- It should be short, easy to pronounce and should not be offensive to any member
- The maximum length of the name will be eight letters
- The proposed name should be provided with its pronunciation and voice over
- The names of tropical cyclones over the north Indian Ocean will not be repeated.

Once used, it will cease to be used again. Thus, the name should be new.

#### Why in the news?

- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) recently released a list of 169 names of future tropical cyclones that would emerge in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea.

#### Procedure for choosing names:

Annexure-I

New list of tropical cyclone names adopted by WMO/ESCAP Panel Member Countries in April 2020 for naming of tropical cyclones over North Indian Ocean including Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea  
(To be used after the name 'Amphan' from the previous list is utilised)

WMO/ESCAP Panel Member countries	Column 1		Column 2		Column 3		Column 4	
	Name	Pron'	Name	Pron'	Name	Pron'	Name	Pron'
Bangladesh	Nisarga	Nisarga	Biparjoy	Biporjoy	Arnab	Omab	Upakul	Upokul
India	Gati	Gati	Tej	Tej	Murasu	Murasu	Aag	Aag
Iran	Nivar	Nivar	Hamoon	Hamoon	Akvan	Akvan	Sepand	Sepand
Maldives	Burevi	Burevi	Midhili	Midhili	Kaani	Kaani	Odi	Odi
Myanmar	Tauktae	Tau'Te	Michaung	Migjaum	Ngamann	Ngaman	Kyarthit	Kjathi
Oman	Yaas	Yass	Remal	Re-Mal	Sail	Sail	Naseem	Naseem
Pakistan	Gulab	Gul-Aab	Asna	As-Na	Sahab	Sa-Hab	Afshan	Af-Shan
Qatar	Shaheen	Shaheen	Dana	Dana	Lulu	Lulu	Mouj	Mouj
Saudi Arabia	Jawad	Jowad	Fengal	Feirjal	Ghazeer	Razeer	Asif	Aasif
Sri Lanka	Asani	Asani	Shakhti	Shakhti	Gigum	Gigum	Gagana	Gagana
Thailand	Sitrang	Si-Trang	Montha	Mon-Tha	Thianyot	Thian-Yot	Bulan	Bu-Lan
United Arab Emirates	Mandous	Man-Dous	Senyar	Sen-Yaar	Afoor	Aa-Foor	Nahhaam	Nah-Haam
Yemen	Mocha	Mokha	Ditwah	Ditwah	Diksam	Diksam	Sira	Sira

- The first cyclone name which will be chosen will be the one in the first row of the first column — Nisarga by Bangladesh.
- Next, India's choice, Gati, will be chosen, and so on.
- Subsequent cyclones are being named sequentially, column-wise, with each cyclone given the name immediately below that of the previous cyclone.
- Once the bottom of the column is reached, the sequence moves to the top of the next column.

#### What cyclone names has India suggested?

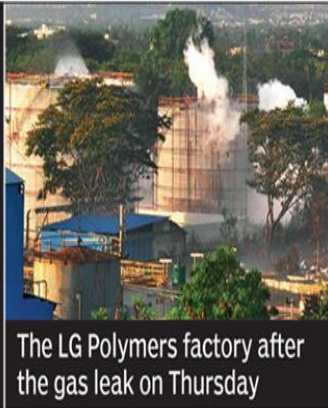
- The 13 names in the recent list that have been suggested by India include: Gati, Tej, Murasu, Aag, Vyom, Jhar (pronounced Jhor), Probaho, Neer, Prabhanjan, Ghurni, Ambud, Jaladhi and Vega.
- An IMD committee is formed to finalize the names before sending it to the PTC.

# RSTV BIG-PICTURE

## 1) Visakhapatnam Gas Leak

### WHAT IS STYRENE?

Styrene is a benzene derivative. It is an oily liquid and usually odourless. It evaporates and mixes with air. It is used in the manufacture of plastics and resins



The LG Polymers factory after the gas leak on Thursday

### Is styrene harmful?

According to International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), a body affiliated with the World Health Organisation, styrene is a 'possible' cancer-causing agent. Before 2018, IARC had classified as 'probable' carcinogen and upgraded the threat level to 'possible carcinogen'

➤ Exposure to styrene may cause irritation of eyes and mucous membrane in mouth, nose and digestive tract, including the intestines. Long-term or heavy exposure may

impact functioning of the central nervous system. Reproductive system may also be affected. It has low acute toxicity, says WHO

### Is styrene present in water and air?

Traces are found in water and air and even in food. WHO warns that smoking may raise daily exposure by up to 10 times, while those living near plastics and resins units inhale a few hundred micrograms per day. The impact on health may not be visible immediately. The permissible level of styrene in drinking water is 0.02 mg/litre

### What are the symptoms of exposure?

The symptoms of styrene exposure include headaches, weakness, tiredness, loss of hearing and depression

### Where do we find styrene in our daily use?

Right from the plastic bottle containing drinking water to styrofoam cups, we find styrene in common things of daily use

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### Context

The Andhra Pradesh government appealed to the people of Visakhapatnam not to panic and cooperate with authorities working to bring under control the situation following a gas leak from a chemical plant there.

A major leak from a polymer plant LG Polymers near Visakhapatnam

impacted villages in a five-km radius, leaving at least 9 people dead and thousands of citizens suffering from breathlessness and other problems in an early morning mishap that raised fears of a serious industrial disaster.

### What is Styrene?

- It is a flammable liquid that is used in the manufacturing of polystyrene plastics, fiberglass, rubber, and latex.
- Also known as ethenylbenzene, vinylbenzene, and phenylethene, Styrene is an organic compound with the chemical formula  $C_6H_5CH=CH_2$ .
- This derivative of benzene is a colorless oily liquid although aged samples can appear yellowish.
- The compound evaporates easily and has a sweet smell, although high concentrations have a less pleasant odor.

### What happens when exposed to Styrene?

- As per the US-based Environment Protection Agency (EPA), short-term exposure to the substance can result in respiratory problems, irritation in the eyes, irritation in the mucous membrane, and gastrointestinal issues.
- And long-term exposure could drastically affect the central nervous system and lead to other related problems like peripheral neuropathy.
- It could also lead to cancer and depression in some cases.
- However, EPA notes that there is no sufficient evidence despite several epidemiology studies indicating there may be an association between styrene exposure and an increased risk of leukemia and lymphoma.

### What are the symptoms?

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

### How bad is the situation in Visakhapatnam?

- While it unclear at the moment whether the deaths are due to direct exposure to styrene gas or one of its by-products, Visakhapatnam Police Commissioner has maintained that the gas is “non-poisonous” and is only fatal when exposed for longer durations.
- However, hundreds of people including many children were admitted to hospitals.
- The cases are high as the gas leak was only detected at 3 am in the morning, meaning several crucial hours have been lost till safety precautions were taken, and the gas was allowed to spread while people were fast asleep.
- Officials said they immediately began making announcements over speakers but many were feared to have already

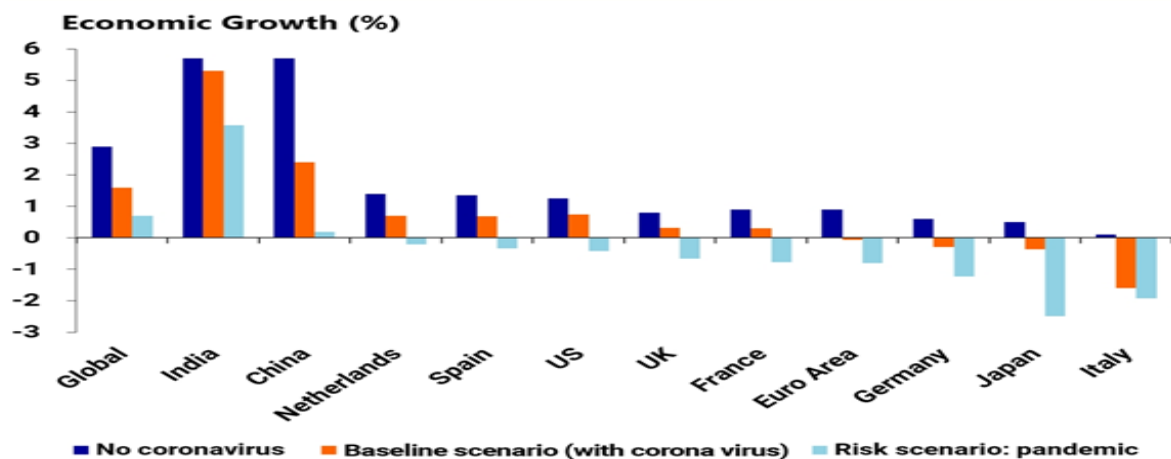
become unconscious as police had to break open doors to shift people.

### Conclusion

- The leak has been plugged and 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.

## 2) How Global Business has changed?

## Global Economic Impact Of COVID-19



Source: Rabobank, Macrobond

Bloomberg | Quint

### Context

The coronavirus pandemic has overturned plans everywhere throughout the globe over the last few months.

From occasions and excursions, to promotions and income estimates, we've seen it all being affected. Companies around the world are thinking up and introducing new strategies to restart operations.

But experts believe that the coronavirus pandemic could permanently upend the way we work, shop and manage our businesses.

### What are the impacts?

- An initial supply side shock imposed from China's shutdown, a fiscal shock for

countries where there is a declared public health emergency.

- An oil price shock with prices of crude oil cut to encourage higher consumption amidst weakening global demand.
- In the meantime, if the US in particular continues to see a rise in infected cases in the near future, the global financial situation could get far worse than a recession - in fact, much worse if compared to the fall out seen from the 2008-09 financial crisis.
- In response so far, despite immediate rate cut measures taken by the Fed and many other central banks in other nations, monetary-policy supported stimulus, on its own, has a limited role to calm financial markets and in addressing the

structural economic fallout of a pandemic like COVID-19.

#### **What are the likely impacts on India?**

- In a recent analysis, economists Hugo Erken, Raphie Hayat and Kan Ji view the COVID-19 shock as a black swan event – where the occurrence of the event might be unlikely but its impact is big.
- In trying to assess the pandemic’s impact on India’s GDP, they use a designed scenario-building model, which is often used as a methodological tool in many disaster impact assessments.
- Firstly, they expect a substantial economic slowdown, estimated at a global growth level of 1.6% which is around 0.8% less than the previous OECD estimate of 2.4%.
  1. For India, they expect growth to come down to 5.3%, from the previous estimate of 5.7%.
  2. India’s exposure to China, according to Erken, Hayat and Kan ji, is limited as compared to many other Asian economies.
  3. The largest impact is likely to be on the currency markets: the Indian rupee, which has depreciated significantly due to the high risk amongst investors globally (raising the demand of US \$ vis-a-vis all emerging market currencies).
- Secondly, in a scenario of a wide spread case of virus-infections across India, the slowdown effect on India’s growth could be more profound at around 0.7% in 2020-21, leading to an overall growth estimate of 5%.
- While these estimates might or might not be totally accurate, they do present a higher probabilistic scenario that seems currently likely.

#### **What is the way forward?**

- Households and businesses hit by supply disruptions and a drop in demand could be targeted to receive cash transfers, wage subsidies, and tax relief, helping people to meet their needs and businesses to stay afloat.
- Italy has extended tax deadlines for companies in affected areas and broadened the wage supplementation fund to provide income support to laid-off workers, Korea has introduced wage subsidies for small merchants and

increased allowances for homecare and job seekers, and China has temporarily waived social security contributions for businesses.

- For those laid-off, unemployment insurance could be temporarily enhanced, by extending its duration, increasing benefits, or relaxing eligibility.
- Where paid sick and family leave is not among standard benefits, governments should consider funding it to allow unwell workers or their caregivers to stay home without fear of losing their jobs during the epidemic.
- Central banks might need to continue providing greater liquidity to ensure that the financial sector of most affected countries remain stable to perform basic credit creation functions and restore confidence in lending to borrowers, especially the small and medium scale enterprises, over a period of time.
- Coordinated fiscal steps through the creation of government owned special purpose vehicle like NHFC may help in creating coordinated, inter-sectional fiscal policy responses to not only ensure containment of the virus, but also ensure timely cash transfers to affected citizens in cautiously addressing the demand and supply side effects of the shock.

#### **Conclusion**

- Businesses are only as strong as the communities of which they are a part. Companies need to figure out how to support response efforts—such as by providing money, equipment, or expertise. For example, a few companies have shifted production to create medical masks and clothing.

### **3) Primary Education: Opportunities and Challenges**

#### **Context**

**Sometime in the second week of March, state governments across the country began shutting down schools and colleges temporarily as a measure to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus.**

**It’s close to two months and there is no certainty when they will reopen.**

**This is a crucial time for the education sector.**

## Fresh focus Key differences between the existing system and the NEP recommendations

Current system	Draft policy recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RTE covers Class 1 to Class 8</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RTE from preschool (age 3 onwards) till Class 12</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anganwadis, preschools cover 3 to 6 age group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrated primary school framework from age 3 to 8</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on health and nutrition in anganwadis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anganwadis, preschools to be linked to local primary schools</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rote learning, formal teaching in preschools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on play and discovery-based learning</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WCD Ministry oversees anganwadi system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MHRD to oversee educational aspects</li> </ul>

### What is the background?

- As the days pass by with no immediate solution to stop the outbreak of Covid-19, school closures will not only have a short-term impact on the continuity of learning but will also have far-reaching consequences.
- The structure of schooling and learning, including teaching and assessment methodologies, was the first to be affected by these closures.
- Only a handful of private schools could adopt online teaching methods.
- Their low-income private and government school counterparts, on the other hand, have completely shut down for not having access to e-learning solutions.

### What are the likely impacts?

- The structure of schooling and learning, including teaching and assessment methodologies, was the first to be affected by these closures.
- Only a handful of private schools could adopt online teaching methods.

- Their low-income private and government school counterparts, on the other hand, have completely shut down for not having access to e-learning solutions.
- The students, in addition to the missed opportunities for learning, no longer have access to healthy meals during this time and are subject to economic and social stress.
- The pandemic has significantly disrupted the higher education sector as well, which is a critical determinant of a country's economic future.
- A large number of Indian students—second only to China—enrol in universities abroad, especially in countries worst affected by the pandemic, the US, UK, Australia and China.
- Many such students have now been barred from leaving these countries.
- If the situation persists, in the long run, a decline in the demand for international higher education is expected.
- The bigger concern, however, on everybody's mind is the effect of the disease on the employment rate.
- Recent graduates in India fear withdrawal of job offers from corporate because of the current situation.
- The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy's estimates on unemployment shot up from 8.4% in mid-March to 23% in early April and the urban unemployment rate to 30.9%.
- Needless to say, the pandemic has transformed the centuries-old, chalk-talk teaching model to one driven by technology.
- This disruption in the delivery of education is pushing policymakers to figure out how to drive engagement at scale while ensuring inclusive e-learning solutions and tackling the digital divide.

### What is the strategy?

- A multi-pronged strategy is necessary to manage the crisis and build a resilient Indian education system in the long term.
  - One, immediate measures are essential to ensure continuity of learning in government schools and universities.
- Open-source digital learning solutions and Learning Management Software



- should be adopted so teachers can conduct teaching online.
2. The DIKSHA platform with reach across all states in India, can be further strengthened to ensure accessibility of learning to the students.
    - Two, inclusive learning solutions, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalized, need to be developed.
  1. With a rapid increase of mobile internet users in India, which is expected to reach 85% households by 2024, technology is enabling ubiquitous access and personalization of education even in the remotest parts of the country.
  2. This can change the schooling system and increase the effectiveness of learning and teaching, giving students and teachers multiple options to choose from.
  3. Many aspirational districts have initiated innovative, mobile-based learning models for effective delivery of education, which can be adopted by others.
    - Three, strategies are required to prepare the higher education sector for the evolving demand–supply trends across the globe—particularly those related to the global mobility of students and faculty and improving the quality of and demand for higher studies in India.
  1. Further, immediate measures are required to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on job offers, internship programs, and research projects.
    - Four, it is also important to reconsider the current delivery and pedagogical methods in school and higher education by seamlessly integrating classroom learning with e-learning modes to build a unified learning system.
  1. The major challenge in EDTech reforms at the national level is the seamless integration of technology in the present Indian education system, which is the most diverse and largest in the world with more than 15 lakh schools and 50,000 higher education institutions.
  2. Further, it is also important to establish quality assurance mechanisms and quality benchmark for online learning developed and offered by India HEIs as well as e-learning platforms (growing rapidly).

3. Many e-learning players offer multiple courses on the same subjects with different levels of certifications, methodology and assessment parameters.
4. So, the quality of courses may differ across different e-learning platforms.
  - Five, Indian traditional knowledge is well known across the globe for its scientific innovations, values, and benefits to develop sustainable technologies and medicines.
1. The courses on Indian traditional knowledge systems in the fields of yoga, Indian medicines, architecture, hydraulics, ethno botany, metallurgy and agriculture should be integrated with a present-day mainstream university education to serve the larger cause of humanity.

### Conclusion

- In this time of crisis, a well-rounded and effective educational practice is what is needed for the capacity-building of young minds. It will develop skills that will drive their employability, productivity, health, and well-being in the decades to come, and ensure the overall progress of India.

### 4) Gilgit-Baltistan polls illegal



### Context

**A Pakistani human rights activist has called Islamabad's move to fortify its occupation of Gilgit-Baltistan by holding elections in the region illegal. He has urged people in Gilgit-Baltistan to boycott the polls sponsored by Pakistan.**

### **What is the background?**

- Earlier this month, the Ministry of External Affairs issued a “strong protest” over an order by the Pakistan Supreme Court allowing the Imran Khan government to hold elections in the region of Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.
- The government said it had issued a demarche to protest what it called Pakistan’s attempt to make “material changes” to the disputed area, by bringing federal authority to Gilgit-Baltistan, which has functioned as a “provincial autonomous region” since 2009.

### **Where is Gilgit-Baltistan?**

- Gilgit-Baltistan is a region administered by Pakistan as an administrative territory, constituting the northern portion of the larger Kashmir region which has been the subject of a dispute between India and Pakistan since 1947 and between India and China from somewhat later.
- It is the northernmost territory administered by Pakistan.
- It borders Azad Kashmir to the south, the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to the west, the Wakhan Corridor of Afghanistan to the north, the Xinjiang region of China, to the east and northeast, and the Indian-administered union territories Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh to the southeast.

### **What is Gilgit-Baltistan order 2018?**

- Pakistan had changed the legal status of Gilgit-Baltistan first in 2009 by introducing Gilgit Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order-2009 which changed its name from Northern Areas to Gilgit-Baltistan.
- Under this arrangement, it was given a province-like status with the appointment of a chief minister and governor for self-rule. Thus, constitutionally it still remained out of Pakistan.
- In May 2018, the Gilgit-Baltistan Order-2018 was passed, replacing the earlier order.
- This was seen as yet another attempt by the Pakistan government towards incorporating the disputed region as its fifth province.

### **What are India’s protests?**

- India has conveyed its strong protest to Pakistan over its efforts to bring “material

change” to territories under its “illegal and forcible” occupation after the country’s top court allowed holding of elections in Gilgit-Baltistan.

- The Ministry of External Affairs said a demarche was issued to a senior Pakistani diplomat lodging a strong protest over the court ruling and clearly conveying that the entire union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, including the areas of Gilgit and Baltistan, are an integral part of India.
- It was further conveyed that such actions can neither hide the illegal occupation of parts of Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh by Pakistan nor the grave human rights violations, exploitation and denial of freedom to the people residing in Pakistan occupied territories for the past seven decades.
- In a recent ruling, the Pakistan Supreme Court allowed Islamabad to amend a 2018 administrative order to conduct general elections in the region.
- India demarched senior Pakistan diplomats and lodged a strong protest to Pakistan against the Supreme Court of Pakistan order on the so-called 'Gilgit-Baltistan', the MEA said in a statement.
- The MEA said the government of Pakistan or its judiciary has no locus standi on territories "illegally and forcibly" occupied by it.
- India completely rejects such actions and continued attempts to bring material changes in Pakistan occupied areas of the Indian territory of Jammu and Kashmir.
- The MEA said Pakistan's recent actions can neither hide the "illegal occupation" of parts of union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh by it nor the "grave human rights violations, exploitation and denial of freedom" to the people residing in these areas for the past seven decades.
- India’s position in the matter is reflected in the resolution passed by the Parliament in 1994 by consensus.

### **Conclusion**

- In a statement, India's MEA said, "It was clearly conveyed that the entire Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, including the areas of Gilgit and Baltistan, are an integral part of India by virtue of its fully legal and irrevocable

accession. The Government of Pakistan or its judiciary has no locus standi on

territories illegally and forcibly occupied by it."

## 5) Changing labour and tax laws

**WHAT INDUSTRY WANTS**

- Changes in labour laws to redefine working hours and shift timings
- Option to choose NPS over EPFO since employees may work for more than one co
- A relook at role of employer with respect to safety and health measures at workplace
- Change in I-T laws since expenses incurred by employers to enable WFH will need to be treated as business expenses
- Make DoT exemptions on work from home permanent
- Improve telecom and broadband infra in residential areas

### Context

The information technology industry has approached the central government ministries to flesh out changes to taxation and labour laws in line with the work-from-home model.

While the coronavirus pandemic forced offices to migrate to WFH, many are expected to continue this even once a solution for the current health crisis emerges.

At least 4.3 million IT workers or half the sector's workforce would WFH permanently, according to estimates.

### What is the background?

- Labour law reforms by states may make it easier for factories and businesses to run efficiently amid the COVID-19 pandemic which will boost economic activities, generating employment and will help in tackling the economic crisis
- The shutdown of factories made a severe dent on employability conditions of labour and now there is a need to create an environment in which the business can run in the present and foreseeing future
- The unemployment rate rose to the highest level of 27.1 per cent in the last

week which is alarming and needs to be addressed now.

- These new reforms will promote ease of doing business in the state.

### What are the various Indian labour laws?

- There are certain Indian labour laws which regulate and address the employment-related issues:
  - Factories Act**- The act ensures safety measures in factory premises, and promotes the health and welfare of workers.
  - Shops and Commercial Establishments Act**- The act aims to regulate hours of work, payment, overtime, a weekly day off with pay, other holidays with pay, annual leave, employment of children and young persons, and employment of women.
  - The Minimum Wages Act**- The act sets the minimum wages that must be paid to skilled and unskilled labours. It covers more workers than any other labour legislation.
  - Industrial Disputes Act, 1947**- The act relates to terms of service such as layoff, retrenchment, and closure of industrial enterprises and strikes and lockouts.

### **Why are labour laws often criticised?**

- Indian labour laws are often characterised as inflexible.
- Due to legal requirements, firms (those employing more than 100 workers) hesitate from hiring new workers because firing them requires government approvals.
- Even the organised sector is increasingly employing workers without formal contracts.
- There are too many laws, often unnecessarily complicated, and not effectively implemented.
- If India had fewer and easier-to-follow labour laws, firms would be able to expand and contract depending on the market conditions.
- At present 90% of India's workers are part of the informal economy and this would have helped workers as they would get better salaries and social security benefits.

### **What recent criticism?**

- Even before the COVID-19 crisis, due to the deceleration in the economy, wage growth had been moderating.
- The removal of all labour laws will not only strip the labour of its basic rights but also drive down wages and will turn the existing formal workers into informal workers as they would not get any social security.
- Instead of providing protection to the most marginalised and vulnerable, as exposed by the COVID crisis, these moves will further exacerbate the crisis for those who are worst affected by it.
- Many central trade unions are considering lodging a complaint with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) against the anti-worker changes in the labour laws in some States.
- According to them, this move was the second phase of anti-worker policies after six state governments increased the working hours from eight to 12 hours.
- Central trade unions consider these moves as being a gross violation of the Right to Freedom of Association [ILO Convention 87], Rights to Collective Bargaining [ILO Convention 98] and also the internationally accepted norm of eight hour working days.

### **Conclusion**

- Even though the industry and free-market experts have been demanding labour reforms for long, it needs to be ensured that the worker welfare is not compromised.
- The change in labour laws should be beneficial for both the industry as well as the labourers.
- It is crucial that companies safeguard the interests and wellbeing of the labourers.
- Change is important, but the change should come with a focus on worker well-being working conditions and living conditions.

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