

OFFICERS' PULSE

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**AT A GLANCE
& IN DEPTH.**

Polity and Social Issues

Economy

International Relations

Environment

Science and Tech

Culture

COVERAGE.

The Hindu

The Indian Express

PIB

Rajya Sabha TV

All India Radio

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THE **PULSE** OF UPSC AT YOUR FINGER TIPS



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News @ a glance

Polity

1) National Party

What is a National Party?

- For any political party to be eligible for recognition as a National Party, it has to satisfy any of the three conditions below.
- If it secures at least 6% of the valid vote in an Assembly or a Lok Sabha General Election in any four or more states and wins at least 4 seats in a Lok Sabha General Election from any State or States.
- If it wins at least 2% of the total Lok Sabha seats in a Lok Sabha General Election and these seats have to be won from at least 3 states.
- The party is recognized as a State Party in at least four states

Role of Election Commission:

- The Election Commission of India lists political parties as “national party”, “state party” or “registered (unrecognised) party”.

Recognition as a State Party

- For any political party to be eligible for recognition as a State Party in a state, it has to satisfy any of the five conditions:
- If it Secures at least 6% of the valid vote & win at least 2 seats in an Assembly General Election
- If it Secures at least 6% of the valid vote & win at least 1 seat in a Lok Sabha General Election
- If it Wins at least 3% of the seats or at least 3 seats, whichever is more, in an Assembly General Election
- If it Wins at least 1 out of every 25 seats from a state in a Lok Sabha General Election
- If it Secures at least 8% of the total valid vote in an Assembly or a Lok Sabha General Election.

Loss of Recognised Status:

- A state party/ a national party, loses its given status if it fails to fulfil any of the conditions for two successive Assembly/two successive Lok Sabha elections.

What are the benefits of being recognised as a national party?

- If a party is recognized as a National Party, it is entitled to a reserved symbol for its candidates contesting from across the country.
- This is critical for political parties since a large section of voters in the country are illiterate and depend on symbols to identify the party they want to vote for.
- Having a pan-India symbol helps parties reach out to prospective voters.
- National parties get dedicated broadcast slots on public broadcasters Doordarshan and All India Radio during the general elections.
- Political parties are entitled to nominate ‘star campaigners’ during general elections. A national party can have a maximum of 40 ‘star campaigners’ while a registered unrecognised party can nominate a maximum of 20 ‘star campaigners’, whose travel expenses are not accounted for in the election expense accounts of candidates.

Why in News

- Political instability is mounting in Manipur Assembly after the four MLAs of National People's Party (only recognized National Party from North East) along with few others had withdrawn support from the ruling government recently.
- There are totally 8 recognized National Parties in India: INC, BJP, BSP, NCP, CPI, CPI(M), Trinamool Congress and NPP.

2) Secrecy of ballot

What is a Secret Ballot?

- The secret ballot is a voting method in which a voter's choices in an election or a referendum are anonymous.
- It aims for forestalling attempts to influence the voter by intimidation, blackmailing, and potential vote-buying.
- The system is one means of achieving the goal of political privacy.

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court has held that secrecy of ballot is the cornerstone of free and fair

elections. The choice of a voter should be free and the secret ballot system in a democracy ensures it.

Background:

- The judgment came on an appeal against the Allahabad High Court decision setting aside the voting of a no-confidence motion in a zila panchayat in Uttar Pradesh in 2018.
- The High Court found that some of the panchayat members had violated the rule of secrecy of ballot.
- It relied on CCTV footage to conclude that they had either displayed the ballot papers or by their conduct revealed the manner in which they had voted.
- The apex court ordered a re-vote of the motion within the next two months.
- News in Detail:
- It is the policy of law to protect the right of voters to secrecy of the ballot.
- Even a remote or distinct possibility that a voter can be forced to disclose for whom she has voted would act as a positive constraint and a check on the freedom to exercise franchise.
- Judges referred to Section 94 of the Representation of People Act, which upholds the privilege of the voter to maintain confidentiality about her choice of vote.

About No-Confidence Motion:

- Neither a confidence motion nor a no-confidence motion is mentioned in the Constitution. But Article 75 spells it out that “the council of ministers shall be collectively responsible to the House of the People”. This implies that the majority of Lok Sabha members must support the prime minister and his cabinet.
- According to rule 198 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of the Lok Sabha, a no-confidence motion (NCM) is “a motion expressing want of confidence in the Council of Ministers.”
- Rule 198 of the Rules of Procedure and conduct of Lok Sabha specifies the procedure for moving a no-confidence motion.
- A no-confidence motion can be moved only in the Lok Sabha and not Rajya Sabha.
- A minimum of 50 members have to accept the motion and accordingly, the Speaker will announce the date for discussion for the motion.
- A no-confidence motion need not set out any grounds on which it is based.

- A no-confidence motion needs a simple majority to pass the House.
- The day of the vote, the appointed government has to prove a majority during the floor test to remain in power. If they fail the floor test, the government has to resign.
- Acharya Kripalani moved the first no confidence motion against Jawaharlal Nehru in August 1963, immediately after the India–China war.

Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1950

- Provides for the allocation of seats in the House of the People and in the Legislative Assemblies and Legislative Councils of States.
- Lays procedure for the preparation of electoral rolls and the manner of filling seats.
- Lays down the qualification of voters.

RPA, 1951:

- All matters relating to the actual conduct of elections are governed by the provisions of the Representation of the People Act 1951.
- It also talks about corruption and other illegal activities related to elections.
- The Act makes provisions for dispute redressal in matters connected to elections.
- It also talks about the qualification as well as grounds for the disqualification of MPs and MLAs.
- The privilege ends when the voter decides to waive the privilege and instead volunteers to disclose as to whom she had voted.
- The apex court referred to Section 28(8) of the Uttar Pradesh Kshettra Panchayat and Zila Panchayat Adhiniyam, 1961.
- This provision states that a motion of no confidence shall be put to vote in the prescribed manner by secret ballot.

3) Anti Defection Law

What is the anti-defection law?

- For a very long time, the Indian political system was impacted by political defections by members of the legislature. This situation brought greater political instability in the system.
- The anti-defection law contained in the **10th Schedule** of the Constitution sought to prevent such political defections which may be due to reward of office or other similar considerations.
- The Tenth Schedule lays down the process by which legislators may be disqualified on grounds of defection by the **Presiding Officer of a legislature**.

- The law applies to **both Parliament and state assemblies.**

When does it apply?

- If an MP/MLA who belongs to a political party **voluntarily resigns** from his party or **disobeys the party "whip"**, he is disqualified.
- **Members independent** of any political party will lose their membership if they **join one after their election to legislature.**
- An MP/ MLA who is **nominated** (to the Rajya Sabha or upper houses in state legislatures) will be disqualified if he/ she joins a political party **after 6 months of nomination.**

Exceptions:

- The anti-defection law allows a party to **merge** with or into another party provided that at least two-thirds of its legislators are in favour of the merger. In such a scenario, neither the members who decide to merge, nor the ones who stay with the original party will face disqualification.
- Any person to be elected as **Chairman or Speaker** voluntarily gives up the membership of the political party to which he belonged immediately before such election and rejoins such political party after he ceases to hold such office.

Deciding Authority:

- Any question regarding disqualification arising out of defection is to be decided by the **presiding officer of the House** i.e, Speaker in case of Lok Sabha and Chairman in case of Rajya Sabha.
- And if the question which has arisen is as to whether the Chairman or the Speaker of a House has become subject to such disqualification, the question shall be referred for the decision of such member of the House as the House may elect on this behalf and his decision shall be final.

Does the decision of the Presiding Officer subject to judicial review?

- The law initially stated that the decision of the Presiding Officer is not subject to judicial review. This was struck down by the Supreme Court in 1992.
- It held that while deciding a question under the 10th Schedule, the presiding officer should function as a tribunal. Hence the **decision of the Presiding Officer was subject to Judicial Review.**
- But it held that there may not be any judicial intervention until the Presiding Officer gives his order.

Challenges:

- The anti-defection law seeks to provide a stable government by ensuring the legislators do not switch sides. But this could lead to a restriction on legislators from voting in line with their conscience, judgement and interests of their electorate.
- The anti-defection law delays the oversight function of the legislature over the government, by making sure that members vote based on the decisions taken by the party leadership, and not based on what their constituents would like them to vote for.
- The law **does not specify a time period** for the Presiding Officer to decide on a disqualification plea.

Recommendations:

- The **170th Law Commission report** underscored the importance of intra-party democracy by arguing that a political party cannot be a dictatorship internally and democratic in its functioning outside. The parties should listen to the opinions of the members and have discussions giving the freedom of speech and expression and promote inner-party democracy.
- **Justice Verma** in Kihoto Hollohan judgment said that tenure of the Speaker is dependent on the continuous support of the majority in the House and therefore, he does not satisfy the requirement of such independent adjudicatory authority. So there is a need for an **independent authority** to deal with the cases of defection.
- The Election Commission recommended that decisions under the Tenth Schedule should be made by the **President/ Governor on the binding advice of the Election Commission.**

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court in a case relating to disqualification in Manipur Assembly had ruled that the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly while dealing with cases under the Tenth Schedule, is **bound to decide disqualification petitions within 3 months.**
- The apex court also called for an **independent mechanism** including a Permanent Tribunal to decide the disputes under 10th Schedule.

4) Extension to OBC Sub-Categorisation Commission About the commission

- The Government constituted a Commission on 2nd October, 2017, headed by retired Delhi High Court Chief Justice G. Rohini, under **Article 340** of the Constitution to examine the issues of the **sub-categorization of Other Backward Classes**:
 - To examine the **extent of inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation among the castes or communities** included in the broad category of Other Backward Classes with reference to such classes included in the Central List;
 - To work out the mechanism, **criteria, norms and parameters in a scientific approach for sub-categorisation within such Other Backward Classes**; and
 - To take up the exercise of **identifying the respective castes or communities or sub-castes or synonyms in the Central List of Other Backward Classes** and classifying them into their respective sub-categories.

Article 340 of the Indian Constitution

- The **President may by order appoint a Commission** consisting of such persons as he thinks fit **to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes** within the territory of India and the difficulties under which they labour and to make recommendations as to the steps that should be taken by the Union or any State to remove such difficulties and to improve their condition and as to the grants that should be made for the purpose by the Union or any State and the conditions subject to which such grants should be made, and the order appointing such Commission shall define the procedure to be followed by the Commission.
- A Commission so appointed shall investigate the matters referred to them and present to the President a report setting out the facts as found by them and making such recommendations as they think proper.
- The President shall cause a copy of the report so presented together with a memorandum explaining the action taken thereon to be laid before each House of Parliament.

Background:

- In 2015, the **National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)** had recommended that OBCs should be categorized into extremely backward classes, more backward classes and backward classes.
- The benefits of the reservation in OBCs are being cornered mostly by the dominant OBC groups over the years so there is a need to recognize sub-quotas for the extremely backward classes within the OBCs.

National Commission for Backward Classes

- NCBC is a **constitutional body** established under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- NCBC has the authority to examine complaints and welfare measures regarding socially and educationally backward classes.
- It presents to the President, annually and at such other times as the Commission may deem fit, reports upon the working of those safeguards.
- It has the powers of a civil court while trying a suit.
- The Commission consists of five members including a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and three other Members appointed by the President.
- The conditions of service and tenure of office of the Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and other Members is determined by the President.

What is the need for Reservation?

- For thousands of years, education was denied to the majority of the population of our country on the basis of one's birth.
- Indian subcontinent was bound by Manu Shashtra, the rulebook of the Hindu religion that proscribed education of the Shudras. Non-Brahmins were oppressed in many ways.
- Not only education, but also positions of power and lucrative jobs were denied to them.
- "Reservation" is a mechanism to give education and jobs to the oppressed for historically and disadvantaged (socially, economically and educationally backward classes) groups.

Constitutional Provisions:

- Under Articles 15 and 16 of the Indian Constitution, it allows the government to set quotas to ensure any "socially and educationally backward classes of citizens" is properly represented in public life.

- **Article 15(4)** allows the state to make special provisions for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.
- **Article 16(4)** allows the state to make special provisions for the reservation of appointments or posts in favor of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State.
- Constitution (103rd Amendment) Act, 2019 introduced **economic reservation by amending Articles 15 and 16**.
- It inserted **Article 15 (6) and Article 16 (6)** in the Constitution to **allow reservation for the economically backward in the unreserved category**.
- It was enacted to promote the welfare of the poor not covered by the 50% reservation policy for SCs, STs and Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC).It enables both Centre and the states to provide reservation to the EWSs of society.

Other Provisions:

- The **Kalelkar Commission**, set up in 1953, was the first to identify backward classes other than the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) at the national level.
- The **Mandal Commission Report**, 1980 estimated the OBC population at 52% and classified 1,257 communities as backward.
- It recommended increasing the existing quotas, which were only for SC/ST, from 22.5% to 49.5% to include the OBCs.
- The **Indira Sawhney Case** recognized socially and economically backward classes as a category and recognized the validity of the **27 percent reservation**. It laid down a **50 percent limit** on reservations and observed that economic, social and educational criteria were needed to define backward classes.

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet has approved the extension of the term of the Commission to examine the issue of Sub-categorization of Other Backward Classes, by 6 months.

Economy

1) India's trade deficit with China

What's in the news?

- A recent study released by Acuité Ratings & Research said India can potentially reduce its trade deficit with China by \$8.4 billion over FY 21-22, which is equivalent to 17.3% of the deficit with China and 0.3% of India's GDP.
- This can be achieved by the **rationalisation of just a quarter of India's imports** from that country in select sectors where India has well-established manufacturing capabilities.
- Without any significant additional investments, the **domestic manufacturing sector can substitute 25% of the total imports from specified sectors** in the first phase.

Highlights of the study

- With an import of \$65.1 billion and export of \$16.6 billion, India recorded a **trade deficit of \$48.5 billion with China in FY20**.
- While imports from China have moderately declined by 15% since FY18 due to imposition of **anti-dumping duties** on some products, the dependence of the domestic economy on Chinese imports remains high with direct contribution to over 30% of India's aggregate trade deficit.
- Over the past 3 decades, India's exports to China grew at a Compound annual growth rate of 30% but its imports expanded at 47%, leading to lower capacity utilisation of domestic players in a few sectors. India can consider certain measures to reduce the dependence gradually which will also have a positive impact on the Indian economy.
- **Nearly 40 sub-sectors of India had the potential to lower their import dependency on China.** The sectors include chemicals, automotive components, bicycles parts, drug formulations, cosmetics, consumer electronics and leather-based goods.

Related information

- Dumping is the practice of selling a product in a foreign market at an unfairly low price (*a price that is lower than the cost in the home market, or which is lower than the cost of production*) in order to gain a competitive advantage over other suppliers.

- An anti-dumping duty is a tariff that a domestic government imposes on foreign imports that it believes are priced below fair market value.
- Countries use anti-dumping duty to curb the ill effects caused by dumping on domestic industries, as well as to promote and establish fair trade.

2) Co-operative banks

About Co-operative banks

- Co-operative banks are financial entities established on a co-operative basis and belonging to their members. This means that the customers of a co-operative bank are also its owners.
- These banks provide a wide range of regular banking and financial services.

Structure of co-operative banks in India

- Broadly, co-operative banks in India are divided into two categories - **urban and rural**.
- Rural cooperative credit institutions could either be short-term or long-term in nature. Further, **short-term** cooperative credit institutions are further sub-divided into State Co-operative Banks, District Central Co-operative Banks, Primary Agricultural Credit Societies.
- Meanwhile, the **long-term** institutions are either State Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (SCARDBs) or Primary Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (PCARDBs).
- On the other hand, Urban Co-operative Banks (UBBs) are either **scheduled or non-scheduled**. Scheduled and non-scheduled UCBs are again of two kinds- **multi-state** and those operating in a **single state**.

Who oversees these banks?

- In India, co-operative banks are registered under the **States Cooperative Societies Act**.
- Cooperative banks are currently under the **dual control** of the Registrar of Cooperative Societies and RBI.
- While the role of registrar of cooperative societies includes incorporation, registration, management, audit, supersession of board and liquidation, RBI is responsible for regulatory functions such

maintaining cash reserve and capital adequacy, among others.

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet has approved an ordinance to bring all urban and multi-State cooperative banks under the **direct supervision of the RBI**.
- Currently, these banks come under dual regulation of the RBI and the Registrar of Co-operative Societies.
- The move is aimed at strengthening lenders' oversight, boosting depositors' confidence, and preventing instances of fraud and financial irregularities.

3) World Economic Outlook

About IMF

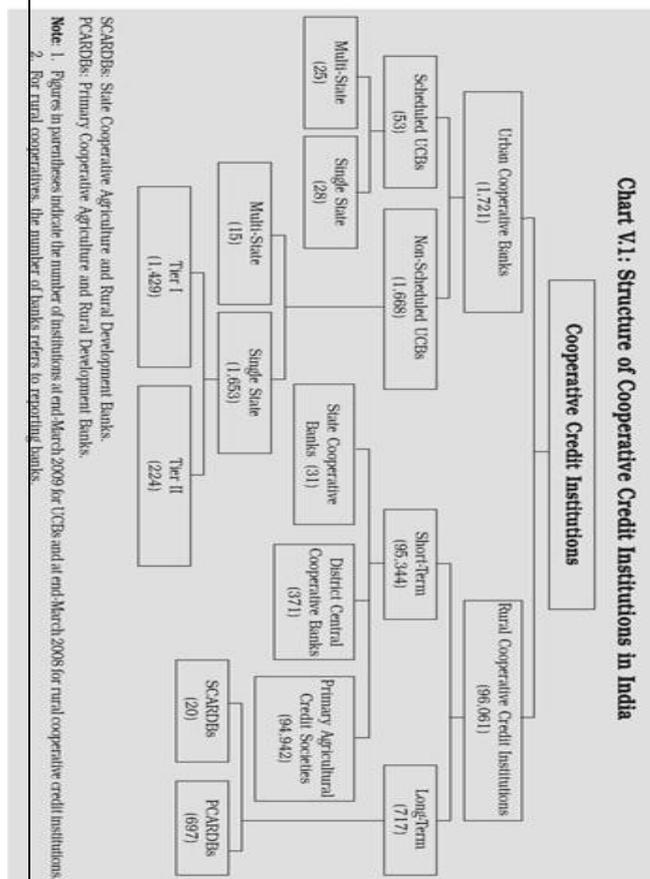
- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) was conceived in 1944 at the **United Nations Bretton Woods Conference** in New Hampshire, United States.
- The IMF and the World Bank are called **Bretton Woods twins**.
- The IMF is a permanent observer at the UN.
- It is an organization of 189 countries. **India** is a founder member of the IMF.
- The mandate of the IMF as follows:
 - To promote international monetary cooperation;
 - To facilitate the expansion and balanced growth of international trade;
 - To promote exchange stability;
 - To assist member countries in correcting maladjustments in their balance of payments without resorting to measures destructive of national or international prosperity;
 - To assist in the elimination of foreign exchange restrictions which hamper the growth of world trade;

Why in News?

- The IMF has released its April 2020 World Economic Outlook (WEO) forecast.

Highlights

- The forecast projected a sharp contraction of 4.5% for the Indian economy in 2020, a historic low, citing the unprecedented coronavirus pandemic that has nearly stalled all economic activities.
- The IMF's record reveals that this is the lowest ever for India since 1961. The IMF does not have the data beyond that year.
- India is expected to bounce back in 2021 with a robust 6% growth rate.
- It projected the global growth at -4.9% in 2020. In 2021, global growth is projected at 5.4%.
- For the first time, all regions are projected to experience negative growth in 2020.



International Relations

1) Visa suspension

What's in the news?

- The US administration has said it was extending the 60-day ban on immigration and non-immigrant worker visas till the end of 2020.
- Popular work visas including the much-coveted H-1B and H-2B (non-agricultural workers), and certain categories of H4 visas (H-1B dependents), J visas, and L visas (intra-company transfers) will also remain suspended until December 31.
- The move, US President Donald Trump said, was to protect domestic workers who had been impacted due to a contraction in the economy in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

H-1B visas

- In order to fill a vacuum of highly-skilled low-cost employees in IT and other related domains, the US administration issues a certain number of visas each year which allows **companies from outside the US to send employees to work on client sites**.
- Of these work visas, the H-1B remains the most popular among Indian IT companies. The US government has a cap of 85,000 total H-1B visas for each year. Of this, 65,000 H-1B visas are issued to **highly skilled foreign workers**, while the rest 20,000 can be additionally allotted to highly skilled foreign workers who have a higher education or masters degree from an American university.
- H-1B visas are generally approved for a period of **three years** for a person, but many visa holders change employers to extend their US stay.

Why did the US suspend non-immigrant worker visas?

- Since it was started in 1952, the H-1 visa scheme has undergone many changes and revisions to allow or disallow certain categories of skilled workers in the US, depending on the economic situation of the country.
- The technology boom coupled with the arrival of the internet and low-cost computers in developing nations such as India and China saw a large number of graduates willing to work at relatively low costs in the US, a win-win situation for both the employer and the employee.

- However, it has since often been **criticised for sending low cost workers to the US at the expense of domestic workers**.

How does it impact Indian IT companies?

- Indian IT companies are **amongst the biggest beneficiaries of the US H-1B visa regime**, and have since the 1990s cornered a lion's share of the total number of visas issued each year.
- As of April 1, 2020, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) had received about 2.5 lakh H-1B work visa applications, according to official data. Indians had applied for as many as 1.84 lakh or 67 per cent of the total H-1B work visas for the current financial year ending March 2021.
- Apart from the suspension of these work visas, the executive order signed by the U.S. administration has also made sweeping changes to the H-1B work visa norms, which will **no longer be decided by the currently prevalent lottery system**. The new norms will now **favour highly-skilled workers who are paid the highest wages** by their respective companies.
- This could result in a significant impact on margins and worker wages of Indian IT companies which send thousands of low-cost employees to work on client sites in the US.
- Though the large Indian IT companies have cut down their dependency on H-1B and other worker visas by hiring as much as 50 per cent of staff locally, they still rely on these visas to keep costs in check.
- Indian IT companies also offer subcontracts to Indian nationals already present in the US with valid H-1B visas. Bangalore-based Wipro spends as much as 20 per cent of its revenue to subcontract Indian workers with valid H-1B visas.

2) Financial Action Task Force

About Financial Action Task Force (FATF):

- It is an **intergovernmental organization** that designs and promotes policies and standards to combat financial crime.
- Recommendations of created by the FATF target
 - Money laundering
 - Terrorist financing
 - Other threats to the global financial system

- The FATF was created in 1989 by the **G7 countries**, and is headquartered in Paris.
- There are 37 members, including **India** and two regional organisations - European Commission and the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Grey list FATF:

- Member countries that have deficiencies in their anti-money laundering and counter terrorist financing (AML/CTF) regimes but they **commit** to an action plan to address these loopholes.
- Currently, there are 18 countries on the grey list, including Mauritius and Pakistan.

Black list FATF:

- Member countries that have deficiencies in their anti-money laundering and counter terrorist financing (AML/CTF) regimes and **do not end up doing enough**.
- As of now there are only two countries in the blacklist — **Iran and North Korea**.
- While greylist includes countries which are considered as safe havens for supporting terror funding and money laundering, blacklisting will mean **severe strictures on the countries banks and credit rating**, as well as **access to loans and foreign investments**.
- Pakistan has been under the FATF's scanner since 2018, when it was put on the greylist for terror financing and money laundering risks.

Why in News?

- Pakistan received another extension on the "greylist", as the FATF plenary session decided to continue all countries under scrutiny for Terror Financing and Money Laundering until October 2020, owing to the Coronavirus pandemic.
- At the FATF plenary, held through video conferencing, Pakistan was due for a decision on whether it would be kept on the "greylist" or downgraded to the blacklist for failing to meet the FATF's 27-point action plan on anti-money laundering and counter terrorist financing (AML/CTF) measures.

Money Laundering and the Illegal Wildlife Trade Report

- FATF has released its first global report on the illegal wildlife trade titled "**Money Laundering and the Illegal Wildlife Trade**".

Highlights of the report

- In its report, the FATF has described illegal wildlife trade as a "global threat", which also has links with other organised crimes

like modern slavery, drug trafficking and arms trade.

- The illegal trade is estimated to generate revenues of up to \$23 billion a year. The report says a financial probe is key to dismantling the syndicates involved, which can in turn significantly impact the associated criminal activities.
- The study has highlighted the growing role of online marketplaces and mobile and social media-based payments to facilitate movement of proceeds warranting a coordinated response from government bodies, the private sector and the civil society.
- According to the 2016 **UN World Wildlife Crime report**, criminals are illegally trading products derived from over 7,000 species of wild animals and plants across the world.

3) World Drug Report 2020

About United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

- Established in 1997, UNODC is a global leader in the fight against illicit drugs and international crime.
- The work of the UNODC is guided by a broad range of **international legally binding instruments**, such as the three drug control conventions, the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols, the UN Convention against Corruption, the UN standards and norms on crime prevention and criminal justice and nineteen universal legal instruments against terrorism.
- It is headquartered in Vienna.

Why in News?

- The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has released its **World Drug Report 2020**.

Highlights of the report

- The report highlighted a wide range of possible consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on illegal drug production, supply and consumption.
- It expressed concern over the adverse impact of the economic hardship caused by the pandemic. This could lead to an **increase in the number of people resorting to illicit activities linked to drugs to make a living**.
- As experienced during the 2008 economic crisis, it could result in reductions in drug-related budgets of the governments;

overall increase in drug use, with a shift towards cheaper and more harmful drugs.

4) Senkaku islands dispute

Background

- The Diaoyu archipelago (known as the Senkakus in Japanese) is an uninhabited chain of islands in the **East China Sea** claimed by **China, Taiwan and Japan**.
- In recent years, the increased presence of Japanese and Chinese vessels in nearby waters has heightened concerns about possible clashes between the two countries.
- The archipelago has been controlled by Japan since 1895.



Why in News?

- A local council in southern Japan voted to rename the area covering the Senkaku Islands from “Tonoshiro” to “Tonoshiro Senkaku”.
- China denounced the move as illegal and a serious provocation to China’s territorial sovereignty.
- Taiwan says the islands are part of its territory, and also protested the move.

5) Global Education Monitoring Report

About UNESCO

- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was constituted as a **specialized agency** of the United Nations that was outlined in a constitution signed November 16, 1945. The constitution entered into force in 1946.
- Its purpose is to contribute to peace and security by promoting international

collaboration through education, science, culture and communication.

- UNESCO has 193 member countries (including **India**) and it pursues its objectives through five major programs: education, natural sciences, social and human sciences, culture, and communication and information.
- The agency’s permanent headquarters are in Paris, France.

Why in News?

- UNESCO has released its Global Education Monitoring Report 2020.

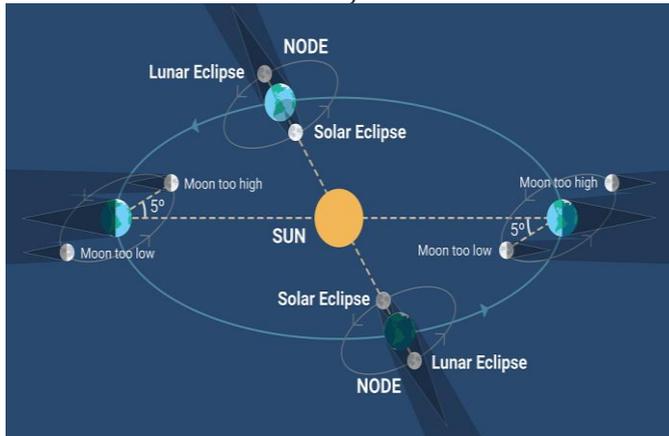
Highlights of the report

- The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities in education systems across the world. Efforts to maintain learning continuity during the pandemic may have actually worsened exclusion trends.
- Education systems responded with distance learning solutions, all of which offered less or more **imperfect substitutes for classroom instruction**.
- Even as governments increasingly rely on technology, the **digital divide** lays bare the limitations of this approach. Not all students and teachers have access to adequate internet connection, equipment, skills and working conditions to take advantage of available platforms.
- School closures also **interrupted support mechanisms** from which many **disadvantaged learners** benefit. Resources for blind and deaf students may not be available outside schools, while children with learning disabilities or those who are on the autism spectrum may struggle with independent work in front of a computer or the disruption of daily school routines.
- For poor students who depend on school for free meals or even free sanitary napkins, closures have been a major blow.
- Cancellation of examinations in many countries, including India, may result in scoring dependent on teachers’ judgements of students instead, which could be affected by stereotypes of certain types of students.
- **Higher drop-out rates** are also a concern; during an earlier Ebola epidemic in Africa, many older girls never returned to school once the crisis was over.

1) Solar and Lunar Eclipse

What Are Eclipses?

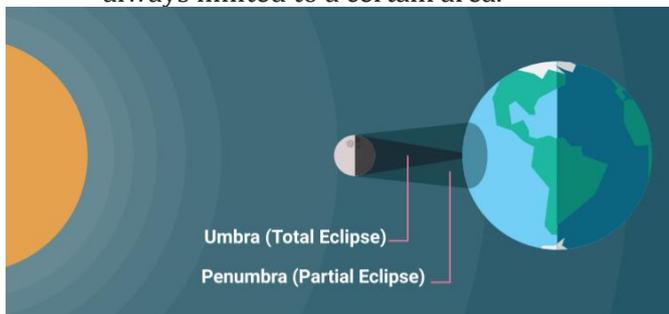
- Eclipses are astronomical events where a celestial body partially or totally covers another celestial object.



- From Earth, we can see 2 types of eclipses – eclipses of the Sun (solar eclipses), and eclipses of the Moon (lunar eclipses).
- For either of the eclipse to take place, the Sun, the Moon, and Earth must be aligned in a perfect or near perfect straight line—an alignment astronomers call syzygy.

What are Solar Eclipses?

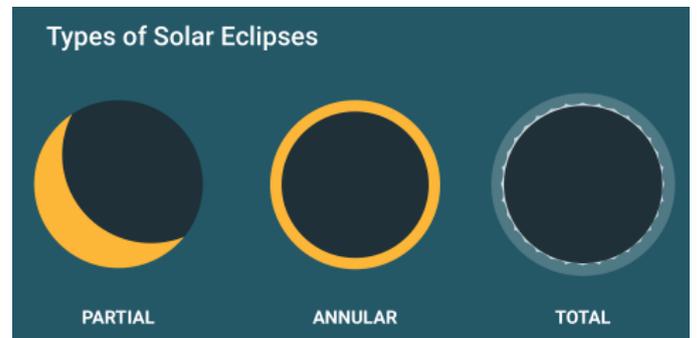
- An eclipse of the Sun occurs **when the New Moon moves between the Sun and Earth**, blocking out the Sun's rays and **casting a shadow on parts of Earth**.
- The Moon's shadow is not big enough to engulf the entire planet, so the shadow is always limited to a certain area.



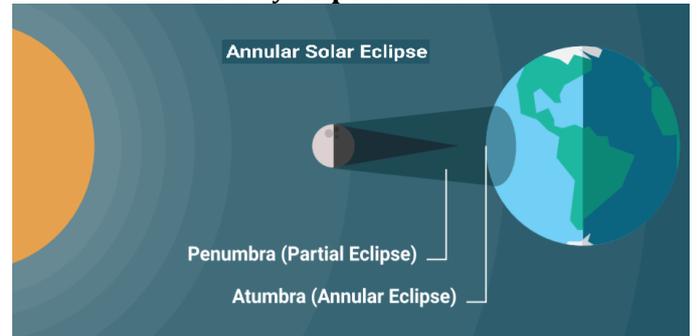
- This area changes during the course of the eclipse because the Moon and Earth are in constant motion.
- Also on average, the same spot on Earth only gets to see a solar eclipse for a few minutes about every 375 years.
- The solar eclipse should not be looked at directly as the Sun's UV radiation can burn the retinas in eyes leading to permanent damage or even blindness.

Types of Solar Eclipses

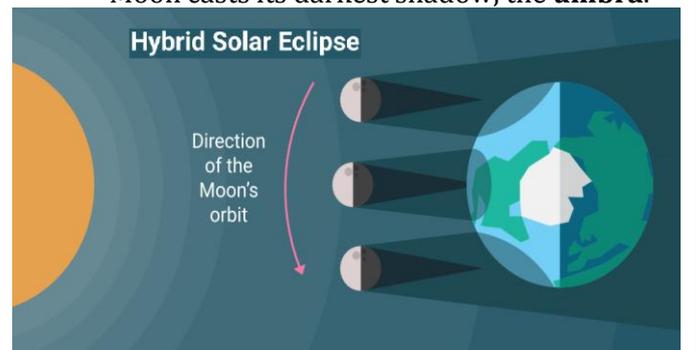
- There are 4 different types of solar eclipses. How much of the Sun's disk is eclipsed, the eclipse magnitude, depends on which part of the Moon's shadow falls on Earth.



- Partial solar eclipses** occur when the Moon only partially obscures the Sun's disk and casts only its **penumbra** on Earth.



- Annular solar eclipses** take place when the Moon's disk is not big enough to cover the entire disk of the Sun, and the Sun's outer edges remain visible to form a **ring of fire** in the sky. An annular eclipse of the Sun takes place when the Moon is near **apogee**, and the Moon's **antumbra** falls on Earth.
- Total solar eclipses** happen when the Moon completely covers the Sun, and it can only take place when the Moon is near **perigee**, the point of the Moon's orbit closest to Earth. In a total solar eclipse, the Moon casts its darkest shadow, the **umbra**.



- Hybrid Solar Eclipses**, also known as annular-total eclipses, are the **rarest** type. They occur when the same eclipse changes from an annular to a total solar eclipse, and/or vice versa, along the eclipse's path.

Why every New Moon does not cause a solar eclipse?

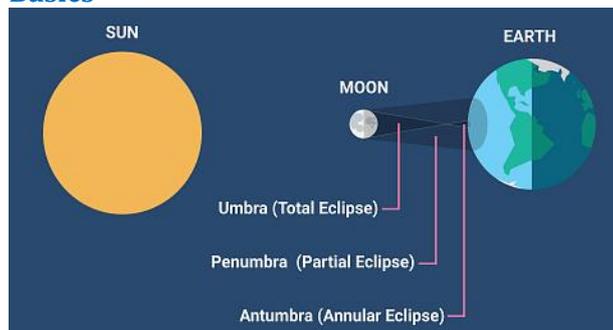
- There are 2 reasons, why isn't there a solar eclipse every New Moon night;
- The New Moon has to be near a **lunar node**. These nodes are the **2 points** where the **plane of the Moon's orbital path**

around Earth **meets Earth's orbital plane** around the Sun—the ecliptic. The paths meet because the plane of the Moon's path around Earth is inclined at an **angle of approximately 5°** to the ecliptic.



- The **Sun must also be close to a lunar node** so it can form a perfect or near-perfect line with the Moon and Earth. This alignment occurs a little less than 6 months apart, and it lasts, on average, around 34.5 days. It is only during this time—the eclipse season—that eclipses can take place.

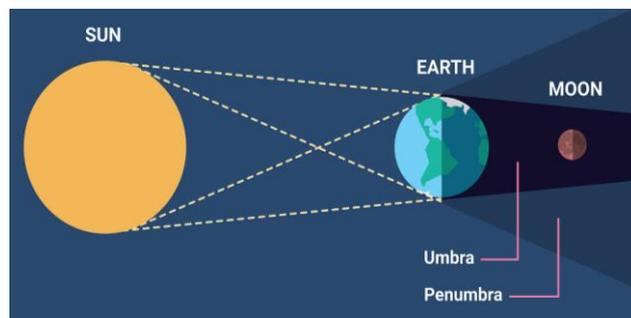
Basics



- Earth's shadow can be divided into three parts:
- Umbra - the darker, central part.
- Penumbra - the outer part.
- Antumbra - the partly shaded area beyond the umbra.

Lunar Eclipses

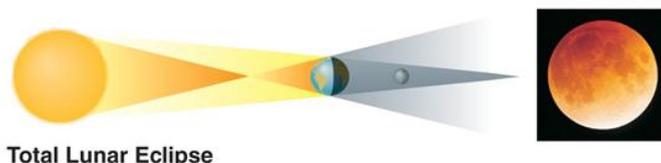
- The Moon does not have its own light but shines because its surface reflects the Sun's rays.
- A lunar eclipse occurs when Earth comes between the Sun and the Moon and blocks the Sun's rays from directly reaching the Moon.
- The Sun casts the Earth's shadow on the Moon's surface.
- Total lunar eclipses happen only when:
 - It is **Full Moon**.
 - At the same time, **the Moon is at (or very near) a lunar node**, so the Sun, the Moon, and the Earth are aligned in a straight (or nearly straight) line.



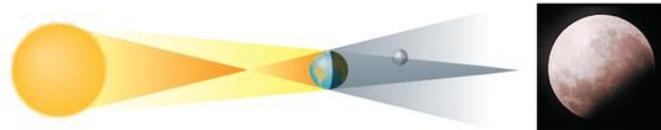
- Almost everyone on the night side of Earth can see a total eclipse of the Moon.
- Because of this, most people have higher chances of seeing a total lunar eclipse than a total solar eclipse, even though both occur at similar intervals.
- Unlike solar eclipses, observing a total lunar eclipse does not require any special equipment. Lunar eclipses are **safe to see with the naked and unaided eye**.
- About 35% of all lunar eclipses in a calendar year are total lunar eclipses. On average, a total lunar eclipse can be seen from any given location every 2.5 years.

Types of Lunar Eclipses

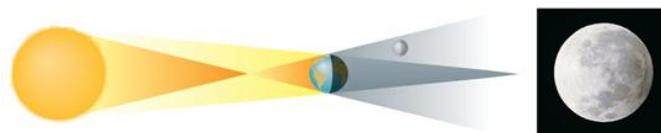
- There are 3 kinds of lunar eclipses: total, partial, and penumbral.
- A **total lunar eclipse** occurs when Earth's umbra – the central, dark part of its shadow – obscures all of the Moon's surface.
- A **partial lunar eclipse** can be observed when only part of the Moon's surface is obscured by Earth's umbra.
- A **penumbral lunar eclipse** happens when the Moon travels through the faint penumbral portion of Earth's shadow.



Total Lunar Eclipse



Partial Lunar Eclipse



Penumbral Lunar Eclipse

Why in News?

- A rare celestial event, an annular solar eclipse, which is popularly known as the

“ring of fire” eclipse, was visible on June 21, 2020 in parts of India.

- The annular phase was visible only in few places of northern India, while the rest of the country witnessed this event partially.

2) Google Chrome spying

Why in News?

- A newly discovered spyware effort attacked users through Google’s market-leading Chrome web browser.

News in Detail

- The spyware has been pushed through at least 111 **malicious or fake Chrome browser extensions**, which have been downloaded some 32 million times.
- Browser extensions are add-ons that provide additional capabilities to the user.
- They can take screenshots, read the clipboard, harvest credential tokens stored in cookies or parameters, grab user keystrokes (like passwords).
- Google had taken off more than many of such extensions from its official Web Store after being alerted to their malicious nature

3) S-400 Triumph Air Defence Missile System

About S-400 missile system

- The S-400 Triumph (NATO reporting name: **SA-21 Growler**) is an **air defence missile system** developed by **Almaz Central Design Bureau of Russia**.
- The S-400 Triumph air defence system integrates a multifunction radar, autonomous detection and targeting systems.
- It is capable of firing **three types of missiles to create a layered defence**.
- The system **can engage all types of aerial targets**, including aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), and ballistic and cruise missiles, within the **range of 400km at an altitude of up to 30km**.
- The system can simultaneously engage 36 targets and can be deployed within five minutes.
- Russia had also supplied two regiments of the S-400 Triumph system to China by July 2019.



Why in News?

- Russia has assured that it would accelerate deliveries of some defence contracts with India.
- India has been asking Russia to speed up deliveries of the S-400 long range air defence system in addition to spares and support for military hardware.

Background

- The Ministry of Defence has signed a \$ 5.2 billion deal for five regiments of the S-400 Triumph.
- This will be under the Indian Air Force (IAF) and these will give more strength to the Air Defence.

4) Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe)

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet recently approved the creation of the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe).

About IN-SPACe

- IN-SPACe is the new entity of the **Department of Space**.
- It will have its own chairperson and board, and **regulate and promote building of routine satellites, rockets and commercial launch services through Indian industry and startups**.
- It will function **autonomously** and parallel to ISRO “without taking away anything from it.”
- IN-SPACe is supposed to be a facilitator, and also a regulator.
- It will act as an interface between ISRO and private parties, including educational and research institutions, and assess how best to utilise India’s space resources and increase space-based activities.
- The IN-SPACe will provide a **level playing field for private companies** to use Indian

space infrastructure, both ground- and space-based, scientific and technical resources, and even data.

- This is part of reforms aimed at giving a **boost to private sector participation** in the entire range of space activities.

More in News

- The NSIL [NewSpace India Ltd] will be strengthened and empowered with a larger role in the new **`open and inclusive` space sector**.
- **NSIL** would endeavour to reorient space activities from a 'supply driven' model to a 'demand driven' one, thereby ensuring optimum utilisation of the nation's space assets.
- It will work with IN-SPACe and enable industry consortia to take on some of the activities of ISRO.
- These include launch vehicles and satellite production, launch services and space based services.
- Some of the planetary exploration missions will also be opened up to private sector through an 'announcement of opportunity' mechanism.

Need for boosting private sector in space

- Indian industry had a barely three per cent share in a rapidly growing global space economy which was already worth at least \$360 billion.
- Indian industry is unable to compete globally, because till now its role has been mainly that of suppliers of components and sub-systems.
- Indian industries do not have the resources or the technology to undertake independent space projects of the kind that US companies such as SpaceX have been doing, or provide space-based services.
- Additionally, the demand for space-based applications and services is growing even within India, and ISRO is unable to cater to this. This can be supplemented by private companies.

How ISRO gains?

- There are two main reasons why enhanced private involvement in the space sector seems important. One is commercial, and the other strategic.
- ISRO seems unable to satisfy the increased requirement of space-based services needed on its own.
- The private industry will also free up ISRO to concentrate on science, research and development, interplanetary exploration and strategic launches.

- Right now, too much of ISRO's resources is consumed by routine activities that delay its more strategic objectives.
- There is no reason why ISRO alone should be launching weather or communication satellites.
- The world over, an increasing number of private players are taking over this activity for commercial benefits.
- ISRO, like NASA, is essentially a scientific organisation whose main objective is exploration of space and carrying out scientific missions.
- And it is not that private players will wean away the revenues that ISRO gets through commercial launches because the space-based economy is expected to "explode" in the next few years, and there would be more than enough for all.
- In addition, ISRO can earn some money by making its facilities and data available to private players.

About NSIL

- New Space India Limited (NSIL), incorporated in 2019 (under the Companies Act, 2013) is a wholly owned Government of India company, under the administrative control of **Department of Space (DOS)**.
- NSIL is the **commercial arm** of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) with the primary responsibility of **enabling Indian industries to take up high technology space related activities**.
- It is also responsible for promotion and commercial exploitation of the products and services emanating from the Indian space programme.

The major business areas of NSIL

- **Production of Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) and Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV)** through industry;
- Production and marketing of space-based services, including launch services and space-based applications like transponder leasing, remote sensing and mission support services;
- Building of Satellites (both Communication and Earth Observation) as per user requirements.
- Transfer of technology developed by ISRO centres/ units and constituent institutions of Dept. of Space;
- Marketing spin off technologies and products/ services emanating out of ISRO activities
- Consultancy services

5) Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration

About SPARC

- The scheme is a **Ministry of Human Resource Development** initiative that aims at improving the **research ecosystem** of India's **Higher Educational Institutions** by facilitating academic and research collaborations between Indian Institutions and the best institutions in the world.
- **Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur** is the National Coordinating Institute to implement the SPARC programme.
- A set of **6 Thrust Areas** (Fundamental Research, Emergent Areas of Impact, Convergence, Action-Oriented Research, Innovation-Driven and Humanities and Social Science) and sub-theme areas in each thrust area has been identified for collaboration under SPARC based on emergent relevance and importance for the nation.
- A set of Nodal Institutions (NI), from India, for each participating foreign country has been identified.
- The expected outcomes include tangible results in terms of large quantity of high

quality research publications, high quality text books and research monographs, imbibing of best practices from top international academicians and researchers, and improved world reputation and ranking of Indian Institutions.

Why in News?

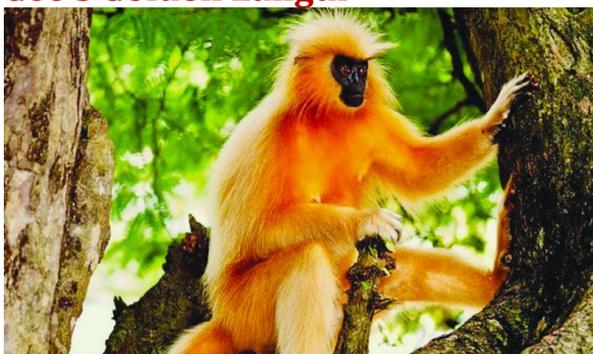
- Researchers from the Indian Institute of Technology Madras are collaborating with their counterparts in Germany to develop new materials for green energy solutions.
- The project, taken up under the SPARC, aims at developing alternative technologies to produce green hydrogen in anticipation of transition to a hydrogen-based economy.
- The aim of this international collaboration is to develop novel low cost electrocatalysts for hydrogen evolution reactions.

Water Electrolysis

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

Environment

1) Gee's Golden Langur



About

- Gee's golden langur (*Trachypithecus geei*), also known simply as the golden langur, is an Old World monkey found in a small region of **western Assam** and in the neighboring foothills of the Black Mountains of **Bhutan**.
- An **endangered** species of monkey, found only in Assam and parts of Bhutan.
- They are endemic to the semi-evergreen and mixed-deciduous forests. In Assam, its main population is in the **Manas Biosphere Reserve** and **Chakrashila Wildlife Sanctuary**. Chakrashila is India's first wildlife sanctuary with golden langur as the primary species.
- The golden langurs habitat in Assam is surrounded by three rivers — Brahmaputra in the south, Manas in east and Sonkosh in west. Their northern limit is the range of hills in Bhutan up to 2,400 metres above sea level.
- To avoid inbreeding (mating among close individuals), golden langurs live in specific groups.
- The recorded estimation in Assam in 2009 was 5,140.
- It is listed in Appendix I of CITES and in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

What are threats?

- They largely travel through upper branches and canopy of the trees. But habitat in Assam has fragmented drastically in the last 30 years. They survive mostly on a variety of juicy leaves. But fragmentation of forests and selective logging is making their food scarcer for them.
- **Electric wires** have been another great threat to them. Unlike the Hanuman langurs elsewhere, golden langurs are yet to adapt to the wires. Recently they have experienced the death of a female golden langur.

Why in the news?

- Primatologists have recently found that occurrences of infanticide and forced abortion practices among golden langurs.
- Forced abortion and infanticide happen when a new male takes over a female. He often kills the baby of a lactating female or hits the abdomen

of a female impregnated by the deposed male till the point of abortion.

- Since a female give birth to a child once in 2-3 years, the practice of infanticide and abortion makes them vulnerable to extinction.
- For example, in 2019, Bhutan recorded a drop of 62% in the population of golden langurs over the 2009 census.

2) Smuggling of exotic species in Indo-Bangla border

Directorate of Revenue Intelligence

- The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) is the apex anti-smuggling agency of India, working **under the Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs, Ministry of Finance**.
- It is tasked with detecting and curbing smuggling of contraband, including drug trafficking and illicit international trade in wildlife and environmentally sensitive items, as well as combating commercial frauds related to international trade and evasion of Customs duty.

Wildlife Crime Control Bureau

- Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) is a **statutory body** established by the Government of India under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to combat organised wildlife crime.
- The Bureau has its headquarter in New Delhi.

Why in the news?

- DRI along with WCCB has busted a wildlife smuggling syndicate with the arrest of two persons and seizure of a consignment of exotic (which are not native to our country) macaws which had been smuggled from Bangladesh to Kolkata and was on its way to Bengaluru.
- The cargo contained 22 exotic bird species largely containing Hyacinth macaw, Pesquet's parrot, Severe macaw and Hahn's macaw.
- West Bengal and north east India are vulnerable to cross border wildlife smuggling because of their proximity to the Bangladesh and Myanmar borders, and to Thailand.
- The campaign to detect trade in exotic species by DRI is to avoid COVID-19 type of diseases which is said to be a zoonotic disease.
- There is a possibility of spread of zoonotic diseases on account of smuggling in such exotic species.

3) Ozone

About

- Ozone (O₃) is a highly reactive gas composed of three oxygen atoms.
- It is both a natural and a man-made product that occurs in the Earth's upper atmosphere ozone molecule (the **stratosphere**) and lower

atmosphere (the **troposphere**). Depending on where it is in the atmosphere, ozone affects life on Earth in either good or bad ways.

- Stratospheric ozone is formed naturally through the interaction of solar ultraviolet (UV) radiation with molecular oxygen (O₂). This "ozone layer," approximately 6 through 30 miles above the Earth's surface, **reduces the amount of harmful UV radiation** reaching the Earth's surface.
- However, this beneficial ozone has been partially destroyed by chemicals used for refrigeration purposes, such as **chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs)** and **hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs)**, causing what is sometimes called a "hole in the ozone."
- Areas with ozone concentrations less than 220 Dobson Units are called "holes" in the layer.
- Tropospheric ozone is a harmful air pollutant, because of its effects on people and the environment, and it is the main ingredient in "smog." Tropospheric ozone is a harmful pollutant that causes damage to lung tissue and plants.
- Tropospheric ozone is not emitted directly from anthropogenic sources. It is a "secondary" pollutant formed by chemical reactions between **oxides of nitrogen (NO_x)** and **volatile organic compounds (VOC)**. This happens when pollutants emitted by cars, power plants, industrial boilers, refineries, chemical plants, and other sources chemically react **in the presence of sunlight and heat**.
- It can be curtailed only if gases from all sources are controlled.

What are the health effects of ozone?

- Ozone in the air we breathe can harm our health. People most at risk from breathing air containing ozone include people with asthma, children, older adults, and people who are active outdoors, especially outdoor workers.
- In addition, people with certain genetic characteristics, and people with reduced intake of certain nutrients, such as vitamins C and E, are at greater risk from ozone exposure.
- Breathing ozone can trigger a variety of health problems including chest pain, coughing, throat irritation, and airway inflammation. It also can reduce lung function and harm lung tissue. Ozone can worsen bronchitis, emphysema, and asthma, leading to increased medical care.

What are the environmental effects of ozone?

- Ozone affects sensitive vegetation and ecosystems, including forests, parks, wildlife refuges and wilderness areas. In particular,

ozone harms sensitive vegetation during the growing season.

Measures related to ozone depletion

- The **Montreal Protocol**, a landmark international environmental treaty that took effect in 1988, has reduced chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) emissions worldwide. It is termed as one of the most successful international agreements.
- In 2016, Parties to the Montreal Protocol adopted the **Kigali amendment** to phase down production and consumption of **hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs)** worldwide.

Why in the news?

- In an analysis by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), it was found that Ozone pollution **has increased** during the lockdown. This is in contrast with other pollutants because other pollutants levels have fallen during the lockdown.
- Scientists are seeing this pandemic-led change in air quality as an opportunity to study summer pollution which is different from winter pollution as the climatic conditions are different.
- The characteristics of summer pollution are different: there are high winds, intermittent rains and thunderstorms, and high temperature and heat waves.
- This is in contrast to winter — with its inversion, lower mixing height of air, and cold and calm conditions that trap the air and the pollutants in it.

Centre for Science and Environment



- Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) is a public interest research and advocacy organisation based in **New Delhi**.
- CSE researches into, lobbies for and communicates the urgency of development that is both sustainable and equitable.
- They publish Down To Earth magazine.

Health

1) Convalescent plasma therapy

What is convalescent plasma?

- People **who have recovered** from COVID-19 have **antibodies** to the disease in their blood. Doctors call this convalescent plasma.
- Researchers hope that convalescent plasma can be given to people with severe COVID-19 to boost their ability to fight the virus.
- Everyone who has suffered from a disease possibly carries what are called **neutralising antibodies** that when extracted via plasma and transfused on to others with the infection can **help their immune system** fight it off.

What are antibodies?

- Antibody, also called **immunoglobulin**, is a **protective protein** produced by the immune system in response to the presence of a foreign substance, called an **antigen**.
- Antibodies recognize and latch onto antigens in order to remove them from the body.
- A wide range of substances are regarded by the body as antigens, including disease-causing organisms and toxic materials such as insect venom.

What are the challenges?

- For all these studies to get off the ground, researchers would need enough donors who have recovered fully and can be tested for other pathogens as well.
- People should be willing to donate plasma, and good tests should emerge to estimate how many antibodies they have.
- While studies are required to show the timing and dosage, there is broad consensus that **early administration** will be ideal.

Why is timing crucial?

- Early on in the disease, there is a lot of virus in the system and the antibodies will bind with the virus eliminating it.
- If this is not done at this stage, then the virus sets off a cascade of inflammation in the body.
- If the patient has reached that stage, the plasma may not be helpful.

Need for blood donation

- Since it rests on blood donation, people from the more common blood groups, for instance, O+ve, will have easier access to plasma.
- Naturally, the pool for rare blood groups is going to be smaller.
- However, experts have been laying emphasis on the need for people who have recovered to voluntarily come forward and donate plasma to help with research and other patients.

Earlier trials

- This is **not the first time** that plasma from recovered patients has been used to treat people infected with certain viruses for which drugs are not available.
- When Ebola struck Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia in 2014, the World Health Organization prioritised the evaluation of treatment with convalescent plasma derived from patients who have recovered from the disease.
- Treatment with convalescent plasma is a classical, time-tested method. It has been used against measles, chickenpox, and rabies.

Why in the news ?

- A team of scientists from the Scripps Research Institute in the U.S. has discovered that neutralising antibodies present in the blood of COVID-19 infected who have recovered offers powerful protection against novel coronavirus in animals.
- The researchers found that passive transfer of neutralising antibodies into Syrian hamsters protects them against the disease when exposed to the virus.
- **2. Generic drug**

What are generic drugs?

- A generic drug is a medication created to be the same as an existing approved brand-name drug in dosage form, safety, strength, route of administration, quality, and performance characteristics.
- It works in the same way and provides the **same clinical benefits** as its brand-name version.
- Approved generic medicines are generally sold **after patents and exclusivities protecting the brand-name version end**.
- Generic medicines **tend to cost less** than their brand-name counterparts because they do not have to repeat animal and clinical (human) studies that were required of the brand-name medicines to demonstrate safety and effectiveness.
- In addition, multiple applications for generic drugs are often approved to market a single product; this creates competition in the marketplace, typically resulting in lower prices. Typically results in prices about **85% less than the brand-name**.

Why in the news?

- Tamil Nadu has received two consignments of Covifor, a generic version of the experimental COVID-19 drug remdesivir, from Hyderabad-based Hetero, and has dispatched them to all districts for treatment of critical COVID-19 patients.
- *For information about Remdesivir refer pulse 1.*

Art & Culture

1) Jagannath Temple, Ahmedabad

About

- The history of the temple goes back to more than 450 years, when a Hindu sadhu settled down in a forest area where the temple stands now and installed an idol of Lord Hanuman.
- His successor, **Sarangdasji**, who was a devotee of Lord Jagannath, founded the Jagannath temple in that area on the east bank of the **Sabarmati river**.
- The chief deities are the trinity of Lord Jagannath, **his elder brother, Balabhadra** (known in Gujarat as **Baldev**), and their sister **Subadhra**.
- In **1878**, the **Rath Yatra** was introduced on the lines of Puri.



Jagannath Rath Yatra, Ahmedabad

- The Ahmedabad Rath Yatra is **second largest** after the one in Puri and more than one lakh people participate in the yatra which passes through the walled city area from Jagannath temple in **Jamalpur**.
- The yatra is conducted on the day of **Ashada shukla dwitiya or Ashaadi beej**, which also marks the **Kutchhi new year**.



Why in News?

- The Gujarat High Court stayed the annual Lord Jagannath Rath Yatra due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- With the court's intervention, the Rath Yatra procession in Ahmedabad will not be held for the first time since 1878.

2) Kanwar Yatra

About

- Kanwar Yatra is a massive **annual pilgrimage** in India dedicated to the Hindu deity, **Lord Shiva**.
- Kanwar refers to a bamboo stick with pots tied to its two ends, with the devotees of Lord Shiva known as the '**Kanwariyas**' who carry the Kanwar on their shoulders.



- It involves the fetching of the holy water, traditionally called '**Ganga Jal**' from the river Ganga or its tributaries at various Hindu pilgrimage sites, such as **Haridwar**, **Gaumukh** and **Gangotri** in Uttarakhand, and **Sultanganj** in Bihar.
- It is carried across hundreds of miles to their respective hometowns.
- And, on the occasion of Maha Shivratri or New Moon Day in the fifth month of the Hindu calendar (**Shravan month**), the devotees anoint the Shiva linga (representation of the Hindu deity, Shiva) with holy water at the local Shiva temple.

- The festivals run during the monsoon month Shraawan (July -August).

Why in News?

- The States of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Haryana have deferred this year's Kanwar yatra due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

3) Yoga

What is yoga?

- Yoga is an ancient physical, mental and spiritual practice that originated in India.
- The word 'yoga' derived from Sanskrit and means to join or to unite, symbolizing the union of body and consciousness.
- Though Yoga was believed to be practised since the pre-Vedic period, the great Sage **Maharshi Patanjali systematized and codified (2nd century BCE)** the then existing practices of Yoga, its meaning and its related knowledge through his **Yoga Sutras**.
- Yoga does not adhere to any particular religion, belief system or community.
- There are four broad classifications of Yoga: **karma yoga**, where we utilize the body; **bhakti yoga**, where we utilize the emotions; **gyana yoga**, where we utilize the mind and intellect; and **kriya yoga**, where we utilize the energy.
- Today it is practiced in various forms around the world and continues to grow in popularity.

International Yoga Day

- Recognizing its universal appeal, on 11 December 2014, the United Nations proclaimed **21 June as the International Day of Yoga** by resolution **69/131**.
- The International Day of Yoga aims to raise awareness worldwide of the many benefits of practicing yoga.
- The draft resolution establishing the International Day of Yoga was proposed by India and endorsed by a record 175 member states.
- 2020 Yoga Day Theme: "**Yoga for Health - Yoga at Home**"

4) Ambubachi Mela

About

- Ambubachi Mela is one of the **biggest congregations of eastern India**.
- It is the most important festival of the Kamakhya temple of **Assam** and is celebrated in the month of June every year.
- The belief is that Kamakhya embodies the **mother cult**, the **Shakti**.

- During the period of Ambubachi from the seventh to the tenth day of the Hindu month of "**Asadha**", the doors of the shrine are closed to all as it is believed that Goddess Kamakhya goes through the **annual cycle of menstruation**.
- On the twelfth day, the doors are opened ceremonially and a big fair is held at the temple premises on that day.
- Ambubachi mela is also known as the '**Mahakumbh of the east**'.

Kamakhya temple



- Kamakhya is one of 51 **Shakti Peethas** or holy sites for the followers of the **Shakti cult**, each representing a body part of the Sati, Lord Shiva's companion.
- The temple's sanctum sanctorum houses the **yonis** – female genital – symbolised by a rock..
- It is situated on the **Nilachal Hill in western part of Guwahati city** in Assam.
- It is an important pilgrimage destination for general Hindu and especially for **Tantric worshippers**.
- The temple complex houses temples dedicated to **ten mahavidyas**, of which the Kamakhya temple is the main one.
- The temple dates back to the 8th century and is believed to have been rebuilt several times till the 17th century.
- Legends say the temple was built by the demon king Narakasura.
- But records are available only from 1565 when **Koch king Naranarayana** had the temple rebuilt.

Architecture

- The current structural temple, built and renovated many times in the period 8th-17th century, gave rise to a hybrid indigenous style that is sometimes called the **Nilachal type**, a temple with a **hemispherical dome on a cruciform base**.

- The temple consists of four chambers: garbhagriha and three mandapas locally called calanta, pancharatna and natamandira aligned from east to west.

Why in News?

- Ambubachi mela began at the Kamakhya temple on June 22 without mendicants, hermits and devotees for the first time in almost 500 years.
- The Kamakhya temple administration decided to keep the premises locked in view of the spike in COVID-19 positive cases in the State, primarily Guwahati.

5) Mappila Revolt

Who are Mappilas?

- The Mappilas were the **Muslim tenants inhibiting the Malabar region where most of the landlords were Hindus.**
- The Mappilas had expressed their resentment against the oppression of the landlords during the 19th Century itself.
- Their grievances centred around lack of security of tenure, high rents, renewal fees and other oppressive exactions.

Mappila Revolt or Malabar Rebellion 1921

- Mappilas or Moplahs rose in revolt against their landlords in 1921.
- The Mappila tenants were particularly encouraged by the demand of the local Congress body for a government legislation regulating tenant-landlord relations.
- Soon, the Mappila movement was **merged with the ongoing Khilafat agitation.**
- The leaders of the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation Movement like **Gandhi, Shaukat Ali and Maulana Azad** addressed Mappila meetings.
- After the arrest of national leaders, the leadership passed into the hands of local Mappila leaders.

Course of the rebellion

- Things took a turn for the worse in August 1921 when the arrest of a respected priest leader, **Ali Musaliar**, sparked off **large-scale riots.**
- Initially, the symbols of British authority- courts, police stations, treasuries and offices- and unpopular landlords (*jennies* who were mostly Hindus) were the targets.
- But once the British declared martial law and repression began in earnest, the character of the rebellion underwent a definite change.
- Many Hindus were seen by the Mappilas to be helping the authorities.

- What began as an anti-government and anti-landlord affair acquired **communal overtones.**
- Previously, the outbreak of violence resulted in divergence of the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation Movement and the Mappila rebellion.
- The communalisation of the rebellion completed the isolation of the Mappilas from the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation Movement.
- By December 1921, all resistance had come to a stop.

Why in News?

- With the rebellion turning 100 next year, four movies in Malayalam have been announced with the rebellion as theme.
- Three of them will narrate the story of freedom fighter **Variyamkunnath Kunhahamed Haji**, who was shot dead by the British police at Kottakkunnu

About Variyamkunnath Kunhahamed Haji

- Chakkiparamban Variyamkunnathu Kunhahamed Haji (1877- 20 January 1922) was an activist of Indian independence movement who led the Malabar Rebellion against the British.
- He **ran a parallel government**, in open defiance of British rulers, for more than six months in most parts of the then **Eranadu** and **Valluvanadu** taluks.
- Subsequently he was executed by British.
- Ali Musaliar was his mentor.

6) Bal Gangadhar Tilak

About

- Bal Gangadhar Tilak was considered the **first popular leader of the freedom movement.**
- He was **born on 23 July 1856 in Ratnagiri, Maharashtra.**
- A nationalist to the core, he was a **great scholar, mathematician and a philosopher.**
- He was conferred upon the title, "**Lokmanya**" (**beloved leader**) by his followers.
- **Mahatma Gandhi** called him "**The maker of modern India**" while **Jawaharlal Nehru** described Tilak as "**The father of the Indian revolution**".

Works and contributions to freedom movement

- Tilak founded the **Deccan Education Society (1884)**, aimed at educating the masses through the **English language,**

which he considered as a **conveyor of liberal and democratic ideals.**

- Tilak popularised Maratha icon Shivaji and organised the **first Shivaji festival in 1886.**
- In **1883** Tilak organised “**Ganesh Utsav**” that mobilized people from different castes and communities to spread nationalism.
- Despite being perennially against early marriage, he **opposed the 1891 Age of Consent Bill** which proposed to raise the minimum age for a girl to get married from 10 to 12 years. Tilak saw the bill as interfering with Hinduism.

Political career

- Tilak **joined the Indian National Congress in 1890** and opposed the moderate nationalists within the party.
- Following the **partition of Bengal in 1905**, Tilak supported the **Swadeshi movement** and said that once British goods were boycotted, there will be a gap which will be filled by the Indian goods.
- Tilak **quit the Congress in the 1907 Surat Session** along with other extremist nationalists due to his differences with moderates.
- He founded the **Indian Home Rule League in 1914**, setting the stage for the freedom movement.
- He gave the slogan of “**Swaraj is my birthright and I will have it**”.
- Tilak also concluded the “**Lucknow Pact**” with **Mohammed Ali Jinnah** which helped create a “Hindu-Muslim” unity during the Khilafat movement (1919) and the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920).
- Tilak died of pneumonia on 1 August, 1920 in Mumbai.

Books and Magazines

- Tilak **owned and edited two weekly newspapers — Kesari (Marathi) and The Mahratta (English).**
- The papers criticized many aspects of British rule and called for a rejuvenation of India's national life.

- Tilak’s editorial in Kesari titled “**The misfortune of the country**” in 1908 slammed the brutal bureaucracy under the British rule, leading to his imprisonment.
- He was sent to jail in Mandalay, Myanmar, from 1908 to 1914 where he wrote an original commentary on the Bhagavadgita, **Bhagawadgita-Rahasya** (Secret of the Bhagavadgita) or **Gita Rahasya in Marathi.**
- In 1893, he published **The Orion; or, Researches into the Antiquity of the Vedas**, and, in 1903, **The Arctic Home in the Vedas.**



Why in News?

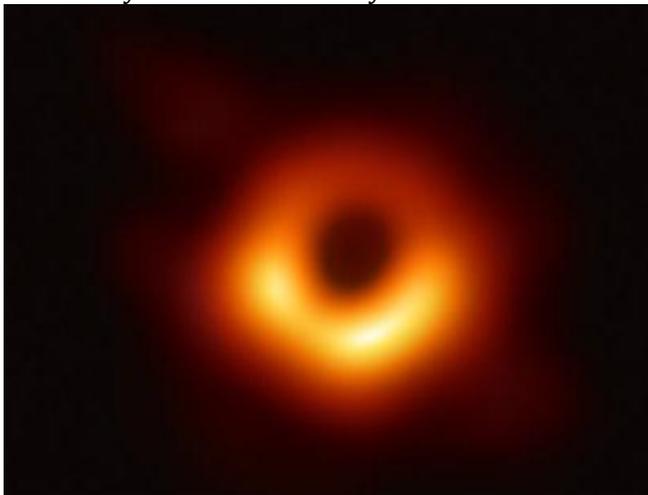
- Cultural and Literary programmes have been planned in Maharashtra to commemorate Tilak’s death centenary on 1 August, 2020.

PIB Analysis

1) Black holes and Gravitational wave

What is a black hole?

- Black hole is a cosmic body of **extremely intense gravity** from which nothing, **not even light, can escape**.
- A black hole can be formed by the **death of a massive star**.
- When such a star has exhausted the internal thermonuclear fuels in its core at the end of its life, the core becomes unstable and gravitationally collapses inward upon itself, and the star's outer layers are blown away.



- The crushing weight of constituent matter falling in from all sides compresses the dying star to a point of **zero volume and infinite density** called the **singularity**.
- Recently, the first ever image of a black hole has been captured using the **Event Horizon Telescope (EHT)**.

About EHT

- The Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) is a large telescope array consisting of a global network of radio telescopes.
- The EHT project combines data from several **very-long-baseline interferometry (VLBI)** stations around Earth with angular resolution sufficient to observe objects the size of a supermassive black hole's event horizon.

About Gravitational waves

- Gravitational waves are '**ripples**' in **space-time** caused by some of the most violent and energetic processes in the Universe.

- **Albert Einstein** predicted the existence of gravitational waves in 1916 in his **general theory of relativity**.
- Einstein's mathematics showed that **massive accelerating objects** (such as neutron stars or black holes orbiting each other) would disrupt space-time in such a way that '**waves**' of **undulating space-time would propagate in all directions away from the source**.
- These cosmic ripples would travel at the **speed of light**, carrying with them information about their origins, as well as clues to the nature of gravity itself.
- The strongest gravitational waves are produced by cataclysmic events such as colliding black holes, supernovae (massive stars exploding at the end of their lifetimes), and colliding neutron stars.

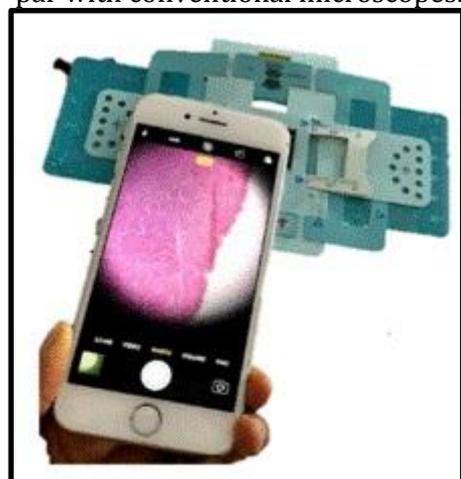
Why in News?

- A research work at Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science (IACS) Kolkata which was primarily focused on the areas of Gravitational physics, in particular black holes and gravitational waves, can help better understand the fundamentals of our nature.

2) Foldscope

About:

- Foldscope is an affordable origami-based microscopy device composed of a series of paper clippings.
- Upon assembly, the device can hold a specimen slide for observation, and this specimen can be viewed via a mobile phone camera attached to it.
- It is portable and durable, and performs on par with conventional microscopes.



Benefits:

- Foldscope can be used to **diagnose diseases** like oral health, urinary tract infection (UTI), leishmaniasis, schistosomiasis, and monitor kidney stones.
- It can be employed in public healthcare centres for primary diagnosis or as personal health monitoring devices.
- Apart from the medical field it can also be used in **agriculture**, to detect various types of microorganisms which affect the crops and animals.

Why in News?

- Recently, a team of doctors have explored and validated the clinical utility of foldscope in the diagnosis of diseases using various patient samples.

3) Ashadhi Bij

About :

- Ashadhi Bij falls on the second day of Shukla paksha of Ashada month of Hindu calendar.
- The festival is associated with the beginning of rains in the **Kutch region of Gujarat**.
- During Ashadhi Bij, the moisture in the atmosphere is checked to predict which crop would do best in the coming monsoon.
- Kutch is largely a desert area therefore people living value rain very much.
- Ashadhi-beej is celebrated mainly at two places in India – **Vishwanath temple in Varanasi, UP** and **Mulesh Mahadev in Umreth, Gujarat**.

Why in News?

- The Prime Minister has greeted the people on the special occasion of Ashadhi Bij, the Kutchi New Year.

4) YUKTI 2.0

What is YUKTI 2.0?

- YUKTI 2.0 is an extension of 'YUKTI Portal' which was launched to identify ideas relevant in Covid pandemic.
- YUKTI 2.0 will help in **fostering the culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in our academic institutions**.

About YUKTI

- It's a unique portal and dashboard to **monitor the initiatives of the Ministry of Human Resource Development**– in academics, research and social initiatives – taken in the wake of COVID-19.
- This portal will help in critical issues related to student promotion policies,

placements related challenges and physical and mental well-being of students in these challenging times.

- The portal will also allow various institutions to share their strategies for various challenges because of coronavirus.
- It will also establish a two-way communication channel between the Ministry of HRD and the institutions so that the Ministry can provide the necessary support system to the institutions.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Human Resource Development has launched the initiative 'YUKTI 2.0' to help systematically assimilate technologies having commercial potential and information related to incubated startups in our higher education institutions.

5) Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana

About:

- Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana is a scheme launched by the government in 2015 for providing **loans up to Rs. 10 lakh to the non-corporate, non-farm small/micro-enterprises**.
- MUDRA (Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency) Ltd., is a financial institution set up by the Government to provide funding to the non-corporate small business sector through various last-mile financial institutions like Banks, Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) and Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs).
- **MUDRA is a refinancing Institution** i.e, it does not lend directly to micro entrepreneurs / individuals.

Types of loans provided

- Shishu : covering loans upto 50,000/-
- Kishor : covering loans above 50,000/- and upto 5 lakh
- Tarun : covering loans above 5 lakh and upto 10 lakh

Why in News?

- The government has approved a scheme for interest subvention of 2% for a period of 12 months, to all Shishu loan accounts under Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana to eligible borrowers.

Background:

- This Scheme is for implementation of one of the measures relating to MSMEs, announced under the **Atma Nirbhar**

Bharat Abhiyan.(Refer Pulse 2 edition for details on Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan).

- The ongoing Covid-19 crisis and the consequent lockdown has led to severe disruption of business and had a severe impact on their cash flows, jeopardizing their ability to service their loans.

Implementation:

- The Scheme will be implemented through the **Small Industries Development Bank of India** and will be in operation for 12 months.

About SIDBI

- Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) set up under an Act of Parliament, acts as the **Principal Financial Institution for Promotion, Financing and Development of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME)** sector as well as for coordination of functions of institutions engaged in similar activities.
- It aims to facilitate and strengthen credit flow to MSMEs and address both financial and developmental gaps in the MSME ecosystem.

Positive Impact of the scheme

- The Scheme has been formulated as a specific response to an unprecedented situation due to Covid-19 and aims to alleviate financial stress for borrowers.
- The Scheme is expected to provide much-needed relief to the MSME sector, thereby enabling small businesses to continue functioning without laying off employees due to lack of funds.
- By supporting small businesses to continue functioning during these times of crisis, the Scheme is expected to have a positive impact on the economy and support its revival, which is necessary for employment generation in future.

6) Kala-azar

About Kala-azar:

- Kala-azar, also called Visceral leishmaniasis, is the most severe form of leishmaniasis and, without proper diagnosis and treatment, is associated with high fatality.
- Leishmaniasis is a disease caused by **protozoan parasites** of the genus *Leishmania*.
- It is transmitted through the bite of **sand flies**.

- Leishmaniasis is a neglected tropical disease affecting almost 100 countries including India.
- There are three main forms of leishmaniasis
- Visceral, which affects multiple organs and is the most serious form of the disease
- Cutaneous, which causes skin sores and is the most common form
- Mucocutaneous, which causes skin and mucosal lesion
- Visceral leishmaniasis, which is commonly known as Kala-azar in India, is fatal in over 95% of the cases, if left untreated.

What is the issue?

- The only drug available against leishmaniasis, **miltefosine**, is rapidly losing its effectiveness because of emerging resistance to this drug due to a decrease in its accumulation inside the parasite, which is necessary for the drug to kill the parasite.

Why in News?

- A team of researchers have found new biomolecules to fight drug resistance in Kala-azar.

Kala-azar Elimination Programme in India

- Kala azar is largely **endemic to four states** in India – Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh.
- Due to the increasing problem of Kala-azar, Government of India (GOI) launched a centrally sponsored Kala-azar control programme in the endemic states in the year 1990-91.
- The Government of India is directly working with development partners such as Bill Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and World Health Organization (WHO) to eliminate Kala Azar from India.
- National roadmap for Kala-azar elimination has been circulated to states with goals, objectives, strategies, timelines with activities and functions at appropriate levels.
- This document has been developed for focused intervention at national, state, district and sub-district and village levels.

7) Country of Origin Made Mandatory on GeM

About Government e-Marketplace (GeM)

- GeM is a one-stop National Public Procurement Portal to facilitate **online procurement of common use Goods & Services** required by various Central and

State Government Departments/Organizations/Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs).

- It was launched in 2016 to bring transparency and efficiency in the government buying process.
- It is a 100 percent government-owned company setup under the aegis of the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.
- In 2017, the government made it **mandatory** for all the departments and ministries to source goods and services from the GeM.

Significance of GeM:

- GeM has taken this significant step to promote 'Make in India' and 'AtmaNirbhar Bharat'.
- The Marketplace has facilitated entry of small local sellers in Public Procurement, while implementing 'Make in India'.
- GeM is enabling quick, efficient, transparent and cost-effective procurement, especially when government organizations require products and services urgently to fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

Why in News?

- The Government e-Marketplace (GeM) has made it mandatory for sellers to **specify the country of origin** while registering new products on the portal, a move aimed at promoting Atma Nirbhar Bharat (Self-reliant India).
- The platform has also enabled a provision for **indicating the percentage of local content** in products in order to promote local goods.
- In addition to these steps, **Make in India filter** has now been enabled on the portal. Buyers can choose to buy only those

products that meet the minimum 50 per cent local content criteria.

8) Skills Build Reignite

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) in partnership with IBM has unveiled Free Digital Learning Platform 'Skills Build Reignite'.

About

- The SkillsBuild Reignite tends to provide job seekers and entrepreneurs, with access to free online coursework and mentoring support designed to help them reinvent their careers and businesses.
- Relevant content on topics including Artificial intelligence, Cloud, Data analytics and security to reskill and upskill themselves, are provided free of cost.

Benefits:

- Its special feature is the personalized coaching for entrepreneurs, seeking advice to help establish or restart their small businesses as they begin to focus on recovery to emerge from the COVID 19 pandemic.
- The initiative will strengthen the skilling ecosystem and leverage the rise in demand for new-age skills by expanding industry cross-collaboration and creating learning pathways through digital learning platforms.
- It will address the widening skill gap in the country and create a culture of up-skilling.
- The platform provides the right set of tools, innovative approach and access to mentors for students to thrive in this competitive environment.

News in-depth

The Hindu Editorials

1) Fighting a double pandemic- COVID19 and domestic violence

Context:

- As economies, institutions and social welfare sectors continue to collapse under the strain of the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic crisis, there is a **dangerous escalation** in the risk to the millions of **people caught in the clutches of domestic and gender-based violence**.

How worse is the situation?

- The crisis has led to an **alarming escalation of violence in the home**, with women bearing the brunt of the frustration and anger.
- In some areas, there have been reports of women being **prevented from seeing doctors**.
- Surging numbers of **emergency calls to helplines**, dramatic increases in **Internet searches for support** for those affected by domestic violence, and higher numbers of **domestic homicides** shows how worse the situation is.

Barriers to care

Women- the most disadvantaged

- Women often tend to be at a disadvantage during crises, epidemics and now this pandemic, and that domestic violence tends to increase. For example,
- In West Africa, 60% of total deaths in the 2014 Ebola virus outbreak were women.
- Following the Canterbury earthquake in New Zealand, there was a 53% rise in domestic violence.

Gender roles

- Gender roles and harmful practices, including customs such as early and forced marriage, limit women's access to health services.
- Women do three times as much unpaid care work at home compared to men, and make up 70% of workers in the health and social care sectors.

Pandemic exacerbates

- During the present COVID-19 pandemic, mass school closures are tending to

entrench learning gaps between girls and boys, and putting many more girls at risk of sexual exploitation, early pregnancy and early or forced marriage.

- They also mean that children are unable to report abuse to a trusted teacher.
- With restrictions on home visits by police and health workers, violence shelters being converted into health facilities, and courts being forced to close, many victims may find themselves trapped and feeling abandoned.

How to address the issue?

Prioritize health

- All evidence points to a clear link between weak health systems and vulnerabilities to domestic violence.
- An important priority is the provision of basic health care to all individuals and communities free of charge at the point of delivery. So urgent action needs to be taken to ensure that during this COVID-19 pandemic, victims of abuse are able to access the health care they need, including mental health services.

Financial independence

- Many of the women need the assurance of financial independence to escape from dangerous domestic situations.
- It is also key that post COVID-19 strategies include **dedicated funding and support for micro, small and medium sized businesses** and the informal sector, which are predominantly led by women.

Additional resourcing

- Providing additional resourcing and **funding to organisations supporting victims**, can make them upscale operations and continue providing services in a safe manner.

Access to justice

- Useful innovations such as **virtual hearings and legal advice**, can allow survivors to continue to access justice.

Measures taken so far by Commonwealth:

- Commonwealth Secretariat is working alongside partner organisations on measures which will help 54 member

countries to deal with gender-based violence.

- Counterpart organisations have explored collaboration and mechanisms to ensure that **women are at the centre of post-COVID-19 recovery planning**.
- Creating opportunities through virtual meetings and seminars for Commonwealth countries to share knowledge, resources and experience on how best to navigate through the rapidly evolving processes.

Way forward:

- Mitigating the devastating impacts of this hidden pandemic of domestic and gender-based violence **requires strong and concerted action**.
- Violence in the home is one of the most pervasive human rights challenges of our time. So, the Commonwealth should collectively stand ready to **bring the power of its advocacy and support to the planned UN Declaration on Women and COVID-19**.
- With the respective members Commonwealth Nations had to **implement policy responses and interventions to safeguard victims** and those at risk.

About Commonwealth:

- The Commonwealth of Nations is a loose association of former British colonies and current dependencies, along with some countries that have no historical ties to Britain.
- It comprises **54 independent and equal countries (including India)**.
- The member governments have agreed to shared goals like development, democracy and peace.
- Their values and principles are expressed in the Commonwealth Charter.
- Members have no legal obligations to one another. Instead, they are united by language, history, culture and their shared values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Background

- The Commonwealth dates back to the first half of the 20th century with the decolonization of the British Empire through increased self-governance of its territories.
- It was only after the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947 that the Commonwealth acquired its modern

shape. It dropped the word British from its name, the allegiance to the crown from its statute, and became an association for decolonised nations.

- The **British monarch**, however, remained the official head of the Commonwealth.
- The current Commonwealth of Nations was formally constituted by the **London Declaration in 1949**, which modernized the community, and established the member states as “free and equal”.
- The Commonwealth's roots go back to the British Empire. But today any country can join the modern Commonwealth.
- The last country to join the Commonwealth was Rwanda in 2009.
- Recently **Maldives** rejoined the Commonwealth more than 3 years after it quit the association.

2) How to battle depression

- Life is sometimes filled with anxiety, internal conflict, disharmony, uncertainty and fear of the unknown. These thoughts give way to extreme feelings.
- COVID-19 has acted as a catalyst inducing anxiety in the life of individuals who are already stressed because of various factors and modern lifestyles.

Stress in modern life

- There are many factors that cause stress in modern life which include
 - more engagement with technology and less with people;
 - more focus on “success” (the ends) rather than the process of learning (the means);
 - never-ending aspirations;
 - relationship issues;
 - impatience while doing tasks, for this is a generation looking for instant gratification; and
 - too many choices and the limitations of the human mind to choose wisely.
 - an underlying strain on the socio-cultural fabric.
- Some of this stress, if not handled well, can push human beings into depression.

Coping mechanisms for anxiety and depression Finding a meaning in life

- Studies about the source of depression found that it is the lack of meaning in life that leads to depression.
- Individuals who are able to discover meaning tend to achieve the will and strength to endure life.

How do we find meaning in life?

- Meaning can be found in love and work.
- Love for fellow beings is what motivates a person to work or take action.
- If we can base our actions and work on a shared love for family members and society at large, we can find effective meaning in life.
- 'The Art of Living' involves managing the self for others.

Being socially connected

- Positive and continuous communication is the key to end the misery of anxiety, depression and stress to achieve higher levels of well-being.
- Being socially connected was an antidote to the mental estrangement and it was widely believed by Rabindranath Tagore.
- A design of togetherness was required for immunity from psychological suffering which Tagore insisted was ingrained in the famous Rig Vedic dicta.

▪ Case study

- Tagore was aware that plague, a wildly contagious disease, was likely to cause panic among the students in 1918.
- He organised many events in the Ashram which ensured that social connections existed despite physical distance.
- In an essay, he suggested that we generate friendliness between the affected and those who were not, because the ill were not the enemy; the illness was.

Way forward:

- People under any form of stress, or tend to feel depressed should reach out and talk to people, whether friends or relatives.
- A depressed person may not want to connect initially. Therefore it is necessary for the family, relatives and friends to watch out for signs in their near and dear ones of persistent sadness, aloofness, loss of interest in activities and appetite, negative thoughts including self-harm, and provide immediate support and connect.
- Support from family and friends can help to tide over the difficult times with love and care.

Conclusion:

- The spirit of harmony between individual and society glued by communication is the best way stress, anxiety and depression can be overcome.

3) Drug abuse amidst pandemic

Context:

- The economic downturn caused by the global pandemic may drive more people to substance abuse or leave them vulnerable to involvement in drug trafficking and related crime.

Drug abuse during recession

- In the global recession that followed the 2008 financial crisis, drug users sought out cheaper synthetic substances and patterns of use shifted towards injecting drugs, while governments reduced budgets to deal with drug-related problems.

Why should it be a concern now?

- Vulnerable and marginalised groups, youth, women and the poor have been harmed the most due to drug abuse.
- The risks and consequences of drug use are worsened by
 - poverty,
 - limited opportunities for education and jobs,
 - stigma and social exclusion.
- This in turn helps to deepen inequalities, moving us further away from achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- And hence governments cannot afford to ignore the dangers illicit drugs pose to public health and safety since we are facing the gravest socio economic crisis.

Prevalence

- More people use drugs in developed countries than in developing countries
- Wealthier segments of society have a higher prevalence of drug use

Drug use disorders

- Substance use disorder (SUD), also known as a drug use disorder, is the persistent use of drugs (including alcohol) despite substantial harm and adverse consequences.
- Substance use disorders are characterized by an array of mental, physical, and behavioral symptoms that may cause problems related to loss of control, strain to one's interpersonal life, hazardous use, tolerance, and withdrawal.

- People who are socially and economically disadvantaged are more likely to develop drug use disorders.
- Only one out of eight people who need drug-related treatment receive it, according to the World Drug Report 2020. Some 35.6 million people suffer from drug use disorders globally.

The affected segments

- One out of three drug users is a woman but women represent only one out of five people in treatment.
- People in prison settings, minorities, immigrants and displaced people also face barriers to treatment due to discrimination and stigma.
- More than 80% of the world's population, mostly living in low- and middle-income countries, are deprived of access to controlled drugs for pain relief and other essential medical uses.

Measures to be taken

Work towards commitment

- Governments should keep up their commitment as they pledged recently in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration adopted by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, to work together (global and regional coordination) to address the challenges posed by the world drug problem, in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Funding

- Development assistance dedicated to drug control should be increased (They fell by some 90% between 2000-2017)
- Funding to address drugs may be provided under other budget lines, but there is little evidence of international donor attention to this priority.

Assistance for alternative development

- Creating viable forms of income to enable poor farmers to stop growing illicit opium poppy or coca can be done.

Investments in evidence based prevention

- Leaving no one behind requires greater investment in evidence-based prevention, as well as treatment and other services for drug use disorders, HIV, hepatitis C and other infections.

International cooperation

International cooperation is needed

- To increase access to controlled drugs for medical purposes,
- To prevent diversion and abuse, and
- To strengthen law enforcement action to dismantle the transnational organised crime networks.

Approaches to drug use

- Health-centred, rights-based and gender-responsive approaches to drug use and related diseases deliver better public health outcomes.

4) DCGI and drug approval

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 the news?

- The DCGI has granted approval for use of Favipiravir drug to treat mild COVID-19 patients.
- The pandemic has not only exposed the dire situation of the public health infrastructure, but also the opacity with which drug/medical device approvals are granted in India.

About Favipiravir

- Favipiravir is a broad-spectrum antiviral agent that has been approved in Japan for the treatment of influenza virus infections.
- **Mechanism of action:**
- Favipiravir selectively inhibits RNA polymerase and prevents replication of the viral genome.

What is the issue?

No scientific consensus

- DCGI has approved Glenmark Pharmaceuticals, an Indian pharmaceutical company, to sell generic versions of Favipiravir for the treatment of COVID-19.
- This drug, originally invented by a Japanese company, was meant to treat influenza.
- After the outbreak of COVID-19, doctors in China and Russia started using it to treat COVID-19 patients although there is no scientific consensus on the efficacy of the drug.

Basis of approval

- There is no information on the DCGI's website explaining the scientific basis of its approval of Favipiravir for COVID-19.

Testing of Pharmaceutical drugs

- Evidence-based medicine requires the testing of pharmaceutical drugs through randomised clinical trials (RCT) wherein one set of patients get a placebo (or an alternate therapy) and the other set of patients gets the investigational drug.
- Neither the doctors nor the patients know who gets what drug.
- If the set of patients that gets the investigational drug shows a better outcome, it can be presumed that the drug has a demonstrable therapeutic effect on the disease in comparison to the comparator.
- This is the gold standard for demonstrating the efficacy of a drug in treating a particular disease.
- The data collected from such clinical trials are usually published in a peer-reviewed journal where they are subject to scientific scrutiny.
- This system has worked during this pandemic to disprove claims that hydroxychloroquine was useful in treating COVID-19.

Data not publicly available

- The DCGI instituted a system of review by a Subject Expert Committee (SEC) in 2012 to decide whether a new drug should be approved for the Indian market.
- The SEC was meant to have external experts who were specialists in the field of therapy being considered.
- After a SEC approval, the DCGI is required to take the final call on whether to approve a drug. Thereafter the information on which such decisions were made was required to be disclosed because the Right to Information Act requires such a disclosure.
- However, in this case, the minutes of the meetings, the composition of the SEC and the clinical trial results submitted to the SEC/DCGI are not available on the DCGI's website.
- While the New Drugs and Clinical Trial Rules, 2019 allow the DCGI to grant approvals for the use of certain drugs based on approvals granted overseas, they do not absolve it from making their rationale for such decisions public.

Flaws in observational studies

- Chinese investigators did an observational study on 80 patients and concluded that those

who got the drug tended to have faster disappearance of virus and quicker improvement of shadows in their chest x-rays.

- The study was not a randomised controlled trial and therefore, small size apart, had serious flaws.
- To find well-designed robust scientific studies on the effectiveness and safety of this drug in COVID-19 patients remains difficult.
- Therefore, the explanation that the grant was approved based on "evaluation of data" does not seem tenable.

Conclusion:

- A culture of secrecy around drug approvals serves no purpose except to benefit pharmaceutical companies. Thus our countrymen should be cautioned against any such purchases until the DCGI makes public the clinical information on the basis of which the accelerated approval has been granted along with the minutes of the SEC meeting where this drug was approved.

About CDSCO

- The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) under the **Ministry of Health & Family Welfare**, is the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) of India.
- CDSCO as the Central Drug Authority discharges 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.

5) Food security and farmer welfare are intertwined

Measures taken by government to support agriculture sector

- Although agriculture accounts for around 17% of India's GDP, nearly 50% of the country's population depends on farm-based income.
- As the Indian agriculture sector was impacted by lockdowns across States following the COVID-19 outbreak, below are the developments brought out by the government to support the agriculture sector.
- Amendments have been made to the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.

- The Finance Minister has urged States to dismantle the Agricultural Produce Market Committees.
- Several long-term changes have been made to the agricultural sector, such as fair pricing and e-trading, along with liquidity measures.
- The Centre has also encouraged the State governments to adopt three model laws on contract farming, agricultural land leasing, and marketing.

Still what's the issue?

- Migrant farm workers fled the fields altogether, unable to sustain their livelihoods.
- Crippling bottlenecks in the supply chain resulted in alarming increase in prices in consumer markets, even as farmers started dumping them at throwaway prices.
- Many remained hungry even as the Food Corporation of India's godowns overflowed with grain stock at three times the buffer stock norms.
- It is an irony that the very people who ensure food security in this nation are being made to go hungry now.
- It is equally an irony that the lockdown was imposed to contain COVID-19 but migration of the poor and vulnerable might be taking the virus to the remote areas of India.
- Parts of the country reeled under a pernicious locust invasion.
- Many farmers rely on a system of informal borrowing, which negates the intended effect of RBI's moratorium.
- The government has also hiked the MSP of 14 kharif crops, but some argue that this may not offer the intended extent of relief due to a lack of manpower, working capital, machinery (stuck in other States) and storage.

One Nation, One Ration Card

- While the concept of One Nation, One Ration Card has potential, people are concerned about immediate relief for the hungry.
- This is being provided with the release of fixed quantities of free food grains and pulses to the migrants, even to those without ration cards, for the months of June and July.
- India has always struggled to fill the gap between policy prescriptions and implementation, it needs to be seen through.
- *For more details about One Nation, One Ration Card refer pulse edition 1.*

Way forward:

Steps that economists suggest are to

- switch from cash to food crops
- listen to the Prime Minister's 'go local' message and invest in redirecting supply chains locally

- increase government allocations to poor farmers through the PM KISAN scheme by including everyone, even those who do not own land
- ensure timely availability of seeds and fertilizers for the next season by roping in gram sabhas to verify claimants and
- involve Farmer Producer Organisations in the process to ensure the safeguarding of farmers' rights.

Conclusion

- The world observed World Hunger Day on May 28, 2020.
- India was ranked 102 out of 117 qualifying countries on the Global Hunger Index.
- The Prime Minister's vision for doubling farmers' income in two years seems a distant dream in the wake of the pandemic.
- The resilience of Indian farmers has meant that the nation was fed even through multiple lockdowns and hence it is the government's turn to help them better.

About Global Hunger Index

- The Global Hunger Index is an annual score ranking countries of the world on hunger levels.
- It is prepared by **NGO Welthungerhilfe and Concern Worldwide.**

It is based on 4 indicators:

- *Undernourishment*
- *Child wasting* - the share of children under the age of five who have low weight for their height, reflecting acute undernutrition
- *Child stunting* - children under the age of five who have low height for their age, reflecting chronic undernutrition
- *Child mortality* - the mortality rate of children under the age of five.
- India is ranked 102 of 117 countries in the Global Hunger Index 2019, behind its neighbours Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh.
- India's ranking has declined over the years. In 2018, it was ranked 103 out of 119 countries. In 2000, the country was ranked 83 out of 113 countries.

All India Radio

1) Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana

About the scheme

- In March 2020, the Union government announced Rs 1.70 Lakh Crore relief package under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana for the poor to help them fight the battle against CoronaVirus.
- Following are the components of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package: —
 - **Insurance cover of Rs 50 Lakh** per health worker fighting COVID-19
 - 80 crore poor people to get **5 kg wheat or rice and 1 kg of preferred pulses** for free every month for the next three months
 - 20 crore women Jan Dhan account holders to get **Rs 500 per month** for next three months
 - Increase in **MNREGA wage** to Rs 202 a day from Rs 182 to benefit 13.62 crore families
 - An **ex-gratia of Rs 1,000** to 3 crore poor senior citizen, poor widows and poor disabled
 - The first instalment of Rs 2,000 due in 2020-21 will be front-loaded and paid in April 2020 itself under the **PM KISAN** Yojana.
 - Central Government has given orders to State Governments to use **Building and Construction Workers Welfare Fund** to provide relief to Construction Workers.

Why in News?

- The Insurance Scheme announced under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package for health workers who are fighting to contain COVID-19 has been extended for another three months till September.

2) Rohingya

Who are Rohingya?

- Rohingya are an ethnic group, largely comprising Muslims, who predominantly live in the **Western Myanmar province of Rakhine**. They speak a dialect of Bengali, as opposed to the commonly spoken Burmese language.
- Though they have been living in the country for generations, Myanmar considers them as persons who migrated to

their land during the Colonial rule. So, it has not granted Rohingyas full citizenship.

- Since they are not citizens, their movements are restricted within the Rakhine state.

2017 attack:

- In 2017, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), a Rohingya insurgent group, attacked police posts and an army base in Rakhine state.
- The response by the Myanmar security forces has sent over 7,00,000 Rohingyas fleeing into Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries including India. Reports of villages being torched and civilian deaths have followed the militant attack.
- The UN has termed the Rohingya's situation as the "world's fastest growing refugee crisis".

India's stand:

- According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, there are approximately 40,000 Rohingyas living in India. They have reached India from Bangladesh through the land route over the years.
- The government had previously informed that all the Rohingyas in India were "**illegal immigrants**" and they will be deported soon.

Legal provisions:

- India doesn't have a specific law regarding refugees.
- India has also **not been a signatory** of the **1951 UN Convention or the 1967 Protocol** – both relating to the Status of Refugees and included in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) statute.
- However, UNHCR had earlier stated that the '**principle of non-refoulement**' is considered part of customary international law and therefore binding on all states whether they have signed the Refugee Convention or not.
- In addition, India is party to major international human rights instruments such as the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and Convention on the Rights of the Child**.

Illegal immigrant:

- A foreigner is considered to be an illegal immigrant under two circumstances.
 - One, if they come into India without valid travel documents, or
 - two, having come in legally, they stay beyond the time period permitted to them under their travel documents.
- Illegal migrants may be imprisoned or deported.

Principle of non-refoulement:

- Non-refoulement is a principle in international law that stops a country from returning a person to a place where they would be at risk of persecution.

Why in News?

- The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has adopted a resolution calling upon Myanmar to create conditions for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of Rohingyas and all forcibly displaced persons.
- The UNHRC also stressed the need to address the root cause of human rights violations and abuses against ethnic minorities like Rohingyas in the Rakhine state of Myanmar.

About UNHRC

- The Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system made up of 47 States responsible for the promotion and protection of all human rights around the globe.
- The Council was created by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006.

Membership

- The Council is made of **47 Member States**, which are elected by the majority of members of the **General Assembly** of the United Nations through direct and secret ballot.
- The General Assembly takes into account the candidate States' contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as their voluntary pledges and commitments in this regard.
- The Council's Membership is based on **equitable geographical distribution**.
- Members of the Council serve for a period of three years and are not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms.

3) Security Issues in Border Areas:

- Geographically, India shares a long border with its neighbouring countries due to

which border challenges have magnified constantly.

- India shares land borders with **7 countries** which are China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- India has around 7000 km of coastline which is also prone to various conflicts especially in Indian Ocean region.

A Glance at border issue in Ladakh region:

- As far as India is concerned, Ladakh has always been considered as an integral part of the country but due uncertain movements after independence, certain parts of Ladakh were ceased away due to frequent invasions by Pakistan.
- After a certain period, Pakistan handed over the part of Indian territory to China (Known as **Akshyachin region**).
- Thus, Ladakh has always remained a weak point for Indian border management because of legal acquisition of parts of Ladakh by China and Pakistan.
- The Government of India is in constant negotiations with its neighbouring countries in order to resolve the border issues because there is no demarcated border.
- Eg: **Treaty of peace and tranquility** was signed between India and China to maintain peaceful and healthy relations.
- The recent brutal attack by China can be a planned intrusion into Indian side of LAC.

What are the efforts being made by India in order to be defensive against border security issues?

- Around the 20th century, there was not much infrastructure built by India to protect the border issues.
- For example, there was not much guarding and patrolling along the LOC or LAC whereas China was deploying army personnel constantly for patrolling along the LAC.
- Now, **India is keen in developing infrastructure** along the LAC so that it can reach upto the farthest point as possible so that there are no gaps in Indian border management.
- A **separate department of Border management** has been created under the Home ministry to ensure peace at borders.
- **Special border security forces** are deployed for defending the borders of our country. Eg: **BSF**.
- The Army is emphasizing on a wider extension of various areas under border

management so that loopholes can be filled up.

- The Army, BRO and the other defense organizations play a vital role in containing the transgression quickly.
- Hence, India has always played a defensive role rather than being offensive in handling the border issues but at certain times India gives a gradual response.
- Eg: Though negotiations were in process, China's aggressive intention was evident and in this scenario India had to give a gradual response by attacking them back.

Does Diplomacy help in managing the border issues effectively ?

- Generally, India believes that issues can be settled effectively by negotiations rather than going for the direct action.
- Here, the Ministry of External Affairs has a leading role to play because it conducts talks between representatives of various countries.
- The National Security Advisor also has a crucial role in managing the border issues.
- Hence, Diplomatic talks are important for peaceful management of border security.

India's effort towards management of Coastal border:

- India's coastal border is as crucial as the territorial border especially around the Indian Ocean because the majority of trade is carried out via Indian Ocean so India has security as well as trade concerns.
- India has always maintained its strategic and economic concerns via maintaining good relations with its neighbours specifically with littoral neighbours so that law of Sea is maintained along Indian Ocean region.
- Eg: India has developed a **Tri-Service command in Andaman**, Indian Navy is constantly protecting the commercial interest by indulging in Anti-piracy methods along the Malacca strait etc. which also in turn strengthens the defensive service of India.

Way Forward:

- India has always tried to maintain the issues bilaterally instead of indulging various countries into it but certain countries with super powers should exert moral influence in order to protect India from harmful activities such as terrorism etc.
- As far as India- China relations are concerned, both the sides should stick to

their territorial limit of LAC in order to de-escalate the situation peacefully.

- Border talks should come to a conclusion as soon as possible so that LAC can act as an international border between both the countries.

Conclusion:

- Hence, instead of going for an offensive solution we can try to manage the border issues by peaceful negotiations and proper demarcation of territorial limits along the disputed land or territories.

4) India- Russia: Strategic and Defense partnership:

- As far India is concerned, Russia has been it's all time long standing and time tested partner which provides a multi-faceted look towards India's Foreign policy.
- India and Russia's relationship is largely oriented towards the defence sector and even both the countries are trying to diversify their relationship in the economic sphere also.
- Eg: The visit of the PM to Vladivostok, various summit meetings etc.

How significant is the visit of India's defence minister to Russia?

- Recently, India's defence minister has been invited to Russia for participating in the 75th victory parade which marks a great significance for India to open up about the issues which India is facing in the current scenario.
- India has a chance to take up the issue of chinese aggression though Russia enjoys an excellent relationship with China due to geo-politics.
- It will provide India an opportunity to discuss 2 important issues which are on the table currently because Indian Air force is having a gap in defence equipment.
- The delivery of more MIG and Su-Khoi fighter jets
- To expedite the delivery of S-400 system
- The other issue is the delivery of spare parts for defence equipment is generally via sea route but this time India is requesting the delivery via Airlifting.
- It can also be a special point to improve our relationship with China.

Can Russia play a vital role in controlling the Chinese aggression towards India?

- In today's scenario, Russia's influence on India and China has grown considerably because Russia is the only country in the

world to have the **trust factor of both the countries.**

- As India, Russia and China are a part of various groupings like BRICS, SCO, RIC etc. so as of now **Russia would not like to disturb the RIC grouping but it can also play a vital role in shaping the event in future.**
- In the recent era, the members of the grouping like Russia and China have a different vision for the world and India has a different view for the World.
- The main factor which has brought Russia and China together is the applicability of **CAATSA** act by the U.S. on both the countries.
- Russia- China relationship has not only grown at the political and military level but also economically the **trade between the 2 countries has increased to 108 billion dollars last year.**
- The defence ties are also becoming strong day-by-day between Russia and China because Russia has already sold S-400 missile systems and fighter jets to China.
- As far as Indo-Pacific region is concerned, Russia and China may join hands together and even in the current scenario Russia may not oppose Pakistan in order to maintain peace in Afghanistan.
- Hence, Russia can play a major role in **defusing the current situation in India** and in order to strengthen its relationship India should diversify its economic relations in other sectors as well.

Does India need to balance its defence ties with Russia and the USA?

- Along with Russia, India's relation is strong in terms of **defence and defence related investment** whereas USA is the **high technology partner for India.**
- There are various defence related agreements which have been signed between India and USA which in turn provides **interoperability** for both the countries and which is necessary for countering China's threat in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Thus, India has always mentioned that it will always go by **its own interest and priorities**, and India needs to balance its relations with both the countries in the requisite manner.

What are the other focus areas where India and Russia can strengthen their relationship?

- There are various sectors or areas where India and Russia can collaborate to diversify their relationship such as **Mining in metallurgy, IT, chemicals, ship building, automobiles, railways, space, manufacturing** and especially in terms of **skilled labour** because Russia has influx of skilled labour from China and it wants India also to represent itself so that it should not become a monopoly for China.
- In the current context, the main focus should be in areas like **nuclear power and hydrocarbons, healthcare, Pharmaceuticals and IT.**
- India should also try **expediting direct gas pipelines** from Russia to India as Russia and China have initiated the project named "Power of Siberia", a direct gas pipeline between the two countries.
- India should also take a step forward for the proposed **1 billion dollar agreement between Russia and India for the infrastructure and Technology.**
- India can also take the opportunity of exporting the fruits, vegetables etc to other countries as well as Russia.
- The major area where India and Russia can collaborate is **investment in industrial corridors, telecommunications and trading and consultancy services.**
- On the International front, India and Russia can join hands for the maintenance of the **International North-South corridor (INSC) which passes through Iran and the Arctic expedition.**
- Hence, in order to diversify its economic relations, India and Russia should go strengthen their relationship in various spheres instead of making it strong just in the defence area.

Conclusion:

- India and Russia should float on many boats instead of floating on just one boat in order to achieve the goal of increasing the **trade and investment to 50 million dollars by 2030.**
- Thus, both the countries have to give a push for strengthening its relationship further and across many sectors and to become **valuable partners in the world order.**

RSTV – Big Picture

1) Government's Warning against Phishing Attacks:

- The government has warned against a large-scale cyber-attack against individuals and businesses, where attackers may use Covid-19 as bait to steal personal and financial information.
- India's cyber security nodal agency, **CERT-In** has issued an advisory warning that the potential phishing attacks could impersonate government agencies, departments and trade bodies that have been tasked to oversee the disbursement of government fiscal aid.

What are Phishing attacks?

- Phishing is a **cyber-attack** that uses disguised email as a weapon.
- The attackers are expected to send malicious emails under the pretext of local authorities that are in charge of dispensing funds because of which it may look like a genuine email.
- The goal is to trick the email recipient into believing that the message is something they want or need eg: a request from their bank, for instance, or a note from someone in their company and to click a link or download an attachment.

Where such information is used and how do we protect ourselves from such attacks?

- Such kinds of attacks are generally used as a weapon against getting financial information of the individual or a company.
- In the last few years, phishing attacks are on a surge and recently Covid-19 situation has become a trigger point for such attacks.
- The information is used generally for the personal purpose or can be an agenda or planned attack of the enemy countries.

Ways to protect ourselves from such attacks:

- Generally, 2 aspects should be taken into account which are,
- **Consumer/Citizens aspect:** The consumers or citizens should be made aware of such attacks by conducting various awareness campaigns, seminars etc. which could help them to be safe from such kinds of attacks.
- **Technological aspect:** In the recent era, technology is getting a new form day-by-day so in such a situation it is the responsibility of service providing institutions to have proper authentication

and security safeguards to protect the consumers from such attacks.

- The institutions shall be responsible for checking the authentication between sender and the user.
- The thumb rule for not getting trapped by such attacks is not to check any emails or SMS or not to click any link which may look different than the genuine or original one or we may be suspicious about something being wrong.
- Eg: If it is asking for personal information or some time limit is mentioned for submitting our details etc.

Do we have the requisite laws and framework to deal with cyber attacks?

- In today's scenario, Covid -19 has created fear and panic which is being misused by criminals and thus various domains have been created.
- Even the Ransomware attacks and transponders crime is increasing day by day.
- Eg: Recently, Australia has faced many ransomware attacks.
- We have **IT Act of 2000** in place which does have provisions and punishment for hacking, identity theft which has provision of imprisonment upto 3 years or fine or both and cyber terrorism which has provision for life imprisonment.
- The main challenge that lies here is the **implementation or enforcement of the law or the other legal framework** rather than non-existence of law.
- On the national front, the **cyber-security policy of 2013** has been curled out.
- Thus, the cyber security policy should be re-framed and its proper implementation should be ensured.

How to differentiate between genuine information and malicious information?

- Generally, there is a very narrow difference or thin line between the genuine information and malicious information so we can't recognise it easily.
- The only thing which can make us differentiate between genuine and malicious information is the **maximum awareness regarding such attacks**.
- Hence, we should never click a link for finding its authentic source or should not open a mail which does not have an

authentic URL in order to avoid being trapped under such attacks.

How to use technology in dealing with such attacks and what needs to be done?

- As we are maintaining physical distancing during Covid-19 pandemic, it is also necessary to maintain digital distancing.
- It is necessary to report each and every phishing attack which is happening around the world.
- We should try to recognise the focal point or the source for origin of such attacks.
- Strengthening our cyber defensive policies is the need of the hour.
- Alertness or awareness regarding such technological attacks is very important because these attacks are designed for physical warfare of minds.
- Citizens should play a leading role in creating the awareness about such attacks for the illiterate, elders etc.
- Thus, the bilateral and multilateral treaties should have the stringent provisions for such malicious attacks.

What are the legal options available for the protection from such attacks?

- If the attack has been made on a financial aspect, there is a necessity to **inform the banks** regarding such an attack.
 - Eg: Credit card should be blocked immediately if information regarding it is captured by someone by the way of phishing.
- We can take the **help of the police**.
- There is a remedy under **Section 43 and 46 of IT Act** under which the adjudicating authority grants compensation to the victim if the activity is reported.
- There is a **Bank Ombudsman scheme** for the redressal of public grievances.
- Hence, there are legal options available but what is needed is that every service provider should have a 2-step authentication for the consumer to avail each and every service.

Way Forward:

- The country's security services should be enhanced in order to give an alert to the public about such attacks.
- The cyber defensive policy should be designed and formulated strictly so that citizens should be cautious about the malicious nature of such attackers.
- Thus, Cyber awareness is the major key to contain such ever-spreading attacks.

2) Russia-India-China virtual meet

- Recently, the special foreign minister level meeting of the trilateral group of Russia-India-China was held through video conference due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The meeting took place in the backdrop of ongoing border tensions between India and China.
- Since the special meeting was held to mark 75 years of the victory over the Axis powers, the foreign minister began the meeting by reminding both Russia and China that 2.3 million Indian troops helped the Allies win the Second World War.

Background of the RIC grouping:

- The RIC grouping was started in the 1990's, a period after the cold war when the geo-strategic ties were still evolving.
- At that point of time, **India did not have dynamism or depth of relationship but Russia and India's ties were strong while China was trying to play in its own field.**
- There was commonality of interest for carving out multipolar world order and ensuring that the important countries like Russia, India and China get their own global space.
- Hence, RIC was started to give a level playing field to all the 3 countries and out of which 2 countries were the emerging economies.

Why is Russia pushing forward for RIC meeting?

- After a certain point of time, Russia's diplomacy policy has been altered and it has been **forced for tactical alliance with China** in order to carve out a niche for itself.
- Even, Russia is trying to play a role in the affairs of both the countries which makes both the countries bound to join the alliance.
- Thus, if India and China are not on the same page, Russia would get into a bigger trouble because it holds the **presidency for not only the RIC but also for the BRICS and SCO and these groupings are significant as it can provide the counter-balance to the global order.**
- India wanted to delay the meeting because of ongoing clashes between India and China but due to Russian compulsions India agreed for the trilateral meeting.

What is the positive outcome of this meeting and how it may be fruitful for the RIC and what does it mean for multilateralism as a whole ?

- The most fruitful outcome of this meeting was that **it did not create any ambiguity for India towards Russia which may help in maintaining their relations further.**
- Russia also feels pressured by the USA and western Europe and it doesn't want **India and China relations to detroit** because if the situation goes bad in the upcoming days, Russia doesn't want India to become the ally of the USA.
- Even Russia made it clear that India and China should solve the problem by its own mechanisms without involving the outside country because it's an internal problem between India and China.
- The other positive outcome is that through the **RIC the Russia and India got their own space to hold negotiations.**
- Thus, Russia did not come out against India and it has tried to collaborate with both the countries because in future there is a possibility that Russia, India and China may join hands to maintain peace in Eurasia.

What kind of role can be played by these 3 countries in the global new world order ?

- As China is a member of RIC grouping, it is more determinant to carve out China-centric world order.
- As of now, China has **come out of all the agreements**, undertakings etc. which were made to maintain bilateral peace in the last 35 years.
- Even China has gone against India's interest and **it has not spared any stone to contain India.**
- Thus, RIC can be a relevant platform for building new world order but all the 3 countries should come together because it is the period of re-calibrating the ties.

Can the bilateral ties or the differences between India and China jeopardise the goals of RIC?

- It can jeopardise the goals of RIC because Russia's economy is running at 1.8 trillion dollars which is less than India as well as China but though Russia is considered as super power, its **compulsions have knitted India and China together.**
- Even, Russia is trying to rectify its far tilting towards China but Russia also has its own reasons to make India and China run together because **RIC is a core for BRICS and SCO.**

- Though equations have changed, Unbelievably, **RIC has relevance as it can be used as a weapon for building up BRICS and SCO in the upcoming future.**

As Russia and the USA have a very different view about the ongoing issue between India and China, can this difference of opinion play a wild role in increasing the tensions?

- Under this situation, the USA tries to get involved in the bilateral issue but as far as Russia is concerned it treats the issue as completely bilateral.
- In the long run, the USA and Russia will be on the same boat because **Russia's trade along with China is just 15% whereas 40% of its trade is with western Europe who is a closer ally of the USA .**
- Through the RIC platform, Russia is trying to balance the relation between India and China so that in the near future Russia doesn't have to take sides.
- Thus, **Russia needs Eurasia at peace** so that it can focus on its western frontier because Russia's and America's reaction will be very different.

Why are bilateral issues kept out of the multilateral meetings especially the RIC ?

- As the RIC includes 3 large countries, **bilateral issues may hijack the core agenda** of the meeting which is coordination on various issues like global economic prospects, political security etc.
- Generally, bilateral issues tend to come up on the sidelines and formal discussions because core issues can't be separated from the global issues.
- A country's global issues are shaped based on its bilateral issues.
- Thus, the core agenda of the meeting should not be impacted.

Though Russia has stated that it is a bilateral issue between India and China, will Russia play a role behind the scenes to sort the tensions ?

- India-China border issue is disputed for a long time but it is kept out of RIC as long as it is possible because it may also **hamper the relations** further.
- As all multilateral institutions take decades to get shaped but until then they are bilateral in nature likewise **bilateral issues determine the nature of the multilateral issues.**
- Thus, Russia has to balance off the relations in order to keep the bilateral issues out of the RIC.

Way forward:

- The areas of **common interest need to be identified** between both countries for resolving the conflict because points of difference between both the countries may hamper the operations of various groupings.
- India has to decide on ways of dealing with China without hampering the working relationship.
- China should put into practice the international norms without crossing its limits.

Conclusion:

- India needs to go for a **quiet diplomacy** which may mutually benefit both the countries at large.
- In order to be the most emerging economies in the world order, both the countries should go for **recalibrating their ties**.

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