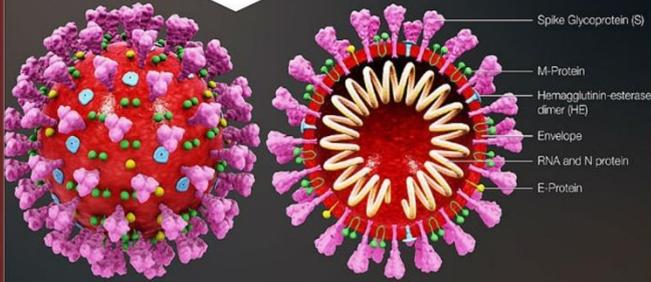


EXCEL QUEST

VOLUME - 4, April 2020

Corona virus structure



Spike Glycoprotein (S)

M-Protein

Hemagglutinin-esterase
dimer (HE)

Envelope

RNA and N protein

E-Protein



Supreme court lifts ban on crypto currency

STAY HOME STAY SAFE



US, Taliban peace deal



RBI imposed moratorium on YES BANK

A Monthly Magazine from

EXCEL CIVILS ACADEMY

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Director's message

Dear Aspirants,

As I pen down my views on the existing scenario as a preface to 'EXCEL QUEST' for the Month of March 2020, it suddenly dawned on me that it is exactly one month since we all met together in the EXCEL ACADEMY just before 'JANATA CURFEW' was proposed by our H'ble Prime Minister Sh. Narendra Modi on 22nd March, none in this Universe could gauge the gravity of the situation that is likely to unfold in the next few days resulting in complete lockdown of the whole World to fight the unseen common enemy no.1, COVID-19.

In a quick succession, one Country after the another started announcing LOCKDOWN in either a part or the entire Country in a bid to combat the deadly Virus given the virality and speed with which the contagion is spreading among the Communities and assumed the proportions of a Pandemic. The World Health Organisation which initially underplayed the epidemic as a localized phenomenon in China confined to Wuhan, Capital of Central China's Hubei Province, had subsequently declared it as a pandemic by which time irreparable damage was already done resulting in loss of thousands of lives and lakhs of infections all across the world choking the Health Care systems and bringing the global economy to a grinding halt.

Prime Minister of India in his address to the Nation, announced a 21 day nationwide lockdown on 24th March 2020, as a preventive measure and appealed the people to completely restrict movements and maintain social distance to break the cycle of the Virus. All the States enforced strict restrictions on peoples movements, be it by Rail, Road, Air or foot. A well planned mechanism was put in place to ensure supply chain and all essential services were activated to attend to the day to day requirements of the population. A large number of Hospitals/Hotels/Buildings were identified for Quarantine/treatment of the suspected COVID-19 patients. A large number of Health Care workers were mobilized to attend to the mounting number of Corona suspected patients. Necessary equipment like Ventilators were procured in addition to the existing ones. Personal Protection Equipment like face masks, gloves, suits and testing equipment was procured on war footing to equip the frontline workers like the Doctors, Nursing Staff, Sanitation workers, Police Personnel and all others who were entrusted with the task of containing the pandemic which took a heavy toll in terms of human lives and economy. The Phase 1 lockdown was to end on 14th April but sensing the gravity, the Prime Minister on 14th April announced Phase 2 of lockdown extending it up to 3rd May 2020. Though 'Health' being a State Subject, most of the State Governments are going by the Centre's directives, some States like Telangana has gone much ahead and declared lockdown till May 7th as many Districts in the State recorded an increasing number of positive cases and some areas have been identified as 'Hot Spots' and declared as 'Containment Zones' to prevent spread of the Virus.

As on today, a total number of 25,65,059 confirmed infections reported globally resulting in 1,77,196 deaths, while 5,97,760 have recovered. Among the most affected Countries, USA reported maximum number of deaths followed by Italy, Spain, France, UK, Belgium, China, Brazil, Turkey, Canada etc. besides most other Countries in the world with India no exception. India, with a population of 1.3 Billion, recorded 19,984 infections with 3,870 recoveries and 640 deaths. The stringent measures taken by the Government contained the spread of the Virus to a great extent. While the Virus was doubling every 3 days earlier, now it is taking 7.5 days due to preventive measures like social distancing, frequent washing of hands and restrictions on travel being strictly followed and tracking down all those we came into contact the suspected COVID-19 patients.

COVID-19, which originated in China, spread to rest of the World in no time and assumed Pandemic proportions on the lines of 1918 Spanish Flu, due to improved global connectivity and travel. While China could act immediately to minimize the damage to its population and economy, it underplayed the gravity and leveraged its hold on WHO Chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus to dilute the impact of COVID-19 before it was declared a Pandemic. Just the other day, the WHO Chief declared that the ‘WORST IS YET AHEAD OF US’ and called for global solidarity.

The impact of COVID-19 on the global economy is unfathomable at the moment. It has disturbed the political, social, economic, religious and financial structures of the whole world. World’s topmost economies such as the US, China, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Japan and many others are at the verge of collapse. Stock Markets around the world have seen blood bath and Oil prices have fallen off a cliff, so much so, the Oil Companies have to pay USD 37 to the purchaser per Barrel for lifting their supplies as Oil production cannot be stopped and the demand is virtually nil with the entire Transport sector including Aviation and manufacturing coming to standstill. Millions of people have lost their jobs all across and a large number of migrant workers in India facing starvation. Various State Governments have started relief measures and started distributing food items as well as cash doles. According to the MD of International Monetary Fund(IMF), the situation could be explained as “a recession at least as bad as during the Global Financial Crisis or worse” and is experiencing the most difficult economic situation since World War II.

India’s GDP forecast is expected to grow at just 1.9 percent in the current fiscal as the nationwide lockdown has impacted industries and their operations have come to a standstill. According Icria Ratings, the Indian economy is likely to witness a sharp contraction of 4.5 percent(de-growth) during Q4 FY20 and is expected to recover gradually, to post a GDP growth of around 2 percent in FY 21.

Despite the grime situation, India as a nation, has risen up to the occasion and emerged as a global leader in providing aid to the developed Countries like USA and other needy nations by shipping Hydroxy Chloroquine (HCL) to them on a war footing as the drug is used for treatment/prophylactic purposes of COVID-19 suspects. If this battle against the

'INVISIBLE ENEMY' has to be won, all the Countries have to unite and rise above their partisan interests and develop appropriate drugs/vaccination for the Pandemic and cooperate with each other in building their respective economies rather than resorting to aggressive 'hostile takeovers' like the one attempted by China which acquired 1 % stake in HDFC and India, rightly, formulated a new FDI Policy to protect the domestic business establishments.

Before I conclude, let me assure you all that EXCEL CIVILS ACADEMY will do everything possible to keep you engaged and disseminate knowledge and information required for facing the CS Prelims. It is with this in view, we started ON LINE Classes and I urge you all to make best use of it. While the suspense over the holding of exams on the due date looms large on your minds, your preparation should be as per the original schedule with May 31st as the 'D' Date.

Stay home, stay safe.



K. Rajendra Kumar IPS (Retd.)
Director.

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1. NATIONAL

1.1 Bundelkhand Expressway

- PM laid the foundation stone for the 296-kilometres long Bundelkhand Expressway at Chitrakoot.
- This will supplement the nodes of the Uttar Pradesh Defence Industrial Corridor, announced in February 2018.
- To be built at a cost of Rs 14,849 Crore, the Expressway is expected to benefit Chitrakoot, Banda, Mahoba, Hamirpur, Jalaun, Auraiya and Etawah districts.



1.2 Suposhit Maa Abhiyan

- The Lok Sabha speaker launched Suposhit Maa Abhiyan in Kota, Rajasthan.
- The Scheme is launched to help India achieve its target of “Malnutrition Free India” by 2022.
- It mainly provides nutritional support to pregnant women and adolescent girls.
- Suposhit Maa Abhiyan was launched to preserve the health of future generations.
- Under the programme, more than 1000 women are to be given food for 1 month.
- The health of the child, including medical examination, blood tests, medicines, delivery, would be covered.
- It is applicable only to one pregnant woman per family.
- In the first phase of the campaign, 1,000 kits of 17 kg balanced diet were provided to 1,000 pregnant women.
- It includes millet flour, wheat, maize, gram, jaggery, large soybean, groundnut, ghee, dates, roasted gram, lentil, oatmeal and rice.

1.3 Araku Utsav 2020

- The two-day annual festival — Araku Utsav 2020 — was off to a grand start at Araku Valley in Visakhapatnam district on Saturday.
- The aim of organising such festivals was to spread the tribal tradition and culture to other regions. Such utsavs would also put Araku on global map.
- People in large numbers from Araku and surrounding mandals thronged the Utsav venue on the first day.
- A number of stalls exhibiting handlooms, garments, tribal foods and others were put up.
- The food stalls with tribal delicacies received good response.
- Cultural programmes, including folk dances, entertained the visitors. Mimicry show by renowned artiste Siva Reddy was the major attraction.

1.4 National Security Guard (NSG) regional hub

- Union Home Minister inaugurated the National Security Guard (NSG) Regional Hub campus at Kolkata.
- This latest NSG complex has become a model regional hub of the NSG, which will help in honing the professional acumen of the NSG commandos and also contribute significantly in capacity building of the first responders, the Police forces of the States.
- The area of responsibility of this Hub comprises of West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand & the entire North East.
- The Kolkata hub is the fourth to have permanent infrastructure after Mumbai, Chennai and Hyderabad.

National Security Guard (NSG)

- NSG which comprises of Indian Army and CAPFs, has multi-dimensional responsibility of countering terrorist attacks/hijack attempts and also providing proximate security.
- **Parent agency:** Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
- **Establishment:** It was raised in 1984, following Operation Blue Star and the assassination of Indira Gandhi.
- **Status:** It has been formed under the National Security Guard Act, 1986. According to Ministry of Home Affairs website, it is one of the 7 Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF).
- **Headquarters:** New Delhi.

1.5 Gold Deposits in Sonbhadra

- The Geological Survey of India has denied that it has found a gold deposit estimated to be around 3,000 tonnes in Uttar Pradesh's Sonbhadra district.
- The local officials claimed that there are about 3000 tonnes of gold deposits in Sonbhadra district in Uttar Pradesh.
- Officials estimated deposits in Son Pahadi at around 2,943.26 tonnes, while the estimate for Hardi block was more modest, 646.16 kg.
- However, according to GSI, the estimated reserve would be no more than 160 kg.

Sonbhadra

- Sonbhadra is one of 75 districts of Uttar Pradesh and also one the backward Districts in the Country.
- It lies in the southern part of the State and shares border with Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh.
- Sonbhadra is also called the "Energy Capital of India" because of many Power Plants and Aluminium Plants in the District.

- Sonbhadra district is an industrial zone and has lots of minerals like bauxite, limestone, coal, gold etc.
- In spite of so many electrical Power Stations in the Regions, Sonbhadra receives funds from the Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme (BRGF).
- It also has UP's highest tribal populations.
- The exploration of the goldmines and other minerals will, possibly, provide a major impetus to the revenue of the country's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh.

India's Gold reserve

- India's Gold reserve is around 626 tonnes.
- According to the World Gold Council (WGC), India is currently at the 10th spot in the list of Nations with the highest Gold reserve.

1.6 EKAM Fest

- The week long exhibition-cum-fair "EKAM Fest" is being organised by the National Handicapped Finance Development Corporation (NHFDC) in New Delhi from 2nd March, 2020.
- EKAM Fest is an effort for promoting entrepreneurship and knowledge among the Divyangjan Community. EKAM stands for Entrepreneurship, Knowledge, Awareness and Marketing.
- Further, it will help in generating awareness among society about Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) entrepreneurs' potential.
- In the first Ekam Fest, Divyang Entrepreneur and Artisans from all over the country have been invited. The fest will see vibrant products ranging from handicraft, handloom, Embroidery work and dry fruits.

National Handicapped Finance Development Corporation

- NHFDC is a corporation under the aegis of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment and has been working since 1997.
- It is registered as a Company not for profit and provides financial assistance to the Divyangjan/Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan/PwDs) for their economic rehabilitation and provides a number of skill development programmes to empower them to grow & sustain their enterprises.
- Some of the initiatives of NHFDC
 - **NHFDC Swavalamban Kendra (NSK):** NHFDC has taken an initiative to establish PwD owned micro skill training Centers throughout the country for skill training of PwDs.

- **Safe Cabs in Delhi and Indore:** NHFDC has made arrangements with Sakha Cabs (Social enterprise) where the PwD owned commercial vehicles will be driven by the women drivers to provide safe taxi options for the women, children and senior citizen commuters.
- **Safe Drinking Water E Carts:** NHFDC has recently agreed to finance E-carts (owned by PWDs) fitted with RO water dispensing vending machines.

1.7 Centrally protected monuments

- The Government of India is planning to conduct a review of monuments under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the ones protected by the State governments.
- At present, 3,691 monuments nationwide are protected by the ASI, with the highest number, 745.
- The list of the Centrally protected monuments had not seen a substantial increase in many years, and important sites under the State governments could be added to the list.
- There is ban on construction within 100 metres of a Centrally protected monument and regulated construction within 100-200 metres under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958.
- The Act protects monuments and sites that are over 100 years old.

1.8 Schemes to promote culture of Tribals

- Union Minister of Culture informed Lok Sabha that various schemes have been launched to preserve and promote languages, folk dance, Art and culture of Tribals.
- **Guru Shishya Parampara:** This scheme envisages transmitting our valued traditions to the coming generations. Disciples are trained under veterans in art forms which are rare and vanishing.
- **Shilpgram:** To promote folk and tribal art and crafts of the zone by organizing seminar, workshops, exhibitions, craft fairs, design development and marketing support to the artisans living in the rural areas.
- **Octave:** To promote and propagate the rich cultural heritage of North East region comprising of eight States namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim, Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura to the rest of India.
- **National Cultural Exchange Programme (NCEP):** Under this scheme, various festivals of performing arts, exhibitions, yatras etc are organized in member States.

1.9 N95 Respirators

- Panicked Americans are rushing to buy masks online, including the so-called N95 masks to ward off Corona Virus infection, leading to an increase in prices and some counterfeit products appearing in the market.
- An N95 respirator is a respiratory protective device designed to achieve a very close facial fit and very efficient filtration of airborne particles.

- The 'N95' designation means that when subjected to careful testing, the respirator blocks at least 95 percent of very small (0.3 micron) test particles.
- If properly fitted, the filtration capabilities of N95 respirators exceed those of face masks.
- However, even a properly fitted N95 respirator does not completely eliminate the risk of illness or death.
- N95 respirators are not designed for children or people with facial hair.
- Because a proper fit cannot be achieved on children and people with facial hair, the N95 respirator may not provide full protection.

1.10 **The Central Sanskrit Universities Bill, 2019**

- Minister of Human Resource Development introduced "The Central Sanskrit Universities Bill, 2019" in Rajya Sabha.
- The Bill was passed by Lok Sabha in December 2019.
- The Bill is intended to convert India's three deemed-to-be Sanskrit universities — (i) Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, New Delhi, (ii) Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, New Delhi, and (iii) Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, Tirupati — into Central Sanskrit Universities.
- The proposed Central Universities will: (i) disseminate and advance knowledge for the promotion of Sanskrit, (ii) make special provisions for integrated courses in humanities, social sciences, and science, and (iii) train manpower for the overall development and preservation of Sanskrit and allied subjects.
- Like at all Central Universities, the President of India will be the Visitor of the central Sanskrit universities.
- He may appoint persons to review and inspect the functioning of the University.
- An Executive Council, which will be the principal executive body.
- The 15-member council will include the Vice-Chancellor appointed by the Centre, who will be the chairperson, a joint secretary of the HRD Ministry and two eminent academics from the field of Sanskrit or allied subjects.

1.11 **PMG PORTAL**

- Union Minister of Commerce & Industry reviewed 17 large-size infrastructure projects through the Project Monitoring Group (PMG) portal.
- Project Monitoring Group (PMG) is an institutional mechanism of Department of Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), New Delhi to expedite resolution of issues and removal of regulatory bottlenecks in projects, with investments upward of ₹ 500 crores in India.
- Invest India provides implementational support to PMG in identifying and following up on issues with the States.

- PMG enlists unresolved project issues of all Public, Private and ‘Public–Private Partnership’ (PPP) projects and undertakes fast-tracking of approvals, sectoral policy issues and removal of bottlenecks for expeditious commissioning.’

1.12 Incredible India

- The Minister for Tourism & Culture launched the multilingual Incredible India website.
- The Incredible India 2.0 website and mobile app, a digital initiative launched by the Ministry of Tourism, aims to showcase India as a popular tourist destination worldwide.
- The website is currently hosted in English and Hindi is now launched in Chinese, Arabic and Spanish to attract tourists from these regions.
- In 2019, India witnessed the arrival of more than 10.9 million foreign tourists, of which about 6 lakh people speak Chinese, about 2 lakh speak Arabic, and about 1 lakh 25 thousand speak Spanish.
- Foreign Tourist Arrivals (in Million) during 2017, 2018 and 2019 were 10.04, 10.56 and 10.89 (provisional) respectively.
- Thus there has been no decline in Foreign Tourist Arrivals to India during the last three years.
- Tamil Nadu topped the list of States in terms of Foreign Tourist Visits (FTV) during 2018.

1.13 Students Suicides

- The Human Resource Development Ministry tabled data on students suicides in Parliament.
- The Ministry sourced its data from ‘Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India’, which is based on data provided by the states and Union Territories.
- About the findings
- Between 2016 and 2018, nearly 10,000 students committed suicide every year in India.
- Maharashtra accounted for 1 in every 7 student suicides in the country — 4,235 out of 29,542 in the three years combined, or about 1,400 a year.
- In the overall three-year totals, Maharashtra was followed by Tamil Nadu (2,744), Madhya Pradesh (2,658) and West Bengal (2,535).
- Under Samagra Shiksha, funds are provided to the States and Union Territories to encourage teachers to function as the first-level counsellors in schools.
- The Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti has appointed counsellors in Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, while the NCERT has developed textbooks that deal with stress, anxiety and related problems in schools.

1.14 Child witness

- After police slapped sedition charges on a school in Bidar, Karnataka, where a play critical of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) had been staged, much of the spotlight has been on reports that the police questioned the children.
- About the safeguards

- In 2009, the ‘United Nations: Justice in Matters involving Child Victims and Witnesses in Crime: Model Law’ provided guidelines in the context of child witnesses.
- These guidelines recommend that authorities treat children in a caring and sensitive manner, with interview techniques that “minimise distress or trauma to children”.
- Under Section 118 of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, there is no minimum age for a witness.
- Children as young as three years old have deposed before trial courts in cases of sexual abuse.
- The Delhi High Court has come up with guidelines for recording of evidence of vulnerable witnesses in criminal matters.
- A vulnerable witness is defined as anyone who has not completed 18 years of age.
- The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 does not provide guidelines specifically relating to questioning or interviewing of children as witnesses.
- The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 has specific guidelines regarding interviewing children as witnesses.

1.15 Haulage charges

- To make the business of running trains more viable for private operators in the future, the government has decided to delink the cost of energy consumed by the private trains from the overall haulage charges payable to Railways.
- Haulage charge is the money private players will have to pay to Railways, on a per-km basis for using its infrastructure in operating the trains – track, signaling, associated manpower and the like.
- It has been decided that if the private players bring in modern trains that are in vogue across the world that display the actual amount of energy consumed the haulage charge will come down to around Rs 512 per km, much below the Rs 668 per km that has been set for the private companies.
- The Rs-668 per km figure includes the energy cost as well.

1.16 Obulavaripalle-Krishnapatnam Railway Project

- The Vice President of India asked the Railway Ministry for early introduction of passenger services on Obulavaripalli - Krishnapatnam rail line in Andhra Pradesh.
- The Obulavaripalle-Krishnapatnam Railway Project is owned by Krishnapatnam Railway Corporation Limited (KRCL), a Joint Venture Company (SPV) comprising Rail Vikas Nigam Limited, Krishnapatnam Port Company Limited (KPCL), Sagarmala (Govt. of Andhra Pradesh), National Mineral Development Corporation and Brahmani Steels.
- Krishnapatnam Port-Venkachalam-Obulavaripalli Railway line provides vital rail connectivity between two major rail routes and reduces the distance by 72 km for the trains coming from Guntakal division to Krishnapatnam and reduces traffic density in Obulavaripalli-Renigunta-Gudur section.

1.17 SheInspiresUs

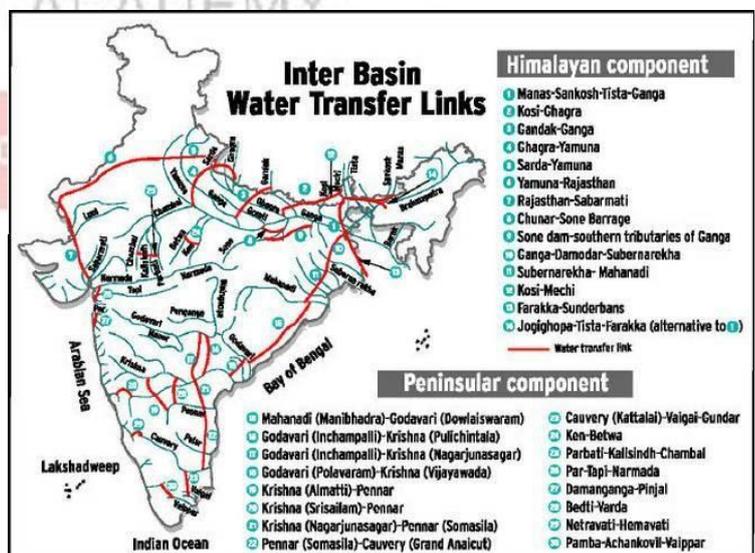
- The Prime Minister announced that on Women's Day he will be giving away his social media accounts to "women whose life and work inspire us. This will help them ignite motivation in millions."
- You can use social media accounts such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to post about your achievements, if you think what you have done is inspirational using the SheInspiresUs.
- One can also shoot a video and post it on YouTube using #SheInspiresUs.
- Select entries will get a chance to take-over Prime Minister's official social media accounts to enable them to share their thoughts and ideas with the world.

1.18 Active pharmaceutical ingredient (API)

- The Government of India has made amendments in the export policy and restricted export of specified APIs (Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients) and formulations made from these APIs.
- A notification issued by Directorate General of Foreign Trade, M/o Commerce and Industry says that the restrictions will come into immediate effect and until further orders.
- The notification covers following APIs and formulations made from these APIs: Paracetamol, Tinidazole, Metronidazole, Acyclovir, Vitamin B1, Vitamin B6, Vitamin B12, Progesterone, Chloramphenicol, Erythromycin Salts, Neomycin, Clindamycin Salts, Ornidazole.
- All drugs are made up of two core components: (1) Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient (API), which is the central ingredient, and (2) excipients.
- The Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient (API) is the part of any drug that produces its effects. Some drugs, such as combination therapies, have multiple active ingredients to treat different symptoms or act in different ways.

1.19 National interlinking of Rivers Authority

- The Central government is working on the establishment of proposed National Interlinking of Rivers Authority (NIRA), an exclusive body to implement inter-State and intra-State projects.
- It will also make arrangements for generating funds, internally and externally.
- An official of the National Water Development Agency (NWDA), which



Source: National Water Development Agency

is responsible for the formulation of proposals of the linking of rivers, said an updated draft Cabinet note has been circulated to other Ministries in the Central government.

- On receipt of comments, the note will be finalised by the Ministry of Jal Shakti and sent to the Union Cabinet for approval.
- Once approved, the projects will be pursued as national projects, wherein the Centre will absorb 90% of the cost and the States concerned the rest.
- As of now, six Inter-Linking River (ILR) projects — the Ken-Betwa, Damanganga-Pinjal, Par-Tapi-Narmada, Manas-Sankosh-Teesta-Ganga, Mahanadi-Godavari and Godavari-Cauvery (Grand Anicut) — have been under examination of the authorities.

1.20 Gairsain

Uttarakhand Chief Minister named Gairsain as the new summer capital of the state, partially fulfilling an over two-decade demand by statehood crusaders to make it the permanent capital.



About the change

- Gairsain is a town and Nagar Panchayat in Chamoli district, Uttarakhand. Gairsain is situated at the eastern edge of the Dudhatoli mountain range.
- Uttarakhand was carved out as a separate state from Uttar Pradesh in 1998.
- Statehood activists had long contended that Gairsain, a tehsil in Chamoli district, was best suited to be the capital of the mountainous state as it was a hilly region falling on the border of Kumaon and Garhwal regions.
- But it was Dehradun, located in the plains, that served as the temporary Capital.
- With the fresh announcement, there is no clarity on either the city's current status or a new winter Capital.
- The State Assembly is located in Dehradun, but sessions are held in Gairsain as well.

1.21 QS World University Rankings 2020

- QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) World University Ranking by Subject were released for 2020.
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Stanford University and University of Cambridge have secured top three positions in the Engineering and Technology category.

- IIT Bombay (44), IIT Delhi (47), IIT Kharagpur (86), IIT Madras (88) and IIT Kanpur (96) found place in top 100 of this category.
- In the Natural Sciences category, three Indian institutions made it to the top 200: IIT-Bombay at 108th rank, closely followed by the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore at the 111th position, while IIT-Madras scraped in at the 195th rank.
- Jawaharlal Nehru University remained the country's top institution in the Arts and Humanities category, with a global ranking of 162, followed at a distance by Delhi University at 231.
- Delhi University topped the Social Sciences and Management category, with a global ranking of 160, followed by IIT-Delhi at 183.
- There are no Indian institutions in the world's top 200 when it comes to Life Sciences and Medicine. The top institution in the country is the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, which had a global ranking of 231.
- The Jindal Global Law School (JGLS) has been ranked in the 101-150 band across all Law Schools that have been ranked in the world while the National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bengaluru has been ranked in the 151-200 band.

1.22 Companies (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Companies (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019 to amend the Companies Act, 2013.
- The Bill would remove criminality under the Act in case of defaults which can be determined objectively and which, otherwise, lack the element of fraud or do not involve larger public interest.
- This would also lead to further de-clogging of the criminal justice system in the country.
- The Bill would also further ease of living for law abiding corporates.
- Earlier, the Companies (Amendment) Act, 2015 amended certain provisions of the Act to remove difficulties faced in implementation of various provisions of the Act.

1.23 Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) Phase-II

- The Union Minister for Jal Shakti launched Phase II of Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) [SBM (G)].
- Phase – II of the SBM(G) will ensure that effective solid and liquid waste management (SLWM) is instituted in every Gram Panchayat of the country.
- SLWM component of Open Defecation Free (ODF) Plus, ODF Plus, will be monitored on the basis of output-outcome indicators for four key areas:
 - Plastic waste management,
 - Bio-degradable solid waste management (including animal waste management),
 - Greywater management and

➤ Faecal sludge management.

- **Funding**

- SBM (G) Phase II will be implemented from 2020-21 to 2024-25 in a mission mode with a total outlay of Rs. 1,40,881 crores.
- Of this Rs. 52,497 crore will be allocated from the budget of Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation.
- The remaining amount will be dovetailed from the funds being released under 15th Finance Commission, MGNREGS and revenue generation models particularly for solid and liquid waste management.

1.24 Impact of the SBM(G) on rural women

- The Union Minister for Jal Shakti released a study done by the UNICEF and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) on the impact of the SBM(G) on rural women.
- About the impact
 - The study – Impact of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) on the convenience, safety and self-respect of women in rural India – surveyed 6,993 women across the 5 states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, in February, 2020.

The study indicated that the increased access to household toilets has led to the improvement in the Suvidha, Suraksha and Swabhimaan of women in rural India.

 - 93% women feel safer from assault by not going out in the open to defecate.
 - 91% women save up to one hour of their day, earlier spent on walking to defecation sites.
 - 88% of women are proud to own a toilet.

1.25 Endophytic Actinobacteria

- Researchers at IASST Guwahati, have found significant plant-growth-promoting and antifungal activities of endophyticactino bacteria associated with Tea plant and related genera, Eurya to find potent plant growth-promoting strains.
- Researchers isolated 46 endophyticactino bacteria found in diverse environments.
- Most of the endophyticactino bacteria isolates having antifungal activity showed presence of chitinase, NRPS (Nonribosomal peptides synthetase) or PKS-1 (Polyketide Synthase) gene, suggesting the presence of mechanisms to inhibit the growth of pathogenic plant fungi.
- Application of endophytic Actinobacteria could reduce chemical fertilizers & fungicides in Tea plantation.
- Institute of Advanced Study in Science and Technology (IASST) located in Guwahati is an autonomous institute under Department of Science & Technology (DST).

1.26 Right of an accused to be defended

- The Karnataka High Court observed that it is unethical and illegal for lawyers to pass resolutions against representing accused in court.
- About the Constitutional provisions
 - Article 22(1) gives the fundamental right to every person not to be denied the right to be defended by a legal practitioner of his or her choice.
 - Article 14 provides for equality before the law and equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.
 - Article 39A, part of the Directive Principles of State Policy, states that equal opportunity to secure justice must not be denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities, and provides for free legal aid.

1.27 Suspension Of MPs

- Seven Congress members were suspended for unruly behaviour in the Lok Sabha.
- The motion was passed by a voice vote.
- The MPs will remain suspended for the remainder of the Budget Session, which ends on April 3.
- Happenings in Rajya Sabha
 - Rule Number 373 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business says:
 - “The Speaker, if is of the opinion that the conduct of any Member is grossly disorderly, may direct such Member to withdraw immediately from the House for the remainder of the day’s sitting.” Rule 374 says:
 - The Speaker may name a Member who disregards the authority of the Chair or abuses the rules of the House by persistently and wilfully obstructing the business thereof.
 - If a Member is so named by the Speaker, the Speaker shall, on a motion being made forthwith put the question that the Member be suspended from the service of the House for a period not exceeding the remainder of the session.
 - Provided that the House may, at any time, on a motion being made, resolve that such suspension be terminated.
 - Rule 374A:
 - It is invoked by Speaker for automatic suspension of member of the House – for five consecutive sittings or the remainder of the session, whichever is less in the event of grave disorder occasioned by a Member (coming into the well of the House or abusing the Rules of the House persistently and wilfully obstructing its business by shouting slogans or otherwise).

- **Highlights**

- Like the Speaker in Lok Sabha, the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha is empowered under Rule Number 255 of its Rule Book to “direct any Member whose conduct is in his opinion grossly disorderly to withdraw immediately” from the House for remainder of the day.
- Unlike the Speaker, however, the Rajya Sabha Chairman does not have the power to suspend a Member.
- While the Speaker is empowered to place a Member under suspension, the authority for revocation of this order is not vested in her.
- It is for the House, if it so desires, to resolve on a motion to revoke the suspension.

1.28 Kishori health cards

- Minister for Women and Child Development informed Lok Sabha about the Kishori Health Cards.
- Most of the States are maintaining Kishori Health Cards for Adolescent Girls in Angawadi Centres (AWCs) to record the information about the weight, height, Body Mass Index (BMI) along with other services provided under the scheme.
- These Health Cards for all Adolescent Girls (AGs) are maintained at the AWCs.
- Government is implementing Scheme for Adolescent Girls across the country.
- The details of achievements/outcomes made under the scheme are marked on Kishori Card and the card also carries important milestones of Adolescent Girls’ life including mainstreaming them into the schools.
- The Funds released to States/UTs in the last three years are at Annexure-II.
- As per the information received from the Government of the Madhya Pradesh, Kishori Health Cards are not being maintained in the State.

1.29 Mines And Mineral Laws (Amendment) Bill

- Lok Sabha passed the Mineral Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2020.
- The Bill amends the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act) and the Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act, 2015 (CMSP Act).
- The Bill proposes to remove end-use restrictions for participating in coal mine auctions, and it will open up the coal sector fully for commercial mining for all domestic and global companies.
- It would also pave the way for auctioning of iron ore mining leases which expire this month.
- The MMDR Act regulates the overall mining sector in India.
- The CMSP Act provides for the auction and allocation of mines whose allocation was cancelled by the Supreme Court in 2014.
- Schedule I of the Act provides a list of all such mines; Schedule II and III are sub-classes of the mines listed in the Schedule I.

- Schedule II mines are those where production had already started then, and Schedule III mines are ones that had been earmarked for a specified end-use.

1.30 Land Acquisition

- A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court held that land acquisition proceedings under the 1894 Act will not be deemed to have lapsed under Section 24(2) of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, if the authorities have tendered the compensation by deposit in the Treasury.
- It held that landowners, who had refused to accept compensation or who sought reference for higher compensation, cannot claim that the acquisition proceedings had lapsed under Section 24(2) of the 2013 Act.
- Section 24 (2) concerns land acquisition compensation awards made five years “prior or more” to the coming into existence of the 2013 Act, which replaced the 1894 law.
- The new Act, which came into existence on January 1, 2014 replaced the colonial 1894 law.

1.31 Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship Programme

- The Union Minister for Skill Development launched the Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship programme in the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Bengaluru.
- The Fellowship is launched as part of the SANKALP programme of the Ministry for Skill Development to provide skilled manpower for District Skill Committees to prepare the District Skill Development plan.
- Under the pilot project, IIMB will train 75 graduates for two years in preparing the District skill plan considering the skill gaps, market utilities, government schemes and institutions available in the district.
- Graduates from 75 Districts in Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Karnataka and Meghalaya are chosen for the training.

1.32 Holi

- President Ram Nath Kovind greeted citizens on the occasion of festival of Holi.
- Holi is also known as the "festival of colours" is a Hindu spring festival.
- It is celebrated all across India and Nepal and in countries with significant Hindu Population.
- Holi is celebrated in different parts of the India in different ways.
- Holi is of particular significance in the Braj region which includes locations traditionally associated with the Lord Krishna.
- It lasts for a night and a day, starting on the evening of the Purnima (Full Moon day) falling in the Vikram Samvat Hindu Calendar month of Phalguna, which falls somewhere between the end of February and the middle of March in the Gregorian calendar.

- It signifies the victory of good over evil, the arrival of spring, end of winter, and for many a festive day to meet others, play and laugh, forget and forgive, and repair broken relationships.
- It is also celebrated as a thanksgiving for a good harvest.
- The first evening is known as Holika Dahan or Chhoti Holi and the following day as Holi, Rangwali Holi, Dhuleti, Dhulandi, or Phagwah.
- Holi celebrations start on the night before Holi with a Holika Dahan where people gather, perform religious rituals in front of the bonfire, and pray that their internal evil be destroyed the way Holika, the sister of the demon king Hiranyakashipu, was killed in the fire.
- The next morning is celebrated as Rangwali Holi where people smear each other with colours and drench each other.
- People visit family, friends and foes to throw coloured powders on each other, laugh and gossip, then share Holi delicacies, food and drinks.
- Some customary drinks include bhang (made from cannabis), which is intoxicating.

1.33 Mahua Nutri beverage

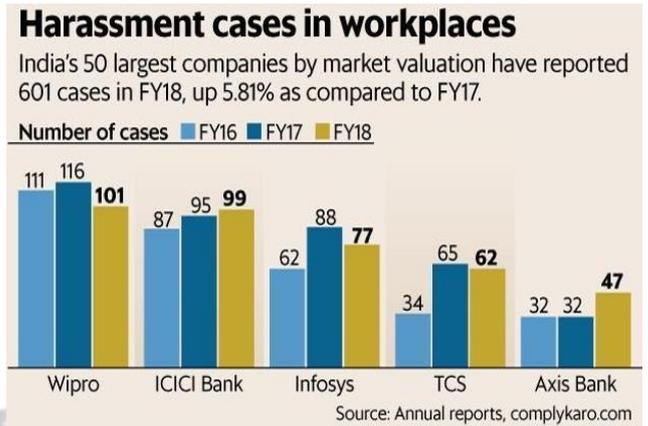
The Government of India is set to launch a mahua-based alcoholic beverage in the market for the first time.

About the beverage

- Called Mahua Nutribeverage, it will be available as early as next month for Rs 700 for a 750 ml bottle, and will come in six fruit-based flavours.
- The beverage has a high nutritional value and relatively low alcohol content, at 5 per cent.
- It has been developed by IIT-Delhi after two years of research in collaboration with TRIFED (Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India).
- The marketing is being undertaken under the Tribal Affairs Ministry's Van Dhan Vikas Karyakram.
- Mahuwa (*Madhuca indica*) is a prominent forest tree in tribal areas of Bastar and plays an important role in the rural economy.
- The mahuwa flowers are a rich source of sugars and are said to contain vitamins, minerals and calcium.
- The flowers are fermented and distilled yielding spirituous liquor also known as 'country beer'.
- An estimated 90 per cent of annual production of Mahuwa flower is used in the process of brewing beverages.

1.34 Sexual harassment at the workplace

- According to a report released by Network of Women in Media, India (NWMI), over 70% of respondents who had approached an internal committee to report sexual harassment at the workplace were not completely satisfied with the outcome.
- The survey found that 36% of all respondents reported having experienced sexual harassment at the workplaces.
- Of the respondents who experienced such harassment at work, 53% did not report it.
- A small percentage made a report to the internal committee (IC) of their media houses.
- But 70% of those who made a complaint were not completely satisfied with the outcome.
- Among the women who said that their organisation did not have a mechanism to deal with sexual harassment, 47% had faced sexual harassment.
- In terms of the kinds of harassment experienced by the respondents, the most common were sexist comments, unwelcome sexual jokes, embarrassing gestures or body language, attempts to establish unwanted romantic and/or sexual relationships, and pestering for dates.

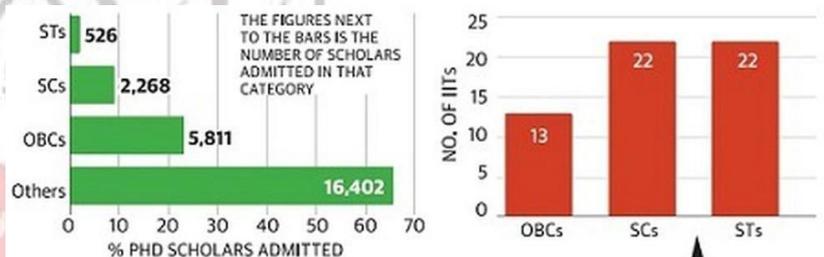


1.35 SC, ST Student Enrolment in Ph.D. Programmes in IITs

Enrolment of students from marginalised communities, mainly the Scheduled Castes (SC) and the Scheduled Tribes (ST), was abysmally low in Ph.D. programmes in the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) from 2015 to 2019, data presented in the Rajya Sabha on Friday showed.

About the findings

- Of the 25,007 Ph.D. scholars admitted in the 23 IITs over the five-year period, only 9.1% were from the SC communities and 2.1% from the STs.
- This is lower than the 15% seats reserved for the former and 7.5% for the latter.
- Those from the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) made up 23.2%, which is also lower than the reservation-mandated 27%.
- Nearly two-thirds of the admissions (65.6%) went to general category students.



ADMISSION PATTERN IN BIGGER IITs

Institute	Admitted	SCs (%)	STs (%)	OBCs (%)	Others (%)
IIT-Bombay	2,877	8.2	1.6	18.9	71.3
IIT-Kanpur	1,653	7.5	0.7	23	68.8
IIT-Delhi	3,081	6.7	1.2	15.6	76.5
IIT-Madras	3,874	6.4	1.3	27.9	64.4
IIT-Kharagpur	3,057	12.7	2.2	20.2	64.9

The chart shows the number of IITs that failed to meet the reservation mandate. For instance, 22 of the 23 IITs failed to fill the seats reserved for the SCs and the STs

- While the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Admission) Act, 2006 seems to have helped those from the OBCs marginally, the enrolment from the Scheduled communities remained low.
- Among the 23 IITs, 10 had at least 27% Ph.D. scholars from the OBCs as mandated by the Act.
- In contrast, only the IIT-Dhanbad ((Indian School of Mines) in Jharkhand had the minimum 15% from SC communities and the IIT-Bhilai in Chhattisgarh met 7.5% reservation for STs.

1.36 Sanitary napkin disposal bags made mandatory

- Union Minister Prakash Javadekar on Sunday said the Centre would make it mandatory for sanitary napkin companies to provide biodegradable disposal bags from January 2021.
- He said that the possibility of getting infected because of handling used Sanitary Napkins thrown in the garbage was brought to notice by many of the women garbage collectors.
- That's why Environment Ministry has taken the decision to ask Makers of Sanitary Napkins to provide biodegradable bags so that Napkins can be wrapped in these bags before being thrown in the garbage.

1.37 Political funding

As much as 67% of donations to National Parties in 2018-19 came from “unknown sources,” an increase from 53% in the previous financial year, said a report released by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).

About the funding

- The ADR analysed the income tax returns and donation statements submitted to the Election Commission by the BJP, the Congress, the Trinamool, the Communist Party of India, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Nationalist Congress Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party.

Party	Total income	Income from electoral bond	% of unknown income
BJP	1,612.04	1,450.89	64.15
INC	728.88	383.26	29
AITC	97.28	97.28	3.87
CPM	36.395	0	1.45
NCP	35.775	29.25	1.42
CPI	2.61	0	0.1
BSP	0	0	0

Source: Association for Democratic Reforms All figures in ₹ cr.

- During FY 2018-19, BJP declared ₹1,612.04 cr. as income from unknown sources, which is 64% of the total income of national parties from unknown sources
- The total income of the Parties was ₹3,749.37 crore, of which ₹951.66 crore was from known donors.
- Of the total income from unknown sources, 64% went to the BJP and 29% to the Congress.
- Electoral bonds accounted for 78% of the ₹2,512.98-crore income from unknown sources.

- While parties are required to give details of all donations above ₹20,000, donations under ₹20,000 and those through electoral bonds remain anonymous.
- “Since a very large percentage of the income of Political Parties cannot be traced to the original donor, full details of all donors should be made available for public scrutiny under the RTI [Right to Information Act],” the ADR said in a statement.

1.38 Right to receive Foreign Funds

The Supreme Court held that the Central government cannot brand an organisation ‘political’ and deprive it of its right to receive foreign funds for using “legitimate forms of dissent” like bandh, hartal, road roko or jail ‘bharo’ to aid a public cause.

About the provisions

- The verdict came on a petition challenging certain provisions of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010 and the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Rules of 2011, both of which confer the Centre with “unguided and uncanalised power” to brand organisations ‘political’ and shut down their access to foreign funds.
- The provisions under challenge before the court included Section 5 (1) of the FCRA.
- This provision allowed the Centre a free hand to decide whether a seemingly non-political organisation was actually political in nature.
- INSAF argued that Section 5(1) was vague and thus unconstitutional.

1.39 India Data Portal

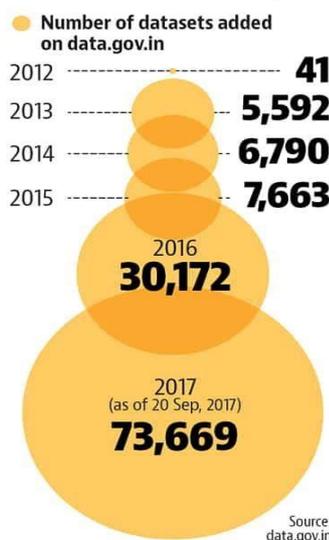
Aimed at collating government data, scattered across multiple sources for consumption of policymakers, researchers, students and journalists, the Indian School of Business (ISB) has developed a one-stop open data portal.

About the portal

- India Data Portal (IDP) incubated at ISB’s Bharti Institute of Public Policy is a platform that has data from multiple disciplines, subjects and areas.
- In the first phase, the focus is on agriculture data, and in later phases the portal will diversify to include datasets on financial inclusion, rural development etc.

Digital push

India launched its own open data portal in October 2012



Global Open Data Index

It ranks countries on openness across various sets of government data. India's rank dropped by 15 places between 2015 and 2016.



1.40 Cord Blood Banking

- Poona Citizen Doctor Forum (PCDF), a body that aims to promote ethical rational medical practice, has come forward to bust the aggressively promoted concept of cord blood banking.
- Cord Blood Banking involves taking the umbilical cord blood, which is a rich source of stem cells, and preserving it for future use.
- Globally, cord blood banking is recommended as a source of hematopoietic stem cell (derived from bone marrow, peripheral blood, or umbilical cord blood) transplantation for haematological cancers and disorders where its use is recommended.
- For all other conditions, the use of cord blood as a source of stem cells is not yet established.
- Private companies who have forayed into this field offer packages anywhere between ₹50,000 and ₹1 lakh to store and preserve the cells in right conditions.
- However, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) does not recommend commercial Stem Cell Banking. It says so far there is no scientific basis for preservation of cord blood for future self-use and this practice therefore raises ethical and social concerns.



1.41 Joy Bangla

- The High Court of Bangladesh has ordered that 'Joy Bangla' will be the national slogan of Bangladesh.
- Highlights
- 'Joy Bangla' was the main slogan during the liberation war of Bangladesh fought against Pakistan in 1971.
- The first President of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman also used 'Joy Bangla' in his speeches and specially during his historic 7th March speech in 1971 declaring the goal of independence for Bangladesh.

1.42 Bi-luminescent security ink

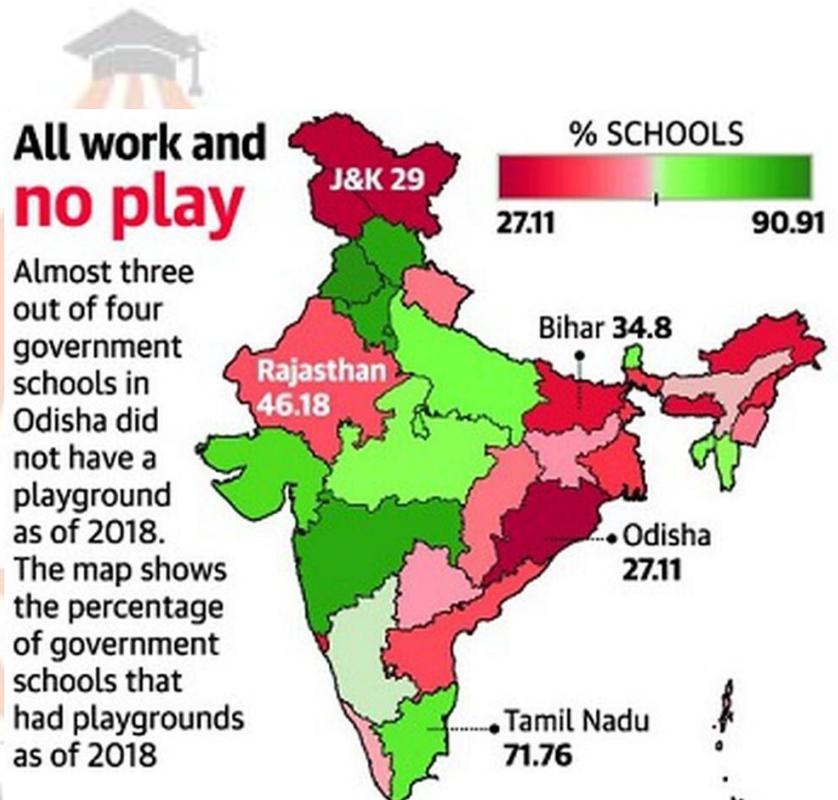
BI-LUMINESCENT SECURITY INKCSIR-National Physical Laboratory has discovered a bi-luminescent security ink to Curb Fake Printing of Passports and Counterfeiting of Currency Notes.

About the Ink

- CSIR-National Physical Laboratory has developed a bi-luminescent security ink which glows in red and green colours when illuminated by two different excitation sources at 254 nanometers (nm) and 365 nm, respectively.
- The ink was prepared in a batch of 1kg and given to Bank Note Press (BNP), Dewas, a unit of Security Printing Minting Corporation of India Ltd. (SPMCIL), New Delhi.
- The ink is found comparable to the standards that are in use.
- The formulation can be used to check the authenticity of passports, Government documents, tamper evident labels, identity cards, etc.

1.43 School Infrastructure

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resource Development (HRD) submitted its report to the Rajya Sabha on school education.
- Only 56% of schools have electricity, with the lowest rates in Manipur and Madhya Pradesh, where less than 20% have access to power.
- Less than 57% of schools have playgrounds, including less than 30% of schools in Odisha and Jammu and Kashmir, according to the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) 2017-18 survey.
- The Parliamentary Panel also slammed the Government for its “dismal” rate of progress in building classrooms, labs and libraries to strengthen government higher secondary schools.
- Budgetary allocations saw a 27% cut from proposals made by the School Education Department.
- Despite proposals for ₹82,570 crore, only ₹59,845 crore was allocated.
- There was a similar 27% reductions for the central and centrally sponsored schemes as well.



1.44 Electoral Reforms

- The nine working groups, constituted after the Lok Sabha election and comprising Election Commission of India (ECI) officials and State Chief Electoral Officers, presented their draft recommendations to ECI.
- The ECI published 25 of the main recommendations and invited comments or suggestions from the public till March 31.



About the recommendations

- Issuing electronic versions of the voter ID card — EPIC — for convenience of voters;
- Replacing all the forms for various voter services, including registration of new voter and change of address, with one single form;
- Exploring new voting methods which remains secure and safe to ease and improve the electoral participation;
- Capping the campaign expenditure of Political Parties;
- Starting online registration facilities at the school or college-level for all prospective voters at 17 years of age, so they can be enrolled in the electoral roll as soon as they become eligible at 18; and
- Imposing a “silence period of 48 hours” before polling on Social Media and Print Media.

1.45 Puducherry’s Lieutenant Governor

- The Madras High Court held that the role of Puducherry’s Lieutenant Governor and that of an elected government in the Union Territory were intertwined as per law, and therefore they were expected to act in unison and not in division.
- The bench set aside the judgment of a single judge who had delivered a verdict in favour of the elected government and held that the L-G could not interfere with its day-to-day functioning by fostering an incorrect opinion that the legislature of the Union Territory was on a par with that of a State.
- The recent verdict by Madras High Court bench said the State legislatures were a creation of the Constitution, whereas the Union Territory legislatures were created under a law such as the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963.

- The constitutional provisions, the 1963 Act as well as the Rules of Business of the Government of Puducherry expect the Lieutenant Governor to act as a bridge between the local government and the Centre and the latter to play the role of an Umpire whenever there was a disagreement between the Lieutenant Governor and the Council of Ministers.

1.46 Can animals spread coronavirus infection?

There is no evidence, either from the history of COVID-19 cases around the world or from the genetic evolution history of the virus itself, that there is any scope of pets (or even stray animals) contracting or transmitting the virus to humans.

About the infection

- According to World Health Organization (WHO) at present, there is no evidence that companion animals/pets such as dogs or cats can be infected with the new coronavirus.
- The current spread of COVID-19 is a result of human-to-human transmission.
- However, it is always a good idea to wash your hands with soap and water after contact with pets.
- This protects you against various common bacteria such as E. coli and Salmonella that can pass between pets and humans.
- There was a lone case in Hong Kong where a pet dog tested positive.
- Experts think the dog's "weak positive" was actually a case of human-to-animal transmission, and say dogs should be kept away from those suffering from COVID-19.



1.47 Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897

- A High level Group of Ministers has decided that all States/UTs should be advised by Health Ministry to invoke provisions of Section 2 of Epidemic Disease Act, 1897 so that all advisories being issued from time to time by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare/State/UTs are enforceable.
- The Epidemic Act is meant "to provide for the better prevention of the spread of dangerous epidemic diseases".
- Section 2 of the act empower the state government to take special measures and prescribe regulations as to dangerous epidemic disease

- Section 2A of the Act empowers the Central Government to take steps to prevent the spread of an epidemic.
- According to section 3 of the act, any person disobeying any regulation or order made under this Act shall be deemed to have committed an offence punishable under section 188 of the Indian Penal Code.

1.48 Pandemic

- As fresh coronavirus cases continue to be reported from different countries, the World Health Organization on March 11 finally declared the Novel Coronavirus a ‘pandemic’.
- According to the WHO, a pandemic is the worldwide spread of a new disease.
- The word “pandemic comes from the Greek ‘pandemos’, which means everybody.
- Demos means the population. Pan meaning everyone.
- So ‘pandemos’ is a concept where there a belief that the whole world’s population will likely be exposed to this infection and potentially a proportion of them fall sick.
- The US’s Center for Disease Control and Prevention defines a pandemic as “an epidemic that has spread over several Countries or Continents, usually affecting a large number of people.”
- The same body defines an epidemic as “an increase, often sudden, in the number of cases of a disease above what is normally expected in that population in that area.”
- Thus, the ‘pandemic’ status has to do more with the spread of the disease, than its severity.
- Declaring the disease a pandemic won’t mean the WHO gets more funds or more powers to fight it.
- However, the declaration is a formal announcement that the WHO assesses the impact of COVID 19 to have reached a new level.

1.49 Delirium

- According to a study published in the journal, American Journal of Critical Care, Music may decrease delirium.
- Delirium is a form of acute brain failure with no effective treatment that especially affects patients on ventilators in the intensive care unit (ICU).
- The study, noted that critically ill individuals who listened to slow-tempo, relaxing music with 60 to 80 beats per minute had decreased need for sedatives, fewer days of delirium, and were more awake.

1.50 OPEC-PLUS

- Oil prices saw their biggest single-day crash in almost 30 years on March 9, throwing global equity markets into turmoil.
- The price of a barrel of Brent crude closed down 24% at \$34.36 after a price war was initiated between Saudi Arabia and Russia, two of the world’s largest oil producers.

- After 2014 “glut” diplomacy which brought down prices below \$30 a barrel, Saudi Arabia and Russia came together to cut output and steady prices.
- Known as the “OPEC Plus” arrangement (Russia is not a member of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC), this alliance kept production lower and pumped up the prices.
- The OPEC-Plus cooperation collapsed last week after Russia rejected a Saudi request to effect more cuts in output given the fall in demand owing to the economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak.
- The existing output reduction deal is set to expire later this month.

1.51 Malnutrition among women

- Union Minister of Women and Child Development informed Rajya Sabha about malnutrition among Women.
- As per the recent report of National Family Health Survey (NFHS) – 4 conducted by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in 2015-16, 22.9% women (15-49 years of age) are underweight (BMI less than 18.5 kg/m²).
- The five States/UTs having highest percentage of malnutrition among women are Jharkhand (31.5%), Bihar (30.4%), Dadra and Nagar Haveli (28.7%), Madhya Pradesh (28.4%), Gujarat (27.2%) and Rajasthan (27%).
- Schemes like Anganwadi Services, Scheme for Adolescent Girls and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojna (PMMVY) and POSHAN Aabhiyaan are being implemented to address the problem of malnutrition among women.

1.52 Crime Multi Agency Centre (Cri-MAC)

- Union Home Minister launched Crime Multi Agency Centre (Cri-MAC).
- A Crime Multi Agency Centre (Cri-MAC) aims to share information between various Police Forces on heinous crimes.
- The Cri-MAC is meant to share information on heinous crimes and other issues related to Inter-State Coordination.

1.53 R-Naught

- As the coronavirus spreads around the world, new terms are entering the lexicon such as R-naught.
- The R-naught, or R₀, is a virus’s basic reproductive number — an epidemiologic metric used to describe the contagiousness of infectious agents.
- At its simplest, the basic reproductive number can show us how worried we should be about infection.
- If the R₀ is above one, each case is expected to infect at least one other person on average, and the virus is likely to keep spreading.
- If it is less than one, a group of infected people are less likely to spread the infection.

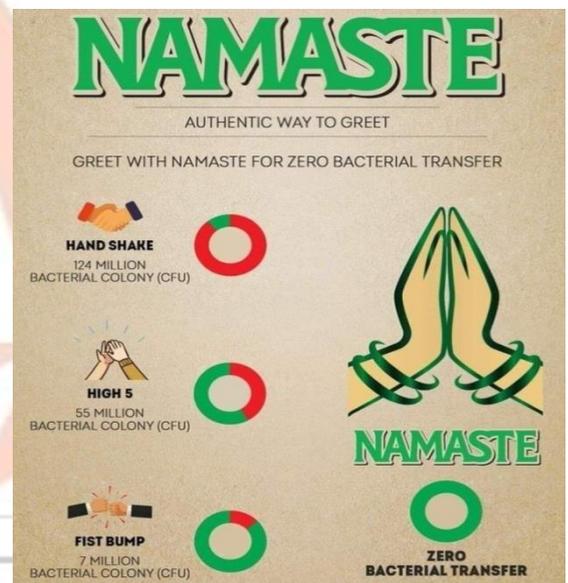
1.54 Wings India 2020

- The three -day civil aviation business exhibition and air show, Wings India 2020 has begun in Hyderabad.
- The biennial event is being organized by Ministry of Civil Aviation and Airports Authority of India (AAI) along with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI).
- Business to Business and Business to Government meetings will take place in which a number of aviation majors including Airbus, Boeing and others are participating.
- About 1000 delegates from across the world are expected to take part in the four-day event.

1.55 Namaste

With the declaration of coronavirus pandemic, Namaste, an Indian way of greeting, instead of the normal handshake, has emerged as the most preferred form of pleasantries to reduce physical contact with others.

- Namaste, sometimes spoken as Namaskar and Namaskaram, is a customary Hindu greeting.
- It is used both for greeting and leave-taking.
- Namaste is usually spoken with a slight bow and hands pressed together, palms touching and fingers pointing upwards, thumbs close to the chest.
- This gesture is called Añjali Mudrā; the standing posture incorporating it is.
- In Hinduism, it means "I bow to the divine in you".
- Namaste may also be spoken without the gesture, or the gesture may be performed wordlessly.



1.56 National Creche Scheme

- The Minister of Women and Child Development informed Lok Sabha about the National Creche Scheme.
- National Creche Scheme (earlier named as Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme) is being implemented as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme through States/UTs with effect from 1.1.2017 to provide day care facilities to children (age group of 6 months to 6 years) of working mothers.

The salient features of the National Creche Scheme are as follows:

- Daycare Facilities including Sleeping Facilities.
- Early Stimulation for children below 3 years and pre-school Education for 3 to 6 years old children.
- Supplementary Nutrition (to be locally sourced)

- Growth Monitoring
- Health Check-up and Immunization
- Further, the guidelines provide that:
- Crèches shall be open for 26 days in a month and for seven and half (7-1/2) hours per day.
- The number of children in the crèche should not be more than 25 per crèche with 01 Worker and 01 helper respectively.
- As on 11.03.2020, 6453 creches are functional across the country under the National Creche Scheme.



1.57 **Mineral laws (amendment) bill, 2020**

- Recently, the Parliament has passed the Mineral Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2020.
- The Bill replaces the ordinance for amendment of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act) and the Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act, 2015 (CMSP Act) which was promulgated on 11th January 2020.
- The Bill is expected to open a new era in Indian coal & mining sector especially to promote Ease of Doing Business.



About the salient features

- Removal of restriction on end-use of coal:
 - Currently, companies acquiring Schedule II and Schedule III coal mines through auctions can use the coal produced only for specified end-uses such as power generation and steel production.
 - The Bill removes this restriction on the use of coal mined by such companies.
 - And thus companies will be allowed to carry on coal mining operation for own consumption, sale or for any other purposes, as may be specified by the central government.
- Eligibility for auction of coal and lignite blocks:

- The Bill clarifies that the companies need not possess any prior coal mining experience in India in order to participate in the auction of coal and lignite blocks.
- Composite license for prospecting and mining:
 - The Bill adds a new type of license, called prospecting license-cum-mining lease.
 - It will be a composite license providing for both prospecting and mining activities.
 - Currently, separate licenses are provided for prospecting and mining of coal and lignite, called prospecting license, and mining lease, respectively.
 - Prospecting includes exploring, locating, or finding mineral deposit.
- Advance action for auction:
 - The Bill provides that state governments can take advance action for auction of a mining lease before its expiry.
 - Under the MMDR Act, mining leases for specified minerals (minerals other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals) are auctioned on the expiry of the lease period.
- Transfer of statutory clearances to new bidders:
 - The Bill provides that the various approvals, licenses, and clearances given to the previous lessee will be extended to the successful bidder for a period of two years.
 - During this period, the new lessee will be allowed to continue mining operations.
 - However, the new lessee must obtain all the required clearances within this two-year period.
 - Currently, upon expiry, mining leases for specified minerals (minerals other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals) can be transferred to new persons through auction.
 - This new lessee is required to obtain statutory clearances before starting mining operations.
- Prior approval from the central government:
 - The Bill provides that prior approval of the central government will not be required by the state government in granting licenses for coal and lignite, in certain cases.
 - These include cases where the allocation has been done by the central government, and the mining block has been reserved to conserve a mineral.
 - Under the MMDR Act, state governments require prior approval of the central government for granting reconnaissance permit, prospecting license, or mining lease for coal and lignite.

1.58 Bhoomi Rashi portal

- Bhoomi Rashi portal has significantly expedited error free and transparent land acquisition for National Highways.
- The Bhoomi Rashi Portal was launched on 01.04.2018 as a major e-Governance initiative of the Ministry of the Road Transport & Highways.

- In 2018-19, 2920 land acquisition notifications have been issued using the portal as against an average of 1000 notifications issued yearly in the previous two years.
- The portal has been integrated with the Public Financial Management System (PFMS) for depositing the compensation in the account of affected/ interested persons on real-time basis.
- The BhoomiRashi portal model is replicable and can be used by State Governments as well as by Ministries which directly acquire land under their relevant legal provisions.

1.59 POCSO Rules, 2020

- The Centre has notified the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Rules, 2020 which enables implementation of recent amendments to the Act under which provisions of punishment for child abuse has been made more stringent
- Some of the significant additions in the new rules include provision of mandatory police verification of staff in Schools and Care Homes, procedures to report sexual abuse material (pornography), imparting age-appropriate child rights education among others.
- For crackdown on child pornography, any person who has received any pornographic material involving a child or any information regarding such pornographic material shall report the contents to the Special Juvenile Police Unit (SJPU) or police, or the cybercrime portal.
- Under the rules, the State Governments have been asked to formulate A Child Protection Policy.
- The Central Government and every State Government shall provide periodic training including orientation programmes, sensitization workshops and refresher courses to all persons coming in contact with the children, to sensitize them about child safety and protection.
- Any Institution housing children or coming in regular contact with children, including Schools, Creches, Sports Academies or any other facility for children must ensure a police verification and background check on periodic basis of every staff.



- The new POCSO rules became effective from 9th of March.
- The POCSO Act was enacted in 2012 to provide a robust legal framework for the protection of children from offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography while safeguarding the interests of children at every stage of the judicial process.

1.60 Masks and hand sanitizers

- Government has declared masks (2 ply & 3 ply surgical masks, N95 masks) and hand sanitizers as Essential Commodities up to 30th June, 2020 by amending the Schedule of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.
- It has also issued an advisory under the Legal Metrology Act.
- Under the E.C Act, after discussions with the manufacturers, States can ask them to enhance their production capacity of these items, to make the supply chain smooth, while under the L.M. Act the States can ensure sale of both the items at MRP.
- Under the EC Act, powers of the Central Government have already been delegated to the States by way of orders during 1972 to 1978.
- The Centre's move is part of its efforts to contain the spread of the deadly coronavirus that has so far claimed more than 5,000 lives the world over including one in India.
- More than 80 are affected in the country.
- The move comes as panic buying by people resulted in stocks of masks and sanitizers disappearing from the markets.
- They are being sold at exorbitant prices in areas where the supplies exist.

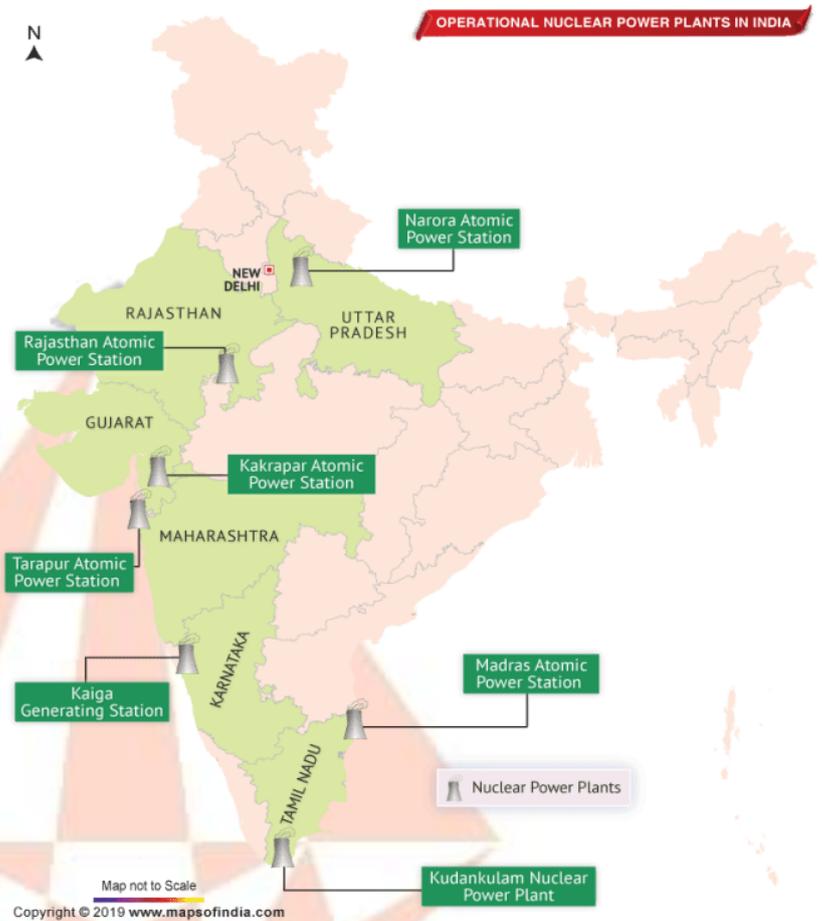
1.61 Upgradation Of National Highways

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved Rehabilitation and Upgradation of stretches of various National Highways covering a total length of over 780 kms in the States of Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh.
- The project involves investment of Rs 7662.47 crore which includes a loan component of Rs. 3500 crore (USD 500 Million).
- The loan assistance of the World Bank will be under Green National Highways Corridor Project (GNHCP).
- The project also includes the maintenance of these National Highways stretches for 5 years (in the case of flexible pavement)/10 years (in the case of rigid pavement) after completion of construction.
- The project comprises following four components:
 - Sustainable development and maintenance of National Highways
 - Institutional Capacity Enhancement
 - Road Safety and

➤ Research and Development

1.62 Nuclear Power Plants in India

- Recently, the government provided details related to various nuclear power plants in the country.
- Presently, India has 22 operating Nuclear Power Reactors, with an installed capacity of 6780 MegaWatt electric (MWe).
- Among these eighteen reactors are Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) and four are Light Water Reactors (LWRs).
- The nuclear energy programme in India was launched around the time of independence under the leadership of Homi J Bhabha.
- Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) is being implemented by the Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam Limited (BHAVINI), a wholly owned Enterprise of the Government of India under the administrative control of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE).



About Pressurized Heavy Water Reactor

- PHWR is a nuclear power reactor, commonly using unenriched natural uranium as its fuel.
- It uses heavy water (Deuterium oxide D₂O) as its coolant and moderator.
- The heavy water coolant is kept under pressure, allowing it to be heated to higher temperatures without boiling, much as in a typical pressurized water reactor.
- While heavy water is significantly more expensive than ordinary light water, it yields greatly enhanced neutron economy, allowing the reactor to operate without fuel enrichment facilities.

About Light Water Reactor

- The light water reactor is a type of thermal- neutron reactor that utilizes normal water as opposed to heavy water.
- It is fuelled by Low Enriched Uranium.
- It uses water as both a coolant method and a neutron moderator.

- It produces heat by controlled nuclear fission.

About Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor

- A Breeder Reactor is a nuclear reactor that generates more fissile material than it consumes.
- These are designed to extend the nuclear fuel supply for electric power generation.
- Breeder reactors achieve this because their neutron economy is high enough to create more fissile fuel than they use, by irradiation of a fertile material, such as Uranium-238 or Thorium-232 that is loaded into the reactor along with fissile fuel.
- PFBR is a 500 MWe fast breeder nuclear reactor presently being constructed at the Madras Atomic Power Station in Kalpakkam (Tamil Nadu).
- It is fuelled by Mixed Oxide (MOX) Fuel.

1.63 Market Intelligence And Early Warning System (MIEWS) Web Portal

Union Minister of Food Processing Industries, launched the– Market Intelligence and Early Warning System (MIEWS) Web Portal. The portal can be accessed at <http://miews.nafed-india.com>.

About the portal

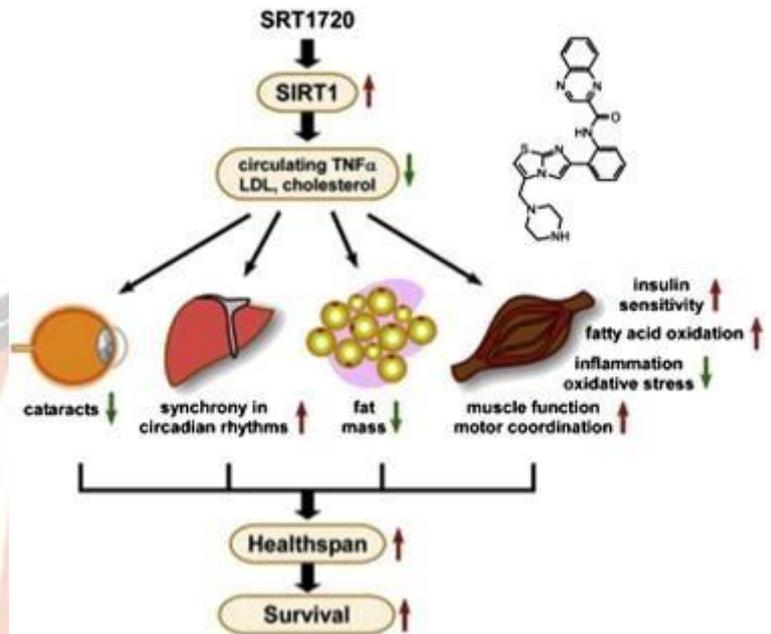
- The MIEWS Dashboard and Portal is a ‘first-of-its-kind’ platform for ‘real time monitoring’ of prices of tomato, onion and potato (TOP) and for simultaneously generating alerts for intervention under the terms of the Operation Greens (OG) scheme.
- The portal would disseminate all relevant information related to TOP crops such as Prices and Arrivals, Area, Yield and Production, Imports and Exports, Crop Calendars, Crop Agronomy, etc in an easy to use visual format.

About Operations Greens Scheme

- In the budget speech of Union Budget 2018-19, a new Scheme “Operation Greens” was announced with an outlay of Rs.500 crores to promote Farmer Producers Organizations (FPOs), agri-logistics, processing facilities and professional management.
- Accordingly, the Ministry has formulated a scheme for integrated development of Tomato, Onion and Potato (TOP) value chain.
- As per the terms of the OG Scheme, during a glut situation, evacuation of surplus production from producing areas to consumption centres will be undertaken as determined by the following:
- When the prices fall below preceding 3 years’ average market price at the time of harvest;
- When the prices fall more than 50% compared to last year’s market price at the time of harvest;
- When the prices fall less than the benchmark, if any, fixed by the State / Central Government for a specified period.

1.64 SIRT1

- A study by researchers from Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai (TIFR) has revealed the role of glucose in regulating liver functions and ageing.
- An enzyme that goes by the name SIRT1 is known to be associated with regulation of metabolic activities and also ageing and hence has become a target of therapeutics.
- The recent study by researchers from TIFR shows that glucose controls the function of SIRT1 directly.
- A shortage or absence of this control can lead to a diabetic-like state, while excess feeding and sustained low levels of SIRT1 can lead to obesity and enhanced ageing.
- This study paves the way to regulating this modification, which might be beneficial in tackling lifestyle disorders and ageing related diseases.



1.65 Plethora

- A paper recently published in Development shows that a protein named PLETHORA (PLT), which encodes stem cell promoting factors, helps in the regeneration of the vascular system at the site of injury.
- This protein binds to and activates the expression of another gene (CUC2).
- These two together increase the production of a plant growth hormone called “Auxin” at the wound site.
- The combination of these proteins and hormones gives the plant the ability to repair wounds.
- These two proteins did not play any role in the general development of vascular system but stepped into action only during its injury.

1.66 Modified NPS-III

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved the proposal of Department of Fertilizers to remove ambiguities in the Modified New Pricing Scheme -III (NPS-III) for determination of fixed costs for the urea units.

About NPS-III

- Modified NPS-III was notified on 2nd April, 2014.
- However, due to ambiguous language of the notification, it could not be implemented.

- The above decision will facilitate its smooth implementation which will result in grant of Additional Fixed Cost of Rs.350/MT to 30 urea manufacturing units.
- The approval will also grant the special compensation of Rs. 150/MT to urea units which are more than 30 years old and converted to gas which will incentivize these units to remain viable for sustained production.
- The measures will ensure maximum domestic production of urea and reduce will reduce import dependency.

1.67 Rampur

- Erstwhile Royals of the State of Rampur in Uttar Pradesh are fighting over the assets and legacy of Nawab Raza Ali Khan.
- The Supreme Court ended India's longest running Civil dispute last year, and the process of evaluating the inheritance is currently ongoing.
- The state of Rampur was founded by Nawab Ali Muhammad Khan, the adopted son of Sardar Daud Khan, the chief of the Rohillas in Northern India.
- The Rohillas were Afghans who entered India in the 18th century as the Mughal Empire was on her decline, and took control of Rohilkhand, at the time known as Katehr.
- Rampur, under Nawab Raza Ali, was the first kingdom to accede to India in 1949, becoming the only Muslim-majority district in Uttar Pradesh.
- Soon after accession, the Nawab handed over the official Royal residence, the Rampur Qila or Fort, built in 1775, to the Indian government.
- Rampur District is the only Muslim majority district in the state of Uttar Pradesh, according to the 2011 Census of India.

1.68 Torreites Sanchezi

- According to a new study of fossil mollusk shells from the late Cretaceous, Earth spun 372 times a year 70 million years ago, compared to the current 365. This means the day was 23½ hours long, compared to 24 today.
- *Torreites sanchezi*, an extinct species of rudist Clam that lived during the Cretaceous period, some 70 million years ago, grew fast, laying down daily growth rings.
- In a new study, a team of researchers used lasers to sample minute slices of *Torreites sanchezi*'s shell and count the growth rings.
- The rings allowed the scientists to determine the number of days in a year and more accurately calculate the length of a day 70 million years ago.
- The new measurement also informs models of how the Moon formed and how close to Earth it has been over the 4.5-billion-year history of the Earth-Moon gravitational dance.

1.69 Shincheonji

In South Korea, which has recorded the third-highest number of Corona Virus cases outside China, a so-called mysterious Christian cult has been linked to the spread of the disease.

About the cult

- Shincheonji Church of Jesus or simply Shincheonji is a Christian new religious movement established in 1984 in South Korea by Lee Man-hee.
- The sect is known for its secretive nature; adherents believe that the group's founder Lee is the reincarnation of Jesus Christ and that the Holy Bible is written in secret metaphors which only Lee can correctly interpret.
- The Sect became the center of controversy during the 2020 Corona Virus outbreak in South Korea.
- The disease spread among Shincheonji's members; the refusal of the group's founder and senior leaders to get tested, citing their religious beliefs to privacy, resulted in a national outcry against the group.

1.70 Ignaz Semmelweis

- Ignaz Semmelweis is regarded as the first doctor to recommend 'wash your hands' by scrubbing hands with soap and water as one of the most effective methods to stop the spread of several illnesses including COVID-19.
- Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis (1818 – 1865) was a Hungarian physician and scientist, now known as an early pioneer of antiseptic procedures.
- Described as the "saviour of mothers", Semmelweis discovered that the incidence of puerperal fever (also known as "childbed fever") could be drastically cut by the use of hand disinfection in obstetrical clinics.
- Semmelweis proposed the practice of washing hands with chlorinated lime solutions in 1847.
- He published a book of his findings in Etiology, Concept and Prophylaxis of Childbed Fever.
- Semmelweis's practice earned widespread acceptance only years after his death, when Louis Pasteur confirmed the germ theory.

1.71 Sanitisers

Guidelines by the World Health Organization (WHO) specify that one of the ways to reduce the risk of novel coronavirus infection is by regularly and thoroughly cleaning one's hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or washing them with soap and water.

About its effects

- Viruses such as Corona Virus, Influenza-causing Viruses, Ebola, Zika have their genetic material encased in a layer of fat called the lipid envelop.

- Soap molecules are pin-shaped with a head that is water-loving (hydrophilic) and a tail that is oil-loving (oleophilic).
- Being oleophilic, the tail portion of the molecule tends to have an affinity for and ‘competes’ with the lipids in the virus envelope.
- Since the chemical bonds holding the virus together are not very strong, the long oleophilic tail gets inserted into the envelope and tends to have a ‘crowbar’ effect that breaks the lipid envelope of the virus.
- The tail also competes with the bond that binds the RNA and the lipid envelop thus dissolving the virus into its components which are then removed by water.

Highlights

- Like soap, the alcohol present in hand sanitisers dissolve the lipid envelop, thus inactivating the virus.
- In addition, the alcohol also tends to change the shape or denature the mushroom-shaped protein structures that stick out of the lipid envelop.
- The mushroom-shaped protein structures help the virus to bind to special structures found on human cells and enter the cells.
- To be effective, the sanitisers should contain at least 60% alcohol.
- Unlike water, alcohol run does not remove the dead viruses from the hand.
- While a sanitiser can quickly reduce the number of microbes, it does not get rid of all types of germs, and is “not as effective when hands are visibly dirty or greasy”.

1.72 ROPAX

- Union Minister for Shipping inaugurated ROPAX service from Bhaucha Dhakka, Mumbai to Mandwa, Alibag in Maharashtra.
- ROPAX service is a ‘Water Transport Service Project’, under Eastern Waterfront Development.
- ROPAX Vessel M2M -1 can carry 200 cars and 1000 passengers at a time and has a ramp on both sides, hence cars can move in and out of the vessel easily and reduce the turn- around time.
- The benefits of this service include reduction in the travel time, vehicular emission and traffic on the road.
- Mumbai Port Trust has developed ROPAX jetty and terminal facilities at Bhaucha Dhakka (Ferry Wharf) at the cost of Rs 31 Crores. Maharashtra Maritime Board has developed Breakwater, ROPAX jetty and terminal facilities at Mandwa at the cost of Rs 135 Crores.

1.73 Chaitra jatra festival

- The famous annual Chaitra Jatra festival scheduled to be held on March 17 at Odisha’s Tara Tarini hill shrine was cancelled as a precautionary measure against COVID-19 infection.

- This festival is celebrated at Tara Tarini hill shrine on Tuesdays of the Hindu month of Chaitra.
- The largest gatherings occur on second and third Tuesdays.
- March 17 happens to be second Tuesday.
- Tara Tarini hill shrine, located at Kumari hill on banks of the Rushikulya river, is a major centre of Shakti worship in Odisha.

Highlights

- Indian Navy's sailboat INSV Tarini was named after Tara Tarini hill shrine.
- The first Indian all-woman crew had circumnavigated the globe in INSV Tarini.
- Uttar Pradesh "Recovery of damage to public and private property ordinance, 2020"
- The Uttar Pradesh government notified the "Uttar Pradesh Recovery of Damage to Public and Private Property Ordinance, 2020", promulgated by Governor Anandiben Patil.

About the law

- It is a stringent new law to recover compensation from those who damage public and private property during protests and riots.
- The owner of any private property or the head of the office concerned in respect of public property may file claims for compensation within three months of any incident that causes any damage during public protests, bandhs or riots.
- Claims for compensation will be decided by designated Claims Tribunals that will be authorised to investigate complaints and assess the damage.
- The claims would cover not only damage to public and private property but also the costs borne by the police and the administration in taking preventive measures.
- The liability would be fixed on the alleged perpetrators as well as those accused of instigating or exhorting them.
- Every order or award passed by the Claims Tribunal would be "final" and no appeal would be "maintainable" before any court.
- Also, no civil court will have the jurisdiction to entertain any question regarding the claims.
- The chairperson of the Claims Tribunal would be a retired district judge, while its members would be of the rank of additional commissioner.

1.74 Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill, 2019

The Standing Committee on Information and Technology tabled its report on the Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill, 2019 in Parliament.

About the report highlights

- Union government is dragging its feet on overhauling the archaic Film Certification and censorship mechanism, bringing only incremental changes to the Cinematograph Act that was first introduced in 1952.
- The Cinematograph Amendment Bill, 2019, is a belated measure by the government to tackle the issue of piracy. It seeks to introduce two Sections to the Cinematograph Act, 1952:
 - One, prohibiting illegal recording in cinema halls to make a “pirate copy” of the film, and
 - Second, prescribing punishment of up to three years or a fine of up to ₹10 lakh for the said offence.
- The Bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in February last year and referred to the Standing Committee.
- The committee has found the scope of the Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill, 2019, limited.
- The Bill only tackles illegal recording at cinema halls.
- Also, the punishment prescribed in the Bill is too little when compared with the losses that a pirated film can lead to.

1.75 Sagarmala programme

Minister for Shipping informed Lok Sabha about the Sagarmala programme.

About the programme

- The Sagarmala programme is the flagship programme of the Ministry of Shipping.
- Its objective is to promote port-led development in the country through harnessing India’s 7,500 km long coastline, 14,500 km of potentially navigable waterways and strategic location on key international maritime trade routes.
- The main vision of the Sagarmala Programme is to reduce logistics cost for EXIM and domestic trade with minimal infrastructure investment.
- It was approved by the Union Cabinet in 2015 and a National Perspective Plan was prepared by the Ministry of Shipping which was released in 2016.
- As of now, 500 projects have been identified.



- Out of these, 143 projects have been completed, and 190 projects are already under implementation.
- Remaining set of 167 projects are under various stages of development and expected completion are well within 2035.
- Implementation of these projects are being done by the Central Line Ministries, State Governments / Maritime Boards and SPVs preferably through the private sector and through the Public Private Participation (PPP) wherever feasible.

1.76 Mission solar Charkha

- Union Minister for MSME informed Rajya Sabha about Mission Solar Charkha.
- The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) has launched the Mission Solar Charkha in 2018-19 for implementation of 50 Solar Charkha Clusters across the country.
- The aims and objectives of Mission Solar Charkha are:-
 - To ensure inclusive growth by generation of employment, especially for women and youth and sustainable development through solar charkha cluster in rural areas.
 - To boost rural economy and help in arresting migration from rural to urban areas.
 - To leverage low-cost, innovative technologies and processes for substance.
- Till date, 10 projects have been approved under Mission Solar Charkha. One Solar Charkha cluster has been identified in Andhra Pradesh.
- The scheme envisages generating direct employment to nearly one lakh persons.

1.77 Electric Vehicles

- The Heavy Industries Minister informed Rajya Sabha that the Government has set an ambitious target to achieve sales of around 70 lakh hybrid and electric vehicles by the end of this year.
- Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles in India, FAME scheme was initiated in 2015.
- The scheme was formulated to promote the manufacturing of electric and hybrid vehicle technology under the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan 2020.
- In the 2nd phase of the scheme, it is aimed to support through demand incentives about seven thousand E-buses, 5 lakh E-3 wheelers, 55 thousand E-4 wheelers passenger cars and 10 lakh E-2 wheelers.

1.78 Efforts to boost defence sector

- Raksha Mantri informed Rajya Sabha about the efforts made by Government to boost country's defence sector during the last two years.
- **Industrial licensing:** Defence Products list requiring Industrial Licences has been rationalised and manufacture of most of the parts and components does not require Industrial Licence.

- **FDI:** Foreign Investment is allowed under automatic route upto 49% and above 49% through government route.
- **Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP):** A new category of procurement ‘Buy {Indian-IDDM (Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured)}’ has been introduced in DPP-2016 to promote indigenous design and development of defence equipments.
- **“Make” Procedure:** In February, 2018 a separate procedure for ‘Make-II’ sub-category has been notified wherein a number of industry friendly provisions have been introduced.
- Government has notified the ‘Strategic Partnership (SP)’ Model which envisages establishment of long-term strategic partnerships with Indian entities, wherein they would tie up with global Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) to seek technology transfers to set up domestic manufacturing infrastructure and supply chains.
- **iDEX:** Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) framework, was launched with the aim to achieve self-reliance and to foster innovation in Defence Sector by engaging Industries including MSMEs, startups, individual innovators, R&D institutes and academia.
- **Defence Corridors:** Government has decided to establish two defence industrial corridors in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh to serve as engines of economic development and growth of defence industrial base in the country.
- The Ministry has instituted a new framework titled ‘Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti’ which aims to provide boost to the IPR culture in indigenous defence industry.
- Defence Investor Cell has been created in the Ministry to provide all necessary information including addressing queries related to investment opportunities, procedures and regulatory requirements for investment in the sector.

1.79 Gross enrolment ratio (GER) for females

Union Minister for Human Resource Development informed Lok Sabha about Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for females.

About the status

- As per All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2018-19, there are 39931 colleges in India, out of which 60.53% are located in rural areas.
- Further, majority of the colleges provide higher education to both males and females and 11.04% colleges are exclusively for females.
- Additionally, as per AISHE 2018-19, females constitute 48.6% of the total enrolment in higher education and the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for females in higher education at 26.4% is higher than the national GER of boys at 26.3%.

- Also, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) has increased during the last 5 years, from 0.92 in 2014-15 to 1 in 2018-19.

1.80 1075

- The Health Ministry has issued a toll-free number 1075 for the public for inquiry about Corona Virus.
- Travel of passengers from member countries of the European Union, the European Free Trade Association, Turkey and the United Kingdom to India is prohibited with effect from Wednesday.
- Other important measures include encouraging private sector organizations or employers to allow employees to work from home wherever feasible. Meetings, as far as feasible, shall be conducted through Video Conferences.
- Restaurants must ensure handwashing protocol and proper cleanliness of frequently touched surfaces.
- They must ensure physical distancing a minimum of 1 meter between tables and encourage open-air seating with adequate distancing.

1.81 National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction

- Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment informed Lok Sabha about the National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR).
- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has formulated a National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR) for 2018-2025.
- The Plan aims at reduction of adverse consequences of substance (drug) abuse through a multi-pronged strategy.
- The activities under the NAPDDR, inter-alia, include awareness generation programmes in schools/colleges/Universities, community based peerled intervention programmes for vulnerable adolescent and youth in the community, provisioning of treatment facilities and capacity building of service providers.
- The Ministry is also providing central assistance for running and maintenance for Integrated Rehabilitation Centres for Addicts (IRCA's).

1.82 Aircraft (Amendment) Bill, 2020

- Lok Sabha today passed the Aircraft (Amendment) Bill, 2020 to amend the Aircraft Act, 1934.
- The amendments would fulfill the requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).
- This will enable the three regulatory bodies in the Civil Aviation sector in India, namely Directorate General of Civil Aviation, Bureau of Civil Aviation Security and Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau to become more effective.

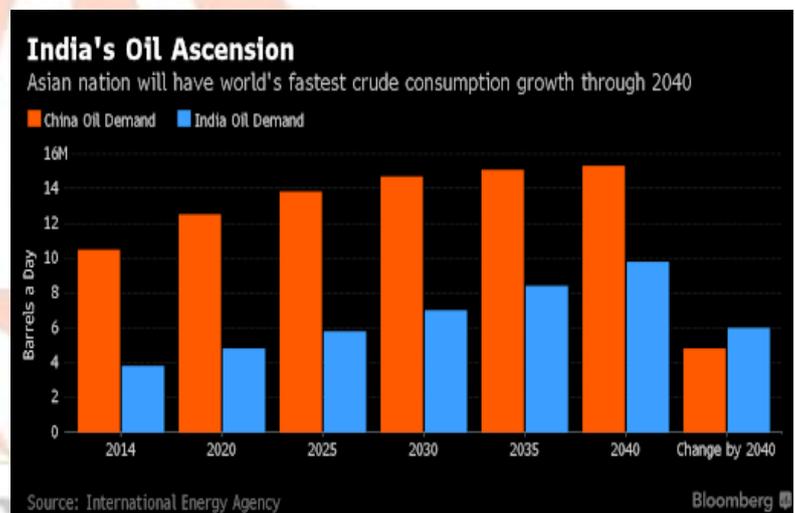
- This will lead to enhancement in the level of safety and security of aircraft operations in the Country.

1.83 Nominated members of Rajya Sabha

- President Ram Nath Kovind has nominated Former Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi to the Rajya Sabha.
- Under Article 80 of the Constitution, Rajya Sabha is composed of not more than 250 members, of whom 12 are nominated by the President of India from amongst persons who have special knowledge or practical experience in respect of such matters as literature, science, art and social service.
- Mr Gogoi served as the 46th Chief Justice of India from 3rd October 2018 till 17th November 2019.

1.84 Demand and import of Oil

- Union Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas informed Lok Sabha today about the Demand and Import of Oil.
- The percentage of Import Dependency on Oil based on consumption of petroleum products during the 2018-19 was about 83.8%.
- Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserve Limited (ISPRL), a Government of India Special Purpose Vehicle, has established Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) facilities with total capacity of 5.33 Million Metric Tonnes (MMT) at 3 locations, namely (i) Vishakhapatnam, (ii) Mangaluru and (iii) Padur.
- As per the consumption pattern of 2017-18, the total capacity is estimated to provide for about 9.5 days of crude oil requirement.
- Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) currently have stock for 64.5 days.
- Hence, total capacity storage of petroleum products is 74 days.
- Government has given 'in principle' approval for establishing two additional SPR facilities with total storage capacity of 6.5 MMT at two locations namely (i) Chandikhol in Odisha (4 MMT) and (ii) Padur in Karnataka (2.5 MMT).



1.85 Permanent commission for women in the Navy

- Maintaining that women and men Officers should be treated equally, the Supreme Court today cleared Permanent Commission for Women in the Navy and asked the Centre to complete the modalities within three months.
- It said, denying Permanent Commission for Women Officers who have served the Nation would result in a serious miscarriage of justice.
- The bench rejected the Centre's stand that sea sailing duties cannot be granted to SSC (Short Service Commission) Women Officers in the Navy as its Russian vessels do not have washrooms for them.
- Such arguments, the court said, are contrary to the Centre's policy of 1991 and 1998 which lifted the statutory bar on the induction of Women Officers in the Navy.
- The bench quashed the prospective effect of the policy barring women officers inducted before 2008 from being granted Permanent Commission in the Navy.
- It also granted Pension Benefits to Women Officers who have retired and were not granted Permanent Commission.

1.86 Supplementary demands for grants

- The Lok Sabha is discussing supplementary demands for grants for 2019-20.
- This includes 78 grants and four appropriations.
- If the government needs to spend any additional money, it can introduce Supplementary Demands for Grants during the year.
- The additional grant required to meet the required expenditure of the government is called Supplementary Grants.
- When grants, authorised by the Parliament, fall short of the required expenditure, an estimate is presented before the Parliament for Supplementary or Additional grants.
- These grants are presented and passed by the Parliament before the end of the financial year.
- When actual expenditure incurred exceeds the approved grants of the Parliament, the Ministry of Finance presents a Demand for Excess Grant.
- The Comptroller and Auditor General of India bring such excesses to the notice of the Parliament.
- The Public Accounts Committee examines these excesses and gives recommendations to the Parliament.
- The Demand for Excess Grants is made after the actual expenditure is incurred and is presented to the Parliament after the end of the financial year in which the expenses were made.

1.87 National Commission for Homoeopathy Medicine Bill 2019

- Rajya Sabha passed the National Commission for Homoeopathy Medicine Bill 2019.

- The Bill seeks to repeal the Homoeopathy Central Council Act, 1973.
- It proposes to setup a National Commission for Homoeopathy (NCH) which will replace the existing regulator Central Council for Homoeopathy (CCH) so as to ensure transparency.
- Under NCH, three autonomous boards will be setup:
 - Homoeopathy Education Board will be entrusted with conducting overall education of Homoeopathy.
 - The Board of assessment and rating will assess and grant permission to educational institutions of Homoeopathy.
 - Board of ethics and registration of practitioners of Homoeopathy will maintain National Register and ethical issues relating to practice are under the NCH.
- Under the Bill, the Central Government will constitute an Advisory Council for Homoeopathy.
- The Council will be the primary platform through which the states/union territories can put forth their views and concerns before the NCH.
- It proposes a common entrance exam and an exit exam which all graduates will have to clear to get practicing licenses.
- Further, a teacher's eligibility test has been proposed to assess the standard of teachers before appointment and promotions.

1.88 Scheme for Comprehensive Rehabilitation of Beggars

- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has proposed to restructure & formulate a scheme namely "Scheme for Comprehensive Rehabilitation of Beggars".
- It will be a comprehensive scheme for persons engaged in the Act of begging which would cover identification, rehabilitation, provision of medical facilities, counselling, education, skill development with the support of State Governments/UTs/Local Urban Bodies and Voluntary Organizations.
- The scheme will be implemented in the selected cities having large concentration of Beggar community during the financial year 2020-2021.
- 100% assistance under the Scheme shall be provided to the States/UTs for its implementation.

1.89 National Commission For Indian System Of Medicine Bill 2019

- Rajya Sabha passed the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine Bill 2019.
- The Bill seeks to repeal the Indian Medicine Central Council Act, 1970.
- The Bill provides for the establishment of the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine (NCISM).
- The NCISM will consist of 29 members, appointed by the central government.
- Functions of the NCISM include:

- Framing policies for regulating medical institutions and medical professionals of Indian System of Medicine and
- Ensuring coordination among the autonomous boards set up under the Bill.
- The Bill sets up following autonomous boards under the supervision of the NCISM:
 - The Board of Ayurveda and the Board of Unani, Siddha, and Sowa-Rigpa,
 - The Medical Assessment and Rating Board for Indian System of Medicine and
 - The Ethics and Medical Registration Board:
- The Central Government will constitute an Advisory Council for Indian System of Medicine, which will be the primary platform through which the states/union territories can put forth their views and concerns before the NCISM.
- There will be a uniform National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test for admission to under-graduate education in each of the disciplines of the Indian System of Medicine in all medical institutions regulated by the Bill.

1.90 Premium Subsidy Sharing Pattern (Agriculture)

- Premium subsidy sharing pattern between Centre & North Eastern states changed from 50:50 to 90:10.
- Agriculture minister informed the Lok Sabha that the premium subsidy sharing pattern between Centre and North Eastern States has been changed from 50 : 50 to 90:10.
- It will allow more States to notify the scheme and existing States to notify more crops and areas to facilitate greater coverage of farmers under the scheme.
- For remaining States, subsidy sharing pattern will continue as 50 : 50.
- The Minister also said, Insurance companies will now be selected by the States for 3 years in a go instead of one year thereby increasing their commitment and accountability to the farmers.

1.91 Call data records

- The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has been asking operators for call data records (CDRs) by the bulk.
- The government seeking such details on specific dates for certain pockets in the country without mentioning the reason is highly unusual.

About CDR

- A Call Data Record (CDR) of a subscriber is a string of information about that mobile phone number for a particular time period.
- This string of information includes details such as the name of the subscriber, the details of calls made by this subscriber during a given time period, the duration of each call, whether the call terminated normally or abnormally, rough location of the caller etc.

- Under the new guidelines, only an officer of the rank of SP and above is authorised to seek details from Telecom Operators, and inform the DM of CDRs obtained every month. The current request is not in line with these guidelines.

1.92 Janta Curfew

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the nation and called for a Janta Curfew on Sunday, March 22.
- He said this Curfew will be “for the people and by the people of India” and will be from 7 am to 9 pm on Sunday.
- PM Modi said it will apply to everyone and urged all Citizens to stay inside their homes.
- He said those in emergency and essential services should do their regular duties.
- PM Modi urged the entire Nation to stay at home for the coming few weeks to arrest the spread of the Corona Virus pandemic.
- He said Senior Citizens aged over 65 years should stay indoors at all cost for the next few weeks.

About Section 144

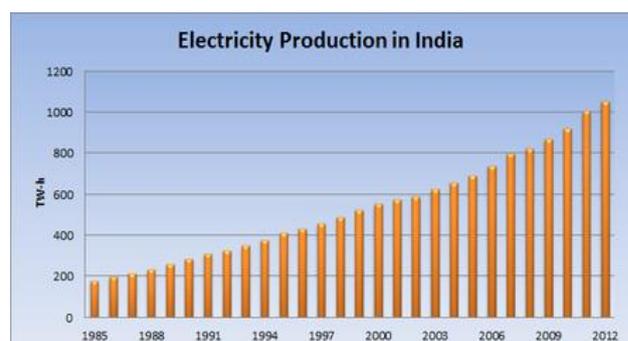
- Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) of 1973 authorises the Executive Magistrate of any State or Territory to issue an Order to prohibit the assembly of four or more people in an area.
- Restriction under Section 144 is different from Curfew. In the areas where curfew is imposed, all public activity is barred.
- Civilian traffic is also stopped.
- Curfew warrants much graver situation posing bigger danger of rioting and violence.

1.93 Institute of teaching and research in ayurveda bill

- Lok Sabha passed the Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda Bill which seeks to accord the status of institution of national importance to a Jamnagar-based cluster of ayurveda institutes.
- The Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda Jamnagar will be granted institution of national importance by conglomerating the cluster of Ayurveda institutes at Gujarat Ayurveda University campus in Jamnagar.
- The three Institutes which would be clubbed are Institute of Post Graduate Teaching and Research in Ayurveda, (Gulakunverba) Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya and Institute of Ayurveda Pharmaceutical Sciences.

1.94 Electricity production in India

- Minister for Power informed Lok Sabha about the status of electricity production in India.
- As per the latest key world energy statistics



published by the IEA in 2019, India is the 3rd largest producer of electricity in the world.

- India also ranks 106th in terms of per capita consumption in 2017.

1.95 One Nation One Ration Card Scheme

- Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution informed Rajya Sabha about the 'One Nation One Ration Card' scheme.
- Under PDS reforms, a scheme on "Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IM-PDS)" is being implemented w.e.f. April 2018 in all States/UTs.
- The main objective of the scheme is to introduce nation-wide portability of ration card holders under National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA), through 'One Nation One Ration Card' system.
- This system enables the migratory ration card holders to lift their entitled food grains from any Fair Price Shop (FPS) of their choice in the country by using their ration card issued in their home States/ UTs after biometric authentication on electronic Point of Sale (ePoS) devices installed at the FPSs.
- So far, the facility of inter-State/national portability under One Nation One Ration Card plan has been made functional in 12 States.

1.96 Project Swastik

In a relief to the residents of Lachen in North Sikkim, the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) opened for traffic 360 feet long Bailey suspension bridge over Teesta River in Munshithang near Chungthang town.

About the bridge

- This Bridge was constructed by Border Roads Organisation (BRO) over Teesta River in North Sikkim under Project Swastik.
- Construction of the bridge commenced in October 2019 and completed it in January 2020.
- The bridge will give impetus to tourism and facilitate the movement of logistics for the Armed Forces deployed in forward areas.
- SCHEME FOR PROMOTION OF MANUFACTURING OF ELECTRONIC COMPONENTS AND SEMICONDUCTORS
- The Union Cabinet has approved to offer financial incentive of 25% of capital expenditure for the manufacturing of goods that constitute the supply chain of an electronic product under the Scheme for Promotion of manufacturing of Electronic Components and Semiconductors (SPECS).

About the policy

- The vision of National Policy on Electronics 2019 (NPE 2019) is to position India as a global hub for Electronics System Design and Manufacturing (ESDM) by developing core components, including, chipsets, and creating an enabling environment for the industry to compete globally.
- It is, therefore proposed to provide an incentive of 25% on capital expenditure on plant, machinery, equipment, associated utilities and technology to the industrial units making investment for manufacturing of electronic components, semiconductors etc.
- The scheme will help offset the disability for domestic manufacturing of electronic components and semiconductors in order to strengthen the electronic manufacturing ecosystem in the country.

1.97 Production linked Incentive Scheme for Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing Writs

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Production Incentive Scheme (PLI) for Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing.
- The scheme proposes production linked incentive to boost domestic manufacturing and attract large investments in mobile phone manufacturing and specified electronic components including Assembly, Testing, Marking and Packaging (ATMP) units.
- The Scheme shall extend an incentive of 4% to 6% on incremental sales (over base year) of goods manufactured in India and covered under target segments, to eligible companies, for a period of 5 years subsequent to the base year as defined.
- The proposed scheme is likely to benefit 5-6 major global players and few domestic champions, in the field of mobile manufacturing and Specified Electronics Components and bring in large scale electronics manufacturing in India.

1.98 Ayush Health and Wellness Centre

The Union Cabinet has approved the inclusion of AYUSH Health and Wellness Centre (AYUSH HWC) component of Ayushman Bharat in National AYUSH Mission (NAM).

About the Centres

- The proposal entails an expenditure of Rs. 3399 Crore for operationalization of AYUSH HWCs within a period of five years that is from financial years 2019-20 to 2023-24.
- The Ministry of AYUSH has proposed following two models for operationalization of 12,500 AYUSH Health & Wellness Centres throughout the country:
- Upgradation of existing AYUSH dispensaries (approximately 10,000)
- Upgradation of existing Sub Health Centres (SHCs) (approx. 2,500)

About the benefits

- Enhanced accessibility to achieve universal health coverage for affordable treatment.
- Reduced burden on secondary and tertiary health care facilities.
- Reduced out of pocket expenditure due to "self-care" model.

- Integration of AYUSH in implementation of SDG 3, as mandated by NITI Aayog.
- Validated holistic wellness model in target areas.

1.99 V K Paul Committee

- The government has constituted a high level technical committee of Public Health Experts for COVID-19 to guide the prevention and control activities in the country.
- The 21 member committee will be headed by NITI Aayog member Dr V K Paul.
- Union Health Secretary Preeti Sudan and Director General Indian Council of Medical Research are the Co-Chair.

1.100 Point-Of-Care Testing

- The US Food and Drug Administration has approved a Corona Virus diagnostic test that can be conducted entirely at the point-of-care and can deliver results in 45 minutes.
- The test will be able to provide results within hours, rather than days like the existing tests.
- Developed by California-based company Cephid, the test would help fast identification of infected people and quickly start treating them and their quarantine.
- Point-of-care testing means results are delivered to patients in the patient care settings, like hospitals, urgent care centres and emergency rooms, instead of samples being sent to a laboratory.

1.101 Shaheedi Diwas (Martyrs' Day)

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid tributes to Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru on the occasion of the Shaheedi Diwas (Martyrs' Day).
- The death anniversary of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev Thapar and Shivaram Rajguru on 23 March 1931, in Lahore is declared as Martyr's Day.
- Bhagat Singh conspired with revolutionaries like Shivaram Rajguru, Sukhdev Thapar, and Chandrashekhar Azad to kill Scott to avenge Lala Lajpat Rai's death.
- However, in a case of mistaken identity, the plotters shot John P. Saunders, an Assistant Superintendent of Police.
- Surfacing again in April 1929, he and another associate, Batukeshwar Dutt, exploded two improvised bombs inside the Central Legislative Assembly in Delhi.

1.102 Community Transmission

- The government of India is yet to confirm community transmission of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), but experts feel that community spread is already happening.
- About the community transmission
- In the simplest terms, community spread is when you do not know the source of the infection — you are unable to trace it back to someone who has travelled in an affected area overseas, or got it through contact with someone who is infected.

- Community spread implies that the virus is now circulating in the community, and can infect people with no history — either of travel to affected areas, or of contact with the infected person.
- In a situation of Community transmission, it is theoretically possible for every person regardless of where they are from or whether they have been in contact, to spread the infection.

1.103 Body Coveralls

- Over the last 45 days, Ministries of Health & Family Welfare and Textiles are attempting to locate adequate number of sources who can produce and supply the requirement of Body Coveralls for the government.
- Since Body Coveralls (PPE) is a specialized protective suit meant for high level of protection to the health professionals, it has stringent technical requirements as prescribed by Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
- During the last week of January 2020, the technical standard for the Coveralls was prescribed as per WHO class-3 exposure pressure in accordance with ISO 16003 or its equivalent. Such materials are manufactured by a few international companies.
- The supply of Body Coveralls from indigenous manufacturers according to the MoH&FW's revised technical requirement dated 2nd March 2020, has already commenced.
- Government has also issued orders banning of exports of Body Coveralls to maintain a strong reserve of this essential medical product.

1.104 Anosmia; Ageusia

- Anosmia and ageusia have emerged as peculiar tell-tale signs of COVID-19, the disease caused by the Corona Virus, and possible markers of infection.
- Anosmia is the loss of sense of smell.
- Ageusia is an accompanying diminished sense of taste.
- British ENT Specialists citing reports from colleagues around the world, called on adults who lose their senses of smell to isolate themselves for seven days, even if they have no other symptoms, to slow the disease's spread.

1.105 SECTION 188 IPC

- After the "Janata Curfew" on Sunday, Delhi and many other States took the Centre's advice to enforce a full lockdown in Districts to contain the spread of COVID-19.
- The orders issued to curb the spread of the coronavirus have been framed under the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, which lays down punishment as per Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860.
- Section 188 IPC deals with the acts of disobedience committed against the orders passed by a public servant, lawfully empowered to pass such orders.

- According to sec.188 Indian Penal Code, disobedience to the order promulgated by the public servant is an offence.
- The term of punishment in the cases of IPC Section 188 differs on the basis of the gravity of the offence committed.

1.106 **UGADI**

The Vice President of India has wished the people on the eve of Ugadi, Gudi Padava, Chaitra Sukladi, Sajibu Cheiraoba, Navreh and Cheti Chand which mark the beginning of a new year in different parts of India.

About the festival

- Yugadi (also known as Samvatsaradi or ugadi): It is the New Year's Day for the people of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states in India. It is observed in these regions on the first day of month of Chaitra (the first month of lunar calendar).
- Gudi Padwa: Maharashtrians term celebrate the festival as Gudi Padwa
- Cheti Chand: Sindhis celebrate the same day as Cheti Chand.
- Sajibu Nongma Panba (also called Meetei Cheiraoba or Sajibu Cheiraoba): Manipuris also celebrate the same day as Sajibu Nongma Panba.
- Traditionally, these festivals mark the onset of New Year and the warmer months and they reflect values of prosperity and well-being.

1.107 **Invest India Business Immunity Platform**

- Invest India, India's national Investment Promotion & Facilitation Agency, under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has launched The Invest India Business Immunity Platform.
- The platform, hosted on the Invest India website, is designed as a comprehensive resource to help businesses and investors get real-time updates on India's active response to Coronavirus.
- The Business Immunity Platform (BIP) is the active platform for business issue redressal, operating 24/7, with a team of dedicated sector experts and responding to queries at the earliest.

1.108 **National Centre For Disease Control**

- Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare visited National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) Control Room and the Testing Laboratories.
- The Institute is under administrative control of the Director General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India.
- The Director, an officer of the Public Health sub-cadre of Central Health Service, is the administrative and technical head of the Institute.

- The National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), formerly National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) had its origin as Central Malaria Bureau, established at Kasauli (Himachal Pradesh) in 1909.
- It functions as the nodal agency in the country for disease surveillance facilitating prevention and control of communicable diseases.
- Headquarters is in New Delhi.

1.109 Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS)

- Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has issued a circular granting one-time dispensation for utilizing funds under the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) to address the challenges in the fight against COVID-19.
- The Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) was launched in 1993.
- Initially, Ministry of Rural Development was the Nodal Ministry for this scheme.
- In October, 1994 this scheme was transferred to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- The Scheme is fully funded by the Government of India under which funds are released in the form of grants-in-aid directly to the district authorities.
- The funds released under the Scheme are non-lapsable, i.e., the entitlement of funds not released in a particular year is carried forward to the subsequent years, subject to eligibility.
- At present, the annual entitlement per MP Constituency is Rs. 5 crores.
- Under it, the role of the Members of Parliament is limited to recommend works.
- Thereafter, it is the responsibility of the district authority to sanction, execute and complete the works recommended within the stipulated time period.
- The elected Lok Sabha Members can recommend works in their respective Constituencies.
- The elected members of the Rajya Sabha can recommend works anywhere in the State from which they are elected.
- Nominated Members of the Parliament can recommend works for implementation, anywhere in the country.
- MPLADS works can be implemented in areas affected by natural calamities like floods, cyclone, hailstorm, avalanche, cloudburst, pest attack, landslides, tornado, earthquake, drought, tsunami, fire and biological, chemical, radiological hazards, etc.
- In order to accord special attention to the development of areas inhabited by Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), 15 per cent of MPLADS funds are to be utilized for areas inhabited by SC population and 7.5 per cent for areas inhabited by ST population.

1.110 Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation

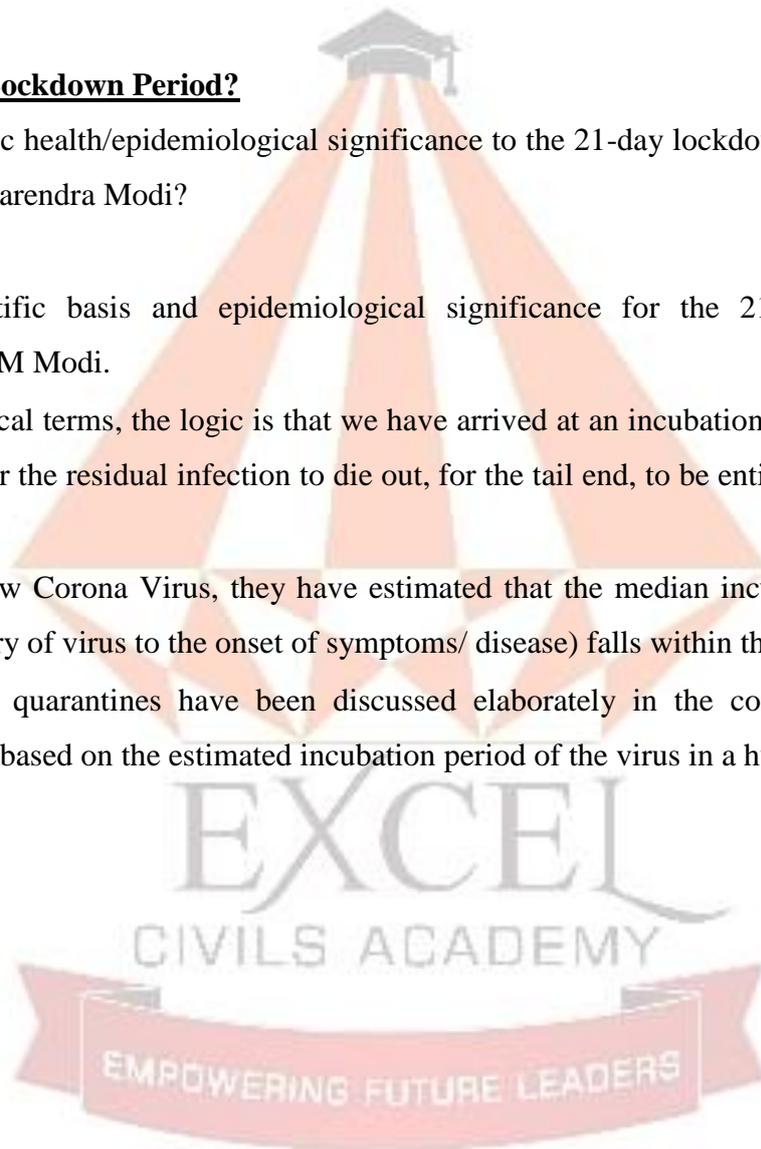
- First Made in India Test Kit to diagnose COVID-19 has got the commercial approval by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO).
- The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) under Directorate General of Health Services, Union Ministry of Health is the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) of India.
- Its headquarter in New Delhi.
- Under the Drugs & Cosmetics Act,1940, CDSCO is responsible for approval of Drugs, Conduct of Clinical Trials, laying down the standards for Drugs, control over the quality of imported Drugs in the country.

1.111 Why 21-Day Lockdown Period?

Is there any public health/epidemiological significance to the 21-day lockdown period announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi?

About the basis

- There is scientific basis and epidemiological significance for the 21-day lockdown period announced by PM Modi.
- In epidemiological terms, the logic is that we have arrived at an incubation period of 14 days. Give another week for the residual infection to die out, for the tail end, to be entirely safe, and you arrive at 21 days.
- This being a new Corona Virus, they have estimated that the median incubation period (the time between the entry of virus to the onset of symptoms/ disease) falls within this period.
- In fact, 21-day quarantines have been discussed elaborately in the context of Ebola and the calculations are based on the estimated incubation period of the virus in a human host.



Agencies for approving Corona Virus Diagnostic Kits

MEASURES TO KEEP PEOPLE INDOORS

Pic: Ashish Gupta

52,000

Fair price shops across Maharashtra

7Cr Ration card holders

75% of them are in rural areas and 50% in urban areas

> **Till March** | Distribution of ration complete

> **From April 1** | Beneficiaries can collect two-three months' ration at one go



A guard at a housing society in Baner helps a milk vendor with hand sanitiser

“ We have identified 80 spots in PMC and PCMC areas to facilitate online delivery of vegetables to customers. This is likely to start from Thursday afternoon – **Suhas Divase** | MAHARASHTRA AGRICULTURE COMMISSIONER

“ The grocers have started allowing one person in the shop at a time and are using sanitisers. Handcarts with vegetables & fruits will be allowed into housing societies – **Naval Kishore Ram** | PUNE COLLECTOR

SUGGESTIONS FOR NOW

- > Groceries, including those in malls, should be allowed to remain open
- > One person at a time to be allowed at these places

- > Second person can be sent back home
- > Grocery shops should make phone numbers public and practise 'home delivery'

STEPS AT HOUSING SOCIETIES

- > Plans afoot to ensure supply of grocery, vegetables and fruits to big housing societies
- > This will start in Mumbai and then in Pune and other cities
- > Necessary information have been sought from the cooperation department and registrars to roll out the system
- > This will take some time
- > Till then, people should be allowed to step out to buy essential items

SUPPLY THROUGH FARMERS & HAWKERS

- > Local farmers and dealers will ensure supply of veggies and fruits in housing societies through handcarts
- > Food supply department has urged the home department to ensure that vehicles carrying essential supply should have the tag and should not be stopped

(Source: Food and civil supplies department)

The Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) has approved three other centres, alongside the National Institute of Virology (NIV), as agencies for approving diagnostic kits.

About the Kits

- These are the National AIDS Research Institute, Pune; the National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases, Kolkata; and the National Institute of Pathology, New Delhi.
- While the rules require that only Kits approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and European CE be allowed, ICMR said that this was no longer mandatory and Indian diagnostic Kit manufacturers were permitted so long as their product was approved by the NIV.
- Mylab, a diagnostic Kit maker in Pune, was the first such indigenous maker of kits to be validated recently.

1.112 Stay Home India With Books

National Book Trust (NBT) of HRD Ministry has launched #StayHomeIndiaWithBooks initiative in the wake of Preventive Measures of the Government of India to contain the spread of Covid-19.

About the initiative

- To encourage people to read books while at home, NBT is providing its select and best-selling titles for FREE Download as part of its initiative of #StayHomeIndiaWithBooks!
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Let us Together Fight the Coronavirus (COVID-19)

- Avoid places with large gatherings
- Clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water
- Maintain social distancing
- Avoid travel as much as possible
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth
- Cover your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early
- Avoid spreading rumours through social media apps

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1.113 Indelible Ink

- Election Commission has decided to allow usage of indelible ink on persons for stamping for home quarantine by health authorities in view of COVID-19.
- Indelible ink refers to the violet-coloured ink in India that is applied on a voter's forefinger after she exercises her vote.
- It is known to contain silver nitrate and is manufactured in secrecy.
- Indelible ink remains bright for about 10 days, after which it starts fading.

- In 1962, the Election Commission in collaboration with the Law Ministry, the National Physical Laboratory of India and the National Research Development Corporation made an agreement with Mysore Paints and Varnish Ltd. to manufacture ink that couldn't be wiped off easily.
- Mysore Paints and Varnish Ltd. was founded in 1937 by Maharaja Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV.
- The company is the sole supplier of indelible ink for civic body, Assembly and Parliamentary polls.
- It also supplies ink to about 25 countries.

1.114 Rashtriya Raksha University Bill, 2020

- The Minister for Home Affairs introduced the Rashtriya Raksha University Bill, 2020 in the Lok Sabha.
- It proposes to establish the Rashtriya Raksha University by upgrading the Raksha Shakti University, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, established under the Raksha Shakti University Act, 2009 by the Government of Gujarat as an institution of national importance.
- The Rashtriya Raksha University is proposed to be a Multi-Disciplinary University to help to fulfil the need for a pool of trained professionals in various wings of Policing, the Criminal justice system and Correctional Administration.

1.115 MACS 4028

- Scientists from Agharkar Research Institute (ARI), Pune, an autonomous institute under the Department of Science & Technology have developed a biofortified durum wheat variety MACS 4028, which shows high protein content.
- MACS 4028 is a semi-dwarf variety, which matures in 102 days and has shown the superior and stable yielding ability of 19.3 quintals per hectare.
- It is resistant to stem rust, leaf rust, foliar aphids, root aphids, and brown wheat mite.
- The wheat variety shown high protein content of about 14.7%, better nutritional quality having zinc 40.3 ppm, and iron content of 40.3ppm and 46.1ppm respectively, good milling quality and overall acceptability.
- The MACS 4028 variety is also included by the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) programme for United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to alleviate malnutrition in a sustainable way and can boost the Vision 2022 “Kuposhan Mukht Bharat”, the National Nutrition Strategy.

1.116 Bhilwara

- Bhilwara, considered the hub of textile manufacturing in Rajasthan, has grabbed national attention following a number of positive cases of COVID-19 being detected at a private hospital in the city.
- Bhilwara is a City in the Mewar region of Rajasthan.
- It is famous for Textile in Rajasthan.
- The main textile product is synthetic fabric used in trousers.

- Many seasonal rivers such as Kothari, Banas, Menali, Bedach, Khari, and Mansi meander their way through Bhilwara.

1.117 Telemedicine Guidelines

The health ministry issued telemedicine guidelines enabling doctors to write prescriptions based on telephone conversations that reduce risks of transmission for medical professionals as well as patients.

About the guidelines

- The move, aimed at decongesting healthcare facilities in the wake of Covid-19, will also make healthcare accessible to remote areas in general and make faster intervention possible with the current immobilisation due to coronavirus making hospital and clinic visits difficult.
- The document provides information on various aspects of telemedicine, including on technology platforms and tools available to medical practitioners and how to integrate these technologies to provide healthcare delivery.
- It also spells out how technology and transmission of voice, data, images and information should be used in conjunction with other clinical standards, protocols, policies and procedures to provide care.
- The guidelines specifically explicitly exclude the following:
 - Use of digital technology to conduct surgical or invasive procedures remotely
 - Other aspects of telehealth such as research and evaluation and continuing education of healthcare workers
 - Specifications for hardware or software, infrastructure building & maintenance
 - Does not provide for consultations outside the jurisdiction of India

1.118 NSO survey on hand-washing

While the experts recommend washing of hands with soap and water as one of the basic protective measures against coronavirus, a survey done by the National Statistics Office (NSO) shows it's not a habit that comes easily to most Indians.

About the Survey Data

- The survey, the results of which were made public in a report titled 'Drinking Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Housing Condition' in November 2019, covered 1,06,838 households (63,736

WHO USES WHAT			
Practice of hand washing before meal*	Rural	Urban	All
Wash hands with water and soap/detergent	25.3	56	35.8
Wash hands with water and ash/mud/sand etc	3.5	1.3	2.7
Wash hands with water only	69.9	42.1	60.4
Do not wash hands	1.3	0.5	1

**Percentage of households*

in rural areas and 43,102 in urban areas).

- According to the survey, while members of most households (99 per cent) wash their hands before a meal, only those in 35.8 per cent households do so with “water and soap/detergent”.
- While members of 56 per cent urban households reported washing their hands with water and soap before eating, only 25.3 per cent households in rural areas did so.
- The percentage of households whose members practise hand washing ‘with water and soap/detergent’ before a meal was found to be lowest in Jharkhand (10.6 per cent) and the highest in Sikkim (87.1 per cent).
- Then, there are households where people wash their hands before a meal, but not with water and soap/detergent.
- About 60.4 per cent households — 69.9 per cent rural and 42.1 per cent urban — used only water to wash their hands before eating.
- About 2.7 per cent households – 3.5 per cent rural, 1.3 per cent urban -used “water and ash/mud/sand etc.” to wash hands.
- There were about one per cent households that did not wash hands at all before a meal.

1.119 World Happiness Report 2020

- Finland is the world’s happiest country according to the World Happiness Report 2020.
- India ranks 144 in the report.

About the report

- Nordic states dominated the top 10, along with countries such as Switzerland, New Zealand and Austria.
- Luxembourg also edged into the 10th spot for the first time this year.
- The happiest Countries are those “where people feel a sense of belonging, where they trust and enjoy each other and their shared institutions.
- Meanwhile, the Countries at the bottom are those afflicted by violent conflicts and extreme poverty, with Zimbabwe, South Sudan and Afghanistan classified as the world’s least happy nations.
- The World Happiness Report is a publication of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, which operates under the auspices of the United Nations since 2012 to mobilize scientific and technical expertise in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- This is the eighth World Happiness Report which ranks 156 countries by how happy their citizens perceive themselves to be.
- Researchers for Report asked people to evaluate their own levels of happiness, and took into account measures such as GDP, social support, personal freedom and levels of corruption to give each nation a happiness score.

- The World Happiness Report 2020 for the first time ranks cities around the world by their subjective well-being and digs more deeply into how the social, urban and natural environments combine to affect our happiness.

1.120 STAFFORD ACT

- In response to the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic, United States President Trump declared a national emergency under the Stafford Act, allowing the Federal Government through FEMA to take advantage of a \$50 billion fund for disaster relief that's rarely been used for disease outbreaks.
- The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act.
- Stafford Act. It is named after Vermont Sen. Robert Stafford (in Senate 1971–89), who helped pass the law.
- It is a 1988 United States federal law designed to bring federal natural disaster assistance for State and local governments in carrying out their responsibilities to aid citizens.
- It created the system by which a presidential disaster declaration or an emergency declaration triggers financial and physical assistance through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
- The Act gives FEMA the responsibility for coordinating government-wide relief efforts.

1.121 PM - CARES Fund

- The Government has set up the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM-CARES Fund) to deal with any kind of emergency or distress situation like posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- This Fund has been set up owing to a number of requests made by the people to support the government in the wake of the COVID-19 emergency.

About the Fund

- The Fund is a Public Charitable Trust with the Prime Minister as its Chairman. Other Members include Defence Minister, Home Minister and Finance Minister.
- The Fund enables micro-donations as a result of which a large number of people will be able to contribute with the smallest of denominations.
- The Fund will strengthen disaster management capacities and encourage research on protecting citizens.

Contribution to PM - CARES Fund will Qualify as CSR Expenditure

- The Ministry of Corporate Affairs has clarified that contributions by companies towards the PM-CARES Fund will count towards mandatory Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) expenditure.

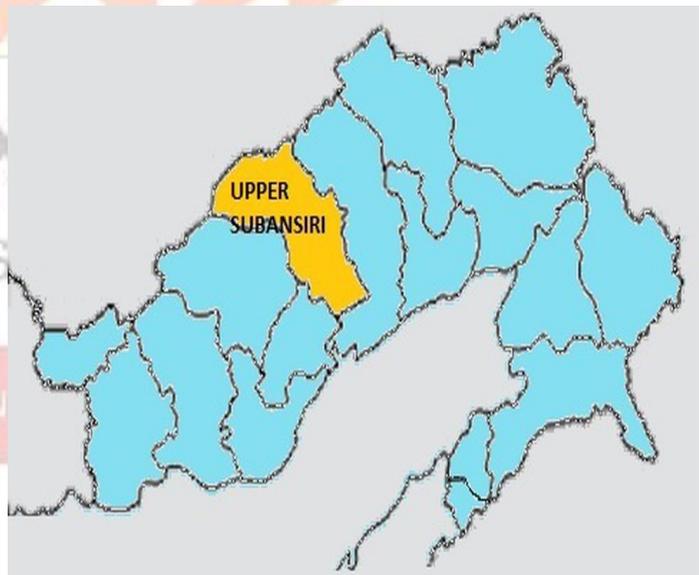
- Under the Companies Act, 2013, companies with a minimum net worth of Rs 500 crore or turnover of Rs 1,000 crore, or net profit of Rs 5 crore are required to spend at least 2% of their average profit for the previous three years on CSR activities every year.
- The term "Corporate Social Responsibility" in general can be referred to as a Corporate initiative to assess and take responsibility for the Company's effects on the environment and impact on social welfare.

Existing Similar Fund: Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF)

- This fund was instituted in 1948 by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, to assist displaced persons from Pakistan. The fund is currently used primarily to tackle natural calamities like floods, cyclones and earthquakes. The fund is also used to help with medical treatment like kidney transplantation, cancer treatment and acid attack.
- The fund consists entirely of public contributions and does not get any budgetary support. It accepts voluntary contributions from Individuals, Organizations, Trusts, Companies and Institutions etc.
- The corpus of the fund is also invested in various forms with scheduled commercial banks and other agencies. Disbursements are made with the approval of the Prime Minister.
- The fund is recognized as a Trust under the Income Tax Act and the same is managed by the Prime Minister or multiple delegates for national causes.
- Contributions towards PMNRF are notified for 100% deduction from taxable income under section 80(G) of the Income Tax Act, 1961.

1.122 Project Arunank

- Under Project Arunank, the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) personnel are working to completely replace Daporijo bridge (located over Subansiri River), the only lifeline of Upper Subansiri district, Arunachal Pradesh.
- Project Arunank is responsible for the construction and maintenance of approximately 1113 Kms of roads in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.
- It is being implemented by the Border Roads Organisation, an important arm of the Ministry of Defence.
- Project Arunank is named after the state of Arunachal Pradesh.



1.123 SECTIONS 269 & 270 OF IPC

- During the Corona Virus outbreak, Penal provisions, such as Sections 269 and 270 of the IPC, are being invoked to enforce the lockdown orders in various states. Sections 269 and 270 have been used to book persons defying quarantine orders for containing the spread of the pandemic.
- Sections 269 and 270 of the IPC come under Chapter XIV of the Indian Penal Code– ‘Of Offences Affecting The Public Health, Safety, Convenience, Decency and Morals’.
- Sections 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) provides for a jail term of six months and/or fine.
- Section 270 (malignant act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) provides for a jail term of two years and/or fine. In Section 270, the word ‘malignantly’ indicates indicates a deliberate intention on the part of the accused.
- Both Sections have been used for over a century to punish those disobeying orders issued for containing epidemics.

1.124 Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package: Insurance Scheme For Health Workers Fighting COVID-19

- Government has approved Insurance Scheme announced under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package for health workers who are fighting to contain COVID-19.
- The scheme will provide an insurance cover of 50 lakh Rupees for ninety days to around 22.12 lakh public healthcare providers.
- They include community health workers, who may have to be in direct contact and care of COVID-19 patients and who may be at risk of being impacted by this.
- The scheme will also include accidental loss of life on account of contracting COVID-19.
- The insurance provided under this scheme will be over and above any other insurance cover being availed by the beneficiary.

2. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

2.1 U.S., Taliban sign peace deal; American troops to leave Afghanistan in 14 months



U.S. peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, left, and Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban group's top political leader shake hands after signing a peace agreement between Taliban and U.S. officials in Doha on February 29, 2020.

Highlights of the deal:

- The United States signed a historic deal with Taliban insurgents on Saturday that could pave the way toward a full withdrawal of foreign soldiers from Afghanistan over the next 14 months and represent a step toward ending the 18-year-war there.
- U.S. Defence Secretary Mark Esper said if Taliban renege on their guarantees, Washington “will not hesitate to nullify” the agreement.
- The agreement paves the way for the United States to gradually pull out of its longest war.
- The deal was signed in the Qatari capital Doha by U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban political chief Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was on hand to witness the ceremony.
- U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper meanwhile travelled to Kabul on a visit that officials and experts said was aimed at reassuring the Afghan government about the United States' commitment to the country.
- For U.S President Donald Trump, the deal represents a chance to make good on his promise to bring U.S. troops home. But security experts have also called it a foreign policy gamble that would give the Taliban international legitimacy.
- Hours before the deal, the Taliban ordered all its fighters in Afghanistan “to refrain from any kind of attack ... for the happiness of the nation.”

- “The biggest thing is that we hope the U.S. remain committed to their promises during the negotiation and peace deal,” said Zabiullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the hardline Islamist group.
- Mujahid said it was “irritating and provocative” that foreign military aircraft continued to fly over Taliban territory, but militia fighters were following the order to stand-down.
- For millions of Afghans, the deal represents some hope for an end to decades of bloodshed.
- Hassan's children were killed in a bomb blast carried out by the Taliban in 2018. Since then, he has been writing letters to world leaders urging them to end the Afghan war.
- The war, which has killed tens of thousands of people, began when the United States launched attacks on Afghanistan just weeks after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington by the Afghanistan-based A Qaeda militant group.
- Washington accused the Taliban of harbouring A Qaeda and its leader Osama bin Laden, and with its allies ousted the group from power. But the Taliban has remained a potent force and currently controls about 40% of Afghan territory.
- Trump said in a statement that the deal will pave way for U.S. troop numbers to drop to 8,600 from about 13,000 in the weeks following the deal.
- Further reductions of Western forces will hinge on the Taliban adhering to a “reduction in violence” pledge, a condition that will be assessed by the United States.
- Under the deal, the Taliban wants 5,000 fighters to be released from Afghan-run jails, but it is not clear whether the Afghan government will agree.
- There are also questions about whether Taliban fighters loyal to hardline Islamist splinter groups will be willing to adhere to the reduction in violence agreement.
- Some Senior Commanders of the Taliban in Doha for the signing said they will ensure that the U.S. and Afghan Governments accept all the conditions laid down by the group, according to Afghan defence officials.
- Sources in the Taliban earlier this month said they were prepared to launch a spring offensive and had recruited more than 6,000 fighters and suicide bombers if the agreement collapses.

2.2 Saudi Arabia to hold virtual G20 leaders summit

- Saudi Arabia announced on March 17, 2020 that it will convene a virtual summit of the G20 nations next week to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Saudi Arabia is the current chair of the Group of 20 major economies.
- The extraordinary virtual summit will bring together leaders of all the G-20 nations on a common platform. The date of the summit is yet not specified.
- The statement from the Saudi secretariat read that the G20 leaders will be putting forward a coordinated set of policies aimed at protecting the people and safeguarding the global economy.

- G-20 leader's virtual summit
- Saudi Arabia has proposed to convene the virtual G20 summit to advance a coordinated response to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the economy.
- The G20 will act, alongside International Organizations, in any way deemed necessary to lessen the impact of the coronavirus outbreak.
- The summit is expected to build on the current efforts being undertaken by the G20 Finance Ministers, central bank governors and senior trade, foreign affairs and health officials to deal with the COVID-19 crisis.
- Saudi Arabia, which is the chair, is expected to continue its support to the international efforts to counter the impact of the pandemic, both in terms of stopping its further spread and reducing its economic impact.

2.3 India to give 107.01 million Nepali Rupees for three new schools in Nepal

- India will provide 107.01 million Nepali Rupees for the construction of three new school buildings. These schools will be built in Darchula, Dhanusha and Kapilvastu districts. The MoU was signed on March 16, 2020 in Kathmandu between the bodies of India, Nepal and allied Districts.
- The Embassy of India handed over a cheque of Eight Lakh Nepali Rupees to Kapilavastu District Coordination Committee for the construction of Shivbhari School Building. India-Nepal Development Partnership program is constructing these schools for the mutual benefit of both countries. Two new school buildings at Dhanusha in Kathmandu will cost about 73.96 million Nepali Rupees.
- In Darchula District, Shree Malikarjun Higher Secondary School will use a new infrastructure while in Dhanusha district, Baidyanath Devnarayan Public Higher Secondary School will also witness new infrastructure.

Key Highlights

- Several facilities will be provided by the Government of India for the construction work. It will include a call for tender, everyday supervision and award of work.
- Embassy of India, General Administration of Nepal and the Ministry of Federal Affairs will monitor the projects at the federal level.
- The Indian Government will construct new school buildings at Kapilvastu, Shivbhari, and Maharajgunj at an amount of 33.05 million Nepali Rupees.
- A cheque of Rs. 8.26 million Nepali Rupees have been handed over to the District Coordination Committee, Kapilvastu by the Embassy of India.

2.4 China takes over Presidency of UN Security Council

China has assumed the **Presidency of the United Nations Security Council** for March 2020. While taking on the role, China vowed to advance solidarity and cooperation among the members.

China's permanent representative to the UN, Zhang Jun said in a press note that his country attaches great importance to the work during its presidency and will act responsibly and constructively.

Zhang Jun further said that China will make an effort to boost cooperation among all parties to ensure that the UNSC fulfils its crucial role and responsibility to maintain international peace and security.

UNSC Presidency

The **presidency of the UN Security Council is rotated** among its members every month according to the English alphabetical order. **Vietnam** held the Presidency in January 2020, followed by Belgium in February 2020. After China, the Presidency of the UNSC will go to Dominican Republic in April 2020.

UNSC:

The UN Security Council is one of the **United Nations' six main organs**. It was **formed in 1945** and held its first session on January 17, 1946.

The Security Council was created after the Second World War to address the failure of the previous international organization, the League of Nations to maintain world peace.

The main responsibility of the UN Security Council is to ensure **international peace and security**. It is the only UN body that has the **authority to issue binding resolutions** to member states.

The UNSC has previously authorized interventions during the Korean War, Congo Crisis and also authorised peacekeeping missions in the Suez Crisis, Cyprus, West New Guinea, Namibia, Kuwait, Bosnia, Somalia, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Cambodia and Somalia.

UNSC Members

The Security Council comprises **fifteen members- five members and 10 non-permanent members** elected for a period of two years.

The five permanent members of the UNSC include the winning side of World War II- the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia (formerly a part of Soviet Union), France and China.

These permanent members of the council have a veto power, through which they can veto any substantive resolution, including those involving admission of new member states or nominees for the post of UN Secretary-General.

The 10 non-permanent members of the council are elected on a regional basis for a period of two years.

India's bid for permanent membership in UNSC

India has been **pushing for its permanent membership** in the UN Security Council. India's bid has the backing of four of the five permanent members- the US, UK, Russia and France. Only China stands in the way of India becoming a permanent member of the UNSC.

India has previously served as a non-permanent member of the UNSC for seven terms, overall 14 years. The most recent term was from 2011-2012.

2.5 UNHRC moves Supreme Court over CAA, India says Act an internal matter

UNHRC in SC: The United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights has filed an **intervention application in the Indian Supreme Court** over the Citizenship Amendment Act.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights had informed India's Permanent Mission in Geneva on March 2, 2020 that her office has filed an intervention in the apex court over the CAA matter. The move is unprecedented and received a sharp retort from the Indian government.

The spokesperson of the Union Ministry of External Affairs, Raveesh Kumar, stated that the Citizenship Amendment Act is India's internal matter and concerns the sovereign right of the Indian Parliament to make laws.

UNHRC's intervention application

- The intervention application was filed by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet.
- She stated that the UN organization wished to **intervene in the CAA matter as "amicus curiae"** in its efforts to **protect and promote human rights** and conduct necessary advocacy in regard to the same.
- The intervention plea was filed in the writ petition challenging the CAA, filed by retired IFS officer Deb Mukharji.
- Though the UN body acknowledged that the CAA had a **"commendable purpose"** and can benefit thousands of migrants, it stated that the Act raised important questions on the international human rights law and its application on refugees.
- The UNHRC underlined in its application that under the international human rights law, the **states must ensure that the migrants** under their territorial jurisdiction **receive non- discriminatory treatment**, regardless of the documentation they possess and their legal status and they should be provided protection from discrimination, including on the basis of religion.
- The UN body stated that the civil rights extended by states to its citizens must also be extended to all individuals including refugees, migrants, asylum seekers and other persons regardless of their nationality or statelessness.

- It also said that while the CAA reduces the risk of persecution for certain communities by protecting them from returning to a country where they are likely to be subjected to persecution, it **places other communities at such risk.**
- It also added saying that the difference in treatment based on religion would constitute discrimination if the criteria for establishing the difference do not achieve a legitimate objective and are not proportionate to the achievement of that objective.

India's response to UNHRC application

India on March 3, 2020 **completely rejected foreign intervention** in the CAA matter saying that it strongly believes that no foreign party has any say on issues concerning India's sovereignty. India maintained that the **CAA Act is Constitutionally valid** and complies with all its Constitutional values. Further, the centre clarified that the CAA act reflects India's long-standing national commitment in respect to human rights issues, which had come out after the Partition of India. The MEA spokesperson reiterated that India is a democratic Country governed by the rule of law and it has the utmost respect and full trust in its independent judiciary and is confident that a sound and legally sustainable stand will be taken by the Supreme Court.

Background

The **Citizenship Amendment Act** was passed by both houses of the Indian Parliament in December 2019. The citizenship amendment law will **grant citizenship to non-Muslim migrants** belonging to Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, who entered India before December 31, 2014 to escape religious persecution.

2.6 Muhyiddin Yassin takes oath as Malaysia's new Prime Minister



- **Muhyiddin Yassin** took oath as the new **Prime Minister of Malaysia** on March 1, 2020 despite opposition from former Malaysian PM Mahathir Mohamad, who slammed the move as illegal. The swearing-in ceremony took place at the national palace in Kuala Lumpur.

- Muhyiddin Yasin heads a coalition government, which is dominated by the nation's ethnic Malay Muslim majority. He is a former interior minister and his swearing-in marks the return of a scandal-hit regime.
- Malaysia plunged into a political turmoil after its Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad resigned on February 24 in what is stated to be a self-staged coup. The 94-year-old is the world's oldest leader.

Background

- **Malaysian PM Mahathir Mohamad** with his **Pakatan Harapan coalition** had stormed to a historic victory in the 2018 elections. The coalition included Mahathir's Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia party, Democratic Action Party and Anwar Ibrahim's Parti Keadilan Rakyat.
- The coalition had a pre-poll power-sharing agreement, under which Mahathir Mohamad was to retain the PM post for the first 2.5 years and **Anwar Ibrahim** was supposed to hold it for the remaining 2.5 years.
- However, after a rift within the coalition that began with Ibrahim accusing Mahathir of not willing to hand over the Prime Ministership to him, Mahathir gave in his resignation and pulled his party out of the ruling coalition, leading to a collapse in the government.



3. INDIAN ECONOMY

3.1 Union Cabinet approves Companies (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019

The Union Cabinet gave its approval to the **Companies (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019** on March 4, 2020. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had chaired the cabinet meeting. The Companies (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019 seeks to amend the Companies Act, 2013.

The Companies (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019 proposes to remove the criminality clause in the act in case of defaults, which can be determined objectively and does not involve larger public interest.

The Bill will now be tabled in the Indian Parliament. It needs to be passed by both the houses and receive Presidential assent to become a law.

Companies (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019: Key Features

- The Companies (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019 proposes to amend the Companies Act, 2013 to enable listing of Indian firms on foreign stock exchanges. This would increase the competitiveness among the Indian companies with respect to access to capital, better valuations and broader investor base.
- The framework for listing of Indian companies under the foreign exchange and securities laws will be finalised by the Union Finance Ministry in coordination with the Reserve Bank of India, Corporate Affairs Ministry and Securities and Exchange Board of India.
- The Bill mainly aims to remove the criminality section under the act to enable ease of living for law-abiding corporates. Over 72 amendments are proposed in the Companies Act, 2013, which are aimed at declogging of the criminal justice system in India. The new bill has also proposed re-categorization of 23 offences.

Following are some of the proposals of the Companies (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019:

- The Companies Act, 2013 comprises 81 Compoundable Offences that are heard by Courts and are punishable with fine or imprisonment or both. The Companies (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019 re-categorizes 16 of these offences including the issuance of shares at a discount and failure to file an annual return as civil defaults, where adjudicating Officers appointed by the Centre may the levy the penalties instead.
- The Companies Act, 2013 prohibits a company from issuing shares at a discount, except in rare cases. If any company fails to comply with the rule then it can face a fine between Rs 1 lakh and Rs 5 lakh and every officer is liable to face imprisonment up to six months and a fine between Rs 1 lakh and Rs 5 lakh. The amendment bill aims to remove the clause of imprisonment for officers as a punishment.

- The Companies (Second Amendment) Bill states that a company cannot initiate a business, unless a declaration is filed within 180 days of incorporation, confirming that all subscribers have paid the value of shares agreed to be taken by them. The company also has to file verification of its registered office address with the Registrar of Companies within 30 days of establishment. In case of failure to comply with these provisions or when the company is found not to be carrying out any business, its name may be removed from the Register of Companies.
- The Companies (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019 also proposes a change in approving authority for the companies. Under the Companies Act, 2013, the change in the financial period for a company associated with a foreign company requires approval from the National Company Law Tribunal. Other approvals including any change in documents also have to go through the tribunal. The amendment bill proposes to transfer the powers to the centre.
- Further, if a person holds beneficial interest amounting to at least 25 percent shares in a company or exercises significant control over the company, he is required to make a declaration of his interest. Under the Companies Act, 2013, in case of failure of the declaration of interest- the person is likely to be punished with a fine between Rs 1-10 lakh along with continuing fine for everyday default. The amendment bill provides that such people may be either fined or imprisoned for 1 year or both.
- The Companies (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019 also increases the penalty of settling offences by a regional director to Rs 25 lakh from the previous Rs 5 lakh.

3.2 Action-Plan to tackle Adverse Impact of Global Warming on Food Crops

Global Warming associated with the increase in concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is one of the reasons for the increase in extreme weather events. Due to global warming agriculture sector is likely to be affected and climate change is expected to impact yields of agriculture crops in a business as usual scenario.

- Simulation studies using integrated modelling framework showed that rainfed rice yields in India are projected to reduce marginally (<2.5%) in 2050 and 2080 scenarios while irrigated rice yields are projected to reduce by 7% in 2050 and 10% in 2080 scenarios.
- Climate change is projected to reduce wheat yield by 6-25% towards the end of the Century with significant spatio-temporal variations. Climate change in 2050 and 2080 scenarios is projected to reduce the *kharif* maize yields by 18 to 23%.
- *Kharif* groundnut yields are projected to be increased by 4-7% in 2050 scenarios where as in 2080 scenario the yield is likely to decline by 5%. Future climates are likely to benefit chickpea with increase in productivity (23-54%).

- During XII Plan (2012-2018), more than 400 climate resilient germplasm lines have been identified and 58 genotypes characterised with high water and nutrient use efficiency by Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).
- National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA) one of the missions under **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)** aims to evolve and implement strategies to make Indian agriculture more resilient to the changing climate.
- National Food Security Mission (NFSM) programme is implemented in the identified districts across the country with the objective of increasing foodgrain production through area expansion and productivity enhancement, restoring soil fertility and productivity at individual farm level and enhancing farm level economy.

ICAR has launched a flagship network project National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA):

The NICRA aims at strategic research on adaptation and mitigation, demonstration of technologies on farmers' fields and creating awareness among farmers and other stakeholders to minimize the impacts of global warming on agriculture.

Under this project, large number of indigenous genetic resources and improved crop varieties of pulses (black gram, green gram, pigeonpea, chickpea) and cereals (rice and wheat) are screened for major abiotic stresses like drought and heat to identify superior cultivars for large scale adoption in farmer's fields genetic materials for cultivation at farmers field. In the process number of genetic materials including improved varieties were identified, some of which are already in the farmer's fields.

Besides, location specific NRM technologies are being demonstrated under Technology Demonstration Component of NICRA in 151 climatically vulnerable districts to achieve climate resilient agriculture.



3.3 India has become world's 5th largest economy: IMF



India has overtaken France and the UK to become the **world's fifth-largest economy**, as per IMF's October World Economic Outlook.

The IMF data from last year shows that when ranked by nominal GDP, India has jumped past both France and the UK to regain its fifth-largest economy spot. On the other hand, India's real GDP is predicted to witness slow growth in the year ahead due to credit weakness.

India had previously slipped down the seventh position following a major slowdown in economic growth. However, despite the current jump, India is battling with challenges concerning sustainability and infrastructure.

India's GDP growth: Key Highlights

- In 2010, India was placed 9th among the **World's Largest Economies**, behind Countries including Italy and Brazil. The United States was ranked first then, followed by China, Japan, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Italy, India and Russia.
- As per the 2017 World Bank report, India had become the fifth largest economy, overtaking France and the UK for the first time. But the 2018 data showed that the two nations had once again moved ahead of India to reclaim their spots, while India was pushed to the 7th spot.
- In 2019, however, India's fortunes changed and it jumped to the 5th spot, again surpassing the UK and France. While the UK remained at its 6th spot, France slipped to the 7th position.
- India's rise, when seen across the past 25 years, is even more dramatic, as its nominal GDP has risen by more than 700 percent since 1995.

Significance

India's GDP growth has been the most phenomenal in the past decade, regularly achieving an annual growth of between 6-7 percent. The rise in GDP is largely credited to factors including urbanization and improvement in the efficiency and productivity of technologies. This was revealed by the **2016 McKinsey Global Institute report**.

Following is the list of the world's largest economies in 2010 vs 2019:

Rank	2010	2019
1	United States	United States
2	China	China
3	Japan	Japan
4	Germany	Germany
5	France	India
6	United Kingdom	United Kingdom
7	Brazil	France
8	Italy	Italy
9	India	Brazil
10	Russian Federation	Canada

Key Challenges

Despite India's rise in the nominal GDP ranking, the Nation still faces the issue of uneven access to development and new opportunities, as per the World Bank. India also continues to struggle with the issue of poverty, as it is home to almost 1/4th of the world's poor.

At the same time, India's poverty reduction rates are among the highest in the world. India is also looking to adopt ways to ensure its future economic growth is sustainable and more inclusive and its policies are aimed at enabling the development of both rural and urban areas. The Digital India programme has played a significant role in providing equal access to technology and other opportunities to the rural population.

3.4 Supreme Court lifts RBI ban on dealing in crypto currency



The Supreme Court on March 4, 2020 lifted the **RBI ban on trading in virtual currencies** such as **Bitcoin**. The order comes as a major relief for the traders in this sector.

The apex court read out its judgement while hearing a plea from the **Internet and Mobile Association of India (IMAI)** challenging the RBI ban. The IMAI petition claimed that by banning virtual currencies, RBI had effectively banned legitimate business activity through virtual currencies.

The Reserve Bank of India had in 2018 imposed restrictions on the banks from facilitating banking transactions for virtual currency exchanges and traders.

SC allows trading in cryptocurrency: Key Details

- The Supreme Court has lifted the ban imposed by RBI on trading in Virtual Currencies referred to as Crypto Currencies and Crypto assets.
- The ruling was delivered by a three-judge bench led by Justice RF Nariman and comprising Justices V Ramasubramanian and Aniruddha Bose. The bench overturned RBI's April 2018 notification that had introduced the restriction.
- The IMAI had filed a petition before the Court questioning RBI's powers of banning virtual currencies when they aren't a currency in a legal sense. The association had argued that cryptocurrencies are more like a commodity.
- The RBI in its arguments before the court had stated that it had treated cryptocurrency as a digital payment method, which had to be stopped to ensure that the country's payment system is not jeopardised.
- The RBI referred to many cases in this context, when it had issued a caution to the users of cryptocurrencies about the virtual currency.

3.5 PAN cardholders may be fined Rs 10000 for not linking PAN with Aadhaar by March 31



PAN card holders may have to pay a hefty fine amounting to **Rs 10,000** if they fail to link their PAN cards with Aadhaar by March 31, 2020.

The Income Tax Department said in a fresh notification that those who fail to link their personal account number with their 12-digit biometric Aadhaar number before the set deadline, their **PAN cards will become inoperative** and they may face a **fine up to Rs 10, 000** for using inoperative PAN cards.

Under **Section 272B of the Income Tax Act**, those found using invalid or operative PAN cards may face fine up to Rs 10,000. The Assessing Officer may direct such people to pay the penalty.

3.6 Yes Bank Crisis: RBI imposes moratorium; limits withdrawals to Rs 50,000



- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on March 5, 2020 imposed moratorium on troubled private lender YES Bank, limiting cash withdrawals to Rs 50,000 per account.
- The restrictions became effective from 6:00 PM of March 5 and will be application till April 3, 2020. Any withdrawal exceeding the capped amount of Rs 50,000 would require the permission of RBI.

- Moreover, the central bank also suspended the Board of Directors of Yes Bank for 30 days, considering the inefficiency of the board to raise the required capital in the last six months.
- At the same time, the RBI exercised its powers under Section 36ACA (2) of the Banking Regulation Act 1949 to appoint Prashant Kumar, Chief Financial Officer of SBI, as the Administrator of the YES Bank.
- All these decisions were taken by the RBI in consultation with the Central Government to protect the interest of depositors.
- As per the RBI notification, the YES Bank will now not be allowed to pay more than Rs 50,000 to any Account holder be it Savings, Current or others.

Cases in which YES Bank account holders can withdraw amount exceeding Rs 50,000

- In case of medical treatment of the account holder or any person dependent on him or her
- In case of payment for higher education of depositor or person dependent on him or her for education
- Obligatory expenses such as marriage or other ceremony of depositor or his or her children or person dependent upon him or her
- Any unavoidable emergency.

3.7 Ajay Bhushan Pandey appointed as India's new Finance Secretary

Ajay Bhushan Pandey was appointed as the new **Finance Secretary of India** on March 3, 2020. His new appointment was approved by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet.

The **1984 batch IAS officer** will succeed current Finance Secretary Rajiv Kumar, who superannuated from the position in February 2020. **Pandey was till recently serving as the Revenue Secretary.**

3.8 Introduction of DBT in Agriculture Sector

Direct Benefit Transfer in schemes like Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM KISAN) has already been adopted by Government. Under PM-KISAN Scheme, an amount of Rs. 6000/- per year is transferred in three 4-monthly installments of Rs. 2000/- directly into the bank accounts of landholding farmers. As on 17.03.2020, financial benefit under the scheme has been transferred to 8,71,54,788 beneficiaries.

Time to time, suggestions have been received from Confederation of India Industry for improvement of agriculture sector, on which views are taken after due-diligence.

3.9 Competition Commission of India

Why in News

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) organised the Fifth National Conference on Economics of Competition Law at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi. **Dr. Bibek Debroy**, Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister was the Keynote Speaker at the Conference.

Key highlights :

Dr Debroy, in his Keynote Address, said that the issues of competition extend beyond the ambit of competition law.

- Functioning of markets and the extent of competition are predicated on the institutional structure and system of laws that undergird markets, he said while adding that there are elements in several statutes in India that inhibit competition. Economic reforms, he emphasised, have been about markets and increasing competition.
- Nonetheless, while entry has been eased in manufacturing pursuant to economic liberalisation, barriers still exist in services and agriculture, he pointed out.
- Referring to the structure-conduct-performance framework, he mentioned that market structure and market shares do not provide complete picture of competition.
- He further alluded to the inherently dynamic nature of markets, and also underlined the need to account for the level of evolution of markets in India in comparison to markets of the developed economies.
- Recognition of these differences are important for the application of competition principles, he emphasised. Finally, he advised against looking at markets and conduct as the two extreme outcomes of perfect competition and a monopoly.
- Allowing for various strategic market interactions in oligopolistic markets would help harness innovation for consumer welfare. Self-regulation by industry could preclude the need for regulatory intervention.
- Government or the CCI needs to step in when the requisite action is not taken by the industry. In this context, he alluded to Kautilya's Arthashastra, during which markets used to function by self compliance rather than government's intervention.

The Competition Act

- The Competition Act, 2002, as amended by the Competition (Amendment) Act, 2007, follows the philosophy of modern competition laws.
- The Act prohibits anti-competitive agreements, abuse of dominant position by enterprises and regulates combinations (acquisition, acquiring of control and M&A), which causes or likely to cause an appreciable adverse effect on competition within India.

Competition Commission of India

- Competition Commission of India is a Statutory Body responsible for enforcing the objectives of the Competition Act, 2002.
- CCI has been established by the Central Government with effect from **14th October 2003**.
- **Composition:** A Chairperson and 6 Members appointed by the Central Government.
- **Duty of the Commission:**
- **To eliminate practices having adverse effects on competition.**
- **Promote and sustain competition.**
- **Protect the interests of consumers.**
- **Ensure freedom of trade in the markets of India.**
- The Commission is also required to give opinion on competition issues on a reference received from a statutory authority established under any law and to undertake competition advocacy, create public awareness and impart training on competition issues.

3.10 Parliament passes Direct Tax Vivad se Vishwas Bill 2020

The **Direct Tax Vivad Se Vishwas Bill, 2020** was passed by the Parliament on March 13, 2020. The Rajya Sabha approved the bill through voice vote and passed a motion to send it back to the Lok Sabha as it is a **money bill**.

The Direct Tax Vivad Se Vishwas Bill, 2020 was tabled in the Parliament on March 2. It was announced during the Union Budget 2020 presentation and received the approval of the Union Cabinet on February 12. The bill aims to settle all the pending direct tax disputes in the country.

The bill seeks to resolve around 4.83 lakh direct tax cases that are currently pending in the various appellate forums of the country including the High Courts and the Supreme Court.

Vivad se Vishwas Bill:

- The Vivad se Vishwas Bill seeks to provide the Taxpayers with an opportunity to **settle all their direct tax disputes** within the ongoing financial year by waiving of interest and penalty on their pending taxes. The legislation will benefit those who have pending direct tax disputes in multiple forums.
- Under the proposed law, the taxpayers willing to settle their tax disputes will be allowed a **complete waiver on interest and penalty**, provided they pay the entire disputed amount by March 31, 2020.
- After March 31, the taxpayers will be liable to pay 10 per cent additional disputed tax over and above the existing tax liability.
- In case of arrears related to disputed interest or penalty then, 25 percent of the disputed penalty or interest will have to be paid if the payment is done by March 31, 2020.

- After the set deadline, instead of 25 percent, the taxpayers will have to pay 30 percent of the disputed penalty or interest as arrear.
- Once the bill is passed by both the houses of the Parliament, it can be available in the tax recoveries amounting to Rs 5 crore. The scheme will remain open till June 30, 2020.

Background

- There are over 4.83 lakh direct tax cases locked in disputes in different forums including India's Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT), Commissioner (Appeals), Debt Recovery Tribunals, High Courts and the Supreme Court. The cases are worth at least Rs 9.32 lakh crore.

3.11 World Consumer Rights Day 2020: Theme, significance and everything you need to know!

World Consumer Rights Day 2020:

- The World Consumer Rights Day was observed globally on March 15, 2020 to **protect the Rights of the Consumers**.
- The day aims to raise awareness about a consumer's needs and rights and ensure that they are not subjected to social injustice or market abuse that may undermine their rights.
- The theme of World Consumer Rights Day 2020 is '**The Sustainable Consumer**'. The theme highlights the need for sustainable consumption globally and the important role of consumer rights and protection.
- Each year a different theme is chosen to address different concerns regarding the consumers.
- The World Consumer Rights Day is commemorated by countries across the world by holding conferences on human rights and conducting discussions on various ways to protect consumer rights.

World Consumer Rights Day 2020 Theme: The Sustainable Consumer

The **World Consumer Rights Day 2020** theme aims to spread awareness about environmental breakdown and global climate changes.

BACKGROUND

The World Consumer Rights Day was first observed on March 15, 1983. Since then, every year, the day is observed as World Consumer Rights Day.

The World Consumer Rights Day is observed annually to promote the basic rights of consumers and ensure that the rights are protected and respected.

3.12 Kerala Sought Relaxation of Frbm Rules

Why in News?

- To help fund the emergency relief package, Kerala proposes to borrow ₹12,500 crore from the market and has urged the Centre to provide Kerala with flexibility under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act.

What is the FRBM Act?

- The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act (FRBM Act), 2003, establish Financial discipline to Reduce Fiscal Deficit.

What are the objectives of the FRBM Act?

- The FRBM Act aims to introduce transparency in India's fiscal management systems.
- The Act's long-term objective is for India to achieve fiscal stability and to give the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) flexibility to deal with inflation in India.
- The Act was enacted to introduce more equitable distribution of India's debt over the years.

How does a relaxation of the FRBM Work?

- The law does contain what is commonly referred to as an 'escape clause'.
- Under Section 4(2) of the Act, the Centre can exceed the annual fiscal deficit target citing grounds that include national security, war, national calamity, collapse of agriculture, structural reforms and decline in real output growth of a quarter by at least three percentage points below the average of the previous four quarters.

What are the Amendments Made?

- The Act has been amended several times.
- In 2013, the government introduced a change and introduced the concept of **effective revenue deficit**. This implies that effective revenue deficit would be equal to revenue deficit minus grants to states for the creation of capital assets.
- In 2016, a committee under **N K Singh** was set up to suggest changes to the Act. According to the government, the targets set under FRBM Act previously were too rigid.

What are the various recommendations made by N.K. Singh Committee?

- The Committee suggested using debt as the primary target for fiscal policy and that the target must be achieved by 2023.
- The Committee proposed to create an autonomous Fiscal Council with a chairperson and two members appointed by the Centre (not employees of the government at the time of appointment).
- The Committee suggested that the grounds for the government to deviate from the FRBM Act targets should be clearly specified

- According to the suggestions of the Committee, the Government must not borrow from the RBI, except when:
- The Centre has to meet a temporary shortfall in Receipts.
- RBI subscribes to government securities to Finance Any Deviations.
- RBI purchases government securities from the Secondary Market.

3.13 IMF declared recession in World due to COVID-19 impact

- International Monetary Fund(IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva has declared a global recession driven by the COVID-19 pandemic that could be worse than the 2008-09 global financial crisis. But recovery is also projected in 2021, if the nations succeed in curbing the coronavirus as well as limiting the economic damage.
- This announcement regarding the recession has been made after a telephonic conference of IMF with finance officials from the 24 nations that make up the IMF's policy-setting panel-International Monetary and Financial Committee.
- The estimated overall financial needs of emerging markets is 2.5 trillion dollars as 81 emergency financing requests, including 50 from lower-income countries, have been received by IMF.
- Kyrgyzstan would receive the first IMF support package of \$120.9 million to deal with adverse effects of the virus.

Steps to be Taken by IMF to support nations:

IMF is ready to make \$1 Trillion of its lending resources available to Countries being hit by the Virus.

To meet the increased demand IMF would seek to double the emergency financing program and simplify the procedures for countries to obtain IMF support.

What is Recession?

The term recession is a macroeconomics term and refers to a period of decline in economic activity lasting more than a few months. It has an unfavourable impact on real GDP, real income, employment, industrial production, and wholesale-retail sales.

Why in News?

- To ease impact of lockdown, RBI reduced the repo and reverse repo rates and the EMIs deferred for three months.

About the News:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has opened up the liquidity floodgates for Banks even as it reduced the key interest rate sharply by 75 bps and allowed equated monthly instalments (EMIs) to

be deferred by three months in a move to fight the economic impact of the countrywide lockdown to check the spread of novel coronavirus.

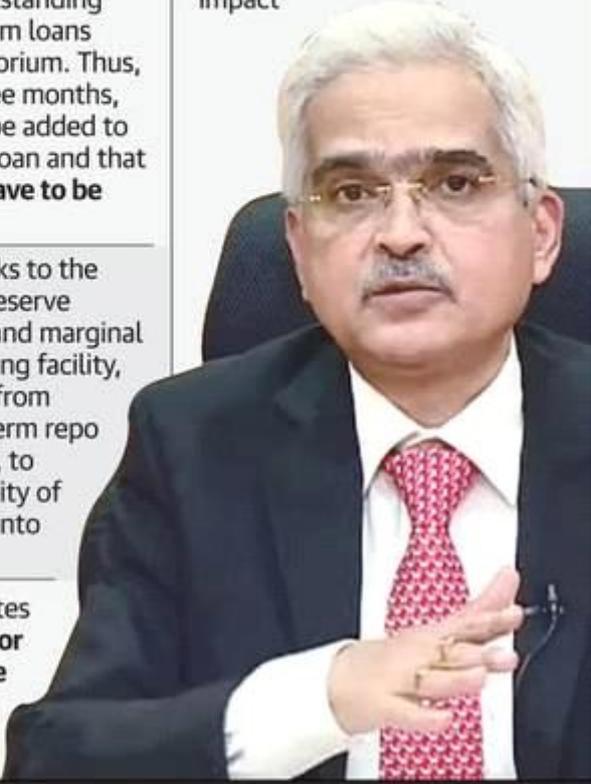
Easing the burden

The Reserve Bank of India has permitted a three-month deferral on all term loan repayments, even as it moved to inject more liquidity in the system. A look at RBI's moves and observations:

- Repo rate cut by **0.75 percentage points** to 4.4%
- For **all term loans** (home, auto, personal, agricultural, retail and crop loans) outstanding as of March 1, lenders can grant a moratorium, i.e., **a temporary halt**, of three months on payment of instalments
- Instalments include equated monthly instalments, credit card dues, principal or interest payments and bullet payments
- Tenure for such loans will be extended by three months after the moratorium period. This means that the instalments are **deferred** but **not waived**
- Interest **shall continue** to accrue on the outstanding portion of the term loans during the moratorium. Thus, at the end of three months, the interest will be added to the outstanding loan and that amount **will have to be repaid**
- Tweaks to the cash reserve ratio and marginal standing facility, apart from long-term repo auctions, to inject liquidity of **₹3.74 lakh crore** into the system
- Centre's estimates for **GDP growth for Q4 and the whole year** are now at risk

from pandemic's impact

All lending institutions shall frame policies for providing the relief to eligible borrowers



- The repo rate was reduced to by 75 bps 4.4% while the reverse repo rate was cut by 90 bps point to 4%.
- The higher reduction in the reverse repo rate was aimed at prompting banks to lend more rather than keeping their excess liquidity with the RBI.
- Apart from cutting the repo rate, RBI has also reduced the cash reserve ratio of banks which released ₹37 lakh crore liquidity. This, along with other measures, will see an infusion of ₹3.74 lakh crore into the banking system.
- RBI has also allowed banks to defer payment of EMIs on Home, Car, Personal loans as well as Credit card dues for three months. Since non-payment will not lead to non-performing asset classification by banks, there will be no impact on credit score of the borrowers.
- The following decisions were taken after the meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee headed by the RBI Governor.

Monetary Policy Committee?

- Strong recommendations to set Monetary Policy Committee in India had come from Urjit Patel Panel Report.
- Monetary Policy Committee is an executive body of 6 members. Of these, three members are from RBI while three other members are nominated by the Central Government.
- Each member has one vote. In case of a tie, the RBI Governor has casting vote to break the tie. MPC is required to meet for two days before deciding on rates. Further, it is needed to meet at least four times a year and make public its decisions following each meeting.
- The Core mandate of MPC is to fix the benchmark policy interest rate {Repo Rate} to contain inflation within the target level.
- In that context, RBI is mandated to furnish necessary information to the MPC to facilitate its decision. Government also, if wishes to convey its views, can do so in writing to MPC.

3.14 THE PRADHAN MANTRI GARIB KALYAN PACKAGE

- Recently, Union Finance & Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has 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.

The components of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package

- Insurance scheme for health workers fighting COVID-19 in Government Hospitals and Health Care Centres
- Insurance cover of Rs 50 Lakh per health worker fighting COVID-19 to be provided under a special Insurance Scheme
- Safai karamcharis, ward-boys, nurses, ASHA workers, paramedics, technicians, doctors and specialists and other health workers would be covered.
- All government health centres, wellness centres and hospitals of Centre as well as States would be covered under this scheme
- Approximately 22 lakh health workers would be provided insurance cover to fight this pandemic.

PM Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana

- 80 crore individuals, i.e, roughly two-thirds of India's population would be covered under this scheme
- The scheme aims to solve the problem of non-availability of foodgrains due to disruption in the next three months.
- People will to get 5 kg wheat or rice and 1 kg of preferred pulses for free every month for the next three months
- Each one of them would be provided double of their current entitlement over the next three months.

Under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana,**Benefit to Farmers:**

- 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.
- It would cover 8.7 crore farmers

Cash transfers Under PM Garib Kalyan Yojana:**Help to Poor:**

- A total of 20.40 crores PMJDY women account-holders would be given an ex-gratia of Rs 500 per month for next three months.

Gas Cylinders:

- Gas cylinders, free of cost, would be provided to 8 crore poor families for the next three months.

Help to low wage earners in Organised sectors:

- Wage-earners below Rs 15,000 per month in businesses having less than 100 workers are at risk of losing their employment.
- The government proposes to pay 24 percent of their monthly wages into their PF accounts for next three months. This would prevent disruption in their employment

Support for Senior Citizens (above 60 years), Widows and Divyang:

- There are around 3 crore aged widows and people in Divyang category who are vulnerable due to economic disruption caused by COVID-19.
- The centre proposes to give them Rs 1,000 to tide over difficulties during the next three months.

NREGA:

- Wages would be increased by Rs 20 with effect from 1 April, 2020.
- Wage increase under MNREGA will provide an additional Rs 2,000 benefit annually to a worker.
- This will benefit approximately 13.62 crore families.

Self-Help groups:

- Limit of collateral free lending would be increased from Rs 10 to Rs 20 lakhs.
- Women organised through 63 lakhs Self Help Groups (SHGs) support 6.85 crore households, which would be benefitted.

Other components of PM Garib Kalyan Package:

- Organised sector:
- Employees' Provident Fund Regulations will be amended to include Pandemic as the reason to allow non-refundable advance of 75 percent of the amount or three months of the wages, whichever is lower, from their accounts.
- Families of four crore workers registered under EPF can take benefit of this window.

Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Fund:

- A Welfare Fund for Building and Other Constructions Workers has been created under a Central Government Act.
- There are around 3.5 Crore registered workers in the Fund.
- State Governments will be given directions to utilise this fund to provide assistance and support to these workers to protect them against economic disruptions.

District Mineral Fund:

- The State Government will be asked to utilise the funds available under District Mineral Fund (DMF) for supplementing and augmenting facilities of medical testing, screening and other requirements in connection with preventing the spread of COVID-19 pandemic as well as treating the patients affected with this pandemic.
- Nearly 75% of the Indian economy will be shut down during the 21-day period, which would lead to a direct output loss of approximately 4.5%. The economic relief package might be used to put money directly into the accounts of more than 100 million poor and to support businesses hit the hardest by the lockdown.

3.15 RBI REGULATION FOR PAYMENT AGGREGATORS AND PAYMENT GATEWAYS**Why in News?**

- The Reserve Bank of India recently released guidelines for regulating payment aggregators and Payment Gateways.

About Payment Aggregators and Payment Gateways:

- **Payment Aggregators** facilitate e-commerce sites and merchants in accepting payment instruments from the customers for completion of their payment obligations without the need for merchants to create a separate payment integration system of their own. Example: Billdesk.
- **Payment Gateways** are entities that provide technology infrastructure to route and facilitate processing of an online payment transaction without any involvement in handling of funds. PGs in India mainly include Banks.
- A Payment Gateway allows the merchants to deal in a specific payment option put on the Portal, whereas a Payment Aggregator allows one to have multitudes of options for payment. Thus, a Payment Aggregator covers a payment gateway in its ambit.

What are the various Guidelines?**Authorisation**

- Non-bank PAs will require authorisation from the RBI under the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 (PSSA). A PA should be a company incorporated in India under the Companies Act, 1956 / 2013.
- Banks provide PA services as part of their normal banking relationship and do not therefore require a separate authorisation from RBI.

- E-commerce marketplaces (e.g. flipkart, Paytm) providing PA services should separate PA services from the marketplace business and they should apply for authorisation on or before 30th June, 2021.
- PGs will be considered as ‘Technology Providers’ or ‘Outsourcing Partners’ of banks or non-banks, as the case may be.

Capital Requirement:

- Existing PAs have to achieve a net worth of Rs15 Crores by 31st March, 2021 and a net worth of Rs 25 Crores on or before 31st March, 2023. The net worth of Rs 25 Crores has to be maintained at all times thereafter.
- New PAs should have a minimum net worth of Rs 15 Crores at the time of application for authorisation and have to attain a net worth of Rs 25 Crores by the end of the third financial year of the grant of authorisation. The net worth of Rs 25 Crores has to be maintained at all times thereafter.

Disclosure Requirements:

- PAs need to disclose comprehensive information regarding merchant policies, customer grievances, privacy policy and other terms and conditions on the website and / or their mobile application.
- They need to undertake background and antecedent checks of the merchants to ensure that such merchants do not have any malafide intention of duping customers, and do not sell fake / counterfeit / prohibited products

3.16 RECAPITALISATION PLAN FOR REGIONAL RURAL BANKS (RRBS).**Why in News?**

- The Centre has approved a Rs 1,340 Crores recapitalisation plan for Regional Rural Banks (RRBs). The move is crucial to ensure liquidity in rural areas during the lockdown due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Significance of the Recapitalisation:

- This Recapitalisation would improve their capital-to-risk weighted assets ratio (CRAR) and strengthen these institutions for providing credit in rural areas.
- The step will help those RRBs which are unable to maintain a minimum CRAR of 9%, as per the regulatory norms prescribed by the RBI.
- The release of the Rs. 670 Crores as the Central share funds will be contingent upon the release of the proportionate share by the sponsor banks.

Background Info:

- The recapitalisation process of RRBs was approved by the cabinet in 2011 based on the recommendations of a committee set up under the Chairmanship of K C Chakrabarty.

- The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) identifies those RRBs, which require recapitalisation assistance to maintain the mandatory CRAR of 9% based on the CRAR position of RRBs, as on 31st March of every year.
- The scheme for recapitalization of RRBs was extended up to 2019-20 in a phased manner post 2011.

About Regional Rural Banks:

- RRBs are financial institutions which ensure adequate credit for agriculture and other rural sectors.
- Regional Rural Banks were set up on the basis of the recommendations of the Narasimham Working Group (1975), and after the legislation of the Regional Rural Banks Act, 1976.

Stakeholders:

- The equity of a Regional Rural Bank is held by the Central Government, concerned State Government and the Sponsor Bank in the proportion of 50:15:35.
- The RRBs combine the characteristics of a cooperative in terms of the familiarity of the rural problems and a commercial bank in terms of its professionalism and ability to mobilise financial resources.

3.17 ECONOMIC RELIEF MEASURES TO TACKLE CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

Why in News?

- Finance Ministry has announced several measures aimed at alleviating the growing economic stress in the country in the wake of the disruption caused by the spread of the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2.

On the Agenda

FM likely to announce measures to deal with the economic impact of Covid-19 in her reply to the Finance Bill today

LIKELY MEASURES

- ₹15 lakh** taxation threshold on income of non-residents
- Excise duty hike** on petrol, diesel to raise revenue for relief measures

SEEKING FUNDS

- Decline in global crude prices** has created room for a reduction in prices
- Govt may use this fiscal space to generate funds**
- A ₹1 per litre duty hike on fuel yields ₹13,000 cr annually**
- India Inc has sought a fiscal BOCPUS of ₹2 lakh cr which is about 2 days ago**

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Highlights:

- Contrary to expectations, the Ministry did not announce any fiscal sops, and limited itself to providing extensions for a range of regulatory requirements.
- The regulatory relief applies to taxation, both direct and indirect, as well as everyday working norms for a variety of economic magnates such as exporters and importers, small and medium-sized firms, and individuals as well.

- The most important change relates to the regulatory forbearance for firms that are likely to face bankruptcies.
- Under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), bankruptcy proceedings can be started against a firm that defaults on an amount of Rs 1 lakh or more, this threshold has now been raised to Rs 1 crore.
- This will immediately help micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) which are expected to be among the worst hit due to the ongoing economic slowdown. By raising the threshold, the government has provided immediate reprieve to all such firms.
- The ministry also noted that if the situation demands, that is, if the economic distress continues or intensifies, the government would consider suspending Sections 7, 9, and 10 of the IBC for a full six months after April end.
- The government has increased the deadline for filing Income-Tax returns for 2018-19 has been relaxed and the penal interest rate has been reduced. On Goods and Services Tax compliance, too, there has been a similar relief.
- The Aadhaar and PAN linkage too has been pushed to June-end. Government has also extended the deadline for dispute resolution schemes on the direct tax (Vivaad se Vishwas Scheme) and indirect taxes (Sabka Vishwas Scheme) till 30th
- It has also provided relief to importers whose shipments are delayed or those who need extended quarantining facilities.
- In the fisheries sector, Sanitary Import Permits, which were to expire by April 15 have been extended for 3 more months. However, these measures target only the organised sector of the economy.
- About 90% of employment in India is in the informal or unorganised sector. Economic slowdown affects that sector the most, and is likely to result in massive unemployment and deprivation. None of these measures is targeted towards that demographic.

3.18 Double Trouble For The Auto Sector

Why in news ?

- The Auto Sector, which has been grappling with multiple challenges over the past year, is headed for tougher times due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Automakers and suppliers, struggling with muted demand, have shut production facilities both in India and overseas.

COVID-19 effect on Automobile Sector:

On the Demand Side:

- The duration and the extent of COVID-19 will determine the income loss of the consumers, and thus will have a bearing on the retail buying sentiment.
- The sector has shed over 37 per cent over the past month due to subdued demand.

- The Virus threat has reduced the demand in the market
- The sector's transition from BS-IV to BS-VI, has increased its cost.

On the supply side:

- The planned transition from BS-IV to BS-VI is not happening as smoothly as planned.
- The two-wheeler segment has been the worst-hit
- Given the curfew-like conditions, the BS-IV inventory cannot be sold to the consumers before the deadline of March, 2020.
- Auto makers are not expected to restart production till authorities relax the lockdown measures.

On the Workers:

- The government has instructed the industries to pay remuneration to the employees, during the times of COVID-19 lockdown.
- However, the MSME sector which employs a large section of the population, supplying goods and services to the automobile sector will be affected largely.
- Unorganized workers indirectly linked to the automobile sector will be affected due to the lockdown and the resultant Job Losses.

Future prospects for the Auto Sector:

- Two-wheelers and truck makers will be the worst hit from the sharp rise in costs due to new BS-VI norms.
- This COVID-19 may further weaken the sector due to weak consumer sentiment and low industrial production, rising uncertainty and slowdown in exports – leading to reduced transit of goods.
- Declining capacity utilisation, partial absorption of the BS-VI price hike, and impairment of the leftover BS-IV inventory are expected to affect the sector for yet another year.
- However, the sharp fall in raw material costs, on account of the global demand crash, is a positive sign for the future of the sector.

Way Forward:

- The rural automobile market, which is still under-utilized, shall be used as a growth focus to revive the sector.
- Proper relief to the workers shall help in sustaining the skilled workforce of the sector.
- In case of early withdrawal of the outbreak, a stimulus package to boost overall consumption, shall increase the demand.
- Government should come forward to extend the date for BS-VI implementation.
- A scrappage policy to replace the pre-BS-IV vehicles can boost the market and help revive the growth of the sector.

4. ENVIRONMENT

4.1 Red Snow

- The phenomenon of “red snow” or “watermelon” has been observed over the last few weeks around Ukraine’s Vernadsky Research Base, off the coast of Antarctica’s northernmost peninsula.
 - The snow is red because of a red-pigmented, microscopic algae called *Chlamydomonas nivalis* *chlamydomonas*, which thrives in freezing water as the ice melts.
- This phenomenon has been known since ancient times but now it raises concerns about Climate change.
 - Aristotle is believed to be one of the first to give a written account of red snow, over 2,000 years ago. He attributed the redness of the snow to the colour of worms and grub (larva of an insect), which are found in long-lying snow.
- According to modern-day scientists, it is an algae species, *Chlamydomonas nivalis* *chlamydomonas* which exists in the snow in the polar and glacial regions and carries a red pigment to keep itself warm.
 - Algae contain Chlorophyll (green pigment) as well as a red carotene layer in their cells which mixes with the green colour to cause snow to look like “raspberry jam”.
 - This layer is also said to protect the algae from ultraviolet radiation.
- These Algae change the snow’s albedo (the amount of light or radiation the snow surface is able to reflect back).
 - The intensity of the redness increases with the dense presence of the algae. The darker tinge leads to more absorption of heat by the snow. Subsequently, the ice melts faster.
 - The melting is good for the microbes that need the liquid water to survive and thrive but it is bad for already melting glaciers.

4.2 Laboratory for Conservation of Endangered Species

- According to a top scientist at the Laboratory for Conservation of Endangered Species (LaCONES), introduction of cheetahs in India will be a big challenge as India first have to adopt International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) protocol to introduce wild animals in the country.
- LaCONES is an acronym for The Laboratory for the Conservation of Endangered Species.
- It is a dedicated Laboratory of CSIR’s Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) in Hyderabad.
- To use modern biotechnologies for conservation of endangered wildlife (It supports both the measures of conservation i.e. in situ and ex situ measures).

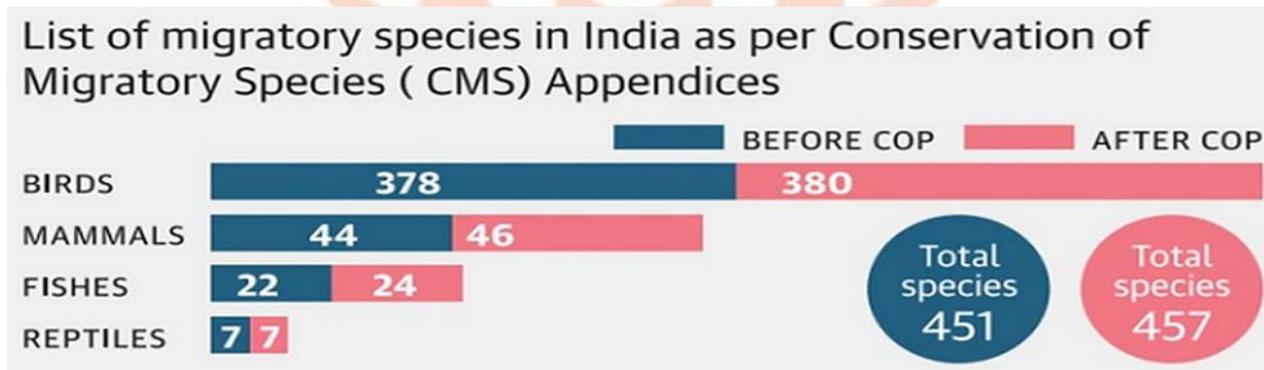
- Project LaCONES was established in 1998 with support from (i) Dept. of Biotechnology (DBT), Govt. of India, (ii) Central Zoo Authority of India (CZA), Delhi, (iii) Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and (iv) Government of Andhra Pradesh.
- The laboratory was itself established in 2007. It is India's only dedicated laboratory for conservation of endangered species.

Working:

- CCMB-LaCONES is the only laboratory in India that has developed methods for collection and cryopreservation of semen and oocytes from wildlife and successfully reproducing endangered blackbuck, spotted deer and Nicobar pigeons.
- Through this work, it has established Genetic Resource Bank for Indian wildlife.

4.3 Migratory Species

- With new additions to the wildlife list put out by the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS), scientists say that the total number of migratory fauna from India comes to 457 species. Birds comprise 83% (380 species) of this figure.
- The new additions are the Asian elephant, great Indian bustard, Bengal florican, oceanic white-tip shark, urial and smooth hammerhead shark
- Globally, more than 650 species are listed under the CMS appendices and India, with over 450 species, plays a very important role in their conservation.



Migratory Birds:

- The bird family Muscicapidae has the highest number of migratory species. The next highest group of migratory birds is raptors or birds of prey, such as eagles, owls, vultures and kites which are from the family Accipitridae.
- The country has three flyways (flight paths used by birds): the Central Asian flyway, East Asian flyway and East Asian–Australasian flyway.
- Another group of birds that migrate in large numbers are waders or shore birds. In India, their migratory species number 41, followed by ducks (38) belonging to the family Anatidae.

Migratory Mammals:

- The estimate of 44 migratory mammal species in India has risen to 46 after COP 13. The Asian elephant was added to Appendix I and the urial to Appendix II.
- The largest group of mammals is definitely bats belonging to the family Vespertilionidae. Dolphins are the second highest group of mammals with nine migratory species of dolphins listed.

Migratory Fish:

- The total number of migratory fish species from India under CMS now stands at 24. The Oceanic white-tip Shark and smooth Hammerhead Shark are the new additions to the list.

Migratory Reptiles:

- Seven reptiles, which include five species of Turtles and the Indian Gharial and salt Water Crocodile, are among the CMS species found in India. There was no addition to the reptiles list.

4.4 Per capita availability of water

- Union Minister for Jal Shakti informed Rajya Sabha about the Per Capita Availability of Water in India.
- About the findings

- The average annual per capita water availability in the years 2001 and 2011 was assessed as 1816 cubic meters and 1545 cubic meters respectively which may further reduce to 1486 cubic meters and 1367 cubic meters in the years 2021 and 2031 respectively.



- As per Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, 135 litre per capita per day (lpcd) has been suggested as the benchmark for Urban Water Supply.
- For rural areas, a minimum service delivery of 55 lpcd has been fixed under Jal Jeevan Mission, which may be enhanced to higher level by states.
- As per the report of National Commission for Integrated Water Resources Development (NCIWRD), the percentage of water used for irrigation out of the total water use for the year 1997-98 was 83.30%.
- For the year 2025, under high demand scenario it is estimated as 72.48%.

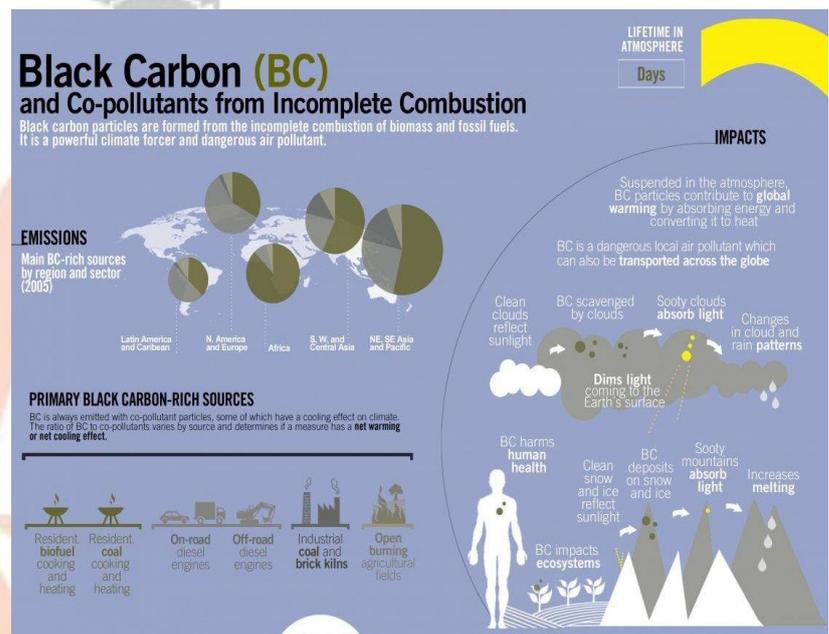
4.5 World Wildlife Day

- World Wildlife Day 2020 was celebrated on March 3 under the theme "Sustaining all life on earth".

- In December 2013, at its 68th session, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) proclaimed 3 March – the day of signature of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 1973 – as UN World Wildlife Day.
- The day is being celebrated on the 3rd of March every year to create awareness about the importance of protecting wildlife.
- The UNGA resolution also designated the CITES Secretariat as the facilitator for the global observance of this special day for wildlife on the UN calendar.

4.6 Black carbon

- According to a study by scientists at the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (WIHG), Black carbon concentrations near the Gangotri glacier rose 400 times in summer due to forest fires and stubble burning from agricultural waste, and triggered glacial melt.
- Scientists measured variations of black carbon concentration at Chirbasa, near the Gangotri glacier in the Indian Himalaya, located at an altitude of 3,600 metres, during the year 2016.



- The monthly mean concentration of EBC (equivalent black carbon) was found to be minimum in August and maximum in the month of May.
- The observed seasonal mean concentrations of EBC indicated a pristine glacial source and an absence of EBC sources in the locality.
- Black carbon results from the incomplete combustion of fossil fuels and biomass.
- The fine particles absorb light and about a million times more energy than carbon dioxide.
- It is said to be the second largest contributor to climate change after CO₂.
- But unlike CO₂, which can stay in the atmosphere for years together, black carbon is short-lived and remains in the atmosphere only for days to weeks, before it descends as rain or snow.

4.7 Swamp Wallaby

- Researchers reported that the swamp wallaby, a marsupial related to the kangaroo, is pregnant throughout its adult life.
- The swamp wallaby is likely the only mammal pregnant and lactating all life-long.

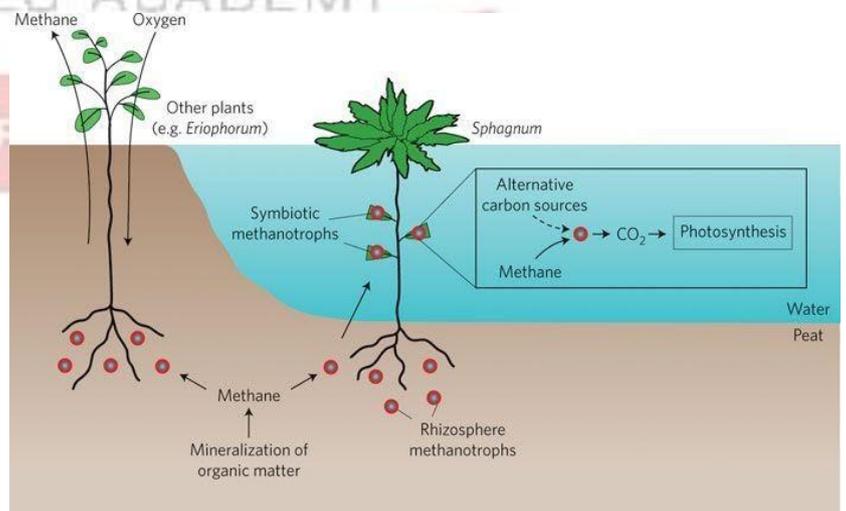
- It typically conceives a new embryo days before delivering the newborn from its previous pregnancy.
- Female wallabies have two uteri and two separate ovaries.
- At the end of a pregnancy in one uterus, a new embryo develops in the other uterus.
- Wallabies regularly have an embryo in the uterus, a young joey in the pouch, and a third semi-dependent young at foot, still drinking its mother's milk.
- In the swamp wallaby (*Wallabia bicolor*), the new conception happens one or two days before the previous joey is delivered.

4.8 Contaminated sites

- There are 128 sites in India contaminated by toxic and hazardous substances, according to a March update by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).
- West Bengal led the list with 27 sites followed by Odisha at 23.
- Including those, there are 324 sites that may be contaminated, with 196 still awaiting an investigation and confirmation.
- Twenty sites in 6 States have seen agencies prepare a detailed project reports, or a plan of action, to clean up sites.
- Such action follows orders by the National Green Tribunal (NGT).
- These incidents include
 - Oil contamination due to leakage of underground oil pipelines of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited in Tamil Nadu,
 - Pesticide and heavy metal contamination in creeks at Eloor, Kerala,
 - Chromium contamination at Rania,
 - Improperly disposed electronic waste lying on the banks of river Ramganga, Moradabad and
 - Mercury contamination of the soil at Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu, and Ganjam, Odisha.

4.9 Methanotrophs

Scientists at Agharkar Research Institute (ARI), Pune, an autonomous institute under the Department of Science & Technology, have isolated 45 different strains of methanotrophic bacteria which have been found to be capable of reducing methane emissions from rice plants.



About Methantrophs

- Methanotrophs metabolise and convert methane into carbon-di-oxide.
- In rice fields, methanotrophs are active near the roots or soil-water interfaces.
- They can effectively reduce the emission of methane, which is the second most important greenhouse gas (GHG) and 26 times more potent as compared to carbon-di-oxide.
- Rice fields are human-made wetlands and are waterlogged for a considerable period.
- Anaerobic degradation of organic matter results in the generation of methane.
- Rice fields contribute to nearly 10% of global methane emissions.
- Bio-methane generated from waste can also be used by the methanotrophs and can be converted to value-added products such as single-cell proteins, carotenoids, biodiesel, and so on.

4.10 State Disaster Response Fund

The Centre said that it will treat the Novel Coronavirus outbreak as a notified disaster for the purpose of providing assistance under the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF).

About the fund

- In case of procurement of essential equipment, the expenditure will be incurred only from the SDRF and not the National Disaster Response Fund, NDRF.
- The total expenditure on equipment should not exceed 10 per cent of the annual allocation of the SDRF.
- World Health Organization, WHO has already declared Coronavirus as a pandemic.

Highlights

- The State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF), constituted under Section 48 (1) (a) of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, is the primary fund available with State Governments for responses to notified disasters.
- The Central Government contributes 75% of SDRF allocation for general category States/UTs and 90% for special category States/UTs (NE States, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir).

4.11 Disposal of bodies

- The Health Ministry has issued guidelines for the disposal of bodies, while noting that an increased risk of infection from a dead body is unlikely.
- For infectious diseases, the World Health Organisation (WHO) prescribes various biosafety levels (BSL) with bodies, medical gear and disposables.
- For bodies of dead COVID-19 patients, the WHO is mandating BSL-3.
- By BSL-3, ideally bodies must be packed intact in leakproof plastic, and cremated. Relatives cannot be allowed to touch them during cremation.
- Embalming and unzipping the packed body must be avoided.

- To prevent contact of doctors and mortuary workers with the deceased's body fluids, or aerosol generating procedures (those that induce coughing), an autopsy must be avoided unless serious doubt is raised about the cause of death.
- In a mortuary, the body should be preserved at 4-6°C if not cremated immediately.

4.12 World Sparrow Day

20th March is being observed as World Sparrow Day with the theme "I LOVE Sparrows".

About the day

- Every year March 20 is observed as World Sparrow Day to raise awareness about the bird.
- The need for marking this day was felt due to the tremendous decrease in its population.
- The House Sparrow is on the verge of extinction.
- The initiative was started by Nature Forever Society (NFS) of India, founded by Mohammed Dilawar, an Indian conservationist.
- He started his work helping the house sparrow in Nashik.
- He was also named one of the Heroes of the Environment for 2008 by Time magazine for his efforts.
- The first World Sparrow Day was celebrated in 2010 in different parts of the world.
- Increased use of pesticides, change in the pattern of buildings and gardens missing from the houses are the main threats.
- Also, the radiation from the mobile and the TV towers has also been a cause of death of sparrows.
- Birds navigate by sensing the earth's magnetic fields and mobile radiations are known to disturb them and interfering with bird's ability to move around.

SPOT THE SPARROW

A social bird, House Sparrow, is found in groups

Height **16 CM**

Weight **25-40 GM**

Length **21 CM**

Average life expectancy **4-5yrs**

Flies at a speed of **24 miles per hour**

Found in every continent except Antarctica, China and Japan

Was declared the **state bird of Delhi** in 2012

FAST DISAPPEARING DUE TO

- Lack of trees – their natural habitat
- Pollution
- Change in agricultural practices
- Electromagnetic radiation from mobile, internet and TV signals

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Hang artificial nests outside homes to give them a safe place for breeding and to roost
- Put out a pot of water and spare some grains
- Plant trees and hedges

4.13 Fish fossil show how fins evolved into human hands

Researchers have revealed new insights into how the human hand evolved from fish fins based on their analysis of an ancient fossil found in Miguasha, Canada.

About the fossil

- Palaeontologists said the fish specimen has yielded the missing evolutionary link in the transition from fish to four legged animals.
- They said this happened during the Late Devonian period, millions of years ago, as fish began to foray in habitats such as shallow water and land.
- The study, published in the journal Nature, noted that the 1.57 m long fossil shows the complete arm — pectoral fin — skeleton for the first time in any elpistostegalian fish.
- This is the first time researchers have unequivocally discovered fingers locked in a fin with fin-rays in any known fish.
- The finding pushes back the origin of fingers in vertebrates to the fish level.
- The evolution of fishes into four-legged vertebrates was one of the most significant events in the history of life.

4.14 Carissa Kopilii

- The study on the *Carissa kopilii*, a wild berry, was published in the latest issue of the Journal of Asia-Pacific Biodiversity.
- The *Carissa kopilii* is threatened by the very river it is named after — Kopili in central Assam.
- A hydroelectric project on the river and water turned acidic because of coal mining in Meghalaya upstream.
- The “sun-loving” plant is distributed sparsely, rooted in rocky crevices along the Kopili riverbed at altitudes ranging from 85-600 metres above sea level.
- *Carissa kopilii*, yielding white flowers from August-October and fruits from November-January, should have all the medicinal and utilitarian properties.

4.15 Olive Ridleys

- In a rare sight after a gap of seven years, mass nesting of Olive Ridley Turtles was witnessed during the daytime along the Rushikulya rookery coast in Odisha’s Ganjam district.
- They inhabit warm waters of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans.
- These turtles spend their entire lives in the ocean, and migrate thousands of kilometres between feeding and mating grounds in the course of a year.
- These Turtles, along with their cousin the Kemps Ridley Turtle, are best known for their unique mass nesting called Arribada. i.e. thousands of females come together on the same beach to lay eggs.
- The coast of Odisha in India is the largest mass nesting site for the Olive-ridley, followed by the coasts of Mexico and Costa Rica.
- Usually, olive ridleys prefer to nest in darkness.
- Sometimes due to pressure of delivery time, they may be opting to nest at daytime.

4.16 World Water Day

- The World Water Day 2020 was observed on 22nd March with theme "Water and Climate Change."
- World Water Day is an annual UN observance day observed on 22 March.
- The objective is to advocate for the sustainable management of freshwater resources.
- The focus on universal access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) is in line with the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 6.
- This day was first formally proposed in Agenda 21 of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro.
- In 1993, the first World Water Day was observed.
- UN-Water is the convener for World Water Day.

4.17 Earth Hour 2020

- Earth Hour 2020 was held on March 28, from 8:30 pm to 9:30 pm.
- Earth Hour is a global grassroots movement uniting people to take action on environmental issues and protect the planet.
- **Organized by:** World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).
- **Background:** Earth Hour was started as a lights out event in Sydney, Australia in 2007.
- The annual Earth Hour lights out event is held worldwide toward the end of March to encourage individuals, households, communities and businesses to turn off their non-essential lights for one hour as a symbol for their commitment to the planet.
- The second-to-last and last weekend of March is around the time of the Spring and Autumn equinoxes in the northern and southern hemispheres respectively, which allows for near coincidental sunset times in both hemispheres, thereby ensuring the greatest visual impact for a global 'lights out' event.
- **Earth Hour logo:** Earlier it was 60 (60 symbolizes 60 minutes). But since 2011 it is 60+. Here + represents the commitment to go beyond the earth hour (i.e. switching off non – essential lights in day to day life).

4.18 Greenco rating system

- GreenCo Rating system has been acknowledged in India's Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) document, submitted to United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2015, as a proactive voluntary action of Indian industry / private sector towards combating climate change.
- GreenCo Rating System has been developed by Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

- It helps the industrial units in implementing various measures in terms of energy conservation, material conservation, recycling, utilisation of renewable energy, Green House Gases (GHG) reduction, water conservation, solid and liquid waste management, green cover etc.
- **Confederation of Indian Industry(CII):**
The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) is an industry association in India founded in 1895. CII is a non-government, not-for-profit, industry-led and industry-managed organization.

4.19 **SAFAR**

- According to the Centre-run System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR), the measures against COVID-19 have led to a drop in PM2.5 (fine particulate pollutant) by 30% in Delhi and by 15% in Ahmedabad and Pune, respectively.
- With a Nationwide lockdown in place, over 90 cities, including Delhi, recorded minimal air pollution in the last few days.
- India is currently under the biggest lockdown with around 130 crore people asked to stay home in view of the COVID-19 outbreak. The government has urged people to avoid unnecessary travel, significantly reducing the traffic movement across the country.
- The level of Nitrogen Oxide (NOx) pollution, which can increase the risk of respiratory conditions, has also reduced. NOx pollution is mainly caused due to a high motor vehicle traffic.
- System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR)?
 - Agencies involved: It was indigenously developed by Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune and is run by India Meteorological Department (IMD).
 - Objective: To provide Real-time air quality index on 24x7 basis with colour coding along with 72-hour advance weather forecast; To issue Health advisory to prepare citizens well in advance.

Parameters monitored:

- Pollutants: PM1, PM2.5, PM10, Ozone, CO, NOx (NO, NO2), SO2, BC, Methane (CH4), Non-methane hydrocarbons (NMHC), Black Carbon, VOC's, Benzene and Mercury.
- Meteorological Parameters: UV Radiation, Rainfall, Temperature, Humidity, Wind speed, Wind direction, solar radiation.

5. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

5.1 Star labelling programme for deep freezer and light Commercial Air Conditioners

- Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) launched Star Labelling Programme for Deep Freezer and Light Commercial Air Conditioners (LCAC).
- The Star Labelling Programme for Deep Freezer has been initially launched in voluntary mode from 2nd March, 2020 to 31st December, 2021.
- Thereafter, it will be made mandatory after reviewing the degree of market transformation in this particular segment of appliances.
- The program covers hardtop and glass top chest type Deep Freezer of all capacities complying with requirements of IS 302-2-24 for safety and IS 7872 for energy performance.
- The performance benchmarks/ energy consumption standards are based on Annual Energy Consumption (kWh/year) of Deep Freezers.
- Through this initiative, it is expected to save around 6.2 Billion Units by FY2030, which is equivalent to Green House Gas (GHG) reduction of 5.3-million-ton of Carbon Dioxide.

5.2 Flow Diverter Stents Technology

SCTIMST has developed Flow Diverter Stents Technology for the treatment of Aneurysms of brain.

About the Diverter

- Researchers of Sree Chitra Thirunal Institute of Medical Science and Technology (SCTIMST), have developed an innovative intracranial flow diverter Stent for the treatment of aneurysms of the blood vessels of the brain.
- It is ready for transfer and further testing in animals, followed by human trials.
- Flow diverters stents when deployed in the artery in the brain bearing the aneurysms, divert blood flow away from the aneurysm, thus reducing the chances of its rupture from the pressure of blood flow.
- Flow diverters have the advantages of being flexible and adaptable to the shape and course of the vessel.
- Also flow diverters promote healing of the vessel wall by removing the constant stress of blood flow on it.
- Sree Chitra Thirunal Institute of Medical Science and Technology (SCTIMST), Thiruvananthapuram is an Institute of National Importance under the Department of Science and Technology.
- Intracranial aneurysm is a localized ballooning, bulging or dilation of arteries in the brain caused by progressive weakening of the inner muscles of the wall of the blood vessels.
- Spontaneous rupture of the aneurysm can result in bleeding into the space around the brain resulting condition called a subarachnoid hemorrhage (SAH).

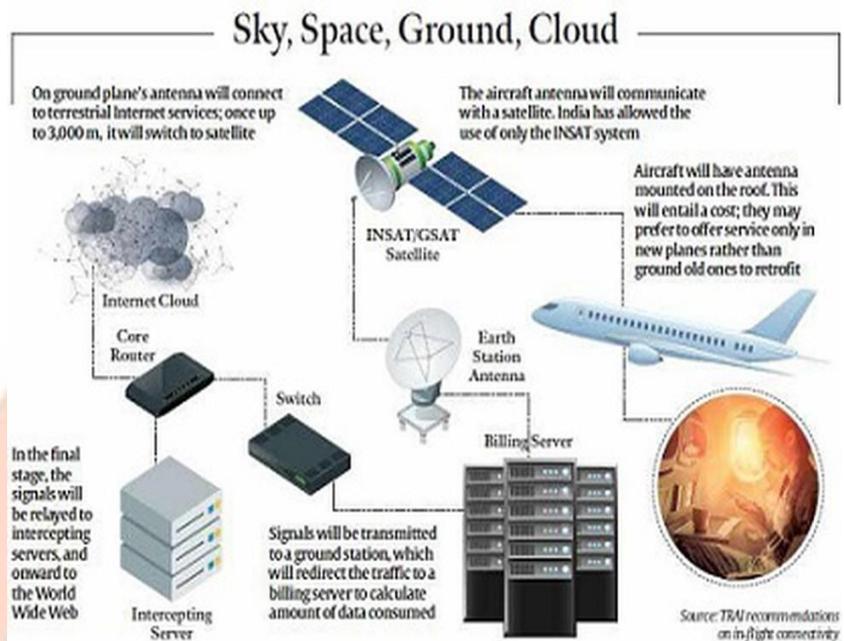
5.3 IN-FLIGHT WIFI

- The Government, through an Official notification has permitted airlines operating in India to provide in-flight WiFi services to Passengers.
- This was earlier approved by the Telecom Commission in 2018.

About its working

- Broadly, in-flight connectivity systems use two kinds of technologies.

- One, an onboard antenna picks up signals from the nearest Tower on the ground, and unless the aircraft flying over a large space with no Towers (such as a water body), the connection will remain seamless up to a certain altitude.



- Otherwise, Satellites can be used to connect to ground stations in the same way that satellite TV signals are transmitted.
- Data is transmitted to a personal electronic device through an onboard router, which connects to the Plane's Antenna.
- The Antenna transmits the Signals, through Satellites, to a ground station, which redirects the traffic to a billing server that calculates the data consumption.
- It is then relayed to the intercepting servers, and to the World Wide Web.
- Once flight mode is activated, the Plane's antenna will link to terrestrial Internet services provided by telecom service providers; when the aircraft has climbed to 3,000 m (normally 4-5 minutes after take-off), the antenna will switch to satellite-based services.

5.4 Unguarded X Hypothesis

According to a new research, Sex Chromosomes is the key reason behind men living shorter lives than women worldwide.

Chromosomes:

- The human body is made up of Cells, and in the centre of each Cell is the Nucleus.
- Chromosomes, which are located inside the Nucleus, are structures that hold the Genes.

Sex chromosomes:

- The human cell has 23 pairs of Chromosomes.
- One pair is of the Sex Chromosomes, named X and Y, which determine whether an individual is male or female.
- A female has two X chromosomes (XX) while a male has one X and one Y (XY).

Unguarded X Hypothesis:

- This hypothesis suggests that the Y chromosome in XY is less able to protect an individual from harmful genes expressed on the X chromosome.
- In a male, as the Y chromosome is smaller than the X chromosome, it is unable to “hide” an X chromosome that carries harmful mutations, which may later expose the individual to health threats.
- Men outnumbered women by 37 million in the 2011 Census of India, but among those over the age of 60, there were more than 1 million more women than men.

5.5 Entanglement Theory (Quantum Computing)

Researchers from Raman Research Institute (RRI) have devised a new test for fairness of quantum coin or ‘qubit’ (the basic unit of information in a quantum computer) using entanglement theory.

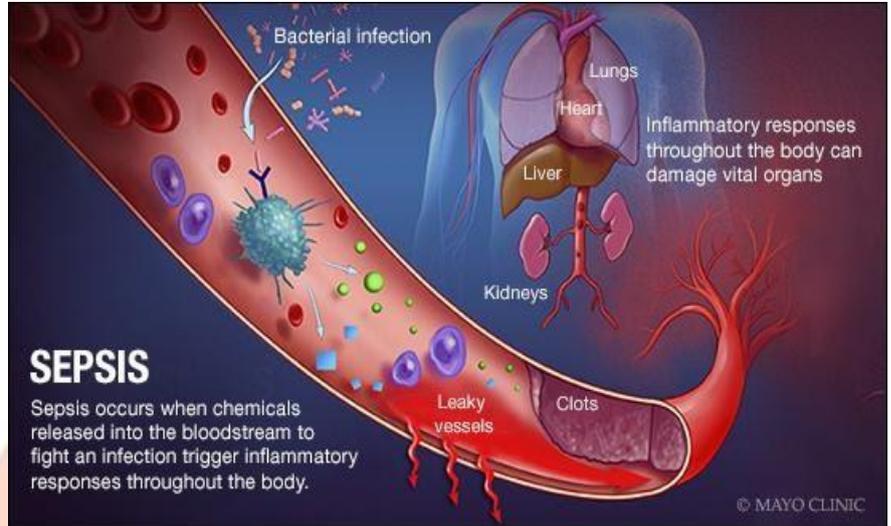
- About the theory
 - Entanglement is a special type of correlation that exists in the quantum world with no classical counterpart.
 - The researchers from RRI made use of this quantum resource to arrive at a test for fairness of a quantum coin (a qubit).
 - This work is a significant contribution to the domain of quantum state discrimination, which is an essential aspect of quantum information science.
 - It brings out the crucial role of entanglement in improving our ability to discriminate quantum states.
 - Such advantage is valuable in quantum sensors.
 - Raman Research Institute (RRI), located in Bangalore, is an autonomous institution under the Department of Science & Technology (DST).

5.6 National cybercrime training centre

- At an event held to mark the 35th inception day of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Union Home minister launched a National Cybercrime Training Centre (NCTC).
- The National Cybercrime Training Centre (NCTC) is meant for professional quality eLearning services on cyber crime investigation on large scale to police officers, judges, prosecutors and other stakeholders.

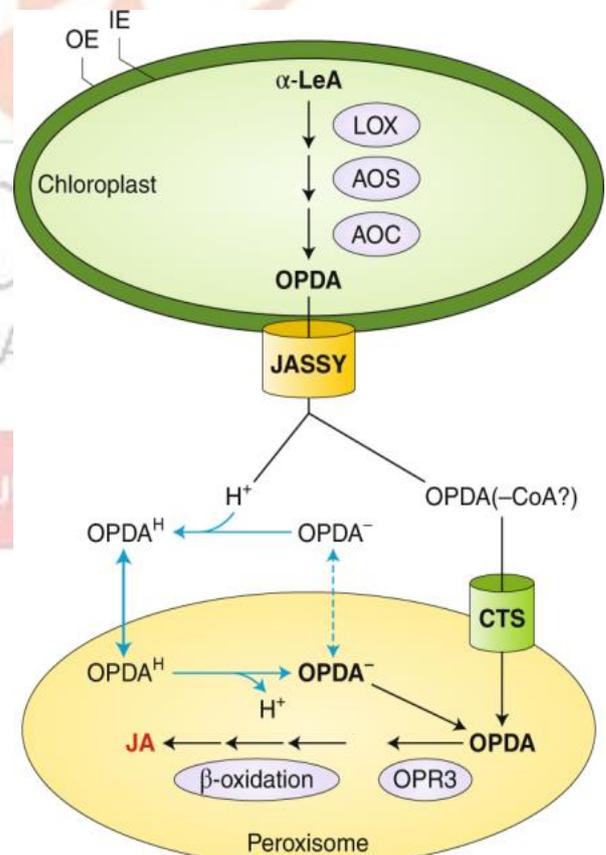
5.7 SEPSIS

- Many Corona Virus patients have died of sepsis — when the body’s immune system goes into overdrive.
- Sepsis is a life-threatening organ dysfunction caused by the body’s immune system overreacting in response to an infection.
- This overactive, toxic response can lead to tissue damage, multiple organ failure and death.
- Sepsis can be triggered by a variety of pathogens such as Viruses, bacteria, Fungi or Parasites.
- The causes of Sepsis are usually pneumonia, wound infections, urinary tract infections or infections in the abdominal cavity.
- Other Viruses that are highly infectious, such as Corona Viruses, Ebola and yellow fever viruses, Dengue, Swine flu or Bird flu Viruses can also cause Sepsis.



Highlights

- Drop in blood pressure with a simultaneous rise in heart rate, fever, rapid, heavy breathing, an unusually strong feeling of illness and sudden confusion.
- Infections, kidney failure or cardiovascular problems can recur about three months after discharge. In addition, many sepsis patients suffer severe, long-term consequences such as paralysis, depression or anxiety disorders.
- When diagnosed, sepsis is immediately treated as an emergency.
- The blood is examined, a broad-spectrum antibiotic is administered, and sufficient blood circulation and ventilation are ensured.
- As a precautionary measure, many sepsis patients are “protectionally incubated,” i.e. put into an



artificial coma.

5.8 **Jasmonic Acid**

- Researchers in the United States have discovered a communication network in plants that helps them respond to a hormone involved in pest resistance.
- The study observed that the hormone called Jasmonic Acid is particularly important for a plant's defense response against fungi and insects.
- They identified genes important for the plant's response to jasmonic acid, and for the cellular cross-communication with other plant hormone pathways.
- The genes MYC2 and MYC3 rose to the top in their degree of importance across the system.
- The two genes are involved in producing proteins that regulate the activity of thousands of other genes.
- By assessing these gene networks and subnetworks, researchers could understand the architecture of the whole plant hormone system.
- It also helped them to understand which genes are turned on and off during a plant's defense response.
- Ultimately, the process helps in identifying breeding crops that are able to better withstand attacks from pests.

5.9 **PCR TEST**

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has said designated labs will use the conventional real-time Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test to test for the novel Corona Virus that causes COVID-19.

About the test

- Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test is conducted on swab collected from the back of the throat, a liquid sample from the lower respiratory tract, or a simple saliva sample.
- Such tests are commonly used in Influenza A, Influenza B and H1N1 virus detection.
- The PCR test uses a technique that creates copies of a segment of DNA.
- 'Polymerase' refers to the enzymes that make the copies of DNA.
- The 'chain reaction' is how the DNA fragments are copied, exponentially — one is copied into two, the two are copied into four, and so on.
- Kary Mullis, the American biochemist who invented the PCR technique, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1993.
- However, SARS-COV-2 is a virus made of RNA, which needs to be converted into DNA. For this, the technique includes a process called reverse transcription.

- A ‘reverse transcriptase’ enzyme converts the RNA into DNA. Copies of the DNA are then made and amplified.
- A fluorescent DNA binding dye called the “probe” shows the presence of the virus.
- The test also distinguishes SARS-COV-2 from other viruses.

5.10 Starch-based ‘HEMOSTAT’ material

Institute of Nano Science and Technology (INST), an autonomous institute under the Department of Science & Technology, has developed a starch-based ‘hemostat’ material that concentrates the natural clotting factors in blood by physically absorbing excess fluid.

About Hemostat

- Hemostat materials absorb excess fluid by concentrating the natural clotting factors in the blood that are critical for stopping the blood flow; however, the bleeding can restart when non-biodegradable materials are removed.
- By chemically modifying natural starch to form microparticles, researchers have combined the advantages of biocompatibility and biodegradability with a five- to ten-fold increase in fluid absorption and much-improved adhesion.
- When the microparticles combine, they create an adherent gel that can remain on the wound until slowly dissipating as healing proceeds.
- The microparticles are prepared by modifying some of the chemical hydroxyl groups on starch to carboxymethyl groups while also incorporating the beneficial calcium ions.
- The biodegradable microparticles that combine to form a gel on a wound offer significant improvements over existing alternatives.

5.11 Usage of modern contraceptives

- Details of measures taken by the Government to increase the availability, awareness and usage of modern contraceptives are given below:
- **Mission Parivar Vikas:** The Government has launched Mission Parivar Vikas on 10th November 2016 for substantially increasing access to contraceptives and family planning services in 146 high fertility districts with Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of 3 and above in seven high focus states.
- New contraceptives viz. Injectable contraceptive (Antara program) and Centchroman (Chhaya) have been added to the existing basket of choices in 2015-16.
- A new method of IUCD insertion immediately after delivery i.e. post-partum IUCD (PPIUCD) has been introduced in 2010.

- Family Planning Logistic Management and Information System (FP-LMIS): A dedicated software launched in 2017, to ensure smooth forecasting, procurement and distribution of family planning commodities across all the levels of health facilities.
- Clinical Outreach Teams (COT) Scheme has been launched in 146 Mission Parivar Vikas Districts wef December 2017 for providing family planning services through mobile teams from accredited organizations in far-flung, underserved and geographically difficult areas.

5.12 **Herd immunity**

- UK has retracted under criticism after suggesting it would allow COVID-19 to pass through the population, so that ‘herd community’ could be achieved.
- Herd immunity refers to preventing an infectious disease from spreading by immunising a certain percentage of the population.
- While the concept is most commonly used in the context of vaccination, herd community can also be achieved after enough people have become immune after being infected.
- The premise is that if a certain percentage of the population is immune, members of that group can no longer infect another person.
- This breaks the chain of infection through the community (“herd”), and prevents it from reaching those who are the most vulnerable.
- "Herd immunity threshold” is the number of immune individuals above which a disease may no longer circulate.
- However, the discussion on herd immunity to fight COVID-19 in the UK has not been based on this conventional definition.
- The UK government had wanted the entire population to be exposed to the novel coronavirus infection, so that the majority could develop immunity to COVID-19.

5.13 **Ibuprofen**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) advised patients suffering from COVID-19-like symptoms to avoid the anti-inflammatory drug Ibuprofen, unless prescribed by Doctors, as it may make patients more vulnerable to COVID-19.

About Ibuprofen

- Ibuprofen is an anti-inflammatory drug.
- Common medicines that contain ibuprofen include Brufen and Combiflam tablets.
- Ibuprofen, a non-steroid, is used for relief from joint pain, migraine, fever, body ache, and even pain during the menstrual cycle.
- Its function is to reduce pain, swelling, and fever by suppressing substances that produce swelling in the body.

- Other non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID) include aspirin, cortisone, naproxen and diclofenac.

5.14 **Tejas Aircraft**

In a big boost to 'Make in India', Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) cleared acquisition of 83 indigenous Tejas fighter aircraft for Indian Air Force (IAF) with more advanced configuration than the 40 currently on order.

Tejas

The Light Combat Aircraft Tejas has been indigenously-designed by Aircraft Development Agency (ADA) under the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL).

While orders of 40 Tejas aircraft had been placed with HAL in initial configurations, DAC paved the way for procurement of 83 of the more advanced Mk1A version of the aircraft from HAL by finalising the contractual and other issues.

The proposal will now be placed for consideration of Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS).

5.15 **Alcohols used in manufacturing hand sanitizers**

- Prices of Alcohols used in manufacturing hand sanitizers has been capped under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.
- In view the ongoing outbreak of COVID-19, prices of the alcohol used in manufacturing the hand sanitizers have been exorbitantly increased by the producers of such alcohol.
- Therefore, Government has notified an Order under the Essential Commodities Act to declare price cap prevailing on the alcohol used in manufacturing the hand sanitizers.
- States can now ask the manufactures of these alcohols not to increase the prices of their produce without concurrence of the Central Government.
- The States have also been advised that the existing manufacturing units of alcohol based sanitizer be encouraged to increase their capacity. Ministry of Environment has allowed increase in capacity by 50% without further environment clearances.

5.16 **E-Learning Platforms**

Union HRD Minister asked students to continue their learning by making full use of the available digital e-Learning platforms during the period the educational institutions are closed as a precautionary measure against COVID-19.

About the initiatives

- **DIKSHA:** Diksha has more than 80000 e-Books for class 12th created by CBSE, NCERT and States/UTs which are available in multiple languages.

- **e-PATHSHALA:** In this web portal NCERT has deployed 1886 audios, 2000 videos, 696 e-books (e-Pubs) and 504 Flip Books for classes 1st to 12th in different languages.
- **National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER):** NROER portal has a total of 14527 files including 401 collections, 2779 documents, 1345 interactive, 1664 audios, 2586 images and 6153 videos on different languages.
- **SWAYAM:** SWAYAM is the national online education platform hosting 1900 courses covering both school (class IX to XII) And Higher Education (under graduate, post graduate programs) in all subjects including engineering, humanities and social sciences, law and management courses.
- **SWAYAM PRABHA:** It has 32 D2H TV channels transmitting educational contents on 24/7 basis. These channels are available for viewing all across all across the country using DD free Dish set top box and antenna. The channels cover both school education and Higher Education.

5.17 Chloroquine And Hydroxychloroquin

- National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) has clarified that there is no shortage of chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine.
- Hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine are oral prescription drugs that have been used for treatment of malaria and certain inflammatory conditions.
- Chloroquine has been used for malaria treatment and chemoprophylaxis.
- Hydroxychloroquine is used for treatment of rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus and porphyria cutanea tarda.
- Both drugs have in-vitro activity against SARS-CoV, SARS-CoV-2, and other coronaviruses, with hydroxychloroquine having relatively higher potency against SARS-CoV-2.
- Based upon limited in-vitro and anecdotal data, chloroquine or hydroxychloroquine are currently recommended for treatment of hospitalized COVID-19 patients in several countries.

5.18 Solidarity trial

- With outbreaks gaining steam in many countries, the global COVID-19 total passed 200,000 reported cases today, and the World Health Organization (WHO) announced a large international clinical trial to test five treatment regimens.
- Multiple small trials using different methods may not yield strong evidence needed to reveal which ones can save lives.
- So, WHO has organized a large international study—called the SOLIDARITY trial—to get more robust data.
- The streamlined randomized trial can be adjusted based on countries' availability of the drugs and can be adjusted to include other arms.

5.19 World Tuberculosis Day

- World Tuberculosis Day is being observed on March 24 with the theme “It’s Time”.
- The objective is to build public awareness about the global epidemic of tuberculosis (TB).
- It is observed every year on 24th March, to commemorate the anniversary of Dr. Robert Koch’s discovery of the Tuberculosis (TB) bacteria in 1882.
- It is one of the eight official global public health campaigns marked by the World Health Organization (WHO).
- The other 7 are: World Health Day, World Blood Donor Day, World Immunization Week, World Malaria Day, World No Tobacco Day, World Hepatitis Day and World AIDS Day.
- India has committed to end TB by 2025, five years ahead of the global targets.
- WHO recommends that either a tuberculin skin test or interferon-gamma release assay (IGRA) be used to test for TB infection.
- WHO recommends new shorter options for preventive treatment in addition to the widely used 6 months of daily isoniazid.

5.20 National Supercomputing Mission

- Government of India informed parliament about the National Supercomputing Mission.
- India’s National Supercomputing Mission (NSM) was set up to meet the increasing computational demands of Academia, Researchers, MSMEs, and startups by creating the capability design and manufacturing of supercomputers indigenously in India.
- National Super Computing Mission is steered jointly by the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) and Department of Science and Technology (DST) and implemented by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Pune and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru.
- The target of the mission was set to establish a network of Supercomputers ranging from a few Tera Flops (TF) to Hundreds of Tera Flops (TF) and three systems with greater than or equal to 3 Peta Flops (PF) in academic and research institutions of National importance across the country by 2022.
- This network of Supercomputers envisaging a total of 15-20 PF was approved in 2015 and was later revised to a total of 45 PF (45000 TFs), a jump of 6 times more compute power within the same cost and capable of solving large and complex computational problems.
- The first Supercomputer assembled indigenously, called Param Shivay, was installed in IIT (BHU) and was inaugurated by the Prime Minister.
- Similar systems Param Shakti and Param Brahma were installed at IIT-Kharagpur and IISER, Pune.

5.21 National Forensic Sciences University Bill, 2020

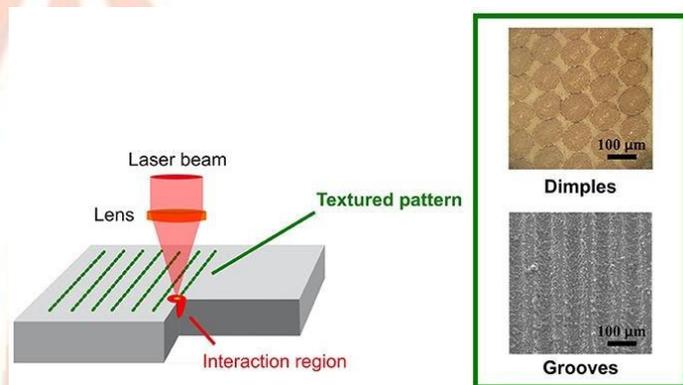
- Minister for Home Affairs introduced the National Forensic Sciences University Bill, 2020 in the Lok Sabha.
- The bill seeks to establish a National Forensic Sciences University as an institution of national importance by upgrading the Gujarat Forensic Sciences University in Gandhinagar.
- The proposed National Forensic Sciences University will promote studies and research in forensic science in conjunction with applied behavioural science studies, law, criminology and other allied areas for strengthening criminal justice system in the country.

5.22 Laser surface micro-texturing

International Advanced Centre for Powder Metallurgy & New Materials (ARCI) has developed ultrafast laser surface texturing technology, which can improve the fuel efficiency of internal combustion engines.

About the Technology

- Laser surface micro-texturing, which offers precise control of the size, shape and density of micro-surface texture features has gained momentum as a way to control friction and wear.
- In this technology, a pulsating laser beam creates micro-dimples or grooves on the surface of materials in a very controlled manner.
- Such textures can trap wear debris when operating under dry sliding conditions and sometimes provide effects like enhancing oil supply (lubricant reservoir) which can lower friction coefficients and may enable reduced wear rate.
- International Advanced Centre for Powder Metallurgy & New Materials (ARCI) is an autonomous R&D Centre of Department of Science and Technology (DST).



5.23 High Definition (HD) Vs. Standard Definition (SD)

- All companies from digital industry have decided upon temporarily defaulting HD & ultra-HD streaming to SD content or offering only SD content, at bitrates no higher than 480p on cellular networks until 14th April.
- In a nutshell, the difference between high definition and standard definition images is the number of pixels contained in the image on display.
- HD images have more pixels per square inch than standard definition videos.
- It means that HD images can show much finer detail than SD images.

- SD or “standard definition” is 640 pixels wide and 480 pixels tall in the U.S. (Slightly larger in Asia and Europe, where the format is different).
- HD or “high definition” is at least 1280 pixels wide, and in a wider format than SD.

5.24 HANTAVIRUS

China’s English daily Global Times has reported the death of a person from Yunnan Province who tested positive for the “Hanta Virus”.

About the Virus

- The Hanta Viruses are a family of Viruses spread mainly by rodents.
- A person can get infected if he/she comes in contact with a rodent that carries the virus.
- The Hanta Virus is not novel and its first case dates back to 1993.
- Cases of the Hanta Virus in humans occur mostly in rural areas where forests, fields and farms offer suitable habitat for infected rodents.
- Hanta Viruses in the Americas are known as “New World” hantaviruses and may cause hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS).
- Other Hanta Viruses, known as “Old World” hantaviruses, are found mostly in Europe and Asia and may cause hemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome (HFRS).

Hantavirus in brief

How the virus spreads to humans

- 1 Virus found in rodent feces
 - 2 Infected feces becomes airborne
 - 3 Inhaled by humans
-

Symptoms

- | Early | Later, 1-2 days |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| • Chills | • Dry cough |
| • Fever | • Headache |
| • Muscle aches | • Nausea, vomiting |
| | • Shortness of breath |

Characteristics

- Most prevalent in rural areas
- Campers and hikers more likely to catch the virus, because tents rest on the ground
- Cannot be spread between humans

- 4 Acute respiratory distress; serious infection that quickly worsens
-

5.25 PROJECT 'ISAAC'

Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar (IITGN) has launched Project ‘Isaac’ to engage its students in creative projects to enhance their critical skills while they are confined to their homes because of Corona virus.

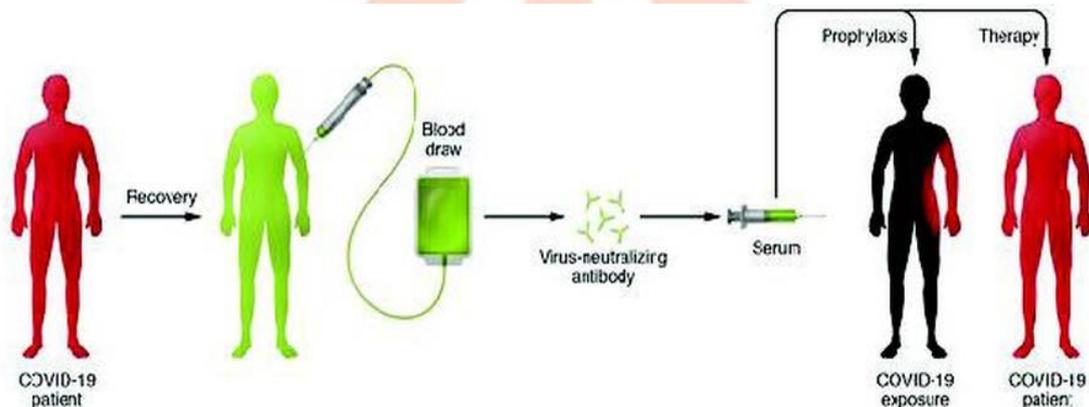
About the Project

- The project is inspired by Sir Isaac Newton, who was similarly sent home by Trinity College, Cambridge, because of the Great Plague of London in 1665.
- During this year, Newton, then a 22-year-old college student developed some of his most profound discoveries, including early Calculus, as well as his theories of optics and gravity.
- As part of the project, four different competitions are being organized by IIT, Gandhinagar to cultivate new skills among students regarding writing, painting, coding, music, creative expression, and so on. Students can take part in competitions online.

- Project Isaac is a model for academic institutions worldwide to explore ways to engage students in the midst of the pandemic.

5.26 Convalescent Plasma Therapy

- The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved use of Blood Plasma from recovered patients to treat severely critical COVID-19 patients.
- It is called Convalescent Plasma Therapy. It seeks to make use of the antibodies developed in the recovered patient against the coronavirus.
- The whole blood or plasma from such people is taken, and the plasma is then injected in critically ill patients so that the antibodies are transferred and boost their fight against the virus.
- A COVID-19 patient usually develops primary immunity against the virus in 10-14 days. Therefore, if the plasma is injected at an early stage, it can possibly help fight the virus and prevent severe illness.



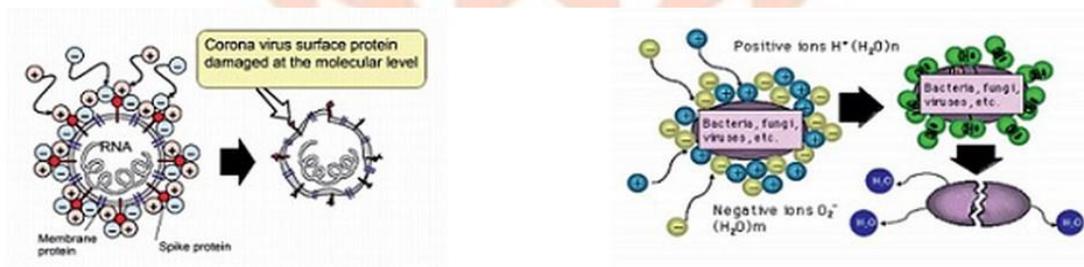
5.27 Sodium Hypochlorite

- In several, migrant workers travelling to their home states, or their belongings, were sprayed with a disinfectant, apparently to sanitise them. The chemical in the spray was a sodium hypochlorite solution.
- Sodium hypochlorite is commonly used as a bleaching agent, and also to sanitise swimming pools.
- As a common bleaching agent, sodium hypochlorite is used for a variety of cleaning and disinfecting purposes. It releases chlorine, which is a disinfectant.
- The concentration of the chemical in the solution varies according to the purpose it is meant for.
 - A normal household bleach (for disinfecting buildings and solid surfaces) usually is a 2-10% sodium hypochlorite solution.
 - At a much lower 0.25-0.5%, this chemical is used to treat skin wounds like cuts or scrapes.
 - An even weaker solution (0.05%) is sometimes used as a handwash.

- The World Health Organization, and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, recommend homemade bleach solutions of about 2-10% concentration to clean hard surfaces to clear them of any presence of the novel coronavirus.
- **Health impact:**
 - Sodium Hypochlorite is corrosive, and is meant largely to clean hard surfaces. It is not recommended to be used on human beings, certainly not as a spray or shower.
 - Large quantities of chlorine can be harmful. A 1% solution can cause damage to the skin of anyone who comes in contact with it. If it gets inside the body, it can cause serious harm to lungs.

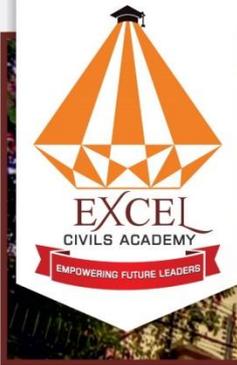
5.28 SCITECH AIRON

- A technology has been developed by an incubatee company of Scitech Park, Pune which offers an effective solution for India's fight against Covid 19 by reducing the viral load of infected areas within a room significantly within an hour.
- The negative ion generator titled Scitech Airon, which helps to control the virus, bacteria, and fungal infections in a closed environment, could clean up the air and disinfect areas which are exposed to the infection through Covid 19 positive cases and suspects.
- Hence it could ensure the wellbeing of the staff, doctors, and nurses who are working round the clock in the quarantine facilities by enhancing their disease resistance power and ability to fight the virus.



One hour of operation of Ion generator machine reduces viral load within a room by 99.7% depending on room size

- Bodies involved:
 - The technology has been developed under the NIDHI PRAYAS program initiated by the Department of Science and Technology (DST).
 - DST has released Rs 1 Crore to manufacture and scale up the product, and 1000 of them will soon be ready for installation in various hospitals in Maharashtra.
 - JCLEAN WEATHER TECHNOLOGIES, a Pune based company, is manufacturing the product.



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