ForumIAS

7 PM COMPILATION

1st - 30th April, 2020

Features of 7 PM compilation

- ❖ **Comprehensive coverage of a given current topic**
- ❖ **Provide you all the information you need to frame a good answer**
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A pandemic in an unequal India

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-pandemic-in-an-unequal-india/article31221919.ece

Context: Inequality amid Coronavirus pandemic.

On March 24, 2020, the Indian government announced a three-week nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of coronavirus in the country. As a result, thousands of migrant workers left India's major cities since the government's lockdown designed to prevent a local epidemic of novel coronavirus left them without jobs or pay.

This brings us to the questions of inequality prevalent in India and impact of Coronavirus pandemic. In this article, we will explain the below:
- What is inequality?
- What are preventive measures against Coronavirus and how the poor people in India face difficulties in following the preventive measures?
- What is the capacity of India's health system?
- What measures did government took for poors?
- What can be done?
- Conclusion

What is inequality?
- The United Nations describes inequality as "the state of not being equal, especially in status, rights and opportunities".
- Inequality can be broadly classified in to:
  - ➢ **Economic inequality:** Economic inequality is the unequal distribution of income and opportunity between individuals or different groups in society.
  - ➢ **Social inequality:** It occurs when resources in a given society are distributed unevenly based on norms of a society that creates specific patterns along lines of socially defined categories e.g. religion, kinship, prestige, race, caste, ethnicity, gender etc. have different access to resources of power, prestige and wealth depending on the norms of a society.
- Both these categories are deeply intertwined and inequality of one type affects the inequality in another e.g. Social Inequality due to gender have large impact on income of women. In patriarchal societies large gender wage gap tends to exist.

What are preventive measures against Coronavirus and how the poor people in India face difficulties in following the preventive measures?
- **Washing hands:** Theres is pre-requisite of washing hands with soap and water regularly and more oftenly. However, millions of people in India still do not have access to tap water or a regular water supply. It becomes impossible for poor people to afford extra water through water tankers to maintain the hygenic conditions.
- **Social-Distancing:** Social distancing helps in breaking the chain of the spread of COVID-19. However, it is not feasible for large extended families who crowd into narrow single rooms in slums and working-class tenements.
- **Avoid mass gatherings and crowded places:** Government requested corporates to provide facilities to 'work from home'. However, government forgot the millions of informal workers and destitute people who would have no work if they stayed home, many of them circular migrants, which is estimated at 100 million.
- **A total lockdown:** Though a lockdown was the need of hour but a total lockdown was possible only for the rich and the middle class with assured incomes during the

period, homes with spaces for distancing, health insurance and running water supply.

What is the capacity of India's health system?
- While the Indian government barely taxes its wealthiest citizens, its spending on public healthcare ranks among the lowest in the world. In the place of a well-funded health service, it has promoted an increasingly powerful commercial health sector.
- As a result, decent healthcare is a luxury only available to those who have the money to pay for it. While the country is a top destination for medical tourism, the poorest Indian states have infant mortality rates higher than those in sub-Saharan Africa. India accounts for 17% of global maternal deaths, and 21% of deaths among children below five years.
- A Jan Swasthya Abhiyan estimate is that a district hospital serving a population of two million may have to serve 20,000 patients, but they are deprived of the beds, personnel and resources to do this.

What measures did government took for poors?
- The Union government has announced a package, including additional 5 kg grain a month for the next three months under the PDS.
- Also, ₹500 per month for the next three months for women holding Jan-Dhan Yojana accounts.
- Three months' pension in advance to nearly three crore widows, senior citizens and the differently-abled
- The govenrment increased ₹2,000 for MGNREGA workers.

However, these are not enough for the survival of a family. Rs. 500 is just about 2 days of a months' salary. The migrants saw the future dark and thus left the cities to reach to their native villages.

What can be done?

- For two months, every household in the informal economy, rural and urban, should be given the equivalent of 25 days' minimum wages a month until the lockdown continues.
- There should be free water tankers supplying water in slum shanties throughout the working days.
- Governments must double PDS entitlements, which includes protein-rich pulses, and distribute these free at doorsteps.
- In addition, for homeless children and adults, and single migrants, it is urgent to supply cooked food to all who seek it, and to deliver packed food to the aged and the disabled in their homes using the services of community youth volunteers.
- India must immediately commit 3% of its GDP for public spending on health services, with the focus on free and universal primary and secondary health care.

Conclusion:

Most of the official strategies place the responsibility on the citizen, rather than the state, to fight the pandemic. Though the government should have been already prepared with health infrastructure of testing and treating before virus entered India. But in such a crisis which is not seen after World War II, whole humanity needs to stand up together and stronger to break the chain of the spread of COVID-19.

Thinking national, acting local
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/thinking-national-acting-local/article31230613.ece

Context: Flaws in National Planning in India.

The attack by the SARS-CoV-2 virus has highlighted the bad shape of the Indian economy and the precariousness in the lives of millions of people. National planning has failed to produce all-round development of India's economy so far. An all-round plan for recovery from the pandemic is required.

This brings us to the questions of National Planning in India. In this article, we will explain the below:
- What is evolution of national planning in India?
- What is importance of Planning?
- What are the pre-conditions of planning in a democratic country?
- What are the challenges to any Planning Institute?
- Conclusion

What is evolution of national planning in India?
- The idea of planned economy was crystallized in 1930s when our national leaders came under the influence of socialist philosophy. India's Five year plans were very much impressed by the rapid strides achieved by the USSR through five years plans.
- In 1934, Sir M. Visvesvaraya had published a book titled **"Planned Economy in India"**, in which he presented a constructive draft of the development of India in next ten years. His core idea was to lay out a plan to shift labor from agriculture to industries and double up National income in ten years.
- The first attempt to develop a national plan for India came up in 1938. In that year, Congress President Subhash Chandra Bose had set up a **National Planning Committee** with Jawaharlal Nehru as its president.
- **The Bombay Plan (1944):** In the early 1944, several eminent industrialists and economists of Bombay Sir Purshottamdas Thakurdas, Mr. J.R.D. Tata and six others made another attempt and published a development plan, which was called Bombay plan. Its main purpose was to stimulate the thinking of the people and to lay down the principles on the basis of which a national plan could be formulated and executed.
- **Gandhian Plan (1944):** Gandhian Plan which based upon Gandhian philosophy was put forward by Shri S.N. Agarwal of Wardha. The outlay of the plan was estimated Rs. 3500 crores only and it sought to set up a decentralized economy with self sufficient villages and Industrial production. It laid emphasis on small scale industries and agriculture.
- **People's Plan (1945):** Another plan was prepared by the late M.N. Roy (a ten year plan) called the 'People Plan.' It was different from the Bombay plan in methodology and priorities. Its chief emphasis was on agricultural and consumer goods industries through collectivization and setting up of sate owned industrialization.
- **Planning Advisory Board** In October 1946, a planning advisory board was set up by Interim Government to review the plans and future projects and make recommendations upon them.
- **Planning Commission (1950):** India has adopted a path of development, which is known as Socialist Path and Mixed Economy, On the one hand, India has encouraged private business and industry and on the other it has almost full

control, at least in principle, over all the major entrepreneurial and business activities. The Planning Commission was set up by a Resolution of the Government of India in March 1950 in pursuance of declared objectives of the Government to promote a rapid rise in the standard of living of the people by efficient exploitation of the resources of the country, increasing production and offering opportunities to all for employment in the service of the community.

- Planning Commission was replaced by a new institution, **NITI Aayog** on January 1, 2015 with emphasis on 'Bottom - Up' approach to envisage the vision of Maximum Governance, Minimum Government, echoing the spirit of 'Cooperative Federalism'.

What is importance of Planning?

- Planning is the most important tool in the battle against poverty and unemployment. Poverty and unemployment were the central problems of our National Five-Year Plans.
- The answer to poverty and unemployment lies in planned development in the sectors of agriculture, power, irrigation, transportation, social life and environment. Planning therefore, is the centre of our lives and should contain the charter for our economic betterment.

What are the pre-conditions of planning in a democratic country?

There are certain general preconditions for democratic planning, namely:

1. there must be a correct comprehension of the laws of development of the society where planning is to take place,
2. there must be means at hand for guiding the development of the society at all levels and
3. All this must be implemented through authentic participation. i.e. for democratic planning it is not enough to have participation, one must also be able to plan.

What are the challenges to any Planning Institute?

Any planning institution in a federal and democratic system faces two basic challenges when it comes to performing a long-term role — a constitutional challenge, and the challenge of competence.

Constitutional Challenge:

- ➢ **Shorter span of government:** The term of governments in a democracy changes in shorter span which generally pause the ongoing plans. There must be provisions of continuing the policies and plans even if the government is changed.
- ➢ Since the planning body in India does not have constitutional status, it will be forced to bend to the will of the government. Planning in China does not face this disruption.
- ➢ **Short- term of plans:** Short-termism in policymaking is a weakness of electoral democracies everywhere. China's long term planning can be studied for a stronger planning.
- ➢ **Financial Autonomy:** Economists say that planning is weak when planners do not have the powers to allocate money for national priorities, which NITI Aayog does not have.
- ➢ **Centre-state relations:** India's national planning process must address the constitutional relationship between the Centre and the States. Finance commission, a constitutional body was established to determine the sharing of centrally raised resources with the States. States which are becoming self-sufficient in their resources, questions the efficacy of planning commission. It was argued that the

commission was out of touch with their ground realities and had little experience of how to get things done to produce outcomes.

Competence Challenge:

➢ A national planning institution must guide all-round progress. It must assist in achieving not just faster GDP growth, but also more socially inclusive, and more environmentally sustainable growth. Thus, it needs a good model in which societal and environmental forces are within the model.

➢ The globalisation agenda has been driven by an economic agenda, with policies promoting global trade and finance to maximise global economic output. It has paid too little attention to the impact of the 'GDP agenda' on the well-being of communities where employment declines when production moves to lower cost sources elsewhere or to the total environmental impact of global supply chains.

Conclusion:

Just like all the organs in human body are important for the overall body functioning, a healthy global system will only work when it helps the weaker members to become stronger. In democratic governance, the national government must devolve functions to the state governments and even to the third- tier of district or city governance to have local solutions.

The spectre of a post-COVID-19 world
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-spectre-of-a-post-covid-19-world/article31252172.ece

Context: Post COVID-19 World.

As COVID-19 spreads exponentially across the world, uncertainty and extreme volatility are creating havoc that has never seen before. The wisest thing is to start thinking about whats next, i.e. post COVID-19.

This brings us to the questions of post COVID-19 World. In this article, we will explain the below:
- What were the hardships that the world was already facing?
- What will be the impacts of COVID-19 on the world?
- What would be expected development of COVID-19 in India?
- How is India standing out in the crisis?
- Conclusion

What were the hardships that the world was already facing?
- **Technological advancements:** The world was already having to contend with an uncertain economic environment, with industries in turn facing newer challenges such as having to adjust to a shift from cost efficiencies to innovation and breakthrough improvements.
- **Global Slowdown:** The International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned of an economic slowdown in 2019 in 90 per cent of the world. Global economy was said to be in 'synchronized slowdown'.
- **Increasing political and policy uncertainties:** World Economic Outlook report of IMF points out that political uncertainties "add downside risk to global investment and growth. These include policy uncertainty about the agenda of new administrations or surrounding elections, geo-political conflict in the Middle East, and tensions in east Asia". The World Uncertainty Index (WUI) latest data shows a sharp increase in global uncertainty in the first quarter of 2019.

- **Changing environmental norms:** In 2019, the UN warned that if the damage to the climate is not reversed by 2030 it will be too late. Thus, around the world, a raft of new legislation to help protect the environment has just come into force. Even INDCs were being implemented by the countries to fulfill Paris Agreement provisions.
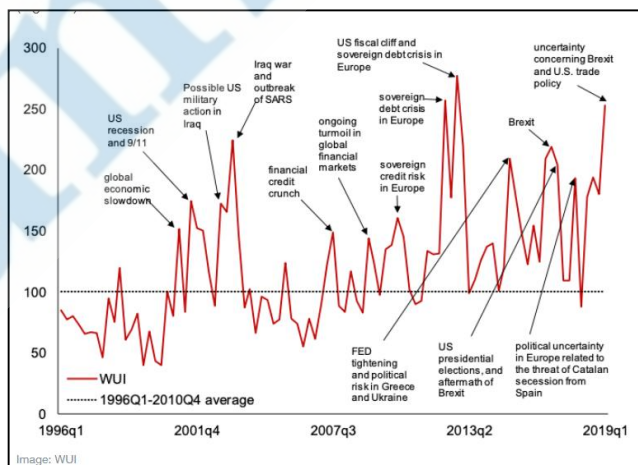
What will be the impacts of COVID-19 on the world?
Economically:
➤ China cease to be the world's biggest exporter of manufactured goods. There is no country in the world to replace its position. The economic slowdown in China, as a

result of COVID-19 pandemic, will precipitate a further economic downturn internationally.

➢ Uncertainty, panic and lockdown policies are expected to cause demand worldwide to decline in a precipitous way. This will inevitably lead to a vicious downward cycle, where companies close down, resulting in more lay-offs and a further drop in consumption. A steep decline in GDP would follow.

➢ Stock markets have reflected the economic alarm. The S&P 500 in the United States fell more than 4% this week as investors braced for worse conditions ahead.

➢ according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), globally, foreign direct investment (FDI) is on track to decline by 40% this year. This threatens "lasting damage to global production networks and supply chains.

Geo-politically:

➢ COVID-19 is expected to bring about major changes in the global order.

➢ As of now, though the U.S. is no longer the global power that it once was, it is hardly in retreat. USA's retreat from Afghanistan after a dubious accord with the Afghan Taliban is one of the evidence of declining power.

➢ Given that the U.S. is among the countries badly affected by COVID-19 pandemic, together with existing uncertainties affecting its financial markets, the U.S. can be expected to step back even further.

➢ China and Russia have strengthened their relationship and improved their asymmetric capabilities. With China becoming the largest economy in the world in PPP terms (Purchasing power parity) and Russia becoming far more economically and politically stable and an important power broker in West Asia, will have a direct impact on the liberal international order.

> **Purchasing power parity:**
> - Purchasing power parity, or PPP, is an economic theory that can be applied to adjust the prices of goods in a given market.
> - In essence, instead of using current market rates for prices (such as in nominal data), PPP tries to more accurately account for differences in the cost of living between countries – especially in places where labor and goods are far cheaper.
> - When applied to GDP measurements, PPP can help provide a more accurate picture of actual productivity.
> - India is the third largest economy in terms of PPP.

Socially:

➢ Psychologists are warning of an 'epidemic of despair' arising from a fear of unknown causes, resulting in serious anxiety and mental problems.

➢ Extended isolation, according to psychologists, can trigger a different kind of pandemic even leading to possible suicidal tendencies, fits of anger, depression, alcoholism and eccentric behavioural patterns.

➢ The current inequalities among population is already high, the pandemic will impact further on the income inequalities.

➢ The loss of jobs in India is already witnessing the burnt as seen in the migrants crisis post lockdown announcement.

What would be expected development of COVID-19 in India?

- An early estimate by the Asian Development Bank, soon after the epidemic was declared, was that it would cost the Indian economy $29.9 billion. However, a recent

industry estimate pegs the cost of the lockdown at around $120 billion or 4% of India's GDP.

- The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) had at one point warned that the COVID-19 impact, and the existing stress in the financial sector, meant that India would require up to six months even after the entire course of the COVID-19 epidemic is over to restore normalcy and business continuity.

- The key to India's continued success will lie in ensuring transparency in coping with the unfolding crisis and mitigating any attempts at misinformation that could prove deadly to India's pushback efforts. As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds, India needs to remain vigilant.

How is India standing out in the crisis?

- India has enforced a nationwide 21 day lockdown and undertaken evacuation of more than 1400 of its citizens and those of its neighbours from high-risk countries, including China, Japan, Iran and Italy.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has led public awareness campaigns to make people more vigilant in the pushback against the outbreak.

- In keeping with India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy, India has shown leadership in mobilising the heads of government of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and that of the G20 to share reliable information, best practices and support each other in fighting this pandemic.

- China sought India's support to counter the US bid to lay COVID-19 blame on its door a few days before the G20 meeting. Also, the Chinese have been deeply appreciative of India's gesture of sending 15 tons of medical supplies to Beijing when it was still reeling under the crisis.

- India has dispatched doctors to the Maldives and Nepal and has offered supplies to Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Italy.

Conclusion:

There are no winners in tragedies but stories of survival, hope and empathy that are retold and remembered in the aftermath. Even as we struggle to fortify responses to the unprecedented crises that the COVID-19 pandemic has unleashed globally, attempts are being made to reframe and deflect attention as to the causes and effects of this global pandemic.

In a world where disruptions had become the new normal, the COVID-19 pandemic has created an irreversible systemic shock, creating new geo-political fault-lines and opportunities. New Delhi must calibrate its responses as Beijing tries to repair its tarnished image, especially along the BRI corridor, and continues its efforts to infuse the dominant global power structure with Chinese characteristics. As Jospeh Nye reminds us, 'power sometimes depends on whose army or economy wins, but it can also depend on whose story wins'.

The deep void in global leadership
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-deep-void-in-global-leadership/article31200881.ece

Context: Collective leadership at global level amid COVID-19.

The world is three months into the catastrophic war declared by an invisible, almost invincible virus that is rapidly gobbling up human lives, regardless of citizenship and race, and contemptuously ravaging economies across continents. There is as yet no comprehensive, concerted plan of action by world leaders to combat the pandemic. The pandemic has exposed the total void in collective leadership at the global level.

On March 26, 2020, the leaders of the Group of 20 nations came together for an 'extraordinary virtual G20 Summit' chaired by the King of Saudi Arabia Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, to discuss the impact of coronavirus pandemic on the global economy.

This brings us to the questions of global leadership in fight against COVID-19 pandemic. In this article, we will explain the below:
-   What is G20?
-   What the outcome is from recently held 'Extraordinary Virtual G20 Summit?
-   What are the developments in the global polity that have contributed to the indifference towards collective global action?
-   What are the possible measures that can be implemented under collective action of G20?
-   Conclusion

What is G20?
•   The Group of 20 is an organization of finance ministers and central bank governors from 19 individual countries and the European Union.
•   In addition to the United States, those countries are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Britain, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea and Turkey. Collectively, its members represent more than 80 percent of the world's gross domestic product.
•   Established in 1999 after a series of major international debt crises, the G20 aims to unite world leaders around shared economic, political and health challenges. It is a creation of the more select Group of 7, an informal bloc of industrialized democracies.
•   In the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, the G20 was elevated to include the leaders of member countries. The first G20 Leaders' Summit took place in Washington D.C. in November 2008. Consequently, the G20 agenda expanded beyond macro-financial issues, to include socio-economic and development issues.
•   The G-20's primary mandate is to prevent future international financial crises and shape the global economic agenda. The finance ministers and central bank governors of the G-20 countries meet twice a year and at the same time as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

What the outcome is from recently held 'Extraordinary Virtual G20 Summit?
•   G20 countries committed to inject over $5 trillion into the global economy to counter the social and economic impact of COVID-19.
•   Leaders also agreed to contribute to the WHO led COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund on a voluntary basis.

- G20 Leaders agreed to take all necessary measures to contain the pandemic and protect people. They also supported strengthening of the WHO's mandate in the fight against pandemics, including delivery of medical supplies, diagnostic tools, treatments, medicines and vaccines.
- India underscored the need to put human beings at the centre of vision of global prosperity and cooperation. The need of hour is to freely and openly share the benefits of medical research and development, develop adaptive, responsive and humane health care systems, and promote new crisis management protocols and procedures for an interconnected global village.
- India asked to strengthen and reform intergovernmental organisations like WHO and work together to reduce economic hardships resulting from COVID-19 particularly for the economically weak.

What are the developments in the global polity that have contributed to the indifference towards collective global action?

There are two developments in the global polity in the last few years have contributed to the indifference towards collective global action.

1. **Right-Wing Nationalism:** There is swing towards right-wing nationalism, as a guiding political ideology, in large swathes of the world, particularly in the U.S. This ideology posits 'global good' being in conflict with and inimical to national interests. The dramatic announcement by U.S. President Trump, in June 2017, that the U.S. will cease involvement from the Paris Accord on climate change, preparatory to full withdrawal after the mandatory period, on the ground that the accord will 'undermine U.S. economic interest' is a classic demonstration of narrow nationalism trumping global interests.

2. **Decline of multilateral institutions:**
   - The United Nations was the outcome of the shared vision of the world leaders after World War II that collective action is the only way forward to prevent the occurrence of another war. That institution has failed to live up to its expectations to maintain peace among nations.
   - WHO, which has as its objective 'to be the directing and coordinating authority among member countries in health emergencies', has proven to be too lethargic in reacting to pandemics.

What are the possible measures that can be implemented under collective action of G20?

- **Tackling shortages of drugs, medical equipment and protective gear:** Some nations have succeeded in bringing the pandemic under control, such as China, Japan or South Korea, They might have the capability to step up production at short notice to meet the increasing demand from other countries which are behind the curve. This involves urgent development of an information exchange on global production capacity, present and potential, demand and supply.
- **Seamless logistics for essential goods:** There is need to ensure seamless logistics for the supply chain for essential goods and services to function efficiently. This would need an associated accord to eliminate all kinds of tariff and non tariff barriers.
- **Information exchange:** There is a need to instantaneous exchange authenticated information on what clinical solutions have succeeded and what has not.
- **Cross-country collaboration on laboratory trials:** There is an urgent need to have cross-country collaboration on laboratory trials and clinical validation for vaccines

and anti-viral drugs. WHO has moved on the issue, but the best way to ensure speedy research is to pool global resources.

- **Movement of trained health professionals:** There is a need to facilitate easy movement of trained health professionals across the world to train others and augment resources wherever there are shortages.
- **Ensuring Food supplies:** It is the time to anticipate food shortages occurring sooner or later, in some part of the world, as a consequence of the national shutdowns. Saving lives from the Coronavirus as well as malnutrition and starvation.

Conclusion:

It is encouraging to learn that the G20 leaders have agreed to inject $5-trillion into the world economy to partially counter the devastating economic impact of the pandemic. Every foot soldier knows that winning a war would require the right strategy, rapid mobilisation of relevant resources and, most importantly, timely action. The world must come together with collective leadership before it's too late for humanity.

Reducing farm distress during a pandemic
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/reducing-farm-distress-during-a-pandemic/article31264242.ece

Context: Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on agricultural sector.

The coronavirus lockdown will have an adverse effect on the agriculture sector in India. The nationwide lockdown has entrenched the economic system. The sector is facing alot of trouble with labourers and movement of goods. Even as agriculture produce is exempted from lockdown directives being an essential commodity, policemen are creating alot of problems for the sector.

This brings us to the questions of agriculture sector amid COVID-19. In this article, we will explain the below:
- What is the condition of agricultural sector in India?
- What are the likely impacts of lockdown on the agriculture sector?
- What can government do to reduce the farm distress?
- Conclusion

What is the condition of agricultural sector in India?
- **Real rural wages** growth has fallen to an all-time-low of minus 3.8% in September, further confirming the deep structural slowdown in 'Bharat' that is also evidenced in sluggish fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and two-wheeler sales.
- The daily wage rate in rural India for male workers across 25 occupations (12 agricultural and 13 non-agricultural) averaged Rs 331.29 during September 2019, as per field data compiled by the Labour Bureau.
- This was 3.42% higher than the corresponding level for the same month of 2018. But in "real" terms, after adjusting for inflation based on the all-India consumer price index (CPI) for rural labourers, the wage increase worked out to minus 3.77% year-on-year.

What are the likely impacts of lockdown on the agriculture sector?
- **Double Hit Due to Lockdown:** Indian agriculture sector, which suffered recently due to uneven monsoon, will face another hit due to disruptions from the coronavirus. As Rabi harvest season approaches, farmers worry about their standing crops. Farmers growing wheat, mustard and pulses already complained about their crops damage due to untimely and heavy rainfall recently. This led to farmers fixing their crops but amid Coronavirus lockdown most of the labourers available fled to their homes.
- **Labourers Fleeing to their Homes:** As the restriction on movement of goods continues amid the lockdown, the farmers are likely to feel the pinch in their income. The government has also received reports on potatoes lying harvested on fields due to a shortage of labour.
- **Lockdown Hampers Movement of Goods:** Coronavirus lockdown has impacted the supply chain of agricultural commodities. By taking a toll on the loading and unloading of agricultural produce. Also, the lockdown has hampered the movement of trucks carrying essential commodities. Several cold storage and warehouse owners complained regarding the dearth of laborers. Unwillingness to work fearing police beating, many labourers are staying home or leaving for their hometown.
- **Rural Unemployment:** The lockdown causes the laborers going back to villages can cause a sudden rise in rural unemployment levels.

- Further, the poultry, fisheries and buffalo meat sectors are facing challenges. Due to spreading rumors about COVID-19 and meat consumption.
- In all, the COVID-19 caused clampdown has caused disruption and will eventually lead to a dip in farmers income.
- **Impact on Horticulture products:** With breakdown of supply chains and lack of cold storage facilities, the farmers of horticulture products are facing the burnts.
- **Decilne in agricultural prices:** There are already signs of a collapse in agricultural prices, which predates the outbreak of the pandemic. The food price index of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), which was showing a rising trend in food prices until January 2020, reported a 1% decline in prices month-on-month in February 2020. This is likely to worsen further, particularly for cash crops.

What can government do to reduce the farm distress?

- Government agri-research body ICAR is assessing the impact of Covid-19 lockdown on agriculture and allied sectors and taking measures to minimise its effect on the country's food security.
- Food Corporation of India (FCI) reporting 77 million tonnes of cereals in stocks as against the buffer requirement of 21 million tonnes as on April 1. Also, the Central government has already announced that for

> **Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR):**
> - It is formerly known as Imperial Council of Agricultural Research.
> - It was established on 16 July 1929 as a registered society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 in pursuance of the report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture.
> - The ICAR has its headquarters at New Delhi.
> - The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) is the apex body for coordinating, guiding, and managing research and education in agriculture in the entire country

the next three months, 5 kg of free grains will be distributed in addition to what people are entitled to under the National Food Security Act. Thus, it is time for the government to release the food stocks through the public distribution system at the earliest.
- The state is expected to intervene and assure remunerative incomes to farmers. This can be done by ensuring reduction in the input costs through existing schemes of subsidies such as the fertilizer subsidy and through price reduction in petrol/diesel meant for agricultural purposes.
- The immediate short-term solution can be compensating farmers for the loss of income through the PM-KISAN scheme. Though the only announcement in this regard is the disbursal of the first installment of the transfer which is due in April.

PM- KISAN Scheme:

- Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) is a Central Sector scheme with 100% funding from Government of India.
- The Scheme is effective from 1.12.2018.
- Under the Scheme an income support of Rs.6000/- per year is provided to all farmer families across the country in three equal installments of Rs.2000/- each every four months.
- The entire responsibility of identification of beneficiary farmer families rests with the State / UT Governments.
- The fund is directly transferred to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries.
- The PM-KISAN scheme aims to supplement the financial needs of the SMFs in procuring various inputs to ensure proper crop health and appropriate yields, commensurate with the anticipated farm income at the end of the each crop cycle.
- This would also protect them from falling in the clutches of moneylenders for meeting such expenses and ensure their continuance in the farming activities.

Conclusion:

India is an agricultural country with more than 50% of people directly or indirectly involved in the sector. The lockdown amid COVID-19 has severly hit the sector at the peak of harvesting season. The government should ensure that the bread-earners of the nation can harvest and sell their produce without much hastle and with all the precautionary measures amid COVID-19 pandemic. While income transfers may not be the best way of supporting the agricultural sector at times like these, they are the best available instruments to raise rural incomes and create demand.

Preparing for SAARC 2.0

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/preparing-for-saarc-20/article31273813.ece

Context: SAARC amid COVID-19 pandemic.

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi interacted with the leaders of the SAARC countries through video conference to chart out a common strategy in order to combat COVID-19 in the region on March 15th, 2020.

This brings us to the questions of SAARC amid COVID-19. In this article, we will explain the below:
- What is SAARC?
- What are the measures taken by SAARC to fight against COVID-19?
- Why SAARC has been dormant in the recent past?
- How will such a leading move would help India in long-run?
- Conclusion:

What is SAARC?
- The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established with the signing of the SAARC Charter in Dhaka on 8 December 1985.
- SAARC comprises of eight Member States: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- The Secretariat of the Association was set up in Kathmandu on 17 January 1987.
- The objectives of the Association as outlined in the SAARC Charter are:
  ➢ to promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life;
  ➢ to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potentials;
  ➢ to promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia;
  ➢ to contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems;
  ➢ to promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields;
  ➢ to strengthen cooperation with other developing countries;
  ➢ to strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interests; and
  ➢ to cooperate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes.
- Decisions at all levels are to be taken on the basis of unanimity; and bilateral and contentious issues are excluded from the deliberations of the Association.
- The Secretariat is headed by the Secretary General, who is appointed from Member States in alphabetical order for a three-year term by the SAARC Council of Ministers.
- The Secretary General is assisted by eight Directors on deputation from Member States.
- The SAARC Secretariat and Member States observe 8 December as the SAARC Charter Day.

What are the measures taken by SAARC to fight against COVID-19?

This video call played a great role in triggering SAARC, which has been sluggish since 2016. Following the 2016 Uri terror attacks that year by a Pakistan-based group, India had refused to participate in the SAARC summit, which was to be held in Islamabad. The summit was finally called off as three other nations also withdrew from the summit.

India's proposal now is a positive move toward smooth South Asian integration:

- All the eight member states were represented by head of the state or government in the video conferencing except Pakistan. They all readily agreed to work together to contain the virus, and shared their experiences and perspectives.
- India proposed the creation of a COVID-19 Emergency Fund with voluntary contributions from all Member States, and pledged an amount of US$ 10 million as an initial contribution from India.
- All the countries, except Pakistan, contributed to the COVID-19 Emergency Fund voluntarily, bringing the total contributions to $18.8 million.
- The fund has been operationalised and is neither controlled by India nor by the secretariat.
- India has taken a lead in implemention. The requestes for medical equipment, medicines and other supplies from Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan, Maldives, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have been accepted and actions are being taken.
- A video conference of senior health professionals of SAARC countries held on March 26 to exchange experiences of combating the spread of COVID-19 thus far, including on specific protocols dealing with screening at entry points, contact tracing, quarantine and isolation facilities etc.
- India suggested for creation of a common Research Platform to coordinate research on controlling epidemic diseases within the South Asian region. The Indian Council of Medical Research can offer help coordinating such an exercise.

Why SAARC has been dormant in the recent past?

- **Lack of trust among the member countries:** In the many failures of SAARC, lack of trust among the member countries has been the most significant factor between India and Pakistan. In recent times, Pakistan's non-cooperation has stalled some major initiatives under SAARC. For example, despite India's keen interest in cooperating and strengthening intra-regional connectivity by backing the SAARC–MVA during the 18th summit of SAARC, the agreement was stalled following Pakistan's reluctance.
- **Security cooperation:** SAARC has also faced obstacles in the area of security cooperation. A major hindrance in this regard has been the lack of consensus on threat perceptions, since member countries disagree on the idea of threats. For instance, while cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan is a major concern for India, Pakistan has failed to address these concerns.
- **Big Brother attitude of India:** The asymmetry between India and other member countries in terms of geography, economy, military strength and influence in the global arena make the smaller countries apprehensive. They perceive India as "Big Brother" and fear that it might use the SAARC to pursue hegemony in the region. The smaller neighbouring countries, therefore, have been reluctant to implement various agreements under SAARC.
- **Resources:** SAARC faces a shortage of resources, and countries have been reluctant to increase their contributions.
- **Lack of Connectivity:** The lack of connectivity among member states is another weakness of the SAARC. This ties in with the lack of a proper infrastructure of member states. This infrastructure deficit in turn leads to reduced connectivity

among the SAARC nations. South Asia needs to invest up to $2.5 trillion to bridge its infrastructure gap over the next ten years, says a 2014 World Bank report. Women, the poor, and marginalized social groups are particularly affected by the region's infrastructure gap.

- **Agreements and Conventions:** Almost all the agreements and conventions, adopted and signed by SAARC members, are concentrating on promotion of economic and social interactions and relations. There is hardly any significant development, under the banner of SAARC, to promote mutual trust and resolve mutual disputes. Dispute resolving has been, unfortunately, left out of the scope of SAARC. Even "SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism" was nothing but ratification and implementation of the UN resolutions and conventions

How will such a leading move would help India in long-run?

- India's move can be seen as a masterstroke to assert India's leadership in the South Asian region. India is also pushing for more clout as the world's largest democracy.
- Recently, Modi's campaign to portray India as a rising power seemed to be ticking along amid China's multi-billion dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and some troubles internally in India.
- China has built inroads in almost every country in the region and promises investments as a part of the BRI, a 21st century Marshall plan to connect Asia, Africa, and Europe. Various countries have pledged their official support to the project, which is part of China's bid for global dominance. So Modi's move may also have the intention to maintain India's leadership role amid China's ambitions.
- India's Citizenship Amendment Act is also creating unnecessary tensions with its neighbors, which in the long run may help China expand its influence in South Asian countries. The reactivation of SAARC may also have the effect of tamping down the misgivings spawned in South Asian countries over the amendment act.

Conclusion:

India's move to convene a video conference of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) states to collectively rein in the threat of COVID-19 can be seen as a thoughtful drive to respond to China's growing influence in the region by reasserting India's leadership. It is a good and timely initiative as COVID-19, the disease caused by the SARS-nCoV-2 virus, has created widespread concerns in South Asian countries. These countries are starting to suffer a widespread cessation of economic activity due to fears of this deadly virus. Follwing the mantra of "Coming together not growing apart ; Collaboration not Confusion ; Preparation not Panic", SAARC countries can together fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Ten questions posed by the virus
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/ten-questions-posed-by-the-virus/article31282596.ece

Context: Questions that would define our life after COVID-19.

COVID-19 pandemic has engulfed whole of the world. Our life after COVID-19 will be defined by questions on the prevailing organising principles of humankind.

This brings us to the 10 questions on the prevailing organising principles of humankind. In this article, we will explain the below:

- ❖ What is the balance between economic and social goals?
- ❖ Will there be a new understanding of power and security?
- ❖ Can there be a new globalisation where humanity and environment take precedence?
- ❖ How much more power will the state accumulate?
- ❖ Will this expanding state be increasingly democratic or progressively authoritarian?
- ❖ What will happen to the neoliberal wisdom that unbridled competition of all against all improves efficiency and brings progress?
- ❖ What will happen to populism?
- ❖ How exploitation of labour came into spotlight?
- ❖ Whether we need to travel as much as we do?
- ❖ How our idea of community and boundaries has changed?

What is the balance between economic and social goals?

- The pandemic has revived the classical ultilitarian question in the situation of life and death. Recently Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro said that, "I'm sorry, some people will die… that's life. You can't stop a car factory because of traffic deaths."
- Such a mindset has revived the utilitarian question of whose and how many deaths would be acceptable for a greater common good.
- Ageing population has been viewed as economic burden by most of the societies.
- The social Darwinism,i.e, the survival of the fittest is being tested for the first time so accurate to the point of causing discomfort to the humanity.

> **What is Utilitarianism?**
> - Utilitarianism is the doctrine that an action is right in so far as it promotes happiness, and that the greatest happiness of the greatest number should be the guiding principle of conduct. The theory was propounded by John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham.
> - Such a theory is in opposition to egoism, the view that a person should pursue his own self-interest, even at the expense of others, and to any ethical theory that regards some acts or types of acts as right or wrong independently of their consequences.

> **What is Social Darwinism?**
> - Social Darwinism is a term scholars use to describe the practice of misapplying the biological evolutionary language of Charles Darwin to politics, the economy, and society.
> - Many Social Darwinists embraced laissez-faire capitalism and racism. They believed that government should not interfere in the "survival of the fittest" by helping the poor, and promoted the idea that some races are biologically superior to others.
> - The ideas of Social Darwinism pervaded many aspects of American society in the Gilded Age, including policies that affected immigration, imperialism, and public health.

Will there be a new understanding of power and security?
- According to Global Firepower Index, the top four military powers are USA, Russia, China and India.
- Since 2006, Global Firepower (GFP) has provided a unique analytical display of data concerning 138 modern miltary powers. The GFP ranking is based on each nation's potential war making capabilities across land, sea and air fought by conventional means.
- We must note what Bill Gates said once, "We need to have more 'germ games' like we have war games."
- An unwanted encouter with the virus has shown the flaws in the healthcare infrastructure of many countries. It is time to rethink about the arm race that countries are still involved in.
- The pandemic has the capability to change the entire understanding of power and security.

Can there be a new globalisation where humanity and environment take precedence?
- It has become commonplace to suggest that globalisation is at a crossroads. From Brexit to the election of President Donald Trump, from the western backlash against migration to the growing trade barriers across the world, this period in world politics has been termed as an era of de-globalisation.
- Now, as nation after nation quarantines itself, the spread of Covid-19 is challenging the way we have become used to living and arranging not only our daily lives, but also the global order.
- The crisis produced by Covid-19 reminds us of the need for global co-operation, the impossibility of erecting impenetrable border walls, international interdependence and regional co-operation, open and democratic political societies, humane approach to global issues and responsible and morally competent global leadership.
- Above all, it reminds us of the continuing importance of responsibly nurturing global organizations like the UN and the WHO.
- In India till now it looks like we have not done too badly although the near future is yet to be seen. Perhaps, lockdown decision could have been made earlier or international and domestic flights could have been grounded much before. Stoppage of trains has taken place more appropriately though much of these have happened under pressure from several state governments.
- In a sense, this crisis is God's or Nature's way of teaching lessons. Our scientific and technological discoveries of recent times have overtaken our souls. We forget the meaning and purpose of life and focus on consuming and enjoying whatever we can lay our hands on.

How much more power will the state accumulate?

- Threatening the world with a long recession, the Covid-19 pandemic looks set to inaugurate a turbulent new political and economic era. Its main tendencies will become visible over the months and years to come. But the most revolutionary shift is already in sight. The state, as a guarantor of safety is coming back in the play.

- In all countries where the novel coronavirus first spread China, South Korea, Iran, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Italy, the state leads the war against it, imposing draconian lockdowns on entire populations, ruthlessly sacrificing personal liberty to security.

- Whether such heavy-handed interventions will eventually succeed, they seem to be working for now in Singapore and China, countries with great state capacity is still unclear. Nevertheless, in many other countries, ruling politicians seem to realise that they will be judged by their administrative capacity to check the spread of the virus.

Will this expanding state be increasingly democratic or progressively authoritarian?

- China and Singapore showed that authoritarian measures work while Germany showed that democratic and inclusive methods work too.

- India which has deployed a hybrid of democratic and authoritarian measures remains an open test case.

- In the interwar era, an expanding state assumed unprecedented powers over its citizens, metamorphosing in some countries into outright fascism.

- The history of war and genocide in the first half of the 20th century tells us that the accumulation of biopower, the technology of control and manipulation over large groups of human beings, can enable horrific crimes.

- Certainly, the techniques of surveillance available to the contemporary state can only further restrict human rights and liberties.

What will happen to the neoliberal wisdom that unbridled competition of all against all improves efficiency and brings progress?

- The virus tells us that competition is risky; cooperation could be redeeming. Collectivisation has a new life. As seen in Italy which has nationalised Alitalia and Spain has nationalised all hospitals.

- As focussed by PM Narendra Modi in keynote at WEF at Davos in 2018, that India has always believed in the theory of "Vasudev Kutumbakam" meaning "the world is one family". He also said that, "There is a lack of consensus between all of us - it happens even in families - however, the essence of a family lies in the fact that there is solidarity when facing challenges together....Global unity is paramount in 21st century".

What will happen to populism?

- Populism is a political approach that strives to appeal to ordinary people who feel that their concerns are disregarded by established elite groups.

- Populism has two core principles:
  - ➢ it must claim to speak on behalf of ordinary people
  - ➢ these ordinary people must stand in opposition to an elite establishment which stops them from fulfilling their political preferences.

- These two core principles are combined in different ways with different populist parties, leaders and movements. For example, left-wing populists' conceptions of "the people" and "the elite" generally coalesce around socioeconomic grievances,

whereas right-wing populists' conceptions of those groups generally tend to focus on socio-cultural issues such as immigration.

- The coronavirus may not knock out populism outright.
- But, surely, multilateralism is gaining important ground as more governments subscribe to the increasingly recognised belief that the right response to the pandemic is an international one.

How exploitation of labour came into spotlight?

- Globalisation and consumerism has led to the inhuman exploitation of labour. Under globalisation, such an exploitation has been labelled 'efficiency' and 'competitiveness'.
- The virus has brought the lives of labourers out into the spotlight.
- Be it the labourers working 16-hour days but unable to get paid leave or healthcare in the U.S or migrant labourers in India walking several days to go home or the wretched labour camps in West Asia.

Whether we need to travel as much as we do?

- As, noted by CEO of Mercedes-Benz, "May be we can save a few business trips now that we know that these digital tools work well".
- The virus has unveiled the potential of digitalization that can prevent unnecessary travels across global. This can also contribute to the fight against climate change.

How our idea of community and boundaries has changed?

The COVID-19 crisis has let loose contradictory forces. On the one hand everyone is confined within the tiniest spaces, but on the other, the crisis has also urged us to community action.

The risks and rewards need to be spread over a longer period of time and larger expanse of space. And that is the most consequential challenge thrown up by the pandemic.

> **What is Collectivization?**
> Collectivization is policy adopted by the Soviet government, pursued most intensively between 1929 and 1933, to transform traditional agriculture in the Soviet Union and to reduce the economic power of the prosperous peasants.
> Under collectivization the peasantry were forced to give up their individual farms and join large collective farms.

For better use: On MPLADS funds
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/for-better-use-the-hindu-editorial-on-mplads-funds/article31293067.ece

Context: MPLADs Funds.

The Union Cabinet has passed an ordinance that suspends the MPLADs (Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme) funds for two years. The MPLADs fund has been suspended till 2022.

This brings us to the questions of MPLADs fund. In this article, we will explain the below:
- What is Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADs)?
- What are the features of the scheme?
- What were the new guidelines made in MPLADs fund?
- What changes the government made in MPLADs scheme amid COVID-19 pandemic (April, 8th 2020)?
- What are the various recommendations made regarding MPLADs?
- Conclusion:

What is Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADs)?
- It was announced in December 1993 and initially came under the control of the Ministry of Rural Development. Later, in October 1994, it was transferred to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- The 1st Guidelines were issued in February 1994, covering the concept, implementation and monitoring of the Scheme.
- It is a Central Sector Scheme. The annual MPLADS fund entitlement per MP constituency is ₹5 crore.
- The **objective** of the scheme is to enable MPs to recommend works of developmental nature with emphasis on the creation of durable community assets based on the locally felt needs to be taken up in their Constituencies. Right from inception of the Scheme, durable assets of national priorities viz. drinking water, primary education, public health, sanitation and roads, etc. are being created.
- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has been responsible for the policy formulation, release of funds and prescribing monitoring mechanism for implementation of the Scheme.

What are the features of the scheme?
- The MPLADS is a Plan Scheme fully funded by Government of India. The annual MPLADS fund entitlement per MP constituency is Rs. 5 crore.
- Under the scheme, each MP has the choice to suggest to the District Collector for works to the tune of Rs.5 Crores per annum to be taken up in his/her constituency.
- The **Rajya Sabha Members of Parliament** can recommend works in one or more districts in the State from where he/she has been elected.
- The **Nominated Members** of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha may select any one or more Districts from any one State in the Country for implementation of their choice of work under the scheme.
- **Development of Areas inhabited by Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe:** There is a greater need to develop areas inhabited by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in order to give special attention for the infrastructure development of such areas. M.Ps are to recommend every year, works costing at

least 15 per cent of the MPLADS entitlement for the year for areas inhabited by Scheduled Caste population and 7.5 per cent for areas inhabited by S.T. population

- **Natural & Man-made Calamities:** MPLADS works can also be implemented in the areas prone to or affected by the calamities like floods, cyclone, Tsunami, earthquake, hailstorm, avalanche, cloud burst, pest attack, landslides, tornado, drought, fire, chemical, biological and radiological hazards.
- **Release of Funds:**
    - ➢ Funds are released in the form of grants in-aid directly to the district authorities.
    - ➢ The funds released under the scheme are non-lapsable.
    - ➢ The liability of funds not released in a particular year is carried forward to the subsequent years, subject to eligibility.
- **Execution of works:** The MPs have a recommendatory role under the scheme. They recommend their choice of works to the concerned district authorities who implement these works by following the established procedures of the concerned state government. The district authority is empowered to examine the eligibility of works sanction funds and select the implementing agencies, prioritise works, supervise overall execution, and monitor the scheme at the ground level.

What were the new guidelines made in MPLADs fund?

As per the amendments to MPLADS guidelines (March 24th, 2020), MPs can now utilise funds under MPLADS for the following:

- Infra-Red thermometers (Non-contact) to enable doctors and medical personnel to record and track a person's temperature.
- Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) Kits to keep the medical personnel well-protected and enable them to function efficiently by minimising the risk of transmission.
- Thermal imaging scanners or cameras for railway stations, airports and other points of entry which allow detecting of temperature from a safe distance.
- CORONA testing kits approved by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- ICU Ventilator and Isolation/ Quarantine Wards within their approved facilities.
- Face masks, gloves and sanitisers for medical personnel.
- Any other medical equipment recommended by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for prevention, control and treatment of COVID-19.

What changes the government made in MPLADs scheme amid COVID-19 pandemic (April 8th, 2020)?

- The Union Cabinet has approved a 30% cut in the salaries of all Members of Parliament and a two-year suspension of the MP Local Area Development (MPLAD) scheme so that the amount saved can go to the Consolidated Fund of India to fight COVID-19.
- In this regard, it approved an ordinance to amend the Salaries, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament Act, 1954, to cut the salaries of MPs by 30%.
- Now, the consolidated amount of MPLAD Funds for 2 years Rs 7,900 crores will go to Consolidated Fund of India.
- The move is seen as a part of government's efforts to address the challenges in the fight against COVID-19. The fund will be used for purchase of equipments for government hospitals and dispensaries, medical testing and screening of patients and also setting up other related facilities.

What are the various recommendations made regarding MPLADs?

Supreme Court:
- The Supreme Court, while declining to strike down the scheme, called for a robust accountability regime.
- The SC said, "The court can strike down a law or scheme only on the basis of its vires or unconstitutionality but not on the basis of its viability. When a regime of accountability is available in the scheme, it is not proper for the court to strike it down, unless it violates any constitutional principle."

CAG: The CAG has flagged instances of financial mismanagement and inflation of amounts spent. The important recommendations made in 2011 are:
- The details of all works executed or in progress should be uploaded after proper data validation. The data uploaded should be periodically reconciled with the works completion reports received from the DAs.
- The ministry should establish a reliable system of data capture of releases, actual expenditure, unspent balances, works sanctioned, works completed etc and its consolidation at different levels.
- The ministry may strengthen its internal controls as well as monitoring mechanism and establish a system responsive to the known shortcomings.
- The DAs should regularly inspect MPLADS works under progress along with the MP concerned and maintain an inspection register to record the findings. All works with an estimated cost of Rs 5 lakh and above should be inspected by the DA.
- A robust and regular internal audit system should be immediately put in place both at ministry and at the state level.

Conclusion:
Since the entire exercise is about ensuring that Indians survive, the development aspect of the MPLADS can be given a holiday for two years. After all, people need to be alive and healthy to enjoy whatever facility is being provided. Therefore, a strong message can be sent to the nation by foregoing this amount.

In fact, this should be the initial step and going forward, one can think of several other costs being done away with, for example travel for MPs (today everyone is managing via the Cloud and even meetings with other country heads can be conducted on the web), entertainment, allowances for services, security (the culture of 10 cars accompanying a secretary or MP to the airport) etc.

A double whammy for India-Gulf economic ties
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/a-double-whammy-for-india-gulf-
economic-ties/article31302542.ece

Context: India and Gulf relations amid COVID-19.

The Gulf region is at the epicentre of a perfect storm with the COVID-19 pandemic and an oil price meltdown. Given India's vital relations with the eight Gulf countries, the situation's impact on bilateral economic ties needs to be anticipated and managed.

This brings us to the questions of India and Gulf countries economic ties. In this article, we will explain the below:
- What is the impact on global oil sector amid COVID-19?
- What is the response from OPEC countries?
- What is Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)?
- What is OPEC+?
- What does IEA has to say about the COVID-19 crisis?
- What are important aspects of India-Gulf relations?
- What can be the impacts of COVID-19 on India's expatriate community in gulf?
- What is way forward?

What is the impact on global oil sector amid COVID-19?
- According to a Goldman Sachs report published on March 30, COVID-19 had lowered the world crude consumption by 28 million bpd (Barrels per Day)
- Oil prices fell sharply Monday morning, as the outbreak continues to crush global demand for crude.
- International benchmark Brent crude traded at $22.68 a barrel, down more than 9%, while U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) stood at $20.01, almost 7% lower.
- Brent futures fell by 55% during March to their lowest level in 18 years on March 30.
- Goldman Sachs noted that, "If pipelines get clogged up as refineries shut down, inventories cannot build, reducing the cushion and creating a very quick risk reversal towards oil shortages."
- This would in turn cause an oil shortage, pushing prices above the Wall Street bank's $55 a barrel target for 2021.

What is the response from OPEC countries?
The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and other crude producers (OPEC+), however, failed to reach a production-curtailing strategy since Saudi Arabia and Russia holds different viewoints. Saudi Arabia and Russia are only beginning to ramp up their oil output in a fight over market share.

What is Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)?
- The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is a permanent, intergovernmental Organization, created at the Baghdad Conference in 1960, by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela.
- OPEC had its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, in the first five years of its existence. This was moved to Vienna, Austria in 1965.
- **OPEC's objective** is to co-ordinate and unify petroleum policies among Member Countries, in order to secure fair and stable prices for petroleum producers; an

efficient, economic and regular supply of petroleum to consuming nations; and a fair return on capital to those investing in the industry.

OPEC Membership, 2019
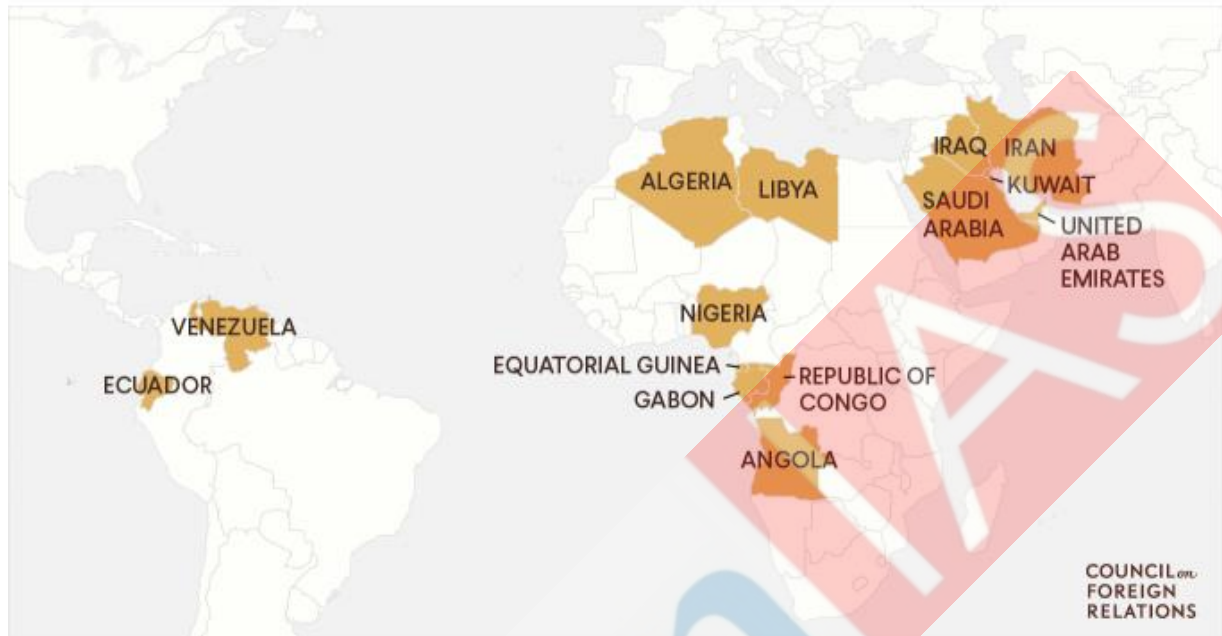
What is OPEC+?

- Opec+ refers to the alliance of crude producers, who have been undertaking corrections in supply in the oil markets since 2017.
- OPEC plus countries include OPEC Countries plus Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Brunei, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Oman, Russia, South Sudan and Sudan.
- The Opec and non-Opec producers first formed the alliance at a historic meeting in Algiers in 2016.
- The aim was to undertake production restrictions to help resuscitate a flailing market.

OPEC and OPEC+ Member Nations, 2019
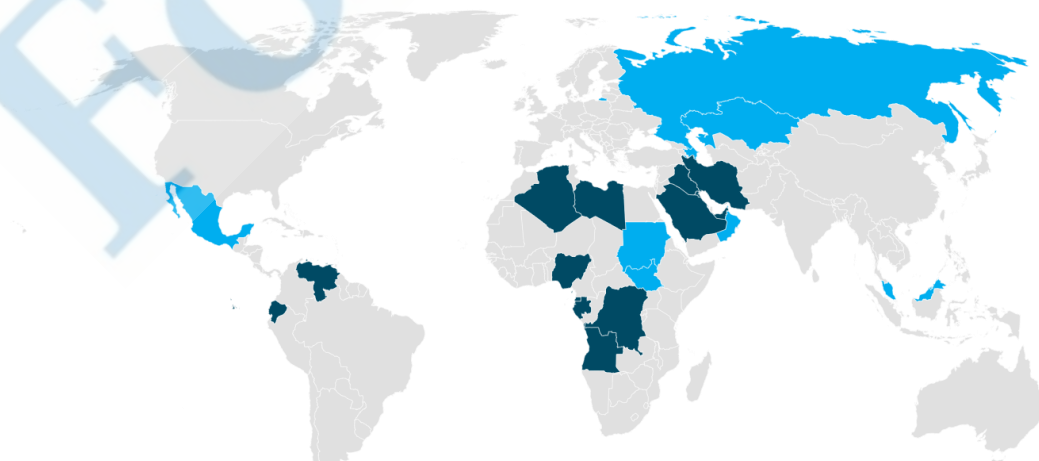
What does IEA has to say about the COVID-19 crisis?

- In a joint statement, both OPEC and IEA expressed deep concerns about the coronavirus (COVID-19), which is already a grave and unprecedented global health crisis with potentially far-reaching economic and social consequences.
- It has been noted that if current market conditions continue, developing countries income from oil and gas will fall by 50% to 85% in 2020, reaching the lowest levels in more than two decades.
- The economic outlook for the Gulf has indeed deteriorated, with Saudi Arabia's fiscal deficit expected to cross 8% in 2020.
- COVID-19 will induce ression this year and even if starts improving in 2021, it would be slow and less energy intensive.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC):

- The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a political and economic alliance of six countries in the Arabian Peninsula: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.
- Established in 1981, the GCC promotes economic, security, cultural and social cooperation between the six states and holds a summit every year to discuss cooperation and regional affairs.
- Due to their geographic proximity, similar political systems and common sociocultural stances, the immediate goal was for these countries to protect themselves from threats after the Iran-Iraq War.
- There is still no India–GCC Free Trade Agreement, although a framework agreement on economic cooperation was signed in August 2004.

What are important aspects of India-Gulf relations?

The important aspects of India's economic ties with the Gulf states are economic symbiosis and India's expatriate community.

Economic Symbiosis:

- India is dependent on the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states for 42 per cent of its overall oil imports; three of the top five oil suppliers to India are Gulf states, with Saudi Arabia, the largest, providing 20 per cent of India's total oil imports.
- Qatar is also India's dominant supplier of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). Any disruption in energy imports from the Gulf will have serious implications for India's economic growth.

International Energy Agency (IEA):

- The International Energy Agency (IEA) is an autonomous organisation which works to ensure reliable, affordable and clean energy.
- It was established in the wake of 1973 (set up in 1974) oil crisis after the OPEC cartel had shocked the world with a steep increase in oil prices.
- It is headquartered in Paris, France
- The IEA has four main areas of focus, i.e. 4Es:
  - ➢ Energy security,
  - ➢ Economic development,
  - ➢ Environmental awareness and
  - ➢ Engagement worldwide.
- India became an associate member of the International Energy Agency in 2017.
- Mexico officially became the International Energy Agency's 30th member country in February 2018, and its first member in Latin America.

- The GCC is India's largest regional-bloc trading partner, which accounted for $164 billion of trade in 2018–19. This is higher than both India–ASEAN trade ($97 billion) and India–EU trade ($115 billion) in 2017-18.
- Two of India's top five trading partners, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, are from the Gulf.

India's expatriate community:
- Indian nationals make up the Gulf states' largest expatriate community, with an estimated 7.6 million Indian nationals living and working in the region; especially in Saudi Arabia (2.8 million) and the UAE (2.6 million).
- Indians number more than the local population in the UAE and Qatar.
- The GCC also provided nearly $40 billion in foreign-exchange remittances from Indian expatriates, accounting for over 54 per cent of India's total.

What can be the impacts of COVID-19 on India's expatriate community in gulf?
- Oil is a cyclic commodity and the Gulf producers have long evolved a pattern to handle its periodic lows. Gulf countries usually transfer the burden on to the last person in line, i.e, the Asian expatriate.
- The fresh recruitment stops, salaries are either lowered or stalled, taxes raised and localisation drives launched. The net result is that a large number of expatriates return to their homes.
- In case the pandemic worsens in the lower Gulf, panic-stricken, wage-deprived Indians may prefer to come back. This may result into another exodus, with a lot more complications as a result of pandemic.
- Apart from creating a logistical nightmare of transporting millions of expatriates back, they would need to be resettled and re-employed.

What is way forward?
- The traditional relations with Gulf countries are currently diversifying into security and defence cooperation and India today has a strong and growing stake in Gulf stability. This includes 'strategic partnerships' with Gulf countries on issues such as counter-terrorism, money laundering, cyber security, organised crime, human trafficking and anti-piracy.
- All the Gulf states are members of the Indian Navy-conceived Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), which was established in 2008 as a biennial forum for navy chiefs of the Indian Ocean littoral.
- India's most notable defence cooperation has been with Oman.
- India has also played an active role in enhancing the stability and security of the Gulf's sea lanes through its participation in anti-piracy patrols off the coast of Somalia.
- In the times of pandemic, India needs to make some contingency plans in consultation with the individual countries to contain the virus and oil shocks.
- It should do whatever it takes to enhance their capacity to handle COVID-19 cases among the Indian expatriates.
- In longer run, both sides could begin with cooperation in healthcare and gradually extend outward towards pharmaceutical research and production, petrochemical complexes, building infrastructure in India and in third countries, agriculture, education and skilling.
- As well as concentrating on the economic activities in bilateral free zones created along our Arabian Sea coast which may eventually lead to an India-Gulf Cooperation Council Free Trade Area.

Addressing domestic violence: A forgotten agenda while locking India down
Source: https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/addressing-domestic-violence-a-forgotten-agenda-while-locking-india-down-64301/

Context: Rise in domestic violence cases amid lockdown.

The National Commission for Women (NCW), which receives complaints of domestic violence from across the country, has recorded more than twofold rise in gender-based violence in the national Coronavirus lockdown period. From March 24 till April 1, 257 complaints related to various offences against women were received.

This brings us to the questions of domestic violence in India. In this article, we will explain the below:
- What is domestic violence?
- What does the Indian law says about domestic violence?
- What is the recent statistics related to domestic violence?
- What is India's position in Global gender equality?
- What are the measures taken by NCW to tackle the rise in cases of domestic violence?
- Conclusion

What is domestic violence?
- According to WHO, Intimate partner violence which is reffered as domestic violence is one of the most common forms of violence against women and includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and controlling behaviours by an intimate partner.
- Domestic violence can also encompass child or elder abuse, or abuse by any member of a household.
- The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, defines "Domestic Violence" for the first time in Indian law. It is a comprehensive definition and captures women's experience of abuse and includes not only physical violence but also other forms of violence such as emotional / verbal, sexual, and economic abuse. It is based on definitions in international law such as the UN Declaration on Violence Against Women and a Model Code.
- The Act recognizes domestic violence as a human rights violation. It recognizes a woman's right to live in a violence-free home. To realize this right, the Act recognizes a woman's right to residence and her right to obtain protection orders under the law.

What does the Indian law says about domestic violence?

There are three laws in place in India that deal directly with domestic violence: The Protection of

> **BOX 1. FORMS OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (2)**
>
> IPV refers to any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship. Examples of types of behaviour are listed below.
>
> **Acts of physical violence**, such as slapping, hitting, kicking and beating.
>
> **Sexual violence**, including forced sexual intercourse and other forms of sexual coercion.
>
> **Emotional (psychological) abuse**, such as insults, belittling, constant humiliation, intimidation (e.g. destroying things), threats of harm, threats to take away children.
>
> **Controlling behaviours**, including isolating a person from family and friends; monitoring their movements; and restricting access to financial resources, employment, education or medical care.

Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005; The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 And Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code.

- **The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005** is a civil law that provides protection to women in a household, from men in the household. This law not only protects women who are married to men but it also protects women who are in live-in relationships, as well as family members including mothers, grandmothers, etc. Under this law, women can seek protection against domestic violence, financial compensation, the right to live in their shared household, and they can get maintenance from their abuser in case they are living apart.
- **Dowry Prohibition Act:** This is a criminal law that punishes the taking and giving of dowry. Under this law, if someone takes, gives or even demands dowry, they can be imprisoned for 6 months or they can be fined upto Rs 5,000.
- **Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code** (Husband or relative of husband of a woman subjecting her to cruelty). This is a criminal law, which applies to husbands or relatives of husbands who are cruel to women. Cruelty refers to any conduct that drives a woman to suicide or causes grave injury to her life or health – including mental health – and also includes harassment in the name of dowry. If convicted, people can be sent to jail for up to 3 years under this law.

What is the recent statistics related to domestic violence?
- According to the Crime in India Report 2018, published by the National Crimes Research Bureau (NCRB), every 1.7 minutes a crime was recorded against women in India, every 16 minutes a rape was committed and every 4.4 minutes a girl is subjected to domestic violence.
- The crime rate per lakh women population was 58.8 in 2018 in comparison to 57.9 in 2017.
- Domestic violence topped in the category of violence against women in 2018.
- The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 2015-16 highlighted that 30% women in India in the age group of 15-49 experienced physical violence since the age of 15.
- The NFHS-4 report suggested that among married women experiencing physical, sexual or emotional violence, an alarming 83% claimed that their husbands were the main perpetrators of such forms of abuse, followed by abuse from the mothers (56%), fathers 33% and siblings 27% of the husbands.
- The major crimes reported by women in India are cruelty by husband or relatives 32.6%, assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty is 25%, kidnapping and abductions 19% and rape 11.5%.

What is India's position in Global gender equality?
- According to UN, gender equality is a fundamental human right and a much-needed foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.
- The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 seeks to "eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women in the public and private spheres, and to undertake reforms to give them the same rights to economic resources and access to property by 2030".
- According to the 2020 Best Countries report, people around the world still believe that Arab nations, as well as other countries such as India and South Korea, have a long way to go.
- India is the fourth worst country (after United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Saudi Arabia) for gender equality (ranked by perception).

What are the measures taken by NCW to tackle the rise in cases of domestic violence?

- The National Commission for Women (NCW) launched a WhatsApp number on Friday to report cases of domestic violence, which have seen a rise during the coronavirus lockdown period.
- The Whatsapp Number is in addition to the online complaint links and emails which are already operational.

> **National Commission for Women:**
> The National Commission for Women was set up as statutory body in January 1992 under the National Commission for Women Act, 1990 to :
> - review the Constitutional and Legal safeguards for women ;
> - recommend remedial legislative measures ;
> - facilitate redressal of grievances and
> - advise the Government on all policy matters affecting women.

- NCW is looking forward to explore the possibility of providing counselling through online and phones services. Counselling in cases of complaints received is also important & all state commissions for women will nominate counsellors.
- NCW is moving ahead to fully utilise 181 women helpline and shelter homes, integrate with One Stop Centres (Sakhi Centres) for addressing grievance and distress.

> **Sakhi Centres:**
> - One Stop Centre(OSC) scheme, popularly known as Sakhi Centres, is being implemented across the country since 1st April 2015.
> - As per the OSC Scheme, OSCs are required to facilitate women affected by violence with a range of integrated services under one roof including police facilitation, medical aid, legal aid and legal counselling, psycho-social counseling and temporary shelter, and are to be located within 2 kms radius of the hospitals or medical facilities.

Conclusion:

It has been seen that violence against women tends to increase during every type of emergency, including epidemics. While the Indian government has made significant efforts in reducing the largely unchecked epidemic of violence against women, but there is still a long way to go.

The present pandemic has unviled the deep rooted psychology of male dominance, resulitng in rise of the domestic violence cases. The true numbers are difficult to imagine considering the various other factors in under-reporting of such cases.

COVID-19 and the crumbling world order
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/covid-19-and-the-crumbling-world-order/article31324259.ece

Context: COVID-19 and the World Order

The lethal combination of an interconnected world and a deadly virus without a cure is taking humanity into unfamiliar circumstances. COVID-19 thus will fundamentally transform the world order, its balance of power, traditional conceptions of national security and the future of globalisation.

This brings us to the questions of impact of COVID-19 on world order. In this article, we will explain the below:
- How COVID-19 is crumbling the world order?
- How China is overcoming the crisis of COVID-19?
- How is the world moving away from neo-liberalism?
- How COVID-19 would lead to new-age racism?
- Conclusion

How COVID-19 is crumbling the world order?
- World order is an international-relations term describing the distribution of power among world powers.
- The phrase "new world order" was used in the period toward the end of the First World War in relation to Woodrow Wilson's vision for international peace. Wilson called for a League of Nations to prevent aggression and conflict.
- The phrase was used sparingly at the end of World War II when describing the plans for the United Nations and the Bretton Woods system partly because of its negative associations with the failed League of Nations. However, many commentators have applied the term retroactively to the order put in place by the World War II victors as a "new world order."
- The contemporary global order, whatever remains of the institutions created by the victors of World War II, was a hegemonic exercise meant to deal with isolated political and military crises and not serve humanity at large.
- COVID-19 has exposed the weaknesses of the institutions created in the wake of contemporary world order. Examples:
  1. **UNSC** met last week after so long and no conclusion was drawn mainly due to deepening divide between USA and China on various issues starting from question of naming the virus.
  2. Dormancy of regional institutions like **SAARC.** Despite some collective efforts, the SAARC countries still are not able to take concrete steps to contain pandemic collectively. Pakistan stayed away from the regional trade officials' video conference on Covid-19 in april. Earlier Pakistan wasn't represented by the head of the state or government when SAARC nations meeting was called by Indian Prime Minister.
  3. **European Union (EU)** failed in the regional cooperation and members preferred to go for self-help. For example, according to a Al Jazeera report, "in contrast to China, Italy's partners in the European Union (EU) earlier this month refused Rome's requests for help with medical supplies as they looked to stockpile face masks and other equipment to help their own citizens."

4. The **WHO** lacked leadership and went easy on China initially. Had China more openly shared its experiences and invited the world's leading public health officials to Wuhan during the very first week of the outbreak, countries around the world could have been better prepared to fight the onslaught. And China, probably, wouldn't have had to face so many deaths.

5. **IMF:** For the first time in six decades, Iran has requested a loan from the IMF to fight the coronavirus outbreak. US sanctions have isolated the country from the global financial system. However, granting $5 billion demand of Iran would undermine Trump's maximum-pressure-on-Iran policy. The United States sits on the IMF's decision-making board. If the organization agrees to the loan, the US might veto it. Even if the IMF decision-making body responds positively to Iran's application, there would be other technical obstacles before any money can flow.

- This indicates that global institutions are not represented by all nations and is dominated by few great powers, and focuses on high-security issues. Hence, the global institutional architecture of the 1940s cannot help humanity face the challenges of the 2020s.

- The extent of international cooperation has remained weak and in fact the actions undertaken on a unilateral basis have so far proved to be more effective. That trend is likely to continue where the idea of international and regional allies proved to be a myth.

- The Sustainable Development Goals will need to be modified to set priorities. Questioning the effectiveness of international and regional organisations will be heightened.

How China is overcoming the crisis of COVID-19?
- The industrial production in China is recovering. With decline in oil prices, it will further increase.
- It is sending medical supplies to Europe, Korea, Japan and Pakistan.
- Initially having shortage of medical kits and suits, China now produces three million test kits and 120 million masks daily.
- The companies that were directly affected because of Covid-19, taxes have been waived off and for others there is a sharp income tax cut. They are putting more money into the market to facilitate liquidity.
- Enhancing the role of private sector in fight against COVID-19. Jack Ma Foundation and Alibaba Foundation are preparing for a joint donation of 2 million masks, 150,000 test kits, 20,000 sets of protective gear and 20,000 face shields to Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand.

How is the world moving away from neo-liberalism?
- Globalization is generally recognized as the fading or complete disappearance of economic, social, and cultural borders between nation-states. However, amid pandemic neolibeal economic globalisation has taken a back seat and the global economy is heading towards

> **Neo-liberalism:**
> - Neo-liberalism is the 20th-century resurgence of 19th-century ideas associated with laissez-faire (no government intervention) economic liberalism and free market capitalism.
> - It is generally associated with policies of economic liberalization including privatization, deregulation, globalization, free trade, austerity, and reductions in government spending in order to increase the role of the private sector in the economy and society.

a recession.
- Further, with closing of borders, self-help in the countries, localisation is increasing. This pushes back the successes of neoliberal globalisation.
- Increase in state's intervention to curb supply side bottlenecks and providing emergency reserves amid lockdowns. This increases protectionist tendencies fuelled by hyper-nationalism or belief in the superiority of one's nation.

How COVID-19 would lead to new-age racism?
- There are incidents of a new form of discrimination against migrants and refugees in almost all parts of the world.
- According to recent report by the Intensive Care National Audit and Research Center, 35% of patients in UK were non-white, nearly triple the 13% proportion in the UK population as a whole. In addition to this, 28% of those of the most serious cases were either Asian or black.
- Racism targeted at Asians and Asian Americans has grown since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus. According to a recent study in USA, Asian and African Americans were more likely to experience at least one form of discrimination and unfair treatment due to other people thinking they might have the coronavirus, compared to other racial and ethnic groups.
- Imposition of phyto-sanitary measures by advanced states on products emanating from the less developed countries.
- The lockdowns and travel restrictions across borders. These precautions may further legitimise conservative countries away from modernisation and development.
- Social distancing in India leading to various undesirable social practices.
- North-eastern people in India face wrath of the spread because of their mongoloid facial features. For example, a Manipuri woman in Delhi was called 'Corona virus.
- Even the communities are discriminating and boycotting those put under Quarantine.

Conclusion:
Amidst the socio-economic disruptions caused by COVID-19, the human race is simultaneously also learning to adapt to the newly emerging systems and processes. The battle against COVID-19 is similar to the one mentioned in Indian mythological story of 'Samudra Manthan' or the 'churn of the ocean of milk'. The churn was a battle fought between the gods and the devils in order to obtain 'Amrita' – the nectar of immortal life. The world today is facing the COVID-19 devil and all humans are fighting to protect our lives and ensure the well-being of the human race.
However in the process, the humanity is also moving towards protectionism, with each country stocking for them. As Former National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon rightly warns, "we are headed for a poorer, meaner and smaller world."

We have miles of roadblocks to remove before we sleep
Source: https://www.livemint.com/opinion/columns/we-have-miles-of-roadblocks-to-remove-before-we-sleep-11586796384892.html

Context: Exposure of roadblocks in various sectors due to COVID crisis.

There are many effects of COVID-19 that we all can see. But there are many other effects that weren't visible but to save lives, these regulatory roadblocks that were present in the country are now visible.

This brings to the question of what these roadblocks are and what are their impacts on the people of India. In this article, we will explain the following:

- ❖ What is the status of import duties on medical equipments in India?
- ❖ What are the impacts of import duties on medical equipments on domestic consumers?
- ❖ What has government announced recently regarding such import duties?
- ❖ How government regulations affect approvals of testing kits and license for COVID-19 tests?
- ❖ How Rules of APMCs impacts the farmers?
- ❖ Way forward
- ❖ Conclusion

What is the status of import duties on medical equipments in India?
- India has a list of import duties (custom duties plus cesses plus special tariffs) on almost every product.
- 80-90% of the country's requirements in the medical devices sector are imported.
- The top five countries India imports medical devices from are the US, Germany, Singapore, China and the Netherlands.
- 5% health cess over and above 7.5% custom duty on import of medical equipment was announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in February, 2020.
- The total duty varies between 11% and 22%, depending on the product.
- This makes foreign-manufactured goods expensive and domestic goods become cheaper.

What are the impacts of import duties on medical equipments on domestic consumers?
- The visible effect of customs duty is to put curbs on foreign suppliers and promote domestic manufacturing giving a boost to Make in India campaign as well.
- The unseen effect of import duty is that the customer has to pay higher prices to a domestic producer leaving less money in his pocket.
- What a customer can buy at a cheaper price (foreign manufactured goods) now buys at higher price (domestic manufactured goods). Thus increased cost due to import duty is borne by the domestic consumer indirectly.
- Second unseen effect includes the delays in collection of these duties by the government.
- Other unseen effects are the multiple regulatory procedures and paperwork to release these goods from the ports which leads to delay in their reach to end consumers.

- These unseen effects became visible due to shortage of testing kits amid COVID-19 pandemic and the increased cost was imposed on the sick Indians.

What has government announced recently regarding such import duties?

- Therefore, the government has exempted imports of Personal protection equipment (PPE), Covid 19 test kits, ventilators, face masks and surgical masks from basic customs duty and Health cess, with immediate effect till September 30, 2020.
- Input materials required for making these products locally, that may have to be imported, have also been exempted from basic customs duty and cess.
- There should be permanent removal of these duties post September 30, as it will

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Custom Duty:

- Customs Duty refers to the tax imposed on the goods when they are transported across the international borders.
- The objective behind levying customs duty is to safeguard each nation's economy, jobs, environment, residents, etc., by regulating the movement of goods, especially prohibited and restrictive goods, in and out of any country.

Types of custom duties:

- **Countervailing Duty (CVD):** This duty is imposed by the Central Government when a country is paying the subsidy to the exporters who are exporting goods to India. It is imposed in order to counter the negative impact of import subsidies to protect domestic producers.
- **Protective Duty:** To make sure that no harm is caused to the domestic industries of India, a safeguard duty is imposed to safeguard the interest of our local domestic industries. It is calculated on the basis of loss suffered by our local industries.
- **Anti-dumping Duty:** Often, large manufacturer from abroad may export goods at very low prices compared to prices in the domestic market. Such dumping may be with intention to cripple domestic industry or to dispose of their excess stock. This is called 'dumping'. Hence, Central government can impose anti-dumping duty up to margin of dumping on such articles, if the goods are being sold at less than its normal value. Anti dumping action can be taken only when there is an Indian industry producing 'like articles'.

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give rise to competitive business environment to the Indian firms and Indians will pay less for the medical equipments.

How government regulations affect approvals of testing kits and license for COVID-19 tests?

- COVID-19 testing Kits manufactured in India now needs National Institute of Virology validation and then apply to Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) for manufacturing licence.
- Earlier, COVID-19 testing kits should be USFDA approved or European CE certified or both.
- Still, several regulations are there for getting both approval and license.
- Therefore, there is a challenge to mass testing in India as there are just 236 laboratories (as on 13th april)–166 government and 70 private—that have been approved by ICMR for covid-19 testing.
- The regulations involved in getting a clearance for testing kit should be minimised to save lives amid the crisis.

How Rules of APMCs impacts the farmers?

- Under APMC Act, markets are divided geographically into different regions and insist farmers to sell to a mandi in their region only.
- The farmers do not receive just prices for their produce despite the end consumer paying higher price for the same produce.
- Most of the money goes to the middlemen who own the license of the Mandi.
- The visible effect here is that farmers are allotted mandis and their transactions can be controlled by the state, thereby protecting their interests.

> **APMC (Agricultural Produce Market Committee) under APMC Model Act 2003:**
> - A marketing board established by a state government in India.
> - Two principles: 1. Ensure that farmers are not exploited by intermediaries (or money lenders. 2. All food produce should first be brought to a market yard (or Mandi) and then sold through auction.
> - Each state geographically divides the state.
> - Markets (mandis) are established at different places within the state.
> - Farmers are required to sell their produce via auction at the mandi in their region.
> - Traders require a license to operate within a mandi.
> - Wholesale and retail traders (e.g. shopping mall owners) and food processing companies cannot buy produce directly from a farmer.

- The unseen effect is they are severely under paid. Also, the farmers are denied big market for their goods, and consumers and retailers are denied the choice of where they buy their vegetables.
- Other unseen effect is the non-development of warehousing and cold storage systems that are integrated with global supply chains.
- Under the crisis of COVID-19, the Prime Minister recommended that all chief ministers suspend the provisions of their respective APMC statutes for three months.
- This will allow farmers to sell their harvest from multiple locations and directly to any buyer. Suspension of APMC rules will allow farmers to sell directly to consumers, via apps or otherwise, at their doorstep. It will also allow farmers to sell crops directly to bulk buyers, processors, and big retailers without a licence or following any registration process.
- However, as agriculture is state subject, state governments will need to allow it.
- APMC mandi system should be completely abolished because it denies choice access to food to both farmers and consumers.

Way Forward: Since many states have not implemented APMC Act, 2003, Agriculture Ministry has come up with a new model Agricultural Produce and Livestock Marketing (promotion and facilitation) Act, 2017 (APLMA, 2017). Some features are:

- Each state will be a one single market instead of earlier division of state into different markets.
- Single-point levy of market fee across a State.
- Single license for agriculture produce as well as livestock. And licence will be given by Director of agriculture marketing and not APMC.
- To end monopoly of APMC, as it will not have regulatory power and will act as a market only.
- Promotion of National Agriculture Market through inter-state trading license.

Conclusion

India was among the last major countries to experience an outbreak of Covid-19. So while it has had a good head start in preparing itself to face the challenge, the next couple of weeks will prove crucial in its battle against the invisible enemy. India in a fight against COVID-19 is taking all measures, including 21 day lockdown and further extending to May 3, travel restrictions at large, providing essential supplies to citizens. Testing has increased rapidly. Several preventive measures are being taken by Central as well as respective state governments to prevent the further increase the cases.

There will be major challenges to overcome post the pandemic. COVID-19 crisis also provides opportunities. Countries may witness better healthcare – both management and facilities. New social and behavioural norms – "social distancing", "wearing masks", "maintaining hygiene", etc., are the new normal, and countries have to adjust with such new normal amid the pandemic. Surely, vaccines and proper medicines to tackle the COVID-19 will be invented. However, there is no place of complacency.

Countries have to be prepared to tackle another such shock in future. At the same time, countries shall undertake reform to strengthen the digital economy and e-commerce not only to manage the pandemic but also to facilitate trade. Trade barriers should not be allowed to happen in trade in goods and services particularly those feed the health science. Also, to sustain the measures taken to combat the crisis should be maintained if they are for the welfare of the citizens of the nation.

Economic Liberalisation and its faults
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/economic-liberalisation-and-its-faults/article31341924.ece

Context: Private sector led economic growth and its impact on countries

With Economic Liberalisation in India in 1991, foreign manufactured goods start entering the country. The concept of Self-Reliance was compromised and domestic manufacturing was not promoted and India relied heavily on imports. This has exposed India to the negative impacts of private sector led economic growth when country is fighting a deadly disease.

This brings us to the question of faults that were created by Economic Liberalisation. In this article, we will explain the following:

- What is Economic Liberalisation in India?
- How development of global supply chains impacted the world?
- How COVID-19 has exposed issues of private sector led economic growth?
- How Economic liberalisation has impacted the government and manufacturing capacity in India?
- Conclusion

What is Economic Liberalisation in India?

- New Economic Strategy of 1991 give rise to LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation) reforms in India.
- Liberalisation of the Indian industry has taken place with respect to abolishing license requirements in most of the industries across the country. Today, only 5 industries require a license (Distillation and brewing of alcoholic drinks; Cigars and cigarettes of tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes; Electronic aerospace and Defence equipment: all types; Industrial explosives including detonating fuses, Safety Fuses, gun powder, nitrocellulose and matches; and Hazardous chemicals).
- Removal of restrictions on the movement of goods and services across the country, freedom in fixing the prices of goods and services, reduction in tax rates, simplification of procedures for imports and exports and easier paths to attract foreign capital and technology in India.

> **Economic Liberalisation:**
> - Economic liberalisation is relaxing the government regulations in a country to allow the private sector companies to operate business transactions with comparatively fewer restrictions.
> - With reference to the developing countries, this term denotes to opening of economic borders to multinationals and foreign investments.

How development of global supply chains impacted the world?

- With globalisation, developed countries attracted by the cheap labour and raw materials started shifting their production plants to developing countries.
- Today, a single finished product often results from manufacturing and assembly in multiple countries, with each step in the process adding value to the end product.
- The value addition was done by a few developing countries, the major one being China.

- China became the global manufacturing hub due to abundance of cheap Chinese labour that brings down the production costs, strong business ecosystem, lack of regulatory compliance, low taxes and duties, and competitive currency practices.
- In health sector, China became global supplier of active pharmaceutical ingredients (API), personal protective equipment (PPE), and medical devices diagnostics.

How COVID-19 has exposed issues of private sector led economic growth?

- Loss of manufacturing base at home country has compromised the effective response against COVID-19 due to shortage of life-saving equipments.
- Countries are now asking their domestic manufacturers to produce medical devices and equipments to fight the pandemic as imports are restricted due to lockdowns all over the world.
- UK Prime Minister has called for National efforts for ventilator production. Carmakers Ford, Honda, Rolls Royce have been asked to make health equipments like ventilators.
- USA has invoked Defence Production Act, 1950. Under the act, The White House has asked companies to ramp up production of protective gear needed by health professionals on the front lines of the crisis as there is huge shortage. Companies like General Electric, General Motors, 3M have been asked to ramp up their production.
- Spain has nationalised all its private hospitals and has declared state of national emergency due to wide spread of COVID-19.
- On the other hand, Chinese billionaire Jack Ma sent 5.4 million face masks, 1.08 million detection tests kits, 40,000 sets of protective clothing and 60,000 protective face shields to the U.S. He also donated supplies to Japan, South Korea, Italy, Spain and Iran.
- This has exposed over dependence of countries on imports of essential goods.
- Shifting of production facilities in other countries may lead to gain in private company's profits but it compromises requirements of a nation in situations like this disease outbreak.

How Economic liberalisation has impacted the government and manufacturing capacity in India?

- With LPG reforms of 1990-91, License Raj came to an end in India. Through License Raj system government used to plan everything and allocate the proper resources but instead it increased corruption rate and frauds that lead to decrease in growth rate.
- With removal of License Raj, government now do not ask manufacturers any information regarding their production which is crucial to make some policy decisions.
- Due to this government took weeks and several meetings to gather information about stocks and the production capacity of pharmaceutical companies in the wake of COVID-19.
- Similarly, it became difficult to gather data on India's production capacity of PPE, medical devices and diagnostics. The only government data available in the public domain is with regard to the production of vaccines.
- Private sector with the aim of enhancing profits goes for imports of cheap raw materials. According to a report of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), nearly 70% of India's API (Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients) import is from China, though India is key supplier of generic medicines to the world market.

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> **Confederation of Indian Industry (CII):**
> - CII is a non-government, not-for-profit, industry-led and industry-managed organization, playing a proactive role in India's development process.
> - It was founded in 1895.
> - The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) works to create and sustain an environment conducive to the development of India, partnering industry, Government, and civil society, through advisory and consultative processes.

- The Union government announced the constitution of a committee under the chairmanship of Eshwara Reddy, Joint Drugs Controller, Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) in March to address the issue of drug security in the country. It also announced a package to revive the API industry in the country.

> **Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO):**
> - It is the Central Drug Authority for discharging functions assigned to the Central Government under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.
> - Major functions of CDSCO:
>   - Regulatory control over the import of drugs,
>   - approval of new drugs and clinical trials,
>   - meetings of Drugs Consultative Committee (DCC) and Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB),
>   - approval of certain licenses as Central License Approving Authority is exercised by the CDSCO headquarters.

- Dependency on imports of chemical components like Reagent which is used in COVID-19 testing has led to expensive test costing Rs 4,500 per test. With huge population of 1.33 billion, affordable testing is what we want.
- Pune-based Mylab has recently got commercial approval by the Indian FDA/Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) for an affordable corona virus testing kit. These kits are expected to be priced approximately at Rs 1,200.
- Domestic manufacturing of chemicals and other medical devices will give advantages of low cost of manufacturing, the companies would be able to save on the freight charges, import duties and other incentives offered by the government like exemption from central sales tax and excise duty. It will help the researchers to enjoy cost effectiveness at cheaper prices thus giving them value for money.

Conclusion

Global production chains have many positive impacts on an economy but it erodes the domestic manufacturing capabilities of many countries. In order to fight global crisis like COVID-19, countries must be self-sufficient in at least health sector.

While India's pro-active, pre-emptive, and a 'whole government' approach to fighting the COVID-19 pandemic is happening on one side, the slowdown in trade between India and the rest of the world works as counter-productive on the other side. This slowdown in trade is disrupting the supply chains of many essential commodities needed for the fight. The list of such essential commodities includes COVID-19 testing kits, masks, alcohol-based sanitizers, personal protective equipment (PPEs), dress materials for frontline health workers, ventilators (breathing devices) for patients, etc. India has a comparative advantage with the human resource to produce this health infrastructure.

The challenge is to produce these as quickly as possible and in bulk. This situation prompted the Government of India to vigorously activate the 'Make in India' Programme, and involved various Research & Development (R&D) institutions of the country. Domestic

manufacturing of essential medical devices can not only overcome trade barriers, but also ensure product quality and market stability. During the pandemic, counterfeiting and price gouging of imported goods happen frequently with surging demand.

Virtual Reality: On Telemedicine
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/virtual-reality-the-hindu-editorial-on-telemedicine/article31359228.ece

Context: Use of telemedicine in fight against COVID-19

Technology plays a crucial role in fight against COVID-19. The pandemic has contributed to the understanding of various ways in which available technologies can be put to better use and presented people with multiple opportunities to harness these devices, techniques and methods to get on with life in the time of lockdown. Among the primary uses is telemedicine that can help reach patients where access to medical care is difficult.

This brings us to the question of how telemedicine can be used to deal crisis like COVID-19 and its scope in a country like India. In this article, we will explain the following:
- What is Telemedicine?
- What is the scope of telemedicine in India?
- How India is using technology in fight against COVID-19?
- What are the government guidelines governing telemedicine?
- Conclusion

What is Telemedicine?
- World Health Organization (WHO) has defined telemedicine as, "the delivery of healthcare services, where distance is a critical factor, by all healthcare professionals using information and communication technologies for the exchange of valid information for diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disease and injuries, research and evaluation, and for the continuing education of healthcare providers, all in the interests of advancing the health of individuals and their communities."
- Initial use of telemedicine took place in early 20ᵗʰ century when ECG data was transmitted over phone.
- Telemedicine use is increasing in modern times due to wide use of wireless broadband technology, mobile phones and internet.
- Telemedicine has advantages like:
  - Reduced travel expenses of patients
  - Time saving
  - Easy access to specialized doctors
  - Decreases the load of missed appointments and cancellations for healthcare providers
  - Increasing patient load and revenue for hospitals
  - Improving follow up and health outcome
  - Increased reach to inaccessible areas

What is the scope of telemedicine in India?
- Telemedicine services in the country come under the combined jurisdiction of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) and the Department of Information Technology.
- Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) through its Department of Space (DoS) had initiated a **Nationwide Telemedicine (TM) program** in 2001.
  - It provided TM systems hardware, software, communication equipment
  - satellite bandwidth for 384 Hospitals with 60 specialty hospitals;
  - connected to 306 remote/rural/district/medical college hospitals.

- ➤ Eighteen (18) Mobile Telemedicine units were also enabled for Satellite connectivity.
- ➤ ISRO first linked Chennai's Apollo Hospital with the Apollo Rural Hospital at Aragonda village in the Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh.
- MoHFW has set up a **National Telemedicine Portal** for implementing a green field project on e-health establishing a National Medical College Network (NMCN).
- Under (NMCN) scheme, 50 Govt. Medical Colleges are being inter-linked with the purpose of tele-education, e-Learning and online medical consultation by utilizing the connectivity provided by **National Knowledge Network (NKN).** Under this initiative a virtual layer of specialty/super specialty doctors from these medical colleges is created for providing online medical consultation facility to citizens similar to OPD facility through a web/ portal.
- **National Telemedicine Network (NTN)** has been envisaged to provide Telemedicine Services to the remote areas by upgrading existing Government Healthcare Facilities in States. Telemedicine nodes across India are being created inter connecting these health facilities.
- MoHFW has developed a set of **Electronic Health Records (EHR) standards in 2013** and revised in 2016, to ensure safe data transmission during telemedicine practices.
- MoHFW proposed to set up **National e-health authority (NeHA)** in 2015, with a vision of achieving high quality health services for all Indians through the cost-effective and secure use of ICTs in health and health-related fields.

> **National Knowledge Network (NKN):**
> - The project aims to connect all universities, research institutions, libraries, laboratories, healthcare and agricultural institutions across the country.
> - The leading mission oriented agencies in the fields of nuclear, space and defense research are also part of NKN.
> - To establish a high-speed backbone connectivity which will enable knowledge and information sharing amongst NKN connected institutes.
> - To enable collaborative research, development and innovation amongst NKN connected institutes
> - To facilitate advanced distance education in specialized fields like engineering, science, medicine etc.
> - To facilitate an ultra-high speed e-governance backbone.
> - To facilitate connection between different sectoral networks in the field of research.

- **National Rural AYUSH Telemedicine Network** aims to promote the benefit of traditional methods of healing to a larger population through telemedicine.
- MoHFW & Department of Space (DoS) jointly have sat up Satellite communication based Telemedicine nodes at various unreachable geographical locations including Chardhams and other pilgrimage centres like Amarnath cave (J&K), Ayappa temple (Kerala).Dwarkadheesh Temple (Gujarat), Kashi Vishwanath Temple,(UP) and Vidhyanchal Devi Temple (UP) to provide health awareness, screening of non-communicable disease (NCD) and specialty consultation to the devotees visiting these places.

How India is using technology in fight against COVID-19?
- Due to nationwide lockdown, people are seeking new solutions to routine tasks, be it food-delivery, medical consultations or education.
- The World Health Organization mentioned telemedicine among essential services in "strengthening the Health Systems Response to COVID-19" policy.

- Tele health can directly influence flattening the curve of demand on health systems worldwide, slowing transmission and spreading incidence over a longer time period.
- Startups like Practo, Portea, and Lybate, are facilitating remote medical checkups keeping in mind the practice of 'Social Distancing'.
- Diabetes care and management **app BeatO** is trying to emulate the real-life experience by giving patients the option of adding their regular doctor to the platform.
- **Meddo Health**, which lists over 200 doctors across 16 specialties, has opened up its platform to doctors free-of-cost to cover other chronic ailments as well apart from Corona virus.
- Maker's Asylum, a community hacker space in Mumbai and New Delhi, has designed face shields for healthcare workers. The **M-19 shield** can be made in just about three minutes by anyone following the guidelines of the prototype.
- The Indian government, on April 6, launched the **Aarogya Setu app** for contact-tracing. It is similar to Singapore's Trace Together.
- **Aerial surveillance** or drones helps track large gatherings, minimizing physical contact, and monitoring narrow by lanes where police vehicles cannot enter. They can also be used to spray disinfectants in public spaces and residential colonies.
- Tamil Nadu has hired **Garuda, a Chennai-based start-up**, for sanitization of hospitals etc through drones.

What are the government guidelines governing telemedicine?

- A set of guidelines for telemedicine or remote delivery of medical services have been issued in March,2020 by the Ministry of health and family welfare (MoHFW), in collaboration with NITI Aayog and Board of Governors (BoG), Medical Council of India (MCI).
- Doctors can write prescriptions based on telephonic, textual or video conversations, chat, images, messaging, emails, fax and others. This will allow users to consult certified medical practitioners without going out of the house and reduce the risk of transmission even further.

> **Indian Medical Council Act (IMC), 1956:**
> - The Act provides for the constitution of the Medical Council of India (MCI).
> - The MCI regulates standards of medical education, permission to start colleges, courses or increase the number of seats, registration of doctors, standards of professional conduct of medical practitioners.
> - The Indian Medical Council (Amendment) Ordinance, 2019 was passed to allow the board of governors appointed in view of supersession of MCI for a period of 2 years with effect from September 26, 2018 to continue to exercise powers of MCI.
> - Indian Medical Council (Amendment) Bill, 2019 was passed by Lok Sabha but not by Rajya Sabha, hence ordinance was promulgated.
> - The move is aimed at ensuring transparency, accountability and quality in the governance of medical education in the country.

- Only medical practitioners, registered under the IMC (Indian Medical Council) Act 1956, are entitled to provide telemedicine consultation.
- The registered medical practitioners (RMP) are allowed to use text, video or audio-enabled solutions for consultations.
- All registered medical practitioners (RMP) will have to complete a mandatory course within three years of the release of the guidelines.

- Telemedicine consultations should not be anonymous, both patient and doctor should know each other's identity.
- The government has also imposed certain restrictions on the type of medications that can be prescribed based on the type of consultations. Drugs listed under Schedule X of Drugs and Cosmetics Act and Rules cannot be prescribed through telemedicine.

Conclusion:

India only has one government doctor for every 1,139 people, whereas the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a ratio of 1:1,000. The shortage of doctors is limiting face-to-face consultations among patients. Secondly, India also has a shortage of hospital beds, which makes hospitalization tricky. Telemedicine will reduce the time of consultations and improve the quality of healthcare services in urban as well as rural areas, removing many of infrastructural challenges. Telemedicine is a sector that bridges the healthcare gap between rural India and urban India. In rural India, where the access to medical facilities, specialists opinion and advance healthcare amenities are limited, telemedicine acts as a healthcare provider bringing access to the specialist doctors to these areas.

India is one of the top 10 countries in the telemedicine market in the world. The early adoption of a regulatory framework will help the segment grow rapidly. India has seen considerable growth in the telemedicine sector but the growth was not rapid due to the lack of proper guidelines and regulations. Though the Government is now starting to take a keen interest in developing telemedicine practices resulting in a slow but steady rise in its utilization in public health.

Helping a lending hand: On RBI's second lockdown stimulus
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/helping-a-lending-hand-the-hindu-editorial-on-rbis-second-lockdown-stimulus/article31370327.ece

Context: Measures by RBI for dealing COVID-19 pandemic and the economic slowdown

With the objective to keep the economy afloat by deploying all the instruments at the RBI's command, there comes second set of measures by the RBI. Most are aimed at maintaining liquidity, the economy's lifeblood, though there are some regulatory proposals aimed at making life easier for banks, NBFCs and borrowers.

This brings us to the question of measures taken by RBI again to combat the lockdown impact on economy. In this article we will discuss the following:
- Why there is further reduction in Reverse Repo Rate?
- How RBI gave further relief to states?
- How RBI gave relief to borrowers?
- What is TLTRO 2.0?
- Conclusion

Why there is further reduction in Reverse Repo Rate?
- Earlier, in late March, the central bank reduced the reverse repo rate by 90bps to 4%.
- Despite the earlier measures taken, the banks had ₹6.9-lakh crore parked with the RBI as on April 15.
- Therefore, RBI has further lowered the reverse repo rate by 25 basis points to 3.75%.
- This is to discourage banks from keeping their surplus funds with RBI and indulge in more lending.
- With these measures RBI ensured liquidity for small non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) and asked banks to lend at least half the money earmarked to be borrowed from the liquidity window to them.

> **Reverse Repo Rate:**
> - Reverse repo rate is the rate at which the central bank of a country borrows money from commercial banks within the country.
> - It is a monetary policy instrument which can be used to control the money supply in the country.
> - An increase in the reverse repo rate will decrease the money supply and vice-versa, other things remaining constant.
> - An increase in reverse repo rate means that commercial banks will get more incentives to park their funds with the RBI, thereby decreasing the supply of money in the market.

How RBI gave further relief to states?
- There is increase of WMA (Ways and Means Advances) limit to 60% over the level as on March 31.
- It is done to enable states "to undertake COVID-19 containment and mitigation efforts" and "to better plan their market borrowings".
- With economic activity at a near standstill, there is hardly any money coming in from GST, petroleum products, liquor, motor vehicles, and stamp duty or registration fee.

- At the same time, the states are also incurring the bulk of the on-the-ground expenditures for combating the novel corona virus.
- These extend not only to purchases of testing kits, personal protective equipment and ventilators or deployment of healthcare and police personnel, but even to providing food, shelter and other relief measures to those worst hit by the lockdown.
- The states are facing an unprecedented cash crunch and therefore increase in WMA will provide temporary relief as higher limit of WMA is valid till September 30.
- For the states, the aggregate WMA limit was Rs 32,225 crore till March 31, 2020. On April 1, the RBI announced a 30% hike in this limit, which has now been enhanced to 60%, taking it to Rs 51,560 crore.

> **Ways and Means Advances (WMA):**
> - It is a facility for both the Centre and states to borrow from the RBI.
> - These borrowings are meant purely to help overcome temporary mismatches in cash flows of receipts and expenditures of Centre or states.
> - Section 17(5) of the RBI Act, 1934 authorizes the central bank to lend to the Centre and state governments subject to their being repayable "not later than three months from the date of the making of the advance".
> - The interest rate on WMA is the RBI's repo rate, which is basically the rate at which it lends short-term money to banks. That rate is currently 4.4%.

- Reserve Bank had constituted an Advisory Committee under Shri Sudhir Shrivastava to review the Ways and Means limits for State Governments and Union Territories.

How RBI gave relief to borrowers?
- Earlier on 27 March, the lending institutions were permitted to grant a moratorium of three months on payment of all term loan installments falling due between March 1, 2020 and May 31, 2020 ('moratorium period').
- RBI has clarified that there will be an asset classification standstill during the moratorium period for accounts that were not already NPAs as of March 1.
- The 90-day NPA norms shall exclude the moratorium period, i.e., there would an asset classification standstill for all such accounts from March 1, 2020 to May 31, 2020.
- This step of the RBI has brought relief to borrowers who were worried that opting for the moratorium may turn them into NPAs.
- The rescheduling of payments, including interest, will not qualify as a default for the purposes of supervisory reporting and reporting to Credit Information Companies (CICs) by the lending institutions.
- CICs shall ensure that the actions taken by lending institutions regarding moratorium period do not adversely impact the credit history of the beneficiaries.

What is TLTRO 2.0?
- Last month, the RBI had announced special targeted long term repos operations (TLTRO) operations to ease liquidity conditions. Under this, RBI will be conducting auctions of targeted term repos of up to three years tenor for a total of up to ₹1 lakh crore at a floating rate linked to the policy repo rate.
- The RBI introduced an additional Rs 50,000 crore under its targeted long-term repo operations (TLTRO 2.0). Through this the RBI will provide cheaper money for lending to corporate.

- RBI has now mandated banks to lend at least 50 per cent of the money they raise from the central bank's targeted long term repo operations (TLTRO) to small and medium sized NBFCs and microfinance institutions (MFIS) so that NBFCs and MFIs get enough liquidity.

- LTROs provide banks with access to cheaper capital from the RBI. This, in turn, encourages them to lend more and spur economic activity. They can also invest these long-term funds in assets that yield better returns to improve profitability.

Targeted long-term repo operations (TLTRO):

- TLTRO is a tool that lets banks borrow one to three-year funds from the central bank at the repo rate, by providing government securities with similar or higher tenure as collateral.
- It is called **'Targeted'** LTRO as in this case, the central bank wants banks opting for funds under this option to be specifically invested in investment-grade corporate debt.
- This helps banks get funds for a longer duration as compared to the short-term (up to 28 days) liquidity provided by the RBI through other tools such as liquidity adjustment facility (LAF) and marginal standing facility (MSF).
- LTRO was first introduced by the European Central Bank during its sovereign debt crisis that began in 2008.

Conclusion

The IMF's Economic Counselor has named it the 'Great Lockdown', estimating the cumulative loss to global GDP over 2020 and 2021 at around $9 trillion. India is among the handful of countries that is projected to cling on tenuously to positive growth (at 1.9 per cent). In fact, this is the highest growth rate among the G 20 economies.

In this scenario, RBI has been proactively monitoring the evolving situation continuously and using all its instruments to address the daunting challenges posed by the pandemic. The overarching objective is to keep the financial system and financial markets sound, liquid and smoothly functioning so that finance keeps flowing to all stakeholders, especially those that are disadvantaged and vulnerable. Regulatory measures that have been announced so far are dovetailed into the objective of preserving financial stability.

As India accelerates its fight against Covid-19, the RBI emerges as top runner in the time taken to respond to the crisis and targeting the issues. While RBI's measures provide for relief, the wait now is for the government to come out with a stimulus package to salvage the economy.

Although social distancing separates us, we stand united and resolute. Eventually, we shall cure and we shall endure.

The COVID-19 virus and its Polyproteins
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/science/the-covid-19-virus-and-its-polyproteins/article31375823.ece

Context: Structure of the Corona virus and use of drugs against it

COVID-19 is easily infecting and transmitting itself from people to people and scientists and medical experts are waging a war against its spread. Though there are treatments that can alleviate the symptoms such as difficulty breathing, they do not address the underlying cause: the virus. All over the world, experts are involved in understanding this new strain of virus and to find treatment and drug for it.

This brings us to the understanding of viruses and their structure and what can be the efforts to deal with it. In this article, we will explain the following:
- How are viruses different from bacteria?
- What is Polyprotein strategy?
- What is the structure of COVID-19?
- How the drugs work on viruses?
- What are India's attempts in fighting the virus?
- Conclusion

How are viruses different from bacteria?

Bacteria	Virus
• Single-celled, living organisms. They can reproduce themselves.	• Viruses are not "living" because they require a host cell to survive long-term, for energy, and to reproduce.
• They have DNA, RNA (both) and proteins that help in growth & multiplication of bacteria.	• Viruses consist of a piece of genetic material, such as DNA or RNA (but not both).
• Less than 1% of bacteria cause disease.	• Most viruses cause disease.
• Antibiotics may be used to treat some bacterial infections.	• Vaccination is the primary way to prevent viral infections; however, antiviral have been engineered that can treat some viral infections, such as Hepatitis C or HIV.
• Some bacterial diseases: TB, Cholera, Diphtheria, Bacterial Meningitis, Tetanus, Lyme disease, Gonorrhea, and Syphilis.	• Some contagious viral diseases: Flu, Common cold, HIV, and Herpes.

- Corona viruses do not have DNA as their genome, but RNA; in other words, they can only translate and not transcribe.
- Thus, they are 'dead', unable to renew and grow themselves; they need help. This they achieve by infecting 'host cells' which they bind to and multiply by the millions.

What is Polyprotein strategy?
- When an infection by virus occurs, entire RNA with its 33,000 bases is translated in one shot as a long tape of amino acid sequences.
- Since this long chain contains several proteins within it, it is called a "polyprotein" sequence.
- Almost all retroviruses and RNA viruses use the strategy of translating an open reading frame as a large, precursor polyprotein.

- Viruses that regulate gene expression by polyprotein processing includes several important human pathogens such as HIV, poliovirus, rhinovirus, Dengue virus, hepatitis C virus, West Nile virus, Chikungunya virus and SARS corona virus.
- Polyprotein strategy is useful to understand lifecycle of the virus and to find the relevant proteins, isolate and study what each of them does in helping infection.
- Polyproteins allow for a more compact genome by eliminating additional genetic features and express the protein when the need arises.
- Scientists call the polyprotein a 'single reading frame', containing several 'open reading frames', namely those that contain a start code and end with a stop code, each containing the relevant protein to be expressed by the host cell.

What is the structure of COVID-19?
- As per Journal of Medical Virology, COVID19 has RNA-based genomes and sub-genomes in its polyprotein sequence.
- The architecture of the virus is the spike protein (S), the membrane protein (M), the envelope protein (E), and the nucleocapsidprotein (N, which covers the viral cell nuclear material).
- There are 16 special structural and accessory proteins, called non-structural proteins (NSP), which serve specific purposes for infection and viral multiplication.

How the drugs work on viruses?
- Corona virus is made up of large set of proteins, against which a number of potential molecules and drugs can be tried to interfere and stop the production of these viral proteins.
- Remdesavir is one of several drugs being fast-tracked into trials by the World Health Organization. It is considered highly effective in stopping the replication mechanism of the corona virus that causes COVID-19. The drug targeted the key enzyme RDRp in the virus and stopped its production.
- The drug worked successfully against the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) virus, a related corona virus.
- Other studies from the US, Germany and China have developed methods to stop the production of the enzyme (called CL3pro, also called as Mpro) which is needed to make the spike (S protein).
- According to an Indian researcher, Thanigaimalai Pillaiyar, there is no specific treatment available for human corona viruses till date, but numerous antiviral agents are being identified through a variety of approaches. His work is well known in finding drugs against SARS-CoV.
- By 3D modeling, he found a key enzyme of the SARS-CoV, called Chymotrypsin-like Cysteine Protease (**3CLpro**) also called the main protease (**Mpro**) and found that this enzyme fits into the virus structure.
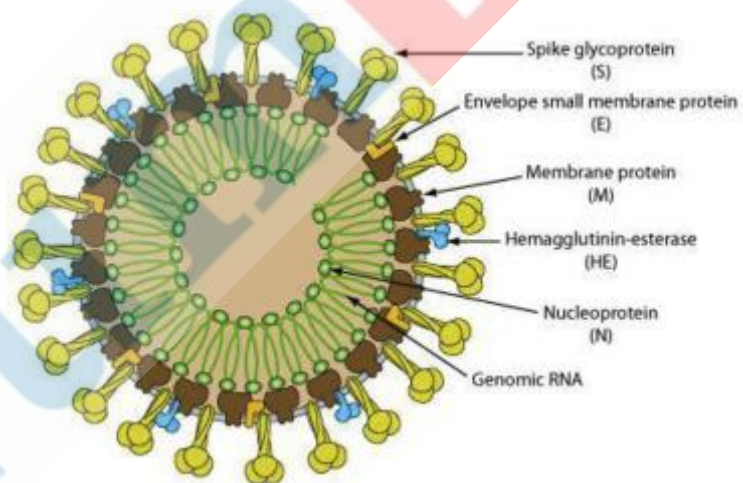
- A total of about 160 known drugs were predicted to deactivate the binding of 3CLpro or pro and thus inhibit the SARS-CoV from infecting.

What are India's attempts in fighting the virus?
- Every virus is different and so is the drugs used to treat them. SARS-CoV-2 the corona virus that causes the disease COVID-19 is completely new and attacks cells in a novel way.
- **WHO** launched a project named **'Solidarity',** that is an international clinical trial to help find an effective treatment for COVID-19.
- The Solidarity trial will compare four treatment options against standard of care, to assess their relative effectiveness against COVID-19.
- The four most promising options include:
  ➢ an experimental antiviral compound called Remdesivir;
  ➢ the malaria medications Chloroquine and Hydroxychloroquine;
  ➢ a combination of two HIV drugs, Lopinavir and Ritonavir; and
  ➢ that same combination plus interferon-beta, an immune system messenger that can help cripple viruses.
- India will also participate in a multi-country trial to identify potential cures for the Covid-19 outbreak.
- The Central Drugs Standard Control Organization has approved the proposal of ICMR (Indian Council of Medical Research) for the clinical trial of convalescent plasma in Covid-19 patients.
  ➢ In **Convalescent plasma therapy**, antibodies from the blood of patients who have recovered from Covid-19 are used to treat severely infected patients.
- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) will start a new trial next week to study the efficacy of BCG vaccine in preventing Covid-19.
- Council of Science and Industrial Research (CSIR) is slated to begin clinical trials on the anti-leprosy vaccine called Mw (Mycobacterium w) to see if it can be used as a vaccine against corona virus.
- The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (**CSIR**), under its **New Millennium Indian Technology Leadership Initiative (NMITLI)**, is also seeking proposals from industries for effective containment interventions, assistive devices such as affordable ventilators, innovative diagnostics (rapid, affordable, cutting edge), novel drugs or repurposed drugs, new vaccines or repurposed vaccine and track-and-trace technologies.

> **Council of Science and Industrial Research (CSIR):**
> - Established in September 1942 as an autonomous body that has emerged as the largest research and development organization in India.
> - Chairperson of CSIR is Prime Minister of India.
> - The research and development activities of CSIR include aerospace engineering, structural engineering, ocean sciences, life sciences, metallurgy, chemicals, mining, food, petroleum, leather, and environmental science.
> - CSIR's 'Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar (SSB) Prize for Science and Technology', instituted in 1957 is the most coveted and revered prize in science and technology in the country.

- On 3 April, Department of Science & Technology (DST) has set up a '**Centre for Augmenting WAR with COVID-19 Health Crisis' (CAWACH)** at a total cost of Rs

56 Cr to evaluate and support up to 50 innovations and start-ups that address COVID-19 challenges.

- The Government of India has set up a '**COVID-19 Task Force**' for mapping the COVID-19 related technology capabilities in start-ups, academia, research and development labs and industry. The capacity mapping group consists of representatives from DST, Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR), Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEIT), Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), Startup India and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE).

Conclusion

India is well versed with expertise in the area of organic and medicinal chemistry since the last 90 years and in manufacturing quality drug molecules and exporting them for use at home and across the world.

The Government of India is fully committed to facilitating Indian health and scientific community in the fight against COVID-19. The government scientific agencies are not leaving any stones unturned in order to provide full support to the community, researchers, private and public research labs, start-ups, incubators, entrepreneurs and industries. Funding agencies are making an effort to link national projects

Department of Science & Technology (DST):
• Established in May 1971, under Ministry of Science and Technology.
• The objective is to promote new areas of Science & Technology and to play the role of a nodal department for organizing, coordinating and promoting S&T activities in the country.

with global projects to share the expertise among nations, avoid duplication and speed up the entire process when and where required.

How covid-19 is transforming global manufacturing
Source: https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/how-covid-19-is-transforming-global-manufacturing-11586794087405.html

Context: Impact of COVID-19 on global manufacturing.

As the COVID-19 pandemic escalates, the risks inherent in global supply chains are more apparent than ever. The manufacturing is concentrated in developing countries that have cheap labour. However, with the uncertainties of returning to business as usual, advanced economies are now looking for lowest wage workers, i.e, robots.

This brings us to the questions of impact of COVID-19 on global manufacturing. In this article, we will explain the below:
- ❖ What changes COVID-19 has brought in global manufacturing?
- ❖ What is industrial automation?
- ❖ How uncertainties have risen in the world?
- ❖ Conclusion

What changes COVID-19 has brought in global manufacturing?
- The coronavirus continues to spread. As more countries impose quarantines and social distancing, the fear of contagion and income losses is increasing uncertainty around the world.
- The firms that began relocating production to low-wage countries in the early 1990s are now moving out of these countries amid lockdown in almost entire world amid COVID-19.
- The period between 1990 and the 2008 global financial crisis has been called an era of hyper-globalization in which global value chains accounted for about 60% of global trade.
- The 2008 global financial and economic crisis marked the beginning of the end of this era of hyper-globalization. In 2011, global value chains stopped expanding.
- When the 2008 crisis struck, some countries, such as Germany, already had enough robots to minimize the importance of labour costs in production. Many others, aided by the sharp post-2008 decline in interest rates relative to wages, boosted robot adoption and reshored a larger share of production.
- COVID-19 pandemic will further push advanced countries to adopt automation and overcome these uncertain times.

What is industrial automation?
- Industrial automation is the use of control systems, such as computers or robots, and information technologies for handling different processes and machineries in an industry to replace a human being. It is the second step beyond mechanization in the scope of industrialization.
- Industrial automation in manufacturing is the use of "intelligent" machines in factories so that manufacturing processes can be carried out with minimal human intervention.
- It involves the application of various control systems to enable operating equipment to carry out on their own, with little human intervention, tasks that require speed, endurance and precision.
- Industrial automation can be achieved by several different means, including mechanical, electrical, electronic, hydraulic, pneumatic, and computers. Usually, two or more of these means are used in combination.

- The main benefits of manufacturing automation include leaner operation processes that require less energy, less material, and reduced labor waste.
- These can lead to improvements in quality, accuracy, and precision. The downsides include high costs of R&D and installation of equipment.

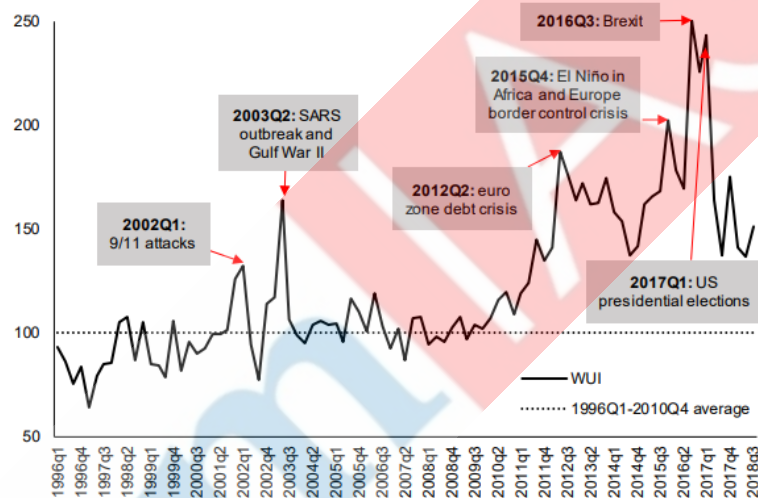**How uncertainties have risen in the world?**

- Uncertainty surrounding the duration of these conditions clouds any insights into how a recovery could unfold for the industry post COVID-19.
- The World Uncertainty Index measures the uncertainty since 1996.
- The World Uncertainty Index is a new measure that tracks uncertainty across the globe by text mining the country reports of the Economist Intelligence Unit. The index is available for 143 countries.

Figure 1. Global WUI over time

(unweighted global average)

Note: The World Uncertainty Index (WUI) is computed by counting the frequency of uncertain (or the variant) in EIU country reports. The WUI is then normalized by total number of words, rescaled by multiplying by 1,000. Here is also rescaled by the global average of 1996Q1 to 2010Q4 such that 1996Q1-2010Q4=100. A higher number means higher uncertainty and vice versa.
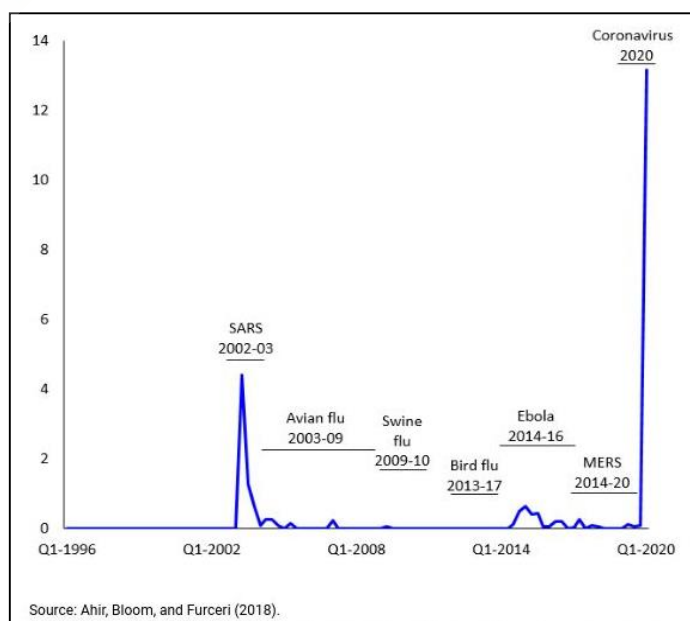
- During the 2002-03 outbreak of the Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), the World Uncertainty Index rose by 70%.
- From 2008 to 2011, the World Uncertainty Index increased by 200%.
- After the United Kingdom voted in 2016 to leave the European Union, the World Uncertainty Index surged by 250%.
- To quantify uncertainty related to the coronavirus crisis and compare it with previous pandemics and epidemics, Hites Ahir, Nicholas Bloom and Davide Furceri developed the World Pandemic Uncertainty Index (WPUI)—a sub-index of the World Uncertainty Index.
- As of March 31, it is three times the size of the uncertainty during the 2002–03 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic and about 20 times the size during the Ebola outbreak. The level of uncertainty

Source: Ahir, Bloom, and Furceri (2018).

around the coronavirus is expected to remain high as cases continue to rise and it is still not clear when the crisis will end.

Conclusion:

As the COVID-19 crisis continues to expand, manufacturers will likely face challenges on numerous fronts. At the outset of any major commercial disruption, companies will be looking for immediate measures to keep their workforces safe and their businesses solvent. Most companies in the sector will need to take concrete steps to succeed in this challenging climate. The best approach is likely to include making surgical cuts, while balancing short- and long-term needs.

The burnt of advanced countries opting for automation would be felt hard by the Asian manufacturing hubs. The respective governments will need to implement policies suited to this new economic order.

Climate Change and Gendered Vulnerabilities: Accounting for Women and Patriarchal Systems in Climate Governance Policy
Source: https://www.epw.in/engage/article/climate-change-and-gendered-vulnerabilities

Context: Climate Change Governance and Gender and Caste Inequalities.

Climate governance policy remains strikingly ignorant of the socio-cultural context that it is embedded in and is thus unable to account for the gender and caste inequalities that are dominant in today's patriarchal institutions.

This brings us to the question of understanding of issues not addressed by Climate Governance Policy. In this article we will discuss the following:
- What is Climate Governance?
- Why there is a need to include Gender in Climate governance?
- What does World Water Development Report says about gender inequalities?
- How women climate refugees suffer?
- Why Caste should be included in Climate governance?
- Conclusion

What is Climate Governance?
- Climate governance can be defined as the purposeful mechanisms and measures aimed at steering social systems toward preventing, mitigating or adapting to the risks posed by climate change.
- In India, climate policy first emerged as a separate policy field after 2007 by the introduction of India's first **National Action Plan for Climate Change (NAPCC), 2008**.
- Eight government missions under National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC):
    o National Solar Mission
    o National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency
    o National Mission on Sustainable Habitat
    o National Water Mission
    o National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem
    o National Mission for Green India
    o National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture
    o National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate change
- To further strengthen the institutional structure, a national level network known as Indian Network for Climate Change Assessment (INCCA) was established. It is a proposed network of scientists in India to be set up to publish peer-reviewed findings on climate change.
- India's climate policy includes a range of sector-based mitigation as well as adaptation policies and strategies.
- Under the obligation of Paris Agreement (2015), India defined its **Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs).**
- Three quantified goals are:
    o Reducing the emission-intensity of its gross domestic product (GDP) by 33%–35% (vis-à-vis 2005) by 2030.
    o Achieving 40% cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources by 2030.
    o Creating an additional carbon sink of 2.5–3 billion tones of CO_2 equivalent by 2030 through additional forest and tree cover.

Why there is a need to include Gender in Climate governance?

- Climate change is not a gender-neutral phenomenon.
- Women in rural areas in developing countries are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood, because of their responsibility to secure water, food and energy for cooking and heating. The effects of climate change, including drought, uncertain rainfall and deforestation, make it harder to secure these resources.
- Families dependent on agriculture and labor jobs to make money, and where male migration, male-dominated labor markets, and patriarchal institutions already put stresses on families, mostly women are further stressed due to climate change.
- Due to current changes in employment patterns where there's been a rapid decline in men's contribution to subsistence and family farming has brought women in the front of agriculture. This shift of males to non-farm wage employment in urban and semi-urban regions can be seen in the rural areas of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala.
- As per **2011 NSSO data**, 79% of rural women are engaged in agriculture as against 63% of men in India, but still there is inequality in access and use of climate information by women.
- The absence of necessary information regarding climate change and sustainable agricultural practices and access to inputs from markets, the women lacks confidence in taking decisions about agricultural work and thus is at greater risks of climate change dangers.
- Women's participation in farm-level decision-making is limited to contribution of labor and execution of agronomic practices like sowing, weeding, and harvesting, based on their traditional roles and experiences.

What does World Water Development Report says about gender inequalities?

- The 2020 **United Nations** World Water Development Report focuses on the challenges, opportunities and potential responses to climate change, in terms of adaptation, mitigation and improved resilience that can be addressed through improving water management.
- Title of 2020 report is **'Water and Climate Change'** and aims at helping the water community to tackle the challenges of climate change.
- The report says that devastating impacts of climate change will disproportionately affect the world's poor, which as of 2017, includes 800 million people (nearly 78% of the world's poor) who are chronically hungry, and two billion people who suffer from micronutrient deficiencies.
- Due to prevailing gender inequalities, the magnitude of impact on women and girls will be significantly higher and much worse.
- Not only are women and children reported to be 14 times more likely to die than men during disasters, about 80% of the people displaced by climate change are women.
- As per International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), environment stress and resource scarcity leads to increase in gender-based violence, which includes domestic abuse, sexual assault, rape, forced prostitution, forced marriages and higher incidence of human trafficking in naturally distressed regions.

How women climate refugees suffer?

- According to the Government of West Bengal and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), in 2009, due to **Cyclone Aila** in Indian Bengal delta, approximately 9,20,000 houses were damaged and 70 lives were claimed.

- This led to migration of approximately half of the men from the most affected blocks of the Indian Sundarbans (which is extremely vulnerable to climate change) to other parts of the country in search of alternative livelihoods. However, women were left behind with the burden of running the household and dealing with the aftermath of the cyclone.
- There was destruction of farms due to intrusion of salt water and women couldn't find alternative employment due to gender restrictions.
- As per reports, several of these women from the Indian Sundarbans ended up migrating to the red-light district of Kolkata due to the climate change-induced distress. The number of women who moved to Kolkata's red-light district increased by 20% to 25% in the aftermath of cyclone Aila.
- Many of these sex workers identified themselves as **Bhasha (environmental refugees).** Women who are forced to enter into prostitution in order to look after their family and children face social ostracism and the threat of sexual exploitation at the hands of their clients.
- The gender biases in the society is revealed by the perception of villagers when they think that "Households with more daughters are the most vulnerable' to climate change induced disasters.

Why Caste should be included in Climate governance?
- The principle of purity and pollution was central to the relations between the upper and lower castes in India since long and ritually impure occupations were historically associated with the Dalits.
- Along with gender, caste is also an often ignored variable in climate governance policies, such as access to water.
- The age-old social hierarchy in Hindu society has historically positioned Dalits as eternally polluted, feared to pollute sacred water sources.
- The sites of fresh water are also forbidden to caste Hindu menstruating women until they are purified on the fifth or the seventh day.
- Dalits, who are highly dependent on earnings from agricultural labour and livestock rearing dependent on forests and other common lands have fewer resources and options to combat the damages to the resource base because of climate change.
- The internalization of discrimination and exclusion continue to deprive them of their social, economic and political rights and opportunities.
- There is a need for proper state support to develop the adaptation mechanism of Dalits and support livelihood diversification strategies. Disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation need to inform the social protection policy so the poor Dalits and other marginalized sections can be shielded from shocks and risks owing to climate change and their livelihoods protected effectively.

Conclusion

India with its geo-climatic conditions is also faced with a high degree of socio-economic vulnerability making it one of the most disaster prone countries in the world. "India is considered highly vulnerable to climate change, not only because of high physical exposure to climate-related disasters (65% of India is drought prone, 12% flood prone, and 8% susceptible to cyclones), but also because of the dependency of its economy and majority of population on climate-sensitive sectors (e.g. agriculture, forests, tourism, animal husbandry and fisheries). Under such circumstances, India cannot overlook the most affected population (women, children, elderly, marginalized sections of society) of climate change.

India is a key actor in global climate governance, a result of its emissions profile, economic performance, and leadership role in the developing world. India is a "dualist" system, which

means that international agreements (such as the Paris Agreement and the UNFCCC) must be translated into domestic law to become enforceable within the country.

A new domestic climate policy must result from a collaborative and democratic exercise that actively seeks and incorporates inputs from policymakers, natural and social scientists, the academic community, civil society and communities from across the country. The role of villages, cities and states in co-creating India's climate policy must be explicitly endorsed and promoted.

Putting the SAGAR vision to the test
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/putting-the-sagar-vision-to-the-test/article31399219.ece

Context: India and Indian Ocean Region

The emerging dynamics of international diplomacy has meant that India has recently begun to take note of managing the oceans, especially the Indian Ocean, more seriously. The gain of Observer status is IOC could provide an opportunity to India to learn from it as well as support it to enhance ties in the Western Indian Ocean Region.

This brings us to the question of understanding of Indian Ocean region and IOC with respect to India. In this article we will explain the following:
- What is the importance of Indian Ocean region for India?
- What is Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)?
- What are the major initiatives under IOC towards cooperation in Indian Ocean Region?
- How India can contribute to IOC?
- Conclusion

What is the importance of Indian Ocean region for India?
- The Indian Ocean region consists of **28 countries**, spans across three continents and covers **17.5% of global land area**.
- These 28 countries include 21 members of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Yemen), and Brunei, Cambodia, the Maldives, Myanmar, Pakistan, Timor-Leste and Vietnam.
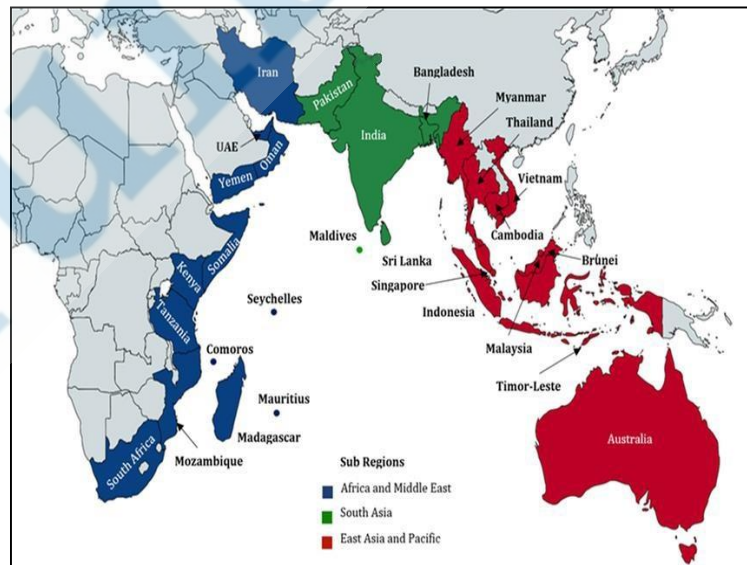
- The Indian Ocean is third largest water body of the world that has vital sea lanes of communication crisscrossing it and which feeds Asia's largest economies. Around 80 per cent of the world's seaborne oil trade passes through the choke points of this ocean and therefore it literally connects the east to the west.
- **Rich natural resource base:** Holds 16.8% of the world's proven oil reserves and 27.9% of proven natural gas reserves. Economies are involved in iron production, gold production.
- The Indian Ocean is home to major sea routes connecting the Middle East, Africa and East Asia with Europe and the Americas. These vital sea routes:
  - facilitate maritime trade in the Indian Ocean region,
  - carry more than half of the world's sea-borne oil and

> ➤ host 23 of the world's top 100 container ports.
- Freedom of navigation is vital for the smooth flow of Indian Ocean maritime trade but threats such as competition among great powers, nontraditional security threats (piracy and drug trafficking) and environmental degradation remain.
- Indian occupies a central and strategic location in the Indian Ocean area. Its national and economic interests are inseparably linked up with Indian Ocean.

WHY WE NEED TO LAND FAR AND WIDE

1. **The Gulf of Aden:** Crucial sea lane of communication to the Mediterranean
2. **The Straits of Malacca:** Crucial sea lane of communication to the Far East
3. **Sakhalin Islands, off Russia:** ONGC Videsh prospecting for oil
4. **South China Sea, the Vietnamese coast:** ONGC Videsh prospecting for oil
5. **Aceh, Indonesia:** India sent relief and flew regular sorties after the 2004 tsunami
6. **Trincomalee, Sri Lanka:** The Indian Navy is rebuilding the port
7. **Maldives and the Seychelles:** The Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force are engaged in establishing a presence for counter-piracy
8. **The East Coast of Africa and the Gulf of Aden:** The Indian Navy is on counter-piracy patrols for two years
9. **Libya:** The IAF evacuated Indians this year and the navy also sent ships
10. **Lebanon:** The navy evacuated Indians in 2006 during the Israel-Hezbollah war
11. **Farkhor/Ayni, Tajikistan:** Undeclared interest in an air base. India also runs a military hospital

Strategic Presence of India: Overseas in

- To keep the Indian Ocean as a zone of Peace free from superpower rivalry and increasing cooperation among littoral countries in the region has always been India's foreign Policy's goal for example Look East policy, Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation, BIMSTEC and Ganga-Mekong Cooperation etc.

Power Balance in Indian Ocean Region

SAGAR initiative:
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled India's strategic vision for the Indian Ocean: **Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)** in **March, 2015** during visit to 3 Indian Ocean island states — Seychelles, Mauritius, and Sri Lanka.
- India's vision for the Indian Ocean is encapsulated by the concept of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region).
- SAGAR has both various distinct and inter-related elements – such as deepening economic and security cooperation in the littorals, enhancing capacities to safeguard land and maritime territories, working towards sustainable regional development, Blue Economy, and promoting collective action to deal with non-traditional threats like natural disasters, piracy, terrorism etc.

What is Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)?
- Founded in **1982**, the IOC is an intergovernmental organization **comprising five small-island states in the Western Indian Ocean**: the Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Reunion (a French department), and Seychelles. IOC coordinates maritime governance in the south-western Indian Ocean.
- The IOC granted **observer status to India on March 6** at the Commission's 34th Council of Ministers Conference at Seychelles.
- India becomes the fifth observer of IOC. The other four observers China, Malta, European Union and International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF).
- The five-member grouping is important given India's plans to expand in The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) which is strategically connects the Indian Ocean to the Southeastern coast of Africa and beyond. It is home to one of the key chokepoints in the Indian Ocean- the Mozambique Channel.
- As an observer to IOC, India can enhance collective engagement with the island nations of western Indian Ocean (WIO) and further boost ties with an already strong friend, France.
- The move will also lend greater significance to India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for all in the Region) policy.
- India has preferred to engage bilaterally with smaller states in the Indian Ocean region. But, the IOC has its own regional agenda, and has made impressive headway in the design and implementation of regional maritime security architecture in the Western Indian Ocean. Therefore, India will not find is a cluster of small states seeking a 'big brother' partnership in the IOC.

What are the major initiatives under IOC towards cooperation in Indian Ocean Region?
- **MASE program** launched in 2012 is the European Union-funded regional program to promote Maritime Security in Eastern and Southern Africa and Indian Ocean.
  - The program is implemented by four Regional Organizations, namely Intergovernmental Authority of Development (IGAD), East African Community (EAC), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and IOC.
  - It supports the implementation of the Regional Strategy and Action Plan to fight piracy and promote maritime security in the Eastern and Southern Africa – Indian Ocean.
  - The program is also implemented in partnership with the FAO, INTERPOL and UNODC.

- **Regional Maritime Information Fusion Center (RMIFC):**
  - ➢ On April 29th, 2018, at the Ministerial Conference on Maritime Safety and Security held in Mauritius, five States from the Eastern and Southern Africa and Indian Ocean (ESA-IO) Region, namely Djibouti, Madagascar, Mauritius, Union of Comoros and Seychelles, signed the Regional Agreement for the Setting up of a Regional Maritime Information Exchange and Sharing Mechanism in the Western Indian Ocean known as RMIFC.
  - ➢ The **Regional Maritime Information Fusion Center (RMIFC),** based in **Madagascar**, is designed to deepen maritime domain awareness by monitoring maritime activities and promoting information sharing and exchange.

- **Regional Coordination Operations Centre (RCOC):**
  - ➢ It is based in **Seychelles**.
  - ➢ It will eventually facilitate joint or jointly coordinated interventions at sea based on information gathered through the RMIFC.
  - ➢ The RCOC whose main function is to conduct joint actions at sea, works alongside the RMIFC, which is responsible for exchanging and sharing maritime information and alert the RCOC of any abnormal activity at sea.

- In 2018 and 2019, IOC served as **Chair of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS)** thus promoting maritime security in the Western Indian Ocean. CGPCS, is an international governance mechanism established in New York on January 14, 2009 to facilitate the discussion and coordination of actions among states and organizations to suppress Somali piracy.
- IOC has been seeking more sustainable ways of addressing maritime security threats in the region, with the RMIFC and RCOC as part of this response.
- A 2019 policy brief published by the IOC 'Strengthening Maritime Security in the Western Indian Ocean', sets out how the counter-piracy response off the coast of Somalia delivered unprecedented regional and international cooperation in the domain of maritime security.

How India can contribute to IOC?
- The **2018 joint strategic vision for India-France cooperation in the Indian Ocean region** – released during the visit of French president Emmanuel Macron – specifically mentions that France would support India's entry in the IOC as an observer and in return India had supported a "greater role" for France in the bigger Indian Ocean Rim Association.
- In 2019, the **MEA** got a brand-new **Indo-Pacific division** to reflect the priority given to the region and bring about a sense of coherence within its various regions. The division also looked after the multilateral linkages in the region and would likely look after the enhanced IOC portfolio.
- With the observer status, India can extend its expertise to the region, put its satellite imagery to the service of the RMIFC, and establish links with its own Information Fusion Centre.
- As a major stakeholder in the Indian Ocean with maritime security high on the agenda, India will continue to pursue its interests and tackle maritime security challenges at the macro level in the region. However, as an observer of the IOC, India can embrace bottom-up regionalism to establish relations in Western Indian Ocean.

- IOC observer status will strengthen western flank of the Indo-Pacific and is a stepping stone to security cooperation with East Africa.

Conclusion

The oceans and world's waterways are global commons. **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**– the concept of whole world as a family – is perhaps most vividly witnessed on the oceans of the planet that connect us all. India is, and has always been, a maritime nation. India's ancient Sanskrit texts also refer to the oceans as the storehouse of **Chaturdashanam Ratnanam**, the 14 gems.

Surrounded by sea from three sides, India has a long coastline of over 7500 kilometers. India's central location in the Indian Ocean has connected us with other cultures, shaped our maritime trade routes, influenced India's strategic thought, and defined our maritime character. Since the days of the Indus Valley Civilization, India has maintained an extensive network of maritime links, including with Africa, Western Asia, and the Mediterranean region, the West, South East Asia and the Far East. India's economic future and prosperity are dependent on cooperation with like-minded nations to secure the global maritime (and cyber) commons, on which its linkage with the world at large depends and an observer status to IOC is a step in right direction.

Woes of China and the US hand India an opportunity

Source: https://www.livemint.com/opinion/columns/woes-of-china-and-the-us-hand-india-an-opportunity-11587572799806.html

Context: Role of India post the pandemic

There are many factors that seems to converge that may offer India a chance to play a bigger role in global growth. With world's two superpowers under great distress due to COVID-19 outbreak, India can grab an opportunity created by the changing world order.

This brings us to the question of what are the opportunities for India and what are the challenges India needs to overcome to grab this historic opportunity. Therefore, in this article we will discuss the following:
- How China is facing distress due present scenario?
- How USA is facing distress due to present scenario?
- How India can use the present scenario as an opportunity to grow?
- What are the challenges India needs to overcome to emerge as a global favorite?
- Conclusion

How China is facing distress due present scenario?
- China started its economic reforms in 1978 under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping who laid out a pragmatic vision for China's future. China kicked off its journey from economic isolation to becoming the world's factory following Deng's vision.
- China's economic growth since the reform has been very rapid, exceeding the East Asian Tigers (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan). Since the beginning of Deng Xiaoping's reforms, China's GDP has risen tenfold.
- China is widely seen as an engine of world and regional growth. Asian leaders view China's economic growth as an "engine of growth for all Asia".
- But China is facing criticism from the world because of the COVID-19 outbreak.
    - US President Donald Trump has blamed China for the cause of COVID-19 outbreak and warned China of "consequences" because of its actions that led to the outbreak. The relations were already strained by the ongoing trade war between two countries.
    - A German newspaper accused China of a surveillance state that infected the world with a deadly disease. German Chancellor Angela Merkel told reporters, "I believe the more transparent China is about the origin story of the virus, the better it is for everyone in the world in order to learn from it."
- The poor quality of Chinese goods has been a loud whisper across consumer markets. But now, with so many countries suffering from faulty test kits imported from China, it is out in the open.
    - The testing kits procured from China have a mere 5% accuracy rate in India.
    - Spain, with one of the largest counts of positive cases returned around 6, 00,000 faulty kits to its manufacturer.
    - The British government is seeking a whopping $20 million refund from the two Chinese companies for providing faulty testing kits.
    - Italy and Netherlands have also halted testing with Chinese kits.
- The companies based in Japan and South Korea are looking at alternatives as China's wage cost advantage fading over the last few years and now the rising risk of having operations in the country. The wages for skilled labor increased rapidly in the past decade. Though, wages for unskilled labor still remains quite low compared to the skilled intensive sectors.

How USA is facing distress due to present scenario?

- USA has been the worst affected country due to the deadly virus that originated in China in December last year. New York City, the financial capital of the world, has emerged as the epicenter of corona virus in the world.
- The quarantines and lockdowns that are needed to fight the virus's spread are freezing the economy, too, with unprecedented force and speed. Unemployment is shooting up far faster than it did during the 2008 recession, a sign the economy is headed toward recession.
- Other potential threat to USA comes when prices of benchmark United States crude turned negative on April 20, dropping as low as -$40.32 per barrel. This means that supply exceeds far than the demand and prices turning negative signals that traders are willing to pay to have oil taken off their hands.
- The demand declined so much because of the corona virus that led to containment measures that shut down businesses, closed borders, disrupted international travel and locked down consumers.
- To deal with the situation President Trump strikes an output-cut deal with Saudi Arabia and Russia. Saudi-led OPEC and its allies did agree to a record production cut of 9.7 million barrels a day. But the markets were hardly impressed because even that historic curb is not enough to counter the blow corona virus has delivered to demand and US shale producers are still struggling.
- US shale oil producers, because of their higher cost of production need crude to fetch between $46 to $54 a barrel to break even, let alone to turn a profit.
- According to Haynes and Boone's Oil Patch Bankruptcy Monitor of 6 April 2020, the cumulative debt of exploration and production companies in the US had climbed to $130 billion by the first quarter of this year, sharply up from around $18 billion five years ago.

How India can use the present scenario as an opportunity to grow?

- The slump in oil prices will be beneficial for India, which gets to record a lower current account deficit and shore up its government finances.
- India imports over 80 per cent of its crude oil requirements. Low oil prices can not only reduce India's import bills but it can also give a room to the government to increase fuel taxes, offsetting low direct tax collection. Further, low petroleum and fuel costs also bring down energy prices, moderating the inflation rate.
- With the imposition of lockdown in the country, India's information technology (IT) services companies used the occasion to test their levels of preparedness for a new world order. As their operations in Bengaluru, Pune, Kolkata and Gurgaon were halted, they moved thousands of people to work from home while simultaneously allaying the security concerns of their global clients.
- Video conferencing and virtual offices have been used extensively for official work without actually hampering productivity.
- India's corporate sector has been working vigorously in the past 2 months in the field of health sector. From domestic manufacturing of testing kits to R&D in the field of drug and vaccine trials, Indian companies are working actively to fight the pandemic.
- The over-dependence on China is hurting the global economy and companies are now on a lookout for alternative production hubs. For many companies, the shift from China began prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, thanks to the rising input costs and the US-China trade war. India can use this opportunity and emerge as a nerve centre of modern supply-chain of the world.

- A changing global economic order will make many focuses on India as a preferred destination for investment. While the global economic system is slated to go to a slump, opportunities and challenges for India occur through all avenues. India can emerge as a potential alternative choice for cost-efficient, quality products which are preferred from China.

What are the challenges India needs to overcome to emerge as a global favorite?

- Lack of skill: Apple's manufacturing stint in India began in 2016, and since then it has been producing four models in the country, all of them old models. However, the new models are still manufactured in Shenzhen, China. The complexity of the components manufactured goods warrants a standard of skill which may be lacking in the Indian labor force.
- To attract foreign investment, a better business environment, lower administrative bottlenecks, more incentives would be required.
- There is a need for a massive push for creating a robust infrastructure. This calls for investments in steady power supplies, efficient port and road operations, and greater ease in custom clearance.
- India needs to move away from an input base system to a more support base system (manufacturing of parts and components) that would promote participation in the supply chains.

Conclusion

In this raging global epidemic, many developed nations' responses have proved inadequate — so overwhelming has been the challenge. Only a handful of countries have withstood the virus onslaught. India has fared somewhere in the middle, though some would reckon that the nation has done well to contain the virus' community spread. Post COVID-19, India needs to address the various challenges and work in the direction to grab the opportunity created by the change in the World order due to Covid-19.

India also looks at economic slowdown due to the pandemic. Once the pandemic is brought under control, India must actively engage in rebuilding the world economy. The world must think beyond naked profit and look to shift manufacturing and sourcing the services to a democratic and competitive nation which guarantees basic freedoms, is committed to reforms and can continuously adapt and innovate to changing global market needs. That is the essential economic take away from the catastrophic disruption of supply chains due to Covid-19 pandemic.

Let's leverage block chain manufacturing to fight covid-19
Source: https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/opinion-let-s-leverage-blockchain-manufacturing-to-fight-covid-19-11587716283110.html

Context: Block chain and supply chain management

Block chain can be used to ensure quality assurance via tracking the supply chain for transportation and storage with minimal manual intervention. Block chain technology could offer a technological means for meeting the challenges arising in crisis like today's and enabling potential steps for improvement of governance.

This brings us to the question of use of block chain and how it can increase business efficiencies and act as a transformative force in multiple aspects of government and private sector operations. In this article we will discuss the following:
- Why Supply Chain Management is important during pandemic like COVID-19?
- What is Block chain Technology?
- What is NITI Aayog's Block chain: The Indian Strategy?
- What are the challenges in adopting Block chain technology?
- Conclusion

Why Supply Chain Management is important during pandemic like COVID-19?

- Due to imposition of lockdown, several steps have been taken to place severe restrictions on economic activities **excluding 'essential services'**.
- Providing essential services to the citizens during this period remains one of the major concerns of the government and their supply chains are critical for commodities such as food and medicine.
- There is a need to establish an oversight on the production, movement and availability of goods, besides ensuring authenticity, quality, and provenance during distribution.

> **Essential Services:**
> - The services whose interruption would endanger the lives, health, or personal safety of citizens.
> - These include groceries, ration shops, hospitals, medical establishments, police, defense, public utilities, banks, power etc.
> - The Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) is an act of Parliament of India which was established to ensure the delivery of certain services, which if obstructed would affect the normal life of the people.

- Shortages in supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and other critical medical equipment in India and abroad demonstrate the need for a robust supply chain management system.
- The Covid-19 Containment Plan released by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) states that for containing a cluster with a population of 100,000 for 1-2 months, there is a need of about 2,000,000 triple layer face masks; 200,000 gloves; 100,000 N-95 masks and 50,000 PPE kits. To meet such large demand of these essential goods, there is first a need to make the suppliers visible.
- Suppliers are reluctant to share information regarding sources and prices, for fear of losing their competitive advantage and misuse of data, hence their visibility and tracking becomes challenging.
- A large number of processes in supply chain management are still managed on paper, necessitating physical contact, which makes it costlier and more difficult to plan efficiently in present conditions.

- In times of crisis management of supply chain is equally important to governments as it is for businesses particularly for production and supply of essential equipment like test kits, PPEs, masks, etc.

What is Block chain?
- Block chains can be defined as a new type of network infrastructure (a way to organize how information and value moves around on the internet) that create 'trust' in networks by introducing distributed verifiability, auditability and consensus.
- Block chains create trust by acting as a shared database, distributed across vast peer-to-peer networks that have no single point of failure and no single source of truth, implying that no individual entity can own a block chain network, and no single entity can modify the data stored on it unilaterally without the consensus of its peers.
- New data can be added to a block chain only through agreement between the various nodes of the network, a mechanism known as distributed consensus. New data is added to the end and once added, it is permanent. Older data can neither be removed nor modified.
- Block chains leverage techniques from a field of mathematics and computer science, known as **cryptography**, to sign every transaction (e.g. the transfer of assets from one person to another) with a unique digital signature belonging to the user who initiated the transaction.
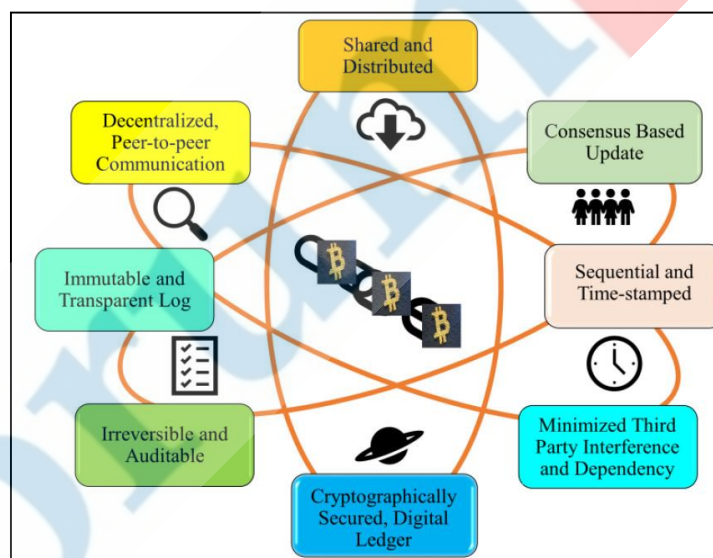
Characteristics of Block chain

What is NITI Aayog's Block chain: The Indian Strategy?
- The leading policy think tank working for the government of India, Niti Aayog, has come out with a strategy document recognizing many crucial areas block chain technology can significantly benefit the country. The first part of the strategy is known as **Blockchain: The India Strategy — Towards Enabling Ease of Business, Ease of Living and Ease of Governance.**
- Governance in India faces unique challenges given the scale, diversity and complexity of processes involved for delivery of varied public services. Block chain offers unique possibilities of addressing issues relating to improving governance. In business, by allowing 'self-regulation'.

- India can considerably move towards improving the 'Ease of Doing Business' by allowing entities to interact through a trusted medium with a reduced dependency on cumbersome regulatory oversight and compliance. By empowering citizens through features of transparency, decentralization and accountability, block chain would help in improving ease of living.

- NITI Aayog has pursued proof of concepts in four areas in an attempt to better understand the possible hurdles to implementing block chain technology. The pilot projects included a **track and trace of drugs in the pharmaceutical supply chain, claims verification and approval in the disbursement of fertilizer subsidies, verification of university certificates, and a transfer of land records.**

> **NITI Aayog (National Institution for Transforming India):**
> - Established in 2015 to replace the Planning Commission with Prime Minister as the Chairperson of the Aayog.
> - It is a policy think tank of the Government of India, established with the aim to achieve sustainable development goals with cooperative federalism by fostering the involvement of State Governments of India in the economic policy-making process using a bottom-up approach.
> - There are two hubs which reflect the two key tasks of the Aayog – Team India Hub and the Knowledge and Innovation Hub. The Team India Hub leads the engagement of states with the Central government, while the Knowledge and Innovation Hub builds NITI's think-tank capabilities.

- In healthcare, block chain technology can be used to create a unified data system. The different partners like drug manufacturers, transporters and logistics service providers can come together for large scale coordination.

- A 'private' block chain could serve as a trusted common platform that would facilitate interaction between the large varieties of IT systems in a manner that maintains privacy through stakeholder specific accessibility controls.

- A block chain can serve as a potential source of data regarding overall supplier dependencies to enable strategies for risk mitigation. The block chain platform also lends itself to ensure quality assurance through tracking the supply chain and compliance with norms for transportation and storage (temperature, etc) with minimal manual intervention.

- On boarding various tiers of suppliers of various supply chains onto a common block chain platform would thus enable businesses and government to form a data driven view of their supply chains, and help minimize disruption caused by future disasters.

- Some of the major organizations exploring this approach are BMW, Tesla, Walmart, Nestle, and the Global Shipping Business Network (GSBN).

- The second part of the strategy, to be released in coming weeks, will focus on recommendations to establish India as a vibrant block chain ecosystem, including regulatory and policy considerations, creating a national infrastructure for policy solutions, and a procurement process for government agencies to adopt block chain technology.

What are the challenges in adopting Block chain technology?

Analysis of NITI Aayog's pilots has led to the led to realization of a number of lessons in implementation of block chain, specifically in the Indian context. Some of the challenges are:

- Block chain's 'immutable' nature necessitates the need to create a single source of truth before a process is put on block chain. This was evident in the creation of a prototype for the management of land transactions by NITI Aayog. The entity governing the recordkeeping of land records has to make sure that all instances of land records are dispute free.

- Block chains require that the asset being tracked be represented digitally. This requirement for a viable block chain use case often require changes in the traditional process before block chain can be deployed, which may cause the involved stakeholders to be reluctant to participate as they are not ready to give up traditional practices.

- Integration with existing and usually complex legacy systems will be a real challenge for large corporations. Therefore, most of the use cases so far have been limited to specific parts of businesses, as corporations figure out their block chain strategy. In the implementation of block chain for 'track and trace' of pharmaceutical drugs, for example, existing ERP or SCM (Supply Chain Management) needed to be integrated with the block chain platform for a unified view of drugs as they moved through the supply chain.

Conclusion:

Block chain is still in its nascent stage in India. Some of the steps to use block chain at wide level can includes, shared ownership model that allays fears of centralization across supply chain stakeholders. Clear incentives must be created to ensure the participation of multiple tiers of suppliers so as to make the initiative a success, with special care taken to ensure that businesses trust the system. These steps are premature in the ongoing crisis but they can be worked upon after the pandemic to avoid similar situations in the future.

NITI Aayog in the first part of the two-part Strategy document has focused on the application of block chain to resolve business and governance process inefficiencies. The second part of the Strategy will focus on recommendations to establish India as a vibrant block chain ecosystem. Taking steps to increase domestic supply chain visibility may also be critical for improving the attractiveness of India as a potential alternative manufacturing hub.

At the edge of a new nuclear arms race

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/at-the-edge-of-a-new-nuclear-arms-race/article31439692.ece

Context: Nuclear arms race and CTBT

The U.S.'s moves to resume nuclear testing, signals the demise of the ill-fated CTBT, could be the first signs of new nuclear arms race. As per Arms Control Association and Federation of American Scientists, there are about 14,500 nuclear weapons in the world and nine nations (USA, Russia, China, France, UK, India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea) are members of the world's nuke club.

This brings us to the question of arms race and prohibition on the development of nuclear arms further. Therefore, in this article, we will discuss the following:
- What is Nuclear Arms Race?
- What is CTBT?
- What are the issues in CTBT?
- How nations in the world are competing with each other for nuclear arms?
- Conclusion

What is Nuclear Arms Race?
- An arms race competition for supremacy in nuclear warfare between the United States, the Soviet Union, and their respective allies during the Cold War. During this very period, in addition to the American and Soviet nuclear stockpiles, other countries developed nuclear weapons,
- The first nuclear weapon was created by the United States of America during the Second World War (1939-1945) and was developed to be used against the Axis powers.
- In addition to the United States and the Soviet Union, three other nations, the United Kingdom, People's Republic of China, and France developed nuclear weapons during the early cold war years.

What is CTBT?
- The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is the Treaty banning **all nuclear explosions - everywhere, by everyone.** The Treaty was negotiated at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva and adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. It opened for signature on 24 September 1996.
- Before CTBT, a Partial Test Ban Treaty was concluded in 1963 banning underwater and atmospheric tests but this only drove testing underground.
- 182 countries have signed the CTBT – the last country to do so was Trinidad and Tobago on 8 October 2009 which also ratified the Treaty on 26 May 2010. 154 countries have ratified the Treaty – most recently Ghana on 14 June 2011.
- The CTBT is the last barrier on the way to develop nuclear weapons. It curbs the development of new nuclear weapons and the improvement of existing nuclear weapon designs.
- The definition of "comprehensive test ban" is a "zero yields" test ban that would prohibit supercritical hydro-nuclear tests but not sub-critical hydrodynamic nuclear tests.
- When the Treaty enters into force it provides a **legally binding norm** against nuclear testing. The Treaty also helps prevent human suffering and environmental damages caused by nuclear testing.
- Nuclear tests conducted before CTBT (between 1945-1996):

- o Over 2000 nuclear tests were conducted by the United States.
- o The Soviet Union conducted 700+, France 200+, the United Kingdom and China 45 each.
- o Three countries have carried out nuclear explosions after the 1996: India and Pakistan in 1998, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in 2006 and 2009.

> **Hydro-nuclear tests**: Nuclear weapon tests, or high-explosive driven criticality experiments, limited to sub-critical or slightly supercritical neutron multiplication.
> - In a hydro-nuclear test, fissile material is imploded, but a supercritical mass is not maintained for a long enough time to permit the device to deliver "full" nuclear yield.
> - Hydro-nuclear experiments, as distinguished from hydrodynamic ones, use actual fissile material assembled to form a supercritical mass in which a chain reaction be-gins.
> - Subcritical Experiments involve chemical high explosives to generate high pressures that are applied to nuclear weapon materials, such as plutonium. The configuration and quantities of explosives and nuclear materials will be such that no nuclear explosion will take place. Thus, the experiments are consistent with the Comprehensive

- The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) is the organization that promotes the Treaty so that it can enter into force. It also establishes a verification regime to monitor adherence to the Treaty. The organization was founded in 1996 with its headquarters in Vienna, Austria.
- CTBTO runs an elaborate verification system built around a network of over 325 seismic, radionuclide, infrasound and hydro acoustic (underwater) monitoring stations.

What are the issues in CTBT?
- The CTBT prohibits all parties from carrying out "any nuclear weapon test explosion or any other nuclear explosion" and these terms are neither defined nor elaborated.
- The treaty fails to define a "nuclear test," the very action it is supposed to prohibit. Consequently, states may decide for themselves what constitutes a test.
  - o The US interprets the treaty as prohibiting tests that produce any nuclear yield. Russia apparently has a different interpretation; it reportedly conducts hydro nuclear tests that produce some nuclear yield. Such tests can be highly useful in assuring the safety and reliability of nuclear weapons, and in their modernization.
- States can defy in numerous ways with very low risk of detection. For example, a nuclear explosion can be decoupled by conducting it in an underground cavity and/or in a special container to reduce the seismic signal. Even CTBT proponents concede that militarily significant nuclear tests may be undetectable.
- In June 1996, India announced its decision to withdraw from the negotiations of CTBT. This led to revision the entry-into-force provisions (Article 14 of CTBT) promoted by U.K., China and Pakistan. The new provisions listed 44 countries by name whose ratification was necessary for the treaty to enter into force and included India.
  - o The Treaty's entry into force depends on **44 specific States that must have signed and ratified the Treaty**. These States had nuclear facilities at the time the Treaty was negotiated and adopted.

- o Of the 44 listed countries, to date **only 36 have ratified the treaty**. **China, Egypt, Iran, Israel and the U.S. have signed but not ratified.**
- o **North Korea, India and Pakistan are the three who have not signed**. All three have also undertaken tests after 1996; India and Pakistan in May 1998 and North Korea six times between 2006 and 2017.
- The CTBT has therefore not entered into force and lacks legal authority.

How nations in the world are competing with each other for nuclear arms?
- Strategic competition among major powers is today's norm. The U.S. now identifies Russia and China as 'rivals'. Its Nuclear Posture Review asserts that the U.S. faces new nuclear threats because both Russia and China are increasing their reliance on nuclear weapons.
- The U.S. have decided to expand the role of its nuclear weapons and have a more usable and diversified nuclear arsenal. The Trump administration has embarked on a 30-year modernization plan with a price tag of $1.2 trillion, which could go up over the years. Readiness levels at the **Nevada test site** that has been silent since 1992 are being enhanced to permit resumption of testing at six months notice.

> **New START:**
> - The treaty was signed in 2010 and took effect on February 5, 2011, aimed to continue long-standing efforts by the United States and Russia to control the size of their nuclear arsenals.
> - It significantly reduced deployed nuclear warheads down to 1,550 from the 2,200 allowed by the 2003 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT). Before that, the 1994 START I Treaty had capped warheads at 6,000.
> - New START also limits the number of launching systems the nuclear triad is allowed to have, including submarine- and land-based ballistic missiles and strategic bombers.

- The Trump administration, as outlined in its **Nuclear Posture Review (NPR)** released on Feb. 2, 2018, intends to continue the modernization plan laid out by the Obama administration, and also develop several new nuclear weapons capabilities.
- Russia initially made sharp reductions in its strategic nuclear forces but retained large numbers of non-strategic nuclear weapons. Today, Russia is modernizing these weapons as well as its other strategic systems. Russia's adoption of military strategies and capabilities rely on nuclear escalation. Moscow has decided return to Great Power competition and is exploring hypersonic delivery systems and theatre systems.
- China, too, is modernizing and expanding its already considerable nuclear forces. Like Russia, China is pursuing entirely new nuclear capabilities tailored to achieve particular national security objectives while also modernizing its conventional military.
- A report issued by the United States State Department on "Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments (Compliance Report) accuses China for secretly conducting a low-yield underground nuclear test and 'a high level of activity at the **Lop Nur test site** throughout 2019'.
- North Korea's nuclear provocations threaten regional and global peace, despite universal condemnation in the United Nations. Iran's nuclear ambitions remain an unresolved concern.
- United States withdrew from a Cold War–era agreement, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in2019. Signed by U.S. President Ronald Reagan and

Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987, the INF Treaty eliminated nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers. The end of the treaty could spark a new nuclear arms race.

- The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) limits U.S. and Russian arsenals but will expire in 2021 and U.S. President Donald Trump has already indicated that he does not plan to extend it. Instead, the Trump administration would like to bring China into some kind of nuclear arms control talks, something China has avoided by pointing to the fact that the U.S. and Russia still account for over 90% of global nuclear arsenals.

Conclusion

Resumption of nuclear testing may signal the demise of the ill-fated CTBT, marking the beginnings of a new nuclear arms race. A new nuclear arms race could just be the beginning. Unlike the bipolar equation of the Cold War, this time it will be complicated because of multiple countries being involved. Technological changes are bringing cyber and space domains into contention. All this raises the risks of escalation and could even strain the most important achievement of nuclear arms control — the taboo against the use of nuclear weapons that has stood since 1945.

Despite the Ujjwala Yojana, Why Does Solid Fuel Use Persist in North India?
Source: https://www.epw.in/engage/article/despite-ujjwala-yojana-why-does-solid-fuel-use-persist-north-india

What has happened: Solid fuel use and Ujjwala Yojana

A major source of air pollution exposure in rural India is the use of solid fuels, such as dung cakes and wood, for cooking and heating. In the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2015–16, 75% of rural Indian households reported using mainly solid fuels for cooking. In May 2016, the Indian government launched the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, which aims to promote the use of clean cooking fuel in rural India.

Although the Ujjwala Yojana has substantially increased access to LPG, many households that have LPG continue to use solid fuels. This brings us to the question of finding the reasons for the same. Therefore, in this article we will discuss the following:
- What is Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana?
- What is rationale behind Ujjwala Yojana?
- Where is Ujjwala Yojana lacking?
- Why use of solid fuel still persistent in rural areas?
- Conclusion

What is Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana?
- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana was launched by Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on May 1st, **2016** in **Ballia, Uttar Pradesh**.
- It is a scheme of the **Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas** that will provide **5 Cr LPG connections to BPL families** with a support of Rs.1600 per connection by **March 2019**. The target was later raised to **8 crore** connections by **March 2020.**
- The Scheme provides a financial support of **Rs 1600** for each LPG connection to the BPL households, **interest free loan** to purchase stove and refill by Oil Marketing Companies. The administrative cost of Rs. 1600 per connection, which includes a cylinder, pressure regulator, booklet, safety hose, etc., would be borne by the Government.
- Ensuring women's empowerment, especially in rural India, the connections will be issued in the name of women of the households.
- Identification of the BPL families will be done through **Socio Economic Caste Census** Data.
- Launch of this scheme will also provide a great boost to the 'Make in India' campaign as all the manufacturers of cylinders, gas stoves, regulators, and gas hose are domestic.

What is rationale behind Ujjwala Yojana?
- India is home to more than 24 Crore households out of which about 10 Crore households are still deprived of LPG as cooking fuel and have to rely on firewood, coal, dung – cakes etc. as primary source of cooking.
- The smoke from burning such fuels causes alarming household pollution and adversely affects the health of Women & children causing several respiratory diseases/ disorders.
- As per a WHO report, smoke inhaled by women from unclean fuel is equivalent to burning 400 cigarettes in an hour.
- According to WHO estimates about 5 lakh deaths in India alone due to unclean cooking fuels. Most of these premature deaths were due to non-communicable

diseases such as heart disease, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and lung cancer.

- Indoor air pollution is also responsible for a significant number of acute respiratory illnesses in young children.

Where is Ujjwala Yojana lacking?

- As per a survey conducted among the rural households in the sates of **Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh** (42% of India's rural population lives in these 4 states), 98% of households with LPG also had chulha, already indicating continued solid fuel use among LPG owners.
- Some food items were more commonly made on chulha, while others were more often cooked on LPG. For example, among households that made chai (tea), most made it on LPG. In contrast, among those who made roti (chapatti), most made them on chulha.
- Only 27% of households from the above 4 states are exclusively using LPG to cook all the items. About 37% are making some items on LPG and some on chulha, and 36% made everything on chulha.
- Conditional on having both types of fuel sources, rich households are less likely to exclusively use the chulha, and more likely to exclusively use LPG, than poor households. However, notably, less than 37% of the richest households exclusively use LPG conditional on having it. Interestingly, rich households are more likely to mix fuel sources than poor households. About 47% of the richest LPG-owning households mixed fuel sources (both chulha and LPG).
- Around 35% of all LPG-owning households and 60% of households that received LPG through Ujjwala, report not receiving the subsidy at all from the government.

Why use of solid fuel still persistent in rural areas?

- In the 4 states (Bihar, MP, Rajasthan and UP) where survey was conducted, LPG ownership increased from 32% households (in 2014) to 76% households (in 2018). But still several of these households continue to use solid fuels instead of LPG for cooking. The reasons could be listed as:
- **Household Wealth:** Refilling a cylinder costs almost half the average monthly per capita expenditure in rural India (National Sample Survey Office 2013). It is possible that poor households do not refill their cylinders often because of the expense.
- **Easy Availability of Other Fuel Sources:** Solid fuels are easily available and free of cost. Households that own cows or buffaloes have access to dung to make dung cakes, and those that own land can use its agricultural waste or cut branches from the trees growing on it. Public land and forests are also a source of free wood.
- **Issue of subsidy:**
  - Most households were not aware that they would not receive subsidies in their account until the "loan component" of the Ujjwala scheme had been adjusted against their subsidies.
  - Many households were not aware of the bank account their subsidy was being transferred to.
  - The relative cost of different fuel sources is likely a reason for some households to continue to use solid fuels despite having LPG.
- **Gender Inequality in Household Tasks:**
  - At all ages, women are more likely to be the main cooks, and to help in cooking, than men. Women between the ages of 25 and 40 are the most likely to be the main cooks, and girls and older women are the most likely to help in cooking.

- o A large fraction of the work of cooking with solid fuels is performed by women. Since North Indian cultural norms discourage women from working for pay outside of the home, there is a low opportunity cost of time spent making and collecting solid fuels and cooking on the chulha.
  - o Women also have low status and are typically not economic decision-makers in the household. Hence, effort and time put in by a woman in household works are not valued.

- **Beliefs and Attitudes:**
  - o Most respondents believe that, compared to the chulha, gas is easier to cook on and is healthier for the person cooking.
  - o But the vast majority of respondents also believe that food cooked on chulha is tastier, and is better for the health of the person eating.
  - o Many women knowingly sacrifice their own health believing that their choices are promoting the health of their children, husbands, and other family members.
  - o Using chulha is not only bad for the woman who cooks but also for the family members as they cannot escape the ambient air pollution caused by solid fuel use.

Conclusion

Despite the expansion in LPG ownership brought about by Ujjwala, most households still regularly cook with solid fuels. Therefore the need is to design interventions to discourage the use of solid fuel. Avenues worth exploring are **greater subsidies for cylinder refills, informational campaigns that educate about the harms of air pollution exposure, and behavioral campaigns that change attitudes. Advertisements** currently promote Ujjwala by emphasizing benefits to women. Although LPG use does benefit women, these advertisements reinforce women's roles as cooks. Instead, promoting **men's involvement in household tasks** such as cooking may help accelerate the use of LPG while promoting **gender equality**. The monitoring the progress of Ujjwala requires **monitoring cylinder refills.** Disaggregated and regular data on refills are important to release because it helps directly measure use.

Thus, to prevent exposure to harmful air pollution caused by the use of solid fuels for cooking, there is need to promote exclusive use of LPG.

Why Only Filling Judicial Vacancies Won't Decrease Pendency
Source: Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy

What has happened: Judicial Reforms in India

The Indian judicial system is plagued with problems of delay and backlog. The consequence of such high pendency of cases is erosion of faith in institution of judiciary. But there is more to judicial reforms than only filling up the judicial vacancies

This brings us to the question of what other issues are there in our judicial system that needs to be addressed. Therefore, in this article we will discuss the following:

- What is the need of judicial reforms in India?
- Why only filling judicial vacancies won't decrease pendency?
- What are the steps taken by government?
- What are the possible solutions?
- Conclusion

What is the need of judicial reforms in India?
The judiciary since its functioning from **January 28, 1950** has been the nation's moral conscience, speaking truth to political power, upholding the rights of citizens, mediating Centre-state conflicts, providing justice to the rich and poor alike, and on several momentous occasions, saving democracy itself.

Despite its achievements, a gap between the ideal and reality has been becoming clear over the years. Some of the prevailing issues are:

Backlogs of cases:

o As per Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, More than 43 lakh cases are pending in the 25 high courts in the country and over 8 lakh of these are over a decade old in 2019.

o The backlogs plaguing our judicial system have gained us disrepute in the international community, too.

o A prime example is the investment arbitration award in the case of **White Industries v. Republic of India**. An ICC Tribunal found that the Indian

> **What is Judicial Reform?**
> - Initiatives taken with a focus on proposing institutional, legislative, regulatory and policy reform needed to reinforce the Indian legal and judicial system.
> - Judiciary is our most trusted and valued institution. However, the mechanisms for judicial appointments have proved to be inadequate in elevating the best and the brightest to the Bench. Also, the existing arrangements to hold erring judges to account have failed.
> - Judicial reform is the complete or partial political reform of a country's judiciary. Judicial reform is often done as a part of wider reform of the country's political system or a legal reform.

Supreme Court's inability to hear an Australian investor's appeal for over 5 years amounted to a breach of India's obligation to provide investors with effective means to enforce their rights under the India-Australia Bilateral Investment Treaty. India was asked to pay a hefty sum of AUS$4.85 million to White Industries.

Disproportionate vacancies in some states:

o As per the **Department Related Standing Committee Report**, released in March this year, the current sanctioned strength for the District Judiciary across the

country is 24,018. Out of these, 5,146 (around **21%**) posts of judicial officers are lying vacant.

o Five states are struggling more than others when it comes to recruiting judges. Vacancy in the district judiciary is highest in **Uttar Pradesh** (1053), **Bihar** (776), **Madhya Pradesh** (370), **Gujarat** (308) and **Rajasthan** (309).

Vacancies not limited to District Judiciary:

o As per the Standing Committee's Report, 397 out of 1079 sanctioned posts lie vacant in various High Courts in the country. This amounts to almost **37%** vacancy in High Courts – higher than the vacancy percentage of 21% in the District Judiciary.

o Out of the 397 vacancies, recommendations for 206 posts have been sent by the High Courts, but the recommendations are still being processed between the Government and the Supreme Court Collegium.

Gap between policy and practice:

o The Supreme Court has endorsed the methodology of the **National Court Management Systems (NCMS)** committee for calculating judge strength. But in practice, High Courts follow different methodologies. Only two out of the 18 High Courts are using the NCMS methodology for calculation of judge strength. This shows there exists a gap between the policy debates at the Centre and the actual manner in which the court administration calculates the number of judicial posts needed across all tiers and cadres.

No measure to check productivity of judges:

o The **National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG)** system, which was created with the objective of improving judicial productivity qualitatively and quantitatively, is not collecting granular, relevant data from courts to determine performance indicators.

o Meaningful data in this regard would include time spent by judges on different case types and at different stages during the trial process.

Inexperience of trial court judges:

o A recent report by think tank Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy claimed that Civil judges and judicial magistrates in India are too young and consequently they lack "significant life experiences".

o The average age of new judges who are being appointed as Civil Judges and Judicial Magistrates is between 26-27 years except in Kerala where the average age is 33 years. Such candidates have little to no experience at the bar and also unlikely to have significant life experiences.

Why only filling judicial vacancies won't decrease pendency?

The conversation on judicial reforms in India so far has focused on supply side solutions like more judges and more funds for the courts. Reforms in the past have been made with a limited understanding of judicial vacancies and have ignored factors such as higher vacancies in some states and differences in the method used for calculating judge strength.

What are the steps taken by government?

• **National Mission for Justice Delivery and Legal Reforms** was set up with the twin objectives of increasing access by reducing delays and arrears in the system and enhancing accountability through structural changes and by setting performance standards and capacities.

- o The Mission has been pursuing a coordinated approach for phased liquidation of arrears and pendency in judicial administration which, inter-alia, involves better infrastructure for courts including computerization, increase in manpower strength of judiciary, suggesting policy and legislative measures in the areas prone to excessive litigation, recommending re-engineering of court procedure for quick disposal of cases and emphasis on human resource development.
- The **National Judicial Academy (NJA)** has made changes in delivery of training programs in the Academic Year 2015-16 to inculcate better use of technology among Judges in a stress free environment.
  - o A session on library reading and computer skills has been introduced for one hour each every day after technical sessions are over. Further, management and psychology disciplines to resolve disputes, conflicts, differences with peers and other stakeholders in the justice system have been introduced.
- The central assistance is provided to the State Governments / UT Administrations under the **centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) for development of Infrastructure Facilities for Judiciary** for construction of court halls and residential units for Judicial Officers / Judges of District and Subordinate Courts. The funds sharing pattern for Centre and State is 60:40 in respect of States other than North Eastern and Himalayan States (which is 90:10).
  - o An on-line monitoring system will be set up by the Department of Justice enabling data collection on progress, completion of court halls and residential units under construction as well as better asset management.
- Scheme on **Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs)** for expeditious disposal of cases of rape and Protection of Children against Sexual Offences (POSCO) Act.
  - o The scheme of Department of Justice aims at effective implementation of Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2018 by ensuring targeted disposal of pending rape & POCSO Act cases.
  - o A total of 1023 FTSCs will be set up under the Scheme out of which 389 FTSCs will exclusively handle POCSO Act case.

What are the possible solutions?
- **Creation of All-India Judicial Service (AIJS):**
  - o The competence and quality of judges in trial courts is critical for the integrity and credibility of the whole justice system. Therefore there is a strong case for creation of an All-India Judicial Service, in line with the All-India Services.
  - o **Article 312** of the Constitution provides for the creation of an All–India Judicial Service (AIJS) common to the Union and the States. Such a service can be created and regulated by the Parliament by law, provided that the Council of States has declared by resolution supported by not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting that it is necessary or expedient in the national interest to do so.
- **Using bottom-up approach: Improve the district courts.**
  - o A high-level team must visit each district court to ascertain what is lacking in terms of infrastructure and facilities. It would surprise many to know that many court halls and rooms for the registry have not been whitewashed for several years. Broken windows, chairs, shelves can be found across most.
  - o Discussions must also be held with district court judges to appreciate the bottlenecks they encounter in their day-to-day functioning and to understand their needs with a view to ease their high-pressure assignment.

- **Case and court management must be embedded in the justice delivery system:**
    - Case management is a comprehensive system of management of time and events in a law suit as it proceeds through the justice system, from initiation to resolution. Here, the court sets a timetable for the case and the judge actively monitors progress.
    - The Singapore judiciary has successfully implemented case management, and today its achievements are recognized across the world.
- The **Law Commission of India** in its **230th report** has also offered a long list of measures to deal with the pendency of cases.
    - These include providing strict guidelines for the grant of adjournments, curtailing vacation time in the higher judiciary, reducing the time for oral arguments unless the case involves a complicated question of law, and framing clear and decisive judgments to avoid further litigation.
    - In addition, the courts should also seriously consider incorporating technology into the system; digitizing courts records has been a good start in this context but a lot more can be done. For example, just like automation powered by Artificial Intelligence is already helping doctors, it can also be leveraged to assist judges and lawyers.
- The court administration, in-charge of computing judge strength, should be trained to use data management tools efficiently so that they apply the method best suited for computation of judge strength.
- All judicial reforms should be based on strong empirical foundations. Given the volume of administrative functions, a possible alternative can be outsourcing functions such as calculation of judge strength, which require rigorous statistical skills, to private experts.
- The NJDG (National Judicial Data Grid) which has been developed as part of the e-courts project, needs to collect better data which can assist in computation of judge strength. It should be able to measure judicial hours spent on different case types and at each stage of court processes.
- Expanding local courts all over the country, especially in urban areas, we can create an acceptable, simple mechanism for ensuring speedy justice in cases of ill-treatment of women, as well as many simple civil and criminal cases. For instance, if a person is held guilty of eve-teasing or harassment in a bus or train, the trial in a local court can be completed within days, and the person, in case of first offence can be imposed a fine and the conviction can be entered in his academic and employment record, with the condition that the entries can be deleted by the court after three years of good conduct.

Conclusion

Timely selection of judges and courts working at full strength will undoubtedly help improve the speed of justice delivery in the country if it also addresses the systemic issues in the ecosystem. Hence filing the vacant seats is not the only solution for judiciary to function efficiently. The mission shall ensure that the Indian judicial system will not only be known for the eloquence of its substantive judgments but also because of its ability to deliver justice quickly, independently and in a manner that keeps the faith of the public intact.

Limitations of online learning
Source: The Hindu

What has happened: Shift to Online Learning during COVID-19

India is following nationwide lockdown to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. Even when the lockdown gets lifted eventually, the government may not allow large congregations in restricted physical spaces that largely include college, schools campuses.

Under such circumstances, majority of the educational institutes are having shifted their operations to online learning. This brings us to the question of how effective online learning can be in long term. Therefore, in this article we will discuss the following:

- What is Online Learning?
- What Learning involves with respect to higher education?
- What are the benefits of Online Learning in distress situations?
- What are the issues in Online Learning?
- Conclusion

What is Online Learning?
- Online education is electronically supported learning that relies on the Internet for teacher/student interaction and the distribution of class materials.
- Online learning is education that takes place over the Internet. It is often referred to as "e-learning" among other terms. However, online learning is just one type of "distance learning", the umbrella term for any learning that takes place across distance and not in a traditional classroom.
- The Government of India has launched several programs under the initiatives such as 'Digital India' and 'Skill India' to spread digital literacy, create a knowledge-based society in India, and implement three principles 'access, equity and quality' of the Education Policy.
  - **e-Basta:** Schools books in digital form
  - **e-Education**: All schools connected with broadband and free Wi-Fi in all schools and develop MOOCs – develop pilot Massive Online Open Courses
  - **Nand Ghars:** Digital tools as teaching aids
  - **SWAYAM (**Study Webs of Active–Learning for Young Aspiring Minds): MOOCs based on curriculum taught in classrooms from 9th class till post-graduation
  - India Skills Online: Learning portal for skill training
  - In order to establish digital infrastructure, the government has also launched National Optical Fiber Network (**NOFN**) which aims to expand broadband connectivity and faster network.

What Learning involves with respect to higher education?
- Higher education means development of analytical and other intellectual skills, the ability to critically deconstruct and evaluate given knowledge, and the creativity to make new connections and syntheses.
- It also means to acquire practical skills, inquire, seek solutions to complex problems, and learn to work in teams.
- All these assume direct human engagement – not just teacher-student interaction, but also peer interactions. Deconstructing given knowledge in relative isolation is never the same as doing it in a group.
- Online learning needs to be understood as one strand in a complex tapestry of curricular communication (teaching-learning and examination) that may still assign an important central role to direct human engagement and social learning.

What are the benefits of Online Learning in distress situations?

- In pandemic situation like today's, where due to nationwide lockdown, all schools, colleges, universities were shut down, online learning comes as a savior to students and provided them with an opportunity to continue learning even while at home.

- There was anxiety, particularly about the graduating batches of students, lest the ongoing session should be declared a 'zero semester'. There were attempts from individual teachers to keep their students engaged. A few universities made arrangements for teachers to hold their classes virtually through video conferencing services such as Zoom. These are well-meaning attempts to keep the core educational processes going through this period.

- Many private and government colleges in the country had been conducting online classes. Very small aperture terminals (VSATs) are still used by top Business schools in the country to create a closed user group (CUGs), which offers online classes globally. However, COVID-19 has hastened

- Online education, a result of the digital world has brought a lot to the learning table at all levels of education, beginning from preschool up to higher level institutions. The move to remote learning has been enabled by several online tech stacks such as **Google Classroom, Blackboard, Big Blue Button, Zoom and Microsoft Teams**, all of which play an important role in this transformation.

- With the development of ICT in education, online video-based micro-courses, e-books, simulations, models, graphics, animations, quizzes, games, and e-notes are making learning more accessible, engaging, and contextualized.

- To ensure that learning never stops, the online education sector, and mobile networks have become the preferred platform. Teachers are preparing lessons using distance learning tools, and parents are learning new teaching techniques at home. Providing aid are the entrepreneurs offering online learning apps like BYJU's, Adda24x7, Duolingo, Khan Academy, Witkali and several others.

- Universities like World University of Design, Jawahar Lal Nehru University, Jamia Millia Islamia, Amity, IP University, Lovely Professional University and Mumbai University are offering online classes across different subjects.

- Schools in 165 countries around the world have closed due to the Corona virus outbreak, according to UNESCO. And, according to the **International Telecommunication Union** (ITU), more than 1.5 billion school children around the world are using online education, following the global lockdown.

What are the issues in Online Learning?

- The UGC Chairman said that to maintain social distancing, e-education was the only way out. He was also quoted as saying that online education was likely to be adopted as a strategy to enhance the gross enrolment ratio in higher education.

- This leads to questions about the appropriateness of what may be an effective contingency measure to tide over the pandemic crisis to be deployed as a long-term strategy for enhancing enrolment in higher education.

- Higher education has an influx of students who are **first-generation aspirants**, who have no support to struggle their way out of college.

- Access is not merely enrolment. It also includes effective participation in curricular processes, which includes negotiating through language and social barriers.

- These students are also from the other side of the digital divide which makes them vulnerable to a double disadvantage if digital modes become the mainstay of education. Unless they receive consistent hand-holding and backstopping, they tend to remain on the margins and eventually drop out or fail.

- **Cyber security** remains a concern with extra use of online education, telemedicine and e-commerce. An ITU report raised an important question about online safety that students, especially those who are new to these online tools have been informed about how to identify fake news and avoid phishing when researching for school projects at home.
- Online learning is not for everyone. Schools located in remote areas of the country with limited availability of electricity and internet is making restricted use of WhatsApp to stay connected with their classrooms.
- Online classes are not feasible for students with research as an essential component. Though the students are able to keep up with the theoretical lessons, practical training held in the laboratories is suffering.
- According to a report by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), **infrastructure** in terms of technology in India has not achieved a state of quality so as to ensure sound delivery of online classes to students across the country. It is seen that both the state and the private players have not yet managed to overcome technical challenges, for instance, in providing adequate **power supply** and ensuring **effective connectivity**.

Conclusion

Open and distance learning (ODL) institutions established during the mid-1960s to 1980s were a consequence of explorations for less expensive models for provisioning access to higher education. ODL may also have been considered by governments at that time for managing mass aspirations for higher education without necessarily effecting large congregations on campuses. E-learning has become an education equalizer but it's still not a replacement for the traditional classroom. Sure, the technology is advancing, but it's not flawless. Just like any new, burgeoning innovation, e-learning faces its own challenges. And direct human engagement is a crucial component of education.