

9pm

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19th to 25th October, 2020

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General Studies - 1

1. The plight of Sanitation workers

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS-1- Society

Context: Despite the laws, Sanitation workers still face stigma and are devoid of essential rights.

What were the demands of civil society? How did the government respond?

- **Civil society started a movement in the 1990s** to eradicate dry latrines, the focus now is on manhole deaths and provision of safety equipment to sanitation workers.
- Several State governments and the previous Central governments have reacted to these civil society demands by **introducing different laws to stop manual scavenging and provide incentives to build toilets.**

What are the issues with various government and civil society initiatives?

- **Act barring the construction of unhygienic dry latrines and employing manual scavengers, 1993:** It defined 'manual scavenger' as a person engaged in or employed for manually carrying human excreta.
 - It defined dry latrine as "latrine other than a water-seal latrine".
- Manual scavenging was not just a practice related to dry latrines, but also to **unhygienic latrines and open excretion.**
- **The Safai Karamchari Andolan** which was a social movement that campaigned against manual scavenging filed a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court along with other organisations.
 - The demand was to direct State governments and Union Territories to strictly enforce the law to stop the practice of manual removal of human excreta.
- **The central government's survey on manual scavengers (2013):** The survey found that dry latrines and manual removal of human excreta still existed.
- **The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act (2013):** Though the construction of dry latrines has drastically reduced, the number of deaths in manholes, sewers and septic tanks continues to remain high.
 - **The issue of labour safety** is not addressed in any amendments.
- **The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan**, limits the issue of labour rights and the stigma attached to sanitation. For instance, in Tamil Nadu, all political parties have trade unions for government servants, except for sanitation workers.
- **No permanent job status for sanitation workers:** Most sanitation contracts are given to private contractors or self-help groups, and such staff hardly have ID cards, leave alone the protection of medical insurance policies.
- **Particular caste members approached for hiring:** During the last Chennai floods, sanitation workers from the Nilgiris district were made to travel in garbage trucks to Chennai.
 - This situation has continued even during the COVID-19 pandemic as sanitation workers are asked to work in newly formed COVID-19 wards.

The issue of dignity of workers

- **Unlike other labour forces, sanitation workers do not have a separate rule-book** that lays down guidelines for their work timings, holidays, a proper place for roll call, removal from duty, etc. This is against the laws and ethics.
- **There are no vehicles for sanitation workers** to travel to their designated workspaces, and they have to either walk for kilometres or use garbage vehicles.

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- **This is a forced choice and is connected to the dignity of a worker** as no supervisor would stand and travel with the sanitation workers.

Way forward

In India, sanitation work is caste-ridden and hence, there is an urgent need to dissociate caste from labour.

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General Studies Paper - 2

General Studies - 2

1. India's low rank in Global Health Index

Source- The Hindu

Syllabus- GS 2- Issues relating to poverty and hunger.

Context- India has been ranked at 94 among 107 countries in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2020.

How Global Hunger Index [GHI] scores are calculated?

The GHI scores are calculated each year to assess progress and setbacks in combating hunger. It is calculated on the basis of four indicators-

1. **Undernourishment:** Share of the population with insufficient caloric intake.
2. **Child Wasting:** Share of children under age five who have low weight for their height, reflecting acute under nutrition.
3. **Child Stunting:** Share of children under age five who have low height for their age, reflecting chronic under nutrition.
4. **Child Mortality:** The mortality rate of children under the age of five.

What are the key findings?

Alarming situation for India-

- The country's score of 27.2 is the worst among BRICS countries, and inferior to Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal.
- India's child wasting rate was extremely high at 20.8% – the highest.
- The child stunting rate in India was 37.4 %,
- The child wasting was at 17.3 %.
- The undernourishment rate of India was at 14% and child mortality at 3.7 %.

What are the reasons for low scores and its possible solution?

1. The national policy-

- Has no appetite for a radical transformation in the delivery of adequate nutrition especially to women and children.
- Has paid inadequate attention to achieving diet diversity through the PDS.

2. Inequality- There is huge inequality because the fruits of growth are enjoyed by selected sections of society.

- Stunting prevalence is 10.1% higher in rural areas compared to urban areas.

3. Anaemia- One in two women of reproductive age is anaemic.

4. COVID-19- The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic downturn are exacerbating food and nutrition insecurity for millions of people.

Possible solution-

1. **Diverse diet-** Nourishment through a diverse diet that includes fat, protein and micronutrients.
2. Strengthening the Public distribution system, with a focus on women's health, would lead to healthier pregnancies, and stronger supplemental nutrition under the ICDS scheme would give children a better chance at all-round development.

Way forward-

- Food should be priced not only by its weight or volume but also by its nutrient density, its freedom from contamination, and its contribution to ecosystem services and social justice.

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- The benefits can reach more people if the government spends more to improve public education, health care, nutrition, social security and gender empowerment.

2. Police Reforms

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: Gs2: Role of Civil Services in a Democracy

Context: To improve the functioning of the police force, the Supreme Court has spelt out various directives which are not been implemented yet.

Recent examples on police brutality?

- The thrashing of a Dalit Ahirwar couple by the police in Guna district of Madhya Pradesh.
- The brutal torture of J. Benicks and his father P. Jayaraj in Sattankulam town in Thoothkudi district of Tamil Nadu
- Encounter of Vikas Dube by the Uttar Pradesh police in Kanpur looked like the law had been subverted.

What is Prakash Singh case?

- The first serious attempt to reform the police forces was made when the **National Police Commission (NPC)** was set up in 1977.
- The NPC submitted its recommendation in eight reports to the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- None of the recommendations were implemented by states as they felt that the report was unduly critical of the political system and the functioning of the police force.
- In 1996, demand for the implementation of the NPC's recommendations came through a retired IPS officer, **Prakash Singh** who filed a PIL in court.
- The landmark verdict of PIL came in 2006, the Supreme Court issued a slew of directives on police reform. (**Prakash Singh Case**)

Status on Implementation of Supreme Court directives?

- One of the recommendations was to set up a State Security Commission (SSC) in each State to arrest the political leader's access to unbridled power.
- According to the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, of the States that constituted an SSC, only Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have made SSC recommendations binding on the State government.
- Only six States provided a minimum tenure of two years to the Director General of Police (DGP).
- Many States have not implemented a single directive of the Supreme Court.

What is the reason for the poor implementation of police reforms?

- **Politicians-criminals-police nexus:** According to a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (2018), there were 1,580 MPs and MLAs facing criminal charges.

With fourteen years passed by, the Court has to take strict actions on the States and the Centre to ensure that its directives are implemented effectively else the country will witness an upheaval of the kind that the U.S. saw following the death of George Floyd.

3. Bangladesh's Economic Success

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: Gs2: India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

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Context: Regional implications of Bangladesh's economic success

Background:

- The International Monetary Fund's latest World Economic Outlook has predicted that Bangladesh's per capita GDP will overtake that of India this year.
- International development institutions have asked the rest of the subcontinent and developing countries around the world to learn much from Dhaka's experience or the Bangladesh model.

What are the regional implications of Bangladesh's economic success?

- **Rise of Bangladesh:** Over the last five decades, South Asia, for most purposes, has meant India and Pakistan. Now, the economic rise of Bangladesh is changing world's South Asian perspective.
- **Fall of Pakistan as a power in south Asia:** With the rise of Bangladesh GDP over Pakistan's GDP, the Bangladesh will gain geopolitical importance steadily in coming years whereas the Geopolitical weight of Pakistan will continue to fall negative.
- **Promotion of regional integration:** Bangladesh's economic growth can accelerate regional integration in the eastern subcontinent. The BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) sub-regional forum will have more significance for India.
- **Increasing role of Bangladesh in Indo pacific:** With economic success of Bangladesh drawing attention from countries in East Asia, including China, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore and also the US, the status of Bangladesh as global power is going to intensify in the new geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific.
- **Enhanced opportunities for Eastern India:** The economic rise of Bangladesh could boost India's national plans to accelerate the development of its eastern and north-eastern states through connectivity and Integration.

What hinders India's Cooperation with Bangladesh?

Progress in India- Bangla relations

- Parliamentary approval of the boundary settlement in 2015.
- India accepted the 2014 international arbitration award on the maritime boundary dispute between India and Bangladesh.
- Progress in strengthening economic ties and connectivity between eastern India and Bangladesh in recent years

Hindrance to India-Bangla relations

- Though India and Bangladesh are eager to promote greater cooperation between West Bengal and Bangladesh there has been little political will in Kolkata.
- In case of Assam, the issue of migration continues to impose major political constraints.
- Also, recent Citizenship Amendment Act has strained India-Bangla relations.

What is the way forward?

- India should jointly develop and pursue with Dhaka an ambitious framework for shared prosperity that would help India consolidate the golden chapter in India-Bangla relations.
- For this, India has to shift the focus from legacy issues to future possibilities.

4. HIV and way forward

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS-2- Health

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Context: There is a reduction in new HIV infections among children and in AIDS-related deaths in India.

Discuss the developments made by India in tackling HIV-related infections and AIDS.

- **According to the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO)/Ministry of Health and Family Welfare with the technical support of UNAIDS** show that there has been a 66.1% reduction in new HIV infections among children and a 65.3% reduction in AIDS-related deaths in India over a nine-year period.
 - **The number of pregnant women living with HIV has reduced** from 31,000 in 2010 to 20,000 in 2019.
- **HIV testing has increased over time** and within target range and treatment coverage has also expanded.
- **Under the leadership of NACO, a ‘Fast-Tracking of EMTCT (elimination of mother-to-child transmission) strategy-cum-action plan’** was drawn by June 2019, in the run towards December 2020: the deadline to achieve EMTCT.
 - **The plan involved mobilisation and reinforcement of all national, State and partners’ collective efforts** in a strategic manner, with district-level focus, and considering latest evidence so that the States/Union Territories and the country as a whole achieve the EMTCT goal.
- India made important progress in reducing the HIV impact on children **through prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV from 2010 to 2019.**
 - This was done through education and communication programmes
 - Increased access to HIV services with innovative delivery mechanisms for HIV testing
 - Counselling and care
 - Treatment and follow-ups
- **India made HIV testing for all pregnant women free** and HIV treatment is offered the same way countrywide without cost to pregnant mothers living with HIV through **the national ‘treat all’ policy.**
- **UNICEF has worked with the World Health Organization and NACO** to find high burden districts (in terms of density of pregnant women living with HIV) for 2 years.
- It is a challenge to diagnose 20,000 pregnant women living with HIV in an estimated 30 million pregnancies annually in India.
 - Since 2002 a series of implementation strategies were rolled out so that all pregnant women can access free HIV testing along with other services at pregnancy clinics, and **free treatment routines for life to prevent HIV transmission from mothers to babies.**
- **National Health Mission** made this possible in government health centres and grass-root level workers through village health and nutrition days and other grass-roots events.
 - **Using data-driven and decision-making approaches,** we are certain that AIDS will no longer be a public health threat for children in India by the end 2030, if not before.

5. UN Reforms

Source- [Live Mint](#)

Syllabus- **GS 2-** Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

Context- India’s absence from UN decision-making structures and lack of genuine reforms might force India to look for alternatives.

What are the current issues of UN?

- 1. Ineffectiveness of UN-**The UN has been unable to respond effectively to the once-in-a-century global crisis triggered by the coronavirus.
 - A global health pandemic should have been the high point of the multilateral search for a collective solution. Instead, it has turned out to be its nadir.
- 2. Challenge to multilateralism-** The rift between the permanent members of the Security Council has already started affecting the work of the UN Security Council.
 - China has stepped in to take advantage of the West's retreat from multilateralism.
 - The U.S. withdrawing from multilateralism.
 - Brexit has shown that nationalism remains strong in Europe.

What steps should India take in future with regard to UN?

- 1. Reforming UNSC** - Equitable representation as well as expansion of the UNSC is the desired reform that India envisages.
 - It is not readily evident if the global multilateral order will be able to reform itself and cope with rising geopolitical tensions and new security challenges.
- 2. Looking for Alternatives-** If the extant multilateral order will not work to secure Indian interests, then India will have to look for alternatives.
 - Today, the Indo-Pacific is driving the global economic and political agenda. Global institutional frameworks should reflect this shift.
 - Reforming UN multilateralism is wishful thinking and countries like India should embrace plurilateral setups, where like-minded nations come together on common interests.

Way forward-

- India called for a new template of multilateralism that reflects today's reality, gives voice to all stakeholders, addresses contemporary challenges, and focuses on human welfare.
- For India, the status quo is no longer a viable option. If UN reforms fail, New Delhi's approach to the United Nations could significantly alter in the coming years as India would feel it necessary to look elsewhere for solutions.

6. Implications of Indo - US Defence deals

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS-2- International Relations

Context: India and the US are preparing for the third 2+2 ministerial meeting between External Affairs Minister and Defence Minister, and US Secretary of State and Defense Secretary in New Delhi.

More on news:

- In the last two meetings, agreements known as LEMOA and COMCASA were signed. Next item on the agenda is the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) which is a pact with deep military implications.

What is BECA?

- **The Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement** mainly refers to an agreement on the sharing of geospatial intelligence, information on maps and satellite images for defence.
 - According to officials, anyone who sails a ship, flies an aircraft, fights wars, locates targets, responds to natural disasters, or even navigates with a cellphone relies on geospatial intelligence.

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- **Signing BECA will allow India to use the US's advanced geospatial intelligence** and enhance the accuracy of automated systems and weapons like missiles and armed drones.
- **BECA will provide Indian military systems with a high-quality GPS** to navigate and missiles with real-time intelligence to precisely target the enemy.
- **This could be a key for Air Force-to-Air Force cooperation** as India and the US have stepped up efforts to sign the pact during the upcoming 2+2.

What are the other two agreements about?

- **LEMOA:** The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement was signed between India and the US in August 2016 and it allows the military of each country to restock from the other's bases:
 - Access supplies, spare parts and services from the other country's land facilities, air bases, and ports, which can then be compensated.
 - This is extremely useful for Navy-to-Navy cooperation, since the US and India are cooperating closely in the Indo-Pacific.
- **COMCASA:** The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement was signed in September 2018, after the first 2+2 dialogue in the US.
 - It allows the US to provide India with its encrypted communications equipment and systems so that Indian and US military commanders, aircraft and ships can communicate through secure networks in peace and war.
 - COMCASA paved the way for transfer of communication security equipment from the US to India to enable interaction between their forces and potentially with other militaries that use US-origin systems for secure data links.

What do these three pacts put together mean?

- **LEMOA means one partner trusts the other enough** to expose its valuable assets.
- **COMCASA means one is confident that it can rely on encrypted systems** to connect the two militaries.
- **BECA means it can share highly classified information** in real time without fear of being compromised.
- **All this signals the level of trust that has developed** between the two countries and their militaries.

What is the significance of the India-USA pacts?

- Amid the stand-off, India and the US have **increased under-the-radar intelligence** and military cooperation at an extraordinary level, since June.
- **The cooperation includes sharing of high-end satellite images**, telephone intercepts, and data sharing of Chinese troops and weapons deployment along the 3,488 km Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- **The armed forces have used at least five American platforms** at the LAC which are:
 - C-17 Globemaster III for military transport
 - Boeing's Chinook CH-47 as heavy-lift helicopters
 - Boeing's Apache as tank-killers
 - P-8I Poseidon for overland reconnaissance
 - Lockheed Martin's C-130J for airlifting troops

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- **The US wants India to move away from Russian equipment** and platforms, as it feels this may expose its technology and information to Moscow.
- India is going ahead with the purchase of the S-400 air defence missile system from Russia, and this has been a spiking point for American panellists.
 - **India is cautious of Pakistan's deep-rooted ties with Pentagon**, and Washington's dependence on Rawalpindi for access to Afghanistan as well as its exit strategy.

Way forward

- Every administration in the last 20 years have left the Indo-US relationship in a better shape than how they inherited it and efforts should be made to continue this.

7. SVAMITVA- Digitization of land records

Source- The Hindu Business Line

Syllabus- GS 2 - Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Context - Importance of SVAMITVA scheme in agriculture and non-farm rural activities.

What is SVAMITVA scheme?

SVAMITVA (Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improved Technology in Village Areas) scheme is a collaborative effort of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, State Panchayati Raj Departments, State Revenue Departments and Survey of India.

Aim - To provide an integrated property validation solution for rural India for setting the boundaries of the rural lands and also provides the record of right to village household owners.

1. It is a scheme for mapping the land parcels in rural inhabited areas using drone technology and Continuously Operating Reference Station (CORS) and prepares GIS based maps for each village.
2. **Implementation**- The mapping will be done across the country in a phase-wise manner over a period of four years - from 2020 to 2024.
3. After physical verification and dispute resolution, property cards or Sampatti patrak will be made available on digital platforms or as hard copies to the village household owners.

Technology used- The Survey of India will use technology for topographical mapping, including satellite imageries and drone platforms.

What are the advantages of digital mapping?

Digital mapping will help raise rural productivity and incomes in various ways-

- a) **Smoother implication**- The digitization of agricultural land records has contributed to the smooth implementation of the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana, Fasal Bima Yojana and Rythu Bnadhu.
- b) **Tax collection**- The database will help in determination of property tax, which would accrue to the Gram Panchayats directly in states where they are empowered to collect such taxes.
 - The scheme will help in streamlining planning and revenue collection in rural areas and ensuring clarity on property rights.
- c) Digitization of personal identity and agriculture land, and now residential property in rural areas through SVAMITVA, will facilitate transparent transactions in land parcels

- d) **Non-farm related activity**- This will benefit from clear title and the removal of land supply constraints. Clear title records, accompanied by legalization of land leasing, will improve their access to credit, insurance and support services.
- e) **Enhances Liquidity of assets**- The cards will help increase liquidity of land parcels in the market and increase the financial credit availability to the village.
- f) **Creation of better GDPs**- The scheme will enable creation of better-quality Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GDPs), using the maps created under this programme.

Way forward-

SVAMITVA scheme is a welcome step for transparency and accountability. By proper co-ordination between Centre and state, smooth working of dispute settlement systems and training the youth for proper implication is required.

8. NEP: Computational Thinking

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS-2- Education

Context: The NEP 2020 must take a larger view of computational thinking and move beyond just data science and AI.

What is algorithms? How does it translate in the NEP?

- **The notions of calculation and algorithms are as old as mathematics** and date back to the early stages of representing numbers and geometrical figures and manipulating them for various uses.
- **All early learning of counting and arithmetic is method-based**, and hence algorithmic in nature, and all calculations involve computational processes encoded in algorithms.
- The framing in the NEP appears to put algorithms at the same level as instrumental 'coding'. It is considered as a **towards the functional goals of artificial intelligence (AI)** and data science.

How is coding and algorithm different?

- **The form of expressions of algorithms and the coding** have been different however the fundamental principles of classical algorithm design have remained same.
- **The use of algorithmic ideas is not limited only to calculations** with numbers, or even to digitisation, communication or AI and data science in the modern world. It is used in:
 - They play a **crucial role in modelling and expressing ideas** in diverse areas of human thinking including the basic sciences of biology, physics and chemistry, all branches of engineering.
 - In **understanding disease spread**.
 - In modelling social interactions and social graphs.
 - In transportation networks, supply chains, commerce, banking and other business processes.
 - In economic and political strategies and design of social processes.
- **Coding is merely the act of encoding an algorithmic method** in a particular programming language, which provides an interface such that the computational process can be raised in a modern digital computer. Thus, it is less fundamental.
- Coding certainly can provide excellent opportunities for experimentation with algorithmic ideas, **they are not central or essential to algorithmic thinking**.

Why is it important to learn the fundamentals?

- It is important at an early stage of education to develop **an understanding of the basic algorithmic processes** behind manipulating geometric figures, computing with numbers, solving systems of equations, modelling road networks and social graphs, and applying algorithmic ideas to everyday problems.
- **An overemphasis on learning of specific programming** languages prematurely may distract from focusing on the development of algorithmic creativity.

Way forward

- While the NEP guideline of introducing algorithmic thinking early is a welcome step, it must be ensured that it does not degenerate and get bogged down with mundane coding tricks at a budding stage in the education process.

9. Precautions during festive season

Source- The Hindu

Syllabus- GS 2 - Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Context - Necessary to take extra precautions during upcoming festive season, amid COVID- 19 Pandemic.

What are the views of experts amid festive season?

1. **Committee warning** - A government-appointed committee of doctors and scientists warned of a rapid surge of 26 lakh Coronavirus cases within a month if people show laxity in following COVID-19 protocol during the upcoming festive season and winter days.
 - **Kerala festive example-** The epidemic curve of Kerala changed completely due to Onam festivities, when there were huge congregations of people convened in large numbers didn't take precautions.
2. **States highlight recoveries over risk-** States, anxious to present a picture of near-normality to boost economic activity, highlight recoveries over risk, which may lead the people to lower their guard.
 - However, there are five States (Kerala, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal) and 3-4 Union Territories (UTs), where there is still a rising trend in daily cases.

What are the possible measures required to control the 2nd wave of COVID-19?

1. **Commercialized health system-** The Centre should launch policy reform to transform a predominantly commercialized health system into one providing universal coverage.
2. **Self-discipline** - If precautions are not taken, the situation can go out of hand with sudden rise of Covid-19 cases. Besides, people need to be extra cautious during the festival season and practice social distancing.
3. Action against those found without masks at all public places.

Way forward-

- With loss of income and steep rise in health insurance premium, the cheapest protection against disease and financial loss is prevention.
- Government needs to make proper market arrangement for residents during the festival season and issue guidelines for social distancing and safety protocol.

10. 2+2 dialogue amid U.S. presidential election

Source- The Hindu

Syllabus- GS 2 - Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Context - With 2+2 dialogue this close to the U.S. elections, India has taken a calculated and bold gamble.

What is 2+2 Dialogue?

It is a format of dialogue where the defense and foreign ministers or secretaries meet with their counterparts from another country. 2+2 Ministerial is the highest-level institutional mechanism between the two countries.

- India holds such talks with Australia, at the foreign secretary and defense secretary level but with Japan and the US at the ministerial level.
- First was held in New Delhi in September 2018.

Why 2+2 dialogue amid US presidential election be called as gamble?

1. Paris Climate Change Agreement- 2016, Just month before US presidential election- U.S. urging India to sign this agreement at the earliest.

- U.S.'s commitment to mobilize \$100 billion per year by 2020 as part of a Green Climate Fund (GCF) to help developing countries such as India with climate adaptation methods and renewable technologies.
- However, newly elected President, Trump, announced that the U.S. would exit the Paris agreement, and also revoked U.S. promises towards the GCF, calling it "very unfair".

2. Un-cleared election result- All presidential polls and predictions for the US Electoral College points to a probable win for Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden.

- In the event Mr. Biden wins the election, India will hardly have endeared itself to the incoming administration by making strong statements of solidarity with Trump policy, strategic or otherwise.

Why the upcoming 2+2 dialogue is important to India?

Significance of 2+2 dialogue-

1. Indo-Pacific- On the maritime sphere, discussions will include strengthening ties in the Indo-Pacific region and also include discussions on how free nations can work together to thwart the threats posed by the Chinese Communist Party.

- **BECA Agreement** - The U.S. wants India to sign the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial Cooperation (BECA), at the India-U.S. 2+2 ministerial dialogue.
 - This agreement would facilitate exchange of geospatial information between India and United States for both military and civilian use.

2. LAC front- US could promise to keep the pressure on Pakistan on terrorism, despite the US need for Pakistan's assistance in Afghan-Taliban talks.

3. Trade issues- U.S. should be pushed on resolving trade issues with India and perhaps commit to restoring India's Generalized System of Preferences status for exporters.

- The government could press for more cooperation on 5G technology sharing, or an assurance that its S-400 missile system purchase from Russia will receive an exemption from the U.S.'s Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (**CAATSA**) sanctions.

Way forward-

- The third edition of the two-plus-two dialogue between India and the US will entail a comprehensive discussion on cross-cutting bilateral issues as well as deliberations on regional and global developments. Unlike the experience of 2016, government must drive a harder bargain to consolidate the pay-offs from the visit.

11. UNSC Reforms

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS2: Important International Institutions, agencies and fora - their Structure, Mandate.

Context: Year 2020, marks the diamond jubilee (75 years) of the United Nations.

How UN performed all these years?

- **During cold war years:** The UN had little room to implement noble visions of peace, development and human rights.
- **Post-Cold War years:** Regarded as the golden age of the UN. It was actively involved in peacekeeping missions, nation-building interventions and promotion of universal human rights.
- **New Cold War years:** It represents present increase in geopolitical tensions between U.S and China. This period again witnesses very low activities of UN similar to the cold war period.

Why veto power was deemed necessary?

- If such VIP status have not been given, UN would have seen the same fate like the League of Nations.
- Collective command model (Use of Veto Power) of big powers was seen as a pragmatic step needed to avoid another world war.

What were the negative consequences of Veto power?

- **Rule of the few over the many:** It gives privilege to the most powerful states of the post-World War II by granting them great command over international politics via the undemocratic instruments of veto power.
- **Failed in its objectives:** Competitive vetoing by P-5 countries has prevented the UNSC from fulfilling its collective security mandate. For example, failure to cooperate against the immediate global threat of the pandemic.
- **Obstacle to reforms:** It has also resulted in P-5 countries blocking reforms

What is the way forward?

- Outmoded procedures based on the discriminatory prerogatives to P-5 countries have to be discarded.
- The obstacles to UNSC reforms would reduce by replacing the P-5 consensus method to the simple majority voting method.

To ensure a renaissance of the UN, there must be a global push against discriminatory rules which have privileged 'rule' of the few over the many.

12. Importance of Nutri-cereals

Source- The Indian Express

Syllabus- GS 2 - Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Context- The promotion of the production and consumption of nutri-cereals seems to be a policy shift in the right direction.

What are Millets and its benefits?

Millet is a common term to categorize small-seeded grasses that are often termed nutri-cereals or dryland-cereals. It includes jowar (sorghum), bajra (pearl millet) and ragi (finger millet), small millet, foxtail millet, proso millet, barnyard millet, kodo millet and other millets.

Benefits of millets-

- 1. Nutrition-** High in dietary fibre, nutri-cereals are a powerhouse of nutrients including iron, folate, calcium, zinc, magnesium, phosphorous, copper, vitamins and antioxidants.
 - Millets can provide nutritional security and act as a shield against nutritional deficiency, especially among children and women.
 - Reduce the risk of heart disease and diabetes in adults.
- 2. Photo-insensitive & resilient to climate change-** millets are hardy, resilient crops that have a low carbon and water footprint, can withstand high temperatures and grow on poor soils with little or no external inputs.
 - Adapted to low or no purchased inputs and to harsh environment of the semi-arid tropics, they are the backbone for dry land agriculture.
 - These unique features make millets suited for and resilient to India's varied agro-climatic conditions.

What are the reasons for decline in the production of millets?

- 1. Green revolution-** The focus was on food security and high-yielding varieties of wheat and rice. An unintended consequence of this policy was the gradual decline in the production of millets.
- 2. Change in consumer demand-** Due to change in consumption pattern, dietary habits, unavailability of millets, low yield, less demand and conversion of irrigated area for cultivation of rice and wheat.⁴

What are steps taken to address this situation?

To address this situation, a multi-pronged strategy has been adopted for the promotion of nutri-cereals by the current government-

- 1. Rebranding-** In order to promote 'millets', India had on its part notified these climate resilient crops as Nutri-Cereals.
- 2. Increment in MSP-** The government hiked the MSP of nutri-cereals so that more and more farmers may opt for cultivation of these less water consuming crops.
 - MSPs have been calculated so that the farmer is ensured at least a 50 per cent return on their cost of production.
- 3. Marketplace-** To provide a steady market for the produce, the government included millets in the public distribution system for improving nutritional support.
- 4. Farmer friendly schemes-** the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare is running a Rs 600-crore scheme to increase the area, production and yield of nutri-cereals.
 - With a goal to match the cultivation of nutri-cereals with local topography and natural resources.
 - The government is encouraging farmers to align their local cropping patterns to India's diverse 127 agro-climatic zones.
 - Provision of seed kits and inputs to farmers, building value chains FPO and supporting the marketability of nutri-cereals.

5. **Generate demand**- The Ministry of Women and Child Development has been working at the intersection of agriculture and nutrition by setting up nutri-gardens, promoting research on the interlinkages between crop diversity and dietary diversity and running a behaviour change campaign to generate consumer demand for nutri-cereals.

Way forward-

- The multi-ministerial policy framework is a strategic move towards building an Atmanirbhar Bharat which resonates with the global call for self-sufficiency and sustainable development.
- People should take small steps towards choosing healthier foods, which are good for the environment and bring economic prosperity to farmers.
- Partially processed millet products can be made available in the market to promote its consumption and thus, create a demand for these nutritious grains and simultaneously reduce the reliance on staples like rice and wheat.

13. Hunger and Solutions

Source: Down To Earth

Syllabus: GS-2- Health

Context: India ranked 94 in global hunger index 2020 among 107 countries.

What are the indicators of GHI? Where does India stand?

- **The GHI 2020 report has placed India 94th position** among 107 countries, much behind Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal.
- **GHI is based on four indicators:**
 - The proportion of undernourished in a population
 - The proportion of children under the age of five suffering from wasting (less weight in proportion to their height)
 - The proportion of children under five suffering from stunting (low height in proportion to their age)
 - The mortality rate of children under five
- **Countries with score within the range 20-34.9 are considered to be dealing with acute hunger.** High-income countries and those with very low populations were excluded from evaluation.

What is the need to battle hunger?

- **Exchange entitlement decline:** It means the occupation a section of people are engaged in is not financially rewarding enough to buy adequate food.
- The starvation is result of decline in four categories of entitlement:
 - 'Production-based entitlement' (growing food)
 - 'trade-based entitlement' (buying food)
 - 'own-labour entitlement' (working for food)
 - 'inheritance and transfer entitlement' (being given food by others)
- The agriculture output from small and marginal holdings are either stationary or declining due to reasons such as reduced soil fertility, fragmented lands or fluctuating market price of farm produce.
- Almost 50 million households in India are dependent on these small and marginal holdings.
- Relative income of one section of people has been on the decline. This has adverse effects on their capacity to buy adequate food, especially when food prices have been on the rise.

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- The public distribution system (PDS) of the state is not functioning well or is not accessible to everyone.
- Lack of income opportunities other than farm sector has contributed heavily to the growing joblessness in rural areas. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2017-18 revealed that rural unemployment stood at a concerning 6.1 per cent, which was the highest since 1972-73.
- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA) had been weakened over the years through great delays in payments and non-payments, low wages and a reduced scope of employment due to high bureaucratic control.

What can be done?

- **A renewed focus on small and marginal farmers** with support from the Union government to grow more crops.
- **The government may create provisions to supply cooked nutritious food** to the vulnerable section of the society. Jadavpur Jyotidevi Shramajeevi Canteen, for example, has been running for more than 200 days.
- **Rural employment schemes** such as MGNREGA should be given a boost to increase employment and wages.
 - Several organisations and individuals working under the scheme have suggested that the guaranteed work-days be increased to 200 and that equal wages be given in accordance with the minimum agricultural wages of the states.
- **Access to food grains under the PDS** needs to be streamlined by simplifying technical processes and reducing Aadhaar-related glitches.
- **One Nation One Ration Card scheme:** After the point-of-sale machines are made available at all the public distribution system (PDS) shops across the country, the scheme will be launched.
 - It will help people, especially migrant workers, who can avail the benefits of this scheme.
- **The National Food Security Act, 2013** is in place to ensure food security for the most vulnerable communities.
 - Ration distribution through fair price shops, mid-day meal programmes at schools, nutrition and maternity benefit programmes for children and pregnant mothers at *anganwadis* fall within the Act.

Way forward

- The Union government should ensure that if One Nation One Ration card scheme is brought into effect; is operationalised through proper preparations such as proper grain allotments to shops, identification procedures and proper issuance of ration cards to individuals seeking food grain.

14. India's maritime domain

Source- The Indian Express

Syllabus- GS 2 - Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Context- It is time for India to seek external balancing, best done via the maritime domain.

What are the significance and issues of QUAD and Malabar Exercise?

1. **Malabar Exercise** - It is an annual trilateral naval exercise between the navies of India, Japan, and the USA which is held alternately in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

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- **Aim-** it aimed at interoperability with an emphasis on humanitarian assistance, anti-submarines warfare, counter-terror operations, gunnery training and aerial surveillance.
- **Australia inclusion-** The move will bolster the ability of India, Australia, Japan and the United States to work together to uphold peace and stability across the Indo-Pacific region.

2. QUAD grouping- the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad has its roots in the Core Group of four senior diplomats representing the USA, Japan and Australia with a shared objective to ensure and support a free, open and prosperous” Indo-Pacific region.

Issues-

Undefined vision- Despite the potential for cooperation, the Quad remains a mechanism without a defined strategic mission.

- Its members have neither created a charter nor invested it with any substance.
- **China’s view to QUAD-** China to describe it as a “headline grabbing idea which will dissipate like sea-foam.

What measures can be opt to tackle China?

In order to rein in China’s hegemonic urges, there is need for affected nations to come together to show their solidarity and determination in a common cause.

- 1. Indo-Pacific Concord-** There is need to create a broad-based “Indo-Pacific Concord”, of like-minded regional democracies as an organization with a maritime security charter, which has no offensive or provocative connotations.
 - The Concord could also designate forces to uphold maritime security or “good order at sea”.
- 2. Multinational naval exercise-** A shore-based secretariat can be established in a central location like Port Blair, in the Andaman Islands, which would schedule and conduct periodic multinational naval exercises. The exercises could be structured to hone the skills of participating navies in specializations like-
 - Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.
 - Countering non-traditional threats.
 - Undertaking search-and-rescue operations.
 - Establishing networked maritime domain awareness.

What are the concerns for India in context of QUAD?

- 1. India-Australia relations-**
 - Australia’s past political ambivalence towards India, its trenchant criticism of our naval expansion and its vociferous condemnation of the 1998 nuclear tests.
 - Beijing’s recent influence on Australia’s foreign policy, which prompted its flip-flops over the sale of uranium to India as well as its peremptory withdrawal from the Quad in 2008.
- 2. BECA Agreement-** There is need to pay heed to valid concerns, regarding the possible compromise of information impinging on India’s security and whether these agreements will barter away the last vestiges of India’s strategic autonomy.

Way forward-

- India should never lose sight of the truism in international relations, that it is the unerring pursuit of national interests that guides the actions and policies of every nation.
- India needs to understand the salience of maritime power

15. India's UN journey and its role

Source- The Hindu

Syllabus- GS 2- Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

Context- The 75th anniversary of UN is an opportunity to look at the major trends, patterns and future challenges as far as India is concerned in terms of safeguarding its interests and promoting common good.

What are the different phases of India's journey in UN?

1. Phase 1- Before the end of the Cold War in 1989-

- The Indian leadership learned that the UN could not be relied upon to impartially resolve vital security disputes.
- The UN only to focus on common causes such as anti-colonialism, anti-racism, nuclear disarmament, environment conservation and equitable economic development.
- In 1988- India claims the moral high ground by proposing, three-phase plan to eliminate nuclear weapons from the surface of earth.

2. Phase 2- The demanding decade from 1990-2000-

- There was a **change in India's foreign policy** which was reflected in voting patterns at the UN.

For example- India showed pragmatism in enabling the toughest terms on Iraq even after eviction from occupied Kuwait, or in reversing the hitherto stated position on Zionism as racism

- India's diplomatic difficulties were exposed when it suffered a **humiliating defeat in the hands of Japan in the 1996 contest for a non-permanent seat in the UNSC.**
- India stood against indefinite extension of the **Non-Proliferation Treaty** in 1995, and rejected the backdoor introduction for adoption of the **Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty** in 1996.

3. Phase 3- Wind of changes – 21st century.

- **India strengthened its profile-** The economic liberalization and globalization policies, helped India to strengthening its profile.
 - a. The reliable and substantial troop contributions to several peacekeeping operations in African conflict theatres.
 - b. India has emerged as a responsible stakeholder in non-traditional security issue areas such as the spread of small and light weapons, the threat of non-state actors acquiring weapons of mass destruction, and the impact of climate change.

What will be the role of India as a non-permanent UNSC member?

India's areas of priority will continue to be-

- The upholding of Charter principles in the backdrop of a turbulent world..
- Mounting effective punitive measures against those who support, finance and sponsor terrorists.
- Striving for securing due say to the troop contributing countries in the management of peace operations.

Challenge for India-

1. In the midst of multilateralism and, and China's aggressive territorial forays India may face challenges and opportunities in the UNSC.
2. **Voting scenario-** China might succeeding in convening a formal meeting on Kashmir, India may have to choose either to abstain in the vote since it is a party to the dispute or vote against any unfavorable proposal that might be tabled.

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- The growing proximity with the US may prompt India not to stay neutral in order to counter balance China.

Way forward-

- India's future role will probably depend on its ability to weather the impact of the multiple crises it now faces on account of an unabated economic slowdown and a troubled relationship with China.

16. India-US Relations

Source: Indian Express

Syllabus: Gs2: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora

Context: A look at how India-U. S bilateral relationship has evolved during the tenure of different U.S Presidents and its highs and lows.

More in News

- The Indian diaspora being one of the most successful expatriate communities in U.S wants a closer bonding between India and U.S
- In 2020, India-U. S bilateral ties have grown in recent years on account of China's aggressive behaviour.

How India-U. S relation evolved over the years?

India-U. S relations were at all-time high during John F Kennedy and George W Bush administration:

John F Kennedy, in the 1960s:

- Kennedy was a firm supporter of India in positioning India as a democratic counterweight to a totalitarian China in Asia in the 1960s
- Even Kennedy had proposed an equivalent of a "Marshall Plan" for India funded by NATO allies and Japan to help India win the race against China.
- During his tenure, India received unprecedented economic assistance, and military aid during the 1962 Sino-India war
- Kennedy also played a role, in restraining President Ayub Khan of Pakistan from opening a second front against India during the Sino-Indian war
- The US-India relationship may have taken a different course during the difficult 1960s and 1970s had Kennedy not been assassinated in 1963, and Nehru not died in 1964.

George W Bush, in the 2000s

- He ensured the success of the nuclear deal between India and the United States. The agreement mainstreamed India's nuclear programme.

Worst phase of India's relations with the US was during Richard Nixon and Clinton administration

Richard Nixon in the 1970s:

- Nixon administration was well known for the pro-Pakistan tilt in the 1970s.
- During this period India departed from its Non-Aligned posture, signed the 1971 Indo-Soviet treaty as a response to the continuing US tilt towards Pakistan and the beginnings of a Washington-Beijing alliance

Clinton years in the 1990s:

- The Clinton years witnessed dip in India and the US bilateral relations.

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- India was pressurised to “freeze, rollback and eliminate” its nuclear programme and to settle Kashmir dispute with Pakistan.
 - The U.S administration, even questioned Jammu and Kashmir’s accession to India.
- American Presidents can make a real difference to bilateral ties, including on trade, on immigration policies, and larger strategic issues. The upcoming US Presidential election (Biden vs. Trump) has enormous significance to India.

17. Non-alignment in multipolar framework

Source- The Indian Express

Syllabus- GS 2 - Important International institutions, agencies and for- their structure, mandate.

.Context- India can play a constructive role in evolving a multipolar and just world order

What are the different phases of world order?

India’s advocacy for autonomy (& non-alignment) in making foreign policy choices in world order over decades.

1. **Bipolar** (1947 to 1991) - Era of Cold War where world was divided in two camps one headed by USA and other headed by erstwhile USSR.
 - During this phase India adhered to the principle of Non Alignment.
2. **Unipolar** (1991 to 2008) - With disintegration of USSR, USA became the sole super power.
 - In this phase India reached out to engage with US, Israel and ASEAN countries more intensively.
3. **Multipolar** at present times where there are big powers and several middle powers.
 - In this phase of transitional geopolitics, India's policy of Non-Alignment has turned into Multi Alignment.

What are the reasons for India to rethink its approach to Strategic autonomy?

1. **Rise of China-**
 - China as the workshop of the world made many established western powers insecure of their status.
 - **Trade war-** This has resulted in a trade and strategic war between China and the US, without caring for the real interests of the people and environment, which will tend to have disastrous consequences for most of the world and global population.
2. **Indo-China conflict-** The tension at the Western Sector of the India-China border claimed lives from both sides and exposed the unresolved conflicts between the two neighboring Asian giants.
3. **Annexation of West Bank** - Donald Trump backed Israel’s plan at annexing the West Bank is the newest in a long series of forcing dispossession and stateless on Palestinians.

These issues have brought the discussion around global power dynamics to the fore even when the world population is gripped with disease, sorrow, trauma and mass unemployment.

What is the significance of Indian foreign policy?

- India’s priorities have tilted towards the US and the neoliberal framework.
 - **Increasing risk-** The US is trying to drag India into its conflict with China to protect the US interests in the Asia-Pacific region.
 - **Impact other interests-** The trade deals done to please the US have resulted in the loss of livelihood, agricultural land, opportunities and hard-won labor rights of Indian working classes.

What are the needs of current situation?

1. Global need-

- The world needs today are international relations based on the principles of mutual respect, concern and cooperation and population involvement.
- To come together to build public health and education infrastructure.

2. Revival of Non-alignment-

- India should reject both the unipolarity of the 1990s and the bipolarity of the current system dominated by the US and China.
- India should live up to its independent non-aligned credentials and play a constructive role in evolving a more inclusive, multipolar and just world order.

- 3. India as a Non-permanent UNSC member-** India should use its UNSC chair to represent nations hitherto unrepresented or underrepresented at the high table and continues the tradition of speaking for the marginalized.

Way forward-

- India and China should engage in a meaningful dialogue to resolve the border dispute.
- India should strive to make the world more inclusive, just and sensitive to the environment.
- India pursuing an independent foreign policy is not only essential for the country or the South Asian region, it can have a bearing on deprived populations of the world.

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1. Nutrient-based subsidy

Syllabus: GS-3- Agriculture

Context: Cap on subsidised fertiliser only addresses issue of its diversion, doesn't fix overuse by farmers.

What is nutrient-based subsidy (NBS) regime for fertilisers?

- Under the scheme, a fixed amount of subsidy, based on the nutrient content present in them is provided on each grade of subsidized Phosphatic and Potassic (P&K) fertilizer except Urea.
- It was expected that the NBS scheme will control farmers from applying too much urea containing only nitrogen.

Was the NBS regime successful?

- No, the actual results prove otherwise. Between 2009-10 and 2019-20, urea consumption increased.
- The reason for this is, Since April 2010, the maximum retail price (MRP) of urea has been raised by hardly 11 per cent.
- Whereas the MRPs of other fertilisers that were decontrolled, with the government only giving a per-tonne subsidy based on their nutrient content have gone up from 2.5 to four times during these 10 years.

What are the steps taken to prevent over use of Urea?

- Compulsory neem-coating of all urea from December 2015.
- Making fertiliser subsidy payment to companies' conditional upon actual sales to farmers being registered on point-of-sale machines with retailers after biometric authentication.
- Along with this, there is an upcoming plan to cap the total number of subsidised fertiliser bags that any person can purchase during an entire cropping season.

What is the reason for the policy failure?

- **Urea Under-priced:** The basic MRP of urea hasn't been revised at all in its nearly six-and-a-half years. So, less cost leading to more consumption.
- **Failed to bring urea under NBS:** This would have pushed up its MRP thereby encouraging farmers for balanced use of fertilisers.
- **Failed policy approach:** Even, the measures taken to prevent over use of Urea merely address the issue of subsidised fertilisers, especially urea, getting diverted to bulk buyers/traders or even non-agricultural users. It does not address overuse by farmers themselves.

What is the way forward?

- **Bringing urea under nutrient-based subsidy (NBS) regime.**
- **Increasing the MRP of Urea to Rs 10,000 per tonne** over two years and simultaneously reducing the NBS rates of phosphorus, potash and sulphur.
- In the long run, **NBS should be replaced by a flat per-acre cash subsidy** that could be used to purchase any fertiliser.

2. Growth through infrastructure and manufacturing

Source-Live Mint

Syllabus- GS 3- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

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Context- India needs to create 90 million non-farm jobs by 2030 to avoid economic stagnation.

What is the importance of these two sectors?

- **Construction-** 24 million non-farm jobs could come from construction alone by 2030, 16 million from real estate and 8 million from infrastructure.
- **Manufacturing-** This sector could generate one-fifth of the incremental annual GDP (about \$750 billion) and close to 11 million new non-farm jobs by 2030.

How India can trigger construction growth and what are the reforms needed?

To generate its share of employment, the construction sector needs to grow at about 8.5%, nearly double its 4.4% growth rate over financial years 2012-13 to 2018-19. The following steps can trigger this growth-

1. Spend about 8% of GDP on infrastructure annually for the next 10 years.
2. Build 25 million affordable homes over the decade.

Reforms required-

1. Real estate reforms-

- India could include generously increasing **incentives for home ownership and creating rental stock.**
- **Tax incentives-** At the central level, substantially raising tax deductions limits on mortgages and rental incomes, as well as introducing tax incentives for investments in rental housing stock could be considered.

For example- The US, which offers tax deductible interest of up to \$750,000 on mortgage loans and an effective low-income housing tax credit incentive.

- Rationalizing stamp duties and registration fees, introducing regulatory amendments in rent-control policies, launching digitally-enabled, single-window clearances to reduce time delays in affordable housing construction.
 - Bringing the goods and services tax on modern construction methods in line with in-situ buildings.
- 2. High land-price-to- average-income ratio-** In terms of per square-meter price to per-capita GDP, it is about 6.0 in Mumbai and 3.8 in Bengaluru versus 0.5 in Bangkok and 0.2 in Beijing. To narrow this gap, India could do two things.
- Release 20 to 25% of underused but buildable public-sector land.
 - Reform zoning regulations in the top 300 cities by population.

What are the proposed ways to turbocharge Manufacturing

- 1. Structural reforms-** India could introduce targeted, time-bound and conditional incentives to reduce the cost disadvantage that Indian manufacturers face while competing with companies from China and Vietnam, among other countries.
- 2. Free trade warehousing zones-** Indian states could also create powerful demonstration effects by establishing port-proximate manufacturing clusters that contain free-trade warehousing zones.
 - They could provide land at lower costs, plug-and-play infrastructure, and common utilities, apart from expedited approvals.
- 3. Reduction in costs-** India also needs to consider reducing its factor costs of power and logistics. Both these costs could be reduced 20–25% by enabling franchised and privatized distribution company models, reducing cross-subsidy surcharges, and establishing multi-modal freight ecosystems.

Way forward-

- If adequately set up for success, manufacturing and construction could be pivotal in driving India's growth over the next decade.
- The government has to introduce sector-specific policies to raise productivity in manufacturing and real estate sectors.

3. Coal mining reforms

Source- Live Mint

Syllabus- GS 3- Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

Context- Centre has allowed commercial mining under its Aatmanirbhar Bharat package, with the aim of making India among the biggest exporters of the dry fuel.

What provisions does coal Ordinance contain?

1. It allows Coal mining by any Company.
 - **Earlier:** Only those in Power, Iron & Steel and Coal washery Business could bid for Mines.
2. It also does away with captive end-use criteria i.e. Coal can be commercially mined and sold to any buyer in an open market.
 - **Earlier:** The Coal mined by a licensee could be used for only specified purpose like for its own Thermal power plant i.e. they could not be sold in Open market like that of Coal India Ltd (Public Sector Enterprise).

What are the advantages accruing from this changed regulatory regime?

1. **Expands the pool of Potential bidders-** This will lead to better competition during auctions thus fetching better revenues for the government.
 - **Foreign Direct Investment-** The move will promote FDI in the sector.
2. **Fixed royalty-** Previously, the floor price was a fixed royalty of ₹150 per tonne, and bidders contested by bidding upwards of this. This time around, the floor price is fixed at 4% of the annual revenue realized from the coal mine.
 - This change from fixed royalty to variable royalty gives miners protection from fluctuations in prices.
3. **Import Substitution-** The move will boost both production and mining efficiency besides substituting import of coal worth Rs 30,000 crore.

What are the challenges?

1. **Underwhelming response-** No bids have been received for 15 of the 38 coal blocks that are up for auction, continuing the trend of tepid participation.
 - None of the big foreign miners like BHP, Glencore and Peabody are participating, and domestic companies dominate the list of bidders.
2. **Lower royalty revenue-** Muted demand for coal due to an economic slump means that auction prices may be depressed. States are already complaining about a possible drop in royalty revenue.
3. **Federal Challenges-** In a writ petition to the SC, Jharkhand has said the Centre's decision to commence commercial mining process flouts Schedule-V of the Indian Constitution, which refers to the 'scheduled areas' falling under the state government.
 - The suit argued that depressed demand for coal due to the ongoing economic slowdown would lead to lower prices accruing to the state.

4. **Monopoly-** The Adani Group, which includes its four subsidiaries, accounts for nearly one-sixth of all bids submitted and has bid for 11 of the 23 mines up for auction, if all Adani Group companies secure their respective blocks, a significant number of new mines will be under the ambit of one conglomerate.
5. **Climatic Concerns-** When countries across the world are moving away from fossil fuel resources this step to enhance Coal production is criticized by environmentalists.
6. **Health Concerns-** Coal burning releases Carbon dioxide, particulate matter, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and mercury- thus damaging the health of many people around the region.
7. **Environmental Challenges-** One of the proposed auctions of a mine site is near Maharashtra's Tadoba- Andhari Tiger Reserve. The State government has raised concerns that mining at the site can lead to destruction of wildlife corridors.

Way forward-

- Government needs to balance its commitments towards Climate Change and its imperative to push the developmental agenda. Promotion of Clean Coal Technology which is at present Cost prohibitive is the way to move ahead.
- As the new auctions usher in a new regime in India's complex history of coal mining, the full implications on both production and revenues realized will be keenly watched.

4. Reason for October pollution

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS-3- Environment

Context: Delhi's air quality started to dip as the AQI touched very poor for the very first time this October.

Why does air pollution rise in October each year?

- Air pollution in Delhi and the whole of the Indo Gangetic Plains is a complex phenomenon that is dependent on a variety of factors. The first and foremost is **the input of pollutants, followed by weather and local conditions.**
- Once monsoon season ends, **the main direction of winds changes to north westerly from easterly winds.**
- According to a **study conducted by scientists at the National Physical Laboratory**, 72 per cent of Delhi's wind in winters comes from the northwest, while the remaining 28 per cent comes from the Indo-Gangetic plains.
- **The dip in temperature is also behind the increased pollution levels.** The inversion height which is the layer beyond which pollutants cannot disperse into the upper layer of the atmosphere is lowered and concentration of pollutants in the air increases.
- **Wind speed dips in winters which are responsible for dispersing pollutants.** AQI dips even more when factors such as farm fires and dust storms are added to the already high base pollution levels in the city.

What is the role of farm fires?

- **Stubble burning which is a way to get rid of paddy stubble quickly** and at a low cost, gained widespread acceptance when governments of Punjab and Haryana passed laws delaying the sowing of paddy.
- The aim of passing this law was to conserve groundwater as the new sowing cycle would coincide with monsoons and less water would be extracted.

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- This left very little time for farmers to harvest paddy, clear fields and sow wheat for the next cycle.
- The paddy straw and stalks have high silica content and are not used to feed livestock.
- **The alternatives like the happy seeder machine** which helps covering the residue, are seen as unavailable, and money and time consuming by smaller farmers.
- **A 2015 source-apportionment study on Delhi's air pollution conducted by IIT-Kanpur** also states that 17-26% of all particulate matter in Delhi in winters is because of biomass burning.
- **The System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR)** has developed a system to calculate the contribution of stubble burning to Delhi's pollution.
- Last year, during peak stubble burning incidents, **its contribution rose to 40%**.

What are the other big sources of pollution in Delhi?

- **Dust and vehicular pollution are the two biggest causes** of dipping air quality in Delhi in winters.
- **Dust pollution contributes to 56%** of PM 10 and the PM2.5 load at 59 t/d, the top contributors being road 38 % of PM 2.5 concentration, the IIT Kanpur study said.
- According to the IIT Kanpur study, **20 % of PM 2.5 in winters comes from vehicular pollution.**

What are the steps taken by the government to address the pollution?

- The effort to reduce vehicular pollution, which experts say is more harmful as it is released at breathing level, the following has been done:
 - The introduction of **BS VI (cleaner) fuel**
 - Push for **electric vehicles**
 - **Odd-Even** as an emergency measure
 - **Construction of the Eastern and Western Peripheral Expressways**

Way forward

- With vehicles back on the road, temperature dipping and stubble burning starting, Delhi's air is set to get worse and so the steps introduced by the government should be implemented properly to find some relief from the pollution in Delhi.

5. Security and Terror Outfits

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: Gs3: Role of External State and Non-state Actors in creating challenges to Internal Security.

Context: During the pandemic, the terror activities around the world has decreased but once the pandemic eases, we may see a resurgence of terror.

The Doha Accord background

- After 9/11 attacks, the U.S. intervened in Afghanistan immediately to capture Osama bin Laden and his associates.
- However, the U.S ended up getting entangled with the Taliban and both remained hostile for several years.
- Under Doha Accord, the Taliban and the U.S are engaged in the process of brokering peace. In return for the Taliban's promise to preserve peace in Afghanistan the U.S has agreed to a near total withdrawal of all its troops from Afghanistan.

What are the factors that makes the al-Qaeda and other terror outfits still relevant to India's security?

- They are threat to modern society, especially to India and its neighbourhood.
- They attract misguided youth in India whose loyalties are extraterritorial.
- Even though they are small in numbers, they can cause a ripple effect that can be devastating.
- Terrorist cells are utilising this period for gathering resources for future lethal assaults against India and other countries in the neighbourhood.
- The aggravating poverty in developing nations due to COVID-19 could offer a fertile ground for recruitment and intensified religious indoctrination of poverty ridden communities.
- Unlike other outfits such as JeM, LeT, that are confined to the Afghanistan-Pakistan area, al-Qaeda and the Islamic State they have global reach backed by global ambitions.
- Recent raids by the National Investigation Agency confirms the presence of al-Qaeda network in India who are conspiring to attack various targets, including the National Capital Region.
- Once the pandemic eases, AL-Qaeda with other aggressive Islamic outfits in and around Pakistan is bound to escalate the offensive against India.

What are the Implications of Doha Accord for India?

- The Taliban's assurance to the U.S. that, as part of the agreement, it will keep the al-Qaeda under check seems doubtful.
- The Taliban and the al-Qaeda need each other in many areas. Both are friendly towards Pakistan and could pose threat to India's security in the near future.

Terror outfits may not indulge in attacks like 9/11, but they will have the determination and prowess to carry out operations that can impact India's border security.

6. It's time to save urban rivers

Source: [Down to Earth](#)

Syllabus: GS-3- Environment

Context: The article discusses about urban river pollution and solutions to address the same.

What is the Importance of Urban Rivers?

- Rivers provide water, and provide habitats for plants and animals.
- These are important to the city. For example, they have a cooling effect, help to lower surface and air temperatures by providing shade and releasing moisture into the air.
- They also manage floods as most of the plants species that grow on river banks absorb a lot of water, reducing flood energy.
- Urban Rivers also provide space for social cohesion and socio-economic benefits to citizens.

What are the threats to urban rivers?

- **Unplanned urbanization:** Rapid and unplanned urbanization leads to increase in impervious surfaces which, coupled with urban drainage systems, alters the hydrological regime, sediment regime morphology of rivers.
- **Water Pollution:** point sources such as waste water from a tributary drain, sewage draining and grey water, industrial effluents and wastewater.
- **Encroachment:** The fragmentation of vegetation in the riparian zone due to human settlements and construction

What are the institutional challenges in protecting urban rivers?

- **No specific land-use category** or legislation which identifies the 'River Regulation Zone' or 'River Riparian Zone' and the optimum width of this zone has been identified in India.
- India has various **socio-cultural religious issues** involved human activities in the rivers like mass idol immersion, cremation by river bank.
- India has promoted 'urban riverfront development'. However, this has been limited to **cosmetic 'river beautification'** and investment to increase its real estate and commercial value.

What is the way forward?

- The solutions need to be multi-dimensional, holistic and should involve all relevant stakeholders.
- The river front development should involve the community to be the key agents for action to mitigate problems related to river pollution.
- The optimal land-use planning for the riverfront areas should be done by adding green spaces along the river edges.
- Regulation and riparian limits should be framed for protection of the actual riverbeds and riparian fringes.
- The encroachments inside the river channels and river beds should be checked and riparian fringes be fully protected along with strict and transparent social and environment impact assessments.
- Yodogawa river side development in Osaka, Japan, and Room for the Rivers Programme in The Netherlands are best practices to refer to for successful models of riverfront development and other interventions at decentralised level.

7. Boundary issues in northeast

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS-3- Internal Security

Context: Residents of Assam and Mizoram have clashed twice over territory, injuring at least eight people and set fire to a few huts and small shops.

What were the recent clashes about?

- Residents of Lailapur village in Assam's Cachar district clashed with residents of localities near Vairengte in Mizoram's Kolasib district.
- **According to an agreement between governments of Assam and Mizoram** some years ago, **status quo should be maintained in no man's land** in the border area.
- People from Lailapur broke the status quo and allegedly constructed some temporary huts, in response people from Mizoram side went and set fire on them.
- The Karimganj DC, said that even if the disputed land was historically cultivated by Mizoram residents, **on paper it fell within the Singla Forest Reserve** that is under Karimganj's authority.
- **Mizoram civil society groups blame "illegal Bangladeshis"** on the Assam side who came and destroyed huts, cut plants and pelted stones on policemen.

How complex is the boundary dispute?

- **The boundary between present-day Assam and Mizoram is 165 km long** and it dates back to the colonial era, when Mizoram was known as Lushai Hills, a district of Assam.

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- **The dispute branched from a notification of 1875 that differentiated Lushai Hills** from the plains of Cachar, **and another of 1933 that draws a boundary between Lushai Hills and Manipur.**
- Mizoram believes the boundary should be drawn on the basis of the 1875 notification, which is derived from **the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR) Act, 1873.**
- Mizo leaders have argued in the past argued against the demarcation notified in 1933 because Mizo society was not consulted and the **Assam government follows the 1933 demarcation.** This was the point of conflict.
- **The last time the boundary saw violence was in February 2018** when the MZP had built a wooden rest house in a forest for farmers and Assam police with the forest department officials demolished it saying this was in Assam territory.

What are the other boundary issues in the Northeast?

- During British rule, Assam included present-day Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya besides Mizoram, which became separate state one by one. Today, **Assam has boundary problems with each of them.**
- **According to a 2008 research paper from the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses,** violent clashes and armed conflicts, marked by killings, have occurred on the Assam-Nagaland border since 1965.
- In two major incidents of violence in 1979 and 1985, **at least 100 persons were killed** and the boundary dispute is now in the Supreme Court. **Nagaland shares a 500-km boundary with Assam.**
- **Assam-Arunachal Pradesh boundary (over 800 km), clashes were first reported in 1992,** according to research paper from the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses.
- There have been several charges of illegal intrusion from both sides, and recurrent clashes. This boundary issue is also being heard by the Supreme Court.
- **The 884-km Assam-Meghalaya boundary faces clashes as well.** There are 12 areas of dispute between the two states according to Meghalaya government.

8. Offset Policy in Defence

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: Gs3: Indigenization of Technology and Developing New Technology.

Context: Recently, the government diluted the “**offset**” **policy in defence procurement,** based on the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India’s report tabled in Parliament last month.

More in News

- As of 2019, the Defence Ministry had signed 52 offset contracts worth \$12 billion via Indian offset partners, or domestic firms.

Findings of CAG report?

- Between 2007 and 2018, the government reportedly signed 46 offset contracts, However, the realised investments were merely 8%.
- Also, technology transfer agreements in the offset clause were not implemented, failing to accomplish the stated policy objective.
- Government has not put in place an automatic monitoring system for offset contracts, as initially promised.

What is an offset policy? And how is it expected to boost domestic capabilities?

- Initiated in 2005, on the recommendations of the Vijay Kelkar Committee.

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- The offset clause has a requirement of
 - Sourcing 30% of the value of the contract domestically.
 - Indigenisation of production in specified time limit and
 - Training Indian professionals in high-tech skills, for promoting domestic R&D.
- In simplest terms, the offset is an obligation by an international player to boost India's domestic defence industry if India is buying defence equipment from it.

What changes were made in the offset policy?

- After the dilution, the offset clause will not be applicable to bilateral deals or deals with a single (monopoly) seller or Intergovernmental agreement.
- For example, the deal to buy 36 Rafale fighter jets, was an intergovernmental agreement .so, the sellers are not obliged to fulfil the offset clause.

Why it is a concern?

- Most defence deals are bilateral or a single supplier deal, the dilution means practically giving up the offset clause that deters India's prospects for boosting defence production and technological self-reliance
- It will be a Setback for augmenting domestic capabilities or for realising the goal of Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- Government defends its decision by stating that, the offset clause results in the higher (upfront) cost of the agreement. But in the long run it reduces costs by indigenisation of production and the potential technology spill-overs for domestic industry.

How the Offset policy performed in Aerospace? (Case study—Success of Offset policy)

- The offset policy was introduced in 2005, for contracts valued at ₹300 crore or more where 30% of it will result in offsets implemented through Indian offset partners.
- According to the United Nations Comtrade Database, the exports via the offsets increased by a whopping 544% in 2007, compared to the previous year. Also, by 2014 exports increased to \$6.7 billion from a mere \$62.5 million in 2005.
- It enabled India to join the league of the world's top 10 aerospace exporters.
- Later in 2016, the offset clause was relaxed, threshold for the policy was raised from ₹300 crore to ₹2000 crore which resulted in lowering exports.

What is the way forward?

- The offset policy can succeed, if it is designed and executed correctly. For example, its success in Aerospace industry.
- India needs to re-conceive or re-imagine the offset clause in defence contracts in national interest.
- Offset policy is very much significant for 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan', or a self-reliant India.

9. India's innovation potential and initiatives

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS-3- Science & Technology

Context: Recognising the innovation potential of India, the government is putting in place a framework of collaboration, simplification and regulation to lift innovative ecosystem of India.

What is the realistic potential of India's Innovation ecosystem?

- The Indian innovation system is very multifaceted in terms of user segments and income gaps. However, central government is trying to boost innovation in the country through several schemes.
- Innovation in India is being planned around the triangle of collaboration, facilitation and responsible regulation. It is advanced by cross-disciplinary collaboration.
- India is the fastest growing country in terms of Internet usage, with over 700 million users and the number projected to rise to 974 million by 2025.
- The JAM (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, and Mobile) trinity has 404 million Jan Dhan bank accounts with 1.2 billion Aadhaar and 1.2 billion mobile subscribers.
- There is a potential to add over \$957 billion to India's GDP by 2035 with artificial intelligence (AI).
- The realistic potential of technology for India echoes in the 'Amara law' named after Roy Amara, a Stanford computer scientist, who said that "People tend to overestimate the impact of a new technology in the short run, but to underestimate it in the long run."

What are the Initiatives of Government of India to boost innovation?

Recently, Indian government organised two events to boost innovation:

- **Vaishvik Bharatiya Vaigyanik (VAIBHAV) summit:** Numerous overseas Indian-origin academicians and Indians participated to form ideas on innovative solutions to several challenges.
- **Responsible AI for Social Empowerment (RAISE) 2020 summit:** It grants a course to efficiently use AI for social empowerment, inclusion, and transformation in key sectors such as health care, agriculture, finance, education and smart mobility.
- **Innovation in Science Pursuit for Inspired Research (INSPIRE) scholarships:** Attract youth talent to the study of science at an early age and thus build the required critical human resource pool for Science & Technology system.
- **Ramanujan Fellowship:** It is meant for brilliant Indian scientists from outside India to take up scientific research positions in India.
- **Knowledge Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing (KIRAN) scheme:** Providing avenues to women scientists and technologists for capacity building.
- **Smart India Hackathons (SIH):** To provide students a platform to solve some of pressing problems of society.
- **Atal Innovation Mission (AIM):** To promote innovation and entrepreneurship across India.
- **Biotechnology Ignition Grant (BIG) scheme:** Largest early stage biotech funding programme in India. Aims to encourage researchers to take bio-technology closer to market through a start-up.
- **Future Skills PRIME** (Programme for Reskilling/Upskilling of IT Manpower for Employability) capacity building platform
- Triad of **Scheme for Transformational and Advanced Research in Sciences (STARS)**, **Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC)** and **Impactful Policy Research in Social Science (IMPRESS)**: Common objective is to boost India specific research in social and pure sciences.
- **National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems:** Aims to catalyse translational research across AI, IoT or the Internet of Things, Machine Learning, Deep Learning, Big Data Analytics, Robotics, Quantum Computing, Data Science.

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- **The Reserve Bank of India, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)** and the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India allow for regulatory sandboxes for channelling new ideas.
- **The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)** has recently introduced recommendations for regulating cloud services in India, suggesting a light-touch regulation in collaboration with industry, balancing commercial freedom and principles adherence.

What are the steps to be taken?

- **Increase R&D spending:** Government should frame a policy with the aim of increasing total GERD (Gross domestic expenditure on R&D) to 2% of India's GDP.
- **Global partnerships in innovation:** Global innovation partnerships need to be strengthened by enhancing public-private partnership mechanisms and increased public funds should be earmarked for joint industrial R&D projects.
- **Idea-to-market challenge:** Government needs to create a **special fund** to help Indian innovations to advance their start-ups during difficult times.

Way forward

- Innovation has the potential to build a future where AI will transform education and health care, clean energy will drive economy, gene-editing would help us bring back extinct species and virtual reality will change the way we interact with the physical world.
- India must make the right institutional, industrial, and policy reforms.

10. Fiscal Expansion Response

Source: [Live Mint](#)

Syllabus: Gs3: Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

Context: The Indian fiscal response till now is more automatic stabilizers than discretionary policy measures, more indirect than direct fiscal action.

What are the Components of fiscal expansion?

- **The non-discretionary automatic stabilizers:** Automatic stabilizers are ongoing government policies that automatically adjust tax rates and transfer payments in a manner that is intended to stabilize incomes, consumption, and business spending over the business cycle.
- **The discretionary fiscal impulse:** Actions taken in response to changes in the economy. These acts do not follow a strict set of rules, rather, they use subjective judgment to treat each situation in unique manner. Examples may include passing a new spending bill that promotes a certain cause, such as green technology.

How was India's fiscal policy response to revive economic contraction?

- Discretionary fiscal impulse in India has been only a modest 1.8% of GDP.
- Most of the fiscal expansion this year is likely to come from a decline in tax collections and other types of automatic stabilizers, rather than government action.
- In comparison, almost 60% of the fiscal expansion in emerging markets has come from discretionary policy
- India's fiscal response has been more of "below the line" measures through credit guarantees, payroll support, equity infusion and special liquidity schemes.
- "Below the line" fiscal support amounts to 5.2% of GDP. In this, India resembles advanced economies rather than its emerging markets peers.

Why India has emphasised to spend low on discretionary spending?

- During the crisis India's Fiscal strength was far less than other major economies.
- Fear of sovereign credit-rating downgrade, in case the fiscal situation deteriorates further.
- Prevalence of high inflation, which means that a demand stimulus during a severe supply shock would have added to price pressures.

11. Digital payment system in India

Source-The Hindu

Syllabus- GS 3- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment

Context- The government has a crucial role to play in protecting consumers against exploitation in the digital payment system.

What is the role of RBI in the evolution of digital payment in India?

1. **RTGS-** This system enables transfer of money from one bank account to another on a "real time" and on "gross" basis.
 - Settlement happens in real time.
 - The large value payments on stock trading, government bond trading and other customer payments were covered under the RTGS, providing finality of settlement, thereby reducing huge risks.
2. **NEFT-** NEFT facilitates funds transfer across all computerized branches of banks (member / sub-member of NEFT) across the country.
 - Settlement happens in batches, and the system is available around the clock and RTGS will follow from December 2020.
3. **SEBI T+1 settlement-** The market regulator SEBI is considering lowering the settlement cycle for completion of share transactions to T+1 (trade plus one day) to boost liquidity, improve efficiency and reduce payment-related risks to brokers and the system.

NPCI: National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), an "Not for Profit" umbrella organization for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India, is an initiative of RBI and Indian Banks' Association (IBA) under the provisions of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, for creating a robust Payment & Settlement Infrastructure in India. It aims in bringing innovations in the retail payment systems through the use of technology for achieving greater efficiency in operations and widening the reach of payment systems.

What steps taken by government to promote digital payment?

1. **Zero merchant discount rate-** In a bid to promote digital transactions, the government exempted merchants from paying merchant discount rate (MDR) cost for payments made through RuPay and UPI platforms.

Issues in Zero MDR -

- a. **Discriminatory approach-** For now, MasterCard and Visa cards are permitted to charge MDR. This has led the banks to switch to Visa and Master cards for monetary gains.
 - b. The European Central Bank imposed a ceiling on MDR for all to protect consumer interest.
2. NPCI must supply retail fee providers at discounted value. This will result in a fee system community and infrastructure in rural and semi-urban areas in partnership with Fin-Tech firms and banks.

Way forward: Government needs to take corrective action in the next Budget to ensure a level playing field and to relieve the NPCI from such policy-induced market imperfection.

12. Durga Puja and Economy

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: Gs3: Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

Context: Economy of Durga Puja being affected due to the pandemic.

How important are festivals for the economy?

- In 2020, the projected size of the Durga Puja economy could be about 2 lakh crores (13-14% of West Bengal's GDP).
- Puja shopping for apparel, shoes, electronic gadgets, spending over idols, pandals, and tourism, all contribute to the economy.
- Contribution of Durga puja festival to the economy is bigger than any other festival around the world such as the Rio Carnival (Rio de Janeiro), Mardi Gras (New Orleans), Oktoberfest (Munich), Hanami (Japan).
- Corporate funding and outdoor advertisements account for about 90% of the funding. The traditional five-day festival usually extends to 10-12 days giving additional business opportunity.

What is the impact of pandemic on Durga pooja?

- The festival and the economy of the Puja will be reduced because of the fear of contagion. It will result in job losses and reduction in income.
- The order of Calcutta High Court to not allow visitors within a radius of five metres for small pandals and 10 metres for big pandals, many of the big Pujas will be offered virtually.
- It has jeopardised Puja-trips of Bengali people, reduced the expenditure on community worship there by affecting livelihood of millions who are dependent on this Puja economy.

13. Fiscal stimulus

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: Gs3: Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

Context: Need for a strong stimulus for a quick recovery.

What is the state of economy?

- The OECD expects the world economy to shrink by as much as 7.6 per cent in 2020. India's full-year economic contraction is estimated between 9 and 12.5 per cent.
- The pandemic has severely impacted both demand and supply.
- With two years of slowdown the balance sheet of both the government and the industry has already strained.
- The banking system is in deep distress to support growth.
- All the four engines of growth (Private consumption, Exports, domestic consumption, government spending) are declining.
- The pandemic has forced most central banks and the governments to announce large stimulus to ensure rapid post-Covid recovery.

What were the steps taken by government to revive the economy?

- **Tight fisted approach:** The government has chosen structural reforms and debt support, rather than offering large scale stimulus to revive the economy or a GST rate-cut, to revive economic growth.
- **Agri-reforms:** It has brought in agriculture reforms to boost the farm sector growth.
- **Conditional Loans:** It has allowed the cash-strapped States, to borrow more but on conditional basis. For example, undertaking reforms like ending free power to farmers.

Why government is not resorting to Fiscal stimulus?

- The stimulus offered so far is just 1.2 per cent of GDP whereas Japan's stimulus stands at 21.1 per cent of GDP and US' at 13.2 per cent.
- The government strongly believes of a V-shaped recovery is in progress but it is unclear whether this recovery will sustain.
- The government is worried that any fiscal stimulus if provided will have same impact that of the 2008 stimulus which caused sustained inflation.

What is the way forward?

- It is clear that without a strong stimulus, the recovery will be slow.
- Only a sustained increase in demand will push the industry to start investing again.
- If that happens, three of the four engines of growth will fire (public consumption, private investment and government spending) causing economic growth to return.

14. Air pollution and green recovery

Source: Down To Earth

Syllabus: GS-3- Environment

Context: The newly released the state of Global Air 2020 report shows that India recorded the highest increase in air pollution related deaths and infant mortality.

What is the state of air pollution in India?

- **India recorded the highest PM2.5 exposure** and the most increase in deaths between 2010 and 2019.
- **Air pollution accounts for 20 per cent of newborn deaths** worldwide, 24 per cent of these infant deaths occur in India which is the highest. This defies the principles of inter-generational justice.
- **The State of Global Air that is a collaborative study** of Health Effect Institute and Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation of Global Burden of Disease Project has presented that:
 - Out of the total tally of 6,670,000 particulate matter (PM) 2.5-attributable deaths globally, 980,000 deaths occurred in India which was a 61 per cent increase since 2010.
- **The other silent killer sidling up in India is ozone:** the country has recorded an 84 per cent increase in ozone-related deaths since 2010.

What is the effect of air pollution on newborns?

- **The effect of air pollution on infants** that shows an estimated 1.8 million deaths worldwide, mostly within 27 days of childbirth. Mothers' exposure to toxic air leads to pre-term birth and lower birth weight.
- **Babies born too small or too early become more vulnerable** to lower-respiratory infections, diarrhoeal diseases, brain damage, inflammation, blood disorders and jaundice.

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- **Inflammation and oxidative stress deeply affect the health** of pregnant women and babies as particles and toxic components move across membranes of the lungs and get carried to different parts of the body and affect placental function and the fetus.
- **Burning of solid fuels for cooking accounts for 64 per cent of infant deaths** while the rest is due to outdoor air pollution. Hence, vulnerability of poorer women increases.
- **According to director of All India Institute of Medical Sciences**, the young and the infants whose lungs and respiratory systems are not yet developed have higher chances of chronic illness, lung damage, and death. This compromises their quality of life.
- **COVID-19 and air pollution: Exposure to air pollution can compromise immune defense**, making people more prone to respiratory and other infections.

What are the steps to be taken for green recovery?

- **The National Clean Air Programme should improve legally** due multi-sector action across regions to clean up all air shelters.
- **Deeper sectoral reforms are required** to clean up emissions from vehicles, power plants, industries and local sources like construction and waste.
- Effective intervention can lead to verifiable improvement in health outcome as this is evident in the reduction in household pollution exposure from 54 per cent to 36 percent due to **improved access to clean fuels in India**.

Way forward

- There can be substantial economic benefit from improvement in health outcomes related to air pollution, as a lot of these diseases are preventable and so required changes should be made to improve the existing situation.

15. Increasing Onion Prices

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS3: Issues of Buffer Stocks and Food Security

Context: To control the rising prices of onions which crossed Rs 80 per kg in many cities, the centre has reintroduced the stock limit on onions.

More in news

- Recently, the Parliament has amended the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 to exclude onions besides potatoes, edible oils, oilseed and pulses from the list of essential commodities, thus freeing them from stock limits.

What is the need for government intervention?

- **Production losses:** Heavy rainfall in north Karnataka has resulted in massive losses of kharif onions.
- **Storage losses:** The heavy rains not only destroyed the new crop in Karnataka but also took a toll on stored onions in states.
- **Low shelf life:** Overuse of urea by farmers has resulted in the lower shelf life of the onions.
- All these factors have resulted in rise of prices due to a supply-demand mismatch.

What steps were taken to reduce the price rise?

- First, to control prices, government banned the export of onion.

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- This was followed by the relaxation of import norms that allowed easy shipping of onions from Iran, Turkey and other onion-producing nations.
- Recently, the government has reintroduced the stock limit. Wholesale traders are now allowed to stock up to 25 tonnes of onion, and retail traders up to 2 tonnes.

16. Farmers' Produce Trading and Commerce Act 2020

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: Gs3: Storage, Transport and Marketing of Agricultural Produce and Issues and Related Constraints

Context: Farmers' Produce Trading and Commerce Act 2020 enables Farmers to engage in direct marketing thereby eliminating intermediaries which was major issue in Agriculture Produce Market Regulation (APMC) acts.

What is Agriculture Produce Market Regulation (APMC) acts?

- From the 1960s, there have been concerted efforts to bring all wholesale markets for agricultural produce in various states under the Agriculture Produce Market Regulation (APMC) acts.
- All states, except Kerala, Jammu and Kashmir and Manipur, enacted such laws.
- The APMC Acts mandated that the sale/purchase of agricultural commodities is carried out in a specified market area, and, producer-sellers or traders pay the requisite market fee, user charges, levies and commissions for the commission agents (**arhtiyas**).
- These charges were levied irrespective of whether the sale took place inside APMC premises or outside it and the charges varied widely across states and commodities.

How effective were APMC acts in achieving its sated objectives?

- In the initial years, APMC acts helped remove malpractices and freed the farmers from the exploitative power of middlemen and mercantile capital.
- Later, market facilities did not keep pace with the increase in output and regulation did not allow farmers to sell outside APMC markets.
- The farmers were left with no choice but to seek the help of middlemen. Due to poor market infrastructure, more produce is sold outside markets than in APMC mandis.
- The net result was a system of interlocked transactions that robs farmers of their choice to decide to whom and where to sell, subjecting them to exploitation by middlemen.
- Over time, APMC markets have been turned from infrastructure services to a source of revenue generation.
- In several states, commission charges were increased without any improvement in the services.
- And to avoid any protests from farmers against these high charges, most of these were required to be paid by buyers like the FCI.
- This not only results in a heavy burden on the Centre but also increases the logistics cost for domestic produce and reduces trade competitiveness.

Need for Farmers' Produce Trading and Commerce Act 2020?

- The reforms in market regulation remained slow even after successive governments at the Centre made repeated attempts to persuade the states to make appropriate changes in their APMC acts.
- Finally, the centre used the constitutional route to address long-pending issues of market reforms by introducing **Farmers' Produce Trading and Commerce Act 2020**.

Significance of FPTC Act

- The FPTC Act gives farmers the freedom to sell and buy farm produce at any place in the country either from APMC markets or outside the mandated area like the sale of milk.
- The Act promote e-commerce in agriculture trade by allowing transactions on electronic platforms.
- Excessive and unjustified charges levied under the APMC acts will be reduced. The FPTC Act will only put pressure on APMC markets to become competitive.
- It is expected to bring down market charges and commissions to 2 per cent or less to enable APMC mandis to compete with sales outside their premises.

The states, in farmers' welfare should keep mandi charges below a reasonable level of 1.5 per cent to ensure the co-existence of APMC mandis and private channels permitted under the new Act in a true competitive spirit.

17. Buffer Stocks

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: Gs3: Issues of Buffer Stocks and Food Security

Context: Irregular rainfall patterns is resulting in production fluctuations of agricultural crops.

How the production fluctuation is happening?

- **Unreliability of kharif crop production even in normal monsoon years:** In the last two years, excess rains in a single month has damaged the standing crops including onions, pulses and soyabean leading to production losses of kharif crop.
- **Bumper harvest during Rabi season:** Extended monsoon rains, although not beneficial for kharif, will help recharge groundwater aquifers and thereby result in bumper production during the rabi season.
- Hence the rabi crop will increasingly impart stability to India's agricultural output.

What are the steps taken by the government?

- Banning exports and easing imports.
- Imposing stock holding limits in onions.
- Forcing cold store owners to release potatoes deposited with them.

What is the way forward?

- With climate change and irregular rainfall patterns becoming a norm, Production fluctuations are inevitable
- The government should create a buffer stock of not just food grains, but even onion, potato, sugar, edible oil, milk powder and white butter, to enable non-distortive marketing intervention.

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1. Dire need of Police reforms

Source- The Indian Express

Syllabus- GS 4 - Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

Context- The country must wake up to the dire need for police reform.

What are the major deficiencies in India Policing?

- 1. The police-population ratio** - The Indian police force is at only 77 per cent of its sanctioned strength. India has 144 police personnel for one lakh population, is less than what is recommended by UN i.e. 222 policemen per lakh population.
 - **Unfilled vacancies**- One in every five posts sanctioned in the Indian Police Service remains vacant. In low and middle rank positions, the vacancies of 5.28 lakh personnel account for nearly one-fourth of the total sanctioned strength of over 22 lakh.
 - **Low numbers of Women police** -Women are grossly underrepresented in our police force. They constitute less than 7 per cent of our total police strength.
- 2. Untrained police personnel**- The existing police personnel are also not adequately trained. Less than 7 per cent police get in-service training. Gujarat scores the lowest, with less than one per cent having received any in-service training.
- 3. Overburdened police force**- Understaffing in turn results into overburdening of work that not only reduces the effectiveness and efficiency of the police personnel (leading to poor quality of investigation) but also leads to psychological distress and contributes to Pendency of cases.

What are the reforms required?

- 1. Sensitization of Police Forces**- The police need to be sensitized about their role in society. There has to be promptness of action and decency when dealing with public especially during sensitive issues like rape.
 - They need to be trained in body language and strictly advised to refrain from abusive behaviour.
 - The sensitization module should aim at bringing about attitudinal change, especially pertaining to gender and power relations and police behaviour.
- 2. Police accountability** - As per the police laws, both the Central and State police forces come under the superintendence and control of political executives. Police priorities are frequently altered based on the will of political executives.
 - Enhancing accountability will improve police legitimacy and increase public confidence, which, in turn, will reinforce the integrity of the system.
 - The police, as the custodian of maintenance of law and order, must stay away from agenda-driven politics.
- 3. Improvement in police-population ratio**- The police-to-people ratio should be improved by at least 50 per cent to meet the challenges faced by the force.
 - **Women policing**- With the increase in the number of gender crimes, it has become a necessity to augment the strength of police by recruiting more and more women police personnel.
- 4. Dharma-Vira Commission recommendation**- The top police leadership should be selected by apolitical representatives and an impartial body. It was a strong antidote to opportunistic appointments and transfers.

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Way forward-

- The challenge of India is to restore the culture of rule of law, and make police and justice accessible, effective and credible.
- A new role and new philosophy have to be defined for the police to not only make it a capable and effective body but also one accountable to the law of the land and to the people whom they serve.
- Police needs to be made accountable, and freed from grip of politics

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