

9pm

Compilation

December, 2020

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General Studies - 4

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1. Uttarakhand's nameplate initiative

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- GS 1 - Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies. Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism.

Context- Pauri district in Uttarakhand boasts nameplates with girls' names as district steps up for gender rights.

More in News

The Pauri administration in Uttarakhand has launched an initiative, '**Ghar ki pehchan, nooni ku noo**' (**House in the name of the daughter**), in its efforts to empower women and girls. Under the initiative, villages are encouraged to put their daughters' names on the nameplates outside their house.

What is the significance of the initiative?

- 1. Women empowerment** - The initiative is to give due recognition to the women of the hills who are backbone of all activities. This will also bring gender sensitivity among men and, in turn, empower the girl child.
- 2. Create awareness**- The initiative is an effort by the district administration to create awareness about gender rights and property ownership among women and their families.
 - The programme has been started under the mass awareness component of the Centre's '**Beti bachao beti padhao**' programme.
- 3. To improve child sex ratio**- An indicator of early gender discrimination is a matter of concern- at 904, it is way below the state average of 963.

What is the way forward?

- This programme is just a start. Having the women's name on the nameplate will elevate her status in the family and within society too.

In a first of its kind initiative in Uttarakhand, intended to raise awareness about the rights of the girl child.

2. Sanitation in India- Cultural stigma

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- GS 1 - Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India, Poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

Context- The problem with sanitation in India is not lack of infrastructure but the social and cultural stigma attached to it.

What is the state of sanitation in India?

- 1. Lack of proper toilets**- the lack of proper restrooms makes long distance journeys an ordeal for women.
 - However, NHA maintains one restroom every 40-50 Km, but their hygiene standards are not monitored.
- 2. A high proportion of the population does not have access to "improved sanitation".**
 - Improved sanitation is defined as facilities that "ensure hygienic separation of human excreta from human contact".
- 3. Work related discrimination**-Sanitation workers are compelled to travel to their workplaces in garbage trucks, standing next to the very garbage they clean and collect.
 - Neither users nor the sanitation workers feel equal.

4. In spite of a well-funded programme such as the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan in operation, little attention is devoted to this aspect of sanitation.

What are the issues related to scavenging in India?

1. **Caste system**- Caste hierarchy still exists, and it reinforces the caste's relation with occupation.
 - Only country that not only differentiates spaces as pure and impure but also its people.
 - The social status of this section has been permanently fixed.
 - Government discussions and policies hardly address this stigma.
2. **Lack of physical resources**- Adequate machinery to clean septic tanks, protective gears and flush toilets are not available.

What are the steps taken by the government to address this problem?

1. **Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act**-
 - a) **Prohibition:** The act prohibits the employment of manual scavengers, manual cleaning of sewers and septic tanks without protective equipment, and the construction of insanitary latrines.
 - b) **Rehabilitation:** It seeks to rehabilitate manual scavengers and provide for their alternative employment.
 - The act ensures the rehabilitation of manual scavengers to be identified through a mandatory survey.
 - Mechanized cleaning of septic tanks is the prescribed norm.
 - The act also directed the government to pay a compensation of 10 lakh rupees to the family members of those killed in acts of manual scavenging since 1993.

Way forward-

- **Adopting technology to end manual scavenging**- Government's move to use machines is a first step towards according dignity and respect to sewer workers. However, technology's emancipatory powers will be realized at their fullest only when the states stop living in denial about manual scavenging.
- **Direct allocation of funds**- Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry said that it would directly transfer funds to 'sanitation workers' to buy cleaning machines, instead of contractors or municipal corporations.

3. Smart Anganwadi system

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS- 1

Context: Infrastructure development and capacity building of the anganwadi remains the key to improving the programme, the standards of all its services need to be up-scaled.

Discuss the areas where ICDS programme has lagged behind.

- **Community development:** The country has 13.77 lakh AWCs. These centres have undoubtedly expanded their reach, but they need to play a much larger role in anchoring community development.
- **Water and sanitation:** Nearly a fourth of the operational AWCs lack drinking water facilities and 36 per cent do not have toilets. In 2015, the NITI Aayog recommended better sanitation and drinking water facilities, improved power supply and basic medicines for the AWCs.
- **Skillset of workers:** It also suggested that these centres be provided with the required number of workers, whose skills should be upgraded through regular training.

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- **A study on utilisation of ICDS services in coastal Karnataka:** It reported enrolment in private nursery schools as a major reason for non-adherence to ICDS services. It also reported the need for improvement in the quality of meals provided by the programme.
- **Lack of facilities:** AWCs do not provide the environment that encourages parents to leave children at these centres. Only a limited number of AWCs have facilities like creche, and good quality recreational and learning facilities for pre-school education.

What can be done to upscale the programme?

- **Playing-based learning:** Research has shown the significance of the playing-based learning approach in the cognitive development of children.
 - An approach that combines an effective supplementary nutrition programme with pedagogic processes that make learning interesting is the need of the hour.
- **Combined efforts:** Effective implementation of the ICDS programme rests heavily on the combined efforts of the anganwadi workers (AWWs), ASHAs and ANMs. Kerala, Telangana and Tamil Nadu are amongst the states that have done relatively better.
- **POSHAN Abhiyaan:** The Centre's POSHAN Abhiyaan has taken important steps towards building capacities of AWWs. It is important that a more robust mechanism is now created to regularly assess and plug knowledge gaps.
- **Technology:** Technology can also be used for expanding the programme's quality. AWWs have been provided with smartphones and their supervisors with tablets, under the government schemes.
 - Apps on these devices track the distribution of take-home rations and supplementary nutrition services.
 - In Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, anganwadi centres have been geotagged to improve service delivery.
 - Gujarat has digitised the supply chain of take-home rations and real-time data is being used to minimise stockouts at the anganwadi centres.
- **The need to improve anganwadi centres:** Its Saksham Anganwadi Scheme aims to upgrade 2.5 lakh such centres across the country.

Way forward

- First, while infrastructure development and capacity building of the anganwadi remains the key to improving the programme, the standards of all its services need to be upscaled.
- Second, states have much to learn from each other's experiences.
- Third, anganwadi centres must cater to the needs of the community and the programme's workers.

4. Nutritional Security

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS- 1

Context: The single greatest threat that blocks the promise of India at a foundational level is malnutrition.

What are the different effects of malnutrition on people?

- **Effect of malnutrition:** Malnourished children tend to fall short of their real potential physically as well as mentally. That is because malnutrition leaves their bodies weaker and more susceptible to illnesses.

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- In 2017, a staggering 68% of 1.04 million deaths of children under five years in India was attributable to malnutrition, reckoned a Lancet study in 2019.
- **Heavy burden:** Malnutrition places a burden heavy enough for India, to make it a top national priority.
 - About half of all children under five years in the country were found to be stunted (too short) or wasted (too thin) for their height, estimated the Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey, carried out by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare with support of UNICEF three years ago.
- **Food insecurity:** COVID-19 is pushing millions into poverty, reducing incomes of many more and disproportionately affecting the economically disadvantaged, who are also most vulnerable to malnutrition and food insecurities.
- **Pandemic-prompted lockdowns disrupted essential services:** Such as supplementary feeding under anganwadi centres, mid-day meals, immunisation, and micro-nutrient supplementation which can worsen malnutrition.
- **Economic insecurities:** It often force girls into early marriage, early motherhood, discontinue their schooling, and reduce institutional deliveries, cut access to micronutrient supplements, and nutritious food which largely tend to be perishable, all of which may worsen malnutrition.
 - Accelerating efforts to address these will be needed to stop the regression into the deeper recesses of malnutrition.

What are the steps to be taken?

- **It is time to renew our commitment to nutrition for two reasons:**
 - First, because it conveys the deeply symbolic value of the first 1,000 days from conception of a child till the child turns two years old, marking the most crucial period for nutrition interventions in a lifecycle, which once missed could result in irreversible damage to the child's physical and mental well-being.
 - Second, focus on nutrition is critical as COVID-19 threatens to derail the gains India has made in nutrition in more than one way.
- **(POSHAN) Abhiyaan:** A holistic approach to tackle malnutrition started gathering momentum.
 - Under it, the government strengthened the delivery of essential nutrition interventions so that more children have the right start in life for optimum growth, health, development and a prosperous future.
- **Six-pronged action that can save on the advances India has made in nutrition:** These clear action points include commitments around sustained leadership, dedicated finances, multi-sectoral approach and increased uninterrupted coverage of a vulnerable population under programmes enhancing nutrition.
- **Schemes:** India already has some of the world's biggest early childhood public intervention schemes such as the Integrated Child Development Scheme, the mid-day meal programme, and Public Distribution System.
 - India needs to ensure coverage of every single child and mother, along with 12 months of Poshan Maah (Nutrition Month), 52 weeks of breastfeeding weeks and 365 days of take-home ration.
- **Financial commitments:** To ensure this, the country needs to retain its financial commitments for the nutrition schemes it already runs.

Way forward

The country must track nutrition indices through data systems. Evidence generated through data will also serve well to track the positive impact of POSHAN Abhiyaan, and course correct on the long journey to a well-nourished India.

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5. Inter community Relationships

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS-1- Society

Context: Campaigns against inter-community relationships are a way to redirect anxieties over large-scale structural disruptions.

What is patriarchy? Discuss the recent expressions of patriarchy in society.

- **Patriarchy:** A social system that places men, women and other genders in hierarchies learns to perceive the plurality of genders as unnatural and views women with suspicion.
- **Potential sign of anarchy:** Lack of control over women's sexuality is an example of such anarchy that concerns not only the women's so-called guardians but the society at large.
 - Recent political campaigns geared towards restricting intimate relationships across communities, even as a fictional plot for jewellery advertisements, reveal how deep the fear of women's choices runs.
- **Beliefs of dominant sections:** The dominant sections believe that societies will collapse if women don't stay in their pre-designated place and if the plurality of gender and sexual expressions somehow finds representation in popular culture.
- **Governance machinery:** Allegedly, governance machinery, that today includes the previous autonomous institutions, as well as the media, have successfully redirected anger to old civilisational fears, especially those surrounding the potential anarchy fuelled by women and their sexuality.

Expressions of patriarchy has been a part of public discourse since 1947. Discuss.

- **Special marriage bill:** In the early 1950s, when the Special Marriage Bill was being debated in the Indian Parliament, similar civilisational fears had surfaced amongst our early lawmakers.
 - The fears were predominately represented in the discussions on age of consent and divorce with comments which were mildly apprehensive.
 - Kishen Chand's claim that women between 18 and 22 are emotional and "high-strung" (Rajya Sabha Debates 1954).
 - Tajamul Husain's contention that older parents would be better capable of reproducing strong and brave Indians "who can defend the country in times of need" (Council of States Debates, 1954).
 - S Mahanty's allegation that the women in Parliament "have lowered marriage to the morass of sex" under the pretext of equality of rights and status (Council of States Debates 1954).
- **Unease with women's sexual freedom:** Even those who passionately advocated for women's equality were not able to shed their unease about sexual freedoms. The then law minister, CC Biswas, argued:
 - "Suppose two young persons have made up their minds to marry and you place all these obstacles in their way. Certain very undesirable consequences may follow (Council of States Debates, 1954)
- **Women's sexuality:** According to the early parliamentarians, women's sexuality carried both the responsibility to reproduce the race and the power to bring civilisations down if their reproductive abilities are left ungoverned.

Way forward

Those pushing forward ordinances that aim to overturn the rights guaranteed by the Special Marriage Act carry the patriarchal baggage borne by the lawmakers. But their

moves also reflect a lack of courage to work against one's own patriarchal impulses for the sake of a better future, a courage shown by the lawmakers in the 1950s.

6. Shakti Act 2020 concerns

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- GS 1 - Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India. Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, their problems and their remedies.

Context - The Maharashtra Shakti Bill, 2020, and the Special Court and Machinery for Implementation of Maharashtra Shakti Criminal Law, 2020 have been criticized by prominent women's rights advocates for being "draconian."

More in news-

The two interconnected bills are **the Maharashtra Shakti Criminal Law** (Maharashtra Amendment) Act 2020 and the Special Court and Machinery for Implementation of Maharashtra Shakti Criminal Law 2020.

- The Bill is proposed to be enacted as Shakti Act, 2020.

What does the draft bill proposes?

1. The draft Bill proposes to make changes to the Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act.
2. The changes are proposed in existing sections of rape, sexual harassment, acid attack and child sexual abuse.
 - The death penalty is proposed in cases which are heinous in nature and where adequate conclusive evidence is available and circumstances warrant exemplary punishment.
 - The media is not allowed to report the name of a rape victim.
 - The draft Bill proposes an additional law to deal with abuse of women on social media.
3. **Provisions for "false" information** - The Bill proposes punishment in cases of false complaints and acts of providing false information regarding sexual and other offences against women with the intention to humiliate, extort and defame.

What are the concerns related to new laws?

1. **Patriarchal conception [Control by men]** - The new will punish the filing of false complaints. This, according to the signatories, "perpetuates the patriarchal notions of viewing women with suspicion, as unworthy of being believed"
 - This will only deter victims from reporting sexual offences.
2. **Improper investigation and trial**- The 15 days' time-frame will not be sufficient for gathering all evidence and will become an excuse for police to not conduct a proper investigation.
 - A hurried investigation and trial, they said, is likely to lead to miscarriage of justice.
 - **Lacking in infrastructure required for effective implementation** - Neither the police nor the courts have the infrastructure to comply with these timeframes. There are not enough prosecutors at trial courts and in high courts.
3. The general perception is that since the laws have been made more stringent, so the rapists resort to extreme measures in a bid to destroy the evidence.
 - The death penalty in the new law reduces both the reporting of sexual offences and of conviction rates.
4. **No clarity of 'heinous in nature' cases**- The proposed bills does not define what cases would qualify as being "heinous in nature", thus leaving it open to the interpretation of courts.

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Way forward-

- The Bills' content reflects the absence of a larger consultative process and lack of understanding of existing criminal laws.
- The Maharashtra government should focus on improving infrastructure.
- The two Bills should have been discussed with lawyers, activists, and academics working on women's issues before they were passed by the state Cabinet.

ForumIAS

General Studies Paper - 2

General Studies - 2

1. Ayurveda and patient safety

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS-2- Health

Context: Efficacy of Ayurveda to incorporate surgical techniques.

What are the requirements for conducting a successful surgery?

- **Apprenticeship is the key:** Surgery in the present era is an interdisciplinary effort. This is one branch of medicine where knowledge can only be acquired through apprenticeship that is, the learner needs to be guided by an expert
 - A well-trained anaesthesiologist keeps the patient free of pain.
 - Other specialist doctors address any other illnesses that the patient has before surgery can be safely performed.
 - The well-trained surgeon must have a good knowledge of the structure of the human body in health and disease.
- **Clinical judgement:** The surgeon needs to know when not to perform surgery, a skill commonly called clinical judgement. These skills are difficult to teach and difficult to master.
- **Modern medical training:** It consists of a basic degree during which the fundamentals of the functioning of humans in health and disease, and techniques to diagnose illnesses are taught. Increased knowledge in various domains is obtained through postgraduate training.
- **Ayurveda and modern medicine:** It is impossible for Ayurveda to incorporate surgical techniques while ignoring all the other domains of modern medicine and still perform surgery safely and effectively.
 - Safe and effective health care should not become a casualty of a misguided desire to protect indigenous systems.

What are the problems?

- **Data:** Data from the United States suggests that up to 4,000 surgical errors occur each year despite well-considered controls on who can perform surgery.
 - Efforts to reduce this rate focus on better training. Besides professional codes, legal mechanisms have been developed to ensure safe medical practice.
- **Consumer protection act:** In India, the Consumer Protection Act serves as an incentive to modern medical practitioners to provide high quality health care. Even this legal mechanism is not accessible to the poor.
- **Deepening inequality:** The quality of medical care received in India is highly dependent on personal resources. Surgical facilities manned by graduates of Ayurveda will be utilized only by the very poor who do not have the resources to access modern medical care.
 - This will further root the existing grossly unequal access to health care.

Way forward

- **Increase medical colleges:** There is a shortage of trained medical personnel in rural areas. The only way to address this is to greatly increase the number of government medical colleges.
- The way forward is to incorporate traditional medical systems into modern medicine.

2. Aspects of vaccine distribution

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Context: Aspects of vaccine distribution.

Background

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the COVID-19 a pandemic in march 2020 and the most optimistic prediction for a vaccine to be available was by the middle of 2021.
- Now, the labs around the world are working faster than anticipated and the first vials of a vaccine are likely to roll out in the next two months.

Why stakes in a vaccine against COVID-19 are unprecedented?

- Though, Economies have gradually opened up after lockdowns, festivals have been celebrated in a subdued manner, and polls have been conducted in several countries.
- But it's the vaccine that can set us free, can give back the human freedom of association, and most importantly, it can relieve the anxiety and worry that has become the part of life in large parts of the planet.

How early research in Corona virus family is helping now?

- The epidemics caused by pathogens of the coronavirus family in the past 20 years, SARS and MERS, have pushed scientists to study the varied interactions between the human immune system and contagions.
- These studies have illustrated that, unlike other flu viruses, coronaviruses make use of various biological pathways in the human body. For example-opting enzymes of the host's cells.
- Knowledge of the spike protein has made the scientific community to understand the ways in which the immune system behaves when a person contracts the novel coronavirus.
- The recent approaches targeting the spike protein whether through genetic material as in the case of the vaccines developed by Moderna and Pfizer or through a viral vector from chimpanzees as in the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, have benefitted from earlier research with coronaviruses.

What are the challenges to vaccine distribution?

- India, produces 60 per cent of the world's vaccines and is home to the largest manufacturer, the Pune-based Serum Institute.
- Yet, the country also has the largest number of unvaccinated children in the world.
- NSO data shows that less than 60 per cent children receive the entire basket of vaccines.
- Delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccines despite availability of vaccination services in more than 90 per cent countries in the world is another hurdle in immunisation programmes.

What is the Way forward?

- Securing 1.3 billion people will require a massive public policy effort at improving the country's public health infrastructure.
- Partnership with the private sector in immunisation programme.
- Controlling the growth of black markets.

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- Checking the diversion of resources from regular immunisation programmes.
- Institute transparent mechanisms at points where science and research meet public policy.

The novel coronavirus forces us to do things differently, it demands a different conception of herd from science and public policy.

3. Aishwarya Reddy's death

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Context: Aishwarya Reddy's death points finger at an education system that turns a blind eye to inequality.

Background

- Recently a young student, Aishwarya Reddy from Lady Shri Ram College, died by suicide.
- The girl from a poor family took her life due to her inability to buy gadgets required by her to continue her online education.

What factors that pushed her to choose death over life?

- Digital divide in accessing online education.
- Delay in giving her the well-deserved scholarship on time by the Department of Science & Technology's (DST).
- Lack of knowledge on part of the college administration about its students' socio-economic backgrounds because of which all students, except the freshers, were asked to leave the hostel premises.
- The girl's inability to proactively reach out to those in positions of authority for help.
- The painful experiences of the daily struggle of her parents, their inability, desperation and frustration to buy her a laptop and the guilt of pushing them to mortgage their house and forcing her younger sister to drop out of school.

What is the most fundamental cause for such student's suicides?

- ours is an unequal society and our socio-economic and cultural locations determine the school that we go to and the nature/quality of education that we get.
- So, most students find it difficult to come out of their vicious cycles of disadvantage, a few resilient ones manage to enter those elite institutions, to which there is limited access.
- Though they clear, the Children with different caste, class, religion and ethnicity, with unequal economic, social and cultural capital, are all treated alike.
- For example, syllabus, curricular resources, pedagogic processes, assessment practices are same for everyone, irrespective of the divergent spaces they come from.
- Though this seems to be equal and neutral is in effect unequal and biased.

What is the way forward?

- Institutions should take responsibility to make such spaces more democratic and egalitarian.
- They need to adopt more proactive measures to reach out to their students, especially those belonging to marginalised backgrounds.
- It is important to recognise that the pressures faced by students such as the pressure to do well academically, pressure to conform and look/dress/talk in a certain way, appreciate a particular kind of music/film etc.

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4. Assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Context: Assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist threatens will have serious geopolitical implications in West Asia and beyond

Background

- Fakhrizadeh, who is widely regarded as a key figure in Iran's nuclear weapons programme was recently killed in an ambush attack on a rural road outside Tehran.
- Also, note that Qasem Soleimani, the Iranian general in charge of the Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guard was killed by a US drone strike in January.

What would be its impact on Peace in West Asia?

- **Direct Wars:** Iran has hinted that Israel and Saudi Arabia are behind the attack and has vowed revenge. Since the Iran-Iraq war, Tehran has conducted a sort of cold war against its rivals, acting largely through proxies such as the Houthi rebels in Yemen, rather than engaging in a direct conflict. A retaliation to the Fakhrizadeh assassination could change the dynamics of this conflict.
- **Threatens renewal of nuclear deal with US:** Israel can push Biden to seek greater concessions from Iran while re-negotiating the nuclear deal which Donald Trump pulled out. This hard strategy can result in strengthening more radical forces within Iran disturbing peace in West Asia.

5. Regional priorities

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS- 2

Context: Three years after joining the eight-nation Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), India hosted the SCO heads of governments (HoG) meeting for the first time.

How does the SCO serve India's quest for geopolitical balance and regional engagement?

- **The focus:** The focus of the 66-point joint statement was in developing a "Plan of Priority Practical Measures for 2021-2022 to overcome the socio-economic, financial and food consequences of COVID-19 in the region".
- **Tackling Pakistan:** India made strong observations on cross-border terrorism; he called it the SCO region's "biggest challenge", in comments aimed at Pakistan.
- **SCO:** The SCO is a rare forum under which India-Pakistan troops take part in joint exercises under the Regional Anti-Terror Structure, although it would seem the two countries have come no closer on the issue.
 - Neither statement on terrorism was reflected in the final joint statement, which focused on trade and economic issues.
- **Dealing with china:** India also marked its differences with China over the BRI by not joining other SCO members in a paragraph endorsing the BRI.
 - India also made a pitch for "transparent and trustworthy" trade practices, seen as a sidebar aimed at China.
- **SCO's significance for India:** The SCO is one of the few regional structures India is a part of now, given a decline in its engagement with SAARC, BBIN and the RCEP.
 - The SCO provides India a convenient channel for its outreach for trade and strategic ties to Central Asian countries.
 - It has afforded a platform, when needed, for bilateral discussions with the two countries India has the most tense ties with: China and Pakistan.

Way forward

- The SCO has been seen as a grouping worth pursuing as it retains India's geopolitical balance, a useful counterpoint to New Delhi's otherwise much more robust relations with the western world, and hosting the SCO meeting was one more step towards developing that engagement.

6. Origin of COVID-19

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS- 2

Context: WHO must work alongside China in quickly uncovering the origins of the virus.

Uncovering the origin of corona virus is shrouded in mystery due to various factors.

Discuss.

- **Origin of the virus:** In the case of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), its source is still unknown even 11 months after WHO reported the first case.
 - Knowing the natural reservoirs, intermediate hosts and the events that allowed the virus to jump across the species barrier are important in prevention.
 - Soon after the virus spread around the world, there was heightened demand to identify its origin in China's Wuhan where the first case cluster was reported.
- **Efforts to find the origin:** It was only in early August that WHO completed the mission to lay the groundwork for joint efforts to identify the origin.
 - It was only in late October that China began early studies for the two-phase investigation.
- **Politicizing the issue:** If China failed to alert WHO immediately after a Wuhan cluster was reported, its reluctance to quickly and earnestly investigate the source can partly be explained by U.S. President Donald Trump's attempt to politicise the issue.
- **Economic cost:** The reluctance has only increased after mounting international anger over its reporting the outbreak and the huge economic cost of the pandemic globally.
- **Susceptibility:** One way to find this out is to know the susceptibility of different animal species.
 - There is strong evidence that the virus originated in bats and probably spread to humans through an intermediate species.
 - Already, many animals including cats have been found susceptible to the virus in the lab and outside.
 - With the virus spread so wide, zeroing in on the intermediate host becomes more difficult as the possibility of humans having spread the virus to animals cannot be ruled out.

Way forward

- A multi-pronged approach with an emphasis on investigating China's wildlife farms becomes crucial. This highlights the importance of working alongside China to uncover the virus's origin.

7. Reopening schools for exams

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS- 2

Context: It is reasonable to plan for school exams in summer, if progress on COVID-19 holds.

Should schools reopen for exams, if covid-19 situation improves?

Views against opening schools:

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- **State board's stance:** State Boards are yet to make up their minds on the schedule for annual examinations and the academic session for next year.
- Badly affected Maharashtra and Gujarat are thinking of postponing the final examinations.
- **ICSE's views:** The Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations has appealed to States to allow its schools to open Classes 10 and 12 in a limited way early in January.
- **Conflicts in some states:** There is also the likely conflict between summer elections in large States such as Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Kerala, and the examination schedule for 2021.

Argument in favour:

The strongest argument in favour of a written Board examination is that it eliminates asymmetrical access, including technology deficits, and gives all pupils an equal opportunity to score.

- **View of CBSE:** The CBSE which has more than 20,000 schools under its domain at the secondary level, has weighed in favour of written mode tests, obviously counting on progress in dealing with the pandemic.
 - The board was able to wrap up its 2020 examination schedule that began in mid-February, without getting derailed by the national lockdown in March.
- **Syllabus reduction:** Students are relieved that, in line with the experience in countries such as the U.K., the syllabus has been significantly cut down and examination schedules may be put off by a few months beyond March.
- **Vaccine covering teachers:** The availability of a good vaccine that will also cover teachers and students through a staggered programme is arguably key to determining the coming year's academic time-table.

Way forward

- **Hearing public concerns:** Education Minister's move to hear public concerns on such issues through an online consultation is a positive step to build consensus.
- India is better placed than America or Europe to provide ventilated classrooms, an important factor in controlling viral spread, because of the climate. Yet, a definitive view on the school schedule for 2021 is not possible until the course of the pandemic over the next few months becomes clear.

8. Gender deficit in Indian Judicial system

Source: [Indian Express](#)

GS2: Structure, Organization and Functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

Context: Attorney-general KK Venugopal has asked the Supreme Court to fix gender deficit in the Indian judicial system.

Facts on number of Women in Indian judicial system.

- Women comprise only 7.2 per cent of all the judges in the SC and the high courts.
- There were only eight women judges till now in Supreme Court and there has never been a woman Chief Justice of India.

Why the Indian judicial system is alleged gender insensitive?

- The Madhya Pradesh High Court had asked a man accused of "outraging the modesty of a woman" to visit the home of the victim and ask her to tie a rakhi.
- Nine women lawyers had moved the SC against the bail order.

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- Courts are also known to nudge alleged sexual offenders and victims towards “compromise weddings”.
- In one instance, SC Chief Justice presided over a case in which he had been accused of sexual harassment at workplace. The SC, which has empowered judgments on gender rights failed to institute an impartial mechanism to deal with the allegations.
- Similar judgments and conduct of court get tangled in patriarchal notions of honour instead of holding up constitutional rights.

What needs to be done?

- Need for gender sensitisation of judges and lawyers to avoid judgments that exuberates patriarchy.
- Greater representation of women across all levels of judiciary is urgently needed for dismantling patriarchal attitudes.

The judiciary should consider the suggestions of the attorney-general and apprise itself of the gender skew in its workings and take urgent steps to bridge the gap.

9. Religious Freedom and Personal Choices

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Indian Constitution Significant Provisions and Basic Structure.

Context: The Allahabad High Court verdict in ‘Salamat Ansari’ is a reminder of the Constitution’s most cherished values.

What did the court say?

- Religious conversions, even when made solely for the purposes of marriage, constituted a valid exercise of a person’s liberties.
- The High Court ruled that **the freedom to live with a person of one’s choice is intrinsic** to the fundamental right to life and personal liberty.
- It held that the **judgment in Noor Jahan was incorrectly delivered**. Marriage is a matter of choice, and every adult woman has a fundamental right to choose her own partner.

What is the issue?

- **Legislation:** Various State governments undertaking projects to outlaw what they describe pejoratively as “Love Jihad”.
- **Petitioners vs. State:**
 - The petitioners had approached the High Court seeking orders to quash a First Information Report (FIR). This FIR alleged that crime was committed under **Section 366** of the Indian Penal Code, which **criminalises the abduction** of a woman with an intent to compel her to marry against her will.
 - The State argued that the partnership had no sanctity in the law, because a conversion with a singular aim of getting married was illegitimate.

What are the other related judgements?

- **Noor Jahan v. State of U.P. (2014):** the High Court had held that a conversion by an individual to Islam was valid only when it was predicated on a “change of heart” and on an “honest conviction” in the tenets of the newly adopted religion.
 - **Burden of proof:** the High Court had ruled that the burden to prove the validity of a conversion was on the party professing the act.
- **Rev. Stainislaus v. State of Madhya Pradesh:** the Court upheld, on grounds of public order, two of the earliest anti-conversion statutes in India: the Madhya

Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam, 1968, and the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967. These laws required that a District Magistrate be informed each time a conversion was made and prohibited any conversion that was obtained through fraud or illegal inducement.

What does the judgement signify?

- **Right to religious freedom:** it is neither the province of the state nor any other individual to interfere with a person's choice of partner or faith.
- **Right to privacy:** It held that an individual's ability to control vital aspects of her life inheres in her right to privacy. **Puttaswamy judgement**, has recognised that every individual possesses a guaranteed freedom of thought.
- **Right to live with dignity:** It includes the preservation of decisional autonomy, on matters such as "personal intimacies, the sanctity of family life, marriage, procreation, the home, and sexual orientation".
- **Freedom of conscience:** Article 25 of the Constitution expressly protects the choices that individuals make. It guarantees to every person the freedom of conscience. The idea of protecting one's freedom of conscience goes beyond mere considerations of religious faith.

This is high time that we need to **respect people's choices**. When we fail to acknowledge and respect the most intimate and personal choices that people make, we undermine the most basic principles of dignity.

10. Purpose of the vaccine

Source- [The Hindu](#)

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

Context- The challenges vaccine poses to qualify as a 'public health' intervention in India.

What is the purpose of vaccination?

1. **Individual prevention-** - The ability to develop immunity by producing antibodies among those individuals who have taken a vaccine shot.
 - **It builds an adaptive immune system**
2. **To achieve herd immunity-** It is a concept used for vaccination, in which a population can be protected from a certain virus if a threshold of vaccination is reached.
 - Herd immunity refers to community protection.
 - The threshold coverage is estimated to be around 60% for COVID-19 vaccine to achieve population-level immunity.
 - The idea of herd community is to protect the vulnerable.

What are the concerns related to vaccination?

1. **Safe immunization-** There are three major elements of immunization safety.
 - Health care providers must be concerned with the safety of vaccines themselves (their composition),
 - Administration of the vaccination (handling, scheduling, and injections),
 - And surveillance and evaluation of the immunization program, including documentation of vaccine efficacy and the probability of adverse events.
2. **Economic concern-** The huge economic resources will be needed to make the vaccine available for a large population.

3. **Lack of infrastructure**- Vaccines require cold chain infrastructure for storage. Logistical and Infrastructural issues in storage of vaccines hampering it's penetrability in the rural hinterland.
4. **Cost**- If open market forces determine the cost of the vaccine and affordability then, the section of society most vulnerable to the disease would get left out.
5. **Credibility**- fears regarding safety and credibility can be almost impossible obstacles to overcome and must be addressed head-on.

What are the challenges related to population based vaccination programme?

Priority- Within the country, it is certainly not clear who should be treated first or it should be determined by need, affordability, vulnerability or some other criterion or a combination of all.

The outcome is the clear- If this process target only specific population group then its very purpose will be defeated as the pandemic can infect all groups similarly.

What is the way forward?

- It is safe to demonstrate the success of vaccination as a public health intervention in a small population, like a block or a district, before scaling it up for the national level.
- However, if herd immunity is not the focus, then the key purpose of COVID-19 vaccines will be to ensure individual immunity.
- **Protect the vulnerable**- Use the first limited supplies of vaccines to protect those most in need, without worrying about the more robust members of the "herd".

11. Behind China's wolf warrior diplomacy

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS2: India and its Neighborhood- Relations

Context: Xi Jinping is deepening a 'Chinese Communist Party-state' brand of nationalism for a domestic and global audience.

What is Chinese brand of nationalism?

- An abrasive brand of nationalism is associated with China.
- Beijing's recourse to nationalistic aggression as a foreign policy strategy has gained the euphemism of 'wolf warrior diplomacy'.
- It involves a state-sponsored and systemic indoctrination campaign.
- It has acquired the dynamics of Chinese nationalism with Xi Jinping at the Core.

What is its basis?

- The Chinese Communist Party initially embraced nationalism as a co-option strategy in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre.
- Nationalism has turned into a state dogma to embed the Chinese Communist Party in the political subconsciousness of the country, and secure the filial piety of its populace.
- It derives its inspiration from the idiom of '**Great Rejuvenation**' and its obsession with re-achieving the glories of an imaginary past.

How this is linked with threat perception?

- The first concerted attempt by the Chinese Communist Party to shape Chinese nationalism came with the launch of the '**Patriotic Education Campaign**' in the 1990s.

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- At the core of this campaign was the grand design to project the Chinese Communist Party as the harbinger and sole guarantor of the peace, prosperity and sovereignty of the eternally 'victimised' Chinese nation.
- It is based on an aggressive posturing and display of strength in international affairs.
- It is secured through patriotic indoctrination campaigns, promotion of a leadership personality cult, and the now legendary anti-corruption drive.

What is Agenda of indoctrination?

- After Mao, Xi has become the only Chinese leader to appoint a Party theoretician on the Politburo Standing Committee.
- The new 'Patriotic Education' guidelines were introduced in 2019, along with the '2019-2023 National Work Program for the Education and Cultivation of Party Members'.
- It includes extra-curricular activities such as '**Red Education**' and the aim of such programmes is to cultivate future generations of Chinese youth with 'Red DNA'.
- In 2018, the Party launched a "patriotic striving spirit" campaign to 'enhance patriotism' among Chinese intellectuals.
- Chinese media outlets have been asked to follow the dictum of "telling China's stories well" to shape domestic and international opinion as per the Party's diktats.
- Promotion of the Xi Jinping personality cult has become an intrinsic component of Chinese nationalism.
- Elite institutions in China have either established research centres or introduced mandatory courses in 'Xi Jinping Thought'.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs recently inaugurated a 'Xi Jinping Thought' study centre to guide the "theoretical construction" of China's foreign policy.

What are the plans ahead?

- Cult of personality will gain further momentum after the recently concluded fifth plenum of the Party which approved a plan for China to become a global leader in technology by 2035.
- Mr. Xi has further declared his intentions to remain at the helm of China's affairs long after his due retirement date as General Secretary of the Party in 2022.
- The international community is poised to face an increasingly aggressive Chinese nationalism.

12. AMR and health crisis

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS-2- Health

Context: Antimicrobial resistance (AMR), a silent pandemic, is growing at an alarming rate.

Why is AMR growing at an alarming rate?

- **AMR:** Globally, about 35% of common human infections have become resistant to available medicines.
- About 700,000 people die every year because available antimicrobial drugs (antibiotics, antivirals, anti-parasitic and antifungals) have become less effective at combating pathogens.
- Resistance to second- and third-line antibiotics the last lines of defence against some common diseases are projected to almost double between 2005 and 2030.

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- According to a study published in The Lancet, an estimated 58,000 new-born children die annually from sepsis in India alone because antibiotics can no longer treat certain bacterial infections.
- **Reasons for AMR:**
- Microorganisms develop resistance to antimicrobial agents as a natural defence mechanism. Human activity has significantly accelerated the process.
- The misuse and overuse of antimicrobials for humans, livestock and agriculture is probably the biggest reason for this.
- Research points to the role of environment and pollution in AMR.
 - Once consumed, up to 80% of antibiotic drugs are excreted un-metabolised, along with resistant bacteria.
- Release of effluents from households and health and pharmaceutical facilities, and agricultural run-off, is propagating resistant microorganisms. Wastewater treatment facilities are unable to remove all antibiotics and resistant bacteria.

What are the problems faced?

- **Issues faced:** In India, there is capacity to treat only about 37% of the sewage generated annually. The rest is discharged into natural water bodies without treatment.
- An analysis of single wastewater discharge from a treatment facility in India catering to drug manufacturers found concentrations of antibiotics high enough to treat over 40,000 people daily.
- **Mode of spread:** Water may be a major mode for the spread of AMR, especially in places with inadequate water supply, sanitation and hygiene.
- Wildlife that comes into contact with discharge containing antimicrobials can also become colonised with drug-resistant organisms.

What are the key initiatives to tackle AMR?

- **UNEP:** The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) identified antimicrobial resistance as one of six emerging issues of environmental concern in its 2017 Frontiers Report.
- The UN Environment Assembly pressed the need to further understand the role of environmental pollution in spreading AMR.
- **GAP:** UN agencies are working together to develop the One Health AMR Global Action Plan (GAP) that addresses the issue in human, animal, and plant health and food and environment sectors.
- **MoEF&CC:** The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) issued draft standards which set limits for residues of 121 antibiotics in treated effluents from drug production units.
- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and MoEF&CC constituted the inter-ministerial Steering Committee on Environment and Health, with representation from WHO and UNEP.

Way forward

- The Centre and State governments in India can strengthen the environmental dimensions of their plans to tackle antimicrobial resistance.
- It is particularly important to promote measures that address known hotspots such as hospitals and manufacturing and waste treatment facilities.

13. Disability - policy and challenges

Source: Indian Express

Syllabus: GS-2- Social Justice

Context: 3rd dec is the annual International Day of Persons with Disabilities, established by the United Nations in 1992.

More on news:

- **International Day of Persons with Disabilities:** Promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in all spheres of society and development.
- Increase awareness of the situation of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.

What are the problems faced?

- **Huge numbers:** About a billion people internationally live with a disability, with 80 per cent of these being residents of the developing world. In 2007, the UN passed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- India is a state party to the convention, and the World Bank estimates that there may be well over 40 million Indians living with disabilities.
- **Shortage of ramps:** The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act was passed in 2016 but our country is still largely devoid of ramps on its footpaths or government buildings.
- **Poor development:** Indians with disabilities are far more likely to suffer from poor social and economic development. Shockingly, 45 per cent of this population is illiterate.
- **Community's lack of political representation:** Despite the vast population of people with disabilities in India, in our seven decades of independence we have had just four parliamentarians and six state assembly members who suffer from visible disabilities.

What are the steps taken by India?

- **Mental health care act:** In 2017, the Mental Healthcare Act recognised and respected the agency of persons with mental-health conditions.
- Expanding the presence of mental-health establishments across the country.
- Restricted the harmful use of electroshock therapy.
- Clarified the mental-health responsibilities of state agencies such as the police.
- Effectively decriminalised attempted suicide.
- **Initiatives:** Initiatives to improve the life of Indians with disabilities, such as the ADIP scheme for improving access to disability aids.
 - The Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan, or Accessible India Campaign, has aimed to make public transport, buildings and websites more accessible.
- **The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act:** The best that can be said is that the passage of this law may have helped shift the treatment of disabled persons in society towards rights-focused thinking.
- **Media representation:** Mainstream media has increasingly started showing positive representations of people with disabilities, from Taare Zameen Par to Barfi.
- **Representation in sports:** Athletes with disabilities have reached the pinnacles of sport and done us proud repeatedly, most recently winning four athletics medals at the 2016 Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro.

Way forward

- It is critical that the government work with civil society and individuals with disabilities to craft an India where everyone feels welcome and treated with respect, regardless of their disabilities.

14. Shadow pandemic

Source: Down to Earth

Syllabus: GS-2- Social justice

Context: A village volunteer from Gharabari village near Siliguri in West Bengal alerted the police of a child marriage in the first week of July. Thirteen-year-old was married off to a 35-year-old man in a discreet manner at her house.

More on news:

- Her parents were warned and a case was filed under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012 Act.

What are the causes of a shadow pandemic?

- **Causes:** Acute poverty, worsened by the loss of jobs and incomes due to the lockdown, push poor people into the daily grind of labour work.
 - The distress and uncertainty is often seen as an elbow to those living on the borders to get rid of the alleged burden of feeding girl children.
- **Exploitation:** Several girls are often made to believe that they are a liability to the family. Some victims of trafficking are also given false promises and money in advance of being abused.
 - They owe debt to the traffickers and are scared to run away. They are captured and enslaved into debt bondage, a cruel form of control and exploitation.
- **Covid-19 impact:** In India, about 400 million people working in the informal economy are at risk of falling deeper into poverty due to the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19).
 - The economic distress has made girls and young women belonging to marginalised sections extra vulnerable.
- **Children are at heightened risk of exploitation:** A 2018 study conducted by non-profit World Vision India revealed that Bengal has a high prevalence of child trafficking cases.
 - The study also highlighted that 48 per cent of the adolescent children in the state have at least one form of vulnerability that included cases where the child was an orphan, the primary care giver chronically sick and unable to work, etc.
- **Priority tasks:** Governments are diverting resources to address the pandemic and the police have new tasks for the enforcement of lockdowns and social distancing, affecting their normal operational capacity.
 - Under these conditions, there is a future danger that investigating trafficking in persons would become a lower priority and that proactive inspection of suspect sites and cases would be reduced.
 - This may have an impact on arrests, investigations, prosecutions and convictions, leading to a climate of practical impunity where traffickers can operate with even lower risk of detection and conviction.

What are the steps to be taken?

- **Committees:** In a situation where policing is overstretched, community-based vigilance committees should play a key role in mapping and monitoring the most vulnerable children who are at imminent risk.
- **Integrated Child Protection Scheme:** The Union Ministry of Home Affairs issued guidelines to undertake such a mapping exercise under the Integrated Child Protection Scheme. Such identified children should also be linked with the various services initiated by both central as well as state government.

Way forward

- Communities must look out for each other, support each other and report suspicious activities. The time has come for the government and society to unite and ensure to end child trafficking, for the greater good of our children.

15. India's stand against 'UN's selectivity on religions'

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Context: India criticised UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) for “selectivity” in seeking to protect Abrahamic religions — Islam, Christianity and Judaism over others.

What is UNAOC?

- UNAOC is an organisation which was set up in 2005
- **Objective:** to prevent polarisation between societies and cultures and to bridge differences between them.

How UNAOC criticised India?

- The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, for example, has been criticised for offering fast-track citizenship to only a select group of religions, leaving out Muslims.
- India cannot call for a culture of peace that stitches together an alliance of faiths, while Indian States bring laws that seek to make difficult inter-faith marriages.

What are the key highlights of statements issued by India while criticising the world body?

- India pointed out that previous resolutions of the UNAOC dating back to 2006 had repeatedly decried the hatred against those religions “Islamophobia, Christianophobia and anti-Semitism”
- However, the body didn't condemn attacks on other religious groups including Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists, who have suffered terror strikes and seen their shrines destroyed in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- The UNGA statement welcomed the Kartarpur Gurdwara corridor agreement between India and Pakistan.
- The world body failed to note that Pakistan's government has taken over the management of the Sikh shrine, which it called a contravention of the agreement and a violation of Sikh beliefs.
- India's delegate also accused Pakistan of a “culture of hatred” against “religions in India” and fostering cross-border terrorism.
- UNAOC only serves to further the theory of an inevitable “clash of civilisations”.

What are India's concerns?

- UNAOC portrays only three religions as victims of religious hatred.
- It is important that they are broadened to include every community that faces religion-based violence.

- It is also important that the government thwarts Pakistan's particularly insidious attempts to create a controversy against India at this time, by pushing these resolutions as India steps to take its two-year seat at the UN Security Council.
- India has been concerned by an **increase in intrusive language** from the UN bodies concerned as well, given that UNAOC issued a statement of "grave concern" over the Delhi riots this year that it said resulted in casualties of "mostly Muslims".
- India is keen to push back on the UNAOC and other UN arms, like the UN Human Rights Council, that have criticised the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

India needs to maintain its own secular credentials enshrined in the Constitution and its pluralistic ethos.

16. Issues in Labour codes

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Context: The labour codes will only better India's 'ease of doing business' ranking instead of improving conditions of employment

What is the Significance of Labour codes?

- Will generate employment and secure the basic rights of the workers.
- It will universalise the right to minimum wage of workers and social security entitlements.

Why, have the labour codes not been universally welcomed by workers?

- **Social Security net is not universal:** The codes mandate benefits of Employees' State Insurance (ESI) and Provident Fund (PF) only for workers belonging to establishments employing 10 workers or more. This leaves out nearly 80% of all Indian workers in the informal sector from the ambit of these benefits.
- **Inadequate hospitals and dispensaries under ESI**
 - The ESI employed around six doctors per one lakh beneficiaries in 2016, as against the World Health Organization norm of 100 doctors.
 - With the new codes seeking to cover 20% of all workers, the membership would further increase to around 10 crore workers a three-time increase over the membership in 2019 (3.6 crore). The available capacity of the hospitals and dispensaries would evidently be inadequate.
- **Disparity on ESI coverage between states:** The ESI coverage follows the map of industrial growth in the country. Thus, in industrialised States like Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, the ESI covered is around 20% of the population as beneficiaries in 2016 whereas, for Bihar the ESI covered is only 0.7%.
- **Abridgement of cess-based welfare boards:** The new labour codes also does away with a number of existing cess-based welfare schemes. For example, the Beedi Workers Welfare Board which covers five lakh home-based women workers.
- **Fixed Minimum wage is meager:** The floor wage announced more recently by the Finance Minister of ₹202 is way less compared to the Labour Ministry's Expert Committee recommendation on Wage in 2019 i.e. is ₹375 per day.

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- **Disparity on ESI coverage between states:** The ESI coverage follows the map of industrial growth in the country. Thus, in industrialised States like Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, the ESI covered is around 20% of the population as beneficiaries in 2016 whereas, for Bihar the ESI covered is only 0.7%.
- **Abridgement of cess-based welfare boards:** The new labour codes also does away with a number of existing cess-based welfare schemes. For example, the Beedi Workers Welfare Board which covers five lakh home-based women workers.
- **Fixed Minimum wage is meager:** The floor wage announced more recently by the Finance Minister of ₹202 is way less compared to the Labour Ministry's Expert Committee recommendation on Wage in 2019 i.e. is ₹375 per day.

19. Lessons for the health sector

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS-2- Health

Context: It has been only nine months since COVID-19 was declared a pandemic on March 11, but the world has changed in previously unimaginable ways.

Discuss the challenges put forth by the pandemic.

- **Health systems:** The health systems in many of the wealthy countries struggled; some were overwhelmed due to inadequate beds, supplies and healthcare workers who struggled with infection, fatigue and stress, recognising their inability to care for everyone who needed it.
- **Damage by virus:** Outside the healthcare system, the information epidemic (termed an "infodemic") in society led to fear, stigma and discrimination that added to the damage caused by the virus.
- **Learning:** The closure of schools affected the learning of children, with those from disadvantaged backgrounds struggling to cope and frequently giving up.
- **Accessibility:** Access to non-COVID-19 essential health services was affected, the impact of which will be fully understood in the time ahead.
- **Business activities:** Reduction in business activities caused massive losses of both formal and informal employment and a fall in economic growth.

How did the countries tried to cope up with the challenges?

- **Health services:** COVID-19 related health services including hospital beds, intensive care unit (ICU) and ventilator beds were increased even as research on drugs and vaccines kicked off at an exceptional rate.
- **Vaccines:** Vaccines have moved even faster than drugs with over 300 vaccine candidates being developed, nearly 40 of them undergoing clinical trials.
- **The accredited social health activists:** ASHA who visited hundreds of households repeatedly during the pandemic to ensure that every possible case is identified as early as possible.

What did the other countries which handled the pandemic successfully do?

- **The countries which handled the pandemic best:** Thailand and Vietnam have well-functioning health systems designed to deliver primary healthcare services.
 - These countries also have strong preventive and promotive health services as well as a dedicated public health workforce.
- **The role of community health workers:** In recognising, referring and motivating individuals for therapy was remarkable.
 - Community trust and participation is essential for implementation of non-pharmacological interventions.
 - Dharavi in Mumbai is an example of the difference community participation can make.
- **The response to the pandemic was multi-sectoral:** Health staff, policy makers and technical experts in multiple domains worked together to identify and implement solutions.
- **Quality data:** The need for timely and quality data in a health information system was recognised again during the pandemic.

Way forward

- **Investments in scientific research:** The solutions that have brought us hope have come from long-term private or public investments in scientific research and developments. It is self-evident that we need to emphasise what is feasible when resources are available.
- **National health policy:** All we need is commitment and that is outlined in the recent National Health Policy 2017 and reiterated in the report of the Fifteenth Finance Commission, which for the first time has a dedicated chapter on health.
- This is an opportunity and should use the challenge posed by the pandemic to accelerate long pending initiatives for health system reforms, accelerating towards universal health coverage, the central goal of the National Health Policy 2017.

20. India's diminishing democracy.

Source- [The Hindu](#)

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

Context – With diminishing democracy policymakers must take note of the drift.

What are the areas of concern for India?

1. **Recession** - The Indian economy is in recession and is among the worst performing among major nations
2. **Cyber security attack**- India ranked second only to the US among the countries most impacted by the **ransom ware** threats.

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- **Ransom ware** is a form of malware that encrypts a victim's files. The attacker then demands a ransom from the victim to restore access to the data upon payment.
- 3. Concerns with India' foreign relation-**
- **India-china dispute-** China unwillingness to reach a reasonable settlement along the Line of Actual Control.
 - **India-Pakistan relations-** China and Pakistan have signed a new military memorandum of understanding to boost their already close defence relationship.
- 4. West Asia-** India has to balance its ties with all regional power in west Asia
- India's close relation with Israel is another sore point with west Asia.

What are the course of actions that have diminished democracy in India?

- 1. Revoking of Article 370-** The government abolished the article that gives special status to Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcate the state into two separate union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.
- 2. The anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act-** The CAA is disturbing because it makes problematic distinctions between different groups of people based on religion and is pursuing a divide and rule policy
- 3. Electoral wins at any cost-** Winning at any cost has become the sole motif of certain parties.
 - Election are turning into conflict zones, they have become tinderboxes for communal, caste, political and other forms of violence.
 - Majority versus the minority have become the stock-in-trade of some parties.
4. Constitutional protection and principles of natural justice as also freedom of the individual are at risk
 - **Love jihad-** UP Cabinet cleared a draft ordinance against forceful inter-faith conversions — or the so-called “love jihad”.
- 5. Restrictions on Social media freedom-** India is beginning to clampdown on social media platforms and enacts draconian laws.
- 6. Farmer's protest-** Latest example of imposing a measure without due discussion and acceptance of farmer and opposition.

Way forward-

- Policymaker needs acknowledge public fears and reassure people, especially in periods of uncertainty.
- Democracy works on the principle of checks and balances. It is these checks and balances that prevent democracy from turning into majoritarianism.

21. Pressure on the education sector- Due to COVID-19

Source- [The Hindu](#)

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

Context - The novel coronavirus has turned India's weak pedagogic system upside down, will be difficult to reunite the new technological environment with child psychology and educational theory.

What is educational technology?

Educational technology is the combined use of computer hardware, software, and educational theory and practice to facilitate learning. Educational technology creates, uses, and manages technological processes and educational resources to help improve user academic performance.

What are the Advantages of educational technology?

1. **Democratized access to education-** The infrastructure of the Indian education system has been a major concern, However, Ed-tech has the potential to democratize access to education and opportunities even amidst such fragmented market conditions.
2. **Bringing fluidity in the curriculum-**
 - **New elements and concepts-** For instance, gamification is a new concept, engaging students to learn by using the design and other elements of video games to capture the attention of learners and help them enjoy while learning.
3. **Equipping students with better perception towards today's world-** Technology is taking rapid strides towards advancement and are also facing a looming climate crisis that demands awareness and active participation.
 - Online teaching facilitates and encourages frequent testing.

What are the issues related to online learning?

1. **Lack of sustained connectivity, a bane-** The Indian internet infrastructure is not ready for the paradigm shift to online learning
2. **Cost -** Both private and government schools have installed 'smart' infrastructure at great expense.
3. **Affordability-** In the push for online education post-pandemic, the poorest of poor students left out as they do not have the e-resources (computers, laptops, internet connectivity) to access it.
4. **All subjects can't be taught online-** It is difficult to teach a few new concepts in an online classroom.
 - Social science teachers face greater difficulties than science teachers do in introducing children to basic concepts.
5. **Not all teachers are technical adequate-** This challenge places the onus on the teachers to up skill themselves to capitalize on the emerging opportunities.
 - Teachers were asked to adopt a harder duty routine, combining screen time with messaging and responding.
6. **Not considerable as a permanent option-** Despite the high momentum, online options are still not considered permanent alternatives to classrooms. The sector can at best make a useful supplementary learning system.
7. **Childhood is now fully exposed to the attractions of the virtual world** and there is no one to offer a safety net. Young children's access to the Internet brings them face to face with self-styled video teachers of every subject, manufacturers of video games, fantasy app makers, and coding instructors.
 - This can expose children's to manipulative advertisements, violent entertainment and pornography.

What is the way forward?

- Government needs to step in to make new system of learning possible for all.
- **Parents have a role to play-** It is important that parents acquire a level of digital literacy, they can get help on using parental control apps. These apps will completely block sites that are inappropriate for children, such as porn sites, Online games can also be restricted.

22. Karnataka's cow protection bill

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs2: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

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Context: The Karnataka's cow protection bill, like similar laws in other states affects rural economy.

Background

- Recently, Karnataka state's Vidhan Sabha passed the contentious cattle protection bill that had been passed by the state assembly 10 years ago which could not enter the statute book because the governor refused assent.

What are the issues involved?

- **Lack of debate:** The Speaker did not give the opposition adequate time to voice their opinion.
- **Disturbs existing network:** The relationship between the farmer and the butcher is threatened as witnessed in similar states like Uttar Pradesh.
- **Indiscriminate powers to law agency:** The proposed law stipulates a prison term of three to five years and fines ranging from Rs 50,000 to Rs 5 lakh for purchasing or disposing of cattle for slaughter and gives the police sweeping powers to search premises and vehicles.
- **Affects farmers whose livelihood is dependent on Livestock:** the cow becomes virtually uneconomical for the farmer after eight years when its milk output falls. Also, such animals along with male cattle not required for draught and breeding purposes.
- **Misuse of law:** As observed by Allahabad High Court, The Act is being used against innocent persons.

23. Iran Nuclear Deal

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests

Context: How the Iran Nuclear deal has shaped till now.

How, the Iran nuclear deal was approached differently under different US presidents?

- **Approach Under Obama Administration:**
- The Obama Administration Washington saw Iran's nuclear programme, which was at an advanced stage in 2015, as a national security problem and tackled it via diplomacy.
- Mr. Obama by agreeing to the nuclear deal lifted the sanctions on Iran and allowed Iran to move towards claiming its natural economic and political might.

Why were the Israel and Saudi's upset over lifting Sanctions?

- Iran's regional rivals, mainly Israel and Saudi Arabia, who are also America's allies, saw the Iran problem differently.
- For them, Iran's nuclear programme was not the problem but was part of the larger geopolitical challenges Iran posed.
- The problem was Iran influence across West Asia, its backing for non-state militias, and its ambition to emerge as a dominant pillar in the region based on the political heft of the Shia community.
- Hence, lifting sanctions on Iran under Obama administration has upset them.
- ❖ **Approach Under Trump Administration**
- The Donald Trump administration took an entirely different line towards Iran.
- It pulled the U.S. out of the nuclear deal, despite United Nations certification that Iran was compliant with its terms, and reimposed sanctions on Tehran.

How it helped Iran rivals?

- Mr. Trump's approach towards Iran had aligned with that of Israel and Saudi Arabia.
- The Trump years gave Israel a window of opportunity to step up its covert and overt operations.
- In 2018, Israeli spies carried out a daring mission at a warehouse inside Iran and stole thousands of documents related to Iran's nuclear programme.
- Iranian nuclear scientists came under attacks. In Syria, where Iran has deployed militias backing the government of Bashar al-Assad, Israel continued to bomb Iranian targets
- **Expected policy approach under Biden administration**
- President-elect Joe Biden has promised to take the U.S. back to the nuclear deal.
- Mr. Biden, who was the Vice President of the Obama administration that originally signed the deal, could zero in on the nuclear programme, like Mr. Obama did, and leave the regional issues to the regional players to settle.

What are the motives of Israel at present?

- Recently, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, a top Iranian nuclear physicist, was assassinated. Israel has been blamed for the attack, an allegation that Tel Aviv has not denied.
- Israel wants to set back Iran's nuclear programme by taking out a prominent scientist and spoil the possible revival of the nuclear deal.
- Israel wants to escalate the conflict, giving the outgoing Trump administration and the Israel government reasons to launch heavier strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities, closing off the diplomatic path.

How Iran responded?

- Iran have opted for the less risky option. Instead of walking into the trap of provocation, its Parliament passed a Bill that obliges the government to enrich uranium to a higher level, from less than 5% now to 20%, which is a technical step away from the weapons-grade level of 90%
- Also, it resorted to stop access for UN inspectors to the country's top nuclear facilities in two months if sanctions relief is not given.

24. Issues faced by Nursing sector in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Context: Nursing education in India suffers poor quality of training, inequitable distribution, and non-standardised practices.

In News:

- The year 2020 has been designated as "International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife".
- Nurses and midwives will be central to achieving universal health coverage in India.

What are the structural challenges affecting nursing sector in India?

- **Low number of nurses:** India's nursing workforce is about two-thirds of its health workforce. Its ratio of 1.7 nurses per 1,000 population is 43% less than the World Health Organisation norm. It needs 2.4 million nurses to meet the norm.
- **Inequal Distribution:** Though the number of nursing education institutions has been increasing steadily, there are vast inequities in their distribution. Around 62% of them are situated in southern India.

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- **Vacancies:** The faculty positions vacant in nursing college and schools are around 86% and 80%, respectively.
- **Higher qualifications of postgraduate nurses are not recognised:** There is a lack of job differentiation between diploma, graduate, and postgraduate nurses regarding their pay, parity, and promotion. Consequently, higher qualifications of postgraduate nurses are underutilised, leading to low demand for postgraduate courses.
- **Outdated and fails to cater to the practice needs:** The education, including re-training, is not linked to the roles and their career progression in the nursing practice. There are insufficient postgraduate courses to develop skills in specialties, and address critical faculty shortages both in terms of quality and quantity.
- **Lack quality training:** Multiple entry points to the nursing courses and lack of integration of the diploma and degree courses diminish the quality of training.
- **Largely unregulated:** The Indian Nursing Act primarily revolves around nursing education and does not provide any policy guidance about the roles and responsibilities of nurses in various cadres. Nurses in India have no guidelines on the scope of their practice and have no prescribed standards of care.
- **Lack of accountability for nurses:** The Consumer Protection Act which protects the rights and safety of patients as consumers, holds only the doctor and the hospital liable for medico-legal issues; nurses are out of the purview of the Act. This is contrary to the practices in developed countries where nurses are legally liable for errors in their work

What is the way forward?

- A common entrance exam, a national licence exit exam for entry into practice, and periodic renewal of licence linked with continuing nursing education would significantly streamline and strengthen nursing education.
- Transparent accreditation, benchmarking, and ranking of nursing institutions too would improve the quality.
- The Indian Nursing Council Act of 1947 must be amended to explicitly state clear norms for service and patient care, fix the nurse to patient ratio, staffing norms and salaries.
- The exodus of qualified nurses must be contained by Incentivising to pursue advanced degrees to match their qualification, clear career paths, opportunity for leadership roles, and improvements in the status of nursing as a profession.
- A live registry of nurses, positions, and opportunities should be a top priority to tackle the demand-supply gap in this sector.
- The National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog has recently formulated a framework for public-private partnership in medical education that could be referred to develop a model agreement for nursing education.

The disabling environment prevalent in the system has led to the low status of nurses in the hierarchy of health-care professionals. The National Nursing and Midwifery Commission Bill currently under consideration should hopefully address some of the issues highlighted.

25. NFHS findings

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS-2- Nutrition

Context: The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has released data fact sheets for 22 States and Union Territories based on the findings of Phase I of the National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5).

What are the worrying findings?

- **Malnutrition:** Of the 22 States and UTs, there is an increase in the prevalence of severe acute malnutrition in 16 States/UTs (compared to NFHS-4 conducted in 2015-16).
 - The percentage of children under five who are underweight has also increased in 16 out of the 22 States/UTs.
 - There is also an increase in the prevalence of other indicators such as adult malnutrition measured by those having a Body Mass Index of less than 18.5kg/m² in many States/ UTs.
- **Anaemia:** Anaemia levels among children as well as adult women have increased in most of the States with a decline in anaemia among children being seen only in four States/UTs.
- **Obesity:** Most States/UTs also see an increase in overweight/obesity prevalence among children and adults, once again drawing attention to the inadequacy of diets in India both in terms of quality and quantity.
- **Stunting:** The data report an increase in childhood stunting in 13 of the 22 States/UTs compared to the data of NFHS-4.
 - There was a 10 pp decline in stunting among children under five between 2005-06 (NFHS-3) and 2015-16 (NFHS-4), from 48% to 38%, averaging 1 pp a year. This was considered to be a very slow pace of improvement.
- **Starvation:** Volunteers of the Right to Food campaign have listed over 100 starvation deaths based on media and/or verified fact- finding reports since 2015.
- **Food insecurity:** Field surveys such as 'Hunger Watch' are already showing massive levels of food insecurity and decline in food consumption, especially among the poor and vulnerable households.
 - In the Hunger Watch survey carried out in 11 States, two-thirds of the respondents reported that the nutritional quality and quantity of their diets worsened in September-October compared to before the lockdown.

What are the steps to be taken?

- **Improvements:** There are some improvements seen in determinants of malnutrition such as access to sanitation, clean cooking fuels and women's status, a reduction in spousal violence and greater access of women to bank accounts.
- **Interventions:** Direct interventions such as supplementary nutrition, growth monitoring, and behaviour change communication through the ICDS and school meals must be strengthened and given more resources.
- **Progress on maternity entitlements:** Universal maternity entitlements and child care services to enable exclusive breastfeeding, appropriate infant and young child feeding, recognising women's unpaid work burdens have been on the agenda for long, but not much progress has been made on these.
- **Strategy:** An employment-centred growth strategy which includes universal provision of basic services for education, health, food and social security is imperative.
- **Expansion in social protection schemes:** Such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, the Public Distribution System, the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), and school meals have contributed to reduction in absolute poverty as well as previous improvements in nutrition indicators.

Way forward: It is hoped that the experience of the pandemic as well as the results of NFHS-5 serve as a wake-up call for serious rethinking of issues related to nutrition and accord these issues priority.

26. New technology coalitions

Source: [Indian Express](#)

GS2: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Context: India must actively participate in new technology coalitions to secure its geopolitical interests.

Why India needs Tech-coalition?

- Reducing economic and digital dependence on China.
- China's use of newly acquired technological muscle in support of its expansionist aims.
- To promote and regulate advanced technologies.
- India is also now a member of the Wassenaar Arrangement that regulates the flow of dual-use technologies and the Missile Technology Control Regime.
- The size of India's market as well as technological capabilities make India an attractive partner in the effort to build "technology coalitions of the capable and willing".
- Developing trusted global supply chains that are not vulnerable to Beijing's weaponisation of economic interdependence.

How issue-based coalitions are growing?

- Biden promised to convene a "**Democracy Summit**" with multiple objectives, including the promotion of human rights and protection of democracies from new digital technologies.
- Britain has been discussing the merits of a "**Democracy Ten**" that brings India, South Korea and Australia with the G-7 to build telecom products to reduce the current global reliance on China.
- European Union has offered to **rebuild the transatlantic alliance** with a special focus on technological cooperation.
- France and Canada launched the **Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence** to promote responsible development and use of AI. India was among the 15 founding members.
- "**Digital Nations**" that was founded in 2014 by Britain, Estonia, Israel, South Korea and New Zealand to mobilise digital technologies to enhance the quality of life for their citizens.
- "**Artemis Accords**" which outline a set of principles for the cooperative and transparent exploration of outer space. The founding members of the Artemis Accords are Australia, Canada, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, and the US.

What are the future prospects for India-USA coalition?

- **New presidency in USA:** Restoring multilateralism is among Biden's top priorities.
- **USA's technological objectives:** for example, the US negotiated arms control agreements with the Soviet Union, during the Cold War. Also, USA worked in multilateral forums to produce the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and exclusive groupings like the Nuclear Suppliers Group to regulate the flows of civil nuclear technology.
- **India's growing significance:** USA devoted much energy to the consolidation of the Quad and idea of a "Quad Plus" to discuss the coordination of national responses to the pandemic.

- **Against China's assertion:** USA mobilised allies and partners to shun China's telecom companies in the rollout of 5G or "fifth-generation" wireless technology and promoted the **idea of a coalition of "clean networks"**.
- **Intelligence sharing:** USA expanded the ambit of Five Eyes (US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) by initiating consultation with Japan and India on addressing the tension between encryption, privacy and law enforcement.

What is way forward?

- Appreciate the **value of issue-based coalitions** in producing more productive outcomes in the technological arena.
- Coalitions will complement India's traditional focus on multilateralism. For example, International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure.
- Like-minded countries can come together to cope with emerging global challenges, including the **governance of emerging technologies** that are reshaping relations within and among societies.

27. Justice delivery system

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS-2-Polity

Context: Inadequacies in the justice delivery system extends beyond the Supreme Court.

What are the various issues faced by the judiciary?

- **Spending on judiciary:** It is equated with a call for increasing the salaries of judges and providing better court infrastructure. Such perceptions are unfortunate.
- **Issues under The Legal Services Authority Act of 1987:** Under this law, all women, irrespective of their financial status, are entitled to free legal aid.
 - **Free legal aid:** Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and children too are entitled to free legal aid. This means that a significant proportion of the population falls under a free legal aid regime.
 - **Lack of well-trained individuals:** There has been little effort on the part of successive governments to provide a task force of carefully selected, well-trained and reasonably paid advocates to provide these services.
 - The system of legal aid in the U.K. identifies and funds several independent solicitor offices to provide such services.
- **The judge-population ratio:** It provides one of the most important yardsticks to measure the health of the legal system.
 - The U.S. has about 100 judges per million population. Canada has about 75 and the U.K. has about 50.
 - India has only 19 judges per million population. Of these, at any given point, at least one-fourth is always vacant.
 - Hardly any attention is focused on this gaping inadequacy in lower courts which is where the common man first comes into contact with the justice delivery system.
 - In All India Judges Association v. Union of India (2001), the Supreme Court had directed the Government of India to increase the judge-population ratio to at least 50 per million population within five years from the date of the judgment. This has not been implemented.
- **Other issues:**
 - Increasing tribunalisation of the justice delivery process;
 - the extortionate court fees payable to access justice in civil suits in some States; and

- the poor integration of technology into the system are some issues that readily come to mind.

What can be done?

- **Access to justice:** Though ‘access to justice’ has not been specifically spelt out as a fundamental right in the Constitution, it has always been treated as such by Indian courts.
 - In Anita Kushwaha v. Pushpa Sadan (2016), the Supreme Court held clearly that if “life” implies not only life in the physical sense but a bundle of rights that make life worth living, there is no justice or other basis for holding that denial of “access to justice” will not affect the quality of human life.
 - Further, the court pointed out important components of access to justice:
 - Existence of adjudicatory mechanisms.
 - Conveniently accessible in terms of distance and
 - The process of adjudication must be speedy and affordable to the disputants.
- **National policy:** The executive, judiciary and the legislature are yet to draw out a national policy and road map for clearing backlogs and making these concepts real.

28. Rise of corporate nationalism

Source: [Indian Express](#)

GS2: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Context: The Rise of ‘corporate nationalism’ empowers Indian companies at expense of consumers.

Instances where the Sentiments of corporate nationalism has been raised against foreign corporates?

- **Amazon-Reliance Dispute:** The counsel for Future Retail accused Amazon of behaving like “the East India Company of the 21st century” and calling it “Big Brother in America.”
- **Whatsapp pay still pending for approval before the Supreme Court:** Even though Whatsapp has obtained all requisite approvals. Multiple oppositions claim that permitting foreign entities to launch payment apps would endanger the country’s financial data. This is despite the National Payments Corporation of India’s approval of WhatsApp’s data localisation practices.
- **Severe restrictions on Chinese investments:** By mandating prior approval for Chinese FDI, banning several Chinese apps and restricting Chinese bidders from participating in public procurement contracts.

Why shifting the focus to the foreignness of a company for regulatory assessment is problematic?

- Foreign investors hold majority stakes in most of these “Indian” startups which make complaints of losing market share to foreign companies. **For example**, while complaining Amazon as a foreign company, Reliance, too, doesn’t shy away from receiving investments from Google.
- It alters the legal jurisprudence by placing the foreign identity of a party at the centre of regulatory assessments, ultimately subverting the objective of commercial laws.
- It increases the risk associated with doing business in India by creating cause uncertainty in an already chaotic legal environment.

There is no doubt that the practices of many foreign companies are suspect. Not only foreign companies, many domestic conglomerates too have equally deep pockets and more political sway than their foreign counterparts, and a questionable track record of regulatory compliance.

Indians need to be protected from its domestic corporate giants as much as any foreign company. This can be guaranteed only if regulators and courts consciously stay true to the statutorily mandated objectives of their respective regimes.

29. PM-WANI: Revolutionise the way India accesses the internet

Source: [Indian Express](#)

GS2: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors

Context: PM-WANI has the potential to revolutionise the way India accesses the internet.

What are the needs of PM-WANI?

- To create value for the consumer.
- To quickly reach countrymen in the remotest areas.
- India's tele-density of landlines never exceeded 7 per 100 people but due to mobile it exceeded to 90 per 100 people.
- India grew from 302 million internet subscribers to 750 million.
- India is one of the fastest growing internet markets in the world.
- To deliver a resilient and reliable connection to every Indian and reliable access everywhere.
- Despite excellent advances in 4G technology, wired connections still offer superior quality, reliability and throughput.

What are the key features of Pradhan Mantri Wireless Access Network Interface (PM-WANI)?

- Bring large scale deployment of Wi-Fi hotspots through the country to drive up connectivity options and improve digital access.
- The scheme envisages setting up of public Wi-Fi networks and access points by local Kirana and neighbourhood shops through public data offices (PDO will be set up on the lines of Public Call Offices (PCOs)) that will not involve any licence, fee or registration.

How PM-Wani can revolutionise access to internet?

- UPI created common payments infrastructure that unbundled whose app you use to pay from which bank your money was in.
- This resulted in 3 Cs — **greater convenience, higher confidence and lower costs.**
- PM-WANI unbundles whose wired connection you use from who you pay to use that connection.
- It allows them to interoperate and focus on connecting the last user. It is built on unbundling three as — access, authorisation and accounting.

What are the dimensions along which PM-WANI has broken away from the past?

- PM-WANI has **liberalised the resale of bandwidth.** Earlier only licensed players could become Internet Service Providers and resell bandwidth.
- This has led to the **top 5 ISPs owning 75 per cent of the volume of all wired subscribers.**
- PM-WANI allows anyone — a kirana shop owner, a tea-stall vendor, or a Common Service Centre to resell internet to its customers without a licence and without fees.

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- By installing a wireless router, they can get on the PM-WANI network and start selling connectivity.
- These small vendors will be called Public Data Offices (PDOs), in a deliberate hark back to the Public Call Offices of yore.
- Due to this deregulation, the distribution of endpoints of PM-WANI will be selected by entrepreneurs rather than being decided top-down.

How PM-WANI is forward-looking in its design?

- Presence of robust identity infrastructure in the form of Aadhaar and DigiLocker. It will help to authenticate its users.
- This architecture also allows a central data base and central KYC, that users can use inter-operably across all PDOs.
- The network operators then settle accounting between them, much like how telecom operators settle call termination charges.
- Indians can log in once and enjoy access on all available WiFi networks.
- It also allows international travellers to take advantage of India's connectivity, without paying exorbitant roaming charges to their home networks.

30. Child nutrition

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS-2- Development issues

Context: New evidence on child nutrition calls for radical expansion of child development services.

What are the various issues found by several survey reports on child nutrition?

- **NFHS-4:** Leaving aside two or three countries like Niger and Yemen, India has the highest proportion of underweight children in the world: a full 36 per cent according to the National Family Health Survey 2015-16 (NFHS-4).
 - The corresponding proportion is much lower in other South Asian countries, including Bangladesh (22 per cent) and Nepal (27 per cent).
- **NFHS-5:** Early data from the National Family Health Survey 2019-20 reveals another alarming fact: Child nutrition indicators have not improved between 2015-16 and 2019-20.
 - In fact, in seven out of 10 major states for which data has been released, the proportion of underweight children increased in that period. In six of these 10 states, stunting increased.
- **Hunger watch:** In the latest survey, Hunger Watch, two-thirds of the respondents (adults from India's poorest households) said that they were eating less nutritious food today than before the lockdown.
- **Lockdown impact:** Mid-day meals in schools and anganwadis were discontinued from the lockdown onwards, to this day. Many states did try to make some arrangement for distribution of cash or "take-home rations" in lieu of cooked meals, but these measures were mostly haphazard and inadequate.
- **Disruption of routine health services:** Children have also suffered from the massive disruption of routine health services including immunisation during the lockdown, evident from the official Health Management Information System.
- **Closure of anganwadis:** The prolonged closure of anganwadis and schools possibly had other, less well-documented consequences, such as an increase in child labour and child abuse.
- **Budget allocation:** In annual Budget for 2015-16, there were staggering cuts in financial allocations for mid-day meals and the Integrated Child Development

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Services (ICDS). The central budget for mid-day meals (Rs 11,000 crore) is lower than what it was in 2014-15 (Rs 13,000 crore).

- The central allocation for ICDS is also lower today than it was six years ago. Poshan Abhiyaan, government's flagship programme for child nutrition, has a minuscule budget of Rs 3,700 crore.

What are the steps to be taken?

- **Pregnant women's right to maternity benefits:** Rs 6,000 per child under the National Food Security Act 2013. The benefits were illegally restricted to one child per family and Rs 5,000 per child under Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana.
 - Extending maternity entitlements to all births, not just the first living child, is a legal obligation under NFSA, and the spirit of the Act also calls for raising their amount well above the outdated norm of Rs 6,000 per child.
- **Reviving and revamping mid-day meals:** In schools and anganwadis would be a good start.
 - For example, inclusion of eggs (not only in mid-day meals but also in take-home rations for young children and pregnant women), with a fruit option or such for vegetarians.
- **The ICDS programme also needs a shot in the arm:** India has an invaluable network of 14 lakh anganwadis managed by local women. Most of these anganwadi workers and helpers are capable women who can work wonders with a supportive environment.

Way forward

- The southern states, and some other states like Himachal Pradesh and even Odisha, have amply demonstrated the possibility of turning anganwadis into vibrant child development centres at the village level.

31. Uttar Pradesh's strategies to contain the pandemic

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

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

Context- Early and systematic tracking of high-risk contacts helped Uttar Pradesh step up the fight against COVID-19.

What were the measures taken by UP government to control the outbreak?

Uttar Pradesh is the largest state in the country in terms of population and hence, the battle against COVID-19 becomes more challenging. Several factors distinguish the handling of the pandemic in the state such as –

1. **Setting up of 'Team 11'** - Team 11 (which is a cluster of 11 committees) at the state level that comprises top officials and report on a daily basis to the chief minister on the corona situation. The daily review meeting has kept the state machinery on its toes.
 - Ministers in charge of Health and Medical Education are also present at these meetings.
 - This committee tasked with managing different aspects like –

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- 2. ICCC set up in every district-** Integrated COVID Command and Control Centre (ICCC), This is the nerve centre of pandemic management in the district which helps in-
 - Sending testing teams to different areas as per plan.
 - Ensuring surveillance and contact tracing.
 - Sending positive patients to different Covid hospitals or placing them under home isolation.
- 3. Integrated data management portal-** UP government launched an integrated Covid-19 portal (**upcovid19tracks.in**), set up a digital mechanism that can help the state government combat the pandemic while controlling community transmission of the virus.
 - It provides us with the ability to crunch and analyse data on a daily basis.
 - Also cajole the districts lagging behind to improve their performance.
 - Provide test results to citizens.
 - Informs citizens about the nearest COVID-19 test centres where they can get themselves tested free of cost.
- 4. Widespread use of the drug, Ivermectin** - The Uttar Pradesh government has issued a government order for not only use of Ivermectin drug to treat COVID-19 patients but also as prevention too.
 - The state government provides free medicines to all patients.
 - The combination of ivermectin and doxycyclin to successfully treat over three lakh home-isolated patients with mild symptoms so far.
- 5. Target testing-** The strategy of testing of selected groups helped assess the level of infection in the general population and identify and isolate super-spreaders.
 - **For example-** Before festive season, the administration tested mehndi artists, sweet shop workers, jewelers, those working at places of worship, roadside cracker vendors and were able to isolate more than 12,500 infected persons.

Way forward-

Heavy testing, strategic containment, new innovative ideas and management ideas and Government relied measures helped Uttar Pradesh to keep the positivity rate below 5 per cent throughout the pandemic.

- Continuous monitoring of patients in home quarantine has been an extremely helpful step.

- A combination of government policies and technology-based solutions has been put in place to ensure the safety and well-being of people along with the smooth functioning of the state.

32. Nutritional agenda

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS-2- Health

Context: The fifth round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS 2019-20) factsheets on the burden of child under nutrition is not encouraging.

How is under nutrition measured?

- **Relied on the measure of a child's anthropometry:** Children are defined as stunted, underweight or wasted if their standardised height-for-age, weight-for-age or weight-for-height is more than two standard deviations below the (WHO) Child Growth Standards median.
 - However, under nutrition can also be measured by observing the adequacy and sufficiency of food or dietary intake among children.

What is the status of under nutrition in the fifth round of NFHS report?

- **NFHS-4 (2015-16):** The percentage of children (aged 6-23 months) who do not meet the minimum dietary adequacy as defined under the Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) practices by WHO is 83.9%; a decline of just over 2 percentage points.
 - Thus, eight out of 10 children appear to be experiencing a dietary shortfall.
 - Analysis based on NFHS-4 has shown that consumption of protein-rich food as well as fruit and vegetables were substantially low.
- **Dietary adequacy:** Goa experienced the largest percentage point decline (11.1%), and Jammu and Kashmir observed the highest increase in its percentage of children not meeting dietary adequacy over the last three years (76.5% to 86.4%).
 - While there are some variations, in every State more than 75% of the children do not receive the minimum adequate diet.
- **Anaemia prevalence:** Anaemia prevalence among children increased by about eight percentage points from 51.8% to 60.2%. The prevalence of anaemia in childhood increased in 18 of the 22 States/Union Territories.
 - In the majority of the States, two out of three children have possible iron-deficiency. The State-wise trends for adults are mixed, although it is clear that women are substantially at a far greater risk for anaemia than men.

What are the steps to be taken?

- **Initiatives:** (POSHAN) Abhiyaan and the Anemia Mukta Bharat or AMB Strategy was launched in 2018 with efforts to improve Iron and Folic Acid (IFA) supplementation.
 - Behaviour change and anaemia-related care and treatment across six target groups including pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children, and the provisional verdict is mixed for women and concerning for children.
- **Typology:** A classification of nutritional status using a combined typology based on children who experience dietary failure and anthropometric failure is crucial.
 - A recent NFHS-4 based study using this typology found that 36.3% of children who experienced a dietary failure do not show anthropometric failure.
- **Nutrition agenda:** Dietary factors can clearly be a major determinant of stagnancy in the nutritional status of Indian children. Therefore, the nutrition agenda needs to be considered from "food as a right" perspective.

- **Quality data:** Data available in a timely manner and in public domain, is empowering, as the NFHS has demonstrated over the last 25-plus years. But systematic and quality data on what Indians eat remains largely unknown.
 - A modern data initiative leveraging and combining aspects of the NFHS, the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau and the National Sample Surveys that collected data on detailed household-level consumption and expenditure on various food items should be considered.

Way forward

- Decluttering our current approach to reducing the burden of child under nutrition and keeping it simple with a policy goal to providing affordable (economic and physical) access to quality food items, particularly for lower socioeconomic populations groups, should be prioritised.

33. Eliminating Tuberculosis (TB)

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

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

Context- The pandemic provides learning opportunity and opens up possibilities of accelerating Tuberculosis (TB) elimination venture.

More in news-

- Covid-19 has derailed the painstaking efforts of decades and diverted scientific attention from killer diseases like tuberculosis
- COVID-19 lockdowns have resulted in a 30 per cent decline in tuberculosis diagnosis and reporting.
- Researchers estimate that over the next five years, an additional 1.19 million TB cases and 3,61,000 TB deaths may occur in India.

What is Tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is caused by bacteria (*Mycobacterium tuberculosis*) that most often affect the lungs.

- TB causes respiratory illness and spread from person to person through the air.
- Mortality rate of 13 per cent — far worse than the 1.3 per cent for COVID-19.

How combating COVID-19 pandemic can help eradicate TB?

1. **Raise the awareness of the general masses-** The leaders and individuals have realized the devastation an infectious respiratory disease can cause.
2. **Behavioural changes-** The changes acquired during the pandemic such as cough hygiene, use of masks, physical distancing will further help reduce the transmission of tuberculosis, which is a respiratory illness.
 - Doctors and nurses will be less complacent about these measures.
3. **Raise investments in the healthcare sector-** investments in health systems infrastructure, infection control equipment and personal protection equipment will ensure better airborne infection prevention and control.
4. **Boost testing scale-**
 - COVID-19 has changed the landscape of testing and surveillance.
 - The speed of research on new COVID-19 tests and the scale at which testing was applied are lessons to be learned by TB programmes.
 - **Bi-directional” TB and COVID-19 testing** - Greater identification of cases will lead to more persons being isolated and treated.

5. **Speed of vaccine development-**

- The success of various COVID-19 vaccine platforms and the speed at which the vaccine has been brought to the market gives tremendous hope for TB vaccine candidates.
 - Fast-tracking of research, advance purchasing, and research sharing by countries witnessed during the pandemic could apply to the TB vaccine.
6. Several dedicated infectious diseases hospitals have come up as a part of the pandemic response measures, which would contribute in a major way towards tuberculosis care and management.
7. **The molecular diagnostic capacity has increased** - These multi-platform devices based on cartridge and chip-based technology can decentralize TB diagnosis.
8. COVID-19 has taught to prioritize public health as much as curative and preventive health.
9. The increased uptake of telemedicine and teleconsultation during the pandemic will provide channels of consultation for tuberculosis

What is the way forward?

COVID-19 is likely to expedite the trajectory of TB elimination.

- COVID-19 pandemic has provided an opportunity to boost TB elimination activities through health system strengthening and infectious diseases control.

34. Health care in India

Source - The Hindu

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

Context - The problems in India's health sector.

What are the issues with healthcare sector in India?

1. **Low government spending** - Public expenditure on health accounts for only 1.13% of the total health expenditure which is abysmally low when compared to WHO recommendation of 5%.
2. **High out of pocket expenditure**- Out of pocket expenses account for 62% of the expenditure. This led to an increasing number of households facing catastrophic expenditures due to health costs.
 - 85% of the population cannot afford high cost, corporate private health care.
3. **Insurance**- 76% of Indians does not have health insurance. Government contribution to insurance is just 32%. Low insurance penetration forces people to spend out of pocket.
 - The behaviour of a private corporate hospital is skewed in favour of profitability.
4. **Malpractices in the healthcare sector** - Selling substandard and counterfeit medicines, unnecessary hospital admissions and exploitation.
5. **Weak government policy**- only 1.27 crore people have taken advantage of the Ayushman Bharat scheme out of 12 crore card holders.
6. **Dark reality of private hospitals**- The insurance backup incentivizes hospitals to expand the bill but the patients do not get attended to in their best interests.
7. **Low health workforce density** - India's public system has a shortage of nurses. The ratio of 0.6 nurses per doctor while the World Health Organization specification is three nurses per doctor.
8. **80:20 Rule** - Only 20% of people can afford modern health care, 40% cannot afford it at all and the other 40%, the non-poor, pay with difficulty.

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- Nearly 7 crore of the non-poor slide into poverty on a year-to-year basis.
- **Under-qualified doctors-** Due to this, 80% of people routinely reach Registered Medical Practitioners who are not trained to treat patients.

What needs to be done to improve healthcare sector?

- **Increase the number of doctors-** Ramp up the number of doctors with counterpart obligation to serve in rural areas.
- **The Licentiate Medical Practitioner [LMP]** - The scheme involves a three-and-a-half year course that leads to a bachelor's degree in medicine and surgery. Doctors trained under this scheme will work in rural areas.
- Empower graduates of BSc (Nursing) to be nursing practitioners.
- **Focusing of primary care-** India needs to shift focus from secondary and tertiary sectors to primary care. PHCs should be made attractive to doctors by providing incentives and making rural service mandatory for medical students.
- States should be incentivized to carry out the appointments of health workers and doctors.

Way forward-

- PHCs should be well-staffed and well-provisioned through a reasonable fee which will cover at least part of the cost.
- Focus should be shifted to preventive healthcare from curative healthcare.
- Policymakers need to focus on the larger picture with steps being taken to reclaim the space under public care.

35. WTO rulebook

Source: [Indian Express](#)

GS2: Important International institutions, agencies and fora - their structure, mandate.

Context: WTO rulebook must evolve to support food security and rural livelihoods in developing countries.

What are the existing issues related to India?

- Whether the current farm subsidy rules provide enough room for developing countries to buy food at government-set **minimum support prices** as part of their public stockholding programmes.
- To negotiate a permanent solution.
- India's farm subsidy notification this year to the WTO's committee on agriculture brought the topic of procurement under public stockholding programmes.
- It indicated that India had breached its agreed ceiling on product-specific support to rice during marketing year 2018-19.
- For example, India's wheat support was close to breaching product-specific support ceilings, with administered prices at \$263.15/tonne.

What are the underlying issues with WTO?

- **Delays:** many countries pursuing improved market access and closer economic integration through bilateral and regional talks.
- **Paralysed dispute settlement function:** Donald Trump administration's decision to veto new appointments to the WTO's appellate body leaving many to question the future of the rules-based multilateral trading system.
- **Method of calculation:** Market price support levels are calculated by taking the gap between applied administered prices and an external reference price or ERP, set at 1986-88 levels, and multiplying this by the volume of eligible production.

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- **Divergent views on benchmark:** WTO members could usefully consider whether the fixed ERP of 1986-88 is still a relevant benchmark, especially in the wake of the global price hikes of 2007-08 and 2010-11.
- **Current scenario:** food security disruption caused by US-China trade tensions and the inconclusive outcome of the WTO's 2018 ministerial conference in Buenos Aires.

How does Indian subsidies doesn't distort market?

- India's support turns out to be negative for the years since 2000-01, **if domestic market prices are compared with international market prices** using the Producer Support Estimate methodology applied by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).
- Even after accounting for input subsidies, which represent a significant share of India's non-product-specific support using the WTO system for calculating farm support.

Way forward:

- **Updating the reference prices** to average 2014-16 or 2016-18 levels or using a rolling average instead flattening out volatility by excluding the highest and lowest years from a five-year period.
- **Exempt support from counting towards maximum limits** when administered prices are set below international market price levels.
- Members could also **discount support consumed by subsistence farmers** themselves from the calculation of the volume of eligible production or **exempting procurement** that only equates to a small share of domestic output.
- WTO members need to agree on a **shared framework for action on farm subsidy reform** and set a clear direction and a timeframe for reaching a rational conclusion.
- Minimise disruption in food supply chain.
- The December meeting of the General Council that is mulling over WFP food aid issues offers India (with G-20) an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to WFP food aid and help **rebuild confidence in WTO's ability**.

An agreement under WTO could also lay the groundwork for long-overdue progress on the wider trade and food security agenda at the WTO.

36. Suitability of International Branch Campuses (IBC) in India's education system

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education.

Context: Before allowing **international branch campuses (IBC)** to operate in India, their potential role and suitability in Indian Environment should be analysed.

Background:

- Although National Education Policy 2020 has recommended allowing universities in the top 100 categories of the World University Rankings to operate in India, inadequate focus has been given to the potential role and suitability of international branch campuses (IBC) in the Indian environment.
- In India, there is general perception that there exists only a single IBC model i.e., foreign universities are self-funded and establish campuses on their own without any major support from the host country. But studies suggest otherwise.
- However, recent studies have shown that there are various other models of IBCs for example, IBC that is fully or partially funded by the host government or IBC

supported by private organisations or an IBC functioning in collaboration with a local partner in the partner's campus.

- The example of Australia's Monash university operating in South Africa from 2001 to 2019, could provide India with useful lessons in this field.

What is an IBC?

- An IBC is an entity that is owned (**completely or partially**) and operated by a foreign higher education provider but provides an entire academic program onsite (I.e., In the host country)
- More than 300 IBCs are functioning in around 80 countries and many of these are operated by universities from the U.S., the U.K., Australia, France and Russia.
- Indian private institutions also operate IBCs in countries such as Australia, Mauritius, Uzbekistan, Singapore, Nepal and Sri Lanka.
- Whereas Countries such as China, Malaysia, Qatar and Singapore host most of them.

Case study on the experience of Monash University in South Africa?

- **SA's regulatory framework:**
 - IBCs there were promoted in parallel with the pre-existing higher education system, on a dual track approach.
 - The SA's regulatory framework permits foreign universities to operate as private entities, but they need to legally register themselves as a company. Though IBC's can offer accredited degrees and diplomas they cannot use the 'university' tag.
- **Structural development of Monash university:**
 - Monash obtained registration in 2001 to operate as an IBC in Johannesburg as 'Monash South Africa (MSA)' and currently ranks among top 100 universities in the QS World University Ranking. It operates IBCs in China and Malaysia.
 - In 2013, it started operating as a joint venture with U.S.-based majority owner Laureate Education after selling 75% of its shares.
 - In 2018 both transferred the ownership to a South Africa based listed company Independent Institute of Education (IIE), a subsidiary of the ADvTech group.

What India can learn from the South African Experience?

- First, even a university that is among the top 100 could become a local private institution through mergers and acquisitions.
- Secondly, it is not necessary that the public nature of a foreign university is also reflected in its branch campus of host country. Nature may change according to the country.
- Third, ensuring parity of the programs offered at host country with the quality of programmes offered at the home campus would be a challenge.
- Fourth, domestic market demand influences course offerings, and there is dependence on contract academic staff.
- Fifth, there are limitations in substituting existing institutions.

The above experience illustrates the big gap between the state's desired objectives and the actual reality that can be offered through IBC's. Hence, we need to review the various delivery models existing in different national contexts to help us aid in future policy formulation process.

37. Impact of New Welfarism approach of government on nutrition

Source: [Indian Express](#)

GS2: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Context: The New welfarism approach followed by the present government can better explain the reason for the overall rise in stunting rates.

Background

- The 5th round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) that covers dimensions such as health, nutrition, and the overall quality of lives, has been recently released.
- It provides reliable and independent evidence to assess micro-development performance under this government.
- NFHS-5 has highlighted the dismal performance of country in reducing the malnutrition specifically stunting.
- The findings of NFHS-5 show, how the government policy has consciously adopted the New Welfarism approach providing Tangibles services, instead of providing Intangibles social benefits i.e., improving nutrition level.

What is new welfarism approach?

- The New Welfarism approach is more similar to the Basic Needs approach to development but a very distinctive approach to redistribution and inclusion.
- It does not prioritise the supply of Intangible public services such as basic health, primary education and safety security net.
- Instead, it focuses on tangible essential goods and services, normally provided by the private sector, such as bank accounts, cooking gas, toilets, electricity, housing, water and cash.

What are the findings that supports New Welfarism approach?

- **Firstly, Increase in Bank accounts leading to women's financial inclusion and empowerment:** As of 2019, 72 per cent of all women had bank or savings accounts that they report as being able to use themselves.
- **Secondly, increase in electricity connections, sanitation facilities, clean fuel:** Ninety-eight per cent of all households had access to electricity, nearly 70 per cent to improved sanitation, and 60 per cent to clean cooking fuel.
- **Third, increase in beneficiaries:** Also, the percentage of households that have gained access to these goods and services each year, has accelerated since 2015
- **Fourth, increase in child Stunting rates:** The improvements towards child stunting, an intangible service has been disappointing as the overall stunting rates are flattening rather than decreasing and urban rates are rising.

Why the New Welfarism approach focuses on tangible goods more than Intangible goods?

- **Ideological dimension:** The government believes that Providing tangible goods and services such as bank accounts, cooking gas, toilets, electricity, housing will make a critical difference to the lives of the poor.
- **Strategic dimension:** Providing tangible goods and services that are relatively easy to deliver, measure and monitor has high electoral opportunity in it. Whereas, providing intangible services such as primary education is difficult to define and less measure and hence difficult to convert into a political advantage.

Thus, the findings clearly explain that the failure on stunting is mainly due to the shift in government policies towards New welfarism approach where the tangible goods and services

are prioritised rather than intangible services such as nutrition, education, child stunting etc.

38. Need for upgrading India-Europe relations

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

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

Context- Integrating Europe into India's new strategic calculus must be a serious goal in 2021.

Three latest developments underline Delhi's altering strategic perceptions of Europe-

1. India's assist for **France's membership of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**.
 - This accession reflects the determination of France, an Indian Ocean rim country, to become more involved in the Indo-Pacific region.
2. India welcomed Germany and Netherlands in constructing a new geopolitical structure within the Indo-pacific.
3. **Emerging Security cooperation** - The plans to work out a decade-long road map to rework the partnership between Delhi and London.

What were the Issues hindering India-Europe relations?

1. The bipolar Cold War and the growing world versus the developed world dynamics prevented India from increasing cooperation with Europe in Post-WWII period.
2. Whereas, Europe found China as an attractive commercial partner compared to India, the gap further widened with time.
3. China also invested heavy political and diplomatic effort to make its place among European countries.

How geopolitics of the Indo-pacific affect Indian foreign policy?

1. India is looking beyond the bipolar geopolitical competition between the US and China.
 - This is because of uncertain political trajectory of the US towards China.
2. India has begun to shed the postcolonial mental block towards regional security cooperation with Europe.
 - The impact of China's rise is being felt across the Indo-Pacific and the arising geopolitical instabilities are producing new partnerships between the affected powers.
 - India has now taken European powers as natural partners in constructing a durable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.

How Europe in the Indo-Pacific can benefit India?

Although, European potential to project army power into the Indo-Pacific is limited. However together with Asian democracies, Europe can definitely make a distinction.

- It may well mobilize large economic assets for sustainable development of regional infrastructure.
- Wield political affect and leverage its important smooth power to form the Indo-pacific discourse.
- Also, can increase India's personal complete national power.

Therefore, a powerful coalition of Asian and European center powers should now be an indispensable factor of the geopolitics of the Indo-pacific.

39. Reasons behind Nepal's political crisis and India's stance

Source: [Click here](#)

Context: PM Oli's decision to opt for fresh elections by dissolving the lower house has created a new political crisis in Nepal.

What is the current crisis in Nepal?

- Nepal Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's move to dissolve the Lower House of Parliament, in order to counter the discord within the ruling party and a challenge to his leadership, has precipitated a constitutional crisis.
- The President Bidya Devi Bhandari has signed off on the cabinet recommendation to dissolve the Nepalese Parliament and called for fresh elections in April-May, next year.
- **Reactions:**
 - The decision has triggered pro-democracy protests.
 - The local newspapers have described the move as "treachery" and "coup de grace on Parliamentary democracy".
 - Several petitions challenging the move have been filed in the Supreme Court.
 - The Nepalese constitution doesn't have a clear provision regarding house dissolution. Thus, the street protests and anger against the move doubtless creates pressure on the judicial proceedings.

An adverse decision on the dissolution of Parliament by the Supreme Court and given the loss of credibility in the Constitutional office would create a constitutional chaos further chaos is expected in the days to come.

Why did the prime minister take such a decision?

- **Reluctance to share power:** Even after winning the elections of 2015 in coalition, PM Oli was reluctant to share powers with coalition leaders.
- **Fundamental differences:** It was a historic opportunity for the NCP, especially for the prime minister, to navigate the young democracy out of its many crises. But the merger did not dissolve the fundamental differences between the NCP's two groups.
 - For instance, for several years, Oli had demanded that the Maoists under Pushpa Kamal Dahal be held accountable for war crimes, including the killings of CPN-UML cadres.
- **Misplaced objectives:** The prime objectives at the formation of the new constitution were to address the concerns of Madhesi groups and strengthen Nepal's institutions. But the focus was on the consolidation of power, **gathering support by adopting anti India postures** and cosying up to China.

What should be India's stance in such a situation?

- Nepal is organically linked to India's anti-colonial struggle with leaders such as BP Koirala having spent years in prison with Jagjivan Ram and Rajendra Prasad.
- India has rebooted its diplomatic outreach with a series of high-profile visits to Kathmandu. This has resulted in the resumption of air travel and fast-tracking of the railway line between Kathmandu to Raxaul in Bihar.
- A fresh popular cry for democracy presents an opportunity for India to showcase its historical partnership in Nepal's transition to democracy.
- Ties with Nepal are critical to India for strategic influence in the Himalayas.
- Thus, India should adopt a strategy of detached pragmatism rather than proactive involvement, given the crisis period in Nepal.

40. Mutated' Covid-19 strain of UK spreads faster

Source- [The Hindu](#)

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

Context- New mutated COVID-19 strain discovered in the United Kingdom underlines the need for adherence to Non-pharmaceutical interventions.

More in news-

A new variant of the pandemic SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus is spreading rapidly in Britain and prompting high levels of concern.

Precautionary measures taken by other countries-

- The United Kingdom stood shut off from the rest of Europe after several nations decided to close borders over fears of the new coronavirus strain.
- India too has joined over two dozen countries in banning inbound travel from the UK.

What is this new strain of coronavirus?

Covid-19 mutant strain- It has been named VUI-202012/01 and is defined by a set of 23 changes or mutations. Among the 23 mutations, the two of which are particularly worrisome.

1. **N501Y** - Has previously been shown to increase how tightly the protein binds to the angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 receptor, its entry point into human cells.
2. **69-70del** - leads to the loss of two amino acids in the spike protein and has been found in viruses that eluded the immune response in some immune compromised patients.

Concern with new strain-

- **It is about 70% more transmissible-** The variant has the potential to increase by over 0.4 the number of people a person can infect.

Mutations, or genetic changes, arise naturally in all viruses, including SARS-CoV-2, as they replicate and circulate among humans. However, these changes, can lead to a quicker spread of Covid-19 between people.

Will vaccines work against this new strain of virus?

According to scientists, Vaccines will be equally effective despite the mutation. So there is no reason to panic.

- This is because vaccines are designed to create antibodies targeting the spike protein and there is also the T-cell immunity that would come into play to clear the virus.
- However, as the virus accumulates more changes, vaccines might require little tweaking.

What needs to be done?

- The emergence of the new variant underlines the compulsion to undertake surveillance following vaccination to track vaccine effectiveness and to look for the appearance of vaccine escape mutants.
- Non-pharmaceutical interventions, including quarantine and social distancing have significantly helped in curbing the transmission of coronavirus and should be followed strictly.

41. Parliamentary Standing Committee recommendation on the management of COVID-19 situation

Source: [Click Here](#)

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

News: The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs has submitted its report to the Rajya Sabha Chairman on the **management of Covid-19** situation.

Facts:

Key Suggestions given by Panel:

Panel has given suggestion on the four aspects:

1. the country's preparedness
2. Augmentation of health infrastructure
3. Social impact
4. Economic impact

The panel's suggestions

 Have regulatory oversight on all hospitals working in the country to prevent refusal to accept insurance claims

 Make COVID-19 treatment cashless for all people who have insurance coverage

 Form a separate wing in the National Disaster Management Authority that will specialise

in handling pandemics like COVID-19 in the future

 Ensure effective implementation at the ground level and address problems being faced by farmers, non-corporate and non-farm small/micro enterprises in getting loans

 Ensure States deliver dry rations/allowances to children deprived of mid-day meals due to the pandemic

Source: The Hindu

On Country's preparedness

- **Separate Wing:** A separate wing may be formed in the National Disaster Management Authority that will specialize in handling /managing the Pandemics like COVID-19 in the future.
- **Center-state coordination mechanism:** For providing quick response to such crisis, an effective functional institutional mechanism is needed for coordination between the Centre, states, and Union Territories.

On country's Health Infrastructure

- **Public Health Act:** A comprehensive Public Health Act preferably at the National Level with suitable legal provisions to keep checks and controls over private hospitals in times of a pandemic to
 - curb black marketing of medicines
 - check the malpractices like selling of hospital beds
 - denial of the cashless facility
 - variation in levying charges towards consumables such as PPE kits, gloves etc,
- **Strengthen Public Health care System:** The public sector healthcare delivery system needs to be further strengthened in all the states/ UTs and a uniform

healthcare system should be established across the country to deal with the pandemic on a sustained basis in the future.

On Social Impacts

- **National Database on migrant workers** should be launched at the earliest as it will help in the identification of migrant workers and also in delivering ration and other benefits to them.
- **Inter-state operability of ration cards:** It recommended that until the One Nation, One Ration Card is implemented in all states/UTs, inter-state operability of ration cards should be allowed.
- **Mid-Day Meal Scheme:** Central government should coordinate with local administration through state governments to ensure rations/ allowances are delivered on time.

On Economic Impacts

- **Awareness Campaigns:** The Government should hold awareness campaigns on cheaper and effective repurposed medicines to prevent panic-buying of expensive drugs by the people.
- **Vaccine Authorization:** Any vaccine against COVID-19 should be granted emergency use authorisation only after proper consideration and conducting its trials on a sufficient sample size.

42. Changing global dynamics and Opportunities for India

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

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

Context – India will need to make difficult judgments about the changing world order and find its place in a more complex and shifting geopolitical landscape.

Established geopolitics has been transformed in the Post-pandemic global order. Some of the trends have been intensified by pandemic like rising of nationalism and some new trends have been established.

What are the trends intensified by Pandemic?

Although COVID pandemic was a global emergency, it intensified nationalism instead of multilateral cooperation:

1. **Vaccine nationalism** – Developed country manages to secure doses of vaccine for its own citizens. It undermines equitable access to vaccines. It further disadvantages countries with fewer resources and bargaining power.
2. **Decline of multilateralism** – International institutions like WTO and multilateral processes have been weakened. There was no International cooperation in developing an effective vaccine and responding to COVID-19 health impacts.

What are the new trends established by pandemic?

1. **Geopolitics has been transformed-** There is a shift from economy and political power and influence from the trans-Atlantic to the trans-Pacific region.
2. East Asian and South-East Asian countries have managed the crisis more effectively and are the first to register the green shoots of recovery.
3. **Revival of growth in China**– China has been the first major economy to bounce back from virus slump.

- China has registered growth in the trade and investment flows and the regional supply chain has been strengthened. As a result, the power gap among the world's two most important powers the US and China is shrinking.

What are the needs to revive multilateral cooperation?

Globalization driven by rapid technological change has also brought new challenges with itself like; climate change, cybersecurity, space security along with the existing global issues like terrorism, drug trafficking, money laundering, and ocean and terrestrial pollution.

Above challenges require collaborative, not competitive solution. Present existing disconnect between the nations if continued, will not be able to deal with these challenges.

Solution-

- Countries around the world should stop engaging in overly nationalistic behaviors.
- Countries particularly those with technological and financial capabilities, needs to pool their resources together to work on an effective and affordable anti-virus vaccine.
- There is dire need of statesman-like leadership to mobilize action on a global scale and orient the world in the right direction

What should be India's approach?

Due to China's aggressive posture across the globe and blatant "weaponization of economic interdependence" as seen in its punitive commercial action against Australia, India is being seen as a potential and credible countervailing power to resist Chinese ambitions.

This opportunity should be leveraged by India to encourage a significant flow of capital, technology and knowledge to accelerate its own modernization by taking following step:

- By Positioning itself as most open and competitive destination for trade and investment
- By adopting its past mobilization techniques like leading the Non-Aligned Movement in an earlier time, large majority of middle and emerging powers can align with India.

Way forward-

Global challenges led by rapid technological change or other challenges such as terrorism, drug trafficking and money laundering can possibly overcome through multilateral approaches and adherence to the principle of equitable burden-sharing.

43. How COVID-19 revealed the limits of Political Accountability?

Source: [Click here](#)

Context: The COVID-19 pandemic has put governance under a stress test which exposed how poorly prepared the world's governments were.

What was the response of the world leaders to the pandemic?

The world's most powerful leaders failed to do their duty to protect the citizens.

- **In Brazil**, Jair Bolsonaro irresponsibly refused to get vaccinated, even as his own government has launched a national vaccination campaign. He even remarked that the vaccine might turn people into crocodiles.
- **In India**, lockdowns of limited effectiveness, the sight of migrants desperately walking back to their villages and having the second largest number of cases, dented Prime Minister Modi's popularity.
- **In Russia**, Vladimir Putin has hardly spoken even as the virus wraths unchecked across Russia. Further, the citizens are against a vaccine whose ability and safety are inadequately understood because of the opacity of Russia's protocols.

Then why people of their country have not held their leaders accountable for the failure in handling this situation? Answer lies in the following propositions that shape the view of general public towards their leaders.

What are the limits of political accountability exposed during the pandemic?

Three propositions frame this analysis:

- **Prospective Accountability:** It is often understood that the voters vote retrospectively, i.e., give their judgement in the elections by voting based on the incumbent's record. Instead, they vote prospectively, i.e., against candidates who the voters fear would put the opponents to a disadvantage.
- **Underestimation of collective action:** Second, disease, unlike war, does not offer a clear enemy to target. Public health advice that stressed the need for personal responsibility to stay home, wear a mask, washing hands. It underestimated the challenge of collective action predicted on millions of individual responses.
 - It emphasises person's responsible for own health, then getting sick is also his own fault. It absolves the govt. off the responsibilities.
- **Poverty of collective empathy:** Third, the coronavirus pandemic reveals our inability to empathise with what we do not see. For example, thousands of deaths due to pollution and road accidents go unnoticed, unlike thousands of deaths by COVID-19.

What is the way forward?

- Prolonged economic suffering demands government remedy more immediately as without some measure of accountability, democracy loses its power, and so do the people.

44. Why call for a comprehensive Public Health Act was much needed?

Source- [The Hindu](#)

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

Context – India's COVID-19 management explained by parliamentary panel and the key recommendation.

What are the key findings of parliamentary standing committee?

1. **Low beds ratio**– Before COVID-19 pandemic, the availability of government beds were terribly low in India. This amounts to 0.55 beds per 1000 population.
2. The burden of extending comprehensive healthcare has been borne by the Government hospitals as private hospitals were either “inaccessible or not affordable
3. **Low government spending** – Public expenditure on health accounts for only 1.13% of the total health expenditure which is extremely low when compared to WHO recommendation of 5%.
 - Results in lack of infrastructure in public hospitals.
4. Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has capped the maximum age of entry for a standard policy at 65, which affects older citizen during such crises.
5. Surge in insurance premiums up to 25 percent in the wake of the pandemic

What are the recommendations of parliamentary committee?

1. **Need for a comprehensive Public Health Act** – Taking note of complaints against private hospitals, it advocated the need for a “comprehensive Public Health Act” at national level with provisions to keep “checks and controls” over private hospitals.

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- The proposed Act should also keep a check on the black marketing of medicines and product standardization.
2. The panel has called for an omnibus law that will curb profiteering during such crises and it can serve a larger purpose if it covered overall system reforms, addressing misguided policies
 3. **Cashless health insurance**– The committee strongly recommends that the target should be to make COVID-19 treatment cashless for all people that are having insurance coverage.

However, the committee missed out on a few observations–

- **Surge in Insurance premiums**- Insurance companies have raised the premium on health policies, especially for senior citizens, to even up to 25% of the insured value.
- Moreover, **insurance regulator, IRDAI, set 65 as the maximum age** of entry for a standard policy earlier this year, affecting older uninsured citizens.

What needs to be done?

- Firstly, creating an equitable framework, with the government being the single and sole payer to care providers. With this, the government is able to resist commercial pressures in determining costs.
- Secondly, the legal reform must provide for a time-bound transition to universal state-provided health services.
- Lastly, there should be more investments in health infrastructure for the rapid scaling up of public health services. The need to spend at least 2.5% of the GDP on health, the Indian government only spends about 1.3% of the GDP on the sector.

45. How to improve tribal Education in India?

Source: [Click here](#)

Context: In order to revamp the tribal education system, the educationists intend to recognise tribal culture, language, cognitive strength, curriculum and inherent learning ability of the tribal children.

Although several initiatives like establishment of Ashram Schools, Ekalavya Model Residential Schools, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya have been taken, there are many challenges in ensuring holistic education in the tribal hinterlands.

What are the reforms required in tribal education system?

- **Teacher-student relationships:** Teacher-student relationships are a very important factor as healthy relationships will promote meaningful learning in classrooms.
 - It should be the responsibility of the teachers to spread, respect and value the culture, traditions, mannerisms, languages of the tribal students.
- **Teaching in mother tongue:** The students should be taught in their mother tongue and every state must have adequate facilities for the same, as stated in **Article 350A of the Indian Constitution**. **Resolute** efforts by states are needed to overcome the language barrier.

For instance:

- The Odisha Government and civil society organizations have made some efforts to educate the Gonds, Bhils, Santals, and other tribal groups in their mother-tongue. The literacy rate among some of these tribes has gradually gone up over the years.

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- **Decentralised syllabus:** The deputy director of Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) has suggested that the syllabus of textbooks should be decentralised and the socio-cultural and economic situations of tribal people should be kept in mind while preparing learning material.
- **Exploring folklore:** The schools should explore folklore in primary education, which would help tap tribals' rich tradition in arts, crafts, music, songs, fables, etc. Similarly, stories and riddles should be collected, documented, and used by teachers.
- **Making it inclusive:** Incorporation of tribal youth in their culture is vital. In order to ensure their active participation and cooperation in sensitisation programmes on the importance of education, the government should work with the tribal leaders.

What is the role of United Nations?

- UNICEF, in collaboration with UNESCO, is supporting the Union government to achieve **quality education for all children between 6 and 14 years**. The key areas for cooperation include:
 - Reaching out to vulnerable and deprived children.
 - Adapting international practices.
 - Supporting care providers and community advocates to demand inclusive and quality education.
- UNICEF is also lending its support for the development of **child-friendly schools and systems (CFSS)**. Assistance has also been provided for monitoring tools and the integration of CFSS indicators into state plans in support of making child-friendly schools.
- Under **Promoting the Rights of Disabled Children to Quality Education** project, UNICEF provides support to states to make primary education curriculum more inclusive for children with disabilities and building the technical capacity of teachers.

Steps by the Indian government to promote tribal education: The formation of Ashram Schools, Ekalavya Model Residential Schools, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, pre-matric scholarships and vocational training centres.

What is the way forward?

- **Firstly, there should be a collaboration** and strategic dialogue between government, policy-makers, and international development institutions to mutually put efforts to address the chronic problems and allocate adequate funds from central and state budget for tribal education.
- **Secondly, policy framers need to focus on a long-term strategy** to enhance educational status of tribal children.
- **Thirdly, equal access and opportunities should be given** to tribal children to empower them.
- **Lastly, tribal communities will have to be uplifted** economically and educationally for promotion of a socio-economically integrated healthy society in the remote pockets.

46. Sci-Hub case: How scientific publishing works?

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS-2: Education related issues.

Synopsis: The recent case of Sci-hub filed by 3 scientific publishers in Delhi HC has highlighted the issues in scientific publishing. To understand these issues, first we need to understand, how scientific publishing works.

What is the case?

- Recently, three scientific publishers' companies such as Elsevier, Wiley, and the American Chemical Society (ACS) have filed a lawsuit against Sci-Hub owner Alexandra Elbakyan of Kazakhstan and others in the Delhi High Court.
- The publishers want Indians to be blocked from accessing the site called Sci-Hub, started by Ms. Elbakyan in 2011.
- To understand why the publishers wanted to block sci-Hub we need to understand the process of scientific publishing in India and how Sci-hub changed this.

How scientific publishing works and how they are making profits?

- Scientists are usually paid by their institutions and their research grants come from various organizations. For example, in India Department of Biotechnology, the **Council of Scientific and Industrial Research**, and the Department of Atomic Energy are the major funding agencies.
- When Scientists complete their research paper, they tend to publish it in an academic journal run by publishers such as Elsevier, Wiley, and ACS.
- Before publishing, the journal seeks **peer review** of the paper but neither the authors nor the reviewer is paid, but they charge libraries and Indian Institutions a sky-high amount for their subscription.
 - For example, it is estimated that about ₹1,500 crore is paid for India annually.
- Moreover, sometimes journals require authors to transfer copyright to them. This process has been generating huge profits to these academic publishers.
 - Elsevier's parent company RELX had profits of over 30% on revenue of nearly \$10 billion in 2019.
- This has resulted in resentment against these companies and many alternatives have been explored such as **open access model, author pays model** etc.

How Sci- hub changed this publishing process

- **First**, Sci-hub operates based on open access and author pays model that enables scientists to search for academic papers from any publisher and freely download them.
- **Second**, Sci-Hub makes accessible to scientific literature without navigating institutional VPNs.
- **Third**, due to exorbitant amounts charged by other journals Sci-hub becomes easiest and sometimes only option though it has **violated many copyrights owned by journals**.

Is Sci-hub beneficial site for India?

- The content on Sci-Hub is beneficial to the scientific development of the country. For example, in 2020, when leading publishers made COVID-19-related articles free to read it resulted in a boom in research and development of dozens of vaccine candidates in a very short time period.
- Unlike, piracy in music and arts the Sci- hub piracy benefits the very people who create that content.

What is the way forward?

- Publishers should voluntarily reform their policies so that there will not be any need for platforms like Sci-Hub.
- Implementation of **'one nation, one subscription' system** whereby, the entire content will be made available to all readers in India in exchange for a fixed and reasonable cost paid directly by the government.

Elsevier, Wiley, and ACS instead of escalating the Sci-hub issue, should work towards an equitable system of access to scientific literature that serves both their commercial interests and the Indian public.

47. Importance and steps for 'Free, fair and safe' elections amid pandemic

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS2: Functions and Responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies-Election Commission

Synopsis: EC should ensure 'Free, fair and safe' upcoming elections in the states of Kerala, Tamilnadu, West Bengal, Assam and Pondicherry (UT).

Background

- Since the pandemic broken, Millions of people have exercised their political right to vote in more than 34 countries, including India (In Bihar).
- With the reappearance of a variant of covid virus in countries like Britain, human beings exposing themselves to the risk of getting and spreading infection through this exercise of franchise is immense.
- So, it becomes crucial that when elections are announced ECI should pay equal attention to both the **election (democratic process)** as well as the constitutional rights **"right to life"** as enshrined in **Article 21** and "right to lead a healthy life" as held by SC in **Sunil Batra vs. Delhi Administration**.
- But as a life with liberty will be pure theory if a person's life itself is placed in danger. Thus, there is a need for taking additional measures while announcing elections.

What are the precautions that needs to be taken while conducting elections in these states?

As the upcoming elections in Kerala (140 seats), Tamil Nadu (234), Puducherry (30), West Bengal (294) and Assam (126) are scheduled in the coming months. Following steps should be taken to ensure the people's right to health life;

- **First**, the senior citizens who are more vulnerable to infections should be enabled to vote in the first three hours of the voting using a separate queue-lane.
- **Second**, Personnel scheduled to be drafted for election duty including security staffs needs to be identified as a priority category for getting vaccinated.
- **Third**, every voter entering a booth must be asked to wear mask like the mandatory requirement of Voter Identity card.
- **Fourth**, ECI needs to repeat the precautions that were taken during Bihar elections such as reducing the numbers of voters per booth, increasing the number of booths, thermal testing each voter and making postal votes available to senior voters above the age of 80.

Commitment to political freedom and a compliance with pandemic mitigation measures are an unavoidable contradiction It is the constitutional duty of the state to protect and reduce the risks of pandemic hazard to as near zero as possible while allowing citizens towards

their constitutional entitlement of universal adult franchise. Elections during the pandemic must be made safe from the virus to protect the Democracy.

48. Right to restitution for victims of crime

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS-2

Synopsis: The Delhi High Court has secured the right to restitution for victims of crime, in a landmark judgment in *Karan v. State N.C.T. of Delhi*.

Why this judgment is important

- Restitution involves ordering the accused to compensate victims of crime for their losses.
- **Section 357 of the CrPC** allows courts to order the accused to pay “compensation” to the victim but it was hardly followed. SC also observed in many cases that Section 357 must be used liberally.
- **In 2013, Ankush Shivaji Gaikwad v. State of Maharashtra**, the SC made it mandatory for lower courts to record reasons for passing, or not passing, orders relating to the use of Section 357.
- Still, lower courts are largely failed in implementation, mainly due to practical constraints faced by them.

What were the constraints found by lower courts while applying section 357?

- **First, Language of section 357:** courts were limited by the language of Section 357. For instance, the language of Section 357 does not differentiate between restitution and compensation.
 - Restitution includes return made by the offender while compensation is paid by the state. Unless this difference is statutorily recognised, opacity is bound to continue.
- **Second, no uniform head:** the courts were restricted by the absence of a uniform head under which compensation could be granted.
- **Third, no mechanism for calculating paying capacity:** the absence of a uniform mechanism to calculate the paying capacity of the accused as well as determining the impact of the crime on the victim prevented courts from granting compensation under the section.
- **Fourth, no guidelines:** the absence of sentencing guidelines blocked the application of the section.

What is the significance of Delhi High Court's verdict?

The significance of the *Karan* verdict lies in the Delhi High Court's use of the Victim Impact Report (VIR) to determine the quantum of compensation. The Court's version of VIR is loosely based on the concept of Victim Impact Statements (VIS), but with some differences.

- **VIS is an instrument of victim participation**, which effectively allows victims to inform the court in their own words as to how the crime impacted them.
- **The VIS's format comprises** the description of physical injury, emotional harm, or the damage or loss to property as a result of the offence.
- VIS provides **victims with the opportunity to directly address the court** and works towards their concerns being heard and addressed by the court.
- **It makes the offender realise the impact of the crime on the victim.** It also works to aid the court in determining the amount of the sentence and fine.

The Delhi HCs conception of VIR differs from a traditional VIS:

- **Firstly**, the primary purpose of the VIR in the Court's idea is to **act as an aid to determine the amount of compensation** to the victim in combination with the paying capacity of the accused.
- **Secondly**, the VIR will not be directly made by the victim before the court but will be **filed by the Delhi State Legal Services Authority (DLSA)**, which shall conduct a summary inquiry to establish the impact of the crime upon the victim.
- **Third**, the DLSA shall submit a report that estimates the **paying capacity of the accused as well as the impact on the victim**, after a conviction.
- **Fourth**, the courts will have to pass an order of compensation based on this. **The scheme is binding on all lower courts** in Delhi that deal with criminal cases.

Way forward

- Moreover, VIR/VIS should not remain limited to calculating restitution; it must be used in the sentencing process. The courts should come forward to adopt VIR/VIS as one of the best practices in the interest of justice to victims of crime.

49. Issue of summoning state legislature and their performance

Source: [Click here](#)

Syllabus: GS-2 – parliament and state legislature and their functioning

Synopsis: Conflicts like the one in Kerala over the power to call session of legislature, will only add up to the already dismal records of sessions of state legislatures.

The events in Kerala and Rajasthan are an abnormality.

- **Kerala Event:** Lately, Kerala government recommended governor for summoning the state's legislature for a one-day session to discuss the issue of farmers' protest, but recommendation was turned down by governor on the ground that there is no emergent situation to meet the assembly on such short notice.
- **Event in Rajasthan:** The Rajasthan governor had rejected the recommendation of Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's government to call a session for proving the majority of his government.
- **Constitutional Provision:** The state government is constitutionally empowered to call a session of the legislature.
 - The dates and the duration of the session is decided by the council of ministers.
 - Governor is communicated of their decision, who is constitutionally bound to act on most matters on the aid and advice of the government.
 - The state legislature is then summoned by governor to meet for a session.

Such conflicts between the governor and the government are hurdles in the functioning of state legislators, which are already suffering from dismal performances.

Performance of state legislatures

The data as follows depicts the dismal performance of the state legislature in their functioning;

- **Number of assembly meetings:** In the last 20 years, state assemblies across the country, on average, met for less than 30 days in a year. But states like Kerala, Odisha, and Karnataka are an exception.
 - The Kerala Vidhan Sabha, for example, has on an average met for 50 days every year for the last 10 years.
- **Performance of state legislatures:** Legislatures meet for longer budget sessions at the beginning of the year. Then for the rest of the year fewer meetings are held just

to meet the constitutional requirement that there should not be a gap of six months between two sessions of a legislature.

What are the reasons for decline in the sitting days of the state legislature?

The blame for the decline in the sitting days of the state legislatures rests with the government.

- **Interest of government:** Legislatures are grounds for debate and giving voice to public opinion. As accountability institutions, they are responsible for asking tough questions to the government and highlighting uncomfortable truths.
 - So, it is in the interest of a state government to organise lesser sittings of the legislature and bypass their enquiry.
- **Not enough time:** Lesser number of sitting days also means that state governments are free to make laws through ordinances and when they assemble legislatures, there is little time for MLAs to inspect laws brought before them.

What can be done?

Continuous and close scrutiny by legislatures is essential for improving governance in the country.

- **Increasing the number of working days** for state legislatures is a first step in increasing their effectiveness. One way to do that is by assembling legislatures to meet all around the year.
- In many mature democracies, a fixed calendar of sittings of legislatures, with breaks in between, is announced at the beginning of the year. It allows the government to plan its calendar for bringing in new laws.
- **It also has the advantage of increasing the time for debate** and discussion in the legislative assembly. And with the legislature sitting throughout the year, it gets rid of the politics surrounding the convening of sessions of a legislature.

50. Need for reform in Governance structure of public universities

Syllabus – GS-2, Social Issues, Issues related to education in India

Synopsis: Governance structure of public universities must be reformed on urgent basis as it may help them become world class universities.

55 central universities, endowed with prime land and extensive central grants, are crown jewels of the Indian academic system.

However, lately these universities are facing governance related challenges. Six vice-chancellors (VCs) of central universities have been sacked. Another five have been charge-sheeted.

Need for Public universities

- There are some important public universities, where **cross-disciplinary research** to solve complex modern problems take place, with the **focus on all the major branches of learning**.
- Locus of innovation has been switched towards innovative private universities which have **failed to develop into broad-based universities** with the full range of **humanities, social and natural sciences and the professional disciplines**.

Thus, central universities must be saved to **save the academia**.

What is the governance structure in public universities?

As each of the 55 central universities is governed by a separate Act, there are difference in governance structures, but broadly it is as follows:

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- **VC:** President of India is the Visitor of the university. On his behalf, Ministry of Education appoints chancellor.
 - For that purpose, Ministry appoints search committee to interview multiple candidates and to come up with the list of 3 candidates. From the list ministry appoints a VC.
- **Senate or court:** It is chosen through different process and constituted of nominees from various stakeholders, including the government, faculty, students, and citizens.
 - Technically, this is **the governing council (GC) of the university**.
- **Executive council:** Council carry on the university work. It is chaired by VC and appoints the registrar.
- **Finance committee:** Finance committee is appointed to maintain financial checks and balances. It is headed by a chief finance officer.

What are the issues in governance structure in public universities?

- GC has no say in the selection of the VC and meets only once a year. In theories, it approves the annual plan of the university, presented by VC. But in reality, plan is approved without discussions or questions.
- After approval there is very minimal direction or monitoring from the GC throughout the year.
- Size of the GC is very big to organise any fruitful meeting. For example; GC of Delhi University has 475 members.

Best Practices

Example of IIM

- In contrast to the general Governance structure, IIM structure is much better version.
- It has set a limit on the members of GC at maximum of 19. All of them are expected to meet s certain standard i.e. eminent citizens with broad social representation and an emphasis on alumni.
- Functions of GC includes:
 - Selection of Director,
 - Providing overall strategic direction,
 - Raising resources,
 - Monitoring the performance of director

Example of Harvard

- Until 150 years ago, Harvard was also a government university and was on verge of collapse.
- It only became what it is today after governance reform by creating an empowered board comprising its most successful alumni. They brought dynamism, oversight, and resources with them and made it a world-class university.

Way forward

- Thus, it is apparent that the governing councils of all central universities IITs, and all other central institutions is restructured by an Act of Parliament.
- Boards of these universities should comprise of their most eminent alumni.
- Recently the billion-dollar endowment campaign announced by university is being spearheaded by its most successful alumni, many of them created Unicorns, or

billion-dollar companies. If alumni like them invited to GC, they may help it become a world-class university like Harvard.

51. U.K., EU reach post-Brexit trade agreement

Source: [Click here](#)

Syllabus – GS-2, International events and their impacts on India

Synopsis: Britain and the European Union have struck a free-trade deal as a Post-Brexit trade agreement to ensure Britain and the 27-nation bloc can continue to trade in goods without tariffs or quotas.

Facts:

- **Brexit:** It is the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community.

KEY FEATURES OF THE POST-BREXIT TRADE AGREEMENT:

- **Trade in Goods:** The agreement ensures that most goods traded between the EU and U.K. won't face new tariffs or quotas.
 - Quotas means limits on the amount of things that can be traded.
- **Level Playing Field:** The deal commits both sides to upholding their environmental, social, labor and tax transparency standards to make sure they don't undercut each other. The British say the deal doesn't include a ratchet mechanism that would force it to stiffen its rule in lockstep with the EU.
- **Customs:** Both sides pledge to limit customs red tape, including through programs for trusted traders known as authorized economic operators (AEOs have benefits including fewer controls).
- **Dispute Settlement:** Disputes on the deal must be negotiated between the EU and the U.K. with no role for the EU courts.
- **Professional Services:** There will no longer be automatic mutual recognition of professional qualifications like engineers, doctors etc. They will have to seek the recognition in the country they are practising.
- **Mobility – freedom of movement:** UK nationals no longer have the freedom to work, study, start a business or live in the EU. Visas will be required for stays over 90 days.

52. The Wistron Dispute and China's lessons.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS2: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Synopsis: Wistron case shows that hasty labour laws violating labour rights is economically suicidal and damaging to India.

Background

Recently, contract workers attacked the Wistron's iPhone assembly that resulted in property damage of worth ₹50 crore.

- According to a preliminary inquiry report by the State labour department into the incident Wistron and its labour contractors violated many provisions of the laws that resulted in sacking of its vice-president for its India operations.
- Also, The Apple Corporation has put further business on hold until Wistron addresses the labour dispute.
- The violence at Wistron unit will negatively affect India's efforts, to attract foreign direct investment through production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme, to boost domestic production ('Make in India') and India's step towards Atmanirbhar Bharat.

What are the reasons for such violence?

- First, **non-payment or delay in payment of wages** along with violation of labour laws, such as non-issuance of the wage contract, employing women workers in night shift without providing adequate safety etc has led to the violence.
- Second, the **anti-labour reforms** brought by Karnataka government's ordinances to amend Factories Act 1948, to attract foreign companies seeking to relocate from China, brought deep discontent among workers in the State.
 - For example, it repealed the rule of standard eight-hour working day with a 12-hour working day and also brought overtime related changes.
- Third, **low living wages**. For example, the average daily earnings of casual workers in urban India in 2018-19, as per the official Periodic Labour Force Survey is well below the official living wage as defined by the Seventh Pay Commission for central government employees.

What India can learn from China?

Although some of the states might be following the labour policies of China, but there are few positives in China's labour policy that need a consideration

- China mandates employers to provide **dormitory accommodation** for workers close to factories. Factory-provided dormitory accommodation is the principal reason for slum-free Chinese industrial cities, unlike in India.
- Apart from this, to subsidise production costs, China's local governments compete with each other to offer excellent physical infrastructure and ensure adequate credit to industrial enterprises through the national development banks. They also act as midwives for Industrial promotion.

Indian government policy to emulate only china's stringent labour policies such as long working days and flexible use of labour, while ignoring the social benefits offered by china to its labours are bound to face resistance.

53. The positive side of National Family Health Survey report

Source: [Click here](#)

Syllabus: GS-2, Malnutrition and hunger

Synopsis: There has been a divergence in the actual NFHS data and the interpretations by the critics.

What are the features of NHFS report 2019-20?

- The initial results of NFHS have been released for 2019-20 along with **comparable data** for the 2015-16 survey.
- **Population coverage** of approximately 700 million and 21 states have been covered under the NFHS data.
- **Tabular data for 131 variables** have been released for 2019-20.
- The data show that there has been **significant improvement in many of these 131 indicators** of social welfare.

Analysis provided by NFHS has been misinterpreted by the critics. Comment

It is important to compare India with the rest of the developing world. Trends in hunger, nutrition, inequality, and growth among others can be carefully evaluated in a comparative angle with the help of World Bank data provides. Some of the misinterpreted data is as follows:

- **Firstly, Bangladesh underweight percentage** in 2015 was stated as 22 per cent but the World Bank data states it to be 30.1 per cent, which makes it 4.7 percentage points (ppt) lower than India, not 12.8 ppt lower.

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- **Secondly, teenage pregnancies** in India were 19.9 per cent in 2005 which reduced to 8.7 per cent in 2015 and further got 1 ppt lower in 2019. Hence, net improvement was about 12 ppt in 15 years.
 - Whereas the level was 10 ppt higher constantly in the developing world during the same period. Even then some editorials claimed of worsening of teenage pregnancies in India.
- **Thirdly, welfare improved** between 2015 and 2019 according to a very large number of NFHS indicators. A summary of these data is as follows:
 - **Child Mortality:** Data on three indicators (neo-natal, infant and under-five) show an improvement between 3 and 4 ppt.
 - **Immunizations:** It improved drastically. For instance, the hepatitis B vaccine percentage (for children 12-23 months) increased from 64.8 per cent in 2015 to 83.6 per cent in 2019.
 - **Breast-feeding and diet of children 6-23 months:** Average gain of 4 ppt for four indicators.
 - **Negative trend in seven young women indicators is 0:** Modern birth control methods, age at marriage, teenage pregnancies, and sexual violence all show improvement. The average improvement in these seven indicators is 3.9 percentage points.
 - **Negative trend in 15 adult indicators is 0:** Average gain is 4.1 percentage points.
 - **Other improvements:** Some of the indicators show an increase of 9 percentage points and above in households with electricity (9.2 ppt), improved sanitation facilities (17.3 ppt), clean fuel for cooking (18 ppt) and women having a bank account that they use (29.8 ppt increase to a level of 77.2 per cent in 2019).

The points stated above show a large divergence in factual data and its interpretation. There is improvement in close to a 100 indicators and stagnation in less than 5 indicators.

54. TPSA (Tibet Policy and Support Act) of US

Source: [Click here](#)

Syllabus: GS-2, International developments and their effect on India

Synopsis: The Tibet Policy and Support Act (TPSA) was passed by the US Assembly and will become a law after the US President signs it.

What are the provisions of TPSA of US?

The TPSA is an amended version of the Tibet Policy Act of 2002, which came into being during the Bush Administration. Most US administrations have extended support for Tibet and the Dalai Lama; and kept a balance between diplomatic relations with China. Following are the changes in the new policy:

- **Firstly**, the recent amendment in the TPSA makes it a US policy, to oppose attempts by Beijing to install its own Dalai Lama. The law refers to a statement made by the spokesperson of the Chinese foreign ministry which said:
 - The “reincarnation of living Buddhas including the Dalai Lama must obey the Chinese laws and regulations and follow religious rituals and historical pacts”.
 - Any Chinese interference in the process of selecting Tibetan Buddhist leaders will face will attract sanctions.
- **Secondly**, the TPSA has introduced provisions for protecting the environment of the Tibetan plateau and urges for more international cooperation and bigger involvement by Tibetans.
- **Thirdly**, the TPSA appeals for a regional framework on water security as they claim that China is diverting water resources from Tibet.

What are the stances of the US, China and India on Tibet?

- **The United States** has made it very evident that Tibet remains a priority by passing the TPSA. They will continue to support the Dalai Lama and the CTA.
 - This does not come as a shock because the US-China relations have become much more difficult over the last two decades.
- **China** had said that the TPSA has sent a wrong message to Tibet independence forces and strictly broken international law and basic norms governing international relations.
 - China has also claimed that this is an attempt to interfere in its internal affairs which they do not allow.
 - The country has outrightly opposed the bills which contain ill contents on china.
 - China's foreign ministry has asked the US to stay out of their domestic affairs and not implement the bill that targets China and undercuts its interests.
- **India** has mostly abstained from using the Tibet issue against China, and like the US, has a one China policy.
 - However, things changed this year in the on-going Ladakh standoff. India used its special forces made up almost completely of Tibetan refugees to occupy strategic heights in Pangong Tso's south bank.

55. Farm laws and Importance of parliamentary process in India

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: Recent controversy on recent farm laws highlights the importance of following parliamentary procedure not just in letter but in spirit as well.

Introduction

There are many benefits attached to the new farm laws for farmers and economy as well, still farm bills are facing heavy opposition. This situation could have been avoided by using parliamentary processes properly.

Even though request for an actual vote was made, 3 bills were passed by Voice vote, without any discussion with the opposition.

What are the benefits attached to farm laws?

There are strong indications that the new law is desirable and will bring in much-needed market reforms in the overregulated farm sector.

- **Role of market forces:** The benefits of relaxing the non-agricultural sector of the economy in 1991 established that, in the end, market forces cannot be ignored.
- **No contrary evidence:** There is no contrary evidence that the new proposals will adversely affect farmers in the long run.
- **No justification for MSP:** There is no justification for a minimum support price regardless of demand and supply.
 - For instance, A pharmaceutical company doesn't need to be assured of a minimum price for essential medicines that it produces, irrespective of whether the quantity produced far exceeds the demand.
- **Experience with over-regulation:** Under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, several control orders were passed on products such as cement and steel, and these were planned to ensure their availability at fair prices.
 - The result was just the opposite: Severe shortages, a huge black market and massive corruption.

Following constitutional conventions always pays dividends. Discuss the statement in the context of new farm laws.

Parliament is at the heart of a constitutional democracy based on the Westminster model and following parliamentary procedures builds trust among the different stakeholders. Therefore, following steps should have been taken by government:

- **Participation of opposition:** Even though government has a clear majority in Parliament, but Opposition is also a part of parliament. Its involvement is necessary in parliamentary procedures.
- **Referring to Select Committee:** The farm bills were very different from the existing system of selling agricultural produce and referring the bills to a Select Committee provides assurance of scrutiny to citizens and serves the following purposes:
 - A detailed deliberation on the Bill,
 - It remains aloof from the sometimes surcharged atmosphere prevailing in both Houses of Parliament.
 - The Select Committee can, and often does, get the views of experts on the impact, particularly economic, of a proposed law.
 - It is a matter of concern that fewer and fewer bills are being referred to Select Committees.
 - Recently Chakshu Roy wrote that while 71 per cent of the bills were referred to a Select Committee in the 15th Lok Sabha (2009-14), only 25 per cent were so referred in the 16th Lok Sabha (2014-19). In 2019, 17 bills were referred and none in 2020.
- **Wisdom of legislature:** Laws represent the “wisdom of the legislature” because they are enacted, according to convention, after a careful examination of their provisions.
- **Preserves Constitutional morality:** It is a matter of concern that fewer and fewer bills are being referred to Select Committees or even deliberated upon. As per Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, the essence of constitutional morality is respect and adherence to constitutional conventions.
- **Tackle the vested interests:** Following constitutional conventions always pays dividends. It benefits the nation and preserves the dignity of Parliament.
 - The delay that arises by following parliamentary procedures acts as a proof that the new law is apt and those opposing it have placed their short-term vested interests ahead of the national interest.

What are the steps to be taken?

- The best way to demonstrate their beneficial effects is to **implement the laws in select states or districts for a year.**
- It is worthwhile considering the **implementation of a controversial law on a trial basis.** The feedback can finally prove whether the new law can achieve its objects and is beneficial to the nation.
- **It can also reveal flaws in the new law.** For instance, if GST had been implemented on a trial basis for select products, it would have revealed the serious technological deficiencies and the nation would have benefitted by delaying its implementation.

56. Examining the Strategies involved in Distributing Vaccines

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Synopsis: The government must examine the principle underlying the triage scheme for optimised use of resources.

Background:

- Over the next 6-7 months, India plans to vaccinate 300 million people against COVID-19 by prioritizing healthcare workers, other **front-line workers** and everyone who is above 50 years of age.
- To vaccinate 300 million people, India requires 600 million doses as two doses are required per individual.
- However, government will not have problems in acquiring the required number of doses as it has already struck a deal with the **Serum Institute** to acquire 500 million doses of the **AstraZeneca vaccine** and also the availability of other vaccines such as **Bharat Biotech's Covaxin** and the Russian **Sputnik V** are also high.
- But the strategies that they have planned for distribution of vaccines needs to be examined.

What are the Issues and dilemmas in the triage scheme?

- **First**, government's strategy of prioritizing the elderly people need to be re-examined because,
 - Vaccination drive should have two distinct objectives, one, providing protection to those vaccinated, and two to slow down the speed and spread of the viral transmission.
 - Providing vaccination to healthcare professionals is not in conflict with the above objective because these are individuals who have high levels of exposure and they also act as active disease vectors since they interact with large numbers of people.
 - But, prioritising the elderly people needs to be re-examined because the elderly is **less mobile** and have a **lower level of social interaction**, they are less likely to spread the virus. So, in the long run, prioritising the elderly people may not actually minimise the total **social and economic cost** inflicted by the virus.
 - This suggests that densely populated areas for instance, the **Dharavi slum** should receive far more attention than they are likely to get under the current strategy.
- **Second**, the government should permit private suppliers to import and distribute the vaccine in India because,
 - Currently, government's procurement strategy relies entirely on public resources for distribution and the government plans to bear the entire cost of vaccination without involving private hospitals.
 - But, allowing the private sector to provide additional supplies of the vaccine would not really be a bad policy decision if it would not decrease the availability of the vaccine to the poor.
 - With more and more vaccines getting approval such as the **Moderna vaccine** in US, there will be a significant boost in the global supply of COVID-19 vaccines which mandates the need for involving private suppliers.
 - Benefits that accrue owing to such decisions are, less waiting time for the less affluent as some of the richer individuals in the target group will opt out of the government distribution system and prefer to get vaccinated at some private outlet owing to increase in supply.
 - Another potential benefit accruing to the entire population is that the larger the numbers who get vaccinated, the lower will be the speed of **virus transmission** amongst the non-vaccinated.
 - Also, there are some **cost benefits**, for example, Belgian Minister has revealed that the European Union has agreed to pay for leading COVID-19 vaccines is substantially lower than the prices of **Moderna and Pfizer**. Given the large size of India's market India has the **bargaining power advantage** too.

57. Essentiality of Dry run for COVID vaccines

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors

Synopsis: Dry runs aimed at testing the planned operations are essential for Covid 19 vaccination process.

Background

- In the coming weeks, the Phase-3 data of two **COVID-19** vaccines tested by Indian manufacturers are expected to be submitted for **emergency use approval**.
- A countrywide rollout to immunize the **four high-risk groups** will begin soon in India if any of the vaccines gets the approval.
- So, to be prepared in hand the government has rightly decided to undertake a **dry run** for **vaccine administration**. The dry run is expected to be initiated this week in four States of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, and Punjab.

Why the Dry run is essential?

- Though, India has been vaccinating millions of young children with a variety of vaccines each year the aspects of the COVID-19 vaccination Programme are new.
- **Firstly**, this is the first time a vaccine to be administered outside the **universal immunisation Programme** and specifically for **adults belonging to specific groups**.
- **Second**, there is a need for administering two doses of the vaccine a few weeks apart and enrolling the recipients which is different compared to our running vaccination drives.
- **Third**, it will allow the administrators to check the usage of the **Co-WIN IT platform** for management of the entire vaccination process including data entry, allocation of date and time and a drill of session sites with test beneficiaries.
- **Fourth**, it will also help to test the linkages between planning, implementation and reporting mechanisms.

What are the measures that needs to be ensured during Dry run exercise?

- The first task is to register the recipients of vaccine identified from the from the **high-risk groups** on the **Co-WIN platform** to **avoid inclusion and exclusion errors**.
- When more than one vaccine becomes available, it is essential to ensure that people receive the same vaccine twice and the exercise should confirm that the Co-WIN platform is able to generate the date and time when people can receive the second dose.
- As no COVID-19 vaccine has undergone long-term follow-up for safety during the trial it is very essential to Check and **report on all adverse events after the vaccination**.
- Regarding storage of vaccines, the existing facilities of the **universal immunisation Programme** in most districts can be used for storing the vaccines since the vaccines that are at an advanced stage of testing in India do not require ultra-low temperature for delivery and storage.
- Also, the exercise should look at creating additional storage capacity at these facilities to store millions of COVID-19 vaccines as the plan is to vaccinate 300 million people in the four high-risk groups for which it requires 600 million doses.

58. State of our prisons today

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS-2

Synopsis: The under-trial prisoners in the Bhima-Koregaon case had to move the courts for the basic requirements such as to get a sipper cup and a straw because the prisoner is an 80-year-old man with Parkinson's and the other to take a pair of glasses to replace a broken pair.

Introduction

The prisons should be places of reform and rehabilitation, but they have become a crowded warehouse for the vulnerable marginalised sections.

What is the state of prisons in our country?

- **Firstly**, around 70 per cent of the prisoners are under trial and more than 75 per cent come from marginalised sections that hardly have knowledge about the laws. Even if they are aware, they have little option and access to any complaint's mechanism.
- **Secondly**, financial, infrastructural, and human resource shortages that range from 20 to 40 per cent also add to staff stress and prisoner despair.
- **Thirdly**, overcrowding in prisons between 2017 and 2019 shows that overcrowding increased from 116 to 119 per cent. Some of the prisons are more than three times crowded than their official capacity.
- **Lastly**, there is a serious shortage of judges which results in gathering of cases in courts, the number of cases rose from 3.5 crore to 4 crore between 2019 and 2020.
 - According to the India Justice report 2019, it takes an average of three years for the case to go across the high court and six years in the subordinate courts.

Did the attempts of prison reforms turn out to be fruitful?

The recent case of "Re Inhuman Conditions in 1382 Prisons, saw the need for systemic change in prisons as violations have become an everyday routine. There are pathways to accountability and to reform:

- Reform attempts like the constitution of under trial Review Committees directed by the Supreme Court work occasionally. In most prisons, the Board of Visitors meant to function as **an oversight mechanism are not even created.**
- **The neglect of reforms by the executive** and oversight bodies make sure they act as warehouses for the poor and the marginalised.

Discuss the various efforts previously taken by the court for the prisoners?

- The Bombay High Court observed that workshops should be conducted for the prison staff to sensitise them towards the prisoners.
- The responsibility of providing basic facilities to the prisoners is with custodial authorities as stated by **the law on provision of basic facilities.**
- **The Nelson Mandela Rules 2015** issued by the UN and **the Model Prison Manual 2016** by the Bureau of Police Research and Development, Ministry of Home Affairs, have detailed provisions regarding the care, treatment and rehabilitation of prisoners.
- The Supreme Court has asked state governments to take steps to prevent the spread of the coronavirus in prisons through a PIL filed in March 2020, which led to more than 68,000 prisoners being released.

So many Supreme Court and high court judgments have repeated that **prisoners are human beings with basic rights.** The law stresses that under trial prisoners, except for being prisoned cannot be deprived of any of their other rights.

59. India should be ready for a two-front challenge.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS2: India and its Neighbourhood- Relations.

Synopsis: The **two-front challenge** long ignored by India has become a reality, therefore there is an urgent need to develop both the doctrine and the capability to deal this threat.

Why India didn't perceive the two-front challenge as a real possibility for long?

The **collusive China-Pakistan military threat** (i.e., China-Pakistan military are working in cooperation to contain India on the northern borders) on Indian borders is known as the two-front challenge.

- Before **Galwan** Issue too, Indian military was firmly believed that the two-front challenge as a real possibility, but the political class and the country's strategic community called this threat as an issue, over-hyped by the military to justify the demand for additional resources and funds.
- As per them, China has never intervened militarily in any India-Pakistan conflict and the presence of strong economic, diplomatic, and political ties between India and China will prevent the rise of conflict between the two countries.
- As a result, Indian strategic thinking was overwhelmingly focused on Pakistan, as a real threat on the border.

Why, the two front challenge is seen as a reality now?

Present developments are enough evidences to perceive that the two front threat has become a real concern for India now.

- The most recent **Chinese intrusions in Ladakh**, the violent clashes between the Indian Army and the People's Liberation Army, and the deadlock in negotiations have now made the Chinese military threat more apparent and real.
- On the other hand, the **situation along the Line of Control (LoC)** with Pakistan has been steadily deteriorating. For example, between 2017 and 2019, there has been a four-fold increase in **ceasefire violations**.
- Also, according to Some media reports, **Pakistan had moved 20,000 troops into Gilgit-Baltistan**, matching the Chinese deployments in Eastern Ladakh which signifies that the China-Pakistan military are working in cooperation to contain India.
- Apart from this, the Military cooperation between the two countries have strengthened. For example,
 - China accounting for 73% of the total arms import of Pakistan between 2015-2019.
 - **Shaheen IX Pakistan-China joint exercise** to improve combat capacity of both air forces and to enhance interoperability between them.

What type of type of capabilities that India should built up to counter it?

- **First**, India needs to develop both the doctrine and the capability to deal with this contingency.
 - For Doctrine development, a **close interaction with the political leadership** is required as any doctrine without a political aim and guidance cannot stand the test when executed.
 - Moreover, a **detailed assessment of China and Pakistan's war-fighting strategies** needs to be done to strike a right balance in our approach to contain the two-front situation.
 - On the other hand, India **needs to build its capability** with more focus on future technologies such as robotics, artificial intelligence, cyber, electronic warfare, etc.

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- A **financial solution for allocation of quantum of resources** required by air force and military should also be developed, so that in the times of need India can engage both the states.
- **Second**, we need to **improve relations with our neighbors through Diplomacy** to contain the two-front challenge.
- On eastern front, India's new **Maritime strategies** such as the QUAD and the **Indo-Pacific might not be** helpful in easing the Sino-Pakistan pressure on the continental sphere. So, it's crucial for India to focus on gaining the trust of our neighbors.
- **On western front**, India should strengthen its **relationship with key powers in West Asia, including Iran** to ensure energy security, increase maritime cooperation and enhance goodwill in the extended neighborhood.
- **On the northern front**, India must ensure that its **relationship with Russia** is not compromised for good India-United States relations as Russia could play a key role in defusing the severity of a regional gang up against India.
- **Third**, a well-planned empathetic **political outreach to Kashmir** aimed at addressing the issues facing people of Kashmir, would be helpful in easing the pressure from either front.
- It will be helpful in potential reconciliation with Pakistan to persuade it to put an end to terrorist infiltration into Kashmir.
- Politically, India should do well to reduce the effect of a collusive Sino-Pakistan containment strategy aimed at India.

60. Need for Gated globalisation in India

Source: [Click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2, Effect of developed and developing country policies on India's interest

Synopsis: Post pandemic era will be giving rise to new world order and create uncertainties. India should use a "Gated Globalisation" framework to handle this change.

Introduction

The 3rd decade of 21st century will witness a multipolar world and the rise of this New World Order will be driven by reliability of partners, national interest, and economic factors.

New developments are being witnessed with the development of vaccines. Nations are forging alliance for the vaccine supplies. Trust factor will also dominate these alliances as seen in the doubts raised over vaccines by China and Russia and this factor will not be limited to vaccines only.

Although security interest will continue to drive partnership but it will not be the sole criterion as seen in the Israel and Arabs relations and BREXIT

What is the gated globalisation framework?

Gated globalisation advocates selective trade policies with selective trade partners like creating walls with restrictive gates, opened on certain conditions.

The Gated Globalisation framework doesn't have a place for "Non-alignment" and will be a test of "strategic autonomy" of India. As per the framework, India need Solid boundaries but building new partnerships (like the Quad) based on trust and common interests is equally important, as necessitated by Doklam and Ladakh clash with China.

- **Firstly**, India will have to make **Partnership choices, beyond security, on the basis of trade, capital flows and the movement of labour.**
- For instance, India has chosen to stay out of RCEP and the UK has left the EU.

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- **Secondly**, technology flows and standards will also define gated communities. The Great Firewall of China has shut out many of the big tech players like Google, Facebook and Netflix.
- Instead, China has its Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent. The introduction of 5G technology, will deepen the issues of trust.
- **Third**, the EU-crafted General Data Protection Regulation (**GDPR**) is a brilliant example of Gated Globalisation. The EU has set the terms of engagement; those who do not obey will be kept out.
- The Indian law on data protection that is currently being discussed follows a similar sovereign route.
- **Lastly**, India and other countries have similar policies where they put restrictions on trade with nations who are unfavourable to their interest and build stronger financial relationships with other countries within their gated communities.
- For instance, India has imposed restrictions on trade with China but this does not stop enhanced capital flows from new partners. To prevent inflow of illegal funds, India has barred capital from poorly-regulated authorities.
- India's global scattering is now over 30 million and sends more through transfers (\$80 billion per year) than foreign capital inflows. The Indian diaspora is now increasingly impacting policy in countries like the US, UK and Australia where it has contributed politicians and technocrats, innovators and influencers, billionaires and cricket captains.

Way forward

- During these fast-changing post-pandemic realities, India has to be quick in identifying partners whom it can trust and who will help protect and further its national interests.

61. Opportunities for India in Anglosphere

Source: [Click here](#)

Syllabus: GS - 2, International relations

Synopsis: The Anglosphere is opposed as a colonial concept in India but colonial past should not be allowed to overpower India's present strategic benefits.

What is Anglosphere?

- **An Anglosphere is also called the world of English-speaking people** bound by common political beliefs, similar legal traditions, and shared geopolitical interests.
- The term was coined around late 19th century, when Britain was facing the challenges to its empire from within and outside. **A modest version of this idea was Commonwealth nations.**
- Later, stronger ties with EU resulted into the waning of this idea. But after cold war conservatives in UK started favouring the idea of Anglosphere.
- **It is also the main idea behind the political movement in UK to pull it out of the European Union.**

Which countries constitute Anglosphere?

There are various theories around the countries that constitute the Anglosphere.

- For few theorists **UK, US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand** are at the core of the Anglosphere.
- Others define it more narrowly as a **CANZUK group** that excludes the United States.

- A broader view sees rebuilding of Anglosphere as economic and strategic collaboration with other states like India, Ireland, Singapore and Japan.
- At present, only the “**Five Eyes**” arrangement for intelligence sharing between the US, Canada, UK, Australia and New Zealand, reflects the possibility of Anglosphere.

Why the Anglosphere could be in favour of India?

Some of the critics in India is against idea of Anglosphere due to India’s colonial past, but 5 arguments have been put forward in favour of the Anglosphere that go against any possibility of repetition of India’s past:

- **Firstly**, Britain and India today are at roughly \$2.7 trillion and occupy the fifth and sixth places in the GDP rankings. **India will be overtaking Britain in the few years** to become the third-largest economy in the world.
- **Secondly, Unlike Indian elites’** Indian middle classes have wholeheartedly accepted the English-speaking world as their favourite foreign destinations for study, work and emigration.
- **Thirdly**, The **Indian population is flourishing in these nations** and is very much part of their political system of Anglosphere, due to their relative openness. For instance:
 - **Kamala Harris** will soon be sworn in as US Vice President.
 - **Three of Johnson’s cabinet** rank ministers are Indian.
 - **Four of Justin Trudeau’s ministers** are of Indian origin.
 - Indians are among the **fastest-growing minorities in Australia and New Zealand**.
- **Fourthly**, the India and the Anglosphere countries has already developed greater bilateral commercial and security cooperation and they share geopolitical interest in the Indo-Pacific as well. Moreover, India is already engaged with Five Eye countries on selected issues.
- **Lastly**, the India is on an advantageous position, when compared to China.
 - The Chinese Communist Party has come close to winning over entire Anglosphere in recent years through the absolute power of its sustained economic investments, political engagement, and elite cultivation.
 - Whereas India won’t need to invest that much and can build good relations on the terms, mutually beneficial.

62. India’s system of bail and personal liberty

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- GS 2- Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Synopsis- India’s bail system is facing in urgent need of reforms.

The refusal to grant of bail violates right to liberty of individuals undergoing criminal prosecution by confining them in jails without trial and conviction.

What is bail?

The bail is the security given by the defendant, it acts like a surety or guarantee for the defendant to show up in the court at a later date when summoned

- The surety may be cash, the papers giving title to property, or the bond of private persons of means or of a professional bondsman or bonding company.

What are the concerns regarding granting of bail in India?

- **First**, routine rejection of bail by subordinate courts for the simplest of an offence.

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- Moreover, the majority of people arrested under excise laws belong to marginalized communities. More than two-thirds of the inmates are undertrials from Dalit, Adivasi and OBC communities, often accused of minor offences.
- **Second, Pending bail pleas**– The Courts should decide regular bail application within a maximum time period of 7 days from filing. Sadly, in practice, it is observed accused languish in jails for months waiting for disposal of his bail application.
- The pendency of bail applications has increased during the pandemic due to the shutting down of courts and the exacerbation of arrests for minor offences by the police.
- **Third, High sureties to secure freedom**– The bail amount in session courts, even for petty offences is a minimum of ₹10,000 and ₹30,000 in the case bail before the High Courts and the Supreme Court.
- This is a form of injustice when a majority of regular wage workers, 57% Indians earn less than ₹10,000 per month.
- Common citizens without the means or resources to move the High Courts or the Supreme Court were languishing in jails as under-trials.
- A bogey of middlemen has also emerged due to these high bail amounts.

Example of absurd bail conditions-

- **CASE** – The Gwalior Bench of Madhya Pradesh High Court has granted bail to two accused in a criminal case on the condition that they install a non-China made LED TV screen at the Gwalior District Hospital.
- The same single-judge bench had directed the petitioners to register themselves with the district magistrate concerned as ‘COVID-19 Warrior’ so that they are assigned suitable work taking all prescribed precautions.

Grant of bail on condition to deposit cash relief fund is improper and unjust.

Way forward

- The courts while granting/disposing of bail applications ideally should draw a fine balance between the individual liberty and the interest of the society without compromising on either.
- While granting bail the court must also look at the socio-economic plight of the accused must also have a compassionate attitude towards them.

63. Policymakers must promote research under NEP

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- GS – 2, Issues related to education in India.

Synopsis – The policymakers that finetuned the NEP and give shape to Atmanirbhar Bharat, must also nurture institutional frameworks that enable research.

Background-

- The NEP also fosters creativity, developing employability and inviting foreign institutions to set up campuses in India.
- We are working to make India a “knowledge economy” in the 21st century and the National Education Policy (NEP) will also tackle the issues of brain drain, said Prime Minister recently.
- However, there is an absence of much required cutting edge research system. The challenges this system facing are related to funding, academic autonomy, designing robust processes for recruitment of faculty, counselling arrangements for early-career researchers, and systems to help overcome the many barriers to equality and diversity.

Why India does not have cutting edge research framework?

- **First, Lack of research institutes**– Only few institutions like TIFR, IITs, across the country and are outside university systems, conducting cutting edge research.
- **Second, Lack of freedom**– Most universities in India do not have the freedom to design courses, find creative ways to raise funds, lack of collaboration between industry and academia.
- **Third, Lack of collaboration between industry and academia** – India is lacking in conducting research that is both practically relevant and scientifically rigorous.

On the other hand, In US, Pfizer [premier biopharmaceutical company], and the University of California have created systems to combine academic thinking with drug development expertise.

What are the most effective strategies to generate cutting edge research ecosystem?

- **First**, there is need to shift university admission process for the success of New Education Policy (NEP),
 - Currently, non-viable high cut-offs speak of an education system that does not encourage creative learning.
- **Second**, there is a need for a strong collaboration between the universities and industries to come up with innovative ideas in research along with higher investments in R&D.

Therefore, policymakers should look after the institutional framework that enables research.

64. Approach of India and China on Nepal's political crisis

Source: [Click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: Beijing and New Delhi are adopting different approach towards China after Nepal's prime minister decision to dissolve Parliament.

Background:

The Supreme Court has given Mr. Oli some time to explain his actions. It is yet to decide on putting stay on the election process.

- Ever since Nepal adopted its new Constitution in 2015, there have been quite a few **instances where the politics has reached a tipping point**.
- One of the examples is, Mr. Dahal's walk out of a coalition government with Mr. Oli in 2016.

What is China's stance?

- **Beijing's sent a senior delegation** of the Communist Party of China to Kathmandu shortly after Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli's decision to dissolve Parliament. **It indicates that China is prepared to interfere in Nepal's politics.**
- Chinese delegation met political leaders of Nepal with a definite task of **trying to reverse the split in the party** and convince Mr. Oli and his rivals to patch up.
- This move of Chinese government flickered protests in Kathmandu. Though China is at a risk of losing popular goodwill in Nepal due to this move, it is equally surprising that **both groups in Nepal were willing to meet the Chinese delegation.**

What is India's stance?

It is evident that **India is not playing its traditional leading role** in Nepal but it is also not facing the hatred for spoiling the situation.

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- **India has a historical understanding of the main players in Nepali politics;** thus, it has chosen to be more logical and controlled.
- **Mr. Oli and Mr. Dahal, both reached out to India** and are engaging with the government about the happenings in Nepal.
 - Mr Oli reached out to India months after the map controversy.
 - Mr. Dahal has been a close Indian confederate during this period.

The present positive situation gives New Delhi a little more space to consider its moves, to bring in stability. **Stability in Nepal's polity is crucial for their better relations** with India in the long term as their prosperity is closely interlinked.

65. Analysis of India's Foreign policy in 2020

Synopsis: An analysis of India's foreign policy for the year 2020 has been put forward.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS2: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora.

Background

- The various developments that have **affected Indian foreign policy** decisions are,
 - The emergence of the **COVID-19 pandemic** that led to severe restrictions on travel.
 - Deadlock over the continuing occupation of Indian territory by China that witnessed violence at **Galwan valley**.
 - The **unsettled situation in the U.S.**, with only three weeks to go for Joe Biden to be sworn in as President.
 - The game-changing developments in West Asia, the progress in **Israel-Saudi bilateral relation**.

How impactful were the India's Foreign policy decision during the year 2020?

India's Foreign policy as a result of various global developments had its own pros and cons. Some decisions that we took raised our status in the global arena as a rising global super power whereas some decisions have invited criticisms.

- **First**, India's efforts towards pandemic recovery through India's **pandemic diplomacy** have made a positive impact.
 - India helped many countries with relief supplies, medicines and equipment during the pandemic. For example, supply of **hydroxychloroquine** and paracetamol to other countries.
 - India has also contributed immensely to **international mobility and migration** during the pandemic. For example, we supported the movement of more than 1,10,000 foreigners out of India to 120 countries while, more than 2.5 million citizens were facilitated to return to India.
- **Second**, India's **stress on multilateralism and international cooperation** have been appreciated.
- Third, India has been increasingly involved in adequately **securitising foreign policy** by integration of foreign and defence policies, a new dimension to policymaking for settling border disputes. For example,
 - The visit of the Chief of the Army Staff and the Foreign Secretary to Myanmar.
 - The visits of the Chief of the Research and Analysis Wing, the Chief of the Army Staff, and the Foreign Secretary to Nepal.
- **Third**, in few examples India was seen as **distancing itself from globalisation** and moving towards **protectionism** as against the **rules of Free trade**. For example,
 - The concept of "**Atmanirbharta**" to reducing dependence on countries like China.

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- India's decision to keep out of the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership** has stating that globalisation and trade agreements have resulted in **de-industrialisation** in certain sectors.
- **Fourth**, the visible **intolerance towards international criticism** had made other countries to express displeasure over India's action. For example, two boycotts by Mr. Jaishankar have been seen as increased intolerance of external criticism.
- The first was his decision not to meet Democratic Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal owing to her **critical view on the Kashmir issue**. Senator Bernie Sanders and Indian-origin Senator Kamala Harris, now Vice-President-elect, criticised India for 'silencing' its critic.
- The second was his decision to boycott **Ministerial meeting on COVID-19 convened by Canada**. The reason for the boycott was Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's statement on the agitation of Indian farmers which is significant to interference in our internal affairs.

However, India's policy is to be supportive of our diaspora abroad and we need to showcase tolerance towards such criticism from abroad.

General Studies Paper - 3

General Studies - 3

1. Dilli chalo farmer's protest

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- GS 3- Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

Context- Farmers from all over the country are protesting seeking the repeal of the new farm laws.

What is Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce [FPTC] Act, 2020?

- **Break the monopoly-** It allows intra-state and inter-state trade of farmers produce beyond the physical premises of Agricultural Produce and Livestock Market Committee (APMC) markets.
- State will be now prohibited from levying any market fees or cess outside APMC areas.

However, a large proportion of Indian harvest is sold outside mandis, only 29% and 44% of the harvest is sold in a mandi.

Farmer's fears- This could corporatize agriculture, threaten the current mandi network and State revenues and dilute the system of government procurement at guaranteed prices.

What are the concerns of farmers?

1. They are farmers are forced to sell their harvest outside the mandis due to -

- **India still doesn't have enough mandis-** Only 7,000 APMC markets operating across the country.
- **Transport costs-** Most small and marginal farmers, given their small marketable surplus, do not find it economical to bear the transport costs to take their harvests to mandis.

Therefore, the farmer ends up selling their harvest to a village/local trader even if at a lower price. Even if private markets replace mandis, small and marginal farmers will continue to sell to traders in the village itself.

2. No assurance of receiving higher prices even if private market emerges.

3. Adverse impact on rural investments- Mandi taxes are reinvested by APMCs to improve market infrastructure. A fall in mandi taxes would reduce the surplus available with APMCs for such investment.

What are the reasons for poor private investment in market?

- **High transaction cost-** Private players have incurred considerable costs in opening collection centres and for salaries, grading, storage and transport.
- Corporate retail chains face additional costs in urban sales and storage, as well as the risk of perishability.

Therefore, corporate retail chains prefer purchasing bulk quantities from mandis rather than directly from farmers.

What is the farmer's fear with regard to MSP?

Many policy signals point to a strategic design to weaken the MSPs

- MSPs are rising at a far slower rate over the past five to six years than in the past.
- The government has not yet agreed to fix MSPs at 50% above the C2 cost of production.
- Recommendation of CACP to stop open-ended procurement of food grains.

What Steps needs to be taken?

- India needs an increase in the density of mandis, expansion of investment in mandi infrastructure and a spread of the MSP system to more regions and crops.
- APMCs need internal reform to ease the entry of new players, reduce trader collusion and link them up with national e-trading platforms.
- The introduction of unified national licences for traders and a single point levy of market fees.

Way forward-

The Farm Acts were legislative measures that were passed without elaborate discussion with stakeholders. Thus, government has to take steps to address the genuine fears of farmers.

2. Farmer's protest

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- GS 3- Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

Context – Massive communication failure on the part of the central government to explain to farmers what these laws are, and how they are intended to benefit them.

What is the farmer's and States concern with regard to new farm laws?

1. **Farmer's fear-** This could corporatize agriculture, threaten the current mandi network and State revenues and dilute the system of government procurement at guaranteed prices.
2. **States fear-** Due to this bill, the revenue earned by the states in the form of market fees will drop drastically. About 13 per cent of the total revenue earned by the Punjab government comes from these mandis.

What are the demands of the farmers?

1. **Repeal of new agriculture law-** Punjab farmer leaders, including two major political parties, demand repeal of these laws.
 - However, repealing would mean bringing back mandi system, licence raj and the resultant rent-seeking.
2. **MSP to be legally binding-** Farmers' second demand is a written assurance in the form of a bill that the MSP and conventional food grain procurement system for the central pool will continue in future.
 - Farmers want a legal guarantee that no procurement will happen below MSP anywhere in the country.

However, The Food Corporation of India is already overloaded with grain stocks that are more than 2.5 times the buffer stock norms.

What are the policy options does government have?

1. **Use of Price Stabilization Scheme** - To give a lift to market prices by pro-actively buying a part of the surplus whenever market prices crash, say more than 20 per cent below MSP.
2. **Decentralization of agriculture system** - Decentralization the MSP, procurement, stocking, and public distribution system (PDS). Since agricultural marketing is a state subject.

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- The food subsidy can be allocated to states on the basis of their share in all-India poverty/proportion of vulnerable population, all-India wheat and rice production, all-India procurement of wheat and rice

What is the way forward?

- Farmers protest in India is an indication of larger complex issue. Pressure groups play a vital role in generating awareness and reaching a consensus and sustainable solutions to farmer's problems.
- The Finance Commission can work out a formula for distribution funds amongst States, based on some tangible performance indicators and the Centre should get off from MSP, PDS, fertilizer subsidy, and MNREGA.

3. Corporate houses owning banks

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS3: Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

Context: Granting license to corporates to promote banks will be disastrous to the economy as a whole.

Background

- Recently, the RBI constituted an Internal Working Group to determine if large corporate houses can be given licence to promote banks.
- The Internal Working Group recommended to allow corporate houses to operate banks.

What are the concerns associated with this move?

- **Experts caution:** Former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan and former RBI Deputy Governor Viral Acharya opined that the recommendations for allowing corporates into banking a “bombshell” and said this proposal needs to be dropped.
- **Issue of connected Lending:** Business houses owning an in-house bank may lead to self-lending.
- **Issue of Credit Quality:** Banks cannot make good loans when it is owned by the borrower. Even under the existing financial regime, the RBI was unable to detect at an early stage the connected lending which felled large regulated financial entities like IL&FS, Yes Bank (Rana Kapoor and his entities held 10.6% as on end September 2018), DHFL (promoter holding 39%).
- **Growth of monopoly market:** India's business landscape is already starting to resemble a Monopoly board for example, telecommunications and transportation. Allowing corporates to own banks will strengthen this process.

What are the arguments given by RBI's Internal Working Group in support of giving corporates licence to promote banks?

- Making necessary amendments to the Banking Regulation Act of 1949 to deal with connected lending and linkages between banks and non-financial group entities.
- Strengthening the supervisory mechanism for conglomerates. These measures will be able to regulate corporate owned banks effectively.

What is the way forward?

- The way forward should be to privatise public sector banks by allowing wide and diversified holding of stock by the general public.

- If the government exits banking ownership, it would lead to professional management and broader distribution of wealth. The banks would come under both SEBI and stringent RBI guidelines.

4. Need for the procurement system

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- GS 3- Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

Context- Dismantling the procurement system is neither in the interests of farmers nor the government.

What are the concerns of farmers related to new farmer's acts?

Farmer's concern-

- Their main worry is about a possible withdrawal of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) and a dismantling of the public procurement of grains.
- This could corporatize agriculture; threaten the current mandi network and State revenues.

However, the government claims that the farmer's new laws will-

- **Break the monopoly-** It allows intra-state and inter-state trade of farmers produce beyond the physical premises of Agricultural Produce and Livestock Market Committee (APMC) markets.
- The MSP-procurement system will continue, and that there is absolutely no plan to dismantle the system.
- **Unshackle farmers-** increase options for farmers in the output markets
- **Boost competition-** The competition will increase and private investment will reach villages. Farming infrastructure will be built and new employment opportunities will be generated.

Why farm protests have been highly intense in Punjab, Haryana?

1. **PDS is the lifeline** - The procurement system and MSP mechanism is strong in Punjab and Haryana.
 - Nearly 88% of the paddy production and 70% of the wheat production in Punjab and Haryana (in 2017-18 and 2018-19) has been absorbed through public procurement.
2. Other states are hardly benefitted from the MSP mechanism.

Does government want this procurement system?

The need for procurement of paddy and wheat to government is even more because-

1. **To support the needy one-** There are nearly 80 crore NFSA (National Food Security Act) beneficiaries and an additional eight crore migrants who need to be supported under the PDS.
2. **To maintain the PDS** - The government needs an uninterrupted supply of grain, particularly from these two States.
3. **To overcome COVID-19 situation-** Due to the onset of the novel coronavirus pandemic and the migrant crisis, government needs to procure a huge quantum of grains than in previous years as the government cannot afford to go to the open market.

What improvements are required in new farmer's Act?

- **Regulatory mechanism-** Framework for supervision of all trade (irrespective of its being done on the electronic market or physical market) to ensure fair play by private players vis-à-vis farmers

- **Lack of transparency in trade area transactions** are two of the major limitations that need to be addressed immediately.

Instituting these safeguards will make the reforms foolproof.

What is the way forward?

- The government has to continue its procurement from Punjab and Haryana even after the COVID-19 situation improves and the migrant crisis abates, as the obligations under the NFSA will continue.
- The government should reach out to the farmer groups and assures them of the indispensability of MSP-procurement system.

5. Protesting farmer' concerns

Source- **The Indian Express**

Syllabus- **GS 3**- Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

Context- Three Acts in Parliament and handed hurriedly, ignoring critical objections inside each Houses and the opposition outdoors.

Why are these bills being opposed?

1. **End of MSP**- The bills also lack any assurance about Minimum Support Price(MSP)
 - Dismantling of the monopoly of the APMCs as a sign of ending the assured procurement of food grains at minimum support prices (MSP).
 - After the abolition of mandis, farmers in Bihar on average received lower prices compared to the MSP for most crops.
2. **Promote corporate control**- The farmers contend the federal government is making ready to withdraw from the procurement of food grain and hand it over to the company gamers.
3. **Weak grievances redress system**- The dispute decision mechanism from the purview of courts and fingers it over to the SDM and the DC, who're perceived as being below stress from their political masters.
4. **Hamper the rural growth**- The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce act prohibits State governments from collecting market fee, cess or levy for trade outside the APMC markets that are used for rural growth and market infrastructure.
5. **No mechanism for price fixation** - The Price Assurance Act offers protection to farmers against price exploitation.
6. **Food security** – Easing of regulation of food commodities in the essential commodities list would lead to hoarding of farm produce during the harvest season when prices are generally lower.
 - This could undermine food security since the States would have no information about the availability of stocks within the State.
7. **Against the Spirit of Cooperative federalism**- Since agriculture and markets are State subjects, the ordinances are being seen as a direct encroachment upon the functions of the States

However, the authorities argues that-

- **Farmers will get higher prices**- The acts aim to increase the availability of buyers for farmers' produce, by allowing them to trade freely without any license or stock limit, so that an increase in competition among them results in better prices for farmers.

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- **Contract farming-** This can present predetermined costs to farmers contracted upfront which will guarantee costs greater than the MSP.
- This enables farmers to promote their produce anywhere within the nation and interact with personal corporations to promote their crops.

What is the way forward?

- The farmers' unions want a complete withdrawal of the recently enacted Farm Acts, and an assurance that MSP and procurement by FCI will proceed.
- The Farm Acts were legislative measures that were passed without elaborate discussion with stakeholders. Thus, government has to take steps to address the genuine fears of farmers.

6. GDP recovery- questionable data

Source- [The Hindu](#)

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

Context- The Q-2 sharp recovery is very tactical because of pent-up demand, because of lockdown and the Data used for quarterly growth rates are weak and questionable.

What in the news-

The second quarter GDP contracted at a slower pace of 7.5 per cent compared to a massive 23.9 per cent in the first quarter of the current fiscal.

- The economy's performance between July and September when lockdown restrictions were eased is better than most rating agencies and analysts anticipated.

Critic's view- India had introduced one of the strictest lockdowns in the world which has resulted in the sharpest output contractions and massive losses in terms of jobs and livelihoods.

Why GDP data should not be taken as sustainable recovery?

1. **The source of information is not reliable-** Very little up-to-date primary information from farms, factories and offices is available for the estimation.
2. **Pent up demand-** The healthy recovery in the second quarter represents meeting the pent-up demand after the 'Unlock' phase started in June.

However, the quarterly figures do indicate the broad direction of change.

- **GDP in the manufacturing sector-** It rose 0.6 per cent in the September quarter, in a big sign of recovery compared with a crash of 39.3 per cent in the April-June period.

What are the challenges for sustainable recovery?

1. Weak aggregate demand-

- Revenue shortfalls- The government's debt-GDP ratio has gone up though.
- Bank credit growth in the economy continues to decelerate.
- The cumulative growth of the index from April to October this year stood at negative 13% when compared to the same period last year.

2. Balance of payment surplus-

the shortfall is on account of a sharp decline in investment demand, denting potential output.

- Both exports and imports have shrunk but imports have shrunk relatively more than exports, such a sharp fall in import demand does not augur well for a growing economy such as India.

3. Rising foreign exchange reserves- India's flourishing foreign exchange reserves are made up of short-term debt flows; they are not our net export earnings.
4. **Sudden booming stock market**- This entirely driven by short-term foreign capital inflows.
 - Such inflows are highly fickle, representing hot money, which can quit the financial markets in a jiffy if perceptions change for any exogenous reason.

Way forward-

- As an additional expenditure on government consumption or investment or credit growth remain muted, recovery is likely to remain modest.
- Economic recovery could still prove to be premature and illusory - Economists have reservations about reading too much into the September-October data as a sustainable trend.

7. Farm Bills Concerns and evaluation

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs3: Issues related to Direct and Indirect Farm Subsidies and Minimum Support Prices

Context: Agriculture in India needs state support to thrive.

Background

- Recently, President Ram Nath Kovind gave his assent to three contentious farm bills passed by Parliament.
 1. The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 (FAPAFS).
 2. The Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020 (FPTC).
 3. The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020 (EC).
- Indian farmers worry that these farm bills may clear the way for giant Indian companies.

Why the Farm bills are touted as a watershed moment for Indian agriculture?

- **Elimination of middlemen:** The reforms would remove the shackles from the agriculture sector and free farmers from the stranglehold of middlemen by creating one market.
- **Abolition of monopoly of APMC mandis:** The bills will permit private buyers to hoard essential commodities for future sales, which only government-authorized agents could do earlier, along with changing the rules for contract farming.

Why the farmers are concerned about farm bills?

- **Issue of withdrawing MSP:** Since the Minimum Support Price (MSP) is not mentioned in the bills, they fear that they will lose the assured option of selling to the APMC mandis and that this will lead to corporate exploitation.
- **Corporatisation of agriculture:** In the absence of regulation, as agribusiness firms might well be able to dictate both the market conditions (including prices) and the terms of contract farming as small farmers do not have the same bargaining power.
- **Loss of livelihood and employment:** Farmers are suspicious that the entry of giant Indian companies in future such as Reliance and Adani who have already made investments in the agri-business infrastructure will wipe out their livelihood in farming. **For instance**, the management of the crop insurance scheme against natural disasters, introduced in 2017, was handed over to one of Anil Ambani's companies, among others.

How in most countries governments subsidise Agriculture sector?

- In the US, the agriculture subsidies accounts for about 40 per cent of the total farm income. sector (\$46 billion in federal subsidies this year). - New York times.
- Similarly, the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy spending has averaged €54 billion annually since 2006.

Why Agriculture sector needs state support in India?

- **Majority of the farmers are small in India:** Smallholder and marginal farmers, those with less than two hectares of land account for 86.2 per cent of all cultivators - **10th Agriculture Census.**
 - For them, it is unaffordable to carry their produce to other states or far-off places to sell. Without some support from the state, the smallest of Indian peasants would be even more vulnerable.
- **Lack of proper jobs:** Also, the prospects of generating employment from other secondary and tertiary sector is not bright. For example, the share of the secondary sector in total employment has been stagnant at around 26 per cent (as against 41 per cent for agriculture) and its share in the GDP is declining.
- **Urban rural divide:** There is a wide gap between urban and rural India in terms of per capita resources is widening.

What is the way forward?

- Need to increase public investment in agriculture in terms of Agri- infrastructure.
- Promote Livelihood and Income Augmentation schemes like the Rythu Bandhu in Telangana or the Krushak in Odisha.
- Need to ensure that no transaction can be done below the MSP, would help alleviate some rural distress.
- For making farming sustainable, the government should draw inspiration from **Andhra Pradesh's community managed farming model** which promotes agro-ecological principles with the use of locally produced, ecologically sustainable inputs, focusing on soil health, instead of depending on chemical fertilisers. This model is more resilient as well as more biodiverse in nature and provides a safety net to farmers.

8. Economic recovery

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS-3- Economy

Context: A recovery led by profits, at the expense of wages, has implications for demand, inequality and policy.

- **GDP is typically reported in two ways:** The sectoral, production side (agriculture, manufacturing, services) and the functional, expenditure side (consumption, investment, net exports).
 - **Third way:** On the income side, GDP is calculated as the sum of profits, wages and indirect taxes.

Discuss the role of factors of production in economic recovery.

- **Capital:** The economic recovery in many parts of the world is too twisted for comfort, driven excessively by capital than labour.
 - If listed company profits are growing at 25 per cent, and yet GDP contracted 7.5 per cent, it reveals significant pressure on profits of unlisted SMEs, wages and employment.

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- **Labour market pressures around the world:** US hiring slowed sharply in November and the unemployment rate is still forecasted to remain close to 6 per cent i.e. almost twice pre-COVID levels even at the end of 2021.
 - Household demand for MGNREGA remains very elevated, suggesting significant labour market slack.
- **The employment rate:** Some labour market surveys still reveal about 14 million fewer employed compared to February.
 - Nominal wage growth across a universe of 4,000 listed firms has slowed from about 10 per cent to 3 per cent over the last six quarters.

Why does this matter?

- **Weak demand:** It disincentivises re-hiring, reinforcing the risks of settling into a sub-optimal equilibrium.
- **Worry for future demand:** It may be normal for any one firm to boost profits by cutting employee reward. But if every firm pursued that strategy, It simply dismantles future combined demand and profitability for all firms.
- **Acceleration of technological adoption:** Differential productivity impacts on capital, skilled and unskilled labour, will likely have more deep impacts on the future capital-labour mix, possibly stressing existing inequities.
- **Job-market pressures:** If job-market pressures convince households into observing this shock as a quasi-permanent hit on incomes, households will be incentivised to save, not spend in the future.
- **Global recovery:** If labour market pressures dent private consumption, and an incomplete global recovery in 2021 dents export prospects.
 - There will be no authoritative for entrepreneurs to invest, especially with manufacturing utilisation levels below 70 per cent heading into COVID-19 outbreak.
- **Fiscal policy:** US policymakers are negotiating yet another fiscal package, and only a small fraction of the large discretionary stimulus that the Euro Area and Japan injected will be reversed next year.
 - India's fiscal response has been controlled so far. It's therefore important for the Centre to step up spending in the remaining months.

What is the way forward?

- **Public investment and a large infrastructure push:** Must be the theme of the next budget. This will be crucial to boost demand, create jobs, crowd-in private investment and improve the economy's external competitiveness.
- **Monetary to fiscal:** In 2021, the stick must pass from monetary to fiscal, especially since the latter is a more surgical instrument to target SMEs and the labour market.

9. The many layers to agricultural discontent

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices

Context: The Farm Acts that are the focus of the farmers' protest bear variously on the different strata of the farming community.

How farming distress is shared in common by the different strata?

- The powerful farmers' movements that sprouted across India from the 1970s, led by such iconic leaders as M.D. Nanjundaswamy, Sharad Joshi, and Mahendra Singh Tikait, which claimed to speak not merely for farmers but to the rural segment as a whole.

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- They presented a platform for discussion and debate beyond their immediate concerns.
- The organisations have undergone much change. In some parts of the country the class and caste divide are still sharp, in other places, farmers' organisations have not shied away from critically engaging with class, caste and gender concerns.
- The very fact that a **social reality** is widely accepted provides space for policy intervention. The Farm Bills have ignored that the rural is a vibrant space in India, with 'elective affinities' binding its vast expanse.
- The rich farmers have also reinforced their position enormously in the rural areas over the years after the Green Revolution and farmers' movements of the 1970s.
- They have also invested their surplus in agri-business and clearly hold access to the wider economic and institutional domains.
- The lower strata of the farming community are invariably beholden to the rich farmer not merely for employment but also to access resources and services.

Why the Farm bills were introduced?

- To double the income of India's farmers by 2022.
- To liberalise access to agricultural markets.
- To remove existing barriers to storage of agricultural produce, and facilitating contract-farming.
- The objective is to create 'One Nation, One Market', and promote 'Ease of doing business'

What is the immediate response?

- Organised farmers' bodies and Opposition in Parliament offered strong resistance to these Bills.
- Some State governments even enacted their own Bills.
- The Shiromani Akali Dal, walked out of the alliance with NDA in protest against these Bills.

What are the key concerns?

- **Agrarian distress:** piecemeal legislation and regulative processes have been put in place such as Pradhan Mantri yojanas but several key concerns of farmers have gone unattended.
- **States' role:** the issues affecting the farming community have a far greater bearing on the States relative to the Centre.
- **Lack of consensus building:** The Centre extended little consideration to the sensitivity of the States.
- **Disparities:** The three Acts bear differently on the different strata of the farming community and in different regions.
- **APMC as cushion:** for instance, weakening the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) system and its resultant bearing on Minimum Support Price (MSP), particularly on crops such as rice and wheat is seen by the farmers as a threat to an assured sale of their produce at a price.
- **Procurement issues:** Subjecting Procurement system to the vagaries of a competitive market, including storing and contracting of the produce, where he would eventually be beholden to the large players, including monopolies, are prospects that a farmer detests even though he is aware that the middleman is not a saint.

10. Exclusive arbitration body for financial disputes

Source: [The Hindu Business line](#)

GS3: Issues related to planning, Mobilization of resources, Growth, Development, Employment

Context: India needs a special arbitration body for financial disputes.

Why financial institutions resort to litigation instead of arbitration for settling disputes?

- **Courts are more powerful:** Litigation, offers a more potent forum for recovery of money and resolving financial disputes as the judges are vested with stronger powers than an arbitrator. such as interim measures, summary judgments, warrants for non-appearance, etc., which are not available in arbitration.
- **Creates more pressure on defaulter:** In addition, the public nature of disputes in courts allows the banks to create pressure on the defaulters to discharge their debts as public disclosure hinders their future investment prospects.

Why settling financial disputes through courts is disadvantageous?

- **Judges lack technical knowledge:** The judges in these jurisdictions are not competent enough to understand complex transactions and financial instruments. After 2009-09 financial crisis, the financial institutes felt a need for adjudicators who possess a deep knowledge of finance and an understanding of complex transactions.
- **Litigation negatively impacts economy as a whole:** Moreover, financial disputes of large size often lead to public distress, resulting in negative impacting listed stocks which could consequently lead to collapse of economies, if big financial institutions are involved.

What is the advantage of resorting to arbitration over litigation?

- **Confidentiality:** Arbitration maintains privacy of proceedings and ensures that the adjudicator is a person with expertise in finance
- **Relatively Easy enforcement:** It is easier to enforce an arbitral award as opposed to a court judgment which can be appealed multiple times.

Why India needs a special arbitration body?

- No special body for financial arbitration exists in India and such arbitrations continue to be adjudicated by retired judges, who are generalists and do not possess a specialized knowledge of finance and financial markets.
- Considering the rise of financial disputes in India, including defaults by some of the biggest Indian corporations such as **Anil Ambani's Reliance Group, Vijay Mallya's Kingfisher and Nirav Modi's Firestar Diamonds**, there is a need for providing a specialised institution to deal with financial arbitrations.

What we can Learn from the International experience?

- In America, the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) provides assistance and advice for dispute resolution involving securities.
- Similarly, The Panel of Recognised Market Experts in Finance (P.R.I.M.E. Finance) was set up in The Hague, Netherlands, in 2012 for providing a panel of arbitrators specialising in banking and finance, offering arbitration rules tailor-made for financial arbitrations and providing financial experts for assistance during such arbitrations.

- The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) is one such institution which possesses a body of some of the most prominent financial experts in India. Perhaps, the government should create a panel in consultation with the ICAI for facilitation of financial arbitrations.

11. Monoculture farming- depleting natural resources

Source- The Indian Express

Syllabus- GS 3- Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

Context- In the ongoing farm debate in the country the green reality check seems to be missing.

What is agro ecology?

It is a concept where agriculture sector of a country expanded along with keeping environmental protection [agriculture with sustainable environmental practice].

What is monoculture farming and its Impact?

Monoculture is the agricultural practice of growing a single crop, plant, or livestock species, variety, or breed in a field or farming system at a time.

- Modern agricultural practices emphasize maximizing crop yields, farm incomes and global competitiveness. The single-minded pursuit of such goals has remade land and farms into monocultures.

Monoculture reduces diversity and leads to a host of other problems-

1. Contributed significantly to climate emissions.
2. Threatened farmer livelihoods and the natural resource base they depend upon-
 - **Destroys soil nutrients-** Single crop eliminates all soil nutrients and everything else is killed as pests or weeds.
 - Pollutes groundwater supplies due to extensive use of fertilizers.
 - Adversely affects and alters the natural ecosystem.
 - Destroys the overall soil's degradation and erosion.
 - **Requires lots of water to irrigate-** Monoculture results in the topsoil cover being harvested all at the same time, the topsoil loses elements that could help it retain moisture. Therefore, require vast amounts of water to irrigate the crops.
3. Distorted food consumption patterns, replacing nutritious millets with polished rice and wheat and negatively affected our nutritional security.

In attempting to offer a new deal to farmers, the new farm laws do not address any of these fundamental concerns. Such changes often affect the resilience of production systems and their role in biodiversity.

How new farm laws and farmers demand promote monoculture farming?

Both government and farmers have continued to ignore the broader ecological and social contexts in which agriculture is embedded.

1. Corporatization of agriculture through contract farming, higher stocking limits and private marketplaces will accelerate the growth of long supply chains of monoculture commodities.
2. Guaranteed procurement in the past has incentivized monoculture farming.

What is the way forward?

Government should make policies that go beyond the productivity trope and populist posturing-

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- Instead of a resource-based approach, the need is to develop a relationship-based approach towards the environment.
- Any sound economic and techno-scientific model must have agro ecology and equity at the core and, must indeed, be guided by them.
- Government needs to promote less favoured crops like millets and pulses.

12. Highlights of MPC meeting

Source- The Hindu

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

Context- RBI in its 6th bi-monthly MPC meeting voted unanimously to maintain status quo on benchmark interest rates to support the economy.

What were the key highlights of latest MPC meeting?

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) recently left benchmark interest rates unchanged and maintained an 'accommodative' policy stance as it prioritized support for the economy's recovery over 'sticky' inflation amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The RBI keeping rates low despite high inflation shows its focus to boost economic growth over keeping inflation under check which is majorly a supply-side issue.

Key highlights-

- **Decision** - The MPC kept the RBI's key lending rate, the repo rate, steady at 4%.
- MPC panel projected that the real GDP contraction will contract at 7.5% [-7.5%] for the financial year ending. It is an upgrade in comparison to -9.5% in October MPC review.
- Citing the improvement in activity in the second quarter, it projected GDP would return to growth of 0.1% in Q3, and expand 0.7% in Q4.
- The RBI also announced a raft of liquidity management measures and steps to improve regulatory oversight of the financial system.
- MPC expects inflation to rise in the near term.

What are the key challenges?

- **Cost push pressure-** The increase in the prices of iron ore, steel and transportation fuels also add to the worries that cost pressures are continuing to accumulate.
- **Food inflation** surges to double in October 2020 across protein-rich items including pulses, edible oils, vegetables and spices on multiple supply shocks.
- **Booming financial markets** and rising asset prices because of surplus liquidity will also contribute to upside risks.

Way forward-

- MPC's policy approach is clearly fraught with risks. A small window is available for proactive supply management strategies to break the inflation spiral being fuelled by supply chain disruptions, excessive margins and indirect taxes
- The RBI policy is supportive of growth and in sync with the government's reform agenda.

13. A new roadmap for end of oil age

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS-3- Environment

Context: The latest book The New Map: Energy, Climate and the Clash of Nations, provides some pointers on how should India navigate future energy transitions.

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Explain the key pointers on navigating future energy transitions.

- **Future pathway:** It pulls together the transformative occurrences and technologies that have shaped the energy world in recent years into a clear framework.
- **Six broad themes define The New Map:**
 - The first is the **US shale revolution**, which transformed the US from a major importer of oil and gas to a significant exporter.
 - The second is the **leveraging of gas exports by Russia** to compel former members of the Soviet Union to stay within its sphere of influence and to embrace China into an energy partnership.
 - The third is **China's assertion of its rights over the South China Seas** which is a critical maritime route for its energy imports and the Belt and Road initiative.
 - The fourth is **sectarian strife (Sunni/Shia) in the Middle East** which, compounded by volatile and falling oil prices, has brought the region to the edge.
 - The fifth is the **Paris climate summit** and its impact on public sentiment, investment decisions, corporate governance and regulatory norms.
 - The last is the consequential impact of the manifold and impressive **advancement of clean energy technologies**.
- **Energy transition:** Energy transition will unfold in different ways in different countries and over different time periods. This is because they will be influenced not just by economics and technology, but also by politics and public activism.
- **Peak oil demand:** They bring out one development that plays to India's advantage i.e. the onset of "peak oil demand". The earlier concern was "peak supply" (supplies are finite and the market will face a shortfall).
 - There is no consensus, however, on the timing of peak demand.
 - BP believes, for instance, it has already peaked;
 - the International Energy Agency (IEA) projects it will peak by 2028;
 - IHS Markit's "rivalry" scenario puts the date around the mid-2030s.

What are the policy initiatives for future energy transitions?

- **A framework for considering policy options**
 - **On the fossil fuel axis:** The book suggests the government leverage its buyer ("monopsonist") strength to secure "most favoured" terms of trade for crude supplies.
 - **Battery storage:** One, India must develop its own world-scale, competitive, manufacturing systems for photovoltaics (PVs) and battery storage.
 - If not, it will not be able to provide affordable solar units unless it accepts the further deepening of dependence on Chinese imports.
 - Currently, China manufactures 75 per cent of the world's lithium batteries; 70 per cent of solar cells; 95 per cent of solar wafers and it controls 60 per cent of the production of poly silica.
 - **Strategy:** India must prepare a clean energy technology strategy.
 - The India strategy should identify relevant "breakthrough technologies", establish the funding mechanisms and create the ecosystem for partnerships (domestic and international).

Conclusion

- No disagreement over the fact that the oil market does face a structural supply overhang. In regard with India, clean energy technology offers an early and mutually beneficial platform for charting out a new roadmap for the end of oil age.

14. Permitting industrial houses to own banks

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Context: Permitting industrial houses to own banks could undermine economic growth and democracy.

Background

- Recently, an internal working group of the RBI has made a far-reaching recommendation to permit industrial houses to own and control banks.
- According to the report, the reason for permitting industrial houses to own and control banks is that industry-owned banks would increase the supply of credit, which is low and growing slowly.
- However, many believe that this step would be a grievous mistake, and it will be a setback to Indian economic and political development.

Why it is a concern?

- **Against the recommendations of the experts:** The report states that majority of the experts were of the opinion that large corporate/industrial houses should not be allowed to promote a bank.
- **The problem of connected lending:** This can lead to Over-financing of risky activities, encouraging inefficiency by delaying or prolonging exit and entrenching dominance.
- **Regulation of Connected lending is difficult:** It is clear from the experience of Indonesia and most advanced countries that regulating connected lending is impossible and the only solution is to ban corporate-owned banks.
- **Overburdened RBI:** RBI has encountered much difficulty in dealing with banking irregularities at Punjab National Bank, Yes Bank, ILFS and Lakshmi Vilas Bank. Regulation and supervision need to be strengthened considerably to deal with the current problems in the banking system before they are burdened with new regulatory tasks.
- **Can delay exiting of inefficient firms:** This makes it impossible for more efficient firms to grow and replace them. If industrial houses get direct access to financial resources, their capacity to delay or prevent exit altogether will only increase.
- **Can stimulate growth of Monopolies:** Already, The Indian economy already suffers from over-concentration. The COVID-19 crisis is aggravating this picture because those with greater resources will not only more easily survive the crisis and they will be able to take over small, medium and large enterprises that have not had the resilience or resources. In this scenario, if large industrial houses get banking licences, they will become even more powerful.
- **Will dampen rules-based well-regulated market economy:** The power acquired by getting banking licences will not just make them stronger than commercial rivals, but even relative to the regulators and government itself. This will aggravate imbalances leading to a vicious cycle of dominance.
- **Affect credit Quality:** Indian financial sector reforms have aimed at improving both the quantity and the quality of credit. If India now starts granting banking licences to powerful, politically connected industrial houses, allowing them to determine how credit is allocated, it will effectively abandon the principle of ensuring that credit flows to the most economically efficient users.
- **Alternative options do exist:** The other powerful way to promote more good quality credit is to undertake serious reforms of the public sector banks.

Mixing industry and finance will set us on a road full of dangers for growth, public finances, and the future of the country itself.

15. Farmers could perish with new farm acts

Source- The Indian Express

Syllabus- GS 3- Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

Context- Agricultural operations may flourish with new farm acts, but they threaten to lead to the marginalization of the farmers

How farmer's protest is unique?

- **Farmer's group come together-** 31 farmers' organizations, which have different ideologies and leanings, are to fight collectively against these Bills.
- **Kept politician out of agitation-** The unions came together and formally decided to keep politicians of all parties out of their "struggle".
- Even the traders and the arhtiyas, who have been staunch supporters of the Central government, have expressed their anguish against the new farm laws.

Why is the anger so pronounced in Punjab?

1. **Food bowl of India-** Punjab has contributed the largest amount of food grain in the central pool.
2. **Un-level field-** The Punjab farmers are being asked to diversify their cropping patterns whereas other states like Madhya Pradesh and western Uttar Pradesh are encouraged to produce grains.
 - This resulted in
3. **The procurement system and MSP** mechanism is strong in Punjab and Haryana
 - Only 6 per cent of the farmers in India are fully covered by the MSP, and 84 per cent are located in the states of Punjab and Haryana.

Therefore, any disruption to the system, real or perceived, will cause a major upheaval

What are the farmer's concerns?

- **End of MSP-** Their main worry is about a possible withdrawal of the MSP and a dismantling of the public procurement of grains.
- **Promote corporate control-** The farmers contend the federal government is making ready to withdraw from the procurement of food grain and hand it over to the company gamers.
 - Small and marginal, would be left at the mercy of the corporates, with reduced collective bargaining capacity.

What is government's contention?

- **Farmers will get higher prices** - These Acts are intended to empower the farmers and ensure doubling of their incomes.
- The Acts will only increase options for farmers in the output markets, that the MSP-procurement system will continue, and that there is absolutely no plan to dismantle the system.

What are the issues with the new farm Acts?

- Free market does not have the solutions to improve the well-being of people living on the margins.
- The assumption that the market shall protect and multiply farmers' income is misleading.

Way forward-

1. **Compensate farmers under WTO compatible blue box-** The Centre could allocate subsidies for diversification to commercial crops for the farmers of Punjab.
 - Subsidy could be given for three consecutive years.
2. To keep the mandi system functional, the APMC Act may be reformed
 - The state governments permitted to collect mandi fee and arhtiyas given handling charges.

16. Coercive and Liberal environmentalism

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- GS 3- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Context- India's ability to influence the new geopolitics of climate change will depend a lot on its domestic political resilience in adapting to the new imperatives.

What are China's climate commitment?

- China would become carbon net-zero by the year 2060.
- Also, China now aims to have CO2 emissions peak before 2030. That means China would not allow its greenhouse gas emissions to grow beyond that point.

What is Coercive and liberal environmentalism?

China's coercive environmentalism

The Chinese government pursues its environmental goals with the authoritarian tools it has available: mandatory targets, mass campaigns, top-down bans, factory closures, forced relocations, and even household trash inspectors who can ticket offenders.

- **Effective state intervention-** Enforcing new environmental norms in the last few years has helped China shed the image of being the "bad boy" on climate issues.
- China has been "codifying" environmental policies into clear rules, regulations and laws.

Joe Biden's environmental polices-

- **Modernizing liberal environmentalism** that relies on political consensus in drafting new environmental norms and their effective enforcement as well as the reliance on market-based mechanisms.
- **To enforce environmental regulations** which were either diluted or discarded by the Donald Trump administration and enhance the incentives for polluters to compensate for their violation of norms.
- **Climate justice-** The recognition that pollution and other ecological problems have a greater impact on the poor and minorities.
- Special focus on an early end to the worldwide use of coal.
- Rejoining the Paris Accord to set accelerated timelines for reducing carbon emissions.

However, Coercive and Liberal approaches to managing climate change totally different but they share some important objectives.

- Both China and the US (along with the West) recognize the urgency of the climate challenge.
- US and China, both are racing to develop new technologies that will constitute the foundations of the green economic future.
- Both have zeroed in on industrial policy to achieve their climate objectives.
- Both understand that climate politics is in the end about rearranging the global order.

What are the challenges ahead of India?

- The urgency of addressing climate change is likely to intensify in the immediate term with the election of Biden as US President and the prospect of cooperation on climate change between Washington and Beijing.
- **Puts Pressure on India:** European Union and 70 other countries (that have relatively low emissions) have committed itself to a net-zero emission status by 2050. The new direction of Chinese and US policies in Environmental Initiatives puts pressure India

Way forward-

India's real test on climate change is on building a new domestic consensus that can address the economic and political costs associated with an internal adjustment to the prospect of a great global reset.

17. Authorisation of coronavirus vaccines

Source: **THE HINDU**

Gs2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Context: Safety and efficacy data for the new vaccine must be known before emergency-use authorisation for vaccines.

Why in news?

- The Pune-based Serum Institute of India has approached the regulator for nod for its vaccine, Covishield, developed by Oxford University.
- AstraZeneca, which is carrying out the phase-3 trials of the Oxford vaccine in four countries, is yet to secure a nod from any of the regulatory agencies.
- AstraZeneca recently gave details of the **interim safety and efficacy data** involving 131 COVID-19 cases in the phase-3 trials in the U.K. and Brazil. But details of the trials in India are not out yet.

Why fast tracking of vaccine authorization is needed?

- The unprecedented speed in taking the **vaccine from the development stage to approval process** in less than a year is remarkable but also necessitated by the toll the virus has taken on lives and livelihoods.
- To reduce mortality and morbidity.

What are the concerns associated with authorization of vaccines?

- **Regulatory bodies under pressure:** to **fast-track** the entire process.
- **Lack of transparency:** Opaqueness about vaccine safety and efficacy does no good in gaining people's confidence and willingness to get vaccinated.
 - For example, Moderna, Pfizer and AstraZeneca took the extraordinary step of publicly sharing the trial protocol, the time points at which interim analysis of phase-3 trial in India will be carried out for safety and efficacy is unclear.
- **No checks:** the U.S. FDA has clearly spelt out at least 50% efficacy and stipulated a median follow-up duration of at least two months after completion of the full vaccination regimen to assess a vaccine's benefit-risk profile for emergency-use approval. However, no such conditions have been mentioned by the Indian regulatory agency. The phase-3 trial of Covishield began on September 21 and completed the enrolment on November 12.
- **Fear of side effects and vaccine hesitancy:** ineffective or unsafe vaccine is worse than not having one. A survey by the London-based Vaccine Confidence Project

revealed that though the intent to get vaccinated was 87% in India, 34% respondents were worried about side-effects while 16% were concerned about fast-moving trials.

What needs to be done?

- Need to engage all stakeholders in a transparent manner at every stage and not by merely sharing guidelines regarding vaccine safety with the States.
- It is also important that those seeking emergency-use authorisation share the safety and efficacy data immediately.

18. Monoculture farming- depleting natural resources

Source- The Indian Express

Syllabus- GS 3- Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

Context- In the ongoing farm debate in the country the green reality check seems to be missing.

What is agro ecology?

It is a concept where agriculture sector of a country expanded along with keeping environmental protection [agriculture with sustainable environmental practice].

What is monoculture farming and its Impact?

Monoculture is the agricultural practice of growing a single crop, plant, or livestock species, variety, or breed in a field or farming system at a time.

- Modern agricultural practices emphasize maximizing crop yields, farm incomes and global competitiveness. The single-minded pursuit of such goals has remade land and farms into monocultures.

Monoculture reduces diversity and leads to a host of other problems-

1. Contributed significantly to climate emissions.
2. Threatened farmer livelihoods and the natural resource base they depend upon-
 - **Destroys soil nutrients-** Single crop eliminates all soil nutrients and everything else is killed as pests or weeds.
 - Pollutes groundwater supplies due to extensive use of fertilizers.
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 - Destroys the overall soil's degradation and erosion.
 - **Requires lots of water to irrigate-** Monoculture results in the topsoil cover being harvested all at the same time, the topsoil loses elements that could help it retain moisture. Therefore, require vast amounts of water to irrigate the crops.
3. Distorted food consumption patterns, replacing nutritious millets with polished rice and wheat and negatively affected our nutritional security.

In attempting to offer a new deal to farmers, the new farm laws do not address any of these fundamental concerns. Such changes often affect the resilience of production systems and their role in biodiversity.

How new farm laws and farmers demand promote monoculture farming?

Both government and farmers have continued to ignore the broader ecological and social contexts in which agriculture is embedded.

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1. Corporatization of agriculture through contract farming, higher stocking limits and private marketplaces will accelerate the growth of long supply chains of monoculture commodities.
2. Guaranteed procurement in the past has incentivized monoculture farming.

What is the way forward?

Government should make policies that go beyond the productivity trope and populist posturing-

- Instead of a resource-based approach, the need is to develop a relationship-based approach towards the environment.
- Any sound economic and techno-scientific model must have agro ecology and equity at the core and, must indeed, be guided by them.
- Government needs to promote less favoured crops like millets and pulses.

19. Highlights of MPC meeting

Source- The Hindu

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

Context- RBI in its 6th bi-monthly MPC meeting voted unanimously to maintain status quo on benchmark interest rates to support the economy.

What were the key highlights of latest MPC meeting?

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) recently left benchmark interest rates unchanged and maintained an 'accommodative' policy stance as it prioritized support for the economy's recovery over 'sticky' inflation amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The RBI keeping rates low despite high inflation shows its focus to boost economic growth over keeping inflation under check which is majorly a supply-side issue.

Key highlights-

- **Decision** - The MPC kept the RBI's key lending rate, the repo rate, steady at 4%.
- MPC panel projected that the real GDP contraction will contract at 7.5% [-7.5%] for the financial year ending. It is an upgrade in comparison to -9.5% in October MPC review.
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- **Food inflation** surges to double in October 2020 across protein-rich items including pulses, edible oils, vegetables and spices on multiple supply shocks.
- **Booming financial markets** and rising asset prices because of surplus liquidity will also contribute to upside risks.

Way forward-

- MPC's policy approach is clearly fraught with risks. A small window is available for proactive supply management strategies to break the inflation spiral being fuelled by supply chain disruptions, excessive margins and indirect taxes

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- The RBI policy is supportive of growth and in sync with the government's reform agenda.

20. A new roadmap for end of oil age

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS-3- Environment

Context: The latest book The New Map: Energy, Climate and the Clash of Nations, provides some pointers on how should India navigate future energy transitions.

Explain the key pointers on navigating future energy transitions.

- **Future pathway:** It pulls together the transformative occurrences and technologies that have shaped the energy world in recent years into a clear framework.
- **Six broad themes define The New Map:**
 - The first is the **US shale revolution**, which transformed the US from a major importer of oil and gas to a significant exporter.
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 - The fifth is the **Paris climate summit** and its impact on public sentiment, investment decisions, corporate governance and regulatory norms.
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What are the policy initiatives for future energy transitions?

- **A framework for considering policy options**
 - **On the fossil fuel axis:** The book suggests the government leverage its buyer ("monopsonist") strength to secure "most favoured" terms of trade for crude supplies.
 - **Battery storage:** One, India must develop its own world-scale, competitive, manufacturing systems for photovoltaics (PVs) and battery storage.
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 - Currently, China manufactures 75 per cent of the world's lithium batteries; 70 per cent of solar cells; 95 per cent of solar wafers and it controls 60 per cent of the production of poly silica.
 - **Strategy:** India must prepare a clean energy technology strategy.

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- The India strategy should identify relevant “breakthrough technologies”, establish the funding mechanisms and create the ecosystem for partnerships (domestic and international).

Conclusion

- No disagreement over the fact that the oil market does face a structural supply overhang. In regard with India, clean energy technology offers an early and mutually beneficial platform for charting out a new roadmap for the end of oil age.

21. Permitting industrial houses to own banks

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Context: Permitting industrial houses to own banks could undermine economic growth and democracy.

Background

- Recently, an internal working group of the RBI has made a far-reaching recommendation to permit industrial houses to own and control banks.
- According to the report, the reason for permitting industrial houses to own and control banks is that industry-owned banks would increase the supply of credit, which is low and growing slowly.
- However, many believe that this step would be a grievous mistake, and it will be a setback to Indian economic and political development.

Why it is a concern?

- **Against the recommendations of the experts:** The report states that majority of the experts were of the opinion that large corporate/industrial houses should not be allowed to promote a bank.
- **The problem of connected lending:** This can lead to Over-financing of risky activities, encouraging inefficiency by delaying or prolonging exit and entrenching dominance.
- **Regulation of Connected lending is difficult:** It is clear from the experience of Indonesia and most advanced countries that regulating connected lending is impossible and the only solution is to ban corporate-owned banks.
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but even relative to the regulators and government itself. This will aggravate imbalances leading to a vicious cycle of dominance.

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Mixing industry and finance will set us on a road full of dangers for growth, public finances, and the future of the country itself.

22. Farmers could perish with new farm acts

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- GS 3- Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

Context- Agricultural operations may flourish with new farm acts, but they threaten to lead to the marginalization of the farmers

How farmer's protest is unique?

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Why is the anger so pronounced in Punjab?

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2. **Un-level field-** The Punjab farmers are being asked to diversify their cropping patterns whereas other states like Madhya Pradesh and western Uttar Pradesh are encouraged to produce grains.
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- The Acts will only increase options for farmers in the output markets, that the MSP-procurement system will continue, and that there is absolutely no plan to dismantle the system.

What are the issues with the new farm Acts?

- Free market does not have the solutions to improve the well-being of people living on the margins.
- The assumption that the market shall protect and multiply farmers' income is misleading.

Way forward-

1. **Compensate farmers under WTO compatible blue box-** The Centre could allocate subsidies for diversification to commercial crops for the farmers of Punjab.
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2. To keep the mandi system functional, the APMC Act may be reformed
 - The state governments permitted to collect mandi fee and arthiyas given handling charges.

23. Coercive and Liberal environmentalism

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- GS 3- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Context- India's ability to influence the new geopolitics of climate change will depend a lot on its domestic political resilience in adapting to the new imperatives.

What are China's climate commitment?

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- **Effective state intervention-** Enforcing new environmental norms in the last few years has helped China shed the image of being the "bad boy" on climate issues.
- China has been "codifying" environmental policies into clear rules, regulations and laws.

Joe Biden's environmental polices-

- **Modernizing liberal environmentalism** that relies on political consensus in drafting new environmental norms and their effective enforcement as well as the reliance on market-based mechanisms.
- **To enforce environmental regulations** which were either diluted or discarded by the Donald Trump administration and enhance the incentives for polluters to compensate for their violation of norms.

- **Climate justice**- The recognition that pollution and other ecological problems have a greater impact on the poor and minorities.
- Special focus on an early end to the worldwide use of coal.
- Rejoining the Paris Accord to set accelerated timelines for reducing carbon emissions.

However, Coercive and Liberal approaches to managing climate change totally different but they share some important objectives.

- Both China and the US (along with the West) recognize the urgency of the climate challenge.
- US and China, both are racing to develop new technologies that will constitute the foundations of the green economic future.
- Both have zeroed in on industrial policy to achieve their climate objectives.
- Both understand that climate politics is in the end about rearranging the global order.

What are the challenges ahead of India?

- The urgency of addressing climate change is likely to intensify in the immediate term with the election of Biden as US President and the prospect of cooperation on climate change between Washington and Beijing.
- **Puts Pressure on India:** European Union and 70 other countries (that have relatively low emissions) have committed itself to a net-zero emission status by 2050. The new direction of Chinese and US policies in Environmental Initiatives puts pressure India

Way forward-

India's real test on climate change is on building a new domestic consensus that can address the economic and political costs associated with an internal adjustment to the prospect of a great global reset.

24. Authorisation of coronavirus vaccines

Source: THE HINDU

Gs2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Context: Safety and efficacy data for the new vaccine must be known before emergency-use authorisation for vaccines.

Why in news?

- The Pune-based Serum Institute of India has approached the regulator for nod for its vaccine, Covishield, developed by Oxford University.
- AstraZeneca, which is carrying out the phase-3 trials of the Oxford vaccine in four countries, is yet to secure a nod from any of the regulatory agencies.
- AstraZeneca recently gave details of the **interim safety and efficacy data** involving 131 COVID-19 cases in the phase-3 trials in the U.K. and Brazil. But details of the trials in India are not out yet.

Why fast tracking of vaccine authorization is needed?

- The unprecedented speed in taking the **vaccine from the development stage to approval process** in less than a year is remarkable but also necessitated by the toll the virus has taken on lives and livelihoods.
- To reduce mortality and morbidity.

What are the concerns associated with authorization of vaccines?

- **Regulatory bodies under pressure:** to **fast-track** the entire process.
- **Lack of transparency:** Opaqueness about vaccine safety and efficacy does no good in gaining people's confidence and willingness to get vaccinated.
 - For example, Moderna, Pfizer and AstraZeneca took the extraordinary step of publicly sharing the trial protocol, the time points at which interim analysis of phase-3 trial in India will be carried out for safety and efficacy is unclear.
- **No checks:** the U.S. FDA has clearly spelt out at least 50% efficacy and stipulated a median follow-up duration of at least two months after completion of the full vaccination regimen to assess a vaccine's benefit-risk profile for emergency-use approval. However, no such conditions have been mentioned by the Indian regulatory agency. The phase-3 trial of Covishield began on September 21 and completed the enrolment on November 12.
- **Fear of side effects and vaccine hesitancy:** ineffective or unsafe vaccine is worse than not having one. A survey by the London-based Vaccine Confidence Project revealed that though the intent to get vaccinated was 87% in India, 34% respondents were worried about side-effects while 16% were concerned about fast-moving trials.

What needs to be done?

- Need to engage all stakeholders in a transparent manner at every stage and not by merely sharing guidelines regarding vaccine safety with the States.
- It is also important that those seeking emergency-use authorisation share the safety and efficacy data immediately.

25. Mismatch between the supply and demand

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- GS 3 - Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country, – different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.

Context- Policies designed for an India on the edge of starvation don't fit the India of today.

What is the history of supply and demand of wheat crop in India?

The genesis of the current state of affairs stems from policies initiated over half a century ago-

1. **Starvation period-** It dates from the 1960s, when India that did not grow enough to feed itself and had to rely upon imports under PL-480 as aid from the US.
2. **New PDS and government policy-** Then, Indian policymakers shifted to setting a minimum support price.
 - Wheat-paddy crop rotation was encouraged in Punjab and Haryana to make India self-sufficient in food grain production.
 - The system guarantees farmers a set price for their output, while their inputs - water, power, fertilizer, seeds - are free or subsidized.
 - Wheat is then stored in the warehouses of the state-controlled Food Corporation of India and distributed at a subsidized price to the population.
3. **Policy result** was a resounding success for the production and procurement of rice and wheat, which was the focus of the PDS and government policy
 - However, India produces too much grain, which is now rotting in government granaries.
4. In today's time, the subsidies for rice and wheat caused too few farmers to plant vegetables, which are subject to major price fluctuations.

How crop rotations can be beneficial for farmers and the challenges associated with that?

Rice wheat cycle- In Punjab and Haryana region

- Rice-wheat rotation by far the most value creating crop cycle.
- **Better varieties of rice** - superior basmati rice in the kharif season that have lower yield, lower water and nutrient requirement but are exportable and highly priced, could possibly be better crop options in the region.
- In the Rabi season wherein the only superior alternatives to wheat in the rice-wheat rotation are vegetables and higher qualities of wheat.
- However, the chances of success in wheat are lower.

What are the issues in current procurement policy?

1. **High incurred cost by the FCI-** Cost of procurement and distribution of food grain has increased manifold.
2. The quality of grains has been ignored.
3. There was no initiative for identifying high-quality wheat strains for increasing their production for local and foreign markets.

What is the way forward?

1. Shift production from normal rice to basmati and other exportable varieties and to give a boost to wheat for substituting rice via sooji, rava and noodles.
2. A boost for infrastructure to increase the production of vegetables in the wheat belt and its transport for the healthy growth of agriculture.
3. The government needs to reduce the institutional costs and move towards a more remunerative cropping pattern.
4. And must make transparent efforts to push exports consistently.

26. The state of farmers

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS-3- Agriculture

Context: While the farmers demand a repeal of the three new farm laws, the government insists the reforms are “farmer-friendly”.

What is the aim and impact of the new farm laws?

- **Aim of farm laws:** The farm laws seek to introduce the neoliberal notion of “choice” into the production and sale of agricultural produce through deregulation. It tries to give a push to private traders and agricultural corporations.
- **Impact on small farmers:** Small and marginal farmers, a section that constitutes 85 per cent of farm landholdings are likely to be worst hit, with the lowest bargaining power and highest level of precarity.

What are the problems faced by farmers?

- **The scale of land acquisition:** It has increased exponentially since the nineties, with the estimate for all displaced people up from approximately 25-30 million by 1990 to 60 million by 2004.
- **Policy framework:** A policy framework shaped by the needs of capital which needs land but not the people, creates a system that renders survival cultivators unnecessary or surplus to development initiatives of the state.
- **Survival cultivation:** Where many small and marginal farmers engage in survival cultivation, sale of agricultural produce is limited to the need for cash or an assured surplus.

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- In 2018-19, the consumption of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium fertiliser in Maharashtra, UP, Assam and Jharkhand was 125.95 kg/hectare (ha), 170.09 kg/ha, 73.69 kg/ha and 59.79 kg/ha respectively (Agricultural Statistics at a Glance, 2019).
- **The state-wise scale of indebtedness of agricultural households:** The All-India Report on Agriculture Census 2010-11 shows the level of indebtedness to be 57.3 per cent in Maharashtra, 43.8 per cent in UP, 17.5 per cent in Assam and 28.9 per cent in Jharkhand.
 - These figures are representative of the increased cash dependence of agriculture in commercially significant states as Maharashtra and UP, and a significantly lower level of debt in states like Jharkhand and Assam.
- **Land arrangements:** Several informal land arrangements are being stripped away constantly, leaving subsistence peasants more dependent on cash for meeting everyday requirements of life and propelling them deeper into an unequal market that constantly reproduces their position at the margins.

Mention a few state policies that seeks to establish powers of state over land?

- **The new Land Acquisition Law 2013:** It has introduced significant changes from the colonial 1894 Law, it serves to firmly keep in place the principle of eminent domain by which the state retains excessive powers over land and, thereby, facilitates the process of land acquisition in the long run.
- **New strategy:** The constant expansion of forest lands is itself the latest strategy to bypass mandated procedures for land acquisition under the new Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013.
- **The latest Environmental Impact Assessment Draft Notification 2020:** It seeks to facilitate ease of doing business by clearing “obstacles” for businesses such that permissions are simpler to get and grievances harder to file.

Way forward

- For a healthy farm sector, the state must strengthen and protect the position of the cultivator.

27. AI moment in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Indigenization of Technology and Developing New Technology.

Context: The importance of AI economy to India

What is the significance of AI economy to India?

- Data and AI services are expected to help boost India’s economic growth in a big way. For example, according to NASSCOM, data and AI will contribute \$450 billion-\$500 billion to India’s GDP by 2025, which is around 10% of the government’s aspiration of a \$5 trillion economy.
- With more opportunities created, there will be a net positive effect on employment generation. For example, it is estimated to create over 20 million technical roles.
- AI can create niche solutions to specific problems that banks and other service providers are deploying, such as speeding up loan application processing or improving customer service.
- it can provide solutions for better governance and social impact. For example, during the lockdown, the Telangana police used AI-enabled automated number plate recognition software to catch violations.

What are the prospects for India?

- India has a thriving AI start-up ecosystem with cutting-edge solutions being developed in areas such as cancer screening, smart farming and conversational AI for the use of enterprises.
- Our skilled human resource in AI/ML is fast growing, with over 5,00,000 people working on these technologies at present.

What are the steps taken to Promote use of AI in India?

- NITI Aayog's national strategy for AI envisages 'AI for all' for inclusive growth, and identifies healthcare, agriculture, education, smart cities and infrastructure, and smart mobility and transportation as focus areas for AI-led solutions for social impact.
- The Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra governments, among others, have announced policies and strategies for AI adoption.
- Technology companies have established AI centres of excellence to create solutions for global clients.

What needs to be done?

- **Skill Development:** In 2019, we nearly doubled our AI workforce to 72,000 from 40,000, however the demand continues to outpace the supply. That means our efforts to develop talent must pick up speed.
- **Data usage policy:** We need a robust legal framework that governs data and serves as the base for the ethical use of AI.
- **Speed up Digitalization process:** though the use of digital technologies has increased, the level of digitisation continues to be low. This poses a big challenge for organisations in finding the right amount of training data to run AI/ML algorithms, which in turn affects the accuracy of the results.
- **Clean Data sets:** Organisations need to invest in data management frameworks that will clean their data before they are analysed, thus vastly improving the outcomes of AI models.

The future for AI looks promising but to convert the potential into reality, India will need better strategies around talent development, stronger policies for data usage and governance, and more investments in creating a technology infrastructure that can truly leverage AI.

28. The dangers of misplaced optimism

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Context: The government's economic recovery hype is off track and this is not a time for fiscal conservatism.

What is current economic scenario?

- India's economy contracted by 7.5% in the second quarter of financial year 2020-21 was, as news, both good and bad.
- It is far lower than the 23.9% contraction registered in the first quarter of this financial year.
- 7.5% second quarter contraction is high with most similarly placed countries.
- Relaxation of lockdown restrictions during that quarter has not ensured automatic recovery.

What is government stance?

- Based on the evidence, the Finance Ministry's **Monthly Economic Report**, for November, speaks of a **V-shaped recovery** reflective of "the resilience and robustness of the Indian economy".

Why slowdown in contraction is not sign of recovery?

- **Lockdown has affected employment, income and demand:**
 - Now since lockdown are relaxed, production must rise, not just to meet demands backed by the available purchasing power but also to restore inventories to normal levels across the distribution chain.
 - Demand must return to and rise above pre-crisis levels for **production to recover and grow**.
- **Burden on economy:** The lockdown increased indebtedness and the bankruptcies. Lockdown induced affects are to be felt well after restrictions are relaxed.
- **Decline in consumption:** the decline in private final consumption expenditure at constant prices, which accounts for 56% of GDP, has come down but still remains high.
- **Lack of consumer confidence:** net incomes and consumer confidence are not at levels that can even restore last year's levels.
- **Less recovery in investment:** the decline in fixed capital formation has fallen from a high minus 47% in the first quarter to minus 7% in the second, however, investment is still falling year-on-year.
- **Half-hearted stimulus:** Government Final Consumption Expenditure, which rose by 10% in the first half of 2019-20, relative to the corresponding period of the previous year, declined by 4% in the first half of 2020-21.

What government should do?

- **Shun fiscal conservatism:** Lockdowns limit production and result in a rundown of inventories.
- **Government's responsibility:** the tasks of providing safety nets, reviving employment and spurring demand become crucial. The market cannot deliver on those fronts that is why state action facilitated by substantially enhanced expenditure is crucial.
- **Increase borrowing:** since government revenues shrink during a recession expenditure need to be funded by borrowing.
- **GDP movements:** need to understand the dynamic of the post-COVID-19 economy.
- **Increase allocations for welfare expenditures:** for example, subsidised food to minimal guaranteed employment.

What are the impacts on States?

- **Squeezing expenditure at the State level:** As per Office of the Controller General of Accounts, the total expenditure of the central government stood at 55% of what was provided for in the Budget for 2020-21, which was woefully inadequate even for normal times.
- **Shortfall in spending:** The shortfall in spending was sharper in the case of capital expenditure, with 48% of that budgeted being spent over April to October. The corresponding figure for 2019-20 was 60%.
- **Fall in GST revenues:** the government has decided not to compensate for the shortfall, as promised under the GST regime.

29. Overestimate GDP growth data

Source-**The Hindu**

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

Context- The higher growth rate of the economy actually masks the decline in the unorganized sector.

What in the news-

The second quarter GDP contracted at a slower pace of 7.5 per cent compared to a massive 23.9 per cent in the first quarter of the current fiscal.

- The economy's performance between July and September when lockdown restrictions were eased is better than most rating agencies and analysts anticipated.

Why GDP data should not be taken as sustainable recovery?

1. **The source of information is not reliable-** Very little up-to-date primary information from factories and offices is available for the estimation.
 - The data usually used to project quarterly growth rates were not available and so "some other data sources" were used.
 - The method of calculation of quarterly growth rates is inaccurate. It was implicit in the method of estimation that this component could be proxied by the data from the organized sectors of the economy.
2. **Pent up demand-** The healthy recovery in the second quarter represents meeting the pent-up demand after the 'Unlock' phase started in June.

How the proportionality between the unorganized and organized sectors disrupted?

1. **Due to demonetization-** The cash shortage impacted unorganized sectors far more than the organized sector.
 - The non-agriculture unorganized sector was disproportionately impacted by demonetization, as this sector consists of tiny units that work with cash.
2. **Implementation of the GST-** The GST system favoured the organized sector, and demand shifted from the unorganized sector to the organized sector.

Why quarterly growth numbers are not robust?

1. Collected data limited to organized sector only.
 - The growth of the economy has been much less than that what is implied by the official GDP numbers.
 - While trade has declined, data will indicate growth since it is available only from e-commerce and big stores [organized sector].
 - If the data are taken only from the larger units, the decline of 20% to 30% will not be captured.
 - **Not all data are collected-** The organized sector was able to restart business but not the unorganized sector due to low demand for the produce of unorganized sectors

Way forward-

- The quarterly growth numbers are not robust.
- It is difficult to predict that whether the economy is recovering or not, as the collected data was non-comparable.

30. Farm laws alter bargaining landscape

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Context: The present farm laws alter the bargaining landscape in favour of the corporate players to the detriment of the farmers.

What is current issue with farm laws?

- The three recently enacted farm laws assented have led to a showdown between the peasantry and the Union government.
- No consultation undertaken by the central government at the time of promulgating the ordinances and then pushing the bills.
- Despite repeated demands of the oppositions to refer the farm bills to the standing/select committee for reconsideration and necessary consultation with all stakeholders.
- Present dispensation believes that its shock-and-awe methods are to be the main medium of governance.
- The Union government has **bypassed the federal structure** by legislating on subjects that exclusively fall within the **domain of the state government** under the state list of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.

What are the salient features of the bill?

- **Reducing role of MSP:** The farm laws open the field to an alternate set of markets/private yards, where the buyer will have **no statutory obligation** to pay the minimum support price (MSP).
- **No fee:** Markets/private yards will not be charged any market fee/levy. The agricultural sector will see the gradual shifting of trade from the APMC mandis to these private yards.
- **Reduce APMC role:** The **shifting of trade to avoid payment of any levy/market fee** by private players and the Food Corporation of India (FCI) will eventually witness the redundancy of the APMC mandis, leaving the farmers at the mercy of the corporate sharks.
- **Exclude the jurisdiction of the civil court:** It will leave the farmers remediless and with no independent medium of dispute redressal mechanism. The farm laws empower the Sub-Divisional Authority (executive) to adjudicate on disputes between the farmers and traders.
- **Increased bureaucracy:** The increased bureaucratic control over the adjudication of disputes between the farmers and corporate players will open the floodgates for corruption and rent-seeking.

How the bills are anti-farmers?

- There are several pro-corporate and perceived anti-farmer provisions in the farm laws.
- The global experience across agricultural markets demonstrates that corporatisation of agriculture without a concomitant security net in the form of an assured payment guarantee to the farmers results in the exploitation of farmers at the hands of big business.
- The primary cause for concern is the systematic dismantling of the **APMC mandis** which have stood the test of time and have provided farmers the remuneration to keep themselves afloat.

What needs to be done?

- The legality of laws should be expeditiously decided by the Supreme Court to halt the central government's repeated encroachment on states' rights.
- There is **need of robust system to annually re-calculate the MSP** keeping in mind the rising input costs of diesel, fertilisers, etc to make farming a viable and lucrative vocation.
- A statutory regulator in the field of agriculture akin to regulators in other fields would fill the gap to address information access and market distortions.

The three legislative nails in the farmer's aspirations might lead to a bitter harvest.

31. Five years after Paris

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS-3- Environment

Context: The Climate Ambition Summit, co-hosted by the UK, France and the UN, on the fifth anniversary of the 2015 Paris Agreement, comes at the end of a dreadful year.

What is the climatic status of nations, 5 years after Paris agreement?

- **GHGs:** Greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere are at record levels, with the global lockdowns only having resulted in a temporary 4.2–7.5 per cent reduction in GHGs.
- **National contributions:** All states have submitted their national contributions to diminish and adapt to climate change.
 - These contributions are radically insufficient to reach the “well below 2 degrees Celsius” limit and are even further from the “1.5 degrees Celsius” temperature limit identified in the Paris Agreement.
- **Scaling up national targets:** The logic of the Paris Agreement relied on scaling up of national targets over time to bridge the gap. The first of these moments for scaling up is 2020.
 - Although 151 states have indicated that they will submit stronger targets before December 31, only 13 of them, covering 2.4 per cent of global emissions, have submitted such targets.
 - Many are expected to submit their updated contributions or make other pledges at the Climate Ambition Summit.
- **Net zero targets:** All G-7 states (except the US) and 11 G20 members have mid-century (2050 or 2060) net zero targets (carbon dioxide or other GHGs). These include Argentina, Mexico, UK, Japan, Canada, Germany, France, the Republic of Korea, Italy, China, and the EU.

Net zero targets need to be subject to credibility, accountability and fairness checks before being applauded. Discuss

- **The credibility check:** It is crucial for updated national contributions to reflect targets and actions in 2030 that will take these states to their 2050 or 2060 net zero target.
 - The IPCC 1.5 degrees Celsius Report indicated that to stay within a reasonable chance of achieving 1.5 degrees Celsius, global carbon dioxide emissions have to fall by 45 per cent from the 2010 levels by 2030.
 - There is a significant “overshoot” in terms of GHGs in the short and medium-term, and a reliance on negative emissions technologies to get there in the long-term.

- **The accountability check:** accountability under the Paris Agreement is limited. States are not obliged to achieve their self-selected targets. There is no mechanism to review the adequacy of individual contributions.
 - The most commonly used metric by states (110 of them) is that their emissions are a “small share of global emissions”.
 - The transparency framework does not contain a robust review function, and the compliance committee is facilitative and limited to ensuring compliance with a short list of binding procedural obligations.
 - Accountability has thus far been generated by non-state actors outside the UN regime rather than in the regime.
- **The fairness check:** The issue of equity and fairness, side-stepped in the Paris Agreement, is emerging in climate litigation before national and regional courts.
 - “Fair shares” are also an issue in the ongoing case filed by six Portuguese youngsters, including two children, in the European Court of Human Rights against 33 European states for inadequate climate action.
 - Issues of fairness and justice, both between and within generations, are “unavoidable”.

Way forward

- Net zero pledges need to be credible, accountable and fair to get us to a stable climate. All states, including India, can pledge actions that are credible, accountable and fair.
- Credible short-term commitments, with a clear pathway to medium-term decarbonisation, that take into account the multiple challenges states face, such as on air pollution, and development, might well be the more defensible choice for some.

32. Protest Against Farm Bills

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Context: A minuscule minority of farmers is protesting against the farm laws. They don't want an end to the system that has benefited them.

Background

- The creation of the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) came into existence almost 150 years ago to feed the colonial master's raw cotton for their Manchester mills.
- The farmers were forced to sell to the masters in a regulated market whose regulation was set by, the colonial masters.
- The corrosive monopoly power held by the APMCs has been recognised by almost all political parties and farmer unions. For example, the Bharat Kisan Union took out a protest in 2008 arguing for the right of farmers to sell produce to corporates.
- Till now, Farmers are forced to sell their marketable produce only through a mandi regulated by the government.
- However, the new Farm bills allows the farmer to sell through the APMC, and to sell outside the APMC.

Why the protest for farm bills is skeptical?

- **Only Fraction of Farmers rely on APMC:** The government procures all of its food through APMCs but only about 6 per cent of the farmers in India sell through the APMCs to the government.

- **Serves the Interest of few states only:** Those 6 per cent are all large farmers, primarily residing in the two states of Punjab and Haryana. These two states typically account for close to 60 per cent of wheat procurement and close to a third of rice procurement.
- **Leakages in distribution:** The government procures from farmers in order to re-distribute the food via ration shops to the bottom two-thirds of the population. But there are leakages. For example, former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1985 stated that only 15 per cent of the food procured by the government reached the poor.

Why Farm Bills are needed?

- Neither APMC, nor subsidies, has resulted in higher output growth in Punjab-Haryana, the pioneers of the Green Revolution.
- Subsidised electricity to farmers has destroyed the water table, the extensive use of fertiliser has destroyed the environment.
- None of the Developing and Developed countries prohibit an individual farmer from selling their produce in the market.
- It does not serve the Interest of very small and small farmers in India.
- Unlike the Industries which are freed from regulation agriculture was not freed or thereafter, until now.

33. Government policies - harder to implement

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- GS 3 - Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

Context- The government's dismissal of the concerns of farmers and workers with bold reforms is not only bad for democracy, it reduces quality of policies and also makes them harder to implement.

What is the core problem in agriculture sector in India?

Largest source of livelihood - there are too many people employed in agriculture.

- The agriculture sector contributes 17 per cent of India's GDP. As per estimate, about 57 per cent of the working population is engaged in agriculture.
- 70 percent of its rural households still depend primarily on agriculture for their livelihood.

Possible solution-

- **Increase productivity-** India needs to shift from basic farming to more efficient, sustainable, productive farming.
 - More technology and automation will be required to improve productivity.
- **Reduce the number of employed-** The agriculture sector should employ only 17 per cent of the workforce as to become more productive like other sectors.
- India must figure out a way to provide meaningful employment to hundreds of millions of people outside agriculture.

What are the issues with new farms and labour laws?

A. Issues in new Farm reforms-

1. Agriculture is a state subject and regulation of agri-markets is very much in the domain of the states. Yet states have not been consulted on changes in agriculture laws.

2. Deregulation- The new farm laws that aim to double farmers' income in two years by deregulating agricultural markets may further widen the inequalities in the sector,

- The deregulation of Bihar's APMC led to no significant changes.
- These changes will affect the small farmers the most because their low output does not allow them any bargaining power.

B. Issues in new Farm reforms-

- 1. Worker's right of association in unions-** In the labour reforms underway, it is the dilution of this fundamental right of collective representation that bodes badly for India's workers
2. The rights of the trade union to go on a lightning strike is sought to be curtailed heavily.

Therefore, new farm and labour reforms laws are the examples of diminishing democracy in India.

What are the set of reforms required to make India's growth more inclusive?

1. Policymakers must listen to the institutions that represent small people — associations and unions of farmers, informal workers and small enterprises.
- 2. Formation of cooperatives of producers and workers-** By aggregating the small into larger-scale enterprises.
 - Government regulations must encourage the formation of strong cooperatives, and improve the ease of doing business.
3. Indian agriculture marketing reforms should derive inspiration from Barbara Harriss-White, a scholar of India's agricultural markets, who once observed, "deregulated imperfect markets may become more, not less, imperfect than regulated imperfect markets.

Way forward-

- Policymaker needs acknowledge public fears and reassure people, especially in periods of uncertainty.
- The concept of democracy should not be reduced to elections and political parties. Democracy is also a process of listening to all stakeholders.

34. Farmer-govt Talks

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS-3- Agriculture

Context: Government has offered significant concessions and farmers must not turn their back on a solution.

More on news:

- Government has agreed to permit state governments to impose the cesses/fee charged in APMC (agricultural produce market committee) mandis including trades happening outside their boundaries.
- **The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act:** It not only provided for sale and purchase of agri-commodities in private mandis, direct collection centres, electronic platforms and other alternative markets, but also exempted such transactions from any APMC imposts.

What amendments in the law are offered by the government to the farmers?

- **Taxes in alternative markets:** States can extend the rates applicable in APMC mandis to the new alternative markets, the Modi government has shown willingness to strike down a key provision (Section 6) of its law.

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- **Option to reach courts:** They include giving farmers the option to approach regular courts in the event of disputes arising from transactions (the current resolution mechanism is limited to sub-divisional and district-level authorities)
 - Registration of traders in non-APMC markets by state governments (the existing law requires them to simply have a permanent account number).
- **Little discussions:** The amendments required in their case could well have been introduced during informed discussions in Parliament, which did not take place due to the government's inflexibility.
- **Government on farmer pressure:** The fact that the same government isn't hostile today to effectively adapt a progressive legislation, which undoes the monopoly of APMCs and opens up new marketing avenues for crops, is a measure of how much it has had to bend to farmer pressure.

What is the stance of farmers?

- **Rollback the three laws:** The farmer unions have not just rejected the government's proposals on extending to a not-legally-binding "written assurance" on continuance of the present minimum support price-based procurement system but are demanding a total rollback of all the three laws.
 - Despite the other two Acts (which significantly do away with stockholding restrictions on agri-produce and enable contract cultivation) having no provisions that can be termed anti-farmer.

Way forward

- Farmers, if anything, benefit from traders being able to buy and stock without limit, just as a legal framework for contract contraction (which is anyway voluntary) is only in their interest.
- The unions have already won a moral victory by forcing the government to negotiate on their terms. They have also, perhaps, gained public sympathy through their dignified and non-violent conduct even in the face of intimidation.

35. Innovations to curb air pollution

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- GS 3 - Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Context- It is important to have systemic changes at the policy and strategy levels to curb air pollution in India.

Why air quality monitoring is essential?

Monitoring helps in assessing the level of pollution in relation to the ambient air quality standards. Robust monitoring helps to guard against extreme events by alerting people and initiate action.

- There are more than 250 continuous ambient air quality monitoring stations and more than 800 ambient air quality monitoring stations operating across the country.

What are the Government initiatives to combat air pollution?

1. **Union Budget 2020-21** allocated Rs.4400 crore for cities having populations above one million to formulating and implementing plans for ensuring cleaner air.
2. **Delhi-NCR air quality commission-** A new ordinance to form a commission for air-quality management in the National Capital Region (NCR) and adjoining areas.

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- This erases all other authorities that were set up under judicial and administrative orders, seeks to limit the role of the judiciary and creates a supra-centralized framework for air-quality management in the region.
3. The government has taken various other initiatives to address the issues related to air pollution such as the **National Clean Air Program, the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana** and the **Bharat Stage-VI (BS-VI) emission norms**.

However, these measures will have a major impact in the long term. India needs innovations to deliver on the promise of cleaner air in the immediate future.

What are the new innovations to curb air pollution?

1. **PUSA bio-decomposer**- an effective way to prevent stubble burning.
 - Pusa bio-decomposer is a solution developed by the scientists at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, Pusa, which can turn crop residue into manure in 15 to 20 days and therefore, can prevent stubble burning.
2. **Filter-less retrofit device**- for cutting particulate matter at source in industries and vehicles.
3. A nature-based solution to amplify air purification through breathing roots technology for improving indoor air quality.
4. Geospatial technology and AI- To upgrade capacities to identify, monitor, regulate and mitigate air pollution hotspots.

Example –

The Geo-AI platform for brick kilns - is supporting environment regulators to identify non-complaint brick kilns from space.

- The platform has already mapped over 37,000 brick manufacturing units across the Indo-Gangetic plains.

What else need to be done to curb air pollution?

1. **Create an innovation framework**- Government should provide an enabling ecosystem for innovations to address context-specific air pollution challenges and resources need to be allocated to support testing, certifying and scaling of innovative solutions.
2. **Mobilize private sector participation** - Businesses and enterprises need to innovate their operations and functioning to reduce carbon footprint.

What is the way forward?

- The new budgetary step, which is also a tacit political acknowledgement of the public health emergency, has to gather momentum to step up fiscal solutions for killer air.
- India needs context-specific innovations not only in the technological but also in the economic, social, legal, educational, political and institutional domains to mitigate the challenges of air pollution.
- The private sector has strong potential to develop commercially viable products to combat air pollution and boost the innovation ecosystem.

36. Farm and Banking Reform

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Context: There is some risk necessary to reform Banking and Agriculture sector.

What are the recently announced reforms in Farming and Banking sector?

- The three farm bills legislated by the government recently, which are in the early stages of implementation.
- The second is a proposal by RBI to let corporates/industry own banks.

Can MSP ensure farm income and Agri-growth?

- **No guarantee of income:** Farmers don't get a remunerative price for their products, with the exception of a minority whose produce, mostly wheat and rice, is covered by the Minimum Support Price policy.
- **Prevalence of middlemen:** Most farmers toil on tiny, suboptimal acreage and have no bargaining power vis-vis the APMC middlemen. Choice in buyers gives them some leeway to bargain for a better price.
- **MSP is not a guarantee:** even those who get MSP are suffering from a fast depletion of the water table.
- **Excessive use of pesticides/fertilisers due to faulty policy:** the high prevalence of cancer in rural parts of Punjab and a higher cost of other foods like vegetables and fruits which are in short supply since everyone who can is planting MSP crops.
- **Post-harvest loss:** every year a lot of wheat and rice rots in the Food Corporation of India's limited warehouses.

What do the laws propose to do?

- **End the monopoly of APMC mandis** where farmers had to compulsorily sell their produce.
- End limits on stock-keeping and **allow contract farming** by the private sector.

What is immediate response of common people?

- The new farm laws have brought the farmers of Punjab and other parts of north India to the streets of Delhi.
- The volume of protest tells us that some of us are afraid of change and unable to see what may be good for all of us a decade from now.
- Farmers will no longer get a remunerative price for their produce

How future will be different for Agriculture?

- Growth in demand for non-cereal foods, like vegetables, fruits and proteins will outstrip demand for cereals.
- Remunerative price for farmers cannot be at the expense of rampant food inflation for the consumer.

What can be the possible consequences if industries house own banks?

- It will channel lending from that bank to its own business at the expense of better, more efficient fund allocation.
- It will be much easier for regulators to track any lending to connected entities than it is for them to track the unofficial connectedness, which has led to the NPA problem.

What is the way ahead?

- Balance the interests of farmers and consumers.
- Bring policy change as the farm reforms are already 10 years late.
- Industry houses are the most obvious source of domestic capital to build such banks.

37. Hazardous ideas for Himalayas

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS-3- Environment

Context: China's major hydropower project as a part of its 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), on the Yarlung Zangbo River, in Médog County in Tibet.

More on news:

- The hydropower generation station is expected to provide 300 billion kWh of electricity annually. The Chinese authorities say the project will help the country realise its goal of reaching a carbon emission peak before 2030 and carbon neutrality before 2060.
- Indian counterparts were quick to restate their plans to dam the Himalayas on this side of the border. India is reportedly considering a 10-GW hydropower project in an eastern State.

What are the various misadventures that can happen due to building of hydropower dams?

- **Unviability of dams:** Both countries ignore how unviable such 'super' dams projects are, given that they are being planned in an area that is geologically unstable.
- **Competing dams:** Over the past 20 years, both China and India have been competing with each other to build hydroelectric dams in this ecologically fragile and seismically vulnerable area.
 - There are two hydropower projects in the works in Arunachal Pradesh on the tributaries of the Brahmaputra: the 600 MW Kameng project on the Bichom and Tenga Rivers and the 2,000 MW Subansiri Lower Hydroelectricity Project.
 - China has already completed 11 out of 55 projects that are planned for the Tibetan region.
- **Overestimating economic potential:** In executing these hydroelectric projects, the two countries have overestimated their economic potential and grossly underestimated the earthquake vulnerability of the region.
- **Earthquakes in the region:** High seismic zones coincide with areas of high population concentration in the Himalayan region where landslides and glacial lake outburst floods are common.
 - About 15% of the great earthquakes of the 20th century occurred in the Himalayan region. The northeast Himalayan bend has experienced several large earthquakes of magnitude 7 and above in the last 100 years, more than the share from other parts of the Himalayas.
 - The 2015 Gorkha earthquake of magnitude 7.8 in central Nepal resulted in huge losses in the hydropower sector. Nepal lost about 20% of its hydropower capacity consequent to the earthquake.
- **Landslides:** The main mechanisms that contributed to the vulnerability of hydropower projects were found to be landslides, which depend on the intensity of seismic ground shaking and slope gradients.
 - Heavy siltation from giant landslides expected in the project sites will severely reduce the water-holding capacity and life expectancy of such dams.
 - Even without earthquakes, the steep slopes made of soft rocks are bound to slide due to deforestation and road-building.

What can be done?

- **Nature reserve:** In recent years, the Himalayas have seen the highest rate of deforestation and land use changes. The upper Himalayas should be converted into a nature reserve by an international agreement.
- **Himalayan river commission:** The possibility of a Himalayan River Commission involving all the headwater and downstream countries needs to be explored.

Way forward

- India and China, the major players in the region, would be well advised to disengage from military adventurism and seek ways of transforming this 'roof of the world' into a natural reserve for the sake of humanity. Carbon neutrality should not be at the expense of the environment.

38. Modernise India's archaic tax laws

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS3: Inclusive Growth and issues arising from it.

Context: Need to modernise India's archaic tax laws.

Background:

- The Income Tax Act was framed in 1961 and has been amended several times.
- The government constituted the Akhilesh Ranjan Task Force to suggest reforms to the Income Tax Act.
- The report has been submitted to the government but has not yet been made public.

People who gained during the Pandemic?

- **India's super rich:** Between January and June 2020, 85 new Indians were added to the list of High Net worth Individuals (with a net worth of more than \$50 million).
- **Stock dealers:** When the Indian GDP was contracting, some stocks surged to phenomenal heights there by benefitting those dealing in stock exchanges.
- **The corporate houses, Internet service providers, laptop makers and scientists** engaged in medical research also gained.
- **The manufacturers of masks and Personal Protective Equipment** also gained during the pandemic

What are the problems in taxation?

- **Implementation of Equalisation Levy:** Through Digitalisation and e-commerce multilateral corporates have found an easy way to make big money. However, the tax administration is struggling with the implementation of the equalisation levy.
- **Implementation of Anti profiteering rules under GST:** As per the Goods and Services Tax (GST) law, any reduction in the rate of tax on the supply of goods or services has to be passed on to the consumer by way of commensurate reduction in prices. Companies are getting benefited from GST rate reduction without passing on the benefits to the end consumers.
- **Tax evasion:** Tax avoidance by global web companies has become acute because of Digitalisation.
- **Tax dispute settlement:** The International Court of Arbitration ruled that the Indian government's move to seek taxes from Vodafone using retrospective legislation was against the fairness principle.

What can be done?

- Digital taxation has to be amended in accordance with the UN Model Convention. There is need for India to act in sync with the OECD.
- The Anti-Profitereing Rules have to be implemented vigorously wherever there is reduction in the tax rate on any commodity or service
- Need to find a suitable mechanism to negotiate settlement through mediation or conciliation or, if necessary, arbitration in connection with tax disputes between the tax-paying companies and the Central Board of Direct Taxes.

Our archaic laws should be modernised and made compatible with international tax laws. The suggestions made by Akhilesh Ranjan Task Force needs to be implemented after wide consultation.

39. Agri model

Source: The Indian Express

Syllabus: GS-3- Agriculture

Context: The next Green Revolution 2.0 will come through in-depth research, better investment opportunities and access to the market.

What led to the green revolution?

- **Scarcity of grain:** After the China war, when India was standing at the cusp of economic destruction, Pakistan attacked India. There was an acute scarcity of food grains in the country.
- **Change in farm sector:** Scientist Norman Borlaug brought a revolutionary change in the farm sector in Mexico with his semi-dwarf varieties of rice and wheat. Borlaug analysed the farm sector in Punjab and concluded that production can be doubled.
- **Beginning of green revolution:** Subramaniam promised the farmers that if they implement the new farming techniques, the central government will compensate them. This scheme was initially implemented in around 150 farm holdings with the assistance of Punjab Agriculture University, Ludhiana.
 - The Green Revolution worked on three fronts: better seeds, irrigation and optimum use of fertilisers.

The new laws have set the tone for second green revolution. Discuss.

- **For the rich farmers of Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh:** Things are different; but for crores of small landholders in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha, etc., it is now possible to feed their families.
- **Landholdings in many states have shrunk:** In eastern UP, the cultivators are largely marginal farmers now.
 - Farmers with less than an acre of arable land are identified as marginal farmers.
 - Small farmers are those with landholdings between 1 acre and 2.5 acres.
 - It is difficult for a farming family to sustain themselves with just an acre of arable land. The farmer will have to explore other avenues to improve his financial position.
- **Agrarian transition development:** The latest farm policy reforms of the government are also called agrarian transition development and were implemented in Europe and the US early on. Today, around 45 per cent of the country's workforce is involved in agriculture.
- **Agriculture after independence:** When India attained Independence, the contribution of agriculture to the country's GDP was huge, which today has come

down to around 15 per cent. The old model has been a drag on the economy as well as the villages.

- **Develop models of contract farming:** It is an avenue to develop an organised corporate model of agriculture in the country. This will speed up urbanisation in the villages and the development of industries and the service sector there.
 - These sectors will be able to absorb the excess workforce in the farm sector.
- **Structure and potential of contract farming:** For instance, if a village has a thousand farmers who have an acre of arable land, then, through contract farming, someone can sow crops on the entire 1,000 acres of land.
 - The land continues to belong to the farmer, while on the other hand, he/she will earn the profit from the sale of produce generated from his/her part of the landholding. This also frees him/her to pursue other employment opportunities.

Way forward

- **The next revolution:** Green Revolution 2.0 will come through in-depth research, better investment opportunities and access to the market. The three farm laws are a revolutionary step in that direction.

40. Income support to mitigate income losses

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

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

Context- The government's unusual reluctance in providing adequate support to the economy has purportedly been because of the lack of fiscal space.

Is India in a technical recession?

Technical recession- The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) in the US defines a technical recession to be in progress when real GDP has declined for at least two consecutive quarters.

- However, the growth rate is measured on a quarter-over-quarter, not year-ago, basis.

According to JP Morgan's estimates – On quarterly basis, India's GDP plunged 25 per cent in 2Q20 and recovered by 21 per cent in 3Q20.

- This implies that India did not suffer two consecutive quarters of negative growth.
- Therefore, India is not in a technical recession.

What is RBI's survey suggests to real GDP growth?

RBI latest survey of professional forecasters (SPF) has forecast that real GDP is expected to recover in FY22 to 12 percent from -9 percent in FY21.

- This implies that six quarters from now it will still be about 7 per cent below the pre-pandemic path, or \$300-billion-a-year of **income losses** across two years.
- **Concern-** This can cause great damage to household and SME balance sheets, to income inequality, to poverty, and to women's employment

What are the issues with government policy?

1. **No income support-** The income loss could have been mitigated by budgetary income support. However, the government chose not to provide this.
 - Government consumption declined 22 per cent on a quarterly basis in 3Q.
2. **Limited support to the domestic economy** - Despite the apparent lack of fiscal space at home, the RBI has been funding other countries' fiscal deficits.

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- RBI invested almost 3 per cent of GDP in foreign assets just in the first half of this fiscal year.
3. **India's huge current account surplus is a bane**- This reflected not economic strength but an economy imploding so much faster than others that India's demand for imports fell faster than foreign demand for Indian exports.
 4. **Ongoing recovery led by capital than wages** - Indian companies reported a decline in sales. However, operating profits growth was in the double digits. Net profits grew even faster. Large firms achieved this by slashing costs.
 - A recovery led by profits will not lead to higher investment demand as long as there is significant excess capacity in many parts of the Indian economy.
 - As far as the labour market goes, unemployment has dropped below pre-covid levels, but that is partly because of a decrease in the labour participation rate.

What is the way forward?

Government needs to provide extensive income support to mitigate the income losses due to pandemic.

- Government needs to be ensured that the recovery is not hamstrung by damaged household and SME balance sheets because of the extended loss of wages and incomes.
- Infrastructure spending and reforms are critical to sustain medium-term growth, neither can boost near-term demand.

41. India's retail inflation

Source- [The Hindu](#)

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

Context- Retail inflation showed signs of easing in November, led by easing prices of some food items.

More in news-

Consumer Price Index inflation stood at 6.93% in November 2020 compared to 7.61% in October, according to data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, though it remained above the comfort level of the Reserve Bank.

What are the reasons for decline in CPI inflation?

1. The movement in retail inflation is broadly driven by the movement in food and beverage inflation which has 46 per cent weight in the consumer price index.
 - Within the food items, the inflation declined for vegetables to 15.63%, cereals and products 2.32%, meat and fish 16.67% and milk and products 4.98%.
2. Inflation in the key transport and communication category that includes petrol and diesel eased by a marginal 10 basis points to 11.06%.
3. The inflation for housing eased to 3.19%, while that for miscellaneous items was flat at 6.94% in November 2020.
 - Within the miscellaneous items, personal care and effects 11.97%, recreation and amusement 4.57%.

What are the areas of concern for RBI?

1. Inflation remained above the comfort level of the RBI-

- Out of the food basket of 12 items, inflation still remained in the double digits in the case of six.

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- Key protein sources including pulses, eggs and meat and fish continued to register worryingly high levels of inflation.
- 2. Worrying high transportation cost-** With oil marketing companies continuing to raise pump prices of these crucial transportation fuels, it is hard to foresee any further appreciable softening in food prices in December.
- This put the RBI's forecast for average fiscal third-quarter inflation of 6.8% in jeopardy.

Disrupted supply chain logistics, higher operational and labour costs, higher administrative fuel costs partly contribute to the upward inflation trajectory in recent months.

What is the way forward?

- Policymakers must guard against easing vigilance on prices while considering growth-supportive measures.
- Price stability must remain the monetary authority's primary target.
- The decline in the CPI inflation print in Nov 2020 to 6.93 per cent from 7.61 per cent in Oct 2020 has definitely come as a relief to the bond markets.

42. Vaccine policy

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS-3- S and T

Context: Recently unveiled India's COVID-19 vaccine policy, should make adequate allowances for ground realities.

What is India's plan on vaccinating people?

- **Strategy to slow the virus spread:** With a definitive cure not yet available for COVID-19, vaccines present the world with the best strategy to slow the virus down.
- **India's plan:** The U.K. and the U.S. began vaccinating their people, India has announced its plan and proposed line-up for COVID-19 vaccination.
 - **Priority population:** As per the government's strategy, the vaccination is to be given first to health-care workers and then to people over the age of 50, with those over 60 given priority, based on the situation. This will amount to about 30 crore people.
 - **Verifying document:** The voters' list for the Lok Sabha and Assembly election polls has been set as the verifying document for the process.
 - **Co-WIN:** A new digital platform, Co-WIN, will be used for COVID-19 vaccination delivery, and about 1.54 lakh Auxiliary Nurse Midwives working on Universal Immunisation Programmes will be roped in as vaccinators, with more such field staff to be mobilised in collaboration with the States.
 - **Cold chain systems:** Cold chain systems are to be strengthened across the country to deliver multiple doses.

What are the steps to be taken?

- **Perception management:** They need to clear the fog on vaccine safety and efficacy among the people.
- **Detailed plan:** A detailed plan must be prepared for vaccinating children and a breakdown of tasks down to the lowest governance rung, as counties in the U.S. have been doing.
 - Unless the latter is done, a proper estimate of the true challenges of administering vaccines in the field will not be available.

- **Tackling vaccine hesitancy:** Vaccine hesitancy is a reality and the only way to counter that is to be open and honest about adverse effects and make available relevant information in the public realm.
 - In the past, in some States, vaccination programmes have suffered temporarily because of misinformation about adverse events following shots.

Way forward

- In this case, a long-term follow up of all who receive the vaccine is absolutely essential. For, therein lies the assurance that everyone in the global line list is waiting for.

43. Punjab, Haryana need to look beyond MSP crops

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS3: Issues related to transport and marketing of agricultural produce, Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies

Context: States of Punjab, Haryana need to look beyond MSP crops

Background

- The states of Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, were an early adopter of Green Revolution technology.
- Owing to early adoption of green revolution technology, they became a major beneficiary of various policies adopted to spread modern agriculture technology in the country.
- It enabled India to move from a country facing a severe shortage of staple food to becoming a nation close to self-sufficiency in just 15 years.

What attracts farmers to rice-wheat crops?

- **MSP:** Procurement of marketed surplus of paddy (rice) and wheat at Minimum Support Price (MSP) completely insulated farmers against any price or market risks.
- **Steady income:** It also ensured a reasonably stable flow of income from these two crops. For example, per farmer agriculture incomes in Haryana and Punjab are two to three times more than the national average
- **Technological Advantage:** Over time, the technological advantage of rice and wheat over other competing crops further increased as public sector agriculture research and development allocated their best resources and scientific manpower to these two crops.
- **Other reasons:** Other public and private investments in water and land and input subsidies were the other favourable factors.

What are the adverse effects of Green revolution?

- Though initially, the progress and specialisation towards these two crops served the great national goal of securing the food security of the country.
- During the mid-1980s, some experts foresaw the serious consequences of continuation of paddy cultivation in the region and suggested diversification away from the rice-wheat system.
- This system had adverse effect on natural resources, the ecology, the environment, and fiscal resources.
- The policy of free power for pumping out groundwater for irrigation has resulted in depletion of groundwater resources. In the last decade, the water table has shown a decline in 84% observation wells in Punjab and 75% in Haryana.

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- The burning of paddy stubble and straw has become another serious environmental and health hazard in the whole region.
- Concerns have also been expressed about plateauing productivity and stagnant income from rice-wheat cultivation.
- However, the area under these two crops has only increased rather than fallen.

Why it needs to be changed?

- The prospects of further growth in agricultural income from the crop sector dominated by rice and wheat are very dim as the productivity of rice and wheat has reached a plateau.
- In India, the per capita intake of rice and wheat is declining and consumers' preference is shifting towards other foods. For example, the average spending by urban consumers is more on beverage and spices than on all cereals.
- Rice and wheat procurement in the country has more than doubled after 2006-07 and buffer stocks have swelled to an all-time high. It has created stress on the fiscal resources of the government.
- The implication of all these changes is that farmers in the region will find it difficult to increase their income from rice-wheat cultivation and they must be provided alternative choices to keep their income growing.
- Procurement of almost the entire market arrivals of rice and wheat at MSP for more than 50 years has affected the entrepreneurial skills of farmers to sell their produce in a competitive market where prices are determined by demand and supply and competition.

What is the way forward?

- The solution to the ecological, environmental and economic challenges facing agriculture in the traditional Green Revolution States is not in legalising MSP but to shift from MSP crops to high value crops and in the promotion of non-farm activities.
- Some options for this are, promotion of food processing in formal and informal sectors, a big push to post-harvest value addition and modern value chains, a network of agro- and agri-input industries; high-tech agriculture; and a direct link of production and producers to consumption and consumers without involving intermediaries.

44. New farm laws will impoverish rural India

Source: [Indian Express](#)

GS3: Issues related to transport and marketing of agricultural produce, Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies

Context: The new farm laws have the potential to restructure Indian agriculture in areas of production, procurement, marketing, pricing, stocking and land ownership.

How farm laws can restructure the whole scenario in rural India?

- **Landless labours:** About 60 per cent of population is engaged in agriculture and allied activities.
- **Affects welfare:** Changes in production, marketing and food distribution directly impact welfare. Many farmers migrate to neighbouring towns and states to work as casual labourers during the non-agricultural seasons.

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- **Livelihood:** Nearly 263 million are directly dependent on agriculture and the rest on agriculture allied small industries such as brick-kilns, quarries and small cottage industries in the villages.

What has been proposed by the farm laws?

- **Contract farming:**
 - **Farmers' (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services, 2020** claims that it will enable agri-business firms, retail supermarket chains to enter into prior agreements with small farmers for production, pricing and purchase of agricultural products.
 - It facilitates **leasing of land** from small farmers and **pooling of plots** to turn them into large farms and cultivate them with modern machinery and technology.
 - **Niti Aayog** has argued that since small farms are non-profitable it is necessary to opt for **corporate farming**.
- **Reducing APMC monopoly:**
 - It will provide a level-playing field to both farmers and traders including agri-business firms, retail supermarket chains parallel to the APMC market yards.

How does it affect the employment and livelihood opportunities of the landless families?

- As per the 2011 Census, there are 494.9 million (49.49 crore) landless individuals in villages, who are directly or indirectly dependent on cultivation for their livelihoods.
- According to Census 2011, around 1.2 crore or nearly 14 per cent of the farming community are tenant farmers or sharecroppers, who work in fields owned by others.
- **With no land reform agenda** on the horizon, this law will lead to large-scale landlessness, unemployment.
- Farmers should find 170 days of employment in two crop cultivated areas. However, the actual employment days are far less.
- With large farms, modern technology and the use of heavy machinery for a majority of field operations, a large chunk of them are certain to lose employment with **no rehabilitation**.
- **Private buyers will dominate the APMC mandis** thus denying small farmers the assurance of selling at MSP.
- **For example**, In Bihar after abolishing the APMC mandi structure in 2006, the small and tenant farmers are now forced to sell their maize produce to private traders and agri-business corporations at prices about 30 per cent lower than the MSP.
- Small tenant farmers do not have the clout to bargain with large corporations.

How the farm laws will impact food security?

- Farmers tend not to keep a portion of the harvest for family consumption and sell the entire produce in markets generally
- Majority of landless and small farmers are dependent on the subsidised grain provided through the PDS.
- With MSPs going out, the agricultural crisis would further deepen and affect the nation's food security.
- With the diminishing of FCI, the PDS will collapse.

45. Waste to Energy

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS3: Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Science and Technology- Developments and their Applications and Effects in Everyday Life

Context: Recently Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa laid the foundation stone for a 11.5 MW waste-to-energy plant near Bidadi. This plant is expected to process 600 tonnes per day of inorganic waste.

What is the significance of Waste to Energy Plants?

- The waste-to-energy plants usually accept the RDF material generated in organic composting plants.
- They also segregate the wet and inorganic material near the plant, convert organic waste to compost, and inorganic waste to energy.

Why it is needed?

- Bengaluru generates close to 5,000 tonnes of waste daily, of which about 2,500 tonnes is organic, about 1,000 tonnes inert material (sweeping waste) and 1,500 tonnes inorganic.
- This inorganic material, which consists of bad quality plastics and used cloth pieces, can be processed as **Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF)**.
- This material has a calorific value of more than 2,500 kJ/kg, and can be used to generate steam energy, which can be converted into electric energy instead of burning coal and other materials used in traditional waste-to-energy plants.
- At present, Inorganic waste that is not fit for recycling are landfilled or left unhandled in waste plants and cause fire accidents.
- Attempts to send this material to cement kilns have not fructified.
- The proposed plant can source 600 tonnes per day of this RDF and generate 11.5 MW of power equivalent to 2.4 lakh units of power per day.
- This will reduce the city's dependency on unscientific landfills, reduce fire accidents, and provide a permanent solution to recover value from inorganic waste.

What are the challenges faced by Waste to Energy plants in India?

- **Poor quality of waste:** The Waste to Energy plants require fine inorganic material with less than 5% moisture and less than 5% silt and soil contents, whereas the moisture and inert content in the mixed waste generated in the city is more than 15%-20%.
- **Lack of segregation at source:** Since segregation at source doesn't happen in the city, the collected waste material needs to be sieved using 80mm-100 mm sieving machines, which lets through organic material with more than 80mm-100 mm particle sizes into the inorganic waste. In addition, the sticky silt and soil particles will also reduce the calorific value.
- **Cost of Power is high:** Generally, the tariff at which the power is purchased by to energy plants across the country is around ₹7-8 Kwh which is higher than the ₹3-4 per Kwh generated through coal and other means. This could be a serious challenge, as the selling price of power cannot be increased corresponding to the purchasing price.

46. Guaranteed MSP will claim half the Budget

Source: [The Hindu Business line](#)

GS3: Issues related to Direct and Indirect Farm Subsidies and Minimum Support Prices

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December, 2020

Context: Procurement of 23 crops at MSP which will amount to ₹17-lakh cr and to support this annual allocation, rich farmers should pay tax.

What is the farmers' demand?

- The protesters have rejected the offer of amendments to farm laws and are firm on their demand for repeal of the three laws.
- Farmers want MSP guarantee.

Is it feasible to accept demand of MSP guarantee?

- **Not economical:** India has about 14 crore farmers (as per PM-KISAN enumeration). Cost of procuring all 23 crops is 50 per cent of India's annual expenditure
- **Unsustainable burden:** The cost of MSP and subsidised food supplies are being met by heavy borrowings from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF).
- **Rising subsidies:** In 2019-20, 11 per cent of the country's total budget was spent on farmer welfare schemes. Subsidies on food and fertiliser and expenses on irrigation schemes in 2019-20 noticed a 65 per cent jump from 2017-18.
- **Direct benefit:** introduction of the PM-KISAN scheme resulted in leap in food subsidy.
- **Rise in procurement:** Procurement of food crops including paddy, wheat, pulses and oilseeds under MSP has seen a dramatic increase. For example, compared to 1,395 lakh tonnes of wheat procured between 2009 and 2014, 1,627 lakh tonnes of wheat have been procured in the last five years.

What are the other issues?

- **Disparities:** MSP's poor implementation has created problems of equity with large farmers of just two States Punjab and Haryana.
- **Faulty policy:** As per CACP, more than 95 per cent paddy farmers in Punjab and about 70 per cent farmers in Haryana are covered under MSP operations. States such as Uttar Pradesh (3.6 per cent), West Bengal (7.3 per cent), Odisha (20.6 per cent) and Bihar (1.7 per cent), have only a minuscule number of farmers benefit from procurement.

Why blanket exemption on taxing agriculture income is bad policy?

- Agriculture income including that from sale of farmland is exempt under Section 10 (1) of the Income Tax Act, 1961 without any limit.
- Rich farmers and politically influential people use the provision to convert black money into white.
- Rich farmers include many corporates who run seed companies and whose profits run into crores.
- In 2019, a Comptroller and Auditor General report red-flagged the **irregularities in exemptions** given by the taxman on agriculture income.
- It said that claims of tax exemption on farm income were given based on "inadequate verification or incomplete documentation" in more than a fifth of the 6,778 cases.
- Exemption was granted in hundreds of cases where land records or proof of farm income was not available.
- According to an article published in the Economic and Political Weekly by Govind Bhattacharjee, a retired Director General from CAG, assesses who had reported agricultural of more than ₹5 lakh each between 2014-15 and 2016-17 were 22,195.

The blanket exemption on agriculture income should be stopped and it should continue for roughly 86 per cent of the peasants of the country. The 14 per cent rich farmers should come forward to help the rest get MSP support.

47. Farmer's protest

Source- The Hindu

Syllabus- GS 3- Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

Context- The economic calculus needs to shift from 'economies of scale with standardization' to 'economies of scope for sustainability'.

How farm productivity can be increased and what are the consequences of this?

The agriculture sector contributes 17 per cent of India's GDP. As per estimate, about 57 per cent of the working population is engaged in agriculture.

According to economists the farm productivity can be increased by -

- India needs to shift from basic farming to more efficient, sustainable, productive farming.
- More technology and automation will be required to improve productivity.
- **Reduce the number of employed-** The agriculture sector should employ only 17 per cent of the workforce as to become more productive like other sectors.

Concern with such approach-

1. Landholdings are too small for mechanization
2. **Mono-cropping-** Mechanized farming will initiate mono-cropping, as mechanization requires standardization of work, which results in-
 - Fluctuate the ecological balance.
 - Reduced diversity of flora enables pests to spread more easily.
 - Soil quality gets reduced and waters resources deleted.

Therefore, India must figure out a way to provide meaningful employment to hundreds of millions of people outside agriculture.

What is government's contention with new farm laws?

1. **Farmers will get higher prices** - These Acts are intended to empower the farmers and ensure doubling of their incomes.
2. **Provide wider markets for farm produce** - The Acts will only increase options for farmers in the output markets.
 - Connections into global supply chains can increase volumes of sales.

What are the major issues with new farm reforms?

1. **Promote corporate control-** The farmers contend the federal government is making ready to withdraw from the procurement of food grain and hand it over to the company gamers.
2. **Will not have adequate pricing power-** Small and marginal, would be left at the mercy of the corporates, with reduced collective bargaining capacity.
 - Trade will always favour the larger players in the supply chains who have easier access to capital.
3. **Against the Spirit of Cooperative federalism-** Since agriculture and markets are State subjects, the ordinances are being seen as a direct encroachment upon the functions of the States

What is the way forward?

1. Experts from many disciplines must collaborate to find systemic solutions for low income in farm sectors.
2. The intended beneficiaries of the new policies must be included in the designing of the new policies right at the beginning.
 - Policymakers must listen to the institutions that represent small people — associations and unions of farmers, informal workers and small enterprises.
3. Cooperative ownership and collective bargaining must be strengthened to give power to small farmers before opening markets to large corporations.

48. Economic Growth

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS3: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

Context: It is important that, only if the Indian economy grows at 8% in 2021-22 we will be able to compensate for the decline in 2020-21.

What needs to be done to make Indian economy to grow @ 8%?

- **Accommodative Monetary policy:** A reduction in interest rate through changes in policy rate, providing liquidity through various measures, and regulatory changes such as moratorium.
- **Fiscal initiatives:** A sharp increase in government capital expenditures which can act as a stimulus for growth. To increase government spending, government revenues should pick up with the rise in GDP and the fiscal deficit must be brought down.
- **Growth and investment:** The investment rate has been falling. In 2018-19, the rate fell to 32.2% of GDP from 38.9% in 2011-12. A detailed investment plan of the government and public sector enterprises must be drawn up and presented as part of the coming Budget.
- **Exports:** Closing borders may appear to be a good short-term policy to promote growth but it kills growth all around. A strong surge in our exports will greatly facilitate growth, in 2021-22.

What is the way forward?

- Strong effort must be made to improve the investment climate. The National Infrastructure Pipeline is a good initiative, but the government must come forward to invest more on its own.
- Reforms are important but the timing, sequencing and consensus building are equally important. For example, Labour reforms, are best introduced when the economy is on the upswing.

The Indian economy in 2019 was at around \$2.7 trillion. To achieve the level of \$5 trillion, we need to grow continuously at 9% for six years from now.

49. Steps needed to make spectrum Auction successful

Source: [Click here](#)

Syllabus – GS-3, Economy, Mobilisation of resources

Context: Government should take lessons from 2016 spectrum auction failure and take steps to get the present auction right.

Discuss the parameters on the auction of radio spectrum.

- A new round of auction has been cleared by government to be held using the methodology of **Simultaneous Multiple Round Ascending (SMRA)** after 4 years.

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- **The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India** recommended the auction spectrum in the sub-GHz bands of 700, 800 and 900 MHz along with mid-band frequencies in bands of 1800, 2100, 2300, and 2500 MHz across the 22 Licensed Service Areas (LSAs) of the country.
- The total spectrum to be auctioned is about 2,251 MHz. **The potential revenue growth** to the government at reserve prices is about \$50 billion. Total reserve price of spectrum put on auction in 2016 was about \$90 billion.

What are the factors that determine the success of spectrum auction?

- **Firstly, the reserve price.** Cross country spectrum database shows that the reserve price is positively correlated to the winning bid price. However, a higher reserve price also stops bidders from bidding for more spectrum blocks, resulting in lower amounts of spectrum sold as happened in 2016.
- **Secondly, Factor of VoIP subscribers.** Over The Top (OTT) providers are providing substitute goods such as Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and are capturing a greater mind share of customers while remaining somewhat invisible to government regulators.
 - The scraping away of the position of telcos in front of OTTs would impact their relationship in the overall digital value network of devices, connectivity and apps, that could result in a lower willingness to pay.
- **Third, allocation of unlicensed spectrum for Wi-Fi.** Wi-Fi shared the load of carrier network and reduces the demand for mobile network capacity. If government want to expand the Wi-Fi facilities, it needs to keep more spectrum unlicensed. The more the unlicensed spectrum allocation, the lower will be the demand for licensed spectrum.
- **Fourth, visibility of spectrum that will be up for auction.** The amount of spectrum for 5G auction (namely 3.4-3.6 GHz) that will be made available by the government in late 2021 is not clear. It is creating a confusion among companies, should they acquire the spectrum now, or wait for subsequent auctions.
- **Fifth, reserve prices of different bands** for the forthcoming auction as recommended by TRAI indicate that the average price per MHz per population (a common metric used for comparing spectrum prices) is around \$3 for sub-GHz band and \$1.70 for mid-band.

What are the key steps to get the auction right?

As Spectrum is a perishable scarce resource and lose its value if left unused, it is important for the government to ensure that the spectrum put on the block is sold successfully, unlike 2016. Therefore, following steps are recommended before the auction begins:

- **First, Government should recheck reserve prices** and consider reducing it further, especially of the “golden band” or 700 MHz band, which is important for covering the surrounding areas of the country.
- **Secondly, Government should release more unlicensed spectrum** in 2.4/5/60 GHz for multiplying Wi-Fi as a suitable supplement to the carrier network. This will increase the placements of the Public Wi-Fi project which got the approval of cabinet recently.
- **Thirdly government should provide clarity about future auctions**, especially the major chunks of spectrum that can be put on the block in 3.3/3.6/26/28 GHz.
- **Lastly, government should release guidelines** on how they will regulate the auctions and what will be regulated so that the telcos and OTTs can join hands to provide superior and better services for the benefit of the consumers.

50. India and EU cooperation on Climate Neutrality

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS3: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation.

Context: How India and EU are working towards the goal of mitigating climate change and what needs to be done further.

In the Post-Covid world, investment towards greening the global economy has become a necessity so that situation doesn't get any worse than at present, due to climate change. India and EU are taking many positive steps towards greening the global economy.

What were the steps taken by EU to achieve climate neutrality by 2050?

- Firstly, to achieve climate neutrality in the EU by 2050, the European Commission has launched the European Green Deal (a new growth model and roadmap).
- Second, EU has designated more than half a trillion euros to address climate change by 2050 under "Next Generation EU" recovery package and long-term budget.
- Third, EU leaders have agreed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% compared to 1990 levels by 2030. Achieving this target will also help them to save up to €3 trillion by 2050.

How EU countries and India has been responded to climate change?

No country alone will be able to deal with the issue of climate change, thus There is a need to foster cooperation with partners from all around the world on the same format as has been done by EU and India;

- Firstly, with participation of EU countries like UK and France, India has taken several initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance, the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, and the Leadership Group for Industry Transition to tackle climate change.
- Second, India and Europe are engaged to make upcoming COP 26 in Glasgow on climate change and COP 15 in Kunming on biodiversity successful.
- Third, Team Europe has assured close cooperation with India on green investments and the sharing of best practices and technologies.

What is the Way forward?

- **Clear targets:** International community need to come forward with a clear strategy for net-zero emissions and to enhance the global level of ambition for 2030.
- **Climate Financing:** There is an urgent need to mobilize \$100 billion to countries most in need, together with the commitments from the receiving countries.
- **Individual actions:** Along with good public policies, countries need to foster small individual actions to attain a big collective impact.
- **Collective action:** Countries should mobilize best scientists, business people, policymakers, academics, civil society actors and citizens to achieve climate neutrality.

By ensuring cooperation and taking all necessary steps most dramatic impacts of climate change on our societies can be avoided otherwise out next generation will have to bear the burden of climate change and pay off the debt of the recovery.

51. Impacts of suspension of Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code

Source: [Click Here](#)

Context: The government has decided to keep the critical provisions of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) of 2016 in a state of suspension till March 31, 2021.

What is the ordinance?

- The government had raised the threshold of loan defaults that would spark off insolvency proceedings from ₹1 lakh to ₹1 crore on the day of the lockdown's announcement.
- An order, in June, indefinitely barred the beginning of insolvency proceedings for defaults arising on or after March 25, 2020, for a period of six months that could be stretched to a year.

What are the possible effects of such a move?

- **On recovery:** It could act as an hindrance to the government's proclamations of a V-shaped recovery.
- **On sectors:** Businesses in the sectors, which are returning to the pre-COVID levels may not be required to be protected from exits if they are not competitive.
- **On small and medium businesses:** If the government is concerned about small and medium businesses, it could squeeze the default threshold limit a bit higher, while letting bankruptcy processes function again for larger loan accounts.
- **On banks:** A catch-all suspension may burden the banks further.
- **On the industry:** Cutting off the ability of businesses to enter insolvency voluntarily may also act against the interests of the industry.
- **On borrower and the lender:** In the absence of an exit-route, the assets of the firm would lose value. Thus, it would negatively affect the lender and the borrower.

What is the way forward?

- A more nuanced approach would have been better for banks, businesses and the economy. Delaying the unavoidable would mean greater financial stress ahead, as the restructuring and recovery of bad loans shall get slower and future growth momentum would be pricked at the cost of understating present systemic stress.

52. How farm laws are Protecting Farmer's interest?

Source: [Indian Express](#)

GS3: Issues related to Direct and Indirect Farm Subsidies and Minimum Support Prices

Context: Farm laws enacted by government will protect farmers' interest only by providing them more option to sell their produce and enter into agreements with corporate buyers. Apprehensions are misplaced.

Why there is need for reforms?

- The mandi trader role in APMC mandis reduces the net received by the farmer to below MSP due to the off-book trader's commissions. Thank
- Still farmers are compelled to sell their produce to traders as each trader in the mandi has built relationships with a set of farmers and provide them with credit, thus the farmer sells his produce only through that trader, to have the credit/advance against such sales adjusted that reduces his profit realisation.
- It is the reason behind Strong opposition by the mandi traders on bringing reforms to the APMC laws for long time. For example, In Rajasthan 2004, a Cabinet-approved amendment to the APMC Act had to be withdrawn because traders went on strike.
- But farmer's opposition to these bills is not rationale as according to many experts allowing/introducing more buyers for farm produce, would further reduce exploitation of farmers because if there are an unlimited number of buyers a farmer can sell to whoever offers the best price.

How the changes brought in three farm laws will benefit farmers?

- **First, The Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020** benefits the farmers by providing farmers the freedom to sell either outside or to the mandi and enables buyers to buy at “farm gate”, without the necessity of a mandi licence.
 - However, farmers are in the misconception that this reform is a precursor to the abolition of mandis and MSP. But it is not true as it would be politically suicidal for any government.
 - Even, the government is ready to provide assurance to the farmers on their continuation, and to make mandi fee applying to private “mandis” as well.
- **Second, The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020**, provides for contract farming that will help the farmer to transit to commercial crops, such as vegetables and fruits, which give higher returns than food grain sold at MSP.
 - Contract farming will provide assured return for farmers even if there is excess production and market fall.
 - In case of contracted prices lower than market prices there are provisions to share the excess windfall to the farmers.
- **Third, the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020** will help the farmers to build better supply/marketing chains and have the potential of getting higher prices/returns for the farmer.
 - Whereas the earlier EC Act served the interest of urban middle classes, by trying to get farm produce to them at low prices. It has also led to discourage investments in cold chains, warehouses, etc.

So, why the Farm laws that has tremendous opportunity and potential to change the lives of farmers are being opposed. The answer partly lies in the way the MSP scheme works in certain states, and the way “big” farmer-trader relationships have worked out in such states.

53. Air pollution killed 1.7 million Indians in 2018 – Lancet report

Syllabus: GS-3 – Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

News: A report titled “The India State-Level Disease Burden Initiative” was published in the journal Lancet Planetary Health.

Facts:

- **India State-Level Disease Burden Initiative:** It was launched in 2015. It is a collaboration between the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) and senior experts and stakeholders currently from about 100 institutions across India.
- **Purpose:** The initiative estimates health and economic impacts of air pollution, both from indoor and outdoor sources.
- **Aim:** There are state-wise and country wide variations in health status and the drivers of health loss. This initiative aims to bridge this gap by providing systematic knowledge of the local health status and trends in each state.

Key Takeaways of the report:

- **Deaths due to Air Pollution:** Some 1.7 million Indians died due to air pollution in 2019 which is 18% of the total deaths in the country.

- **Disease Burden:** 40% of the disease burden due to air pollution is from lung diseases, the remaining 60% is from ischemic heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and neonatal deaths related to preterm birth,
- **Indoor vs Outdoor Air Pollution:** The mortality from indoor air pollution reduced by 64% between 1990 and 2019, that from outdoor ambient air pollution increased by 115% during this period. Due to Indoor pollution, Goa had the least loss at \$7.6 million and UP the highest at \$1829.6 million.
- **Economic Loss due to Air Pollution:** India has lost 1.4% of GDP due to premature deaths and morbidity from air pollution. It is equivalent to Rs 2,60,000 crore in monetary terms — more than four times of the allocation for healthcare in the Union budget for 2020-21.
- **Economic loss to State GDP:** The economic loss due to air pollution as a percentage of the state GDP was higher in the northern and central India states, with the highest in Uttar Pradesh (2.2% of GDP) and Bihar (2% of GDP). Further, the highest health and economic impact of air pollution is in the less developed states of India.
- **Highest Per Capita loss:** Delhi had the highest per-capita economic loss due to air pollution followed by Haryana in 2019.

54. India lost Retrospective taxation case to Cairn

Source - [Microsoft news](#). [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- GS 3

Synopsis: In a 2nd setback after Vodafone case, Indian government has lost an International arbitration case to energy giant Cairn, on the issue of retrospective taxation.

Introduction

- The Indian government has lost an international arbitration case to energy giant Cairn Plc over the retrospective levy of taxes, and has been asked to pay damages worth RS. 8000 crore to the UK firm.
- This is the second setback for Indian government related to retrospective taxation after it lost the arbitration case against Vodafone.

What is retrospective taxation?

Retrospective taxation allows a country to pass a rule on taxing certain products, items or services and deals and charge companies from a time behind the date on which the law is passed.

- Countries use this route to correct any anomalies in their taxation policies that have, in the past, allowed companies to take advantage of such loopholes.

Apart from India, many countries including the USA, the UK, the Netherlands, Canada, Belgium, Australia and Italy have retrospectively taxed companies.

What is the case?

The case pertains to the tax demand related to an alleged Rs24,500 crore worth capital gains it made in 2006 while transferring all its shares of Cairn India Holdings to a new company, Cairn India, and got it listed on the stock exchanges.

However, Cairn argued the retroactive application of a newly enacted law is a breach by India of its obligations under the Treaty **[UK-India Bilateral Investment Treaty]** to treat Cairn and its investments fairly and equitably and refrain from unlawfully expropriating Cairn's assets.

- Owing to different interpretations of capital gains, the company refused to pay the tax.

- This prompted cases being filed at the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT) and the High Court.

What is the verdict of Court?

The Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague has maintained that the Cairn tax issue is not a tax dispute but a tax-related investment dispute and, hence, it falls under its jurisdiction.

- India's demand in past taxes, it said, was in **breach of fair treatment under the UK-India Bilateral Investment Treaty**.
- The GOI was ordered to compensate for the total harm suffered together with interest and cost of arbitration.

The order does not contain a provision for challenge or appeal. Moreover, Cairn can use the arbitration award to approach courts in countries such as the UK to seize any property owned by India overseas to recover the money if the award is not honored.

Way forward-

Government needs to assured global investors that concerns over retrospective taxation would be taken care of.

55. EU's new draft digital-services laws against dominance of big tech players

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- GS 3 - Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention.

The European Commission, the executive arm of the EU, recently presented two new draft digital-services laws that will affect how Big Tech operates.

What are the new EU regulation laws?

1. **Digital Service Act**- The focus of the Act is to create a single set of rules for the EU to keep users safe online, protect their freedom of expression and help both them and local authorities hold tech companies to account.
 - The Act introduces a sliding scale, under which the larger and more influential a firm becomes, more obligations they need to take on.
 - The tech companies could also face annual scrutiny of European Commission on illegal and harmful content and restriction on the use of user's data and promotion of their own services over competitors'.
 - They could face fines of up to 6% of a firm's annual turnover or their break-ups for non-compliance.
2. **Digital Market Act** – Aimed at ensuring fair and open digital market. The act centres on the regulation of "gatekeepers" i.e., operators of search engines, social networks, and chat apps.
 - This covers the operators of search engines, social networks, chat apps, cloud computing services and operating systems, among others.

Why US probing big tech companies?

There were allegations and concerns that big tech companies have exploited, entrenched and expanded their power over digital markets in anti-competitive and abusive ways.

- **For instance-** Recently, Texas and nine other states sued Google. There are allegations of abuse of its dominance in internet search, advertising and its mobile system, to the detriment of rival content producers.

What are the challenges for the success of new regulatory laws?

1. First, Formulation of EU laws may take years in the process of consultation and enactment.
2. Second, EU's new digital-services laws would only come into force after the end of Brexit transition period.
3. Third, Past efforts at antitrust enforcement were sluggish and did little to directly curb technology companies. Microsoft's antitrust case commenced in 1998, and reached a resolution only in 2004.
4. Fourth, Chances of success of proceedings in US is very slim due to their importance in competing with China and economy of US.

How would it impact India and what are the steps taken by CCI in India?

The impacts of new rules in the E.U., would not be limited to EU only, it could force tech companies to change their practices globally, including in India.

India itself is taking steps to curb the anti-competitive practices. CCI (Competition Commission of India) has increased the scrutiny of these companies and in few cases, actions have been initiated;

- The CCI has initiated a probe against Google for alleged abuse of dominance to force app makers to exclusively use its billing system Google Pay for in-app purchases.
- CCI has been looking into allegations over Google's alleged practice of creating barriers for firms wanting to use or develop modified versions of Android for smart TVs, such as Amazon Fire TV's operating system.
- In 2019, CCI held Google guilty of misuse of its dominant position in the mobile Android market for imposing "unfair conditions" on device manufacturers to prevent them from using another operating system.
- In 2018, CCI fined Google for "search bias" and giving "undue" space to its Flights option on its search homepage, over and above other rivals in the market. Later put on hold by National Company Law Appellate Tribunal.

Way forward-

Free and Fair market is needed to balance the need for innovation and to protect the rights of people & society. There is need to create a safer digital space in which the fundamental rights of all users of digital services are protected

56. Issue of Retrospective tax cases; what should India do next?

Source: [Click here](#)

Syllabus: GS – 3, Indian Economy, Mobilisation of resources

Context: After Vodafone, India has lost its 2nd case to Cairn Plc at Permanent Court of Arbitration over a retrospective tax demand. Now, what are the options left with India and which one should it chose?

What are the cases in question?

- Very recently, Cairn Plc has won a case of retrospective tax against India at Permanent Court of Arbitration. Court has asked Indian government to pay for damages to the tune of \$1.4 billion.
- Previously in this year only, Indian Government lost a retrospective taxation case to Vodafone, where government need to pay around ₹80 crore, if it doesn't make any further appeal.

Now India has been left with the option of either conceding defeat and making payment to the companies or making further appeals. But cost-benefit analysis of both the option is necessary.

Why Government should not make any further appeals?

- **Firstly**, there is a need for attracting global investments to the country and any further appeal would put investors in a doubt.
- **Secondly**, the stance of the present government on the issue was different in the past. They called out the UPA government for setting free "tax terrorism" and "uncertainty" in the country by enacting retrospective taxation.
 - The Centre has now filed an appeal in the Vodafone matter in Singapore because it cannot take a different stance on two similar cases. A similar appeal too can be expected on Cairn.
- **Thirdly**, it would further dampen India's reputation as the court already noted that this was a breach of fair treatment under the UK-India bilateral investment treaty.

Why government should make further appeals?

- Keeping in mind the cost on exchequer, the government should make further appeals. This verdict includes a sharp \$1.4 billion payable as damages to Cairn.
 - In the Vodafone case, the government would need to divide out around ₹80 crore if it were to accept defeat.
- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has repeatedly stated that **India retains the supreme right to put taxes.**

As a first step after this setback, government must analyse carefully all the available options with it, as India is already suffering from an economic slowdown and looking to strengthen its domestic manufacturing capability. Some of the available options might turn away the foreign investment and technology associated with it.

57. New norms for DTH television distribution sector

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS3: Changes in Industrial Policy and their Effects on Industrial Growth.

Synopsis: The reasons why a revised scheme for the Direct-to-Home (DTH) television distribution sector has been brought in.

Background

- Recently, the Union Cabinet has approved a revised scheme for the Direct-to-Home (DTH) television distribution sector which were in due for last 6 years after the TRAI gave its recommendation to reduce the license fee.
- Under the new norms,
 - **100% FDI in** Direct-to-Home (DTH) television distribution sector has been allowed.
 - The **licence period** has been **extended to 20 years** from the present 10.
 - The **license fee** has been reduced to 8% of Adjusted Gross Revenue, as opposed to 10% on Gross Revenue now.

What is the need?

- **Firstly**, The Direct-to-Home (DTH) television distribution sector has been impacted by **technological change** like high bandwidth Internet and Over the Top (OTT) channels.
- **Second**, some DTH operators are under pressure as few big DTH players have made their **presence on Internet service and OTT** as well.

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- **Third**, Fee reduction will address the **concerns of petitioners** filing the case in SC against high fees which is yet to get hearing.
- **Fourth**, as per the operators, the **amended New Tariff Order (NTO)** by TRAI has made them mere carriers of channels, with taking away the pricing power. Thus, high fee is not feasible.

What is the way forward?

- India with an estimated 200 million cable and satellite households serves as one of the biggest single markets for audiences. Any regulation should serve the consumer rather than the businesses.
- The broadcasters must realise that only authentic programming and entertainment along with best combination of technology and pricing can attract viewers.

58. Vital notes from the year 2020

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3

Synopsis: As 2020 is coming to an end, we should ponder upon the issues the country faced this year and ensure that 2021 does not become another wasted year.

What are the issues India faced in the year 2020?

- **Pandemic:** The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on every segment of Indian society and infected approximately more than a crore of its citizens (1.5 lakh fatalities).
- **Border stand-off:** India is facing an unexpected border stand-off situation with China in eastern Ladakh. The tensions even led to martyrdom of Indian soldiers. This has had a serious impact on India-China relations.
- **Internal Security issues:** The bitterness caused by the altered status of J&K and the custody of political leaders and the Naxalite violence have resulted in serious internal problems.
- **States:** There lies a grave concern for **violence in the upcoming elections of West Bengal.**
- **Economy:** The economy is in recession. India has fallen down the scale in the Human Development Index and in the Global Economic Freedom Index.
- **New bills on social issues**, for instance:
 - A law against forced conversion by marriage will intensify an already divisive society.
 - The farmers' agitation is another instance where official inflexibility has led to a situation in which the Supreme Court had to intervene.

What should India do in the upcoming year?

Series of electoral successes for the ruling party; the personal popularity of the Prime Minister; and the absence of any strong competitor on the national stage gives the current government an opportunity to bring solid changes.

- **Firstly**, India should come up with a new model of ideas for foreign policy which can be implemented. This would enable India to be viewed as the only nation in Asia that can stand-up to the China challenge.
- **Secondly**, the idea that says India should look inward rather than outwards to enlarge its economy needs to be rejected, and India should enhance its export capacity.
- **Thirdly**, the government should take crucial steps to resolve the troubles in the labour market caused by the pandemic and other contributory factors.

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- Creating new jobs in new industries should be a critical requirement.
- Stimulating demand would ensure growth in job opportunities.

Way forward

- Effective cooperation between the Centre and the States must be restored to impart confidence about India's democratic future.

59. Lack of fiscal support could stoke inequality

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

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

Context- India's low level of fiscal spending could leave behind other problem and leads to inequality.

India has stood out in three distinct ways.

- Firstly, India seems to have broken the link between rising levels of mobility and COVID-19 cases. As of now the fear of increased mobility around the festive season stoking cases has not come to bear and the fatality rate continues to fall as the recovery rate rises.
- Secondly, India has seen amongst the smallest fiscal support packages globally, government expenditure has not grown in the year so far.
- Third, inflation is now a big problem, CPI inflation has been outside the 2-6% tolerance band for seven months in a row.

How small fiscal support link with inequality?

1. The government's fiscal packages were far too modest and indirect to achieve much, some part was not covered (like the urban poor), and overall outlays were small.
2. **Rise in inequality between large and small firms** - Large listed firms saw a larger rise in profits and the smaller listed firms did not do as well.
 - A combination of cost-cutting, lower interest rate environment, access to buoyant capital markets, and formalization of demand could also be a driver of the rise in individual-level inequality.
 - **Impacted larger number of people-** small firms are more labour-intensive than large firms. Data shows that small firms have cut staff costs by much more than large firms.
3. **Widening wealth gap-** The coronavirus pandemic has dealt a huge blow to India's middle and low-income groups. This is likely to further widen the wealth gap between India's rich and poor.
 - **For instance-** Expensive passenger vehicle sales doing better than two-wheeler sales.

What are the negatives of rising inequality?

1. **Inequality could elevate inflation-** People with higher incomes can offset rising inflation with rising incomes. Sadly, though, income inequality and rising inflation can entrap lower-income households in poverty.
- **For example-** India has had a troubled past with services inflation. once it takes a stronghold (for instance, in 2011), it remains elevated for a prolonged period (it averaged 7.7% in the 2011-13 period).

There are three possible reasons that services inflation rises quickly in 2021-

1. **Inequality could stroke prices**- The large firms and their employees do relatively well through this period, they are likely to demand more services, stoking services inflation.
2. **Pent up service demand**- As a vaccine comes into play, there could be a wave of pent-up (high-touch) services demand.
3. The service providers did not do the regular annual price reset in 2020, and may do it jointly for two years, once demand picks up.

What need to be done?

1. Inflation control could be the main task cut out for policymakers in 2021.
2. RBI have to take steps to gradually drain the excess liquidity in the banking sector, provide a floor for short end rates and finally narrow the policy rate corridor by raising the reverse repo rate.

60. Possibility of China's 5G warfare and India

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs3: Achievements of Indians in Science & Technology; Indigenization of Technology and Developing New Technology.

Synopsis: China is preparing to dominate the world by rolling out its 5G technology warfare across countries, India needs to fast the pace of its 5G implementation to contain the digital threat of China.

What is 5G warfare?

- **5G technology** will enable **IOT (Internet of Things)** and IOT is driven by data and Information.
- It will aid the providing country with the power to access and control the data of individuals, groups or even nations.
- Moreover, 5G technologies are main enabler of AI technologies and the recent example of use of AI in warfare, like drone killing machines, multiply these threats.

Implications of Chinese 5G warfare?

China, as one of the foremost countries to roll out 5G technologies with huge investment worldwide, posing the risks of digital encirclement of the world. An invasion by Chinese 5G technology in to other nations will make them completely dependent on China

- **First example is** the recent cooperation of measurement of Mt. Everest between China and Nepal may enable the launch of Chinese 5G technology in Nepal, with the following implications.
 - It will provide china the ability to control Nepal's business interests, its **mountaineering and tourism industry**.
 - It will make locals or visitors to Nepal dependent on China for **Real-time information** on weather, routes, map/terrain details, logistics and rescue programmes, etc.,
 - There is a significant chance that, with lower incomes, the Nepal's tourism industry might get lured into Chinese cheap loans, leading to a **strategic debt trap**.
- **Second**, Militaries who do not have indigenious 5G capabilities for IOT platforms might allow Chinese 5G infrastructure, leading them to become a hostage to Chinese technology. For example, The **CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor)** is a clear example. Pakistan today has become the **virtual vassal state** of China.

- **Third**, with Chinese companies having made huge investments across the world to spread a 5G it would lead to complete **digital encirclement of the world** when combined with **BRI (belt and road initiative)**

How India should prepare to fight the onslaught of the Chinese 5G invasion?

- First, India is already working on **Indigenous 5G technology** that would run **IOT platforms** for civilian as well as military applications, it needs to accelerate the launch of Indian 5G.
- Second, the **Counteroffensive measures** such as banning of Chinese apps and blocking of hardware supply chains will be able to protect the business and security interests of the country.

There is an urgent need to fasten the pace of 5G technology development in India which is suffering due to slow adoption, entangled **policy processes** and bureaucratic processes.

61. Impact of Facial Recognition Technology (FRT) on the rights of people

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- **GS 3** - Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

Synopsis- The rapid use of Facial Recognition Technology (FRT) by law enforcement without proper guidelines and regulation, will have many negative impacts on people.

Introduction-

- In recent times the facial recognition tracking (FRT) systems has seen rapid development. **Central and State governments across India are using 16 different facial recognition tracking (FRT) systems** for surveillance, security or authentication of identity.
- FRT uses algorithms to **extract data points from a face** to create its digital signature. This **signature is compared with an existing database** to find possible matches.
- Still there are no specific laws or guidelines to regulate the use of this potentially invasive technology.
- As facial recognition technology use grows, so do privacy fears.

As a result, the FRT system poses a huge threat to the fundamental rights to privacy and freedom of speech and expression.

How FRT invades the fundamental rights to privacy and freedom of speech and expression?

The rapid growth of this technology has triggered a much-needed debate. These systems need a huge amount of sensitive personal data and biometric information, and their existence is at odds with user's privacy. Here are some concerning points why people should worry about the use of facial recognition technology in public spaces.

1. **The FRT system violates right to privacy-** As per the Puttaswamy judgment, Privacy is a fundamental right, even on public spaces.
 - Large-scale recordings, storing and analyzing of images undermines this right because it means it won't be possible to anything in public without the state knowing about it.
2. **It operates without a clear legal or regulatory framework-** There is a lack of detailed and specific information as to how facial recognition is actually used.
 - The system has no legal backing, claims Internet Freedom Foundation [IFF], which has recently issued notices to the Union home ministry and NCRB over the legality of the system.

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- If the police has detained or arrested any person with the use of the FRT system, then there is not proper guidelines/set of SOP of what to do.
- 3. **Function creep surveillance**- Function creep” occurs when information is used for a purpose that is not the original intended.
- Use of facial recognition software in India began benevolently for identify missing children. Now it is being used for all kinds of surveillance. This shift from locating missing children to identifying rioters happened without any legal sanction or due planning and procedure which it a function creep.
- 4. **It has a chilling effect on our democratic rights**
 - Blanket surveillance can deter individuals from attending public protests. It can stifle participation in political protests and campaigns for change. And it can discourage nonconformist behavior.
 - This chilling effect is a serious infringement on the **right to freedom of assembly, association, and expression.**
- 5. **It is often inaccurate**- t is not 100% accurate and there can be “misidentification (false positive) and failure to identify (false negative).
 - In case of a false positive- the algorithm said photos of two different people showed the same person
 - In case of a false negative- the algorithm failed to correctly detect that two photos showed the same person.

What is the International experience on FRTs?

US has taken steps to prevent The Facial Recognition Technology's weaponization by law enforcement against a section of people.

1. Many US cities and states have **banned public agencies** from using facial recognition and passed legislation to demand more transparency on how police use surveillance tools.
2. Microsoft followed **Amazon and IBM**, have decided to limit the use of its facial-recognition systems and **not to sell it to police departments** until there is a federal law regulating it.

What is the way forward?

With so many concerns about facial recognition technology and desperately need a more prominent conversation on its impact on people's rights and civil liberties. Without proper regulation such systems of mass surveillance will erode democratic liberties and threaten the rights of lakhs of Indians

62. More genome sequencing to study the spread of the variants

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- GS 3 - Science and Technology – developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

Synopsis- There is need for more genome sequencing from samples from all over the world in order to come up with effective approaches to control and prevent COVID-19 infections.

Background-

- A new variant of the pandemic SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus is spreading rapidly in Britain and prompting high levels of concern.
- Six samples of the recent U.K. returnees have been found to be positive with a variant of SARS- CoV-2 virus.
- From 25 Nov-23 Dec, about 33,000 passengers landed at various Indian airports from the U.K. So far, only 114 have been found positive and samples have been sent

to 10 INSACOG (Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium) labs for genome sequencing.

Thus, only through detailed epidemiological studies combined with genome sequencing data can we confirm the presence and spread of the variant in India.

What are the findings with related to new stain of coronavirus and will it cause concern in India?

The genomic analysis undertaken by the COVID-19 Genomics U.K. Consortium found that-

- **First. The new variant of coronavirus is named "VUI 202012/01"** and is defined by a set of 23 changes or mutations. Among the 23 mutations, the two of which are particularly worrisome and specifically N501Y makes is more transmissible.
- It includes a genetic mutation in the "spike" protein that can lead to easy and immediate spread of the virus, making it deadlier. This new variant has 17 mutations that affect the shape of the virus.
- **Second, It is about 70% more transmissible-** The variant has the potential to increase the number of people a person can infect by over 0.4

However, it might not be able to spread wildly in India as a sizeable percentage of people are already infected.

Read more – [Mutation in Coronavirus](#)

Why it is important to undertake more genome sequencing of the virus?

The genome sequencing study would determine if the COVID patients are carrying the existing strain of SARS-CoV-2 or the mutant strain.

- **First, to understand the evolving nature of the virus-** So far, we are doing very less frequent genomic sequencing compared to western nations. For instance, in England, around 10 per cent of the infected virus samples are sequenced to study the nature of the virus.
- **Second, to find an immune escape variant** of the SARS-CoV-2, [which means a mutation in the virus that allows it to evade the immune system]
- One of the immune escape variants found in genomes from India, **known as N440K variant** — was found to be in 2.1 per cent of the gene sequences in India.
- **Third, The N501Y mutation** can arise independently here in India. Hence more genome sequencing and genomic epidemiology is needed.

Steps taken by Indian Government regarding this-

- The **genomic surveillance consortium (INSACOG)** has been recommended for laboratory and epidemiological surveillance of circulating strains of the SARS-CoV-2 in India.
- Under this initiative, **5 percent of the positive cases** will be tested for Whole Genome Sequencing, from all the States and UT.

What is the way forward?

Genome sequencing is very much important of the higher percentage of the samples to understand the evolving nature of the virus.

63. Path to economic recovery of India

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis: Government should adopt a fiscal stimulus Path **for the economic recovery of India**, to make our economy grow at 9% GDP in the coming years.

Background

- The impact of the **pandemic** has pushed India to impose stringent lockdown measures to save millions of lives of Indian citizens but its after effect has caused massive **economic disruption**.
- This has resulted in fall of GDP by around 7.5 per cent for this full year which has dented our aspiration to become a **\$5 trillion economy by 2024**.
- Though nothing much can be done for what has happened, in the coming years India needs to get back to the trend line of growth (pre-COVID years) to sustain the aspiration of our young population.

How different sectors are performing currently?

- The sectors which have shown positive sign of recovery are
 - Pharmaceuticals and chemicals, the FMCG sector, the two-wheeler sector, Construction equipment's driven by rural demand from sales to individuals, Capital goods.
- In contrast, Sectors which are still struggling for a full recovery are
 - Mainly, the travel and tourism sector, real-estate and construction sector, and retail which are significantly high employment sectors.

So, what steps must government take?

Though the recovery underway is solid, but we need measures to sustain and deepen it. The government can do three things.

- **First, the government should resort to fiscal stimulus** by paying long overdue government bills. Few examples are,
 - Distribute the **pending tax refunds**, pay the bills of all companies (large and small), pay off the many **arbitration awards** pending where the government has lost cases, and pay state governments their **pending GST dues**.
- **Second, invest in public health infrastructure** and centre should finance state government efforts to build an extensive public health network.
 - While this will equip as to handle a possible second wave of the virus, on the other, it will spread confidence.
 - Also, it is essential for government to **work in partnership with private sector hospitals**.
- **Third, invest massively in infrastructures such as Roads, ports, logistics**. Areas where investment can be channelised are,
 - By Providing decent, accessible housing to improve the living conditions in slums across our cities by providing right **public-private programme**.
 - By providing cheap connectivity into our cities.
 - Even, the **20 trillion infrastructure pipeline project** that requires massive funding can be considered.

How the funds for the above will be sourced?

- **To mobilise its resources** that are needed to finance the above measures, government can opt for a huge privatisation programme (**Disinvestment**)
 - Under this program, government should intend to **reduce its share-holding to 26 per cent across** public-sector banks, steel companies, oil companies, and every manufacturing company and hotel it currently owns.
 - This announcement might **trigger a big rally in the stock prices of PSUs**, increasing return.

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- **To stem the protests due to big reforms**, we are witnessing currently, the government should **choose democratic methods for implementing** them such as use of **discussion papers for public comment, debate in Parliament**.

We need to act swiftly to regain from stunted recovery. We must use our **economic crisis as an opportunity** to set some bigger things right that we have ignored for too long.

ForumIAS

General Studies Paper - 4

General Studies – 4

1. Values of advertising

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS-4- Ethics

Context: Ethical values in advertising.

What are the guiding principles for publishing advertisements in the newspaper?

- **Principles:** The code of business values has eight governing principles: honesty and integrity, respect, humility, excellence, consumer focus, transparency and fairness, neither favour nor discrimination, and finally, commitment to social good.
- **A fair balance:** If journalism is about maintaining a fair balance between what is in public interest and what the public is interested in, the ethical business practice for a news organisation in its pursuit of a sustainable revenue model is to refrain from interfering with editorial practices.
- **The code of editorial values:** There is no wall but there is a firm line between the business operations of the company and editorial operations and content.
 - It is necessary to create a professionalism in the editorial functioning independent of shareholder interference so as to maintain an impartiality, fairness, and objectivity in editorial and journalistic functioning.
- **The advertising team is guided by a triad:** the laws governing the sector, the code adopted by the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), and the in-house code of the newspapers.