

9pm

Compilation

February, 2021 (Third week)

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General Studies Paper - 1

General Studies - 1

1. Vaccination of manual scavengers must be prioritised

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS-1

Synopsis: The government is focussing on the vaccination of frontline sanitation workers. However, the most vulnerable among them, Manual Scavengers, did not get the attention they deserve.

Introduction

India is far behind in terms of understanding sanitation workers and their different categories. Manual scavengers belong to the lowest strata of unprotected sanitation workers. Many people in India believe that manual scavenging is already eliminated since it is legally banned. However, **the ground reality is very different.**

- **Sanitation workers can be categorized into** faecal sludge handlers, sewage treatment plant sanitation workers, toilet sanitation workers, public transportation site sanitation workers (railway, roads), sewer and drain sanitation workers, sanitation-waste intersection workers, etc.
- Manual Scavengers are workers discarding human excreta manually, in any form.

The risk involved in septic cleaning is the highest. One sanitation worker dies every five days. Waste recovery sanitation workers perform the work of manual scavenging as they come in regular contact with unprotected bio-medical waste, animal faeces.

Why sanitation workers should be included in priority population for vaccines?

Vaccination of sanitation workers should be prioritized due to following reasons:

- **First, several laws banning this practice are not working properly on the ground.** Sewer deaths continue to happen. Caste and economics have a role to play in the deprivation.
- **Second, the absence of a policy for the protection of the sanitation workers** resulted in the loss of many lives during the initial days of the pandemic. These cases are not even mentioned in the records of the National Commission of the Safai Karmachari (NCSK). The Safai KarmacharI Andolan (SKA) has had far better data.
- **Third, there is no social security, no accountability** in the actual expenses of the rehabilitation schemes. Even no definite provision for healthcare or pension is being provided.
- **Fourth,** the representation of sanitation workers is not involved during creation of policies for them.
- **Fifth, sanitation workers are prone to long-term diseases. In many cases, they don't even live till the age of retirement.** Their children suffer from malnutrition, TB, and cholera because of their habitation around the waste generated by the cities.
- **Lastly, the sanitation workers worked full time** to ensure safety for the people during the pandemic.

Way forward

The government must urgently prioritize vaccination for manual scavengers without giving the argument that they have already developed “herd immunity”.

General Studies Paper - 2

General Studies - 2

1. Need of reforming the blocking powers of Government

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.

Synopsis: The government's use of its blocking powers under Section 69A of Information and Technology Act 2000 (I.T Act) attracted criticism. There is a need to reform the [blocking powers to ensure free speech](#) in Indian democracy.

Background:

- [Twitter suspended some user accounts](#) based on Emergency restriction orders issued by Government under **Section 69A. Govt. issued** this order in wake of violence in farmer's protest on 26th January in Delhi.
- The apparent reason behind such an order was the use of a controversial hashtag #ModiPlanningFarmerGenocide. It could have disturbed the public order.
- However, later on, Twitter **reactivated** some of the accounts that didn't violate Indian law. It attracted a sharp reaction from the Indian Government. A [non-compliance order](#) against Twitter and its employees was issued for violating Section 69A.
- At present, a **temporary peace has been established, after a meeting** between Twitter officials and the government.

Government's power to block online users:

1. [Section 69A of I.T Act 2000](#):

- It empowers the government to order an intermediary for blocking access to any information in the digital world.
- The grounds for exercising the power are; threat to national security, public order, sovereignty and integrity of the country etc.
- A punishment up to 7 years can be imposed on intermediaries who don't comply with the government's blocking orders.

2. [Blocking Rules 2009](#):

- It tells the **procedure** which needs to be followed for **blocking online content**. As per these rules, the orders are subject to **review** by government committees. Further all orders and complaints should remain strictly **confidential**.
- **Issues with Blocking Power:**
 1. **First**, the government can issue restricting orders without any evidence. It **undermines the Fundamental Right to free speech**.
 2. **Second**, the confidentiality of orders makes it very **difficult for users to challenge** it in open courts. There is no requirement of giving any reason or hearing opportunity is a clear **violation of due process**.
 3. **Third**, These rules make censorship an easy and costless option. It places the burden of going to court and gathering the evidence on the user.
 4. **Fourth**, The framing of section 69A is in such a way that protection of online free speech mainly **depends on the courage** shown by intermediaries against government's blocking orders.

Way Forward:

1. Reforms should take place in compliance with prior judgments of SC. In the **Shreya Singhal case**, the court allowed challenges to blocking orders in high courts. In the **Kashmir Internet ban case**, the court said any order restricting access to the internet should be put in the public domain.

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2. The government should block access to information only when an affected party is given a fair hearing in courts. Direct blocking should be permissible only in emergency situations.
3. Blocking orders must be put in the public domain along with proper reasoning. The power of government to limit the flow of information needs to be rationalized.

At present the extent of free speech depends upon the capacity of multinational social-media platforms to face governments. Twitter managed to stand up against a clear case of overreach. However, other companies may not show similar courage, especially in cases of borderline overreach thereby threatening free speech. Thus, the demand to ensure free speech must come from citizens themselves.

2. 'Disengagement activities' for reducing Sino-India tensions

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Synopsis: India and China have simultaneously begun [disengagement activities around the Pangong Tso](#) region in eastern Ladakh. It is a laudable step for reducing tension between the two countries.

Background:

- The two countries were undergoing severe tensions since May 2020. It is when the Chinese army entered 8 km inside Eastern Ladakh.
- This Chinese encroachment along east of finger 8 along the LAC (Line of Actual Control) led to unprecedented clashes. The most severe was the Galwan valley clash that caused casualties at both ends.
- Almost 10 months after the first clash, China agreed to enter into a conciliatory agreement.

About the agreement:

- It calls for a **systematic and coordinated withdrawal** along the northern and southern banks of Pangong Tso region.
- China has to pull back its troops at Siriraj, east of Finger 8 and dismantle infrastructure created after April 2020.
- India has to return to its Dhan Singh Thapa Post near Finger 3.
- A **temporary moratorium** on patrolling activities has been imposed along the northern bank of Pangong Tso.

Reasons behind China's altered stance:

- **First, good diplomacy** was shown by the Indian government that didn't surrender to Chinese demands.
- **Second, a strategic advantage** was gained by Indian army at Kailash heights in the southern bank which enhanced its bargaining power.
- **Third**, China realized that a long stand-off will only **hamper bilateral relations** and would give little gain.
- **Fourth**, the **growing closeness of India-US** and their greater engagement in the **QUAD group**, might have pressurized China to alter its stance.
 - **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)** is an informal group of the US, Japan, India and Australia. The group aims to maintain a rules based order in the Indo-Pacific region.

Way Forward:

- The agreement must be implemented in letter and spirit to **re-instill the lost trust** between the countries.
- The focus should be on doing robust **verification and monitoring** in order to ensure its effective implementation.
- The success of this disengagement agreement will also open gates for **negotiation on other friction points** like Hot Springs and Depsang plains.

3. Issues in 15th Finance Commission Recommendation

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 2: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure, Devolution of Powers and Finances up to Local Levels and Challenges Therein

Synopsis: The recent 15th FC report recommendations have been criticised on the basis of two grounds. **One**, the recommendations will impact **co-operative federalism**. **Two**, the recommendations are not aligned with the changing federal structure in India.

Background

- Recently, the 15th Finance commission (FC) report has been tabled in the parliament. It's following key recommendations have been accepted by the government.
 1. The Commission has recommended a total devolution of Rs 8,55,176 crore to the states, which is 41% of the divisible pool of taxes.
 2. It also recommended for **revenue deficit grants** of Rs 1.18 lakh crore to the states.
 3. Furthermore, it recommended a **non-lapsable defence fund**. The grants component of the states has been reduced by 1 per cent (from 42% to 41%). It will be used to set up special funds for defence.
- The FC's recommendation for the **vertical devolution** at 41% is pragmatic. However, some of its recommendations will have an implication on the **co-operative federalism**.

What are the issues in the 15th FC recommendations?

- **First**, the **1% cut in the devolution is for special funding on defence**. It means states are paying Rs 7,000 crore for defence and internal security. But, Defence and National Security are the centre's responsibility as per the 7th **Schedule** of the Constitution. This use of funds from states to finance the Centre's expenditure is against the **spirit of cooperative federalism**.
- **Second**, the issues in the **horizontal distribution of funds**. Successive finance commissions have used the criteria of need, equity for devolving 92.5 per cent of funds to a state. Whereas 15th FC has reduced this to 75%. And the remaining 25% will be based on efficiency and performance. This is the lowest weightage for equity, making the 15th FC transfers the least progressive.
- **Third**, 15th FC recommendations do not depict the changed fiscal conditions. For example, after GST, the tax collection method has changed from a **production-based tax system** to a **consumption-based tax system**.
 - This structural change has a significant impact on the interstate distribution of tax. It is not taken into account by the 15th FC report.
- **Fourth**, the approach for **distributing revenue deficit grants** has not changed. The 15th FC could have recommended a **minimum-guaranteed revenue of 14 per cent** to every state.
 - This unchanged policy approach has resulted in an increase of **statutory and non-statutory grants** to almost 55 per cent of the total transfers. Whereas the

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aggregate transfers have dropped to 45 per cent. This makes the devolution process more discretionary.

4. Climate activist arrested in 'Toolkit Conspiracy'

Source: [The hindu](#), [Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis: A 22-year-old climate activist got arrested for misusing a toolkit. Such instances raise a question of alleged misuse of power by the government officials.

Read More – Toolkit conspiracy case and its impact on India- Explained Pointwise – ForumIAS Blog

Background:

- The Delhi Police has already registered multiple First Information Reports (FIRs) post the 26th January farmer protest in Delhi.
- They have now arrested Disha Ravi, a climate activist from Bengaluru for editing a toolkit published on 3rd February by climate activist Greta Thunberg. It was used by social media users to protest against the farm laws.

What is a tool kit?

- It is simply a document containing a set of directives for social media campaigners.
- It includes the hashtags to be used, persons to be targeted, duration of campaign and other things for a systematic and synchronized online campaign.

[Read more about tool kit conspiracy case](#)

Reason for Arrest:

- The allegation is that the toolkit was made by Pro – Khalistani separatists. Thus, editing it amounted to **sedition and incitement to riots**.
- The government believes that activist is part of a **global conspiracy** to incite violence in the country by secessionists based in Punjab.

Issues with Arrest:

- **First**, the Delhi Police didn't seek permission from the state Police. By that, it disobeyed interstate arrest guidelines formulated by the Delhi High Court. Further the accused was not allowed to be properly represented by a counsel.
- **Second**, the toolkit doesn't contain any directions which led to direct incitement of violence. It was a necessary condition for sedition.
- **Third**, it undermines democratic power when people are arrested due to excessive suspicion and not on merits. Thereby undermining due process.
- **Fourth**, such arrest shows non judicious use of police power which will diminish India's Global image.

Way Forward:

- The focus should be on addressing the tolerance gap in governance and not on using more repressive strategies.
- The masses shouldn't feel that their rights are not respected by the government and free speech should not be curbed by illegitimate means.
- In the case of Ravi, an impartial investigation to establish her crime should be done.

5. Government's Notice to Twitter: Why Twitter's actions are justified?

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 : Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.

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Synopsis: Twitter has acted with reason after defying the Indian government's legal orders. It didn't implement the order fully and this action is desirable despite the criticism.

Introduction

Twitter did not act in accordance with the Indian government's orders under Section 69A of the IT Act. It was required to block hundreds of accounts under the order.

However, Twitter has said that the list had **accounts of journalists, activists, and politicians**. Twitter believes that blocking these accounts would not be fair to Indian law and the platform's contract objectives.

- This defiance has not gone down well with the government. Independent verifications revealed **that many accounts did not post messages suggesting a genocide plan but supported farmers' protest**.

What were the criticisms against Twitter?

Twitter witnessed criticism on multiple grounds such as:

1. **First, Twitter's refusal shows a lack of respect for Indian law** because it is bound by legal orders of the government under the Act.
2. **Second, Twitter is a private company, and it cannot decide what is proportionate or lawful**. Twitter can challenge the order in a court, but cannot choose to comply partially.
3. **Third**, Twitter's decision indicates that it is denying parity to India with the U.S. The platform blocked Donald Trump's account but refusing to block users in India.
4. **Fourth, its defiance indicates the increasing power** and liberty of Big Tech. It requires a clear and plain zero-tolerance response.

Why Twitter's actions are justified?

1. The tension between the government and social media platforms **is healthy and constructive. It keeps a balance**, which was not possible if both were on the same side.
2. Following government's orders blindly will seriously impact **twitter's audience's fundamental rights**. Twitter also has a responsibility to ensure people's right to free and informed speech.
3. **Big Techs has often sided with the government hurting its users' rights**. For instance, the Wall Street Journal reported that Facebook India failed to act on provocative posts of a member of the ruling party. It is good that Big techs are thinking about users.
4. Twitter didn't ban Trump's account all of a sudden despite the repeated promotion of lies. His account was spreading misinformation during the Capitol Hill riot. Before suspending his account, Twitter tried to flag his content and limit its reach. A permanent ban was the last step. **Demanding a direct ban is against this process of twitter**.
5. The current incident is among the rare instances that **Twitter has given equivalence to its Indian audience with that of its U.S.'s**. Twitter chose to take an independent view of the matter and not blindly complied with the wishes of the government.

Way forward

- The attempt to extend similar safeguards to Indian users as the US users enjoy is a welcome step. That would also be consistent with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights endorsed by the UNHRC.

6. 'ICC ruling' over Palestinian Territories

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis: The recent ICC (International Criminal Court) ruling allows it to prosecute war crimes in Palestinian Territories. The ruling has been welcomed by Palestine but criticized by the U.S. and Israel.

Background:

- Israel had been accused of committing atrocities in Palestinian Territories of West Bank and Gaza Strip since 1967.
- Palestine joined the ICC in 2015 but remained silent towards the atrocities during the Trump administration. It was because it didn't want to end U.S. aid towards Palestinian Territories.
- It is notable that the US Congress was allowed to freeze US Aid in Palestinian territory if Palestine pursues its own legal matters.
- The change of administration in the U.S. allowed it to be more focal in the ICC. The recent February 2021 ruling of ICC is a result of this changed stance.

About the Ruling:

- It allows the ICC to **investigate** persons committing **war crimes in the Palestinian Territories** of West Bank and Gaza Strip.
- However, there is no possibility of immediate investigations, even on the cases already filed in front of ICC.

International Criminal Court:

- It is the only court in the world to try individuals for international crimes.
- It is headquartered in Hague, Netherlands.
- Not only that, but it is empowered to try crimes of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the crime of aggression.
- A war crime is an act that constitutes a serious violation of the laws of war which includes intentionally killing civilians or prisoners, torturing, destroying civilian property among others.

Significance of Judgement:

- It will ensure **accountability and justice** delivery in the region.
- It will ensure that individuals and militant groups like Hamas are subjected to international law. Furthermore, it will impose **adequate criminal responsibility** on them.

The response of various countries:

- **Palestine:** It welcomed the judgement as a step towards correcting past injustices suffered by the country since the 1967 occupation of Israel.
- **Israel:** It criticised the judgement of being Anti-Semitic and accused the court of ignoring atrocities done by Iran and Syria in the region.
- **US:** It objected against the judgement and reminded that Israel was not a member of the ICC.

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- **India:** It has refrained from commenting on the judgement based on its geopolitical interest as both Palestine and Israel share a good bond with it. ICC has said that any future conduct would be based on a thorough examination of judgement based on principles of impartiality and objectivity.

7. Significance of Telehealth services like Remote SMAs

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Synopsis: The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted Normal health Services in India. The telehealth services like **Remote Shared Medical Appointments (SMAs)** should be used.

Background:

- The March 2020 lockdown reassigned healthcare professionals towards COVID-19 specific duties.
- This deviated the focus from other healthcare domains in India and across the world.

How Covid-19 disrupted normal Health care services:

- As per a survey of WHO, Essential services like immunization and childcare got disrupted in the majority of the 105 countries surveyed.
- Around 45% of low-income countries witnessed a disruption in 75% of services. While this figure for high-income countries was only 4%.
- **Impacts on India:**
 - Fear of transmission and lockdown resulted in the fall of diagnostic services. In tuberculosis detection cases 50% fall was reported from April-December 2020. Whereas, in antenatal care visits 56% decline was observed during the first half of 2020.
 - The inequalities got widened when people in rural and remote areas were not able to travel to cities for getting specialized care.
 - However, the use of technology helped to mitigate the impact.

Virtual Consultation India

1. The **E-Sanjeevani platform of the Indian Government** provides virtual consultations to patients. It includes patient-to-provider and provider-to-provider consultation.
2. **A hub and spoke model** used for this platform. It connected smartphone-equipped rural wellness centers to specialist doctors located in cities.
3. Private players and non-governmental organizations also used the technology for reaching out to patients.

However, given the scale of India's population which is devoid of healthcare, a switch towards remote shared medical appointments is needed.

About Remote Shared Medical Appointments:

- **Remote Shared Medical Appointments** virtualizes the process of in-person shared medical appointments (SMAs). It is an effective practice in the US for more than 2 decades.
- Thus, It involves the **virtual interaction of a doctor** with **multiple patients** having similar issues.
- **Advantages:**
 - Patients get more time with doctors.
 - This process develops a sense of bonding among patients.

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- This process provides better productivity as patients learn from each other's questions.

Utility for India:

1. SMAs have been very effective in the case of diabetes. It is notable that India is home to the largest number of diabetes patients.
2. Aravind hospital in Puducherry has **shown the potential of SMAs** to combat glaucoma, a disease that causes gradual blindness.
3. Offering this facility through the E-Sanjeevani platform can help the country **meet the healthcare gap in rural India**.
4. SMAs will encourage people interaction and attract supplementary providers like physiotherapists and optometrists.
5. The **current COVID-19 vaccine drive** will also be strengthened as providers can offer sessions to burst the myths related to vaccine efficacy.

Way Forward:

1. The switch to a new technique of healthcare delivery will require adequate training and mentoring of both providers and patients.
2. **Collaboration with training platforms like ECHO** is desired to encourage the adoption of virtual SMAs. It trains primary healthcare providers in multiple states.
3. India is blessed to have **very low data rates** where 1.5 GB data/day is easily affordable for many Indians. This automatically gives the country a significant edge towards augmenting telehealthcare.
4. Further, the strengthening of digital health services will also be in line with **WHO's Global strategy** on Digital health. It would help in realizing the dream of **'Health for All'**.

8. The case of Four Capitals or the Supreme Court bench in South India

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS-2

Synopsis: The proposal of four capitals may not be feasible in India. However, a Supreme Court Bench in south India can be created.

Introduction

West Bengal's CM Mamata Banerjee suggested that there should be four capitals of India. She is of the opinion that Parliament sessions should be held in each of the four capitals in rotation. However, the proposal is not feasible.

Why is the plan not feasible?

Each one of the Four Capitals will require parliament buildings, accommodation for all the MPs, and adjunct staff. Moreover, there will be other cost involved with it:

1. **First**, if constructed, these **residential accommodations would be vacant for a year or 2**. There would be an **added cost of traveling for all the MPs** and their staff.
2. **Second, it will overburden the state police**. All the MPs and their vacant accommodations will require security round the clock.
3. **Third**, depending on the risk factor, **enhanced security** will have to be necessarily provided to a fair number of MPs.
4. **Fourth, the cost to the government exchequer** to have capitals in three other States will be huge.
 - For instance, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister proposed to shift the State capital to Tiruchirappalli in central Tamil Nadu in the 1980s. It was shelved due to the huge burden it would impose on the State exchequer.

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The case for SC bench in Southern state

The Bar Councils of the five southern States called for a Supreme Court bench in south India in 2021. This demand needs consideration.

1. **First**, there is a long-distance between the southern states and Delhi. **Many people cannot afford to travel** all the way to New Delhi to engage lawyers and plead their cases.
2. **Second**, the excessive fee of the Supreme Court lawyers in New Delhi is another constraint.
3. **Third**, Attorney General K.K. Venugopal suggested that four benches of the Court of Appeal with 15 judges each should be created across the country. It will **reduce the burden of the Supreme Court**.
4. **Fourth, moreover, Judges would be able to go through each case thoroughly. Thus, it will ensure** the delivery of a well-thought-out verdict. However, implementing this would require an amendment to the Constitution.

The way forward

This arrangement will allow the Supreme Court to deal with constitutional issues. With cases rising in various courts, a practical solution needs to be worked out. Easy accessibility to justice for every citizen is a right that cannot be countered.

9. Need for a balanced approach on 'Bilateral Investment Treaty' for India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Synopsis: Sri Lanka's revoked the **East Container Terminal (ECT) agreement** without any valid reason. **However**, Indian investors can't oppose this decision under International Law, due to India's withdrawal from Bilateral Investment treaties (BIT). This calls for adopting a balanced approach towards **BITs**.

Background:

- An agreement to jointly develop ECT at Colombo port was signed between Sri Lanka, Japan and India in 2019.
- In February 2021, the Sri Lanka government pulled out from the agreement.
- This hampered the interest of Indian investors as they can't approach international tribunal for protecting their interest under India-Sri Lanka BIT.

Read more – [Sri Lanka Writes Off Strategic Colombo Port Deal With India & Japan | ForumIAS Blog](#)

India-Sri Lanka Bilateral Investment Treaty:

- It governs the treatment of foreign investment between two countries on the basis of International Law. **India-Sri Lanka Bilateral Investment Treaty** was signed in 1997.
- It has a provision of **Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS)**. It allows individual foreign investors to sue host states in international tribunals if treaty obligations are violated.
- It calls for giving **Fair and Equitable Treatment (FET)** to foreign investments in the host state under **Article 3(2)**.
 - A core component of **FET is the protection of legitimate expectations of investors**.
 - **In International Thunderbird Gaming Corporation v Mexico Case**, the concept of legitimate expectations got clarified.

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- It is a situation in which the act of the host state creates a reasonable expectation in the mind of the investor to act in line with such expectation. Failure to fulfil such expectations would cause damage to investors.
- India- Sri Lanka BIT also has a **survival clause under Article 15(2)**. It protects investors interest for 15 years if the treaty is unilaterally withdrawn by either party.
- India withdrew from the treaty in 2017 due to a high number of ISDS cases filed against it. But survival clause **assures protection to Indian and Sri Lanka investors till 2032**.

Why can't Indian investors sue the Sri Lankan Government for revoking 2019 agreement?

- Although the act of Sri Lanka to withdraw from 2019 agreement is a clear breach of the principle of legitimate expectation. But the Indian investors can't appeal for protection.
- **Survival clause** gave protection to investments made before India's withdrawal from the treaty in 2017 and not to investments after that. It is due to this **cut-off date** that investors of 2019 ECT agreement can't do much regarding Sri Lanka's withdrawal from the agreement.

Way Forward:

- India must **understand the reciprocal nature** of BITs. The withdrawal will save it from ISDS claims but would also hamper the interest of Indian investors abroad.
- Decisions of withdrawal need to be taken with greater caution in a post-Covid world where the probability of taking arbitrary actions by foreign governments is quite high.
- The need is to adopt a **balanced approach towards BITs** that doesn't subject India to multiple ISDS claims nor harm the interests of Indian investors in foreign countries.

10. Evaluating India- China Disengagement agreement on Pongong Tso

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: **GS 2: India and its Neighborhood- Relations.**

Synopsis: India-China disengagement process on the border is ongoing. There is a need for the cost-benefit analysis of this disengagement process.

Background:

- Recently, both India and China have announced the start of **disengagement** between the two armies in Ladakh.
- The current disengagement is limited to two places on the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** in Ladakh:
 - One, the north bank of Pangong lake
 - Two, Kailash range to the south of Pangong.
- However, the disengagement in other regions is yet to take place. The other three sites of contention on the Ladakh border are **Depsang, Gogra-Hot Springs, and Demchok**.

Why the disengagement from the north bank of Pangong lake got prioritized?

1. **First**, nearly a quarter of all the Chinese transgressions on the LAC between 2014 and 2019 have taken place on the north bank of Pangong lake.
2. **Second**, the north bank of Pan gong lake is a famous tourist spot. For example, the Hindi film 3 idiots was shot here.
3. **Third**, the decision seems to be a political priority. There are habitations close to the north bank and any Chinese ingressions can be easily sighted from here. Any report of Chinese encroachment will bring embarrassment to the center.

Is the disengagement from the Kailash range a good move?

1. Kailash range was the only place where the Indian military had leverage against the Chinese army. The Chinese army was insisting on disengagement from this area first.
2. Initially, India was pushing for a simultaneous resolution of all the flashpoints on the Ladakh border. However, it did not happen.
3. Disengagement seems to be the right step. However, giving away the only leverage (Kailash range) that India had, along the LAC, needs to be debated.

What is the significance of Depsang plains?

Depsang plains are situated in the **Daulat Beg Oldi (DBO) sector**. It is a strategically important place for India because of the following reasons;

1. **One**, its proximity to the **Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie (DSDBO) road**, the **DBO airstrip**, and the **Karakoram Pass**.
2. **Two**, it poses threats to Indian control over the **Siachen glacier**.
3. **Three**, it is the only area on the Indian landmass where China and Pakistan can plan a collusive military attack on India.
4. **Fourth**, also, a former northern army commander identified this area as tough to defend in case of a Chinese military attack.

Thus, Depsang plains are strategically significant. India needs to find a holistic solution to **Depsang issue**.

How effective is the solution of creating a buffer zone?

The creation of Buffer zones has been effective to date in controlling the India-Chinese clashes around the LAC. But there are some issues,

1. **First**, it denies India, access to the areas up to PP14, which it patrolled earlier.
2. **Second**, there are worries that such buffer zones would lie majorly on the Indian side of the LAC. Thus converting Indian-controlled territory into a neutral zone is required.
3. **Third**, 'no petrol zones' has not been announced publicly yet, in all the contentious border areas along LAC. For example, Kailash range. Any violation may result in a Galwan like clash.

Thus, buffer zones can only provide a temporary solution. They are no alternatives to the **mutual delineation** and a final settlement of the Sino-Indian boundary.

Suggestions for India

- The **Centre for Policy Research produced a Non-alignment 2.0** strategy in 2012. It advocates for taking a prompt **quid pro quo** military operation in Chinese territory in case of escalation.
- However, this strategy may result in a military confrontation. Considering India's economic crisis, India won't pursue a quid pro quo strategy.
- Rather, India should enhance the deployment of troops along the LAC. It will prevent PLA ingress from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh.

The government has made a choice to seek restoration of peace and tranquillity on the LAC instead of a reversion to the status quo as of April 2020. Any strategic consequences of that choice should be managed by the government in the future.

11. An Analysis of 15th Finance commission's recommendations

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: **GS 2: Functions and Responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies**

Synopsis: The 15th Finance Commission recommendations are slightly different from the other Finance commission's recommendations. It has introduced many revolutionary changes that can shape India's future.

What are the major challenges faced by 15th Finance commission?

The 15th Finance commission (FC) had faced many challenges while preparing its report for the year 2021-26. Some of them are,

1. One, the issue of using 2011 population census data. The southern states were against it.
2. Two, the issue of creating a **non-lapsable defence fund**.
3. Three, using certain parameters for calculating performance incentives to states.
4. Fourth, the 15th FC was required to prepare the fiscal roadmap for the Union and state amid a shortfall in the GST collection and the Pandemic.

How the 15th FC report addressed these challenges?

1. **First**, the 15th FC recommended **vertical devolution at 41 per cent** to states against 14th FC recommendation of 42% devolution. The 15th FC adjusted 1 per cent for the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir.
2. **Second**, for **horizontal distribution**, it introduced **efficiency criteria** for tax and fiscal efforts of states. This is expected to harmonise the principles of revenue needs and performance.
3. **Third**, the 15th FC assigned **12.5 per cent weightage to demographic performance**. By that, it incentivized the southern states for the progress made by them in replacement rate of population growth.

What was the recommendation of 15th FC for distributing grant in aids to the states?

- The grant allocation will be based on the below five categories. 1. Revenue deficit grants, 2. Grants for local governments, 3. Grants for disaster management, 4. Sector-specific grants and 5. State-specific grants.
- The centre in its **Action Taken Report** accepted all the grants except **sector-specific grants** (Rs 1,29,987 crore) and **state-specific grants** (Rs 49,599 crore).
- The Commission also tasked to examine, whether **revenue deficit grants** should be provided at all to the states. Some states argued that providing **revenue deficit grants** will disincentivise tax efforts and **prudence** in expenditure.
- However, the FC recommended revenue deficit grants of Rs 2,94,514 crore for (2021-26). It will help fiscally stressed states due to COVID pandemic, such as Kerala, Punjab, West Bengal.

What were the Changes brought by 15th FC regarding grants to local governments?

- **First**, the 15th FC has prescribed the following conditions to local bodies to get access to the grants.
 - Constitution of State Finance Commissions
 - Timely auditing and online availability of accounts for rural local bodies
 - Notifying consistent growth rate for property tax revenue for urban local bodies.
- **Second**, it has also recommended for tying the grants to the local bodies to drinking water, sanitation, solid-waste management and faecal sludge management. This is in line with the national programmes such as Swachh **Bharat Mission** and **Jal Jeevan Mission**.
- **Third**, for the first time, the FC recommends Rs 8,000 crore to states for **incubation of eight new cities**. It also provides for urban grants to **million-plus cities** for improving air quality, to meet the benchmark of solid waste management and sanitation.
- **Fourth**, the landmark recommendation of the 15th FC is the health grant of Rs 70,051 crore through local bodies. It will help to address the gaps in primary health infrastructure.

15th FC recommendations for strengthening Disaster risk management

- The FC recommends setting up the state and national level **Disaster Risk Mitigation Fund (SDRMF)**. It is in line with the provisions of the **Disaster Management Act**.
- **Also**, for the first time, it introduced a 10-25 per cent **graded cost-sharing** by the states for the **NDRF and NDMF**. Though, this is not accepted by the states.

15th FC recommendations to strengthen Defence sector

- It recommends for setting up of a dedicated **non-lapsable fund** and the **Modernisation Fund for Defence and Internal Security (MFDIS)** for 2021-2026.
- The fund will bridge the gap between projected budgetary requirements and budget allocation for defence and internal security. It will also provide greater predictability to critical defence related **capital expenditure**.
- It has recommended the following **four specific sources** from where the funds for defence can be sourced.
 1. Transfers from the Consolidated Fund of India.
 2. Disinvestment proceeds of DPSEs.
 3. Proceeds from the monetisation of surplus defence land.
 4. Proceeds of receipts from defence land, which is likely to be transferred to state governments.
- Furthermore, it recommends an allocation of Rs 1,000 crore per annum for the welfare of families of the defence and CAPF personnel who sacrifice their lives in frontline duties.

12. Celebrity activism and government's response to it

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: The MEA's response to celebrity activism is fair. But its global reach has to go beyond majoritarian representation.

Introduction

The tweets by international pop singer Rihanna and climate activist Greta Thunberg on farmers' protest created a huge stir.

- **In response, The Minister for External Affairs tweeted about motivated campaigns targeting India.** It also said that India has the self-confidence today to hold its own. However, MEA's reaction has come under criticism, inside and outside Parliament.
- On the one hand, the hashtag activism was welcomed by the protesting farmers' associations. However, **some Indian film and sports stars tweeted that policy matters are internal to the nation.**

How is celebrity and Twitter activism used globally?

Celebrity activism over human rights is now an established tradition the world over. Twitter diplomacy is a fairly new phenomenon in India, but it is for the MEA to decide how foreign policy is best conducted.

1. **First**, the world of celebrities is firmly rooted in international relations. **It has helped in the growth of global civil society opinion and action.** Many Indian film celebrities such as Rajinikanth and Kamal Hasan are engaged in such activism.
2. **Second**, many celebrities become a member of Rajya Sabha or receive national honours. It is because **political parties also seek to convey their messages to the masses** through their chosen celebrities.
3. **Third, the United Nations makes celebrities its goodwill ambassadors.** Many celebrities are used as brand ambassadors for corporates. For example, the Gates Foundation has engaged in supporting AIDS sufferers in India, and elsewhere.

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4. **Last, there is a growing public trust in the image of the celebrity** as a rescuer of victims.

However, celebrity activism has its downside as well. Sometimes they promote ill-informed solutions and glamourizes populist policies, which results in misinformation among the public.

What should India do?

- The MEA should extend its reach beyond **majoritarian representation to the minority**. It has a different opinion from the masses.
- The government should create a wider constitutional trust among the Public. It requires a focus beyond governance and development.
- All citizens have a fundamental constitutional **duty to reject violence and develop respect for India's diverse culture**.
- These duties apply equally to the protesters, citizens, government or Opposition, the media, or state and party actors, etc.

13. A robust 'health and well-being budget for 2021-22'

Source: <https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GKD89ON6M.1&imageview=0>

Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Synopsis: The government has come up with an integrated health and well-being budget for 2021-22. It would help meet the current and upcoming challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background:

- The pandemic struck India in March 2020 and exposed the vulnerabilities of the Indian health care system.
- Although India's performance in tackling the pandemic was better than various developed countries. But its impact on the economy and society was significant.
- It was therefore imperative to come up with a strong health and wellbeing budget to develop resilience against the ill effects of the pandemic. The health budget was prepared in this context of Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.

Government measures for strengthening 'health and wellbeing':

- A Production linked incentive scheme is announced to boost the manufacture of pharmaceutical and medical devices.
- **35000 crore rupees** has been allocated for the development of COVID-19 vaccine. **Mission COVID Suraksha** has been launched to improve indigenous vaccine testing and development. Further coverage of pneumococcal vaccine will also be enhanced.
- Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) was launched to provide free food grains to 800 million beneficiaries.
- One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) will target 690 million beneficiaries covering 32 states/UTs.
- Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) has been given substantial allocation.
- There would be an expansion of health and wellness centres under **Pradhan Mantri – Atmanirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana (PMANSBY)**. It would also involve using a 13,192 crore Finance Commission grant for strengthening the primary health system.
- Allocation for the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) has not changed in comparison to last year.

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- There has been a **40% increase in Budget** of the Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) Ministry.

Significance:

- **First**, the nature of allocation strengthens the **vision of making India Atma Nirbhar**.
- **Second**, initiatives like Mission COVID Suraksha will help India **sustain** its position of being the **vaccine hub of the world**. Significant allocation towards vaccine development will also ensure all the citizens are able to get vaccinated in due time.
- **Third**, PMGKY and ONORC will help in ensuring **food and nutritional security** in the country.
- **Fourth**, a **reduction in diseases** namely Malaria, Polio and Diarrhoea would be seen due to substantial allocation towards JJM. This is explained by a report released by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in 2019.
- **Fifth**, focusing on **capital expenditure** through schemes like PMANSBY is a welcome step for strengthening the health system. Earlier the capital expenditure used to constitute only a small fraction of health allocation.
- **Sixth**, an improvement in AYUSH Ministry's budget will allow the country to focus more on **preventive care** and integrated treatment.
- **Lastly**, integration of health with well-being (Water, Sanitation and Nutrition) would help in improving the outcomes. Both National Health Policy, 2017 and Economic Survey have stressed the **interdependence of these sectors**.

Way Forward:

India's commitment towards health has allowed it to successfully deliver 8 million doses of COVID vaccine to health and frontline workers. This is the fastest vaccination drive in the world.

- Allocation towards schemes like PM-JAY should be enhanced. A 20% decline was seen in infant mortality rate (IMR) between 2015-20 in states which adopted the scheme in comparison to a 12% in IMR decline in states which didn't adopt it as per the economic survey.
- The states must increase their **health spending to 8%** of their respective budgets by 2022 as recommended by the National Health Policy and Finance Commission. This would reduce the burden on the Centre and ensure effective spending.

The Union Budget has effectively prepared the ground for tackling the upcoming challenges in the health sector. This should be coupled with other reforms so that the resilience capacity of the country gets enhanced. This would help in achieving the vision of universal health coverage by 2030 as part of sustainable development goals.

14. Balancing freedom of speech and national security

Source: <https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GN689L1EJ.1&imageview=0>

Syllabus: GS-2 – Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments

Synopsis: The government warned Twitter over its reluctance in following the executive order for blocking of information. However, the focus should be on balancing free speech and national security.

Background

- The government used its power under **Section 69A** of the Information and Technology Act to block information on the Micro-blogging site.
- This section allows the **government to block any information by issuing orders to a digital intermediary**. National security, public order, sovereignty and integrity of India, etc, are some grounds for blocking.

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- The apparent reason behind such an order was the use of a controversial hashtag that disturbed public order.
- The order was only partially followed by Twitter.

Government's Stance:

- Social media platforms should respect the law of the land. Partial compliance is simply a violation.
- Further, there should be consistency in behaviour as Twitter supported police action in Washington's Capitol Hill incident. But similar support was not seen in the 26th January violent protests at Red fort, Delhi.
 - It removed problematic hashtags as the same was spreading the hatred.
 - It viewed the blocking of journalists' and activists' accounts as a threat to freedom of speech and expression under Article 19 of the constitution. Therefore, accounts were reactivated after some time.

Way Forward:

- Both the government and Twitter are determined not to escalate the issue. The government has only issued a warning while Twitter has refrained from approaching the court.
- There is a need to re-examine the extent of the wide ambit of censorship powers under Section 69A. An opportunity was missed by the court in Shreya Singhal versus Union of India, in which the extent of the section was not rationalized.

In the world's largest democracy, the culture of secrecy and arbitrariness shouldn't be allowed to suppress freedom of speech and expression. The government must view freedom of speech as a facilitator to the security of the state and not an impediment.

15. Issues in Taxing PF contribution

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: **GS 2:** Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Synopsis: By taxing the income of PF contributions over 2.5 lakhs, the government wants to restrict **High net-worth individuals** (HNIs) who are using the social welfare scheme as a tax haven. Though it is well-intended, it has many ambiguities.

[Read More – Budget proposes tax on EPF interest | ForumIAS Blog](#)

Background

- The Union Budget 2021 has proposed taxing the income on provident fund contributions of over Rs. 2.5 lakh a year from 01 April 2021.
- The rationale given for taxing the income from provident fund contributions is to target HNIs. They are using the PF savings to avoid taxation. **For example**, the 100 largest employees' PF (EPF) accounts had a combined balance of over ₹2,000 crore.
- This is not the first time the government had tried to tax PF savings. In the 2016-17 Budget, the government proposed to tax 60% of EPF balances at the time of withdrawal. But due to protest from employees, it was withdrawn later.

What are the ambiguities in this scheme?

Revenue Department has pointed out that the tax will only affect a small group of HNIs. However, the scheme suffers from the following ambiguities,

- **First**, the threshold of taxing contributions of over Rs. 2.5 lakh is very low. It will end up taxing PF income for employees who are investing ₹21,000 a month towards their retirement.

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- **Second**, the threshold proposed is also not in line with the ₹7.5 lakh limit. It was set in last year's Budget for employers' contributions into the **EPF, National Pension System (NPS)** or other **superannuation funds**.
- **Third**, it creates inequity between India's limited retirement savings instruments. For example, it does not cover NPS **investments** over ₹2.5 lakh a year, but it includes government employees' contributions into the **GPF**.
- **Fourth**, it is also not clear on when and how the tax is to be paid. Either at retirement or each year after the PF rate is announced.
- **Fifth, The CBDT chief** has said that employees should showcase PF income in their annual tax returns. But this may work for GPF members whose interest rate is announced every quarter. Not for EPF accounts, as interest rates are declared late and credited even later.
- **Finally**, this move will affect the fund flow into EPF. This will in turn hamper the government's sources for finance which is largely dependent on market borrowings.

16. Judicial Review and Public Protests in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS-2: Structure, Organization, and Functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

Synopsis: The timely judicial review of the constitutional validity of laws would have reduced the number of protests in India.

Background:

- In the **Shaheen Bagh protest case**, in 2020, SC held that there is no absolute right to protest and public spaces cannot be occupied and that too indefinitely. It affects the right of the general public to move freely without hindrance.
- Recently, the Supreme Court has refused to review its earlier verdict on the Shaheen Bagh protest.

Why the SC decisions on protests are seen as arbitrary?

- **First**, many protests took place because laws passed by the Parliament (**economic reservation, CAA, Farm laws**) were not subject to timely **Judicial review**.
 - Almost all the major protests that happened recently in India, involved legal and constitutional issues. The court could not deliver the required immediate and effective adjudication over the constitutional validity of bills.
 - If the court would have delivered the judgement on time regarding the validity of the laws, then the protests could have been probably reduced.
- **Second**, the court is attempting to mediate the issue rather than providing a solution to that.
 - For example, **Shaheen Bagh protest case verdict**. The court balanced its verdict by upholding the **right to peaceful protest** while stating public spaces cannot be occupied indefinitely.

Why SC's refusal to review its earlier judgment is not right?

The court's judgment was against the indefinite occupation of public space in Shaheen Bagh protest case. It provides a licence to the police to commit atrocities against the legitimate protest in the name of the occupation.

During the agitations against the **farm laws also, the protesters had to face repressive actions of the state.**

- Protesters prosecuted by the state on serious charges of **sedition** and terrorism.
- Not only the protesters but also their supporters, including comedians and journalists were prosecuted. For example, Disha Ravi (climate activist) recently charged for 'conspiracy against the government'.

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- Protesters were denied the **freedoms of expression and peaceful association** provided under **Article 19** of the Indian Constitution.

The Supreme Court is globally seen as a guardian of the **right to dissent**. But it has not provided the protesters with the required support against the state action.

What is the way forward?

- A fair and effective justice mechanism on constitutional matters can reduce the protest on the streets.
 - For example, according to **Sociologist Luke Martell** the radical green movement in Britain was at a lower scale when compared with other parts of Western Europe.
 - This is because the “**public enquiry system**” in the United Kingdom is good. It processes ecological demands, and integrate them into the political system.
 - This minimised the radicalization of the movement arising out of **exclusion and marginalisation**.
- The spirit of judgment in **Himat Lal K. Shah vs Commissioner of Police (1972)** **should be upheld**.
 - The Court struck down the rules framed by the Ahmedabad Police Commissioner because it conferred arbitrary power on the police officers in the matter of public meetings.
 - Justice Kuttayil Kurien Mathew**, in Himat Lal K. Shah, explained that “freedom of assembly is an essential element of a democratic system” and that “the public streets are the ‘natural’ places for expression of opinion and dissemination of ideas”.

17. Importance of COVID 19 learnings in fight against tuberculosis

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/coronavirus-covid-19-cases-tuberculosis-cases-in-india-7194807/>

Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Synopsis: The COVID 19 pandemic has given an opportunity to India for combating other respiratory diseases like Tuberculosis (TB). The learnings from the pandemic can be used to control the spread of TB.

Background:

- The first case of COVID 19 was reported on 30th January 2020. After that, the disease claimed the lives of 1,54,000 people and infected 10.7 million in India.
- However, with robust efforts, the government managed to control its spread. Due to this, the country is not facing a brutal second wave as suffered by other countries.
- The number of active cases is decreasing since mid September and people are getting back to their normal lives.
- The focus should now be shifted to other respiratory diseases like TB.

About Tuberculosis:

- It is a contagious infection that usually attacks your lungs. But can infect other parts like your brain and spine.
- It is a bacterial disease caused by Mycobacterium tuberculosis and affecting mankind for 3000 years.
- Furthermore, it is a disease with the ability to damage multiple organs which enhances mortality risks.

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Issues with Tuberculosis:

As per World Health Organisation (WHO), India has more than 10 million active cases of TB. 4 lakh lives are lost per year due to TB and shares 1/4th of the global burden.

1. **First**, it causes a disproportionate impact on the poor who live in overcrowded spaces and lack proper nutrition.
2. **Second**, numerous myths and stigma are associated with the disease which discourages reporting and proper treatment.
3. **Third**, it becomes very difficult to control TB if multi-drug resistance gets developed or a person is already suffering from diabetes or HIV.

Using COVID 19 Lessons to combat TB:

- **First**, the **PM must take a lead** to sensitize masses about the disease. It was done by him in the case of COVID 19, to induce behaviour change.
- **Second**, the concept of **physical distancing** can be effective in curtailing the spread. The droplets from one person will not reach another if the due distance is maintained.
- **Third**, patients, as well as nearby family members, must **wear masks** to curb the spread of infection.
- **Fourth, improved detection techniques** developed during COVID can be used to replace the traditional sputum tests. This would ensure better diagnosis and quick results.
- **Fifth**, in order to improve tracking and contact tracing, the focus should be on **instant notification techniques**.
- **Sixth, awareness is developed around respiratory diseases. It** can be used to build community-led participation and burst the stigma surrounding TB.
- **Lastly**, the enthusiasm shown by media and coordination shown by governments in tackling COVID-19 should also be carried forward to TB.

India has set a target to eliminate TB by 2025 which is 5 years prior to the sustainable development goals target. This can be achieved if COVID 19 learnings are aptly adopted in combating TB.

18. Why Complete Elimination Strategy of COVID virus is not feasible?

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Synopsis: The empirical evidence shows that the idea of the complete elimination of COVID viruses in a selected few countries is not feasible. Rather, it will only increase the **socioeconomic disparities** thereby making the goal of elimination infeasible.

Background

1. A recent article published in **The Lancet** has advocated for “elimination strategy”, it is also known as the **zero-COVID-19 strategy** for eliminating the virus.
2. **Zero-COVID-19 strategy** means that the replication of the virus will be reduced to the least so that no new cases will occur in a defined geographical area.
3. The elimination strategy has the following three elements,
 - Rapid reduction in the number of infections to zero.
 - Creation of virus-free green zones and
 - Prompt **outbreak management** when new cases occur occasionally.
4. Rich countries are working on this strategy by vaccinating each and every citizen.
5. However, this strategy of the complete elimination of the virus is not suitable for every country.

Why this strategy is not suitable for all countries?

Complete elimination of the virus by vaccination is only suitable for **geographically isolated countries** such as **New Zealand**. It can afford strict border control measures. Even here, it is difficult because of the following reasons,

- **First**, the virus will keep on circulating in other countries. So, the threat of a Virus outbreak will stay for a while.
- **Second**, the Virus is mutating at a very fast pace. **Universal vaccination** will not be helpful against new variants. It is difficult to consistently upgrade vaccines.
- **Third**, a zero-COVID-19 strategy will worsen **global health inequities**. The idea of creating green zones for free travel will benefit richer countries and alienate poorer nations.
- **Fourth**, the experience from the elimination of other diseases shows that the complete elimination of the COVID virus is not possible. For example,
 - **Measles and neonatal tetanus** are present for more than 20 years. It caused nearly 25,000 newborn deaths in 2018. Despite the global efforts for vaccination it still remains a major public health challenge in the developing world.
 - **Polio**, eradicated from Southeast Asia, is still endemic in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
 - Also, according to immunologists surveyed by the **science journal Nature**, the COVID virus will become endemic in certain countries.

What are the Solutions?

Instead of isolated strategies for few countries, **global leadership and resources** to vaccinate the vulnerable population are required.

- **First**, disease control measures should be implemented globally. The vaccine coverage for vulnerable populations across the globe should be increased.
- **Second**, the current pace of vaccination needs to be increased by 4.3 times to vaccinate 6.4 million persons per day.
- **Third**, along with this, mapping of elderly and persons with comorbidities needs to be done on a priority basis for vaccination.
- **Fourth**, there is a need to strengthen **epidemiological and genomic surveillance** for COVID-19.
- **Fifth**, a plan for the goal of achieving **Universal Health Coverage (UHC)** is required. Because the COVID-19 pandemic has reversed the gains made in other health programmes like tuberculosis control.

Thus, the idea of eliminating virus in selected few countries should be replaced with a pragmatic goal of controlling COVID-19. Since the zero-COVID-19 strategy comes with zero evidence of feasibility, focusing on it will result in wastage of our attention, funds, and time.

19. 'Weakness of Indian state' in elimination of poverty

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Synopsis: The pandemic has exposed the weakness of the Indian state in fulfilling the needs of the poor. This calls for a change in the current approach to eradicate the miseries faced by the poor.

Background:

- Two books have tried to explain the shortcomings of the Indian state in meeting the aspirations of the poor.

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- The books are Locking Down the Poor: The Pandemic and India's Moral Centre by Harsh Mander and Despite the State: Why India Lets Its People Down and How They Cope by M. Rajshekhar.
- They **threw light on the problems faced by the poor** during the pandemic including loss of jobs, shortage of food, etc.
- As per them, the failure is based on the **systematic weakness** of the Indian state which is devoid of the key pillars of a strong state.

What are the key pillars of a strong state:

- It is built with strong support from people
- It has robust administrative machinery for the delivery of services and maintenance of stability.
- Furthermore, it has managerial abilities to shape and implement change.

Issues with Indian state:

- **First**, it is very difficult to develop a shared identity among Indians due to the high degree of **diversity**. Shared identity is essential for obtaining the support of people as seen in the case of strong states like Japan and China. They used Japanese and Han Chinese identities for unification.
- **Second**, apart from the diversity, the Indian state is also suffering from **caste division**. It is often used by leaders to divide the Indian masses.
- **Third**, the Indian bureaucracy performs poorly in the domain of **shaping changes**. This is mainly due to the colonial mindset which focuses more on stability and compliance.
- **Fourth**, governance is **more focused on capitalist ideology**. It induces the bureaucracy to function as corporate managers. This eventually neglects the spirit of socialism which is necessary to uplift the poor people.
- Fifth, the approach of looking at politics as not more than an extension of economics has led to **privatization** of necessary services such as health and education.
- **Sixth**, the approach of strengthening the top of the pyramid and expectation of **improving the bottom through trickle-down effect** has not delivered desired results.

Way Forward:

- The focus should be on uniting the masses around a **modern and inclusive identity** as taught by our constitution-makers.
- The bureaucrats must be given due training in order to simultaneously **balance stability and change**. As too much change can create chaos and no change can solidify the inefficiencies of the current setup.
- Public servants should not function as corporate managers. Rather they must be willing to devote their lives for the welfare of the masses in order to strengthen the process of nation-building.
- The state must realize that it can't function like a private corporation that can easily fire its employees. It must ensure everyone is given due opportunities to grow and prosper.
- The state must now **focus on parameters like economic justice, environmental sustainability**, etc. rather than focusing solely on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) numbers.

In a nutshell, India today desires political leaders who can unite the masses, administrators who can deliver good governance, and business leaders who are wealth creators as well as distributors.

20. Overexpansion of IIT's will reduce its standards

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education.

Synopsis: The recent decision by UGC to allow IITs to open branches abroad will jeopardize the Institution's brand. This overexpansion of IITs will reduce their quality.

Background

- The Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) are India's premier institutes with world-class quality standards. They are among few Indian higher educational institutions that perform well in the global rankings.
- However, in the last decade, the IIT institutes have expanded beyond their capacity. This accelerated expansion is likely to affect its quality standards. For example, Currently, there are 23 IITs as compared to 5 IIT's in the early 1960s.
- Moreover, recently, the University **Grants Commission permitted** selected IITs under the '**Institutions of Eminence**' category to set up campuses abroad. This decision could further weaken the quality standards of IITs.
- So, we need to rethink the changing role and mandate of IITs in order to ensure that quality and focus are maintained.

How the expansion of IITs is affecting the quality standards of the premier institutions?

In recent years, the government expanded the number of IITs throughout the country. This has the following consequences:

- Most of the new IITs are located in smaller towns. Mandi (Himachal Pradesh), Palakkad (Kerala), Dharwad (Karnataka), and others.
- It will be difficult for IITs in small locations to attract top-quality faculty and staff. For example, **IIT Dhanbad** has been approved to hire 781 instructors, but only 301 positions were filled as of January 2021.
- Also, it will be difficult to provide world-class facilities and infrastructure for IITs that are located in smaller towns.
- Thus, inevitably it will lead to quality decline and the dilution of "IIT brand".

What are the other issues hampering the growth of IIT's?

- **First**, IIT's are unable to attract a sufficient number of young faculty to fill vacancies resulting from retirements.
 - Because the salaries offered by IIT's are relatively less compared to the salaries offered by the industries.
 - Also, bright minds are getting attracted to universities and industries in other countries.
- **Second**, exclusive focus on technology and engineering and very less importance given to the humanities and social sciences.
 - Recently, the 2020 **National Education Policy** emphasized that the IITs should focus more on "**holistic and multidisciplinary education**".
- **Third**, lack of correlation between the local needs and IITs. Only a few State governments are effectively utilizing the presence of IITs for **community outreach programmes** through **knowledge-sharing networks**.
 - An effective approach for local area development through IITs could have prevented the resistance of local groups for setting up new IIT in their region. For example, Goa.

What needs to be done?

- **First**, rather than creating new IIT's we need to prioritise **limited "IIT system"**. It should be funded at "world-class" levels and staffed by "world class" faculty. Only, 10 to 12 "real" IITs located near major cities are practical for India.
 - Whereas, the newly established institutes can be renamed. After that, they can be provided with sufficient resources to produce high-quality graduates and good research.
 - The recent decision to liberalise the recruitment rules to attract more foreign faculty is a good step in the right direction.
- **Second**, IITs need to pay attention to internationalization by collaborating with the best global universities and hiring foreign faculty. Rather than starting overseas branches we need robust policies to attract international students.
 - This move will produce excellent results and build the IIT's international brand. For instance, **IIT Bombay-Monash Research Academy** and **University of Queensland-IIT Delhi Academy of Research (UQIDAR)**, are promising examples.
- **Third**, adequate and sustained funding is mandatory from both the government and the **philanthropist** to ensure high-quality standards.

21. A tussle between Australia and Facebook over News Charges

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 2: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora

Synopsis: Recently, a clash erupted between the Australian government and Facebook. The Big Techs in Australia are opposing the Fee to media companies for using their content.

Background

- Recently, the Australian government has proposed the '**News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code Bill 2020**'.
- The Bill aims to make **Google and Facebook** pay to media companies for using their content.
- It also proposes for an **arbiter** to decide the payments. It is important because small publishers have no **bargaining power** against **Big tech companies**.
- Facebook has retaliated with a **news blackout**. It blocked all the news links on its platform. In this process, it also ended up blocking out emergency services such as weather forecast, rescue operation, news related to health, etc.
- In response to this bullying action by Facebook, Australia's Prime Minister has sought global **diplomatic support** for forcing Internet giants to pay media companies.
- In this context, he also contacted Indian Prime minister **Narendra Modi** and Canada's Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau** to discuss the progress of **media platform bill**.
- The legislation sets a precedent in regulating social media across countries.

Why the government resorted to draft a bill for this purpose?

- In 2017, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) recommended a **voluntary code** for internet companies. It was to balance the negotiating power differential between major digital platforms and media businesses.
- However, the businesses were not able to reach an agreement voluntarily. This prompted the government to legislate a mandatory code.

Why the internet companies are reluctant to accept this bill?

The basic argument of both companies is that,

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- The media industry is already being benefitted from the traffic routed to them by the digital platforms.
- Also, they are of the opinion that the proposed rules would expose the Internet companies to unseen levels of financial and operational risk.

How it is being regulated in other countries?

- Both the platforms Facebook and Google aim to formalize payment pacts with news companies in several other countries.
 - **For example**, Facebook is planning to launch its news tab feature in the US and in the UK, with likely tie-ups with The Guardian, The Economist, and The Independent.
 - Whereas Google has planned to roll out its news offering platform, **Google News Showcase. It has** 450 publications on board in a dozen countries.
- Similarly, Google has accepted to pay news publications in France for using their content online.
- Even in Australia, Google has opted for a more conciliatory position by signing a deal with Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. Whereas, Facebook has resorted to retaliation.

Why internet companies are having double standards with respect to different countries?

- Paying for a news feed is not an issue for the tech giants. They have already accepted to pay News publications in France.
- But the fight in Australia is over, how much control these companies would be able to retain on their pay-out process and on operational aspects. For example, the power to decide the payments for news feed sources, revealing changes in their algorithms, etc.,
- European laws have specifically linked payments to copyright, without any pressuring features into the agreements. Whereas Australia's code is entirely focused on the bargaining power of news outlets and has some coercive features.

What is the status in India?

- According to a **FICCI-EY report** for 2020, there are 300 million users of online news sites, portals, and aggregators in the country. It comprises around 46% of Internet users and 77% of smartphone users in India at the end of 2019.
- Also, India is the **second-largest online news consuming nation** after China. This has increased the revenue for aggregators, news publishers through digital advertising.
- For example, according to EY estimates, digital advertising spends in 2019 grew 24% and is expected to grow to Rs 51,340 crore by 2022.
- Despite huge prospects, a substantial discussion on this issue is yet to begin in India.
- In India, **Daily hunt and In Shorts** are the other major news aggregators. They are yet to find a sustainable revenue model to make payments to publishers.

General Studies Paper - 3

General Studies – 3

1. “First Trade Minimum Price” (FTMP): A model to increase farmer’s income

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 3: Transport and Marketing of Agricultural Produce and Issues and Related Constraints; E-technology in the aid of farmers.

Synopsis: Industrial revolution 4.0, will reduce employment opportunity. The “First Trade Minimum Price” model can be used for increasing farmer’s income.

How Industrial Revolutions are changing employment dynamics?

- The subsequent three Industrial revolutions reduced the dominance of the agriculture sector. They made the service and manufacturing sector dominant.
- This forced the agrarian workforce to shift to secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy.
- The advent of the **Industrial Revolution (IR) 4.0** will make this situation more complex.
- The use of new technologies in IR 4.0 will lead to job losses in the service and manufacturing sectors. New techs include Artificial Intelligence, robotics, cognitive analytics, 3D printing, genomics.
- Thus, the industries employing a huge population from the agriculture sectors will have a reduced capacity for employment.

Present status of Agriculture sector

- According to **the FAO**, about 60 percent of the global population, directly or indirectly, is still dependent on agriculture.
- However, its contribution to the world GDP is just about 4 percent. Whereas, the contribution of secondary and tertiary sectors to the economy is 90%.
- In India, the contribution of the agriculture sector to GDP is 12-15 percent. Though it is higher than the world average, it is still much less, compared to the contribution from other sectors of the economy.
- Centre and state governments are continuously trying to improve the economic status of the farmers. Yet, their efforts are unable to deliver a sustainable increase in their per capita income.

Thus, there is an urgent need to think about the way to avoid the possible employment crisis of the future. It involves increasing the productivity of the agriculture sector and farmer’s income.

What is the method to improve the farmer’s income?

The author suggests a **new economic model** for fixing farm prices. If this model gets employed then it will address the issue of the agrarian economy, and will also retain the population in the agriculture sector. Also, it will make agriculture more prosperous by bringing rural average household income closer to those engaged in manufacturing and services sectors.

- The author proposes for “**First Trade Minimum Price**” (FTMP). According to this model, the local farming community will fix the prices of all the agricultural primary goods on a day-to-day basis or periodically.
- Also, this will make it mandatory for the first trader to procure the commodity at a price, not below the price fixed by the above criterion.
- He also suggests the use of robust digital technologies for the exercise of fixing prices.
- This proposal is based on the present market-based pricing of services and products. Here, the prices of products or services are determined and decided by the manufacturers or providers.

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- Similarly, the farming community also can decide the prices of their products. It will increase their per capita income. This will also help to retain the agriculture workforce in the farm sector thereby decreasing the unemployment rate.

2. Why prices of Petrol and Diesel are rising?

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 3: Issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment

Synopsis: Retail prices of petrol and diesel have reached record highs in India. One major reason is a heavy tax on Petrol and diesel in India.

Introduction

The price of petrol is touching Rs 89 per litre in Delhi and diesel reaching Rs 86.30 per litre in Mumbai. The government states that the reason behind this rise in price is an increase in global crude prices by more than 50 per cent.

While retail prices of both fuels in other countries are just reaching pre-pandemic levels, Indian consumers are paying a lot more.

Why are consumers in India paying more for petrol and diesel?

Retail petrol and diesel prices are linked to global crude oil prices in theory. That means if crude prices fall, retail prices should come down too, and vice versa. However, this does not happen in reality especially in India.

1. **First**, when global prices go up, the consumer has to pay the increase in price. But when the prices decrease, **the government introduces fresh taxes to ensure that it collects extra revenues.**
 - **For instance**, the government hiked the central excise duty on petrol and diesel at the beginning of 2020 to boost **revenues**. The government did this to boost **economic activity government**. This resulted in the revenue gain to the government.
 - Currently, state and central taxes amount to around 180 per cent of the base price of petrol and 141 per cent of the base price of diesel in Delhi.
2. **Second, crude oil prices collapsed during the pandemic.** But as economies have reduced travel restrictions, global demand has improved, and prices have been recovering.
3. **Third, the controlled production of crude amid rising demand** has been another key factor in boosting oil prices.
4. **Fourth**, Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) are free to set prices for petrol and diesel based on international prices on paper. Increase in central levies has meant that **the consumer hasn't benefited from low international prices** and has ended up bearing the cost of rising crude oil prices.

[Read How India should end oil age?](#)

Conclusion

- Experts suggest that the impact of rising fuel inflation has been balanced by declining food inflation. However, the consumers with greater expenditure on travel are bearing the higher prices even though the overall inflation reduced down to 4.06 per cent in January.

3. Deregulation of Geospatial Data: Prospects

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs3: Science and Technology- Developments and their Applications and Effects in Everyday Life. Indigenization of Technology and Developing New Technology

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Synopsis: Recently, the Ministry of Science and Technology deregulated the geo-spatial data and map-making in India.

What is geospatial data?

- Geospatial data is the data about objects, events, or phenomena that are located on the surface of the earth.

[Read More about Geospatial data and Geospatial policy](#)

What is the present policy on geospatial data?

- Till recently, the government had a near-monopoly regarding the collection, storage, use, sale, dissemination of geo-spatial data and mapping. This was because of concerns over internal as well as external security threats.
- Only government-run agencies such as the **Survey of India, Defence and Home Ministries** were allowed to use geospatial data.
- Whereas, the private companies needed approval from different departments of the government as well as the defence and Home Ministries. Then only, they were able to collect, create or disseminate geospatial data.
- The lack of private participation led to the underdevelopment of the **Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping**.
- The Kargil war highlighted the dependence on foreign data and the need for indigenous sources of data. Only, after the **Kargil war**, the government heavily invested in Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping.

Why has the government deregulated geospatial data?

The government has deregulated the geo-spatial data to achieve the following objectives:

1. **First**, it will help in the timely completion of the project without delay. Over-regulation in the use of geo-spatial data has led to **red-tapism**. It delayed the start of projects for both private and government agencies.
 - The Deregulation now allows the Indian companies to **self-attest** by confirming the government guidelines. This eliminates the need for monitoring by a government agency, thereby improving **ease of doing business**.
2. **Second**, it will help to improve the status of **data deficiency** in the country. Lack of appropriate data impedes planning for infrastructure, development and businesses.
 - Also, Mapping of a country as large and diverse as India with high accuracy will take decades if it is done only by government agencies.
 - Hence, incentivizing the Indian companies in the geospatial sector and increasing investment from private players in the sector will establish India as a data sufficient country.
3. **Third**, the application of geospatial data has become widespread. It is no more confined to security purpose alone.
 - An increasing number of sectors such as agriculture, environment protection, power, water, transportation, communication, health (tracking of diseases, patients, hospitals etc.) currently rely on this data.
 - Geospatial data is now crucial for the government in planning for infrastructure development, social development, natural calamities etc.
4. **Fourth**, it is also in line with the global consensus for **open access** to geospatial data. Many countries have made their geo-spatial data freely available. The new guidelines will ensure open access, except for sensitive defence or security-related data.

What impact is this expected to have?

1. **First**, deregulation will ensure more This will result in more accurate data available to both the government and private agencies for planning.

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2. **Second**, it will promote the setting up of new **Startups** and businesses especially in the sector of e-commerce or geospatial based apps. This will increase employment in these sectors.
3. **Third**, it also promotes the building of **indigenous apps**. For example, an Indian version of Google Maps.
4. **Fourth**, with data collection companies working with the Indian government on various sectoral projects it is also likely to increase in **public-private partnerships**.
5. **Fifth**, it will also boost the economy by attracting investments in the geospatial sector by companies and by an increase in export of data to foreign companies and countries.

4. Causes of accidents in firework industry

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 : Growth, development and employment

Synopsis: Labour reforms and technological advances within the fireworks industry is the need of the hour to minimise the causes of accidents in the firework industry.

Introduction

Thousands of workers in Tamil Nadu's famed fireworks' industry are working in unsafe conditions. It resulted in a series of accidents. Such as

- 20 workers died and 28 injured in the latest accident at a fireworks unit in Virudhunagar. These incidents take place **due to gross violation of norms governing the industry** and human error in handling explosive substances.
- 25 lives were lost in an accident in three fireworks factories in Virudhunagar (9), Cuddalore (9), and Madurai (7) in the past 11 months.
- **After such accidents, only short-term action is taken. It** includes
 - Registration and identification of cases,
 - Arrest the person responsible for an accident
 - Symbolic inspections,
 - Issuance of warnings and safety advisories

What are the causes of such accidents?

- **First**, there is a large-scale **illegal sub-leasing of workers** for licenced firework units.
- **Second, there is a violation of the limit on workers** to be deployed. This leads to crowding in each shed.
- **Third**, there is a **piece-rate system in payment** (payment to workers is provided based on the number of firecrackers produced by workers). People are tempted to produce more units per day. For example, a tired worker hurriedly emptied semi-finished crackers, which caused the recent accident.
- **Fourth**, there is also a **lack of trained workers**. This encouraged the industry to hire new workers with limited skills leading to accidents.
- **Fifth, Unlicensed units have expanded**. They mostly escape the inspection until an accident occurs.

The way forward

- **Supervision of the chemicals** to be mixed or stored is a key task to avoid casualty.
- There should be **periodic inspections** at factories and **strict penal action** against violators.
- Central and State governments must **provide the needed manpower** for enforcement agencies as the industry has grown manifold.
- A **continuous political push for labor reforms** and **technological innovations** within the industry is also essential.

5. Issue of MSP Calculation and farmer's demand

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices

Synopsis: As per the government, M S Swaminathan report's recommendations on MSP are already implemented. However, protesting farmers and farm experts contest the claim.

Introduction

Protesting farmers and farm experts have contested the government's claim. They say that the government is going by its own formula and farmers' income have not been improved yet.

- The farmers are claiming so because the actual amount depends on the method used to calculate the cost of production.

What are the various formulas used to calculate the cost of production in agriculture?

- There are at least six formulas to make that calculation which include A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2.

Formulas used to determine the cost of production	Criteria included
A1 method	all actual expenses in cash. Included the value of hiring human resource, the value of owned machine labour, hired machinery charges, the value of seeds both farm produced and purchased, the value of pesticides etc.
A2 method	A1 plus rent paid for leased-in-land
B1 method	A1 and interest on the value of an owned capital asset
B2 method	B1 plus the rental value of owned land and rent paid for leased-in-land.
C1 method	B1 and the credited value of family labour
C2 method	B2 and the credited with the value of Family Labour

- M S Swaminathan report** had **recommended** that the MSP should be calculated by including all actual farm costs as **C2 along with an additional 50% margin.**

What formula does the government use, to calculate MSP?

Different formulas were recommended by different committees formed for calculating MSP. For example, Dr M S Swaminathan Committee recommended C2+50%, Ramesh Chand Committee (RCC) recommended MSP on C2+10% formula.

- First, the government used** its own formula **A2+ Family Labour** as a cost of production. The government then pay farmers 1.5 times the amount of A2+FL. But, the increase in the revenue of farmers did not make any difference in reality.
- Second,** a comparison with the government method and Swaminathan report shows that there is a **huge difference between A2+FL (Government) and C2 (Swaminathan committee)** for the main crops. The value of A2+FL is much lower than the C2.
- Even if the costs suggested by RCC are taken into consideration, it can also **improve the welfare of farmers.** But the government is calculating MSP based on their own formula.

The way forward

- Swaminathan report's MSP formula, C2 plus 50% is better for providing farmers with a higher value for their produce.
- Thus, the government should fix MSP by calculating C2, along with an addition of 50% margin. The MSP for wheat would be Rs 2,787 and paddy Rs 3,116 per quintal.
- If the RCC formula (C2 +10%) is adopted, then the MSP should be fixed at Rs 2,044 (wheat) and Rs 2,285 (paddy), respectively

6. Issues in the draft rules for the Code on Social Security 2020

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis – The Government drafted the rules for the **Code on Social Security 2020** without considering **growing informal workforce**.

Introduction:

- During the Budget, Finance Minister highlighted the implementation of the four labour codes.
- Budgetary Allocation for the MSME sector this year was Rs.15700 Crores. This is more than double the amount allotted last year.
- This will be a positive step if it provides jobs and social security to informal workers.

What are the positive aspects of the draft labour codes?

1. Social security benefits will extend to gig and platform workers.
2. Minimum wages will apply to all categories of workers. They all will be covered by the Employees State Insurance Corporation (ESIC).
3. Compliance burden on employers will get reduced. Because the labour codes provide a single registration and licensing instead of multiple ones at present.

Impacts of lockdown on informal workers-

1. The lockdown impacted the informal sector more. This is highlighted by the [Oxfam inequality Virus report](#). Few key findings of the report were,
 - **Informal workers were the worst hit**– 75% out of the total 122 million who lost their jobs were in the informal sector.
 - Over **300 informal workers died due to the lockdown** due to starvation, suicides, exhaustion, road and rail accidents, police brutality and denial of timely medical care.
2. More than **2,582 cases of violation of human rights** were recorded by the National Human Rights Commission as early as April 2020.

What are the issues pertaining to the draft rules for the code on Social security, 2020?

1. **First, Lack of information**- The Draft rules make Aadhaar based registration mandatory for receiving benefits. However, there is not much information available in the registration process.
2. **Second, Confusion regarding applicability**-There is no specific guidelines on how benefits will be applicable to all the informal sector employee.
 - **A question for example**- Will migrant workers qualify for the social security benefits if they employed in a different state than the registered [Aadhaar based] state?
3. **Third, rising inequality gap**- The draft rules are not able to address the issues of the growing informal workforce. The growing informal workforce along with the lack of state's accountability is responsible for rising inequality.
 - Due to this, workers face the risk of human and labour rights violation. It also leads to unsafe and unregulated working conditions and lower wages and other vulnerabilities.

Way forward-

- There is a need to address the growing informal workforce and provide social protection, especially to the 450 million informal sector workers.
- It is important that the draft labour codes take that also into account.

7. Conservation of Migratory Birds

Source- **Down To Earth**

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

Synopsis- Migratory birds are important for ecological balance. However, they are facing several threats, leading to their extinction.

What are migratory birds?

- Bird migration is the regular seasonal movement. Birds fly hundreds and thousands of KMs to find the best habitats for feeding, breeding, and raising their young ones.
- Migratory birds come to India from about 29 countries between September and October during the winter migration season. For example, Pallikaranai in Chennai attracts many flamingoes, ducks, and waders.
- However, India witnessed a decrease in the number of migratory birds.

Threats to Migratory Birds in India

Migratory birds are under threat from the following factors:

1. **Loss of biodiversity**- Over-exploitation, unsustainable use of natural resources, population explosion along with increased weather variabilities, and climate change has resulted in the loss of biodiversity.
2. **Declining water sources**
3. **Illegal killing** – Hunting along migration routes threatens some migratory bird species.
4. **Stopover habitat loss** – Migratory birds use stopover sites to feed, rest and re-energize during their migration period. But many stopover sites are threatened due to increased urbanization and over-exploitation.
5. **Collision** – Structures such as power lines, windmills, and offshore oil-rigs have also affected migratory birds.
6. **Poisoning by pesticides**- Pesticides have an adverse effect on migratory birds as they can directly kill some birds.
7. **Increasing illumination** – The artificial light at night adversely affects migration by confusing the birds.
8. Increasing encroachment and human interferences, lack of food become a challenge, and birds can die of starvation.

Importance of migratory birds

1. Migratory birds play a critical role in maintaining a balance in the ecosystem. They are helpful in pollinating plants, dispersing seeds, act as pest control agents, and consuming insects and small mammals.
2. The absence of these birds from an area can result in disasters like a Locust attack.
3. Duck helps in the transportation of fish eggs in their guts to other water bodies. Bird droppings are rich in Nitrogen and act as organic fertilizers.

What are the measures required to address the issues?

- **Long-term monitoring programs** to assess the migration trends in birds, diseases monitoring and enumeration.
- **Educating** people about bird migrations and their impacts. Seeking local support for nesting and conservation of migratory birds.
- **Fishing operation to be minimized/abandoned/banned** during the migration season.
- Need to create **Bird-friendly landscape** and **maintain natural habitat** to help birds roost and build their nests.

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- **Banning single-use plastics** and avoiding dumping of single-use plastics in water bodies.
- Strict law enforcement is required to support the conservation of migratory birds.
- **Modern technologies** like drones can be used to track poachers in areas where birds converge.
- **Minimizing night illumination** along the migration paths.
- **Promote awareness** regarding the conservation and protection of migratory birds and their natural habitats.

8. Importance of Mars 2020 Perseverance Rover

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 3: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life

Synopsis: NASA's Mars 2020 Perseverance Rover touched down on the Martian surface. The results of the experiment will determine the quest for life on Mars and the future manned mission to Mars.

Introduction

Perseverance mission is the most advanced, most expensive, and most sophisticated mobile laboratory sent to Mars. The results will determine the next couple of decades of Martian exploration

Experiments on Mars in the past 30 years:

1. **Viking missions in the mid-70s:** During these missions the first **chemical analyses of Martian soil** took place. Along with that, four biology experiments to detect biological activity were also conducted.
2. **In 1984**, a study showed that the **isotopic composition of rare gases** (Xenon, Krypton, Neon, and Argon) in the earth, matched the isotopic ratios of the Martian atmosphere measured by Viking spacecraft. This discovery boosted the understanding of the geochemical evolution of Mars.
3. **Mars Odyssey spacecraft in 2001:** This spacecraft found the hydrogen signature on Mars. This indicated the presence of **water ice on Mars**.
4. **Phoenix Mars lander in 2008:** NASA sent another spacecraft to Mars. It landed near the Martian South Pole. The lander **officially confirmed the presence of**
5. **water** on Mars for the first time.

Why are scientists so interested in Mars?

Scientists are interested in Martian research primarily for two reasons. They are,

First, life may have evolved in the past on Mars. Further, Mars had conditions similar to earth. There is a possibility that microscopic life evolved on Mars.

Second, Mars is the only planet that humans can visit. It has a temperature ranging from between 20 degrees C at the Equator to minus 125 degrees C at the poles.

What is the significance of the Perseverance mission?

Perseverance focuses on finding life on Mars and will help in a future human mission to that planet.

1. Perseverance would bring rock samples back from Mars. This will provide a **decisive answer on whether life existed on Mars in the past or not.**
2. **Producing oxygen on Mars** is necessary for a successful human mission. Perseverance has an instrument known as **MOXIE or Mars Oxygen In-Situ Resource Utilisation Experiment**. It will use 300 watts of power to produce about 10 grams of oxygen using atmospheric carbon dioxide.
 - This will provide oxygen for breathing and rocket fuel.

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3. Perseverance will carry the Radar Imager for Mars' Subsurface Experiment (**RIMFAX**). This will **help in looking for underground water on Mars**. It could possibly help in the human settlement on Mars if the water is found.
4. Apart from that, Perseverance will **try to fly a helicopter on Mars** (which has a sparse atmosphere). The Mars Helicopter is really a small drone. Currently, long-distance transportation on Mars has to depend on vehicles that rely on rocket engines for powered ascent and powered descent.

Conclusion

- Perseverance is expected to provide a significant understanding of whether a **human mission to Mars is possible or not**. Not only that, it is expected to give a decisive answer to the question of whether **Mars ever had or still has microscopic life** on the planet.

9. Factors affecting present inflation level in India

Source: <https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GHU89SO5J.1&imageview=0>

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

Synopsis: The recent January 2021 retail inflation data provides relief to monetary authorities. Consumer Price Index (CPI) stood at 4.06% which is a desired outcome for ensuring macroeconomic stability.

Background:

- The inflation had remained above the RBI's threshold mark of 6% for six months till November. The **ideal range of CPI is 2-6%**.
- In January 2021, inflation reached **a 16-month low**.
- The fall in the inflation rate was particularly attributed to a modest rise of 1.89% in Consumer Food Price Index. This was majorly a result of 15.48% drop in vegetable prices and easing of cereal prices.

RBI's view over inflation:

- As per RBI, bumper Kharif crops, good vegetable supply in winters, and better prospects of rabi produce could reduce inflation in future months.
- Further, rising fears of avian flu will decrease poultry demand and control inflation.
- However, RBI is cautious of higher inflation in pulses and edible oils. A 13.4% price rise was seen in pulses and products. Further, the rise in the oils and fats category was 19.7%.

Future concerns which may cause inflation to rise:

- **First**, inflation for eggs and meat was in double digits despite the avian flu threat.
- **Second**, the favorable base effect is about to decrease. It is causing fear of rising inflation in the future. The base effect is the fluctuation in a monthly inflation figure due to low or high base i.e. level of inflation in the same month a year-ago.
- **Third**, the producers in multiple sectors (automobile, real estate, etc.) are expected to transfer the cost of inputs to consumers. This is due to rising input costs as shown by IHS Markit India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI).
- **Fourth**, the rising fuel prices could also contribute to increasing inflation. Diesel has already crossed the 80 rupees mark which has pushed prices of numerous goods.

In the current scenario, banks have been given necessary support which has enhanced their liquidity. This calls for due vigilance by policymakers, else inflation can't be moderated thereby impacting macroeconomic stability.

10. Need to regulate Big techs in India

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 3: role of media and social networking sites

Synopsis: The Indian government is planning to announce important regulations on big Internet-related technology companies.

Introduction

At present the world has two visions of the internet technology:

- **Libertarianism:** Under this, liberal internet policies were followed by countries such as the USA. This model was successful in the past but now under pressure due to internal conflicts.
- **Authoritarianism:** Under this, Countries will enforce strict authoritative Internet policies. For example, China. This model is now getting strong support.

Both of these creating a dilemma for other countries in regulating the big techs.

What is the need to regulate the big-techs?

There are several issues with internet platforms. These issues get intensified after big-techs starts creating and generating their own contents. The issues are

1. Big tech companies acquire monopoly power in their operations. This leaves no scope for free and fair competition.
2. The **algorithms used by the big-techs were opaque and not subject to accountability.**
3. These big tech companies became the symbol of inequality. They acquired more economic and political power.
4. These **companies viewed themselves as a sovereign power** and regulated speech on their own. For example, a private CEO banning the elected president trump from social media.
5. There might be a **harmful impact of big tech on democracy and democratisation.** Democracies became more polarised and free speech abuses got increased.

What does India intend to achieve by regulating the big-techs?

The regulations against big tech are an **attempt to curb the unfair advantages taken by the big techs** to exploit the Indian market. India can create competition and be more self-reliant in the internet space.

1. **Ideological push to Atmanirbhar Bharat:** China kept out big tech companies from exploiting their market. At the same time, China did not face any difference in financial flows or investment in other areas. This is because China developed more indigenous technology. India can also create Atmanirbhar Bharat by regulating big techs.
2. Many critics have urged the government to **potentially control the information** as much as possible. By regulating big techs India **can control the data generated by Indians** more easily.

Suggestions:

- **The government should show a moral commitment and invest in science and technology.**
- **India can address complicated issues** by following these steps:
 - Enhancing India's technological capabilities.
 - Creating an **institutional structure** to prevent big techs from diminishing democracy and freedom of speech.