

9pm
Compilation

April, 2021

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General Studies Paper - 1

General Studies - 1

1. Empowerment of Transgender community in India

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 1

Synopsis: The introduction of 13 members of the transgender community into the Chhattisgarh police is an encouraging step.

Introduction

13 members of the transgender community selected as constables under the Chhattisgarh police.

This move is truly historic and exciting for this community. The Tamil Nadu police also welcomed a few transgender earlier. Their entry into the law and order system would ensure the empowerment of the transgender community.

- Their community had no legal recognition till the Supreme Court judgment in **NALSA vs. Union of India (2014)**. It ruled that transgender persons have the right to decide their self-identified gender.
- This move may help in changing the opinion of people.

Steps taken for Empowerment of Transgender community

Post the 2014 Supreme Court judgment, the Chhattisgarh government created the Third Gender Welfare Board. It takes various welfare measures in favor of trans people.

- **Firstly, all departments were asked to include the third gender** as an option in official documents that need mention of gender or sex of a person.
- **Secondly, district-level committees were established** to recognize members of the transgender community. It will help in the implementation of welfare schemes for their benefit.
- **Thirdly, sensitisation workshops** were held at State and district levels by the police department and police officers.
- **Fourthly, training capsules were prepared for police training institutes** with the help of transgender members of the Welfare Board.
- **Fifthly, the police permitted the use of their sports ground** for practice and also helped the trans-genders in preparing for the written examination. It was the hard work of the transgender people which ensured their success and marked their presence in the department.

Various institutional developments for the empowerment of transgender Community

The recently passed **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019** is used for issuing a certificate of transgender identity.

- **It has the essence of international conventions** like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966, and the Yogyakarta Principles, 2006.
- **The Act recognizes the legal right to have a self-perceived gender identity.** It is in accordance with the principle of the Psychological Test instead of the Biological Test. In employing people, any discrimination against the transgender is against the law.
- The Kerala High Court allowed a petition by a **transwoman seeking admission into the National Cadet Corps** based on her self-claimed gender identity. The court noted that the NCC Act cannot prevent the operation of the Transgender Persons Act.

The way forward

- It requires more effort to bring about changes in the view of people towards this marginalized community. Implementation of the law must be in letter and spirit to fulfill its objective.
- Society needs to remove its biases and accept transgender people as equal human beings with humility.

2. Refugee problem in India and its solutions

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS-1: Population and Associated issues

Synopsis: By introducing appropriate legal and institutional measures India has to solve the issue of [refugee problem in India](#).

Introduction

The fleeing Myanmar citizens were turned away at the Indian border in the Northeast. This revived the debate about protecting refugees in India. Rohingyas also faced similar problems earlier.

- India was witnessing the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 and its impact on those seeking refugees. Now, the refugees from Myanmar will not get any benefit under the law.
- India wants an end to the illegal immigration from neighbouring countries. Illegal immigration is a **threat to the socio-political fabric** of India.

What refugee problems India have?

The issue of refugees often gets included under illegal immigration. These two different issues get jumbled together. Policies and solutions to deal with these issues suffer from a lack of clarity.

- **Firstly, confusion in policies** is because as per Indian law, both categories of people are viewed as the same. They both are **covered under the Foreigners Act, 1946**. The definition of a foreigner in the act is a person who is not a citizen of India.
- **Secondly, India lacks legal provisions** to deal with them separately. India is **not a part of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol**. The absence of such convention and its legal framework leads to policy vagueness.
 - It also increases the risk of the domestic politicisation of protecting the refugees.
- **Thirdly, informal methods** allow the government **to pick and choose the refugees** it wants to admit or send back.
- **Fourthly, India is concerned that their decision might annoy the Generals** in Myanmar. Further, protecting refugees will also bring closer China-Myanmar ties. This will hurt India's interests in Myanmar.
- **Fifthly**, The CAA is not the solution to the refugee problem. Because it is discriminatory in nature based on religion. The CAA is an act of refugee avoidance, not refugee protection.

Should India become a part of the refugee convention?

India has the largest number of refugees in the world. Even though, it was not a part of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

- The definition of refugees in the 1951 convention only refers to **the violation of civil and political rights, but not economic rights**. If economic rights were to be included, then it would pose a major burden on the developed world.
- Scholar B.S. Chimni suggested that **India should not agree to the 1951 convention** when the European countries themselves violating the provisions of it.

He mentioned the **no entry regime** of Western countries as a clear violation of the 1951 convention.

- **The non-entrée regime** is constituted by several legal and administrative measures. This includes Indirect policies to reject refugees like,
 - Visa restrictions, carrier sanctions and interdictions.
 - Restrictive interpretations of the definition of a refugee.
 - Removal of social welfare benefits to [asylum seekers](#) etc.

Suggestion to improve the Refugee situation in India:

India must use its history of refugee protection to begin a global conversation on the refugee problem.

- **Creation of New domestic law aimed at refugees.** In the absence of proper legal measures, refugee documentation, and work permit, refugees may end up becoming illegal immigrants. So, such a law should include certain essential provisions. Such as,
 - Allowing refugees for temporary shelter and providing work permits.
 - Differentiate between temporary migrant workers, illegal immigrants and refugees.
 - The law should deal with each of them differently through proper legal and institutional mechanisms.

3. Gyanvapi Mosque dispute and the Places of worship Act 1991

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs1: Communalism, Regionalism & Secularism.

Synopsis: The recent ruling by Varanasi civil court in the Gyanvapi Mosque dispute threatens the secular feature of India.

Background

- Earlier, the representatives of the Hindu faith had filed a petition to reclaim the Gyanvapi mosque land.
- Now, a civil court in Varanasi directed the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** to conduct a survey. In that, the ASI will confirm whether the Gyanvapi mosque was built over a demolished Hindu temple or not.
- But any attempt to bring back the buried disputes is a threat to secularism and peaceful coexistence

What does the Place of worship act 1991 say in this regard?

- The [Places of worship Act](#) declares that the religious character of a place of worship shall continue to be the same as it was on August 15, 1947.
- It says no person shall convert any place of worship of any religious denomination into one of a different denomination or section.
- **Exemptions under the Act:** There are few exceptions under the Act. Such as,
 - The Act will not apply to ancient and historical monuments and archaeological sites. Because these are covered under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958.
 - The Act exempted the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute.

Challenges with the recent Case:

- **One**, it will open the floodgates for another prolonged religious dispute.
- **Two**, the order is a gross violation of the [Place of worship act](#) that prohibits any litigation over the status of places of worship.

- **Three**, the Allahabad High Court reserved its order on the maintainability of the suit on March 15. Further, the High Court is yet to pronounce its ruling. So, the implementation of the judgement might change after the High Court Judgement.

4. Ambiguities Over the Status of Rohingyas in India

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 1 – Population and associated Issues

Synopsis:

India has shown an ambiguous stance over the status of Rohingyas. This has created some complexities, thus it desires alteration as per international law.

Background:

- It is assumed that the Supreme Court(SC) has implicitly accepted the center's view that Rohingyas in India are illegal immigrants.
- The belief is based on the court's refusal to release 300 Rohingyas from detention camps in Jammu and Delhi. The **court called for their deportation under the Foreigners Act, 1946**.
- However, different countries/organizations have different stances over them.

Stand of different Stakeholders over Status of Rohingyas:

- The UN treats Rohingyas as refugees. As per the organization, the Myanmar military crackdown in Rakhine state in 2017 created the world's biggest refugee crisis.
 - The 1951 UN convention on the status of refugees and 1967 protocol defines refugees as:
 - Persons who fled their homes and countries due to a well-founded fear of persecution. The persecution can be because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.
- Bangladesh gave refuge to Rohingyas in the Cox Bazaar region on humanitarian grounds. It converted the region into the biggest refugee camp in the world.
- Myanmar believes that Rohingyas are illegal immigrants that entered their country from Bangladesh.

Ambiguous Stance of India:

- The Indian PM has assured Bangladeshi PM that both countries will ensure the return of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar sustainably. There are about a million refugees in Myanmar and 40000 in India.
- Further, India allowed the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to carry out verification and provide some of them with identity cards. Approximately 14000 issued refugee identity cards.
- However, the solicitor general has imposed allegations of terrorism and communalism on them and demanded their deportation.

How has India been able to maintain this ambiguity?

- The country is non-signatory to the 1951 UN Convention or the 1967 Protocol.
- Further, it doesn't have a dedicated refugee law or policy that determines who should be given the refugee status.
 - Some people say the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 comes closest to a refugee policy. Although it discriminates between refugees on the basis of religion in offering them Indian citizenship.

It allows the government to declare any person as an illegal migrant. Despite this, the country has nearly 3 lakh refugees.

ISSUES WITH DEPORTATION OF ROHINGYAS:

- **Influx of Pro-Democracy Protestors:** They have entered India through Manipur and Mizoram since the Feb 2021 military coup in Myanmar. If refugee status is given to them, then it would be very difficult to deport Rohingyas as both face a threat of persecution.
- **Cooperation from Myanmar:** Myanmar is reluctant to admit Rohingyas under its territory. Further India has been able to send back only a few refugees in the last 4 years.
- **Principle of non-refoulement:** The desire to send back Rohingyas goes against this principle. India is bound to follow it as it is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
 - The principle states that no refugee shall be returned in any manner to any country where he or she would be at risk of persecution.
- **Differential Treatment:** India offers Voluntary repatriation to Sri Lankan Tamil refugees after the end of the civil war in 2009. Further, they can seek jobs and send their children to schools.
- Thus, the need is to engage with agencies like UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and country of origin (Myanmar). This will result in the creation of an enabling environment for voluntary repatriation in consonance with international law.

General Studies Paper - 2

General Studies - 2

1. Issues with UGC's New Undergraduate History Curriculum

Source: [Click Here](#)

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

Synopsis: Recently a new undergraduate history curriculum suggested by UGC (University Grants Commission). It falls short to meet its desired objectives and requires reconsideration.

Background:

- The UGC released a new document on the undergraduate history curriculum, named Learning Outcomes-based Curriculum Framework (**LOCF**), 2021.
- The document has been suggested changes as per the changing domestic and international scenario.

Objectives:

- Use history as a vital source to obtain knowledge about a nation's soul.
- Create a conscious student body that is aware about India's glorious past and can compete at the global level.
- Build a new narrative about the nation through a dialogue between past and present.

About the curriculum:

- The five units of the course cover:
 - The concept of Bharatvarsha
 - Indian knowledge traditions, art, and culture
 - Indian economic traditions
 - Dharma, philosophy and 'VasudhaivaKutumbakam'
 - Science, environment, and medical sciences

First paper of course is titled 'Idea of Bharat.' It seeks to study the primitive life and cultural status of the people of ancient India.

Concerning Issues:

- The **idea of Bharatvarsha is portrayed as devoid of invasions.**
 - The origin is **associated with the pristine ancient past.** No credit is associated with Kushans, Mughals, etc. invasions in shaping the idea of Bharat.
 - Further **little role focus is paid towards the contributions of the south, east, and northeast people** towards nation-building.
 - The **struggle of the masses** in the freedom movement is also **not given its due space** in the creation of Bharat.
- The paper on medieval and early modern India (History of India, 1206-1707) shows the **Hindus and Muslims as two separate entities.** This would strengthen the belief in separate nations for Hindus and Muslims which led to the country's partition in the past.
- The **use of force is projected as the main driver of change in society.** It is shown in the case of Aryan, Mughal or any other invasion. This kind of narrative portrays **violence as the sole reason for the change.**
- It has **adopted the categorization methods of colonial historians.** This simply undermines the efforts of historians to challenge the colonial way of history-writing.

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- The colonial methods used to pose a contrast between the secular, modern Europe and the backward 'oriental' states (having irrational adherence to religion).
- The curriculum is **biased towards the history of North India**. The rich sociocultural, economic and political changes of other regions have been given very little room. Further, some regions are only introduced as political formations.

Pedagogical Issues:

- The **style of pedagogy is more textbook-oriented**. A less emphasis is placed on archaeological artefacts, coins, visits to monuments and museums etc. that helps in better understanding.
- The students are **not encouraged to read the diversity of opinion** which would have helped in a better understanding of history.
- The **curriculum ignores the finest writings in Indian history**. The bulk of readings span from the 1900s to the 1980s, with a heavy dependence on the work of Indologists. This curtails their resource base.
- The **linkage of critical 21st-century issues** like climate change, democracy, social justice etc. with the historical framework is missing.

In a nutshell, the curriculum aims to make history education space for passive rote-learning of ideas which was last popularized in the 1920s.

2. Issues of Vacancies in IIMs For Reserved Faculty Positions

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Synopsis: There are larger vacancies in IIMs for reserved faculty positions from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and the Other Backward Classes communities. The unavailability of deserving candidates is one of the reasons for that.

Introduction:

According to an RTI, older Indian Institutes of Management(IIMs) are lagging behind the newer IIMs in enforcing the quota rule. For example, **IIM-Kolkata** has no SC or ST faculty member and only two OBC faculty members.

Does IIMs oppose equality?

It is not like IIMs are not trying to fill the vacancies, there are many reasons behind that. Also, IIMs have taken many steps towards ensuring equality, such as,

1. The IIMs fulfill the government-mandated admission quotas for SC, ST, and OBC candidates.
2. Apart from that they also implement certain own inventions towards inclusion. For example, IIM-Bangalore has taken the following measures towards inclusion. Such as,
 - The IIM-B provided reservations to the students with a disability even before the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995.
 - IIM-B set up a dedicated Office of Disability Services in 2009. This functions as a nodal support point for students with disability. This helps in studying the needs of each student and proactive recommendation for disabled students.
 - All these steps resulted in global recognition with the **NCPEDP-Mphasis Universal Design Award**. The award for IIM-B highlighted the pioneering work in promoting accessibility and ensuring a life of equality and dignity.

Then, why there are large no. of vacancies on reserved positions in IIMs?

But according to the recent report the IIMs also facing certain challenges. Such as [shortage of qualified candidates from reserved categories](#). But this is not a simple thing to fill up. This is due to the following reason.

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- IIMs need to balance between the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act 2019 and the Indian Institutes of Management Act, 2017. (The IIM Act recognizes IIMs as Institutions of National Importance and demands their fulfilment to global standards.)
- **Admitting potential students to doctoral programmes is a challenge.** The alumni discussion reveals that the reserved category students pursue MBA programmes to employ themselves in a good job. So that, they can move up the societal ladder quickly. But they don't want to pursue the Research and not showing interest in the faculty postings.

How the IIMs can tackle the challenge?

The IIMs have to launch a specific pre-doctoral programme to fulfil the following objectives.

1. Encourage under-privileged category students to take up research and Faculty positions.
2. Encourage them to do research by offering financial incentives.

This can improve the necessary talents in the long run. Further, It will also improve the social positions of the under-privileged persons. For example, IIMB in 2019 launched the N.S. Ramaswamy Pre-doctoral Programme. It is a self-funded academic and mentoring initiative.

The other Higher Educational Institutions(HEI) in India have to follow the path of IIMB. It will fulfil the [large vacancies in the HEI's](#).

3. Higher Education in India – Significance of Quality Faculties

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: The size or location of educational institutions is not a big barrier to academic excellence. The quality and strength of faculty should improve to ensure quality higher education.

Background

- Some experts are of the belief that there should be only 10 to 12 IITs. Furthermore, the location of these institutes should be in big urban areas, and they should focus on becoming “crown jewels”.
- However, other experts do not favour this belief. Instead, they believe that the size or location of campuses can not be a barrier to academic excellence.
- The success of IIT-Mandi and other international universities such as **Cornell University** (England) and **the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology Graduate University** (Japan) favors this belief.
- Thus, the focus should be on increasing the number and quality of faculties in higher education. The recruitment parameters for faculties should be strengthened to ensure quality.

Significance of faculties in higher education

There are a few best practices adopted by some IITs for improving the quality of education. However, not all the IITs are able to adopt these practices due to the shortage of faculties.

- **First, the majority of incoming students lack language and study skills.** Thus, they require extra training and confidence-building measures in using the English language.
 - For this purpose, many IITs like IIT-Mandi introduced induction programs.

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- This program helps to break the ice between students and faculty, making it easy for the students to get in touch with their teachers.
- However, this program is not mandatory in even some “crown jewel” IITs. One of the reasons for this is the increasing strength of the students without a proportionate increase in faculty members.
- **Second**, Innovative curriculums to provide students with practical work experience are very helpful in exposing students to industrial requirements.
 - **For example**, IIT Mandi courses from a design and innovation stream include a mandatory socio-technical practicum.
 - These kinds of innovative curriculums need effort from faculty members.
- **Third**, many IITs have scrapped the mandatory requirement to submit final year projects. But final year projects are important to test an individual’s knowledge and skills on a concrete problem. The key reason for this is that the increase in student’s strength is not in proportion to increase in faculty strength.

Issues related to the current recruitment process of faculties

There are two existing problems with recruiting and retaining faculty members.

- **First**, not enough faculty members are hired. The hired faculties are burdened with additional non-academic responsibilities such as: running the canteen, managing the placement cell, etc.
- **Second**, the issues in the current recruitment process.
 - **One**, shortlisting process is mechanical. It creates the possibility of the elimination of quality resources.
 - **Second**, shortlisting done on the basis of the number of papers taken and the size of grants won by faculties.

Suggestion to improve the recruitment process

1. First, each applicant should be asked to provide their two best research publications and their two best pedagogic materials. It should be in addition to their full curriculum vitae.
2. Second, based on the two best publications and sample pedagogic materials the external experts should prepare a shortlist. Then the local hiring committees should attempt hiring from within this shortlist.

Case Study: Remoteness will not impact Academic quality: The case of IIT Mandi

- It has as international a resident faculty body as any other IIT.
- It was seventh in the Atal innovativeness ranking published last year.
- Notably, the IIT Mandi project that developed a landslide warning system won the SKOCH award

4. Pending Issues in India Bangladesh relations

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS-2: India and Neighbourhood relations

Synopsis: [India Bangladesh relations](#) is not achieving the full potential at present due to some minor issues.

Introduction:

Recently Indian PM visited Bangladesh to take part in their golden Jubilee celebrations of Independence. India also awarded [Gandhi Peace Price 2020 to Bangladesh’s founding president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman](#). Both India and Bangladesh maintains a cordial relationship between them.

Significant events in the recent visit:

Apart from attending the Independence Day celebrations, PMs of both countries utilized this as an opportunity to build bilateral relations. This includes events such as,

1. Indian Prime Minister **visited the Bangabandhu (Mujib) memorial** at his hometown in Tungipara.
2. Both Indian PM and Bangladesh counterpart **paid homage to the nation's founders**. Further, they paid homage to the millions massacred by the Pakistani military regime in 1971 and the people who died fighting Bangladesh freedom. This includes nearly 4,000 Indian soldiers
3. Bangladesh PM mentioned **India's role in the creation of Bangladesh**. Further, She also thanked India for its aid and protection to her when her family members (Including Mujib) were assassinated.
4. Apart from that, the Indian PM wrote an editorial of the hope. In that, he outlined the **ShonaliAdhyaya (Golden Chapter) in South Asia** if the Bangabandhu not get killed.

Recent Initiatives to boost India Bangladesh relations:

Both India Bangladesh took many proactive steps to improve relations. The recent steps include,

1. **Virtual meet during Pandemic:** In 2020, both the countries involved in plans to improve the connectivity and infrastructure projects. Apart from that, they also signed MoUs on sports, education and disaster management.
2. **Created a sense of trust in the relationship:** Bangladesh **shut down anti-India terror camps** operating in Bangladesh. Further, the Bangladesh government also hand over nearly two dozen criminals on India's "most wanted" list. This improved the trust in the relationship.
3. **The signing of the Land Boundary Agreement in 2015:** This is a historical foot in India Bangladesh relationship. India completely accepted the international tribunal verdict favoured Bangladesh. Further, India also went ahead and passed the Act for faster resolution of the boundary dispute. This resulted in the solving of the 40-year-old maritime dispute.

Present challenges in India Bangladesh relations:

[India Bangladesh relations](#) at present faces few challenges. This includes,

1. **Water sharing agreements** are not yet signed. This includes the water-sharing arrangement between both the countries on the **Teestariver and the other six rivers**.
2. The **killing of Bangladeshi civilians** on the Indian Border by Indian security forces also poses a challenge.
3. **There is still a misunderstanding about the sensitivities** of people in India and Bangladesh. For example, During the recent visit of the Indian PM, he highlighted the need for Citizenship Amendment Act and also addressed the minority Matua Hindus. This was misunderstood by other sections of people in Bangladesh. This resulted in violent protests and the killing of at least 11 members in Bangladesh.

So the government of India and Bangladesh need to understand the sensitivities of relations. This is more important than the celebration of success. As it would improve a better India Bangladesh relations.

5. White Revolution in India and Women Empowerment

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Synopsis: Dairy cooperatives models adopted by India during Operation Flood improved women development in India

Introduction: Women dairy farmers' contribution to India's **white revolution** is immense. That itself is a great reason for India to celebrate **Women's History Month** in March.

What is the White revolution?

1. **Operation Flood** led to the **White revolution**. It aimed to make India a self-dependent nation in milk production.
2. National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) launched it in 1970. Dr Verghese Kurien is the father of the White Revolution in India.
3. Operation Flood **promoted the AMUL model**. Under this model, milk is procured from farmers' co-operatives. The excess milk is converted to skimmed milk powder and get utilized during the lean season. The milk is distributed through an organized retail network.
4. So far operation flood is the world's biggest dairy development program. The Operation flood made India the world's largest producer of milk.

Role of cooperatives in Operation Flood:

In India Majority of the dairy farmers own only small landholdings (households with two to five cows). But due to the development of co-operatives under Operation Flood, they were able to improve a lot. This includes,

1. The small dairy farmers were able to avoid middlemen.
2. They also started getting a guaranteed minimum procurement price for milk.
3. It enhanced the knowledge and bargaining power of small and marginal farmers.

Achievement of women dairy farmers:

Apart from the general benefits, women dairy farmers achieved many significant achievements. This includes,

1. According to the latest data, there are more than 1,90,000 dairy cooperative societies across the country. Approximately 6 million of their members are women members.
2. A study conducted on Women Dairy Cooperative Society (WDCS) members in Rajasthan shows certain striking development among women. Such as,
 - 31% of the women dairy farmers in Rajasthan converted their mud houses to cement structures.
 - 39% of women dairy farmers in Rajasthan constructed concrete sheds for their cattle
 - Women-led cooperatives provide fertile ground for the **capacity building of rural women** in a leadership position.
3. For example, A woman dairy farmer who not even visited the school joined a Dairy cooperative. Now she is the main breadwinner in her family and bought 25 acres of land with the income she earned through dairy farming.
4. Apart from that, Women dairy farmers also broke the traditional practices of patriarchal society.

All these developments are demonstrated through the testimonials on International Women's Day. It was conducted by the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying.

Financial success of women-led dairy unions and companies:

- During the early years of Operation Flood, the National Dairy Development Board worked on setting up women-led producer enterprises. This includes companies like ShreejaMahila Milk Producer Company. The company started with 24 women, but now it has more than 90,000 members. The company now has a turnover of approximately ₹450 crores/year.
- In 2019, Amul released a list of 10 women dairy farmers who became a millionaire by selling milk.

The women development achieved by the women dairy farmers in India is huge. They achieved this feat even without getting any formal education.

Conclusion:

A study by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) indicates that 93% of women who succeeded received both financial support and training. Instead, the success rate is only 57% if they receive financial aid alone.

So the government has to understand this and start providing training to the remaining women dairy farmers. As this will be the only way to improve women's empowerment.

6. Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill, 2020 – Associated Issues

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis – The Medical Termination of Pregnancy MTP (Amendment) Bill 2020 Continues to ignore Pregnant person's rights.

Introduction-

- Recently, The Medical Termination of Pregnancy MTP (Amendment) Bill 2020 passed in the upper house by voice vote.
- The bill seeks to amend the MTP Act, 1971. It provides for enhancing the upper gestation limit from 20 to 24 weeks for special categories of women but does not specify the category.
- Although the MTP Amendment Bill does expand the gestational cap in some cases, it falls well short of becoming rights-based legislation.

Medical termination of pregnancy bill 2020 – explained

Objections raised in the Upper House

- Lack of consultation with stakeholders.
- Lack of inclusion of transgender people within the MTP framework.
- Moreover, there is a lack of emphasis on women's autonomy in pregnancy.
- Medical boards would be a breach of privacy. It would cause excessive delays in access to abortion due to a shortage of specialists.
- The time limit for decision-making by the medical board is missing. Moreover, the women's representation is unclear.

Issues in the proposed Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020

- **Lack of consultation** with civil society and grassroots organizations. This is an example of drafting and enacting laws without consultation with the people who are most affected. The Recent Farm Bill, 2020 is a prime example of this.
- **The provision still restricts abortion to a heteronormative framework.** Only cisgender women are considered in it, and not persons with other gender identities.

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- Under the heteronormative framework, it is a belief that there are only 2 two sexual orientations and genders i.e. male and female.
- Cisgender is the person, who identifies herself with the sex at the time of birth. The person who undergoes gender change is not a cisgender.
- **Issues with setting up of Medical Boards** – The MPT bill mandates the setup of a Medical Board in every state. The Medical Boards require giving opinions based on the facts regarding the termination of pregnancies.
 - This could cause severe delays in the abortion process.
 - Pregnant women living in rural areas in large parts of the country could find these Medical Boards inaccessible.
- **The bill retains the hetero-patriarchal population control legacy.** The bill continues with the lack of control to the women, of their reproductive and sexual rights. Abortion will be subject to doctor approval. This is in direct contrast with the Supreme Court's precedent on reproductive autonomy and bodily integrity.
- **The Bill's provisions continue to criminalize abortion.** It will promote negative stereotypes and stigma surrounding reproduction, sexuality, and motherhood.

Way forward

Before drafting or enacting legislation, the government must ensure the following:

- **Consultation with all stakeholders** – Consultations and deliberations with members from civil society and grassroots organizations should be held by the government since they all have an interest in the implementation of such laws based on their personal experiences.
- **Women can be responsible for their own choices-** The decision to terminate a pregnancy should be granted to the woman, not to doctors or any medical board.
 - The paternalistic notion that women need assistance in making decisions about their sexual and reproductive rights needs to change.

7. Afghan Peace Process and India's stake in it

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS-2: India and Neighbourhood relations

Synopsis: India should actively involve in the Afghan Peace Process and use its influence to guarantee peace in Afghanistan.

Introduction:

India's position in the Afghan Peace process has evolved over the years. There is a subtle shift in New Delhi's approach towards the Afghan crisis. For example,

- In the 1990s and 2000s, India constantly opposed any dealings with the Taliban.
- In 2018 during the time when Russia hosted Afghan and Taliban talks, India had sent a diplomatic delegation to Moscow.
- During the [9th Heart of Asia Conference](#) in Tajikistan, the External Affairs Minister said that India supports talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

How the countries participating in the Afghan peace process?

- **Firstly**, the new Afghan **peace process by the Joe Biden administration** of the US includes two important proposals:
 - Establishment of a **single transition government** between the warring parties.
 - UN-led multilateral conference of ambassadors from India, China, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and the US. India has supported this UN-led process.
- **Secondly, the U.S. has signed a deal with the Taliban.** Under this, the American troops are scheduled to pull back from Afghanistan by May 1.

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- **Thirdly, the Participation of Other countries in Afghan peace process:**
 - **China** had communicated with the Taliban long ago.
 - **Russia** has hosted several rounds of talks with the Taliban.
 - **European powers** have also shown interest in funding talks.
- **Fourthly, the participation of India:** The inaugural session of Intra-Afghan peace talks occurred in Doha in September 2020. The External Affairs Minister was present at the inaugural session. This is in conformity with the long-held Indian position on the Afghan peace process. That is, **any peace process should be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-controlled.**

Why India needs to improve its participation in the Afghan peace process?

India's economic, strategic and security ties could be disturbed if the Taliban takes over. Recently, India has improved its relations with Afghanistan in the following ways.

1. India has built deep ties with the Afghan people and the government by investing in multiple projects. These projects deal with education, power generation, irrigation, and other infrastructure development, etc.
2. **India has sent Afghanistan its first batch of vaccines** in February.
3. Recently, India had signed an agreement to build the **Shahtoot dam near Kabul.**

So, **India has to be more flexible and adapt to the new strategic reality.**

Suggestions to improve India's participation:

- India needs to figure out how to help Afghanistan to end the violence without total submission of power to the Taliban.
- India joining the peace process could strengthen the hands of the Afghan government. As the government is negotiating from a position of weakness.
- Apart from that, India should use its regional influence to deepen ties with both the U.S. and Russia to achieve double peace. (Both inside Afghanistan and in the region.)

8. The New EPF Tax Rules Should be Re-examined

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes

Synopsis: A limit on tax-free income under **EPF(Employees Provident Fund) contributions** is under the proposal. The intended objective is to prevent abuse of process by HNIs (High net individuals), however, there are some concerns that demand re-examination.

Background

- Before the budget announcement, the EPF contributions were taxable beyond the permissible tax-free limit (1.5 lakh per annum) under Section 80C of the Income Tax Act.
- However, there was **no tax on interest income** earned on such contributions except in the case of premature withdrawals (before 5 years).

What changes have been made?

- The finance bill 2021 was passed with 127 amendments.
- This included a proposal to tax the interest earned on EPF contributions beyond Rs. 2.5 lakh rupees.
- The limit is 5 lakh in cases where employers do not make contributions to the provident fund.

Rationale behind the proposal:

- It intends to prevent abuse of process by HNIs who was getting the benefit of tax exemption at all stages — contribution, interest accumulation, and withdrawal.
 - **Example:** More than 20 accounts in EPF hold a balance of around 800 crores which is completely tax-free.
- Further, the move will not harm other contributors as 90% of them contribute less than 2.5 lakh.

Concerns with new EPF rules:

- **Complexity** – Earlier the process was simple and easy to understand. But now the taxation of interest makes it difficult to ascertain the retirement amount.
 - It is also unclear if the interest on such excess contributions is to be taxed once during the year of contribution or throughout the term of investment in EPF.
 - The mechanism of tax communication from the EPFO to the member also remains uncertain.
- **Double Taxation:** Contribution above 1.5 lakh is already taxable under the Income Tax act. Taxing interest over 2.5 lakh contribution can lead to double taxation.
- **Regressive View:** The government is treating more investment by the rich as a regressive move that would do only evil.
 - A greater contribution is helpful considering the medical cost, inflation, volatile interest rate cycles, and minimal choices for post-retirement investments.
 - Further, corporates earn from a mix of government securities and market instruments. The government gives them no subsidy towards EPF.
- **Ignore the safety potential:** The new rules ignore the safety of investment under EPF. It is the government backing that induces greater investment rather than a desire to abuse the tax concessions under the instrument.

Way Forward:

- Reconsideration of tax proposals is desired so that EPF remains the primary retirement saving instrument for people owing to its attractive nature and not by compulsion.
- Further systems at EPFO will require changes as taxation of the annual interest rate is a new concept for the organization.

EPF (Employees Provident Fund):

- EPF is a social security scheme under the Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952
- **Managed by:** The scheme is managed under the aegis of Employees' Provident Fund Organization (EPFO).
- **Coverage:** EPF accounts are mandatory for employees earning up to ₹15,000 a month in firms with over 20 workers.
- **Contribution:** Under the scheme, an employee has to pay a 12% contribution towards the scheme. An equal contribution is paid by the employer. The employee gets a lump sum amount including self and employer's contribution with interest on retirement.
- The employees can transfer contributions from one employer to another with the support of the Universal Account Regime. Withdrawal is possible only after permanent cessation of employment.

9. Critical Analysis of 15th Finance Commission Recommendations for Local Bodies

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Devolution of Powers and Finances up to Local Levels and Challenges Therein.

Synopsis: Critical analysis of the recommendation of the 15th Finance Commission on grants to the local bodies.

Background

- The primary task of the Union **Finance Commission (FC)** is to rectify the vertical and horizontal imbalances between the Union, the States, and the Local bodies.
- **Part IX** and **Part IX-A** of the Constitution mandate the FC to supplement the resources of panchayats and municipalities. It should be on the basis of the recommendations of the **State Finance Commission**.
- Local governance in India consists of nearly 2.5 lakh local governments and over 3.4 million elected representatives.
- The significance of Local governments was highlighted during the Pandemic. The **Gram Sabha** and other participatory institutions were instrumental in containing the crisis and delivering social protection in India.

What were the lacunas in the recommendation of 15th FC for the local government?

While there are some critical lacunae, it has several positive features too,

Positives:

- **First**, the **Grants to local bodies** is high compared to the previous **Finance Commission**. **For example**, Finance Commission has granted Rs 4,36,361 crore from the central divisive tax pool to local governments.
- **Second**, it will strengthen **cooperative federalism**. Out of the total grants earmarked for Panchayati raj institutions, 60 percent is earmarked for national priorities. (drinking water, rainwater harvesting, sanitation, etc.,).

Concerns:

1. **First**, the 15th FC has failed to provide **Performance-based grants** for the Panchayati raj. While only 8000 crores (for incubation of new cities) has been allocated to Urban local bodies.
 - The performance-linked grants were thoughtfully introduced by the 13th Finance Commission.
 - It earmarked 35% of local grants specifying six conditions for panchayats and nine for urban local governments. **For example**, the establishment of an independent ombudsman, notifying standards for service sectors such as drinking water and solid waste management, etc.,
 - Performance-linked conditionality is vital for improving the quality of decentralised governance, especially in underperforming local bodies.
 - By neglecting the Performance-based grants, 15th FC has failed to acknowledge the transformative potential in it.
2. **Second**, there are no entry-level criteria specified for **Gram Panchayats** to avail grants.
 - Whereas, the **14th FC**, has recommended measures to standardize the accounting system and update the auditing of accounts.
 - Without reliable data on Financial performance, it will be difficult to ensure Good governance.
3. **Third**, the 15th FC has missed the opportunity to **‘restructure the public finance’** for greater **fiscal decentralisation** in providing basic services. It will ensure

comparable minimum public services to every citizen irrespective of her choice of residential location.

- The **11th and 12th schedules** demand better public services and delivery of 'economic development and social justice at the local level.
 - To fulfill this mandate we need **fiscal decentralization**. Public finance is an integrated whole and there needs to be an integrated, local government-centric approach as envisioned in the **Alma-Ata declaration** of the World Health Organization
4. **Fourth**, the 15th FC has used the criteria of the population (2011 Census) with 90% weightage and area 10% weightage for determining grant to local governments. However, it ignores **equity and efficiency criteria**.

We need to fiscally empower local governments to deliver territorial equity and to empower local people.

10. The NCT of Delhi Act, 2021 Enhances Cooperative Federalism

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure

Synopsis: The accusation made on the Government regarding the passage of the Government of the NCT (National Capital Territory) of the Delhi Act is groundless.

Background of the NCT of Delhi Bill

- Last week, both Houses of Parliament voted in favor of the amendments to the **[Government of the National Capital Territory \(NCT\) of Delhi Act](#)**.
- Many criticized the passage of the bill that the government is undermining the federal structure of the country. Some have equated the passage of the bill as the **[death of democracy and Federalism](#)**.
- But the government mentioned the Bill as a necessary change vital for the following things,
 - Ensuring clear-cut roles and responsibilities.
 - To remove ambiguities in the governance of the NCT of Delhi
 - To facilitate a clear chain of command among stakeholders

Why the accusation against the NCT of Delhi Bill is groundless?

The **[Evolution of The GNCT of Delhi bill](#)** has to be examined carefully to understand the issues against the accusations of the GNCT bill.

- **First**, the aim of the amendments was to clear the ambiguities in the roles of various stakeholders. Since various court judgments have observed the ambiguities and lack of clarity. The government through the recent amendment brought consistency in the definition of the term "Government".
 - The amendment clearly stated that the term 'government' refers to the Lieutenant Governor. By doing this, the government has only formalised the definition of a term that the **Delhi Assembly itself had already accepted**.
 - For example, in 2015 the Legislative Assembly of Delhi passed the **Delhi Netaji Subhas University of Technology Bill**. It was sent for the President's assent.
 - However, it was returned to the Delhi assembly as it had defined the term "Government" as the "Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi.
 - Later, the Delhi assembly sent a modified version of the Bill for the President's assent. This time the definition of "government" was described as "Lieutenant Governor of NCT Delhi appointed by the President."
- **Second**, the government has proved itself as a **torch-bearer of Federalism**. For example, the government provided equal opportunities for States in the following events. Such as,

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- The creation of NITI Aayog,
- During the establishment of the Goods and Services Tax Council,
- The acceptance of the Fifteenth Finance Commission's recommendations for greater devolution.
- **Third**, the amendments will ensure that there is no encroachment in legislative matters in the union's jurisdiction. NCT Delhi has no legislative competence in matters pertaining to the police, public order, and land. However, the current proposals for providing statehood to Delhi Legislative Assembly involve one major risk. That is the encroachment of the Delhi assembly on these subjects.
- **Fourth**, Delhi is of unique importance to India. It hosts the Parliament, the seat of the Union Government, Supreme court, Foreign embassies, and other institutions of national importance. In such instances, ensuring the opinion of the Lieutenant Governor can only ensure the smooth functioning of the government.
- So, the [NCT of Delhi \(Amendment\) Bill](#) balances the proper functioning of the Delhi Assembly and the cooperative federalism in India.

11. Appointment of Ambassadors – in US and India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: The US administration needs to make a choice between appointing career diplomats or big contributors for appointing the new ambassadors. In India as well, there is a practice of appointing diverse people as ambassadors.

Background:

- The US administration under Joe Biden will be appointing new ambassadors as per the spoil system.
 - The system allows the president to give government jobs to its supporters, friends, and relatives as a reward for working toward victory.
- It is assumed that many ambassador posts would be given to wealthy contributors.

Why are wealthy contributors made ambassadors?

- It is a token of **reward** for making hefty contributions towards the party and assuring future contributions.
- Further, their appointment has become a **tradition** in US politics. Minimum 30% to a maximum of 57% (under Mr. Trump) posts of ambassadors were offered to them.
- The **US Constitution** doesn't forbid their appointments.
 - Article II provides that the President can appoint ambassadors with the advice and consent of the Senate.
- There exists a notion that long careers in the Foreign Service are not necessary to be effective ambassadors.

Why shouldn't they be appointed?

- **Incompetent:** Many wealthy contributors are not aware of the history and geography of the country in which they get posted.
- **Undermines Diplomatic potential:** They treat ambassadorship as an extended holiday and seldom focus on strengthening bilateral relations. For instance, an ambassador wanted to get a private jet on his diplomatic mission.

Appointments of ambassadors in India

- India appoints politicians and other renowned people (Former Maharajas, Judges etc.) for ambassadorship as a recognition of their hard work and talent. The appointments are not based on the quantum of donation towards a political party.
- The Government apparently has the discretion of appointing political ambassadors in up to 30% of the posts. Apart from this, other positions are filled by career diplomats.
 - Earlier career diplomats were not appointed to very strategic locations like London, Moscow, or Washington.
- Currently, the number of political ambassadors is very small and career diplomats are given top posts in every foreign embassy.

Positive role of Political Ambassadors:

- Dr. K.S. Shelvankar, D.P. Dhar and I.K. Gujral were appointed at the Moscow embassy at different time periods.
 - They played a pivotal role in strengthening bilateral relations.
 - Career diplomats used to do much of the work, leaving the political ambassadors to deal with high policy.
- KushokBakula Rinpoche was appointed to Mongolia. He helped in strengthening Indo-Mongolia relations as Mahayana Buddhism provided a common platform for convergence.

Way Forward:

- A balance can be established by appointing some wealthy contributors as ambassadors provided they are familiar with basic history and geography of the nation.
- The senate should conduct due investigation and prohibit the appointment of truly incompetent persons.
 - A potential candidate for ambassadorship of Fiji had to withdraw after a senate investigation or else face FBI charges.

A divergence from tradition will ensure a greater number of career diplomats are made ambassadors. This will boost the credibility of Biden diplomacy but may dry up future political funding.

12. Why the Places of Worship Act, 1991 has been challenged?

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Indian Constitution—Historical Underpinnings, Evolution, Features, Amendments, Significant Provisions and Basic Structure.

Synopsis: The enactment of the Places of worship act, 1991 is an act of colourable legislation. Further, it is against the liberty of belief, faith, and worship to all.

Background

- Sections 3 and 4 of the [Places of Worship Act, 1991 has been challenged in the supreme court](#) as being unconstitutional, void and against the Basic Structure of the Constitution of India.

What is Colourable Legislation?

The government can enact a law within the power of the legislature. When the government enacts a law, It can hide a provision (illegal provision) within the provisions under the government's legislative competence. This legislation is called Colourable Legislation.

The SC in the **State of Bihar vs Kameshwar Singh case**, used a **doctrine of Colourable legislation**. Under this, the court held that **whatever is prohibited directly is prohibited indirectly also**.

Why the Places of Worship Act, 1991 is said to be unconstitutional?

1. **First**, The Places of Worship Act, 1991 is against the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution. Because it restricts the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. Also, it nullifies the Fundamental Right(s) guaranteed by the Constitution of India as per Article 32.
 - According to **Ambedkar**, Article 32 is the very soul of the Constitution. It states that “enforcement of fundamental rights” cannot be suspended except as stated in the Constitution.
 - Under **Article 32** of the Constitution of India, the Supreme Court has the power to issue writs for enforcement of all the Fundamental Rights.
 - Also, the SC on several occasions ruled that no Act of Parliament can exclude or curtail the powers of the Constitutional Courts with regard to the enforcement of fundamental rights”.
 - Hence, the act is appropriately called an **Act of colourable legislation**. As it limits the powers of constitutional courts though there is no scope for such powers.
2. **Second**, the **Places of Worship Act**, 1991 is against the liberty of belief, faith, and worship to all citizens.
3. **Freedom of religion** is guaranteed to all citizens under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution.
4. It also includes Rights to pray and perform the religious practice. Therefore, prohibiting citizens from approaching appropriate courts with respect to handover the land of any temple of certain essential significance is arbitrary.

What is the way forward?

- The exclusion of the Mathura and Varanasi disputes as being additional exceptions from the Act of 1991 is unacceptable.
- The Act provides an exception to the “Ram-Janmbhoomi matter”. The need and importance of resolution of such a controversy.
- The Supreme Court can increase the number of exceptions in Section 5 of the Places of Worship Act, 1991, to three.
 - Including, the GyanvapiKashiVishwanath Temple in Varanasi and the Krishna Janmabhoomi Temple in Mathura along with Ram-Janmbhoomi
 - It can be done through the use of the Supreme Court power under Article 142 of the Constitution.
- Under Article 142, the Supreme court can pass any order to carry out for doing complete justice being in the public interest, while upholding the Constitution of India.

13. Right To Education Act still has some arbitrariness

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis: The **Right To Education Act** evolved so much in the past. But there is still some arbitrariness in the RTE Act.

Introduction:

Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act or RTE Act is a horizontally enforceable Fundamental Right. That is, the Right is enforceable against the State and Individuals. But the Right To Education Act have some arbitrary discrimination against private institutions and favours minority educational institutions.

Evolution of Right To Education as a Fundamental Right:

Earlier, Article 45 mentions the right to education as a part of the Directive Principles. It mentions that the state should provide free and compulsory education to children up to the age of 14. The provision also mentions a timeline for this achievement (within a decade).

Mohini Jain v. State of Karnataka case 1992: In this case, the Supreme Court held that the Right to education is a part of the right to life recognised in Article 21.

Unnikrishnan JP v. State of Andhra Pradesh case 1993: In this case, the Supreme Court held that the state was duty-bound to provide education to children up to the age of 14. Further, the SC also mentions that the state alone cannot fulfil the task. Private educational institutions, including minority institutions, have to assist the State in that.

86th constitutional amendment of 2002: The government provided a **status of a fundamental right** to the right to education. The government inserted Article 21A into the constitution.

Evolution of Right To Education Act:

P Alnamdar vs State of Maharashtra 2005 case: In this case, the court held that there shall be **no reservation in private institutions, minority and non-minority institutions.**

93rd constitutional amendment of 2005: This amendment included Clause(5) to Article 15. Under this, the State can provide for admission in institutions, including private institutions for the advancement of “backward” classes. This purposefully omitted both the aided and unaided minority educational institutions.

In 2009, the government enacted the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act or RTE Act. The Act provides for 25 per cent reservation in private institutions.

Society for Unaided Private Schools of Rajasthan v. Union of India case. Private schools challenged the 25% percent reservation in the RTE Act. The court, on the other hand, upheld the validity of the legislation. But the court exempted the unaided minority institutions from providing reservation.

The arbitrariness in Right To Education Act:

The amendment to the Right to Education Act 2012: The amendment mentions that the RTE Act will subject to Articles 29 and 30. In other words, It protected the administrative rights of both unaided and aided minority educational institutions.

But in the **Pramati Educational Trust vs Union of India case 2014**, the court held that the RTE Act is applicable to both **non-minority aided** and **unaided Private schools.**

This **created an arbitrariness** in the Act. This has the following [problems in the RTE Act](#),

1. Onus on private unaided schools is higher than the government schools
2. Minority institutions both aided and unaided were exempt.
3. According to Article 21, there is no discrimination between minority and non-minority institutions. But, the RTE Act has.
4. There is no explicable or rational explanation for leaving minority institutions, especially the unaided ones.

Suggestions to improve the Right to Education Act

In the **Sobha George v. State of Kerala case**, 2016 the court held that the [no-detention policy](#) will apply to minority schools also. Further, the court also held that the minority institutions will not subject to the RTE Act. But they are **subject to the fundamental**

rights of the Constitution. The Court demands two fundamental questions on Section 16(no-detention policy).

- Whether the provisions such as Section 16 of RTE are statutory right or Fundamental Right?
- If it is the Fundamental Right, then the minority institutions will not claim the exemption under the **Pramati Educational Trust case**.

So, the government has to relook the **Right to Education Act** to fulfil the view of the **Sobha George v. State of Kerala case**. Until then the Supreme court may overrule its judgement on the **Pramati Educational Trust case**.

14. A friendly India Pakistan Relation is Much Needed

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs2: India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Synopsis: The positive signs in the India-Pakistan relation are again turning negative. Pakistan recently took anu-turn after the announcement to open trade with India.

Background:

- Recently, Pakistan reversed a two-year old decision to suspend all trades with India. Followingly, Pakistan allowed for the import of cotton and sugar from India.
- However, the decision to allow the import of cotton and sugar from India has been withdrawn within a fortnight.
- It has been stated that restoration of J&K's special status will be the precondition for opening up trade with India.

Why Pakistan was ready to resume trade with India?

Because of the following reasons, the government of Pakistan was ready to resume trade with India,

1. First, the economy of Pakistan is very weak, and it has been sustained by IMF loans.
2. Second, the action by **Financial Action Task Force** over possible blacklisting on terror financing is affecting the ordinary citizens.
3. Third, the Pandemic has also impacted the financial health of the country.
4. Fourth, a steep fall in the cotton yield has kept the prices of the commodity high. This has caused a crisis in the country's main manufacturing and export industry.

What is the way forward?

India needs the cooperation of Pakistan to maintain peace on the western front. Especially after the standoff with China at the LAC in eastern Ladakh.

To maintain friendly relation, India needs to be supportive of Pakistan by helping them to overcome the financial crisis by

- Lifting the 200 percent tariffs on Pakistani imports imposed after the Pulwama attack.
- Restoring the hugely popular cross-LoC trade and bus service. This will also help to strengthen the peace across the border.

15. Examining UNHRC Resolution against Sri Lanka

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Important International Institutions, agencies, and fora – their Structure, Mandate.

Synopsis: The [UNHRC \(United Nations Human Rights Council\) resolution against Sri Lanka](#) is a victory for victims of abuses. It will help them obtain information, accountability, and justice.

Background

- Recently, the **UNHRC** adopted the resolution titled 'Promotion of Reconciliation Accountability and Human Rights in Sri Lanka.
- The resolution accused Sri Lanka of war crimes. It promises to bring responsible personnels to the international courts along with imposing targeted sanctions on them.
- The resolution decided to create capacity at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). It will collect, preserve and consolidate evidence.
- Evidences can be not only on war crimes but also on other gross violations of human rights and serious violations of humanitarian law.
- India along with several other Muslim countries abstained from voting. Whereas, China and Pakistan voted against the resolution.

What are the Main Factors that led to the adoption of the UNHRC resolution against Sri Lanka?

There are mainly three factors responsible for this, they are

1. **First**, the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Special Rapporteurs and procedures gave strong support to the resolution. For example, the Report of the High Commissioner on "Promoting Accountability and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka" made the resolution inevitable.
2. **Second**, in addition to the work of OHCHR, the Tamil groups were active, nationally and globally. The effort by Tamil diaspora throughout the world mounted pressure on Human rights watchdogs.
3. **Third**, the most important reason for the adoption of resolution was mainly due to the abstinence of Muslim countries. Despite efforts from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and China, and Rajapaksas personal calls to OIC members, the majority of Muslim countries abstained.
4. **Fourth**, the efforts by **international civil society** to stand up for a global cause. They are very active members of the Human Rights Council.

What led to the resolution?

1. In 2014 Sri Lanka faced a hostile Human rights Council. It led to the Resolution of the Human Rights Council in 2015 (resolution 30/1) that was co-sponsored by Sri Lanka.
2. Co-sponsorship means that Sri Lanka will accept international standards while keeping control of the national process. i.e., the legislation to be enacted and the personnel to be appointed.
3. After that, As per the 2015 resolution, Sri Lanka accepted international best practices. An office for missing persons, an office for reparations, a truth commission and a judicial process for those guilty of serious crimes established.
4. Thus, the resolution 30/1 became a great success. After that, Sri Lanka was not on the international punitive agendas. It became eligible to GSP plus incentives from the EU, and UN peacekeeping missions.
5. But, Sri Lanka withdrew from the resolution arbitrarily. This allowed the Human Rights Council to create a new mechanism to collect and preserve evidence. This process is now independent of the Srilankan government.

How this resolution is viewed by different stakeholders?

- For Sinhalese, they see it as an attack by western countries on Sri Lanka for its closeness to China. They see this as a process of Imperialism and neocolonialism in the 21st century.
- But for members of the minorities, victim groups, and civil society activists see this resolution as a check on the surveillance state.

16. India-NATO alliance – Why India Should think About it?

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs2: Important International Institutions, agencies, and fora – their Structure, Mandate.

Synopsis: India maintains a distance from the NATO alliance due to various reasons. However, it is not the right strategy to continue in the present scenario. [India NATO alliance will be in line with India's present policies.](#)

Introduction

- NATO ([North Atlantic Treaty Organization](#)) is an intergovernmental military alliance between 30 North American and European countries. Its independent member states agree to mutual defence in response to an attack by any external party.
- India, as per its non-alignment strategy, still maintains a distance from the NATO alliance.
- This stand is not in line with some steps taken by India
 - India is doing military exercises with countries like China and Pakistan.
 - India already has military engagements with many NATO members, such as the US, Britain, and France.

Then, why India cannot have a military alliance with NATO?

What are the arguments favouring India NATO Alliance?

- Engagement with NATO could facilitate productive developments against terrorism, changing geopolitics, the evolving nature of military conflict, the role of emerging military technologies, and new military doctrines.
- Further, it would be easier for India to deal with the military establishments of its 30 NATO member states.
- On a bilateral front, each of the members of NATO can support in strengthening India's national capabilities.

Why India didn't give much attention to Join NATO?

- **First**, India has viewed European Powers with suspicion. This mindset is due to India's historical struggle against European powers-The France, Portuguese, Dutch.
- **Second**, India's reliance on Russia during the Cold War years due to the political divide between the west.
- **Third**, after the end of the Cold War, the India-Europe tie could not be strengthened due to a lack of high-level political interest. This prevented India from taking full advantage of a re-emerging Europe.

What are the arguments against India NATO Alliance?

1. **First**, the Idea of **Non-alignment** after the Cold War years has little relevance. **For example**, after the Cold War years, NATO built partnerships with many neutral and non-aligned states.
2. **Second**, most of the NATO members are well-established partners of India. **For example**, India has military exchanges with many members of NATO — including the US, Britain, and France

3. **Third**, for the European and NATO members to play any role in the Indo-Pacific, they need partners like India, Australia, and Japan.
4. **Fourth**, if India wants to draw Russia into discussions on the Indo-Pacific then, engagement with NATO is significant. Because, NATO has regular consultations with both Russia and China.
5. **Fifth**, Russia and China have intensive bilateral engagement with Europe, India cannot afford to miss out.
6. **Sixth**, India's worry that joining NATO will upset Russia-India relation is groundless. As engagement with Quad and a closer alliance with the US have already strained India-Russia relations. Further, deepening ties between China and Russia calls for India's application of **Strategic Autonomy**.

What are the present issues in the NATO alliance?

1. **One**, it is divided on how to share the military burden and balance between NATO and the EU's willingness for an independent military role.
2. **Two**, there is no convergence in decision-making in matters related to Russia, the Middle East, and China.
3. **Three**, conflicts among NATO members have increased. **For example**, Greece and Turkey.
4. **Four**, NATO's recent adventures in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya have not been successful.

Way Forward

- The present government efforts to end the prolonged political neglect of Europe is a significant improvement in building India-Europe ties. For example,
 - Deepening maritime partnership with France since 2018.
 - Joining the Franco-German Alliance for Multilateralism in 2019Further India needs to strengthen this by joining NATO.

17. Significance of Circuit Benches

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary

Synopsis: Virtual hearings started during the pandemic provided much relief. However, now focus should be on other measures like the establishment of circuit benches.

Background:

- The pandemic saw the initiation of virtual proceedings in the Supreme Court. It was because the physical hearing was not possible due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- This new method ensured fair and equal access to justice for many people. Now, many are demanding a continuation of this novel practice even in a post-pandemic scenario.
- However, it will not be sufficient. For increasing accessibility more circuit benches

What are circuit benches?

- A dedicated place in Delhi is provided for the functioning of the Supreme Court (SC).
- The Constitutional makers wanted the Court to have a specified place of sitting so that litigants can approach it.
- They were also aware of the geographical constraints of India. Hence, they empowered the Chief Justice to establish circuit benches.
 - These are temporary courts that hold proceedings for a few selected months in a year.

Nonetheless, no circuit benches have been established despite [rising Pendencies](#).

The adverse impact of Fixed Location:

- **Denial of Justice:** Many litigants are discouraged to travel to Delhi from far away locations like south or northeast India.
- Further, as per a report of Centre for Policy Research, a disproportionately high number of cases filed in the Supreme Court originates in **High Courts closer to Delhi**.
 - Almost 18% of all cases in the Supreme Court originate from Punjab and Haryana. They have less than 5% of the total population share.
 - But States like West Bengal, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh which make about 20% population, contributed to less than 10% of cases.

Appearance in SC has become an **exclusive domain of limited lawyers** located around Delhi. This also puts an **additional financial burden** on litigants as they can't hire their local lawyers.

However, these constraints were effectively tackled by Virtual proceedings during the pandemic that resulted in more equitable access to justice.

Way Forward:

- The chief justice must establish circuit benches as recommended by multiple law commissions and parliamentary committees.
- For the time being, SC must continue with the virtual proceedings along with physical proceedings in order to prevent denial of justice. The court can also continue it as a matter of just and equitable policy if not as a matter of right.

18. Need for Police Reforms in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Role of Civil Services in a Democracy.

Synopsis: Police reforms require urgent attention. There have been many instances of Police-politician nexus. It is not right for democracy.

Background

- The 21st century witnessed many crises. For instance,
 - One, the 2007-08 financial crisis affected the growth of many economies and the recovery process has been slow.
 - Two, the most recent **impact of the Pandemic**, it has affected every sphere of Human activity.
 - Three, the crisis of **Disinformation** and **fake news** became a big menace for society.

All these circumstances expose the fragility of today's party-based democracies. Also, it exposed the inability to manage such problems. However, finding an optimal combination of authoritarian, populist and democratic trends will not be easy. It could give way to the rise of new **political oligarchies**, and the creation of new elites. They may identify themselves as the defenders of democracy. Recent trends within the country suggest the starting of such problems.

What are the recent issues affecting democracy in India?

1. **First**, the concept of the **free and fair election** itself is under threat. This new reality gives way to authoritarian methods over democratic means. For instance,
 - a. One, in most electioneering campaigns personal remarks dominate political debates, instead of developmental issues or policies.

- b. Two, the use of Money power and Violence during elections is very much evident.
 - c. Three, the verdict of the election does not reflect the true will of the electorates.
2. **Two**, the most worrying issue is the collapse of systems of governance in many States. For example, the recent case of Maharashtra after the **Antilia bomb case**.
- a. The event highlights the issues in the police system.
 - b. Police made no or very little effort to discover the truth and the involvement of assistant police inspector, S. Vaze. It signifies the decline in standards of police mores.
 - c. This incident is a prime example that reflects the problems in the law and order system across the country.

What needs to be done?

Police reforms by establishing a new police commission will not yield results. Because police commissions cannot change the system that compels police to operate by the politicians, bureaucrats, and others in authority.

So, we need to think of other alternatives to address the issue.

1. **First**, nurture courageous police leadership that can stand up for the right policies and punishes officers indulged in wrongdoings.
2. **Second**, create and execute a national public awareness campaign against the kind of excesses that have been allowed to continue. Creating such a movement and sustaining it will not be easy, but if the system is to be saved, there is a need to consider such real alternatives.

19. Performance Analysis of Lok Adalats in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Statutory, regulatory, and various quasi-judicial bodies.

Synopsis:

The Lok Adalats (People's Court) have been functioning in India since the last 38 years. They have successfully solved lakhs of cases that have reduced the judicial burden. However, some experts question their efficacy as they tend to neglect justice for speedier resolution.

Background:

- Lok Adalats established to provide quick, accessible and affordable justice to masses. This prevents delay in justice delivery as justice delayed is justice denied.
- It is a type of Alternate Dispute Resolution mechanism outside the formal judicial process.

History of Lok Adalats:

- They were popularised by Harivallabh Parikh (a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi) in Rangpur, Gujarat in 1949.
- Later on, the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 passed by Parliament to achieve the constitutional mandate of Article 39A. The article aims to ensure equal justice and free legal aid for everyone.
- The act aimed to
 - Provide free and competent legal services to weaker sections of the society
 - Organise Lok Adalats that would give people an equal opportunity to seek justice.

Why do people go to Lok Adalats?

- **Huge Pendency in Formal Judicial System:** As per National Judicial Data Grid there exists enormous pendencies in the formal judicial setup.
 - More than 3 crore cases are pending in district and subordinate courts, over 57 lakhs in high courts and above 66000 in supreme court.
 - As per a rough estimation, it will take around 320 years to settle the existing backlog.
- **Greater Control:** As it is a party-driven process, it encourages parties to reach an amicable settlement.
- **Speed:** Sometimes lakhs of cases are disposed in a single day which is not possible even in other Alternate mechanisms like arbitration, conciliation, etc.
- **Flexibility:** Lok adalat is not bound by procedural laws like the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, or the Indian Evidence Act, 1872.
- **Affordability:** No fees are charged from parties by the Lok Adalat.
- **Finality of Awards:** The award of Lok Adalat is like a civil court's decree but can't be appealed in the formal courts. Hence, cases are not dragged on for years and speedier settlement takes place.

Performance:

- They are regularly organised to help parties reach a compromise. Core Subject matters of Lok Adalats include motor-accident claims, disputes related to public-utility services, cases related to dishonour of cheques etc.
- As per the estimates of National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) – State Adalats disposed of around 52 lakh cases between 2016-20.
- Similarly, the (National Lok Adalats) NLAs have disposed of a total of 2.93 crore cases in the same period.
- E-Lok Adalats were organized at both the national and State level to overcome the pandemic challenge. The first national e-Lok Adalat disposed of around 10.5 lakh cases.

Issues:

- A **fall in performance** is witnessed since 2017. NLAs now cover a variety of subjects while earlier they were subject matter-specific. The average cases settled by NLAs in 2015 were around 18 lakhs. It has now reduced to 13.3 lakhs in 2019 as per NALSA's data.
- Similarly, the **efficiency of E-Lok adalats is not at par with physical Lok adalats.**
- It is **conciliatory in nature**. Therefore, it is alleged that justice is sometimes undermined to do speedy disposal as conciliation doesn't always lead to justice delivery.
- **Unequal bargaining power exists** between the parties. Strong parties like insurance companies, electricity boards etc. can easily put pressure on a poor person to accept discriminatory awards.

Way Forward:

- The Lok Adalats must look **beyond swift disposal of cases and focus on just and fair outcomes as justice hurried is justice buried.**
- There is a need to take **some concrete and innovative steps** by the legislature or the judiciary to improve the quality of justice rendered by Adalats.

Revamping of Lok adalat along with initiation of phase 3 of e- courts project can be a game changer in improving the efficiency of the dispute settlement.

20. Chinese Threat to Hong Kong' Democracy

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: The new electoral techniques represent the end of democracy in Hong Kong that was never truly democratic.

Background

Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region of China. Recently the Hong Kong's Chief Executive and members of its legislature were chosen in an undemocratic way. Adding to that, the Chinese government also made drastic changes to the process of choosing the Chief Executive and members of its legislature. This will further impact Hong Kong's democracy.

Functioning of Hong Kong's democracy:

- The term democracy does not denote the western type of democracy in Hong Kong. They follow **Democracy with Chinese characteristics**.
- Under this concept, democracy stands for more than electoral campaigns, voting, etc.
- In Cantonese(a Sino-Tibetan language), **These characters are called manzyu**. Man means **people** and zyu means **rule**. In simple, People's rule.
- *Manzyu* suggests a system in which those who rule(zyu) have to listen and provide for the people(*man*).
- Under this, Rulers can be more responsive in different ways. Such as listening to protest slogans, reading petitions, and engaging in dialogue with representatives of social groups, etc.
- This makes Hong Kong a **hybrid regime**. It includes elements of liberal and illiberal institutions.
- Popular protests(*Man*) have earlier compelled officials(*Zyu*) to withdraw the public policies.

Power of People(*Man*) in Hong Kong:

Local officials and opposition in Hong Kong often support the people(*Man*) to remove the unpopular proposals from the government(*Zyu*).

- In 2003, China wanted the Hong Kong government to pass a law on national security and sedition. But the people(*Man*) protests made the proposal to withdraw from the government(*zyu*).
- In 2012, the government tried to introduce Chinese mainland-style **patriotic education into local schools**. But the *Man*-made *Zhu* to withdraw that too.
- Earlier, Hong Kong citizens have forced one Chief Executive to step down before his term.

But the Future Hong Kong Chief Executive will not face such threat of removal by people(*Man*) protest. This is **because of the new electoral rules**. There is **less political space** for the creation of people(*man*) movements.

Changes in new electoral rules of Hong Kong:

The new plan reduces the number of directly elected seats in the Legislative Council (Legco) from 35 to 20.

1. **Firstly, 40 representatives will be chosen by the Election Committee** of 1,500 members. They will select the Chief Executive.

2. **Secondly**, The Hong Kong government will pre-screen the individuals who run for the seats in the legislature. They will judge if **the person has sufficient patriotic credentials or not**.
3. **Thirdly**, When the application is rejected based on patriotism grounds, the person cannot appeal the rejection in **Hong Kong's courts**.
4. **Fourthly**, the new rules also **banned the protest marches**. These were legal earlier and one of the foundational character of Manzyu.
5. **Fifthly**, the popular television show, **Headliner has discontinued** under the new rules. The iconic show informed the Man(people) about the arbitrary policies of rulers(zyu). For example, it telecasted comic sketches on the policies of the colonial Governor and the Chief Executive policy during 1997.

The conclusion

All these steps indicate the arrival of a more authoritarian and less responsive era in Hong Kong. The citizens of Hong Kong will continue to find ways to voice resistance. But will have to do so in indirect ways. There is significant power contrast between the zyu in Hong Kong and the far more powerful rulers in Beijing.

21. The MTP Amendment Act 2021 is against Women's Rights

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: Though the MTP or Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act 2021 act has progressive features. However, it fails miserably in acknowledging the bodily rights of Women.

Overview on The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971

1. It was considered a progressive law then because it replaced the 100 years IPC (Indian penal code) that considers abortion a crime.
2. Section 3 of the act prescribes 20 weeks as the limit to allow for abortion.
3. Further, abortion requires the certification from two doctors that,
 - a. The pregnancy would involve a risk to the life of the woman or
 - b. Grave injury to her physical or mental health or
 - c. That there was a substantial risk that the child born would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities.
4. Along with this, Section 5 gave an exception to the 20-week limit. An abortion can be done whenever it is immediately necessary to save the life of the pregnant woman.
5. The 1971 Act is based on "The Report of the **Shantilal H. Shah Committee**."
6. The committee had set a 20-week limit considering the fact that, abortions done after the 20th week will be hazardous for women due to limitations of technology.
7. But in the current situation, the improvement in technology has allowed to carry out abortions safely right up to full term.

Side effects of restricting abortion:

It has pushed women to seek illegal abortions and terminations are carried out in unhygienic and dangerous places.

Even today about 800,000 illegal and unsafe abortions are performed every year in India. Many of them resulting in morbidities and death

Role of Courts:

- The Bombay High Court stated that the court cannot overrule statutory restrictions in **Nikita Mehta vs State of Maharashtra**. It sparked the debate around the right to abortion in India.
- This led to the increasing number of PIL in the high court and supreme court.
- Later, the court has ignored the statutory provisions in many cases and routinely allowed abortions way past the 20-week limit. For example, **Murugan Nayakkar vs Union of India & Ors**, abortion was permitted at 31 weeks.

What are the issues in The MTP Amendment Act 2021?

- **First**, it fails to recognize the absolute right of a woman over her body in taking decisions regarding abortions and reproductive health.
- **Second**, though the limit has increased from 20 to 24 weeks, this comes with the same conditionality.
- **Third**, the 24-week limit is not rational given today's technology where abortions can be done safely up to full term.
- **Fourth**, the requirement of the pregnant woman to approach a medical board in where she has crossed the 24-week limit is not justified, because,
 - **One**, it is a breach of Privacy as the women have to consult a minimum of three doctors.
 - **Two**, the Act provides for a single board for a State. Millions of abortions took place in India in past the 24 weeks. It is impossible for one board to handle all cases.
 - **Third**, records show that no State has the finances or the human resources to maintain the operation and functioning of these boards.
 - **Four**, the right to seek termination is restricted to "such category of women as may be prescribed by rules" is vague.

Way forward

Boards are totally unnecessary and an invasion of privacy. Following the trend worldwide, pregnant women should have right to consult their gynaecologist in late-term pregnancies and carry out their abortion under the certificate of their own gynaecologist.

22. Why Pakistan Reverses its Decision on Trade with India?

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Synopsis: Pakistan recently took back its decision to allow trade with India. It is an evaluation of Pakistan's reversal of trade decision with India.

Background

- Recently, the decision by Pakistan to [allow for the import of cotton and sugar](#) from India has been [withdrawn within a fortnight](#).
- It has been stated that restoration of J&K's special status will be the precondition for opening up trade with India.
- However, Pakistan's textile industry has not welcomed the decision. Because, for them, importing cotton yarn from India is an immediate need, else, it would impact their export potential.

Evaluation of Pakistan's Decision

1. **First**, Pakistan's decision to import only three items from India, namely cotton, yarn and sugar was based on Pakistan's immediate economic needs. It is not a political

confidence-building measure to normalise relations with India. This is clear by the following observations.

- a. Cotton-related products (raw and value-added) earn close to half of the country's foreign exchange.
 - b. According to the latest Pakistan Economic Survey, 2019-20 cotton and sugarcane production were declining.
 - c. The Cotton industry estimates that in 2021, there would be a 50% decline (2020-21) in cotton production mainly due to supply chain disruption and decreasing yield in cotton areas.
 - d. This means that Pakistan's cotton export would reduce, creating a domino effect on Pakistan's garment industry.
 - e. So, to balance the loss in output, Pakistan decided to import cotton from India which is more practical and the most economic for Pakistan.
2. **Second**, the crisis in Pakistan's sugar industry due to a shortage of sugar for local consumption and increasing cost. Market manipulation and hoarding further resulted in the increased sugar price.
- a. The sugar crisis was an outcome of Pakistan's sugar policy that primarily focused on exports over local distribution.
 - b. Again, in this case, importing sugar from India would not only be cheaper for the consumer market in Pakistan it will also help Pakistan's exports.
3. **Third, the U-turn to overrule the decision to open trade with India** highlights the supremacy of politics over economy and trade.
- a. Not only in Pakistan, but this situation is also true to the whole of South Asia. This is the reason for very low intra-**South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) trade**.
4. **Fourth**, the emphasis on Jammu and Kashmir by Pakistan to start bilateral relations **goes** against any further developments in India-Pak relation. It also hints at Pakistan's precondition of revoking India's decision on Jammu and Kashmir to future engagements with India.

In conclusion, Pakistan has to move away from the politicization of all problems. Else it is only Pakistan that will suffer in the long run. So, it is only [friendly India-Pakistan relations](#) will benefit both.

23. Increasing Racial Discrimination: Causes and Way Forward

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS

Synopsis: The use of internet also increased the prevalence of Racial Discrimination.

The only way to overcome racism is by anti-racism action.

Introduction

Every year March 21 is considered as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This is a global movement to fight prejudice and intolerance. It provides an opportunity to explore the causes and consequences of modern racism and helps in fighting discrimination.

- Racial discrimination is a breach of human rights. It has harmful effects on human health and well-being. It leads to wider disturbances to social unity.
- In this context word of the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan are still relevant

"Our mission is to confront ignorance with knowledge, bigotry with tolerance, and isolation with the outstretched hand of generosity. Racism can, will, and must be defeated."

What are the types of racism faced by people in society?

Recent forms of racism and discrimination are complex and often hidden. The facelessness of the Internet allows racist stereotypes and incorrect information to spread online.

1. **Firstly, traffic to hate sites and posts against Asians** grew by 200% in the US during the pandemic. Social media groups and messaging platforms assist in social and economic boycotts of religious minorities. Minorities were falsely accused of spreading the virus in India and Sri Lanka.
2. **Secondly, structural forms of discrimination** which include micro-aggressions and everyday indignities are widespread. The use of new technologies and artificial intelligence in security raises the threat of techno-racism.
 - This is because facial recognition programmes can misidentify and target racialised communities. A study by The Lancet focussed on the social dimension of the [COVID-19](#) pandemic and the vulnerability of ethnic minorities.
3. **Thirdly**, the World Health Organization has warned about **the dangers of outlining and defaming communities**. It can lead to fear and the subsequent cover-up of cases and delays in detection.
4. **Fourthly, women and girls also experienced racial and gender-based biases.**

Suggestions to tackle Racial discrimination

UNESCO suggested steps against racism through education, the sciences, culture, and communication.

1. UNESCO emphasizes **the role of education**. It provides young people with an understanding of processes that tolerate racism and encourages them to stand up for human rights.
2. UNESCO offers master classes to help students to become **campaigners of anti-racism in their schools and communities**. It will be helpful to remove harmful stereotypes and raise tolerance.
3. The International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities provides a platform for **city-level planning and a laboratory** for good practices in the fight against racism.
4. Renewed commitments are required to mobilize for equality. **Racism must be fought with anti-racist action**. A global culture of tolerance, equality, and anti-discrimination should be built in the minds of women and men.
5. UNESCO's headquarters in Paris hosted a **Global Forum against Racism and Discrimination** on March 22, 2021.
 - o Policymakers, academics, and partners were present at the Forum to initiate a new multi-stakeholder partnership on anti-racism. The new proposed map to tolerance calls for a multi sectoral effort to control the root causes of racism through anti-racist laws, policies and programmes.

24. Violation of India's Exclusive Economic Zone by US Navy

Source- [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis – Recently, the US Navy challenged India's maritime rights in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) near Lakshadweep Islands. It called India's claim excessive and its actions as per the freedom of navigation.

Introduction

- Recently, a move by the US navy came as a surprise to India. It is a surprise, especially after two successful visits by senior U.S. officials.

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- The US Navy carried out **Freedom of Navigation Operation [FONOP]** in India's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) near Lakshadweep Islands.
- The US warship did not request India's permission before sailing through its Exclusive Economic Zone.
- It also challenges India's excessive maritime claims. This operation, according to the US Seventh Fleet, was to assert navigational rights and freedoms. Moreover, it also claims that this move was in accordance with [the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea \(UNCLOS\)](#).

What was India's stand on the issue?

- **However**, India has raised its concern to the US, through diplomatic channels.
- Further, India also said that UNCLOS did not authorize military maneuvers on the continental shelf or EEZ. That too without the prior consent of a country.

The incident is an unusual fallout between the two members of the QUAD. They both recently pledged to work together to protect freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific.

Way forward

US may adopt a new SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) for these FONOPs. India must take some of the following steps to avoid any further tension.

- India needs to deal with the US's open challenge to its maritime claims.
- Further, India must clearly articulate its stance, demonstrating to all stakeholders how Indian maritime law is consistent with international law.
- Also, India must seek clarification from the US that how the aim of the Quad grouping of "free and accessible Indo-Pacific," can coexist with the US Navy's open challenge.

25. NYAY Scheme: Significance of Cash Transfer Schemes

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS

Synopsis: Congress has promised the revival of the NYAY scheme in its Kerala manifesto. This cash transfer scheme could have been beneficial during the lockdown.

Introduction

The NYAY Scheme has become more relevant in today's age and time of the Pandemic crisis.

- This scheme offers a monthly transfer of ₹6,000 to homes living below the poverty line. This unconditional cash transfer to the poor is a good idea.
- Cash transfers lead to important short-term effects such as better nutrition, less food insecurity, higher consumption.
- Other benefits of cash transfer according to research are it can totally transform people's futures, unlock blocked entrepreneurship, investment etc. It could lead to a bearable exit from poverty. Cash transfers are a powerful tool for sustainable poverty reduction.

Why a scheme like NYAY is important in the present times?

The need for NYAY has only become stronger after the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, rural-urban migrants faced hardships during the lockdown, followed by the economic slowdown.

- **Firstly**, if an NYAY-like scheme during the lockdown, could have helped **migrant workers** to remain where they were, after losing their job. Further, it could have helped companies to restart activity easily once lockdown was lifted.
- **Secondly**, Ideas42 is non-profit behavioural science research and design firm. It experimented with the benefits of cash transfers on 2 types of people in Africa:
 - The one's who just received cash transfers.

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- Others, who along with the cash transfers, also were trained with some (Nudge tools) behavioural methods. These methods were directed towards setting long-term goals, saving more and making productive investments.
- After the pandemic, ideas42 interviewed both the recipients. Everyone stated a loss of income and also told that the cash they had received helped them cope. However, the people that received the **“nudge” tools did better because they saved more.**
- Even during a pandemic, cash transfers helped people feel in control, and adding **behavioural tools increased the cash’s impact** on people’s well-being.
- **Thirdly**, a state-level implementation of a scheme like NYAY helps **the necessary fixing out of logistical challenges.**
- **Fourthly, it also allows for strategically including ‘nudges’** and other proven involvements that can help increase the effect of cash transfers.

The conclusion

- Such involvements can help ensure that people receiving cash are able to meet their immediate needs. Also, they are able to set some money aside for emergencies, such as the pandemic or natural disasters.

26. Increasing Importance of Indo-Pacific for EU

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis: Europe is ready for a new Indo-Pacific relationship. The new EU and Indo-Pacific relationship are mutually beneficial. Further, the EU can aid the Indo-Pacific region to become globally competitive.

Introduction:

When the global economy crashed in 2020, Economies such as Vietnam and China grew. A number of Asia’s open societies shown how to successfully contain the virus. Further, the world **depends on India to end the pandemic** for its capacity as a vaccine exporter.

At present, one can observe three types of Asian countries.

1. Firstly, Asia of business – This includes Asian countries with open, dynamic, interconnectedness.
2. Secondly, Asia of geopolitics – This includes Asian countries with nationalistic policies, territorial conflicts, arms races, etc. Geopolitical rivalries threaten free trade.
3. Lastly, Asia of global challenges – This includes countries that lack cooperation in fair globalization and getting climate crisis.

The European involvement in the Indo-Pacific:

1. Recently, the German government has for the first time **adopted certain guidelines for the Indo-Pacific.**
2. European countries are the **key trading, technology, and investment partner** for many countries of the region. Germany alone now conducts one-fifth of its foreign trade with the Indo-Pacific countries.
3. Recently the **EU has concluded free trade agreements** with Japan, Singapore, and Vietnam.
4. China remains a key economic partner for the EU.
5. The EU and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations(ASEAN) concluded a **strategic partnership.** This connects the EU with the South-East Asian Countries.

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6. The EU is the biggest supporter of the [international vaccine platform \(COVAX\)](#). Further, India as a leading producer of vaccines is the most important COVAX supplier. The benefits of this platform are beyond the Indo-Pacific region.
7. Europe also supports **human rights and the promotion of democracy** in the region. For example,
 - o Sanctions against those responsible for human rights violations in Xinjiang
 - o Sanctions against Myanmar's generals following the [Myanmar coup](#).

Suggestions to improve the European presence in the Indo-Pacific:

The **European strategy for the Indo-Pacific** must include all three Asia's into account.

1. The **time for the EU is running short**. Because in 2020 the countries of East and Southeast Asia created the world's largest free trade area(RCEP). The [RCEP\(Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership\)](#) includes one-third of the global economy. So Europe has to act swiftly and starts negotiations for FTA's with Indonesia and India.
2. The EU should not neglect the developed economies of Asia like Japan, South Korea etc.
3. Europe must take a stand against polarisation and geopolitical rivalry. Further, the EU can also advise on inclusive, rules-based Indo-Pacific.

Advantages for EU engaging with Indo-Pacific:

1. **Europe can set standards** for new technologies, human-centered digitization, and sustainable connectivity.
2. **Europe can improve its innovation and economic strength** as well as its regulatory power at a global level.
3. Indo-Pacific is the biggest emitters of CO2 in the world(China and India contribute to that). The **EU can invest in renewable energies, climate protection and biodiversity** in the region.

Upcoming engagement of EU in Indo-Pacific:

1. The EU aims to launch a connectivity partnership with India in the upcoming **EU-India Summit**.
2. To ensuring fair market access and investment conditions in Asia, the **EU will hold meetings with the US**.
3. This week, **Germany and Japan** are going to undertake **Ministerial discussions** on challenges in free trade and security in the region.
4. Further, **France and the Netherlands** also **started their work on a European strategy for the Indo-Pacific**. The strategy is expected to be in place by the end of the year.

In conclusion, Europe is ready for a new partnership that focuses on all three types of Asian economies. Further, it focuses on dialogue with open Asia, taming geopolitical rivalry in Asia and providing solutions to the Asian Challenges.

27. Backchannel Diplomacy Between India and Pakistan

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Synopsis: The recent developments in India – Pakistan relation suggest that there is an ongoing backchannel diplomacy since 2020.

Developments in India- Pakistan Relations indicating backchannel diplomacy

Important developments took place between India and Pakistan. It suggests the functioning of an ongoing backchannel talk.

1. **First**, India-Pakistan agreement to follow Ceasefire reached by India-Pakistan border commanders at LoC. It indicates coordination at a diplomatic level and high-level political approval.
2. **Second**, the events including the scheduling of the much-delayed **Indus Water Treaty talks**. Further, the granting of sports visas strengthened rumors of a backchannel process.
3. **Third**, most recently, contrary to the usual stand, there were no references to Pakistan in electoral speeches by the ruling party. Further, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)'s silence on U-turn by Pakistan on trade are the other clues.

What is the need for back-channel process in India-Pakistan Relations?

Engagement between India and Pakistan is inevitable due to the following reasons:

1. One, for Pakistan, the weakening economic condition and the increasing pressure from the Financial Action Task Force to shut down all terrorist safe-havens.
2. Two, for India, a stand-off with the Chinese Army at the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh and the possibility of a two-front war situation.
3. Three, apart from this, the geopolitical issue of engaging with Afghanistan will be one of the major reasons for the engagement.

What are the past examples when India engaged with Pakistan through backchannel diplomacy?

- **One**, a channel for peace talks began in 1988 during the **Rajiv Gandhi** period, supported by Jordanian Crown Prince Hassan. However, the death of Pakistan's general ended the process without any solution.
- **Two**, during the Kargil War, PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee employed a back-channel interlocutor to finalize a ceasefire agreement.
- **Three**, more recently, in 2016, six former Pakistani High Commissioners traveled to Delhi for a Track-II consultation with nine former Indian High Commissioners.

28. Freedom of navigation operation (FONOP) in Indian waters

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Important International Institutions, agencies and fora – their Structure, Mandate.

Synopsis: The U.S. Navy's FONOP in India's EEZ highlights the difference in the Indian and American perception on international maritime law (UNCLOS).

Background

- Recently, the USS John Paul Jones carried out freedom of navigation operations (FONOP) in the west of the Lakshadweep Islands. It lies in India's exclusive economic zone.
- It was done without requesting India's prior consent.
- Some of India's strategic community members described this as an unnecessary provocation by the U.S. Navy.
- Whereas the US defended its operation by stating that it is consistent with international law (**UNCLOS**).

What are the ambiguities in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)?

Different interpretations of the UNCLOS gave rise to the problem. For example,

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- According to the U.S Navy, India's requirement of prior consent for the passage of foreign warships through Indian EEZs is a violation of UNCLOS.
- Articles 56 and 58, Part V of the Law of the Sea, entitles U.S. warships to high-seas freedoms in the 200-nautical mile EEZs of another coastal state.
- Whereas, according to India's Interpretation, the UNCLOS does not explicitly permit the passage of military vessels in another state's EEZ. Military exercises in the EEZ require the consent of the coastal State.
- This position of India is also consistent with India's domestic law (I) the Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone, (II) Other Maritime Zones of India Act of 1976.

How India responded?

India refrained from stating its differences with the US interpretation of UNCLOS because of the following reasons,

1. One, India understands that FONOPs give the U.S. Navy leverage in the contest with China in the South China Sea.
2. Two, FONOPs in Indian EEZs have been relatively low compared to other countries. **For example**, since 2016, the U.S. Navy has carried out only three FONOPs through Indian EEZs. Whereas, U.S. warships have conducted eight FONOPs in 2019, and nine in 2020 in Chinese islands.
3. Three, apart from conducting FONOPs in Indian EEZ the US navy also conducted FONOPs in the territorial seas of the Maldives. It is done mainly to inform China that the U.S. Navy is committed to upholding the rules-based order in the waters of opponents and partners.
4. Four, the choice of Lakshadweep rather than Andaman Nicobar Islands to conduct FONOPs indicates that US doesn't want to make a rift in India-U. S relation. Because maritime boundaries around the Lakshadweep are more settled than the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

What are the lessons for India?

1. First, FONOPs normalizes military activism close to India's island territories. It makes Indian waters vulnerable to incursions by foreign warships. It encourages other regional navies to violate India's domestic regulations in the waters surrounding the Andaman and Nicobar Island.
2. Second, India should also rethink its stand on freedom of navigation in the EEZs. Because, India's domestic regulation is not in concurrence with international law (UNCLOS). For example, India's declaration of straight baselines delineating zones around the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is a violation of UNCLOS law.

29. Need of Peace Between India and Pakistan

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: Peace Between India and Pakistan is essential for the transformation of South Asia.

Introduction

The Director Generals of Military Operations of India and Pakistan agreed to strictly observe ceasefire agreements between the two countries. This matched with the Pakistani PM's statement that Pakistan's only issue is Kashmir, and it can only be fixed through dialogue.

- This statement was strongly supported by General Qamar Bajwa, Pakistan's Army Chief.

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- There is a growing realization that both the countries cannot take parts of Kashmir that the other country controls.
- Thus, the focus should be on resolving issues that scar the whole subcontinent instead. These issues include poverty, malnutrition and an unacceptable disregard of the young.

How will peace with Pakistan help in transforming South Asia?

The India-Pakistan hostility hurts regionalism and South Asian growth. Peace between India and Pakistan will be beneficial for all the nations constituting the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

- **Firstly**, many reports proved that a good economic value can be derived from **South Asian economic integration**. The World Bank publication titled 'A Glass Half Full' is one of those reports.
- **Secondly, SAARC has remained a victim of India-Pakistan enmity**. Even though it has formed partial alliances among its members.

How can India make a difference to the SAARC?

Professor Selim Raihan of the University of Dhaka highlighted India's vast 'size imbalance' in South Asia.

1. **Firstly**, Professor Selim Raihan shared that **India's total land area is 62%**, the population is 75%, and the GDP of South Asia in 2016 was 83%.
 - Pakistan and Bangladesh have a share of only 7.6% and 5.6%, respectively in regional GDP.
2. **Secondly, this indicates that only India can take the lead** in changing a grossly under-performing region like South Asia. South Asia has a GDP (PPP) of \$12 trillion with a population of a tad over 1.9 billion.
 - On the other hand, the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has a GDP (PPP) of around \$9 trillion. Member states like Vietnam are growing enormously.

Way forward

1. **Firstly, India needs to think big and act big** by determinedly aiming to plan a South Asian economic miracle. China did the same and even rose in 1972.
2. **Secondly, India needs to view peace with Pakistan as essential** and urgent and not just a bilateral matter. It is a chance of a lifetime to drastically makeover South Asia for the better.

30. Talks on Iran Nuclear Deal Resumes

Source – [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis – The Joint Commission of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) [Iran nuclear deal] resumed talks. The lifting of sanctions on Iran and nuclear implementation measures are on top of the agenda.

Background-

- In 2018, former US President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the nuclear deal. Further, it imposed sanctions on Iran and jeopardized the 2015 agreement to limit Iran's uranium enrichment.
- In response, Iran increased uranium enrichment and stockpile and expanded its research and development.

Therefore, for the revival of the 2015 agreement, diplomats from Russia, China, France, Britain, Germany, and Iran have been meeting in Vienna.

- The aim is to reach an agreement on a road map for lifting US sanctions and recommitting Tehran to its agreements under the accord.

Changing approach of US toward IRAN-

- The US President appointed a special envoy to Iran.
- It ended US support for Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen against the Houthis [Iran-backed militants].
- Biden Administration also offered Iran to release \$1 billion of Iranian money frozen in South Korea according to sanctions. In exchange, Iran was asked for ending its 20% uranium enrichment.

However, Iran has rejected the offer, seeking more concrete measures from the U.S.

Is there a deadline for this deal to be done?

Presidential election in IRAN – Iran will go to the polls in June to elect a new president. The current president Hassan Rouhani, seen as a moderate in Tehran, will not be able to stand again for the presidential race.

Challenges –

Rising security tension in the region could jeopardize the diplomatic efforts to revive the JCPOA.

- Shia militias supported by Iran continue to attack US forces and bases in Iraq.
- The Israel-Iran shadow conflict is now being fought inside Syria and on the seas. In the Red Sea, an Iranian ship was attacked.

Way forward-

- The best chance for the US is to revive the JCPOA, and that too, before the presidential election.
- Both Iran and the United States must work to re-establish lost faith and take measures to revive the nuclear deal. It would end the nuclear crisis in exchange for the lifting of sanctions.

31. The National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions (NCAHP) Bill, 2020

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis: Lok Sabha passed **The National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, 2020 [NCAHP]** unanimously. Importance of Allied Health professionals in the delivery of health care services.

Introduction-

- Recently, **the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, 2020 [NCAHP]** passed unanimously by the Lok Sabha.
- The Bill would control and standardize allied and healthcare professional education and practice.
- The recognition of allied healthcare professionals under NCAHP 2020 is paradigm shift.

Allied health professionals and their role in the delivery of healthcare services-

Allied health professionals are individuals engaged in the delivery of health or related care. Their area of expertise includes therapeutic, diagnostic, curative, preventive, and rehabilitative interventions.

Role-

- They are the first to recognize the problems of the patients and serve as safety nets.
- Their awareness of patient care accountability adds tremendous value to the healthcare team in both the public and private sectors.

Key takeaways of the NCAHP bill 2020

1. First, The Bill defines an allied health professional as an associate, technician, or technologist. The professional, who is trained to support the diagnosis and treatment of any illness, disease, injury, or impairment.
 - **For example-** The bill recognizes over 50 professions such as physiotherapists, optometrists, nutritionists, medical laboratory professionals, radiotherapy technology professionals.
 2. Second, The bill used the **International System of Classification of Occupations (ISCO code)** to classify allied professionals.
 - This allows for greater global mobility and better prospects for such professionals.
 - It will benefit up to 8-9 lakh current allied and healthcare professionals.
 3. Third, **the establishment of a central statutory body as a National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions.**
 - To frame policies and standards.
 - To govern professional conduct.
 - Also, to recommend credentials.
 - Further, to establish and maintain a central registry.
 4. Fourth, the Bill has the provision for state councils to execute major functions through autonomous boards.
 - The state councils are in charge of implementation, while the National Commission is in charge of policy formulation.
- **Why government's recognition of allied healthcare professionals is a paradigm shift?**
 - Stressful life due to modern lifestyle, rapid urbanization
 - Rising chronic non-communicable disease burden.
 - An increasing proportion of elderly people.

The above issues require a change in healthcare delivery methods. Therefore, trained, allied health professionals are needed to care for patients with mental illnesses, the elderly, those in need of palliative treatment. Also, it will enable professional services for lifestyle change related to physical activity and diets.

Way forward-

- Allied healthcare professionals are an important part of the medical profession. Their contribution is equal to, if not greater than, that of doctors.
- The law would increase job opportunities for allied and healthcare professionals and also provide dignity to their valuable works.

32. India's vaccination strategy needs a course correction

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: India's vaccination strategy lacks few important steps and needs immediate action.

Introduction: Recently Drug Controller General of India formally approved another vaccine candidate([Sputnik V](#)). This vaccine is approved under [emergency use authorisation](#).

India's vaccination strategy:

1. So far, India's vaccination strategy **relied almost entirely on Covishield**. The other vaccine Covaxin so far has only limited extent in India's vaccine strategy.
2. India also allowed using **foreign-made vaccines in India**. But, these vaccines have to be approved by their respective regulatory agencies. Such as the U.S., the U.K., Europe, Japan.
3. Similarly, there is **World Health Organization's** (WHO) list of approved emergency use vaccines. Indians can also use those vaccines.

Concerns with India's vaccination strategy:

1. Vaccine approved in a different country may have adverse effects on the Indian population.
2. The WHO vaccines can avoid **local clinical trials**. But, they are subject to parallel bridging trials. For example, Pfizer approached Indian regulators for such bridging trails.
3. India due to **emergency use authorization rushed through its regulatory process**. This is evident as India had enough time and opportunity to conduct clinical trials in the right way for Vaccines such as [Covishield and Covaxin](#). But India approved these vaccines under Emergency use.
4. **Not clear planning on vaccine stocks**. Countries like the U.K. and the U.S. planned enough vaccine dosage for their country for attaining self-sufficient. For example, in the US at least 30% of its adults have got one dose of vaccination. But India did not have any such plan. So, without that, 'atmanirbhar' in the vaccine is not feasible.

Suggestions to improve India's Vaccine strategy:

India's pharmacovigilance programme has to step up to solve the challenges in India's vaccine strategy.

1. India **must not repeat the same mistake**. India has to understand that the available choice of vaccine does not translate into immediate availability.
2. All the Indian **vaccine companies** had a tie-up with their foreign counterparts. So, even though they make millions of vaccines in India, they will **sell them to the highest global bidders**(Profit-motive). So India has to ensure vaccine availability to at least for its adult population.
3. India has to **study the past**. Last year, the Indian health system faced a shortage of hospital beds, ventilators, and black marketing of drugs. With the cases increasing once again, India has to improve the situation prior to the worrying state.

33. Issues in the MTP Amendment Bill

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections

Synopsis: The Medical Termination of Pregnancy or MTP Amendment bill is a step forward in recognising the rights of women. But it is not a giant leap.

Introduction:

The 1971 [Medical Termination of Pregnancy \(MTP\) Act](#) aims to reduce the maternal mortality ratio due to unsafe abortions in India. The amendments made a few significant updates to the 1971 Act.

Salient provisions of The MTP Act, 1971:

1. The act allows a woman to **terminate her pregnancy within the first 12 weeks** of pregnancy. After consulting an RMP (registered medical practitioner) woman can terminate her pregnancy.
2. If the women want to terminate her pregnancy between 12-20 weeks, she needs to get an opinion from 2 RMPs.
3. The Medical practitioners have to ascertain that continuance of the pregnancy would **risk the life of the pregnant woman or** substantial risk (Physical or mental abnormalities) to the **child** if it is born

Salient provisions of the MTP Amendment Bill:

1. The amendment **extends the upper limit for permitting abortions from the current 20 weeks to 24 weeks.**
2. The opinion of one **RMP is required for termination** of pregnancy up to 20 weeks of gestation. (Between 20 weeks to 24 weeks the opinion of two RMP's is required).
3. The Amendment also allows the termination of pregnancy beyond 24 weeks **if there are foetal anomalies.**
4. **Formation of the [medical boards](#) in each state** by State governments for this specific purpose(termination of pregnancy after 24 weeks).
5. Further, the amendment **[facilitates abortion of "unmarried women also"](#)**. As the amendment replaced the word 'husband' with the word 'partner'. For the first time, the amendment of the MTP Act moved beyond marital relationships.

The problems in the MTP Amendment Bill:

But the [MTP Amendment falls short of few important things](#). Such as,

1. The amendment does not address the heart of any debate on abortions. That is a **woman as an agency of reproduction.**
2. The key decision-maker regarding the termination of pregnancy after 24 weeks should be the woman and her gynaecologist (for deciding the health of the woman/foetus). Instead, the **amendment created a Board of specialists.** The board will make the **woman undergo a difficult process** before such an abortion. Sometimes the cases will also get decided in courts.
3. The Amendment is **not in line with the global trend.** Over 60 countries allow women to abort their pregnancy at any point during their 10-month gestation.

Suggestions to improve the MTP Amendment Bill:

1. Because of a lack of development in medical technology, the **1971 Act prescribes the 12-week limit.** As it is not safe for pregnant women to abort after 12-weeks.

- But with the advancement of **medical technology**, it is safe to abort at any stage during their gestation. So the government has to remove the gestation limit in the Amendment.

2. **Fundamental change in mindset** is the need of the hour. Until women are seen as an agent of reproduction, nothing will change in reality.

So, the improvement of the **MTP Amendment** is not a holistic one. Instead, it is a minor update.

34. Issues and Challenges facing BIMSTEC Organisation

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Bilateral, Regional, and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Synopsis: Recently, the 17th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting held. In this article, we will discuss the **progress, issues, and challenges concerning the BIMSTEC organisation.**

Background

- Recently, the 17th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting held online. The foreign ministers of **BIMSTEC** (the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) were the participants.

About BIMSTEC

- Initially, BIMSTEC was a grouping of four nations (India, Thailand, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka) formed through the **Bangkok Declaration** of 1997. Its aim was to promote rapid economic development.
- Later, three more countries (Myanmar, Nepal, and Bhutan) also included in BIMSTEC.
- The progress under BIMSTEC was slow in the first 2 decades of its establishment. For instance, only 3 summits were held in the first 20 years.
- However, After the failure of SAARC, India changed its foreign policy to treat it as a more important instrument for regional cooperation.
- BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat, followed by their Outreach Summit with the BRICS leaders in Goa in October 2016, gained international attention.
- Later, the 4th leaders' summit, held in Kathmandu in August 2018. It framed an ambitious plan for institutional reform to include **economic and security cooperation.**
- During the 4th summit, the decision was also taken to form the BIMSTEC charter.
- Today the shared goal is to aim for "a Peaceful, Prosperous and Sustainable Bay of Bengal Region".

What are the developments in the 17th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting?

- **One**, the meeting welcomed the proposal to hold the 5th BIMSTEC Summit in Sri Lanka in the next few months.
- **Two**, the ministers recommended the early adoption of **BIMSTEC charter.**
- **Three**, they also endorsed the rationalization of sectors and sub-sectors of activity, with each member-state serving as a lead for the assigned areas of special interest.
- **Four**, they also supported the Master **Plan for Transport Connectivity**, which will be adopted at the next summit.
- **Five**, three MoUs / Agreements were also endorsed for signing at the next BIMSTEC Summit.
 - Mutual legal assistance in criminal matters.
 - Cooperation between diplomatic academies.

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- The establishment of a technology transfer facility in Colombo.

What were the opportunities missed out in the recent ministerial meeting?

- **One**, lack of deliberation on the trade and economic front. The BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Framework Agreement, signed in 2004 remains unsuccessful even after 20 rounds of negotiations. A recent study by the **Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry** had suggested that BIMSTEC should aim for a comprehensive **Free Trade Agreement** to be a real game-changer.
- **Two**, there is no effort from the BIMSEC leaders to expand their dialogue by involving the vibrant business communities.

What are the issues that are hampering the progressive development of BIMSTEC?

BIMSTEC has achieved much progress in the fields of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief and security, counterterrorism, cybersecurity, and coastal security cooperation.

Also, the academic and strategic community actively interact through the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks. Despite these developments, some concern remains

1. **One**, lack of cordial bilateral relations between its member states. For instance, India-Nepal, India-Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh-Myanmar ties are not good, due to political, economic, and social reasons.
2. **Two**, uncertainties over SAARC impact the development of BIMSTEC. For instance, BIMSTEC members Nepal and Sri Lanka want a revival of the SAARC summit.
3. **Third**, the growing influence of China in South Asia is another threat to BIMSTEC cooperation. For instance, a popular Bangladeshi scholar supported admitting China as a partner in BIMSTEC. However, India will not welcome this idea.
4. **Fourth**, the ongoing military coup in Myanmar and popular protest against the military coup is a new practical challenge.
5. **Fifth**, apathy towards holding regular annual summits. For instance, while most of the regional organisation (SCO, ASEAN, G20) were able to meet at a high political level even during the Pandemic, BIMSTEC leaders failed to meet.

35. Why India Needs to Balance Relations with China, Russia and US?

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India

Synopsis: India must actively engage with all the three big powers (US, Russia, China). It is because there is no guarantee that today's friends will not confront and today's enemy will not cooperate in the future. This is based on the principle that change is the only permanent thing in foreign relations.

Background:

- The recent visit of the Russian Foreign minister to Delhi and Islamabad shows India's changing relations with big powers. Earlier, Russia used to give more importance to India.
- It is just one example amongst the multiple indications that includes:
 - China's rising assertiveness over India.
 - India's growing relationship with the US and Europe signals a shift from an earlier stance of alienating the west.
 - India's rising stature in the International arena due to its economic might and diversified foreign policy.
- Change is the only permanent thing in International relations as can be seen by changing relations between the trio (US, Russia, and China).

Russia-China Relations:

1. They shared very good relations in the 1950s due to the shared ideology of communism. A formal treaty of alliance was signed in 1950.
 - Russia generously gave economic and technological support to China that helped in the development of China's nuclear program.
2. However, relations deteriorated in the 1960s and a tussle between the armies was seen in 1969.
3. After this, both countries tried to enhance their closeness with the U.S as a way of countering the other. However, a little normalcy in relations was seen in the 1980s post the American pressure.
4. The relationship strengthened once again after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. It was due to the ignorant attitude of the western bloc towards Russia.

US – Russia relations:

1. They were allies in the 1940s and defeated the axis powers in World War 2. They laid the foundation of the Yalta system on which the current world order rests.
2. However, in the late 1940s, a Cold War emerged between the two based on ideological confrontation – Capitalism versus Communism.
3. A ray of hope was again witnessed in the 1960s when the two agreed to lay the foundations for nuclear arms control. They also agreed to develop a new framework for shared global leadership.
4. Nonetheless, the relationship has been confrontational in nature after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991.

US-China Relations:

1. They shared a sour relationship in the 1950s. The countries were confronting each other in the Korean War in the early 1950s.
2. However, the growing differences with Russia and fear of two countries' global domination in the 1960-70s induced it to engage more with the U.S.
3. As a mark of loyalty towards the US, the Chinese government didn't renew the security treaty with Russia in 1980.
4. China took the support of the US and strengthened the economic power that eventually helped it to become a future global leader.
5. Despite this, China and the US don't share a cordial relationship in the current scenario.

India's relationship with China, Russia, and US:

- **Russia had shown considerable support** in the form of repeated veto in the UN against Anglo-American interventions in Kashmir.
- The 1960s tussle between Russia and China allowed India to enhance its cooperation with Russia especially post the 1962 Sino-India war. Both countries viewed China as a common threat.
- India became cautious of US- Russia dominance over the world in the 1960s especially post the adoption of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty system. This was to curtail India's atomic ambitions.
- Russian intervention in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan were against Indian principles. It created a gap in relations.
- Russia and China are today cautious of India's growing closeness with the U.S. They want to create an Asian [NATO](#) to counter the west. India on the other hand is concerned about America and China setting up a G-2 over Asia and the world.

Way Forward:

- The changing relationships between the trio indicate that bonding between Russia-China can decrease in the future. Similarly, the US can develop closeness with China.
- Understanding this, India must actively partner with all of them as done by it in the past.
 - In the case of Russia, the mutually beneficial bilateral relationship shouldn't be compromised despite the current differences over Afghanistan and the Indo-Pacific issue.
- India should leverage its economic potential (6th Largest) and diverse base of foreign policy to effectively balance the relationship with the trio.
 - Diverse Base – Actively engaging with US, European powers (France, UK), Asian powers (Japan, Korea, and Australia), etc.
- In a nutshell, we can say that the only permanent thing in foreign relations is that they are bound to change in the future.

36. India – China Bilateral Relationship Demands a Minimalist Approach

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – India and its neighborhood- relations

Synopsis: India and China should adopt a minimalist approach in their future negotiations. This would give better and realistic results rather than an idealist and unfulfilled expectation.

Background:

- A track 2 dialogue held recently between China and India. In dialogue, a consensus was aimed at the adoption of a minimalist approach.
 - This approach focuses on low-hanging fruits that are easier to grab, rather than aiming for a full-scale solution.
- This approach is emphasized because high expectations have failed to deliver credible results in the past.

High Expectations and Unwanted Results:

- In the 1950s, both countries **idealized the restoration of pan-Asian civilizational** partnership. However, this notion didn't exist in reality and the two sides were confronting each other in the 1962 war.
- **Two informal summits took place in 2018 (Wuhan) and 2019 (Mamallapuram)** aimed at everlasting peace between the countries. However, barely after two years, a grave border confrontation took place in eastern Ladakh.

Therefore, the countries must focus on modest goals to improve the relations. The **3 areas that deserve priority** in this regard are 1) border dispute, 2) trade, and 3) the role of other countries and multilateral platforms in bilateral relations.

Current Situation of Border Dispute:

- The border clash at Galwan Valley, Eastern Ladakh is going on for ten months.
- It is the worst violence since 1967 and the de-escalation effort has reached an apparent stalemate.
- There is no clarity over the withdrawal of armies along the north and south bank of Pangong lake, Eastern Ladakh. Further, no joint statement was released post 11th round of talks between Corps Commanders on April 9.
- Thus, it appears that China is in no mood for a final settlement of the boundary question.

Equation on the trade front:

- There were talks of **decoupling Chinese trade** post the Galwan valley stand-off. However, the latest trade data shows a different picture.
- The figure stood at \$87.6 billion where Chinese exports amounted to \$66.7, making it India's largest trading partner. Similarly, Chinese company Vivo sponsored India's biggest cricket tournament.
- The reliance is so high that complete decoupling is not possible in the near future.

Role of other countries and multilateral platforms in bilateral relations:

- The track 2 dialogue made it clear that China views its relationship with India through its relations with the U.S. The country criticized the creation of small circles like QUAD group to undermine its national interest.
- India too has shown discontent over its **exclusion from China led small circles** in South Asia and multilateral efforts on Afghanistan.

Way Forward:

- The countries must curtail the mistrust between them. On boundary questions, they can at least bring **clarity on most sensitive hotspots** and do **coordinate patrolling** over them.
- They **should cooperate in areas that don't have security implications**. This includes infrastructure development, clean energy, etc.
- A **robust policy framework** should be drawn for security-sensitive areas like 5G operations. This would protect India from every other malicious country, not solely from China.
- The countries must leverage **shared platforms** to discuss their respective concerns pertaining to 3rd countries or any multilateral platform. These platforms are also useful for reviving and strengthening bilateral relations.
 - For instance, **BRICS** can be used for reviving bilateral cooperation in Afghanistan or developing vaccine initiatives as done by Quad.

Thus, both countries should focus on modest goals that may be more rewarding than misplaced expectations.

37. Degree of Trust in Public Institutions across different castes

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – mechanisms, laws, institutions, and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections

Synopsis:

The India Human Development Survey (IHDS) tries to ascertain the degree of trust that people across different castes hold in public institutions. A thorough analysis of the data calls for strengthening trust, especially among the vulnerable sections.

Background:

- The IHDS categorizes public institutions into state government, judiciary, and police. Caste categories are divided into General, OBCs, SCs, and STs.
- The survey asks a question on the degree of confidence that people have over public institutions.
- This confidence indicates their trust in them and people can choose from – a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, and hardly any confidence.

Findings of IHDS:

- **Household Level:**

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- Judiciary is most trusted followed by state governments and police in public institutions.
- **Across different Castes:**
 - Maximum general category people have low confidence in public institutions.
 - A high proportion of OBCs displays great confidence in public institutions. A similar level of confidence is shown by STs.
 - SCs display the highest level of confidence in public institutions. Only a small proportion choose the 'hardly any confidence' option.

Analysing the Findings:

- SCs display a **very high degree of confidence in state governments**. They largely depend on affirmative actions and state support. The government gives quotas to SCs, STs, and OBCs in education and public sector employment.
- STs, on the other hand, display slightly less confidence than SCs due to their isolationist nature. It has devoided them of various social security nets.
- The **trust over the judiciary is quite high** in comparison to state governments across all the castes. Eg- three-fourths of STs reported a great deal of confidence. This is surprising given the judicial overload of cases and prolonged delays.
- The overall confidence over police is also low with only 13-18% showing great confidence. Further SCs and STs have very little confidence in them due to the **rampant corruption and discrimination against lower castes**.

Need for strengthening Trust:

1. **Positive Correlation:** There exists a positive relationship between trust and quality of governance or any other outcome.
 - For instance, greater trust results in better functioning of financial markets as the higher the trust, the higher is the credibility of debtors.
 - Similarly, greater trust manifests higher levels of cooperative relations between labour and management. It results in better functioning of labour markets.
 - Eg. – Firms that have trade unions are better able to adapt to new management methods, and show better productivity.
2. **Declining Trust:** The trust in institutions rose from 2005 to 2012. However, it is now showing a downward trend due to:
 - Non-inclusive policies of the government
 - Substandard judicial verdicts that compromise on autonomy and fairness
 - Also, due to, action of Police that undermines rights of citizens

We need to transition to a policy environment that is inclusive and transparent. It is a challenging task that could be facilitated with growing awareness among the citizens.

38. Issue of Freedom of Navigation in EEZs

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS

Synopsis: States should consult the coastal state before conducting military exercises in an exclusive economic zone.

Introduction

The USS John Paul Jones conducted a 'Freedom of Navigation Operation' 130 nautical miles west of the Lakshadweep Islands. The operation took place inside India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This exercise was conducted without asking for India's consent.

- The U.S. 7th Fleet said that India's emphasis on prior consent is inconsistent with international law.

- India stated that the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) “does not allow other States to carry out military exercises in the Exclusive Economic Zone and on the continental shelf without the consent of the coastal state”.

Explain the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)?

UNCLOS binds all its parties and customary international law binds all states. India is a member of the UNCLOS while the U.S. is not. According to the UNCLOS, EEZ is an area next to the state waters of a coastal state where the state has rights and duties.

- Firstly, the right and duties involve management of natural resources;** formation and use of artificial islands, installations, and structures; marine scientific research; and protection of the marine environment.
- Secondly, the present issue highlights Articles 58 and 87 of the UNCLOS.** Article 58 (1) provides that in the EEZ, all States enjoy the freedoms referred to in Article 87 of navigation.
 - Article 87 offers freedom of the high seas** under which all states have the freedom of navigation. However, the freedom of navigation is subject to the conditions provided under the UNCLOS.
 - Article 58 (3) specifies that,** in the EEZ, States shall respect the rights and duties of the coastal State and shall obey the laws adopted by the coastal State.
 - The Indian law relating to this is the Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone, and Other Maritime Zones of India Act, 1976.
- Thirdly,** the assertion by India in 1995 told that the **Convention does not allow other States to carry out military exercises** in the EEZ. The event involving the use of weapons or explosives without the consent of the coastal State is not allowed.
- Fourthly, Article 310 of the UNCLOS allows the states to** explain the relationship between the Convention and their own laws. However, such statements should not modify the legal effect of the provisions of this Convention.

What should be done?

- Freedom of navigation cannot be read in a complete and isolated manner. **Non-consensual military activities that obstruct the lawful enjoyment** of such rights need not be allowed.
- A coastal state is worried about military exercises posing a risk to its coastal communities, its installations or artificial islands, and the marine environment. Any state who wants to conduct such exercises must do so after **consultation with the coastal state.**
- India and the U.S. should discuss such concerns and maintain international peace** and security. Otherwise, it might threaten friendly relations and undermine the progress towards codification and development of international law which is particularly complex.

39. SC Directions to CBI in ISRO Espionage Case, 1994

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- GS 2 – Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.

Synopsis – The Supreme Court has ordered the CBI investigation in the Nambi Narayanan ISRO Espionage case. CBI will review the involvement of the Kerala police.

What is the ISRO espionage case?

- In 1994, a Maldivian woman was arrested. She was suspected of selling secrets from ISRO scientists to Pakistan.
- Mr. Narayanan was arrested along with two other scientists by the Kerala Police on charges of sharing official secrets on space technology and launch missions.
- Later, the CBI took over the probe from the Kerala police. In 1996, CBI recommended closure of the case due to lack of evidence.
- The CBI also highlighted serious flaws in the police investigation, which relied on dubious tactics and was based solely on suspicion.

What is the court order [2018]?

- In 2018, **the Supreme Court dismissed the case as a criminal frame-up** based on “some sort of fancy or notion.”
- According to the Court, the former **ISRO scientist was “unnecessarily arrested and harassed”**.
- **Thus, the court ordered the State of Kerala to pay him Rs.50 lakh as compensation** for the damage to his honor and dignity.
- The court also formed a committee headed by Justice D.K. Jain to find ways and means to take appropriate steps against the erring officials

Recent court order-

- The SC ordered CBI to investigate the alleged **espionage case** against a former ISRO scientist in 1994 and to submit a report within three months.
- Furthermore, the CBI will investigate the report of Justice D.K. Jain Committee on senior Kerala police officials accused of framing ISRO scientist.

Concerning facts about the case-

- The ‘ISRO spying case’ has raised significant concerns about police investigations in the country.
- Also, Kerala’s government has been ignoring calls for disciplinary action against the erring police officers.
- Moreover, the State government opposed the CBI’s closure report and made an attempt to revive the investigation by its own police.

Suggestion

- SC order is a welcome and necessary step toward ensuring transparency for the alleged frame-up.
- Also, it would be in the best interests of the case if the CBI could continue with its inquiry into the officers involved without hindrance

40. Strategic Autonomy will shape the Emerging global order

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests

Synopsis: The middle powers like Japan, Iran, Turkey, and India are looking for strategic autonomy. It will make the emerging global order into a multipolar world instead of a new Cold War type bi-polar world.

Background

- The confrontation between greater powers (The US on one side and the Russia-China axis on the other side) is giving rise to a **New Cold War**.

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- Some following examples are a sign of the Cold War,
 - The hard negotiations of the US with China at the Alaska summit.
 - An allegation by US over Mr Putin as a “killer”
 - The reluctance of the US to rejoin the nuclear agreement with Iran are some.
 - Further, the development of QUAD, to ensure a “free, open, resilient and inclusive” Indo-Pacific region to contain China.
- US enmity towards Russia and China has encouraged them to strengthen their relations under the **‘Greater Eurasian Partnership’**.
- Now, the New Cold War is being reflected as the **Indo-Pacific versus Eurasia**.
- The final shape of this divide will be determined by four middle powers, namely Japan, Iran, Turkey and India.

Why the middle powers are reluctant to join the alliance?

The middle powers will not join the alliance (either Indo-Pacific or Eurasia) due to their compelling national interest. Instead, they will pursue **Strategic autonomy**.

1. **First, Japan** has a more friendly relationship with the US than China. While Japan has territorial disputes with China (the Senkaku Islands dispute in the East China Sea), it has signed a security treaty of 1951 with the U.S. to safeguard its interest. Yet, Japan will not be willing to join the US bloc because,
 - a. One, Japan is dependent upon China in trade. For example, in 2019, 24% of Japanese imports came from China, while 19% of its exports went to China.
 - b. Two, Japan is emphasising Self-reliance and aims to reduce its security-dependence on the U.S. Thus, it wants to pursue an independent role in the Indo-Pacific.
 - c. **For example**, Japan’s \$200 billion **‘Partnership for Quality Infrastructure** that funds infrastructure projects in Asia and Africa. It also wants to work on BRI projects on a selective basis.
2. **Second**, since 2016, **India** has moved very close to the US by expanding its Defence ties, frequent military exercises and elevation of the Quad to the ministerial level. Yet India will not be willing to join the US bloc because,
 - a. One, neither the U.S. nor the Quad can address the challenges it faces at its 3,500-kilometre land border with China.
 - b. Two, US intervention in Human rights issues in India is forcing India to realign its strategies with china and Russia. India now wants to manage its ties with China through its own efforts and retain Russia as its defence partner.
3. **Three**, sanctions on **Iran** by the US have made Iran a natural ally of the Sino-Russian axis. Yet, Iran will be willing to pursue its strategic autonomy once sanctions are lifted instead of an alliance with the Sino-Russian axis.
4. **Four, Turkey** has benefitted more by increasing geopolitical, military and economic alignment with Russia and China. Yet, Turkey will not join the Sino-Russian axis as it wishes to continue ties with the US parallelly. For example, its **“New Asia”** initiative, involves the strengthening of east-west logistical and economic connectivity backed by western powers and China.

“Strategic autonomy” defined by flexible partnerships, with the freedom to shape alliances to suit specific interests at different times will shape the emerging global world order.

41. A Balanced Approach Under IBC Amendment Ordinance 2021

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis: The new Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code amendment ordinance 2021 shows a shift from a creditor-centric approach towards a more balanced approach. Under the new approach, both promoters and creditors are incentivized to reach a more acceptable solution.

Background:

- The President has promulgated the [Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code \(Amendment\) Ordinance 2021](#).
- It marks a shift from earlier approaches against the promoter and focussed on the creditor. Under this, the creditor was given the main control over the insolvency process while the promoter hardly had any say.

About the amendment:

- It tries to address the structural weakness in IBC by allowing a [pre-packaged insolvency resolution process](#) (PPIR).
 - PPIR is a form of restructuring that allows creditors and debtors (or promoters) to work on an informal plan within the IBC structure.
 - It is done before the commencement of insolvency proceedings.
 - Once accepted by creditors, the plan must be presented to the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) for approval.The process is available only for MSMEs (Micro, small and medium enterprises).

Difference from earlier approach:

- The amendment has **made the process less promoter averse**. Now PPIR will ensure promoters are able to retain their control over their business.
 - Earlier, the control was given to a resolution professional. He/she was appointed to manage the affairs of the company during the insolvency process.
 - The promoters did not have control due to cases of corruption, crony capitalism, and other fraudulent activities tagged with them. This undermined the creditor's interest and sanctity of the resolution process.

Further, the **new process doesn't give the scope of open bidding** that was available earlier. This might hinder price discovery and value maximization for creditors.

Benefits of the new amendment:

- **More powers to Promoters:** They get to hold on to their firms, and exit the process with more manageable obligations.
- **Prevents Closure of Genuine Firm:** With greater promoter control, the genuine firms will not get closed, like the ones who are not performing due to pandemic stress or other genuine barriers.
 - Further, the IBC process suffers from **a liquidation bias**. Around 46.5 % of all cases under IBC have ended up in liquidation. While only 13.1% witnessed a resolution.
- **Creditor Incentivisation:** As past data shows that liquidation value is only a fraction of the creditor's claims and the majority of IBC cases end up in liquidation.
 - The new process can help the creditors get better value for their debt. Especially economic distress when there are limited buyers of stressed assets.

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- **Better Coverage:** The PPIR process doesn't fall under the central bank's restructuring framework. It covers all financial creditors as opposed to RBI's restructuring schemes which deal only with banks.
- **Prevents future scrutiny:** PPIR involves approval by a judicial seal that prohibits any future questioning by investigative agencies.

Way Forward:

- The PPIR process should be **gradually made available to all corporate debtors.**
- The government can also **relax the terms of Section 29A** of IBC in order to widen the list of possible buyers.
 - The section disqualifies those who had contributed to the downfall of the corporate debtor or were unsuitable to run the company.

42. Significance of Lessons from the First COVID Wave

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS

Synopsis: Partial lockdowns again, are going to widen economic and social inequalities. Every step towards prevention must consider the Lessons learnt from the first COVID-19 wave in India.

Introduction

- India's second COVID-19 wave is more contagious than the first. Many States have imposed lockdowns of various scales. However, political rallies, social and religious events are still ongoing, making these restrictions meaningless.

How did the first wave lead to uneven growth?

The International Monetary Fund estimated India's GDP to grow at 12.5% this year, but this growth cannot be inclusive.

- **Firstly**, the technological, pharmaceutical, and healthcare sectors saw the greatest growth. The **wealth of billionaires in India increased by 35%** even during the pandemic.
- **Secondly**, sectors including travel and tourism and wellness and hospitality recorded historic lows. **The pandemic destroyed the informal and MSME sector.** It pushed 75 million Indians into poverty.
- **Thirdly**, the unplanned lockdown highlighted the **vulnerability of the migrant workers** and poor as they had to walk back to their villages.
- **Fourth**, many economists predicted that India's revival from the COVID-19 induced depression would be a **'K-shaped' curve.** It means **only a part of our population recovers.**
- **Fifthly, COVID-19 has affected the poor the most.** Introducing partial lockdowns will limit the movement of goods and laborers. It will considerably reduce industrial productivity and create paths that will widen our inequalities.

Suggestions

Interconnected industries can function at the maximum possible capacity in multiple shifts. However, Strict health and safety regulations should be framed and followed. Non-essential gatherings should be banned.

- **Firstly, governments will have to account for demand contraction. Thus, It should** urgently ensure cash incentive packages at both individual and institutional levels. This will boost consumption and investments.
- **Secondly**, the need to provide additional provisions for job stamps; direct cash transfer and employment guarantee schemes.

- **Thirdly, the NYAY scheme** that guarantees a minimum income of ₹6,000 to every household is a solution that needs to be used at this time.
- **Fourthly**, reports indicate that new COVID-19 mutations are challenging even to the younger population. **India will have to speed up vaccine production, procurement,** and distribution.
- **Fifthly, Open vaccination for all age groups.** This would make it easier for the majority of laborers to be present at their workplaces with lesser risks. Students will also be able to attend classes and examinations.

The conclusion

The government should take responsibility for the lapses in the health care system and vaccine shortages. The private sector and NGOs played a huge role in quickly scaling up healthcare infrastructure during the first wave. With political will and public participation, we should now be able to save lives without negotiating on our population's livelihood.

43. Need to Enact Siras Act on the Lines of Alan Turing law

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- GS 2 – mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections.

Synopsis- Ex-post facto pardon to the convicts of homosexuality will serve justice to them. Alan Turing law is a perfect example in this case. Government should consider enacting Siras Act on the same line.

Introduction

- On September 6, 2018, India's Supreme Court ruled that consensual homosexual acts would no longer constitute a crime.
- The historic move reversed Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code.
- The change was a positive step towards acceptance and equal rights to LGBTQ+ communities.

However, it is time to enact ex post facto pardon for those who are in jail due to their acts in the past because of their sexuality.

ex-Post facto means it will apply to the acts before the enactment of law or before the judgment i.e. retrospective effect.

What is section 377?

- Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code criminalized homosexuality. Section introduced in 1861 during the British rule in India, modeled on the Buggery Act of 1533.
- In 2018, The Supreme Court ruled that the criminalization of consensual homosexual sex, under Section 377 between adults was **unconstitutional, irrational, indefensible, and manifestly arbitrary.**
- However, Section 377 remains in force for sex with minors, non-consensual sexual acts, and bestiality.

Example of Persecution faced by the LGBTQ+ community in India

Ramchandra Siras Case –

- Siras was a Professor and HOD of Modern Indian Languages at Aligarh Muslim University.
- AMU suspended him for gross misconduct in 2010 due to consensual homosexual sex.
- However, Later, Professor Siras won his case against the university in Allahabad High Court on 1 April 2010 and got back his job as a professor.

What is Alan Turing law?

The Alan Turing law (**formal title- the Policing and Crime Act 2017**) was passed to correct a historic injustice. The law pardoned gay men convicted in the past because of their sexuality.

- The Law is named after Alan Turing, the World War II code-breaker and computing pioneer. He was convicted of gross indecency in 1952.
- However, Alan Turing received a royal pardon in 2013.
- Now, The law applies in England and Wales.

Landmark Judgments related to LGBTQ+ communities–

- **First, Naz Foundation v. Govt. of NCT of Delhi [2009]** is a landmark Indian case of the Delhi High Court. It held that treating consensual homosexual sex between adults as a crime is a violation of fundamental rights.
 - As a result of the ruling, homosexual acts between consenting adults are no longer illegal in India.
- **Second, Suresh Kumar Koushal vs. Naz Foundation [2013]-**
 - In Suresh Kumar Koushal vs. Naz Foundation, SC overturned the previous judgment by Delhi HC 2009 and restored Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code.
- **Third, Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India [2018]-**
 - In **Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India in 2018, SC decriminalized homosexuality.** Dismissed the position taken by SC in Suresh Kumar Koushal case (2013).

Way forward-

The Indian government should pass a 'Siras Act,' similar to the Alan Turing bill, to make amends for past and current abuses towards the LGBTQ+ community.

44. The Questions Surrounding COVID Vaccine Exports by India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: The government should make sure to citizens that the COVID vaccine exports by India are not at the cost of their health.

Introduction:

Recently Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs stated that India is **Exporting Vaccine after considering the domestic and international Factors.** Further, he also mentions that India will continue to export vaccines based on the production and needs of the national vaccination programme.

Potential of India's vaccine exports:

1. According to Ministry of External Affairs statistics, upto April 13, India alone supplied over 65 million vaccines to 90 countries globally. This accounts for one month of India's current COVID-19 vaccines production. Of these
 - More than 10 million doses are sent as grants.
 - Almost 36 million on a commercial basis.
 - About 19 million under the [COVAX programme](#).
2. India also exports vaccines to GAVI. India is a member of [Gavi's COVAX facility](#). Further, India also receives other vaccines from GAVI. So, exporting vaccine to GAVI is an obligation to India.

Why India need to export vaccine?

India explained the need to export vaccine during the recent [Raisina Dialogue](#).

1. Our PM mentioned that Humanity as a whole must be at the centre of our thinking and action. Further, he explains India must think of the entire humanity, not merely of people with Indian boundary.
2. Also, the Minister of External Affairs mentions “**equitable access to vaccines is critically important**“. Further, he also mentions that “no one will be safe till everyone is safe”.
3. Indian PM also mentioned the concept of ‘*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*’. (the world is one family). India desires to be a good global citizen. A similar concept is also enshrined in the Objective Resolution. (moved by Jawaharlal Nehru in the Constituent Assembly by 1946.)

So being a responsible global power, India needs to think beyond itself. So, exporting vaccine is essential as much as vaccinating Indians.

How India calculates the number of Vaccines to be exported?

Being a global citizen India needs to export vaccines but not at the cost of non-vaccinating Indians. The recent Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs speech mentions that it is decided based on three factors.

1. Quantum of domestic production.
2. The demands of the national vaccine programme
3. Requests for vaccines manufactured in India.

Questions surrounding quantum of exporting vaccine:

1. Despite the above factors, the export value is not clearly defined. There is an ambiguity on how these factors collectively help in the decision-making process of calculating vaccine exports. For example, If an independent judgment is based on domestic production and national vaccine programme, then only the leftover (remaining) vaccine has to be exported.
2. Even if it is obligatory to send vaccine to the COVAX programme, sovereign states can always **invoke national interest to override obligations**.
3. Similarly, the commercial contracts of the company can also get disregarded under existing laws to fulfil national interests.

So exporting vaccine is for the general foreign policy of India. But the government have to clarify to its people, that vaccine exports are not at the cost of their health.

45. Bringing Down the Western Hegemony on the World Order

Gs2: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Synopsis: Developing countries must unite to meet the challenges of the US-led liberal hegemonic world order

Background

- The US hegemony started after the end of British imperialism in the aftermath of the **Suez Crisis** (1956).
- After, six decades-long control over the world order, the authority of the US has started declining.
- As a result, the world will witness a more decentralised and pluralistic global order.

Reasons why the authority of the US is declining?

- **One**, the rise of China as a rival to challenge the US hegemony. **For example**, China is the world leader in renewable energy, dominates global investment and trade, and with a military budget of \$230 billion.
- **Two**, the rising economic power of the BRICS nations that are aggressively building a parallel economic order.
- **Three**, a decline in America's image as a result of Trump-era policies. For instance,
 - Threatening to withdraw from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
 - Withdrawing from the Paris Agreement on climate change
 - Poor handling of the marginalized immigrants
 - Apathy towards Democratic values in support of ultra-nationalism and ethnic purity.
- **Four**, rising impact of **Asian Regionalism** on international trade and commerce with China spearheading Asian regionalism. Nevertheless, America will continue to play a prime role in the international world order. Because its economy and Military strengths are still unmatched, and the global dominance of its MNC's.

What role can China play to control the hegemony of the US?

1. **First**, China must strengthen the opposition to the West through the promotion of regional multilateral institutions. China's self-centered policies such as **Belt and Road Initiative** and the **Silk Road project** have raised skepticism among the other countries. Hence, China must push to harmonise regional tensions.
2. **Second**, power rivalry in a multipolar world is a possibility, and it will give rise to military conflict. For instance, Russia's assertion of power in Georgia and Ukraine, India's disputes with Pakistan and China's infiltration into India, etc., China must resist using its military might in the Power rivalry. Rather, it should focus on challenging the established western world economically.
3. **Third**, China adopted the idea of absolute sovereignty and followed the nation-state model. This helped China to rise as a global superpower. But it cannot continue to rise by following the same idea of absolute sovereignty. It needs to ensure the liberal democratic model, to gain trust from other countries. Otherwise, U.S will deepen the divide against China. For instance, the U.S is already encouraging NATO members to join the US against China.

Way forward

- The developing countries should attempt to overcome their territorial aspirations. They should prioritize cultural mediation and democratic values.
- They should increase their cooperation through mutual sharing of knowledge and signing inclusive treaties.
- This will help them to tackle the challenge posed by the western hegemony

46. An Analysis of SC Ruling on Rohingyas

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs2: India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Synopsis: Supreme court recently ruled against providing protection to Rohingya refugees. It signifies a flawed understanding of the international convention to protect Refugees.

Background

- Recently an application was filed before the supreme court to release the Rohingya refugees. They were detained in a sub-jail in Jammu and were likely to be deported to Myanmar.

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- The Supreme court disposed of the application.
- It signifies a lack of understanding of international law and constitutional protections for refugees.

About Rohingyas

- The Rohingyas are termed as the world's most persecuted ethnic minority by the U.N
- In August 2017, the Myanmar military launched a clearance campaign in the Rakhine state (home to the ethnic Rohingya).
- As many as 7,50,000 Rohingyas fled to the neighboring states to escape a military crackdown and brutality.

India and Rohingyas

1. Nearly 40,000 Rohingyas who were feared of Genocide entered India and got settled in Refugee camps.
2. Recently, the home ministry had issued circulars to states sharing borders with Myanmar to identify, detain and deport Rohingyas back to Myanmar.
3. Following this, few states withdrew their support to provide food, shelter, or even essential medical care to the refugees.
4. In Jammu and Kashmir after a biometric verification drive, over 170 Rohingya refugees were detained despite having **UNHCR refugee cards**.
5. The Indian government labeled them as illegal economic migrants and perceived them as a national security threat. They are also excluded from the Citizenship Amendment Act.
6. In the past, India has differentiated illegal migrants and Refugees in its treatment of Afghan, Sri Lankan, or Tibetan refugees.
7. However, lack of consideration over Rohingyas as refugees is a disservice done to thousands of lives who are already affected by **Ethnic cleansing**.

What arguments are given by the supreme court?

- **First**, SC held that refugees cannot invoke Article 32 right. However, the constitutional safeguards of Articles 14 and 21 are equally available to every person, including refugees.
- **Second**, the court distanced itself from commenting on the genocide happening in Myanmar. The court distanced itself despite the International Court of Justice (ICJ) observation that the Rohingya had suffered genocide.
- **Third**, the court ignored India's binding commitment to **non-refoulement** and obligations in prohibiting genocide. India has ratified the Convention on **Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide** in 1959.
 - **Principle of Non-Refoulement**: It prevents expulsion of a refugee where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.
- **Fourth**, allowing Rohingyas to get deported is a breach of Article 21 and against the Gujarat High Court ruling in **Ktaer Abbas Habib Al Qutaifi v Union of India**. Even, Delhi High Court in **Dongh Lian Kham v Union of India** (2016) held the same view.
 - According to the Delhi and Gujarat High court, the Principle of Non-Refoulement protects the life and liberty of a human being irrespective of his nationality.
- **Fifth**, the court stated that petitioners' claim to a right against deportation should be seen along with the **right to reside**. Under Article 19 right to reside is only available to citizens. But Rohingyas had never asked for the right to reside. Rather

they have prayed for the **right to life** to reside in a camp and the **right to liberty** to protect them from arbitrary arrests, harassment, and intimidation.

47. The US Afghan Strategy Fails to Control Taliban

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: The US Afghan strategy to pull out the US troops without any settlement leaves the Taliban stronger.

Introduction:

In 2020, the Trump administration signed a deal with the Taliban to pull off US troops from Afghanistan. Following that, the current President Joe Biden upheld the agreement and agrees to pull off US troops. But there is no settlement reached between the Afghan government and the Taliban. It leaves the Afghan government as a vulnerable stakeholder.

Background of the US Afghan strategy :

- The U.S. and Taliban signed an agreement for “Bringing Peace to Afghanistan” on February 29, 2020, at Doha. (also called Doha agreement).
- [Features of Doha Agreement](#)
 - **Troops Withdrawal:** The US and NATO will withdraw their troops from Afghanistan. All the troops will be out of Afghanistan within 14 months. The withdrawal will start on May 1, 2021, with a full withdrawal by September 11.
 - **Taliban:** Taliban will not allow any of its members to use the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies.
 - **Prisoners:** Exchange of prisoners between the Afghan government and the Taliban will be done to build trust.
 - **Sanctions Removal:** As per the Doha agreement, US and UN sanctions on the Taliban leaders will be removed.

The US Afghan strategy under Joe Biden:

1. After becoming President Joe Biden ordered a review of the U.S.'s Afghan strategy. This includes the implementation of the Trump-Taliban deal(Doha Agreement).
2. There was also speculation that the current President will delay the implementation of the Doha Agreement. It will have to wait until there is a political settlement between the Afghan government and the Taliban. This is because of the following reasons.
 - a. The Biden administration also actively pursued to establish [a peace plan](#) between the [Afghan government and the Taliban](#).
 - b. Under this, the US also initiated an **UN-led regional peace conference**. It is scheduled to take place in Ankara, Turkey, in the next week.
3. But the Taliban has made it clear that it will not participate in the conference. Further, they also threatened to step up attacks if the US did not meet the May 1 withdrawal deadline. So, the US president upheld the Doha Agreement.

Vulnerability of Afghan Government:

1. There is an ambiguity with the **peace conference**. It is not clear whether the peace conference will go through without the Taliban's participation. If it is without the Taliban participation then there is no point in conducting it at all.
2. After September, the Afghan government will not get troop support from the US and NATO. The Afghan government will be on its own to fight the Taliban. The Afghan government depend on US forces driving out the Taliban in the past.

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- For example, whenever the Taliban overran cities, U.S. airpower was crucial in driving them back.
3. The country is also witnessing a series of targeted killings of journalists, activists and other civil society members opposing the Taliban. So, with US and NATO troops are gone this will intensify as the Afghan government is not capable to control the Taliban.

So, Once the Americans are gone, the balance of power will shift in favour of the Taliban.

Hope for Afghan government:

1. Already, The US promised that it would continue **remote assistance** to the Afghan government.
2. The role of regional players such as Russia, China and India is also crucial in deciding the Afghan's future.

Despite that, the US Afghan strategy not only lost the war, but it also lost the process of withdrawal also. As there is **no clear peace settlement and peace roadmap** between the Taliban and the Afghan Government. This leaves the Taliban a stronger force in Afghanistan.

48. Issues Associated with Election Commission of India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Powers, Functions and Responsibilities of ECI

Synopsis: Recently, the Election Commission of India was in discussion. Many questions and doubts are being raised regarding the model Code of Conduct and powers of ECI under Article 324.

Background

- **Model code of conduct (MCC)** is a set of guidelines that ECI issues. The political parties, candidates, and governments need to follow MCC during an election.
- **T.N Seshan** (former chief election commissioner) enforced the **model code of conduct (MCC)** for the first time using the powers under **Article 324**.
- It brought the issue of **ballot rigging** and the use of Muscle power during elections under control.
- Apart from **MCC**, the ECI also gives directions, instructions, and clarifications on other issues that emerge during the election.
- However, some issues linked to the model code, and the exercise of the ECI under Article 324, requires clarity.

What is Article 324?

- Article 324 empowers the Election Commission to direct, control, and conduct elections to Parliament and Legislature of every state. It also conducts elections to the offices of the President and Vice President
- In **Mohinder Singh Gill case**, the SC stated that Article 324 gives plenary powers to ECI to ensure free and fair elections.

What are the issues?

1. **First**, with respect to the Model code, the question about the enforceability of the code remains unresolved.
 - The Model Code was framed on the basis of a consensus among political parties. It has no legal backing.

- But the commission has the power to suspend or withdraw recognition of a political party. If, it refuses to follow the MCC according to the **Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968**.
 - Now, the question is, since the MCC is legally not enforceable, how can the ECI take punitive action; such as withdrawal of recognition against a political party.
2. **Second**, ECI's intervention in the administrative decisions of a Union or State government during elections is questionable. For example, ECI recently stopped the Kerala Government from continuing to supply kits. It was containing rice, pulses, cooking oil, etc.
- According to the MCC, if the ECI believes that such actions will affect free and fair elections, It can stop a government from taking any administrative action.
 - The issue here is, whether the distribution of food will affect free and fair elections.
 - Further, The SC in **Subramaniam Balaji case** held that distribution of colour TVs, computers, cycles, goats, cows, etc., that is in accordance with the **directive principles of state policy**, is permissible during an election.
 - Also, according to **Section 123 (2)(b) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951**, the declaration of a public policy will not amount to interfering with the free exercise of the electoral right.
3. **Third**, under **Article 324**, ECI has the power to abruptly transfer any senior officials working under State governments. If it believes that the presence of those officials will adversely affect the free and fair election.
- However, in **Mohinder Singh Gill's case**, the Court had made it clear that the ECI can draw power from Article 324 only when no law exists which governs a particular matter.
 - Transfer of an official is within the exclusive jurisdiction of the government. It needs the concurrence of the State governments.
 - Further, Article 324 does not confer absolute powers on the ECI to do anything in connection with the elections.

No constitutional body has absolute power. Because in the words of justice **S.M. Fazalali**, if ECI is armed with unlimited and arbitrary powers and if it becomes partisans, it might lead to a constitutional crisis. Integrity and independence of the electoral process are important and indispensable to the democratic system.

49. What led to the abolition of Intellectual Property Appellate Board?

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Statutory, Regulatory, and various Quasi-judicial Bodies.

Synopsis: A lack of effective government support provided to the Intellectual Property Appellate Board has led to its demise.

Background

- The **Intellectual Property Appellate Board** (IPAB) established in 2003. It aimed to specifically deal with matters of intellectual property including copyright, trademarks, patents, and geographical indications.
- Further, since 2007 **Novartis' patent case**, the IPAB has been authorized to hear and decide upon the appeals made by the Patent Controller under the **Patents Act**. Therefore, all pending appeals of Indian High Courts under the **Patents Act** transferred to IPAB.

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- However, the IPAB stands abolished after the passage of Tribunal reforms (Rationalisation and condition service) ordinance 2021.
- India has been a good example for the world with regard to legislating **TRIPS** compliant Patent laws. For example, **anti-evergreening provisions, compulsory licensing regime**.
- However, by the abolition of IPAB, India has the missed opportunity to develop an effective indigenous appellate mechanism on patent law.

What are the reasons for the failure of IPAB?

1. **First**, IPAB was not able to perform its adjudicatory functions due to administrative reasons. Many issues were pending in the court for resolution. For example,
 - a. Petition on the constitutionality of the IPAB.
 - b. Petitions to fill up the vacancies before the High Court in Delhi and Chennai.
 - c. Also, Petitions in the Supreme Court for extension of the term of the chairperson.
2. **Second**, the issue of understaffing. For example, it was functioning without a chairperson for almost two years. Also, there were subsequent delays in the appointment of the technical member for patents.
3. **Third**, lack of judicial and institutional independence of the IPAB. Previous chairpersons raised this issue publicly.
4. **Fourth**, lack of Power. For example, the highest authority on protecting technology and innovation working had to function during power cuts without any viable backup.
5. **Fifth**, lack of efficiency. For example, the disposal rate was about 20 patent cases a year. Further, nearly 70% of the patent cases filed were either pending at some stage.
6. **Sixth**, finally, the apathy of the government towards IPAB led to its demise. For example, most of the significant amendments to the Patents Act since 1970 came through, not by way of an Act passed by Parliament, but through an ordinance.

An appellate mechanism allows for the correction of unjustified patent grants at the Patent Office, by error or oversight. An effective appellate mechanism on patent law is critical for the innovation ecosystem.

50. Importance of Secondary Level Health Services

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: The load on tertiary health services can be reduced by strengthening the secondary level care health services. For rural areas, the focus should be on community health centres and for urban regions, peripheral hospitals at the secondary level.

Background:

- The Indian health system is generally divided into the primary, secondary and tertiary level.
- The second wave of Covid-19 has exposed the deficiencies in the current reactive approach of the government.
- People are dying due to a lack of access to treatment facilities rather than inadequate solutions to treat the virus.

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Reactive approach:

- Under this, the government transforms well-performing facilities at the tertiary level into state-of-the-art COVID-19 hospitals.
- Similarly, many temporary COVID-19 facilities are created by hiring buildings and open spaces providing only beds.
- The government has also created many first-line treatment centres under this approach.
- This approach is being adopted in the majority of states.

Concerns associated with Reactive approach:

- People are unable to access their routine hospital services from these facilities. Because routine hospitals are turned into COVID facilities.
- The temporary structures without adequate infrastructure were unable to cater to the needs of patients in real-time situations.
- First-line treatment centres are failing to generate trust among people and were shut down when the cases went down.

Therefore, many experts are now advising the government to leverage the potential of the secondary level.

New Approach of using Secondary Level Health Services:

- Under this, the functional facilities at the secondary level can be converted into exclusive COVID-19 care centres. It will be useful to treat those patients who don't need ICU support.
- In rural areas, the Community Health Centre (CHCs) can cumulatively add up to 50000-75000 beds.
 - A CHC covers a population of 80,000-1,00,000 in rural areas.
 - It functions as the first referral unit for curative care services referred from primary health centres (PHCs).
- The PHC (Primary Health Centres) must be strengthened to cater to the needs of people for other curative care services.
- In urban areas, states must develop peripheral hospitals at the secondary level within the government sector. Ideally, 100-150 bedded hospitals for every 3 lakh population.

Benefits of the Secondary Level Health Services:

- It will **reduce the workload on tertiary care** especially in states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, which possess poor health infrastructure.
- Specialists for these secondary centres can be easily directed from district hospitals or medical colleges. Thereby providing **better feasibility**.
- These new centres can be used for sample collection and vaccine delivery as well. As the centres are **already functional and command a certain level of trust**.
- Post the Pandemic, these facilities can return to their normal work and won't be closed like temporary structures.

Way Forward:

- The states must leverage the potential of this new secondary level approach.
- They should provide the secondary level units with sufficient funds and personnel so that they can duly function as COVID-19 care centres.

In a nutshell, we can say that adoption of this new approach will improve delivery potential, augment people's trust and contribute to strengthening health services in the long run.

51. Why India-Russia Relations Demands Reconsideration?

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India

Synopsis: The recent visit of Russia's Foreign Minister to India has once again highlighted the issues in India-Russia bilateral relations. As Russia has been a good friend to India, it demands a reconsideration.

Background:

- The year 2020 witnessed a break in the annual India-Russia bilateral summit. Before this, the leaders of two countries met every year for the last 2 decades.
- Russia's Foreign Minister visit aimed at preparing the ground for the next India-Russia bilateral summit.

Outcome of the visit:

- A joint statement was released on areas of cooperation and collaboration.
- The diverging issues were less focused like views over Afghanistan.
- The Russian foreign minister was not able to meet the Indian PM. This was an unprecedented event and shows the existence of numerous concerning issues between the countries.

Concerning Issues in India-Russia relations:

- **Indo-Pacific region:** Russia doesn't welcome the use of the term Indo-Pacific. Because it symbolizes US leadership, thus it prefers to use the term 'Asia Pacific'.
- **QUAD Group:** Russia views the grouping as a political-military alliance against the Russia-China grouping. Furthermore, the US wants to use the grouping as a tool to counter China's rise as a superpower.
- **Declining India-China relations:** The recent border clashes in Galwan region have marked a new low in relations. On the other side, there has been an enhanced collaboration between Russia and China. For instance, Russia accounted for 77% of China's arms imports in 2016-20.
- **Russian closeness with Pakistan:** Russia is increasing its proximity with Pakistan as seen especially in the defense sector. Consequently, it is now Pakistan's second-largest defense supplier, accounting for 6.6% of its arms imports in 2016-20.
- **CAATSA:** Many Russian companies are listed as adversaries under the CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act). This may impair future Russia-India interaction.

Importance of Russia:

- **All-weather Friend:** The bilateral relations between the countries had stood the test of time. Russia provided constant support to India since its independence.
- **Defence Cooperation:** The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) records that Russia supplied 49% of India's arms imports in 2016-20.
- **India's Strategic Interest:** The geographical location of Russia and India automatically demands cordial relations amongst them. Because this would fulfill India's strategic interest in Central Asia and West Asia. Further, it will help in materializing projects like the International North-South Transport Corridor.

Way Forward:

- India needs to **carefully glide through the new alliances** in the world order. The gliding must enable the country to maximize its global influence.

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- Further, the country should leverage Russian potential in its future endeavors like India's manned space program.
- Both the countries should **cooperate on current commitments** like a \$1 billion Indian line of credit for projects in the Russian Far East and activation of a Chennai-Vladivostok maritime corridor.

52. Misuse of Ordinance Making Power

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Separation of Powers between various organs Dispute Redressal Mechanisms and Institutions

Synopsis: Ordinance Making Power by the executives has been misused increasingly. A vigilant Legislature and Court can reduce this menace.

Background

- **Recently**, the central government Re-promulgated **the Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Ordinance, 2020**
- This raises questions over the constitutional validity of issuing ordinances and that of repromulgating ordinances, that too without their ratification by Parliament.

About Ordinance making power of executives

- The **Article 123 and Article 213** empowers the central and State governments to make laws when Parliament or the State Legislature are not in session.
- The Constitution states that the ordinance will lapse at the end of six weeks from the time Parliament or the State Legislature next meets.
- Originally, it was conceived as an emergency provision and was expected to be used rarely.

Misuse of the [Ordinance making power](#)

- **One**, the number of Ordinance issued by the centre has increased from an average of 7.1 per year in the 1950s to 15 in 2020.
- **Two**, States have also been using the ordinance route to enact laws. For example, in 2020, Kerala issued 81 ordinances, while Karnataka issued 24 and Maharashtra 21.
- **Three**, further repromulgation of Ordinance by both centre and state is also increasing. For instance, The Indian Medical Council Amendment Ordinance by the centre and Kerala University of Digital Sciences, Innovation and Technology by Kerala are two recent examples.

What is the court's view regarding promulgation and promulgation of the Ordinance?

- **In the D.C. Wadhwa case**, the court took up the issue of promulgation of 256 ordinances, of which 69 were repromulgated in Bihar between 1967 and 1981.
- The supreme court ruled that repromulgation of ordinances is against **Constitutional morality** and is an **act of Colourable legislation**. Because through ordinance making power the Executive encroaches into the law-making function of the Legislature.
- Further, the court said that there was no such practice of repromulgation by the centre.
- Later, the Centre too started to follow the lead of Bihar. For example, in 2013 and 2014, the Securities Laws Ordinance promulgated 3 times, Land Acquisition Act twice.

- In 2017, the matter came up again in the Supreme Court. This time, the court gave a strong verdict. It declared that Re-promulgation of ordinances is a fraud on the Constitution and a subversion of democratic legislative processes.
- However, the Centre and states are not following this judgement. It is evident in the current case of the Commission for Air Quality Management.

The principle of **Separation of Powers** and **Checks and balances** empowers the legislatures and the courts to check the encroachment of the Executive. However, by allowing for repromulgation of ordinances, the Legislature and the court are abdicating their responsibility to the Constitution.

53. Roadblocks to achieve universal vaccination

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: India needs to develop a practical plan. Presently, it is facing many roadblocks to achieve universal vaccination for all.

Background

- Initially, India decided to prioritize vaccination for the most vulnerable citizens (nearly 300 million).
- The main reason for that was the limitations of India's manufacturing capacity to provide for vaccination of its whole population.
- Thus, only about 5% of the intended beneficiaries have been vaccinated till now.
- However, a combination of panic, public pressure, and the magnitude of the second wave has forced the government to authorize vaccines to anyone above 18.
- Further, the state government's control over procurement has been liberalized.
- But achieving the goal of **universal vaccination** for all is still a distant dream due to a lack of planning and preparedness.

What are the roadblocks to achieve universal vaccination for all?

- **First**, lack of foresight has led to shortages in the supply chain. India unlike other countries did not foresee a devastating second wave. Hence, India did not make purchase agreements with other vaccine manufacturers. India also applied different standards, while waiving critical trials for Covaxin, it applied stringent requirements for foreign companies.
- **Second**, liberalizing states to procure vaccines will not help. This is because of two reasons,
 - **One**, already international vaccinators such as **Pfizer and Moderna** have supply commitments to other countries.
 - **Two**, States in India are weak in finances and negotiating power.
- **Third**, with the resurfacing of lockdown due to second-wave, the administration of logistics will be challenging.

India could have avoided this situation with effective foresight and planning. Now, India should work with Pragmatism and preparedness to achieve the goal of universal vaccination for all as soon as possible.

54. A Lost Opportunity to Reform the Educational System

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- GS 2 – Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to education.

Synopsis- Pandemic provided a vital opportunity to initiate sustainable reforms in the education system in India. But bureaucrats and administrators failed to take advantage of it.

Introduction-

- The pandemic offered an opportunity for bureaucrats and administrators to re-examine the educational system, but nothing has changed.
- As a result of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, students in schools and higher education institutions have once again been affected, as they were last year.
- Instead of assisting institutions, faculty, and students in overcoming uncertainty, administrators focused on excessive bureaucratic centralization.

The phenomenon exposed the administrative inadequacies of the past year.

Why it is a lost opportunity for bureaucrats and administrators?

The pandemic provided the bureaucrats and administrators an opportunity to initiate sustainable reforms in the educational system in the following ways-

- **Collaborate with teachers to discuss their concerns –**
- **Could consider promoting better student-teacher relationships.**
- **The exam system could have been reformed.** They could create a better system for determining the qualifying grade for students to progress to the next level of study.

However, administrators lost this opportunity because-

- Rigid emphasis on rote learning.
- Failure to acknowledge that test results are not the only indicators of a student's skills.
- Unwillingness to collaborate with teachers.
- They ignored plans to evaluate the mental health of teachers, non-teaching staff, and students.

What needs to be done?

Decision-makers need to learn from previous mistakes and take the following steps to find a sustainable solution.

1. Bureaucratic administrators should consult with Academic stakeholders before any decisions.
2. **Institutions need to reconsider their approach –**
 - a. Schools and higher educational institutes need to find alternative forms of assessment for promoting students.
 - b. Need to come up with new ways to assess the teaching and learning process.
 - c. **Make academic evaluation more rigorous and sustainable** encouraging students to write creatively. The concept of open-book exams must be considered.
3. The bureaucracy must acknowledge that '**one order fits all**' approach to improving educational system is not feasible.

Way forward-

Administrators need to concentrate on assisting institutions, faculty, and students in overcoming uncertainty. Thus, they should decentralize decision-making.

- It is important to avoid responses such as canceling and/or postponing exams and remaining fixated with the completion of the academic term.

55. Need of Granting Interim Bail to Pregnant Women Undertrials

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS:2 Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Synopsis: Even though Pregnant women and children cannot get the Covid-19 vaccination, they continue to remain in prisons. The court has to provide interim bail to women, children and other vulnerable sections in prison.

Introduction:

Long [pending prison reforms](#), overcrowded prisons made the situation of prisoners in India, very cruel. The state of women's prisons is much worse than male prisons. But so far the courts do not consider this condition in granting bail to the persons.

Status of women prisoners:

- So far, bail jurisprudence does not empathize with women and children, or the elderly.
- Similarly, the courts do not consider Custodial rape, pregnancy, or childbirth and degrading treatment of women prisoners as cruel, inhumane.
- While granting bail the court does not consider the rights of children of imprisoned parents.

The recent case:

- In **State v. Suman Kumari case**, Delhi High Court made a departure from bail jurisprudence. The court regarded the Rights of children of an imprisoned parent and provided bail to a woman.
- This was a case of dowry murder allegation. In this case, the court mentioned that the imprisoned woman (accused sister-in-law of the dead victim) was also the mother of a 21-month infant. From December 9, 2020, the mother was in prison.

The reasons stated by the court for granting bail:

The court granted bail by mentioning that the Imprisonment of mothers amounts to the “**de facto detention of their infant/toddler wards**”. The court also observed,

1. This is a serious violation of Article 37 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.
2. Furthermore, the court also held this as a violation of the [Juvenile Justice Act](#), 2015. As under Section 3 of the JJ Act, the best interests of the child are considered paramount. Further, the Act suggests “institutionalization of the child as a step of last resort”.
3. The court also points out that the child under “de facto detention” must not suffer worse custodial conditions than the children in conflict with the law.
4. In this case, the court considered “empathy” as “the ground for bail”.

Impact of the Covid-19 in Prisons:

This order is more significant as the Covid-19 virus attacks increased in prison. The Covid-19 cases in prisons include,

- In Tihar Jail, so far (up to April 17) 117 prisoners and 14 jail staff found infected with the Covid-19.

- 55 prisoners and 4 jail staff infected with the Covid-19 from the Sabarmati Central jail.
- In Maharashtra, 198 prisoners get infected due to the Covid-19.

Disaster Management Act, 2005 on prisons:

At the beginning of the Covid-19, the Disaster Management Act, 2005 (DMA) mentioned overcrowded prisons as hotspots of mass contagion. Further, as per the Act, the state government needs to take mandatory mitigation, rescue, or relief works.

Section 61 of the DMA mentions that the state must provide compensation and relief to the victims of a disaster. The Act also mentions the state shall not discriminate based on the ground of sex, caste, community, descent, or religion.

Earlier committees on women prisoners:

1. In 2020 the [NHRC](#) recommended state governments for releasing women prisoners. Especially the pregnant women and mothers with children from prisons. But, most states did not fulfill the recommendations.
2. Similarly, in 2020, the high-powered committee of the Delhi High Court did not release all pregnant women or mothers with infants. The high-powered committee mentions the type of offence, duration of sentence, nationality, etc as a condition to release women in prisons. The committee upheld the Prison rules above the DMA.

The high-powered committee failed to read the DMA along with the prison rules. If it read it together, then the most vulnerable population in Prisons such as women, children, and transgender prisoners might receive relief, mitigation, and compensation.

Suggestions to improve the condition of vulnerable prisoners:

1. The court while hearing the case, shall consider the **release of women, children, and trans-prisoners**. Also, the court should provide support for their survival.
2. The court should consider situations like Custodial rape, pregnancy, or childbirth and **move towards Gender-Sensitive prisons**. This is feasible by creating a system of imprisoning women, children, sexual minorities irrespective of their offense, nationality, or exceptional laws.
3. The Courts also need to **strengthen the law's legal journey for humanity** instead of historical attachment to the custody of prisoners.

56. Demands for Delinking of State and Religion

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Constitution – features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure

Synopsis:

Some religious groups in Tamil Nadu are demanding delinking of state from religious affairs. However, minimal state intervention to promote justice and equality is permitted by the constitution.

Background:

- Amidst the electoral process, some Religious groups are demanding delinking of state and religion in Tamil Nadu.
- They are opposing laws like Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR&CE) Act 1959. The law allows the state to intervene in the affairs of Hindu public endowments.
 - Under this, the government can appoint a State Commissioner for general superintendence over all Hindu religious endowments.

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- The commissioner will further appoint executive officers to temples. They will ensure that the funds are being properly applied.

Arguments by protestors in favour of delinking:

- **First**, intervention by the state is against the secular and democratic credentials of India.
- **Second**, intervention undermines their freedom of religion which is guaranteed by the constitution under Articles 25 and 26.
 - Article 25 gives the freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion.
 - Article 26 protects group rights. It grants to every “religious denomination” the right:
 - to establish institutions;
 - to manage its own affairs in matters of religion;
 - also, to own and acquire property; and
 - administer that property in accordance with law
- **Third**, there is an unequal degree of control amongst religions. They argue that a lenient attitude is shown towards other religions like Islam and Christianity.

Arguments against Delinking:

- **No credible successor**: Apart from the state, no institution or group can curtail the evil practices surrounding a religion.
- **Strengthening Evil practices**: Delinking might uphold the interest of dominant communities and strengthen the evil hierarchical division in society.
 - For instance, the government of Madras formulated a law in 1927 to intervene in the management of religious establishments. As powerful castes and communities within the Hindu fold appropriated control over them.
- **Indian Concept of Secularism**: The constituent assembly adopted a model based on the notion of principled distance and not complete isolation like the western model. It allows intervention for establishing a free and egalitarian society.
- **Constitutional Provisions**: Articles 25 and 26 are subject to public order, health, and morality. This gives ample scope to the state to frame a law regulating any economic, financial, or other secular activity associated with religion.
 - Using this, the government of Madras enacted a Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act in 1951. It was later replaced by the 1959 Act.
- **Judicial Backing**: The supreme court in Shirur Mutt Case (1954) case upheld the 1951 Act. The court said the act was in consonance with the state’s power under Articles 25 and 26.
- **Laws for other religions**: There are laws for other religions as well. The amount of intervention depends on the gravity of the situation.
 - **For instance**, the Waqf Act 1995 gives the government substantial supervisory control over the management of properties dedicated for religious purposes under Muslim law.

Way Forward:

- Complete state isolation is not possible as per the constitutional directives. Although the deficiencies in HR&CE law must be re-examined on its merits.
- People should constantly demand transparency and hold the state responsible to the administrative standards prescribed under the law.

57. Police Reforms Needed to Ensure Political Neutrality

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Role of Civil Services in a Democracy.

Synopsis: There is a need to ensure a right balance between the government's role in appointing or removing the police chief and the need to safeguard the Police's operational autonomy.

Background

- Recently, the State government removed Param Bir Singh (Mumbai Police Commissioner) from his post.
- It brings back the focus on the long-overdue reforms require, in the process of appointing and removing police chiefs.

History of recommendations for police reforms

- In 1979, **National Police Commission (NPC)**, suggested for an independent body for the appointment and removal of police chiefs. The rationale was to avoid Political intervention and to maintain independence of the police.
- Further, the Supreme Court (SC) of India in its judgment, in **Prakash Singh Case (2006)** reaffirmed the **NPC** suggestions.
- Further, the Supreme court entrusted the **Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)** to shortlist candidates. After that, the State government can appoint the police chief from this list.
- However, the **Model Police Bill, 2015** placed the responsibility of shortlisting candidates on the **State Security Commission (SSCs)**.
 - SSC is a multiparty State Police Board. It consists of government officials, the Leader of the Opposition, independent members from civil society.

What reforms are needed?

First, need to ensure **bipartisanship** in the appointment of police chiefs. For that, the constitution of the State Security Commission (SSCs) is needed. For instance,

- Around 26 States and the Union Territories have established SSCs. However, not a single state adheres to the balanced composition suggested by the SC. Some states do not include the Leader of the Opposition, others do not include independent members.
- Also, in as many as 23 States the governments retain the sole discretion of appointing the police chief.
- Further, there are concerns over concern over non-functioning SSCs. For example, according to RTI information, only four SSCs have held meetings since 2014.
- As a result, the commissions still remain dominated by the political executive.

Second, institutionalise an independent and transparent selection process for appointment and removal of police chief based on objective criteria. For instance,

- The Model Police Act require the SSC to shortlist candidates on some requirements. It includes the length of service, service record, and range of experience, and a performance appraisal of the candidates over the past 10 years.
- However, the criteria's used are more subjective rather than objective. For example, what qualifies as a "good" range of experience?
- Further, there is no scrutiny process to justify removals from tenure posts.
- This allows for the use of Subjective terms such as "on administrative grounds" or "in the public interest" to justify the removal.
- This is against the Supreme Court ruling in **Senkumar vs Union of India case, 2017**.

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- The SC ruled that satisfaction of the government alone is not a sufficient ground to justify removal from a tenure post in government. Rather, it needs to be based on verifiable material that can be objectively tested.

What needs to be done?

- **First, objective** benchmarks need to be integrated into decision-making processes, both on appointments and removals. It will prevent politically motivated actions.
- **Second**, learning from UK's example to improve transparency of the review process. UK's '**The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act, 2011**', introduced **public confirmation hearings** as an additional layer of check for the appointment of police chiefs.
- This provides the police chief an opportunity to respond to the allegations leading to their removal.

58. China Model to Contain Pandemic

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis: The Centre should step in to coordinate policy measures across states to contain the Pandemic, rather than putting the onus on the states. China's model to contain pandemic should be studied and replicated in India

Background

- The central government recently adopted decentralised decision-making approach, to contain the spread of Covid second wave.
- The government has given free hand to the states to decide on lockdowns and other measures.
- Further, Prime Minister in his recent speech appealed to the youth to form small committees to ensure adherence to COVID-19 restrictions.
- However, the **China model centralised planning** along with local mobilization shows a different story. It was immensely successful in containing the spread of COVID-19.

How the China Model functioned?

China Model included the **Residential Committees (RC)** at the grass-root level and the **Central leadership** to assist the RCs with resources.

About Residential Committees

- RCs were officially not part of the state and defined as **institutions of self-governance**. It had a large number of voluntary Youths and college students.
- They had to perform administrative tasks, implement policy, mediate local disputes. Also, they had a task to assist government agencies with maintaining public surveillance, health, and sanitation, etc.,
- After the outbreak of the Pandemic, the RCs were the main authorities that enforced rules and assisted people with their necessities. For example,
 - They strictly enforced rules of entry and exit. No residents were allowed to leave, and no non-residents were allowed to access the community area other than for essential medical needs.
 - Also, they assisted people by providing home delivery of daily food necessities, tracing contacts, registering and visiting each individual, etc.,

Role of Central Leadership

- Further, the central leadership quickly acknowledged the efforts of the “**first line of defence**” the Residential Committees.
- The government also supported the RC workers with subsidies, provision of health equipment, insurance, publicity, and other institutional support.

The China Model though had certain challenges the epidemic has been successfully contained.

How the China Model can be replicated in India?

- In urban India, many have residential associations and local governments that can undertake similar mobilization like RCs in China.
- Through the support from Central leadership and a centralised plan of action, it can support them through resources and authority from central to local organisations.
- This will help in the effective mobilization of volunteers for better information dissemination, service delivery, and promoting social distancing.

Allowing states to their own means will only increase policy inconsistency and unequal access between states with different fiscal capacities and healthcare infrastructure. The need of the hour is for the central leadership to step up and coordinate policy measures across the country.

59. Criteria for Selection of Experts in Tribunals Needs More Clarity

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Statutory, Regulatory and various Quasi-judicial Bodies.

Synopsis: Centre needs to enact rules for selection of Experts in NGT Tribunals with clarity and objectivity.

Background

- The Criteria used for the appointments of NGT members are not clearly defined by the central government, giving way to litigations.
- Recently, the appointment of former IAS officer, Girija Vaidyanathan, as Expert Member in the Southern Bench of the NGT was challenged in the Madras High court.

Why Tribunals are formed?

- **One**, the need for specialisation and expertise to decide complex cases of a technical nature. Experts appointed to these tribunals bring in special knowledge and experience.
- **Two**, tribunalisation’ of justice will be cost-effective, accessible.

What are the criteria for the appointment of Expert members to the tribunal?

As per the NGT act there are two criteria for the appointment of Expert members to the NGT tribunal. A candidate has to fulfil only one of them.

1. **One based on qualifications and practical experience:** a masters’ or a doctorate in science, engineering or technology, with 15 years’ experience in the relevant field, including five in environment and forests in a national level institution, is needed. The fields include pollution control, hazardous substance management and forest conservation.
2. **Two, administrative experience in the field:** This condition is not clearly defined. It merely stipulates 15 years’ experience, of which five should have been in “dealing with environmental matters” in either the Centre or the State or any reputed institution.

Why the appointment of Girija Vaidyanathan has been challenged?

- In Ms. Vaidyanathan's case, she has served in Environmental related sectors for only 28 months that is less than the prescribed criteria of 5 years.

What did the court say?

- The court opined that the appointment is valid considering her tenure as Health Secretary.
- However, the court declined to interfere with the appointment, as the jurisdiction of this matter comes under the domain of Parliament.

What is the way forward?

- **One**, government should redefine the criteria for appointments through administrative **experience** with clarity and objectivity.
- **Two**, need to implement Supreme Court directions to constitute a **National Tribunals Commission** to supervise the appointment and functioning of tribunals.

60. Making Education Accessible and Affordable

Source: GS-2

Syllabus: [click here](#)

Synopsis: The AIR and DD, and Internet service providers are some possible solutions for making education accessible and affordable.

Introduction

Access and affordability continue to impact teachers and students. Teachers and policymakers are working, but the results are not encouraging.

- Exams have lost their reliability and learning has taken a back seat. The health of students and teachers is suffering due to continuous exposure to screens. Some of them suffer financially as well.
- Access to education is entirely dependent on online classes. Internet penetration in India is 50% which is one reason for the less than efficient performance in the online education sector.

What are the possible solutions to improve the access to education?

Almost everyone has experienced poor connectivity. In rural areas, online access remains an aspiration. However, the government can come up with a solution. The Indian Government has its own airwaves.

- **Firstly, Prasar Bharati is India's broadcasting corporation** that handles both radio and television in India. All India Radio (AIR) has 470 broadcasting centres which cover 92% of the country's geographical area and 99.19% of the population.
- **Secondly, Doordarshan (DD)** handles television, online and mobile broadcasting in India and in the world. It has 34 satellite channels, 17 well-equipped studios in State capitals and 49 studio centres in other cities.
 - **AIR and DD can be used to broadcast lessons.** Education is one of the three functions of the two agencies under the Prasar Bharati Act. These two agencies can be used to satisfy the needs of the education sector.
- **Thirdly, educational broadcasts for classes 10, 11 and 12 can be done in the ratio of 4:1** (four hours of radio and one hour of TV). The courses in which demonstration and where physical activity is needed can be broadcast on TV. This will require some training and effort.
 - If implemented well, there will be less strain due to screen time for our teachers and students. The heavy strain on financial resources will be drastically reduced as DD and AIR are free.

- **Fourthly, teachers should be involved in the planning of policies.** Training can be provided to teachers by a set of trainers for scriptwriting and programming.
- **Fifthly, Further, after training, these teachers can create appropriate tools for evaluation over radio and TV.** The Central and State educational boards should support, monitor and provide feedback to improve the system.
- **Sixthly, If regular radio is not enough, digital radio can also be used.**
- **Lastly,** the government can ask Internet Service Providers to **offer many hours of free Internet usage to teachers and students.** This will not be easy, but the government should call the shots and make a decision that is in the interest of the people.

61. Need to Strengthen Panchayati Raj System

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure, Devolution of Powers and Finances up to Local Levels and Challenges Therein

Synopsis: There is a need to strengthen the Panchayati raj system to make the participation of the people in governance a reality.

Evolution of Panchayati Raj System

- **First**, during the Ancient period, the Cholas pioneered the formation of local bodies to oversee the implementation of State plans.
- **Second**, during the British period, in 1884, **the Madras Local Boards Act** was passed. After that, unions in both small towns and big cities were formed to ensure better administration.
- **Third**, gram panchayat laws were enacted in 1920. It allowed people over 25 years of age the right to vote and choose their panchayat members.
- **Fourth**, Gandhiji was one of the pioneers to emphasise the importance of local bodies. He stressed the importance of autonomously ruled villages.
 - He quoted that, “The voice of the people is the voice of god; The voice of the Panchayat is the voice of the people,”
- **Finally**, only in 1992, after the 73rd and 74th Amendments, local bodies were given constitutional recognition. This provided many positive changes such as,
 - Powers to grama Sabha,
 - Reservation for the downtrodden and women,
 - Consistency in economic development,
 - Mandatory local body elections once in five years,
 - Formation of the State Election Commission, Finance Commission,
- However, the Panchayati raj is not being given due importance by the state administration which is affecting the participation of the people in governance.

Case Study: Apathy towards Panchayati raj in Tamilnadu

- It is mandatory that Gram Sabhas should meet at least four times in a year, according to the rules framed by the Tamil Nadu government.
- Also, as per the constitution 73rd amendment, local body elections must be conducted once in a five years.
- Further, Gram sabhas are empowered to take opinions and the consensus of the people on significant issues.
- However, in Tamilnadu these mandatory norms are being violated. For instance,
 - One, holding of elections to local bodies is being postponed by the government by giving irrelevant excuses. For the first time, in the last 25 years, local body elections were not held.

- Two, consensus of the people on significant issues such as an eight-lane highway project and hydrocarbon project are not being taken.
- Third, lack of women's representation in major administrative roles in the local bodies.

Way forward: Need to strengthen our Gram Sabhas

- Proper allocation of funds,
- Ensuring the efficiency of administration by making eligible appointments,
- Ensuring decent remuneration to Panchayat chiefs and councilors
- Giving powers to Gram Sabha to revoke appointed members and representatives.

The demand for federal rule in the Centre and autonomous rule in the States should resonate along with the need to have autonomous local bodies too. A peoples' movement can ensure the strengthening of Panchayati Raj.

62. Measures to Control the Covid-19 Second Wave

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: The current rapid spread of the Covid-19 is a result of poor political choices, poor communications, and neglect of public health principles

Background

- India is witnessing a more intensive spread of Covid 19 in the second wave. For example, more than 3 lakh daily cases are reported, fatality rate has increased (2,000 deaths daily).
- This poses a threat to the economic and social well-being of the Indian people.

What are the reasons for the spurt in Covid 19 infection?

It is due to combination of many factors, such as

- **Demography:** India hosts the second largest population in the world. As the disease is contagious it spreads faster in high density population areas. Example, Cities like Delhi, Maharashtra.
- **Diversity:** India is geographically a large state and it is a socially diverse country. This makes controlling the corona virus more challenging.
- **Lack of effective Political leadership:** During the first wave of infection, successful efforts to enforce social distancing and other public health measures helped in containing the spread of Covid19. However, the large political rallies and religious gatherings (Kumbh Mela festival) have contributed to the sudden surge in infection.
- **Natural factors:** Consistent mutation of the virus resulted in the production of more deadly variants. For example, India is now faced with "double mutant" strain of SARS-CoV-2.
- **Ineffective public health management:** Limited efforts towards genomic surveillance has resulted in lack of data to guide policy decisions.

What needs to be done?

First, need to break the chains of transmission by imposing Short-term targeted lockdowns. However, it has to be reminded that lockdowns cause a terrible economic and social cost and should be used as a last resort.

Second, need to expand access to vaccines. However, efforts must be made to overcome the logistical challenges to administer vaccines to a large number of populations.

What can be done to minimise the number of lockdown days?

- **First**, the Health functionaries should increase the testing rate with the goal of getting the positivity rate under 5%.
- **Second**, society has to be made responsible. Universal mask-wearing should be followed mandatorily as it is largely helpful in curbing the spread of the disease.
- **Third**, sensitive decision-making by the political agents. Restriction on all major indoor and outdoor events, including rallies, religious festivals, weddings, is essential.
- **Fourth**, Vaccine manufacturers should be incentivised to produce Vaccines at a large capacity and at faster rate. In all likelihood, India's pandemic will end if enough Indians are vaccinated.

Focus on public health measures, improve vaccinations, universal masking, and effective coordination across public health efforts can get back life to normal.

63. The New CJI Needs to Address Present Issues in Judiciary

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS-2: Structure, organization, and functioning of the judiciary

Synopsis: The new Chief Justice must seriously consider the Challenges in Judiciary. He must free himself from the bias in constituting benches. Also, he should take concrete steps to revitalise the administration of justice.

Introduction:

[Justice N V Ramana](#) will be the next [Chief Justice of India](#). But there are certain serious challenges in Judiciary. One of the most important ones is to reform the Judiciary to provide "Justice to all".

Constitution on Supreme Court:

1. The framers of the Constitution understood the importance of the oath of office of judges of the Supreme Court of India (SC). They carefully designed its language.
 - The oath contains "without fear or favour" to "uphold the constitution and the laws". These words show the significance and stress the court to a ferociously independent.
2. Similarly, Article 50 of the Constitution provides "The State shall take steps to separate the judiciary from the executive in the public services of the State"

Constituent Assembly debate on Separation of Judiciary:

- K T Shah moved an amendment to Article 50 proposed an important amendment. He proposed "separation of powers as between the principal organs of the State. I.e., the Legislative, the Executive, and the Judicial. He mentions the separation of Judiciary alone will result in the following. Such as,
 - This will make Judiciary open to suspicion from the Executive and the Legislative
 - The separation of Judiciary and Executive will also rule out the possibility of translation from a high judicial office to an equally high executive office and vice versa.
 - Over a period of time, the Judiciary will suffer from their personal privileges or personal ambitions.
 - Overall, this will affect the civil liberties in the country.
- On the other hand, Shibban Lal Saxena was of the opinion that the complete independence of the Judiciary from the state was an important one.
 - He mentions that the High Courts at that time were are not independent. They are influenced by the political consequences of their actions.

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- So he wanted the future Judiciary to be free from these influences.
- Further, he also mentioned that the Supreme court has to observe the principles inherent in the constitution. I.e. a clear-cut mention of functions and procedures to avoid any influence of government in the Judiciary.
- But B R Ambedkar rejected these views. Furthermore, he was of the opinion that the chances of influencing the conduct of a member of the judiciary by the Government are very less.
 - He predicted that the judiciary will very rarely decide the cases between citizens and the Government.
 - He also predicted that the judiciary will decide the cases in which the Government has very little or no interest at all.
 - But history shows even a great man can go wrong. Today the Judiciary is deciding numerous cases in which the government has a direct interest. CJI being a Master of the Roster is constituting these benches and allocate matters.

Challenges in Judiciary:

There are various challenges in Judiciary. These are,

- The SC is expected to look for strict accountability from the legislature and executive. Moreover, the SC also corrects any violation of the Constitution and laws. But this is not happening in reality. There are many instances where the court sided executive of the day and not stand for the people of India.
- The Judiciary is also facing few fundamental challenges. Such as,
 - [Millions of cases pending in Judiciary](#)
 - [Quality of Judges and Judiciary](#)
 - Organisational issues in the Judiciary such as [gender gap in Judiciary](#), etc.
 - Challenges to integrity and impartiality of Judiciary.
- All these challenges in the Judiciary deprive and elude Justice to the common man, especially the vulnerable sections of society. The present CJI also highlighted this deprivation of Justice.

Suggestions to improve the Judiciary:

1. The Preamble of the Indian Constitution begins with “We, the people of India”. So the powers of the Judiciary is also come from the people, like the executive and the legislature. The Judiciary has to accept this.
2. **Revitalising the administration of justice:** This is feasible if the CJI take concrete steps such as
 - a. Freeing himself from the bias in constituting benches and allocating cases
 - b. He can seriously introspect and review the actions of his immediate predecessors,
3. All this will restore the “**rule of law**” and the proper fulfilment of the provisions of the Constitution.

During the NJAC judgment (2015) one of the Judges observed that the decisions of CJI have immeasurable political and financial consequences. Further, he also mentions the far-reaching public interest of CJI's decisions. So, the current CJI has to make serious efforts to address these challenges.

64. A Case of Declining Judicial Federalism in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Structure, Organization and Functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

Synopsis: SC transferred all [oxygen supply-related cases](#) in various High Courts. It did so, in the name of prioritising uniformity across nations in the distribution of essential services. This step of SC is against **Judicial Federalism**.

Background

In **Parmanand Katara v. Union of India** (1989), the Supreme Court said that ‘the right to emergency medical treatment is part of the citizen’s fundamental rights.

The lack of oxygen supply during Covid crisis prompted many hospitals to file pleas in their respective High court lately. They wanted to defend their right to emergency medical treatment.

Accordingly, the High Courts of Delhi, Gujarat, Madras, and Bombay issued a series of directions to the executive. For instance,

Bombay High Court, directed immediate restoration of oxygen supply that had been reduced from the Bhilai steel plant in Chhattisgarh.

The Delhi High Court directed the Central government to ensure adequate measures for the supply of oxygen.

Later, the Supreme court (SC) took suo motu cognisance of the issue and hinted the possibility of shifting the cases related to oxygen supply to supreme court from high courts.

The SC said that the distribution of essential services needs uniformity across the nation. Further it asked the Central government to prepare a national plan for the same.

However, several senior lawyers have criticized the intervention by the Supreme Court while High Courts were already hearing the issues.

This move by the SC is against **judicial federalism** in India.

Why the decision of SC is seen as an attack against Judicial federalism in India?

- **First**, [Article 139A of the Constitution](#), empowers the SC to transfer cases from the High Courts to itself if cases involve the same questions of law.
- However, the SC’s contemporary conduct of being indifferent towards executive actions in significant cases has cast doubt over Judiciary. For instance,
- The SC did not use article 139A to hear cases related to the **Internet ban in Kashmir** or activists and journalists who were arrested and detained.
- **Second**, many lawyers viewed this as an act of “arrogance of power” and contempt for and disregard of the High Courts in the country.
- **Third**, declining of trust over SC to provide **deliberative justice**. SC sits in two or more benches to deliberate and dissent upon significant issues. However, In the recent years, there is a lack of dissent in issues that have serious political implications.
- **Fourth**, public health and hospitals come under the State List. And the respective High Courts have been dealing with specific challenges at the regional level. It did not warrant any interference from the SC.
- **Fifth**, In **L. Chandra Kumar v. Union of India (1997)**, the SC itself has said that the High Courts have significant advantage in winning the confidence of the people. Further, the power of the High Court under Article 226 to issue writs is wider than the Supreme Court’s under Article 32.

Way forward

- Need to learn from the good practices of the American Judicial System. The U.S. Supreme Court reviews only a few cases from state courts. It ensures autonomy in the application of federal law for the State courts.
- Further, the need for a uniform judicial order across India is needed only in cases of conflict of laws or judgments on legal interpretation. Otherwise, autonomy, not uniformity, and decentralisation not centrism should be the rule.

65. Need to Accelerate Vaccination drive

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: Need to address the issues that are hampering India's accelerated vaccination drive on a priority basis.

Background

- Currently, India is vaccinating more than three million people per day and has administered more than 140 million doses of the vaccine as of April 25, 2021.
- However, only about 22.3 million (1.63% of India's population), have been fully vaccinated, against a requirement of 70%-75% for achieving **herd immunity**. Whereas the Israel has vaccinated 55% of its population.
- India needs to address the issues that is hampering its efforts to push for accelerated vaccination drive.

Steps Taken to Accelerate India's Vaccination drive?

- **First**, the eligible population for getting vaccinated has been expanded. Earlier Population above 45 years were prioritised, but now People above the age of 18 years were also allowed.
- **Second**, decision has been taken to make available vaccines in the open market and vaccines approved in other countries.

What are the issues that are hampering India's accelerated vaccination drive?

Though many policy decisions were taken to augment vaccination drive, there are certain challenges that need to be addressed on priority basis,

- **First**, issue of delay over availability of imported vaccines due to policy restrictions.
 - India's drug regulatory authority relaxed Imports restrictions on COVID-19 vaccines. Also, it approved the restricted use of vaccines, which are already approved for restricted use by US in emergency situations.
 - Consequently, newer generation mRNA vaccines and other vaccines effective against the variants and mutant strains are made available in India.
 - However, full-fledged roll-out of these vaccines will be delayed. There is a mandatory requirement for trials and safety assessments of the first 100 recipients of these vaccines.
- **Second**, issue of ethics in making vaccines available for priority populations is a hurdle in universal vaccination. For instance,
 - One, Priority was assigned to health care and other front-line health workers. Because it satisfied the **doctrine of utilitarianism** (Maximum benefit for maximum number of people).
 - Two, Prioritising population above 60 plus and with co-morbidities was done to protect the most vulnerable.
 - Three, prioritising population above 18 years was done based on health economics point of view. Because the **Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs)** saved through vaccination of the 18-plus age-group would be the highest.
 - However, students in the 16-plus age-group were deprived of vaccination.
- Third, the issue of **vaccine pricing**. Lack of access to vaccines for the population under 18 to 44-year age-bracket under the 'Government of India channel' may

discourage the socially and economically disadvantaged people. For example, labourers and daily wage workers.

What needs to be done?

- **One**, utilising the data of vaccine efficacy of foreign vaccines that has been tested on Indian origin population can cut short the mandatory trial necessities in India.
- **Two**, allowing the population above 16 plus age group for getting vaccinated as approved by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- **Third**, State governments can provide the vaccine to Socially disadvantaged age-group free of cost. For example, Kerala have already committed to providing vaccines free of charge to all eligible people
- **Fourth**, the differential pricing regime announced by the Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech for supply of their vaccines to the central government and State governments needs to be reconsidered.

66. A Crisis of Reverse Migration

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis- As the Covid-19 curb expands, a crisis of reverse migration of labors from manufacturing centers to native places has appeared once again.

Introduction-

- The second wave of COVID-19 brings a threat of national-wide lockdown. It triggered a mass migration of low-wage migrant workers from industrial centers and cities to their native places just like a year ago.
- As per study, only 5 – 7.7 percent of migrants reported being engaged in MGNREGA.
- The Centre and the state governments have failed to learn from the previous lockdown.

The misery of migrant workers is that existing government programmes cannot provide gainful employment opportunities to the migrants at their native places.

Impact of Pandemic on migrant worker-

ICRIER, in collaboration with the Inferential Survey Statistics and Research Foundation (ISS&RF) conducted a three phase survey on migrant workers. It aimed to assess the varying degrees of vulnerabilities among the migrants prior to, during, and after the first lockdown.

- As per survey, after reverse migration there were no employment opportunity for these migrants in their native places. Thus, their **household incomes fell by 86%**.
- **The following data shows the employment status of migrant workers at native places after reverse migration-**
 - 35.4 percent had no employment
 - 35.8 percent were involved in agriculture as self-employed (SE) labour.
 - 9.7 percent worked as agriculture labour.
 - 4.6 percent in MNREGA and other public works.
 - 12.2 percent as casuals in other non-agriculture work.

How can the government help migrant workers?

1. **First, Priority should be given to the portability of entitlements and social safety nets.**
 - Expansion of **one-nation, one-ration-card scheme** to make subsidized grains available at places of work in cities and industrial centres.

- Provide free ration to migrant workers from the government overflowing godowns.
 - **Financial help** under the Garib Kalyan Yojana should be extended to migrants to help them remain in their cities of their work.
 - Migrant workers should put under group medical insurance.
2. **Second, existing government programmes should be strengthened-**
- The scope of employment under MGNREGA should be expanded to include a wide range of skilled and unskilled migrants.
 - The government should engage returning migrants in the creation of new agri-value chains. It can generate sustainable jobs.
3. **Third, Comprehensive database on migrants** – The government should digitize all data on migrant workers in order to develop an action plan in the event that another mass migration occurs.

67. Rising Food Insecurity Due to Pandemic

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Issues relating to Poverty and Hunger

Synopsis: Food insecurity is rising among the most vulnerable populations, due to 2nd wave of the Pandemic. Hence, the government should take precautionary steps to save millions from hunger and food insecurity.

Background

- Even before the Pandemic, India's efforts to tackle the food security crisis have been poor. For example, India ranks 102 among 117 countries in the **Global Hunger Index 2019**.
- The economic shock produced by the COVID-19 pandemic have added to the already rising food insecurity.
- The data collected by the **Rapid Rural Community Response** (a collective of over 60 NGO's) provides crucial evidence on the nature of food and financial insecurity among the poor in rural areas.

What does the data suggest?

The Rapid Rural Community Response data suggests that food insecurity is rising among poor households. Reasons for that are job losses, lack of income, lack of access to government welfare schemes, etc.,

- **First, the data suggest a reduction in nutrition intake.** For instance,
 - The poor and the socially marginalized people are forced to cut down on food intake (especially nutritious food) during the lockdown period. For example,
 - Households reported nearly 80% cut down on nutritious food such as milk, vegetables, pulses, and oil.
 - These reductions in nutritious intake will hamper India's effort to provide adequate nutrition to children as per the **National Family Health Survey** (2019-20) and the **Global Food Policy Report**, 2021.
- **Second**, increasing the food insecurity of poor people due to loss of income during the lockdown.
 - Earlier, according to **Pew Research Center**, the middle-class population in India has shrunk by over 32 million households.
 - According to the **Rapid Rural Community Response survey**, the income of poorer households is reducing at a higher rate. Many of them are relying on loan support even to meet their food requirement.
- **Third**, the food and financial insecurity among the migrant's community increased due to lack of universal access to government welfare schemes.

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- For instance, among the poorest, households with migrants were more likely to seek work than those without (43% versus 32%).
- But only half were provided employment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

What needs to be done?

- **One**, the government's willingness to restart **the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana** (PMGKAY) for the next two months is a step in a good direction. However, the government needs to include nutritious foods like pulses in the **PMGKAY scheme**.
- **Two**, need to address issues in MGNREGA scheme, such as delays in wages and rationing. Further, the government should explore the feasibility of the urban **MGNREGA scheme** for urban poor and migrants.
- **Three**, food security schemes for children, through **anganwadis, Public Distribution System** and **mid-day meal scheme** in primary schools, need to expand the coverage on an urgent basis.
- **Finally, community kitchens** similar to **Amma canteens** need to be set up across all urban cities to support migrants stuck in cities without work.

68. The New Vaccine Strategy May Widen Inequality

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: The new vaccine strategy fails to address the issues of affordability and accessibility. It may contribute to widening inequality in access to health care.

Background

- Recently, the Centre revised its vaccine strategy to accelerate its vaccination drive to bring the Second wave Covid 19 under control.
- The revised strategies are,
 1. **One**, Vaccine coverage is now been extended to the entire adult population i.e., Population above 18 years of age.
 2. **Two**, vaccine market has been deregulated. Vaccine manufacturers can now sell 50% of their vaccine production to State governments and private hospitals, and the prices can be higher than the price fixed by the government.
 3. **Three**, a grant of ₹45 billion to the two vaccine manufacturers, the Serum Institute of India (SII) and Bharat Biotech, to boost their capacities. Note, the grant has not been announced formally till now.
- However, the newly revised vaccine strategy fails to address many critical issues, such as Universal vaccination, responsibility of a welfare state, affordable life-saving drugs etc.,

What are the issues with the new vaccine strategy?

- **First**, issue of demand-supply mismatch due to the expansion in the coverage of the vaccine-eligible population.
- India faces vaccine shortages mainly due to the following issues,
 - One, lack of vision led to the policy of **'Vaccine diplomacy'**. India promised exports of vaccines to 95 countries, mostly in Africa and Asia instead of securing Vaccines for its own population.
 - Two, the inability of Indian vaccine manufacturers to increase production capacity because of the following two reasons,

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- Lack of access to essential raw materials to produce vaccines from the U.S. a few days back, the US restricted the Export of essential materials under its **Defense Production Act**.
- Lack of financial capacity to expand vaccine production. Vaccine manufacturers are requesting a grant of ₹30 billion from the government.
- **Second**, the issue of affordability and accessibility to vaccines.
 - The center had shifted its responsibility to states to procure vaccines for the population aged above 18 years to 45 years.
 - Whereas the centre will support vaccination only for people above 45 years, and healthcare workers, and frontline workers.
 - Further, the government has not fixed the prices of vaccines that are to be sold to the state government and private agencies. This has given rise to the following issues,
 - One, increase in vaccine pricing due to fragmentation of the market into three layers namely, central, State, and private hospitals. Earlier, the role of center as a single central procurement agency helped in limiting the price of vaccines.
 - Two, it may result in inequitable access to vaccines across States owing to disparities among states' financial capacity. Further, many State governments may find it difficult to procure the required number of vaccine doses to meet the demands of the targeted population.
- **Third**, the issue of public money involved in Vaccine production without considerable benefits to the society at large.
 - The government provides ₹45 billion to the two vaccine producers in India for expanding their production capacities. It is questionable.

Way forward

The issue of affordability of vaccines can be tackled by ensuring a competitive market for vaccines. More **open licensing** for vaccine manufacturers to scale up production would enhance competition in the market. It would enable the vaccines to reach every citizen in the country.

69. Need of Special Insurance Cover for Police Personnel

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis:

The second wave Covid-19 virus is producing greater challenges in front of frontline workers (including police personnel) than the first wave. Hence, the special insurance cover for police personnel of 50 lakh rupees must be revived and extended to all front-line workers.

Background:

- The second wave of Covid-19 induced the government to impose lockdown and curfews in some regions of the country.
- After this, the hardships and challenges of frontline workers (including police personnel) got enhanced by a greater magnitude than the previous lockdown.

Challenges Faced by Police in First Lockdown:

- Enforcement of Lockdown protocols as it was a first of its kind event for the whole country.
- Providing Migrant Labour with ration, transport, and inter-State passes.

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- Dealing with the rising number of cyber-fraud cases, particularly those relating to online purchases and phishing.
- Implementing SC judgment in Re: Contagion of Covid-19 Virus in Prisons' (2020) case.
 - Under this, the court directed High Courts to decongest prisons in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. They were ordered to release convicts on parole and under-trial prisoners on temporary bail.

How is the second wave more threatening?

- In only 15 days, we are seeing a shortage of hospital beds, ICU beds, medical oxygen, and drugs.
- The cremation grounds are reaching their full capacity due to the rising number of deaths. This is enhancing the degree of panic in society.
- In the second wave, people are demanding enhanced protection for police personnel.

Why Insurance Cover for Police Personnel is required?

- **Enhanced Challenges:** Apart from their regular duties, they need to:
 - Tackle the menace of people hoarding scarcely available medical products
 - Maintain public order in front of hospitals
 - Deal with Covid-19 status of criminals. If positive then police personnel need to quarantine him/her and later on produce before a magistrate post the negative report.
- **Greater Risk:** The second lockdown was imposed before all police personnel could be vaccinated, hence they are at higher risk.
 - As per the Indian Police Foundation's March 2021 tweet – 1,207 security men have died of COVID-19 and more than 2 lakh have been infected. The figure includes policemen of the State police and Central Armed Police Forces personnel.
- **Family Concern:** They are working day and night in enforcing the Covid-19 lockdown which increases the probability of getting a Covid-19 infection. This enhances hardships for their families who might get infected by them.

Way Forward:

- The scheme of special insurance cover of 50 lakh rupees needs revival, and it should be extended to all front-line workers (including the police).
 - It was notified for the medical fraternity last year for a limited period of three months.
- The Civil Society (including media persons and social activists) must come forward to lend a helping hand for the vulnerable sections.

70. Increasing Gender Gap in India

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs2: mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Synopsis: Various factual estimates on Women highlights India's disregard for Women and the increasing Gender gap in India.

Background

- India slips 28 spots on the 2021 [Global Gender Gap index](#) released by **World Economic Forum**.
- Currently, India ranks **140th** rank among 156 countries. In 2020, India's rank was 112th among 153 countries on the index.

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- India was the 3rd worst performer in South Asia, after Afghanistan and Pakistan. Whereas Bangladesh topped the list in the South Asia region.
- **Why India's rank slipped to 140 from 112th in 2021?**
- **Declining political participation:** the share of women ministers has declined sharply from 23 to 9 percent.
- **Declining labour force:** Indian women's labor force participation declined from 34.1 per cent in 1999-00 to 21 per cent in 2020.
- **Increasing crime against women:** According to the **National Crime Records Bureau** data, nearly 88 rapes occurred daily in 2019, with Dalit women being more vulnerable.
- **Arbitrary use of State power to curtail women's participation in social movements:** For instance, arrest and sedition charges against Disha Ravi, Noddeep Kaur, Hidme Markam.

What are the other reasons for the increasing gender gap in India?

- **Son meta preference:** As per UNFPA estimates, each year India loses more than 46 million "missing women" due to misuse of ultrasound technology for sex-selective abortion.
- **Glass ceiling effect:** Barriers for women to reach higher positions in corporates and public sector companies. India has only 15 percent of women as a board of directors.
- **Lack of educational opportunities due to Increase in Child marriages:** According to **National Family Health Survey 2020**, reveals that child marriages have increased since the previous survey in 2015-16.
- **Sexual harassment in the workplace:** for example, **the MeToo movement has** exposed the vulnerabilities of women in workplaces.
- **Weak enforcement of laws:** Crèches are legally mandatory in all offices with more than 50 employees and MNREGA worksites. However, in practice, they hardly exist.
- **Unpaid care work:** As per the **2019 NSSO time-use survey**, Indian women's daily work is almost 10 times more than men's on unpaid domestic chores.
- **Gender Digital divide:** Though more than half of women have a mobile phone, only a third have access to the internet.
- **Increase in domestic violence:** due to lack of economic independence
- While other countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Rwanda are making serious efforts to close the Gender gap, India's effort in this direction is poor. India needs to understand that Economic growth is not possible without the empowerment of women. The East Asian growth "miracle" was associated with large increases in the working women population.

71. Significance of India Pakistan Agreement on Consular Access

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS – India and Its neighborhood

Synopsis: India Pakistan Agreement on Consular Access is inactive. Hundreds of Indian fishermen have been suffering in Pakistan's prisons for years with no end in sight.

Background:

An Indian fisherman named Ramesh Taba Sosa is the recent victim of an inhuman and crooked system involving India and Pakistan. Sosa died in a prison hospital in Malir Jail, Karachi, Pakistan and his mortal remains have not been returned yet.

- There is no guarantee when his family in Nanavada, in Gujarat, will be able to conduct his last rites.

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- Sosa was arrested in May 2019 when his fishing boat entered Pakistani waters. His sentence in the Pakistani prison ended on July 3, 2019, but neither he was sent back home nor he was given consular access till his death. This is an issue of basic human rights.
- In 2008, India and Pakistan signed the **Agreement on Consular Access. Section 4 of the agreement** states that the governments of both nations would provide consular access. This has to be provided within three months to citizens of another country, under arrest, detention, or imprisonment in the other country.
- **Section 5 of the agreement** provides that within one month of confirmation of the national status and completion of sentences both governments should release and return people.

What are the impacts of not implementing an agreement on consular access?

- **More than 300 Indian fishermen are in Pakistan's custody** in Malir jail. The nationality of a person cannot be confirmed without consular access, which is not easily available. There are several instances in which both countries did not confirm nationality for as long as 18 months.
- In very rare cases, it had happened that a prisoner repatriated the day he completed the prison sentence.
- **Other similar cases:**
 - A fisherman named **Vaaga Chauhan died in Pakistani custody** in December 2015. His mortal remains reached his village in April 2016.
 - Latif Qasim Sama accidentally crossed over to Pakistan in 2018. He was arrested and his sentence ended in April 2019. Latif didn't get consular access. Ismail Sama **returned from a Pakistan jail after 13 years** for the same mistake.
 - **Fishermen from the Saurashtra region of Gujarat** often get arrested when they accidentally cross over into Pakistani waters.
 - Dharam Singh from Kashmir had unknowingly crossed over in 2003. He **spent 18 years in a Pakistani prison**. He was later punished by 14 years of imprisonment. This ended in December last year but he reached home this month.

What should be done?

- In 2007, India and Pakistan set up a **joint judicial committee on prisoners** including four retired judges from both sides. The committee used to assemble twice a year to meet prisoners. It facilitated many repatriations.
- **However, its** last meeting was held in 2013 after which it was stopped. In 2018, efforts were made to restart it, but Pakistan is yet to appoint judges or call for a meeting.
- The committee should be revived at the earliest. Delay is costing lots of lives.

72. Issues in COVID-19 Management Guidelines

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: The Health Ministry's **COVID-19 management guidelines** show disregard for evidence, pricing, cost-effectiveness, and social relevance.

Introduction

The Health Ministry released its first COVID-19 management guidelines about a year ago. This guideline included hydroxychloroquine for the treatment of Covid-19. It led to its panic buying.

Later, in a year, multiple studies rejected this claim. However, Health Ministry's guidelines released on April 22 still prescribes hydroxychloroquine.

What are the other issues in the COVID-19 management guidelines?

- **First**, disregard for evidence. For example,
 - The ICMR after several trials has revealed that the **use of convalescent plasma** does not save the lives of those with COVID-19. At best plasma can prevent progression to severe disease in mild cases. Yet, convalescent plasma is mentioned in the Ministry's guidelines.
 - **Ivermectin, a drug** used against parasites, has been recommended in the guidelines. However, **World Health Organization (WHO)** recommended against its routine use.
- **Second**, it also overlooks the importance of pricing and cost-effectiveness. For example,
 - **One, Supply-demand mismatch in Remdesivir** due to black-marketing. It led to an increase in the cost of hospitalization due to the steep price of the drug in the black market.
 - **Two, budesonide inhalers** have been included as an option for mild patients, based on the results of two clinical trials. Though it does not result in saving lives or reducing hospital admissions.
 - This will result in a lack of access to inhalers for patients with asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) due to panic buying by Covid patients.

What changes are needed?

- **First**, guidance on drugs being used for COVID-19 should be included. Because, many unsafe drugs such as Azithromycin, Doxycycline, are being prescribed.
- **Second**, the most efficacious antivirals in COVID-19, the monoclonal antibodies should be mentioned.
- **Third**, the COVID-19 treatment guidelines should focus more on oxygen delivery, steroids, and anti-coagulants.

Rewriting the guidelines based on the available evidence, and keeping cost-effectiveness and the social relevance of the Indian health system should be the way forward.

73. India needs to Focus on Universal Social welfare

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis:

The pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities of India's social welfare potential. The country failed to provide adequate social welfare services to the marginalized during the pandemic times. This calls for focusing on universal social welfare.

Background:

- The Covid-19 pandemic struck the country in 2020 and brutally impacted the lives of the Indian masses especially the marginalized community.
- The pandemic followed a series of crises including mass inter and intra-migration, food insecurity, and crumbling health infrastructure.
- This has induced some experts to demand universal social welfare from the government.

What is Universal Social Welfare / Social Security?

- According to the International Labour Organisation, Social security is the protection that society provides to individuals and households:
 - To ensure access to health care and to guarantee income security; particularly in cases of old age, unemployment, sickness, invalidity, etc.
- Giving such protection to every individual in the country is called Universal Social Welfare.

Need of Universal Social Welfare:

- **Vulnerability of masses:** The pandemic has enhanced the vulnerability of masses as:
 - It has pushed an estimated 75 million people into poverty.
 - The second wave has shown even money is not enough to access health care services. It has brought even the middle and upper-class citizens to their knees.
- **Poor performance of Social Welfare schemes:** The country has over 500 direct benefit transfer schemes but still many weren't able to get desired benefits during the pandemic.
 - The schemes are **fractionalized across various departments and sub-schemes**. This causes problems on every stage of the scheme from data collection to last-mile delivery.
- **Better results:** India's Pulse Polio Universal Immunisation Programme helped it to become polio-free in 2014. This shows the country has the potential to run universal programs and achieve better results.
- **Avoiding Inclusion/Exclusion errors:** Universal system will encompass every individual and household in the country thereby tackling the problem of inclusion/exclusion.
 - For instance, PDS can be linked to a universal identification card such as the Aadhaar or voter card, in the absence of a ration card.
 - This would allow anyone who is in need of foodgrains to access these schemes especially the migrant populations.
- **Improved Living Standard:** Access to education, maternity benefits, disability benefits, etc. social benefits would ensure a better standard of living for the people.

Way Forward:

- The government should **map the State and Central schemes** in a consolidated manner. This would avoid duplication, inclusion, and exclusion errors in delivering welfare services.
 - For instance, Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) can be strengthened into universal social security.
 - It already consolidates the public distribution system (PDS), the provision of gas cylinders, and wages for the MGNREGA.
- It must **compute the costs of delivering universal social services**. Post computation, robust steps must be taken to arrange the requisite amount.
- The country can learn from successful global models like **Ireland's Poor Law System**.
 - The system was introduced in the 19th century to provide relief to the masses. It was financed by local property taxes.
 - The system was built keeping in mind the future economic crisis and dignity of the masses.

- It has now evolved into a four-fold apparatus. It promises social insurance, social assistance, universal schemes, and extra benefits/supplements.
- There must be a **focus on data digitization**, data-driven decision-making, and collaboration across government departments. This would improve the implementation potential.

74. Antimicrobial Resistance may Become a Silent Pandemic

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis:

The challenges posed by Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) demands a comprehensive and collaborative approach by all the countries. They must come together to tackle the silent pandemic.

Background:

Covid 19 exposed the vulnerabilities of health systems across the globe. It took away the lives of more than 3 million people since January 2020.

Experts believe that greater destruction would be caused by AMR in the coming years. This calls for taking strong steps at the national and global levels.

What is AMR?

It is a phenomenon by which bacteria, fungi, parasites, and viruses evolve and become resistant to presently available antimicrobial treatment.

The infections persist in the body, increasing the risk of spread to others.

Reasons behind the development of AMR:

Primary reasons:

- **Misuse of antimicrobials in medicine** – This happens when the proper course of medication is not done or the person indulges in self-medication.
- **Inappropriate use in agriculture** – Antibiotics are used to boost the productivity of livestock.
- **Contamination around pharmaceutical manufacturing sites** – The untreated waste releases large amounts of active antimicrobials into the environment.
- **Secondary Reasons:**
- **No new antimicrobial developments:** No new classes of antibiotics have made it to the market in the last three decades. This is a result of inadequate incentives for their development and production.
 - A recent report from the non-profit PEW Trusts found that over 95% of antibiotics in development today are from small companies.
- **Easily Availability:** Antimicrobials are easily available as ‘over the counter drugs’ in many countries. This ease facilitates more consumption and development of AMR.

Challenges posed by AMR development:

- **Threat to the health care system:** Antimicrobials prevent infections post a routine surgery or cancer treatment. Their ineffectiveness would impair the modern health system.
 - The problem is more grave for low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) of Asia and Africa where cheap antimicrobials have significantly reduced the mortality rates.
- **Loss of Human Lives:** It is responsible for up to 7 lakh deaths a year. It is estimated that 10 million annual deaths would be caused by it post 2050.

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- **Economic Brunt:** The countries would require abundant capital to manage the AMR crisis in the future. As per an estimate, it may cost up to \$100 trillion by 2050.

Way Forward:

- **Accessibility:** There is a need to ensure better accessibility of antimicrobials. Globally, 5.7 million people die every year because they cannot access drugs for infections that are treatable.
- **Incentivisation:** The companies must be encouraged to develop new antimicrobial drugs. In this regard, a multi-sectoral \$1 billion AMR Action Fund was launched in 2020 to support the development of new antibiotics.
- **Judicious Use:** There must be appropriate and judicious use of antimicrobial drugs. Countries can learn from:
 - **Peru's efforts on patient education** to reduce unnecessary antibiotic prescriptions
 - **EU-supported VALUE-Dx programme** that has increased the use of point-of-care diagnostics. This has resulted in prudent drug intake.
- **Tracking the spread of AMR:** Surveillance measures to identify these organisms need to expand beyond hospitals. They should encompass livestock, wastewater, and farm run-offs.
 - For instance, Denmark's efforts to prevent the use of antibiotics in livestock had reduced AMR prevalence and boosted agricultural productivity.
 - Similarly, countries must formulate a dedicated and holistic plan to deal with AMR like India's National Action Plan for antimicrobial resistance.
- **Global Coordination:** International alignment and coordination are paramount in both policymaking and its implementation. The countries can use the Paris Agreement as a blueprint for developing a **similar global approach** to tackling AMR.

75. States control over temples is against Secularism

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Indian Constitution Significant Provisions and Basic Structure.

Synopsis: There is an urgent need to provide adequate community representation in the management of their places of worship

Background

- There has been a persistent demand from the communities to deregulate state control over temples.
- Communities are asking for their right to representation in the affairs of the management of temples.
- Now the question is if the government releases its control over the management of temples, to whom the temples would be entrusted.
- This article will explain,
 - How the government's control over temples is against the principles of secularism?
 - How community control over temples can be regulated.?

Why the government control over temples needs to be replaced?

States control over temple have become a more controversial issue due to,

- Gross mismanagement of financial resources
- Increasing Corruption
- Disregard to temple maintenance leading to loss and destruction of temple antiquities.

- Against the principle of Secularism.

How the government control over temples is against the principles of secularism?

The Supreme court in **Raja Birakishore vs The State of Orissa** ruled that appointment of temple priests by the state a secular function.

Yet, the State's involvement in the appointments of heads of Mutts and the authority to conduct poojas is against the principle of Secularism. Because

- **One**, Article 25 empowers the state to enact laws for the regulation of religious institutions. But it is to prohibit discretionary religious practices and to make law for social welfare and reform.
 - **Article 25(2)(a)** empowers the state to regulate “economic, financial, political or other secular activities which may be associated with religious practice”.
 - **Article 25(2)(b)** empowers the state to enact a law to prohibit the exclusion of ‘classes and sections’ of Hindu society to enter into Hindu temples of a public character and also make law for social welfare and reform.
 - However, these safeguards are being misused by the state to assume ownership of properties belonging to religious institutions.
- **Two**, the establishment of **Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department** is not a cause for social justice.
 - In the **Shirur Mutt case**, the supreme court struck down a major portion of the **Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments** 1951 Act. The court ruled that the provisions are a “disastrous invasion” of religious liberty.
- **Three**, the comparison with the **Waqf Act** to legitimize the control over Hindu religious endowments is misleading. Because,
 - One, **Waqf Act** clearly reveals that it applies only to charities and specifically excludes places of worship such as mosques.
 - Two, it also supports the argument that government should not regulate places of worship.

What needs to be done?

- It has been said that handing over the temples to the community will strengthen class hierarchies.
- However, communities are looking for control. They are asking for representation in the management of the place of worship. It is possible by the creation of boards with representatives of religious heads, priests, and responsible members from the dharmik sampradaya.
- The colonial law, the **Religious Endowments Act** (Act XX of 1863) has similar provisions for handing over religious institutions to society.
- It created committees in every district to exercise control over temples.
- This act should be made applicable to all religious institutions to guarantee adequate community representation in the management of their places of worship.

76. New Rules by ECI and Effectiveness of Multi-Phase Polling

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: New rules by the high court will help prevent a new surge after counting days. Elections Commission also needs to reconsider the effectiveness of Multi-Phase Polling.

Introduction

The Election Commission of India has banned victory celebrations after the election results are declared on May 2. ECI took the step after receiving criticism for not enforcing steps to control the spread of COVID-19 during the campaigns.

What steps did the ECI take to curb the spread of the virus?

- ECI has restricted the number of people who can go with the winning candidate to meet the Returning Officer and collect the election certificate.
- The agents cannot enter the counting hall without a negative test report for COVID-19 or final vaccination reports. These strict rules are a welcome step.
- However, it is unfortunate that these rules were missing or were not in force **during the long campaign for elections.**

What was the view of the court on ECI?

The Madras High Court stated that the ECI officials should bear great blame for the terrible spike in infections.

- The court's expression of displeasure with ECI for failing to make all parties obey its rules was right. However, the suggestion by the Bench that ECI officials should bear sole responsibility for the situation was avoidable.
- But, the court's advice that the counting process should not become a promoter for a new surge has **definitely led to new rules for counting day.**

Should multi-phase polling be a permanent practice?

The ECI should reconsider its route to multi-phase polling as a permanent practice.

- **Multi-phase voting** has been protected for the last three decades as something compulsory. This is because of the time needed to move central forces to different parts of the country. Moreover, Security and sensitivity in select constituencies are also concerns.
- **However, a long campaign contributes to the build-up of tension.** Covering an entire State in as few phases as possible will help localise the potential for violence. It will prevent the spread of tension due to the virulence of the campaign.
- **Further, it will also reduce the fatigue of forces deployed** throughout the campaign till the day of counting. A shorter election may be a safer one too.

77. At Leaders Climate Summit, Countries Adopted Net Zero Targets

Source: [DTE](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Synopsis:

At the Leaders Climate summit, the countries including U.S, U.K, Japan, etc. have adopted revamped Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) (under the Paris agreement). This is a step in the right direction, but a higher commitment is desired to keep temperature rise below 1.5 degrees celsius.

Background:

- The two-day Leaders Climate Summit was hosted by the US virtually.
- It was attended by leaders of more than 40 countries amongst whom many have resorted to new NDCs targets and climate commitments.

New Targets and Commitments as part of NDCs:

- **US:** It has pledged to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions 50-52 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030.
 - The country aspires to attain net zero emissions status before 2050. Also, it committed to double its annual public climate finance to developing countries by 2024.
- **Japan:** It has pledged to reduce emissions by 46 per cent from 2013 levels by 2030.

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- **Canada:** It has pledged to cut emissions by 40-45 per cent from 2005 levels by 2030.
- **EU:** It has shown a commitment to reduce emissions by 55 per cent from 1990 levels by 2030.
- **U.K.:** It has shown a commitment to reduce emissions by 78 per cent from 1990 levels by 2035.
- **India:** It didn't announce any updated NDC. However, India reached a consensus with the US over a new India-US Climate and Clean Energy Agenda 2030 Partnership.
 - It aims to mobilize investments in clean technologies for industry, transportation, power, and buildings.

Analysing the new targets of Leaders Climate Summit:

- The new 50-52% reduction target of the U.S is 12 percent higher than its previous commitment. As its previous NDC worked out to a 38 percent reduction by 2030.
- Similarly, the targets of Japan, EU, U.K, and Canada are greater than their previous emission targets.
- U.K's commitments and targets are the most ambitious amongst all the countries.
- Although the U.S has increased the commitment, it falls short of a 1.5C -compatible 2030 target as per the Climate Action Tracker (CAT). The commitment is even short of a Fair Shares NDC estimate.
 - The fair share of the US is 70 percent domestic emissions' reduction below 2005 levels by 2030 and a further 125 percent reduction abroad through support to developing countries.

Way Ahead:

- The summit has put climate back on the agenda and forced leaders of major economies to confront the scale of the task ahead.
- The U.S should adopt a 57-63 % domestic target to be 1.5°C compatible by 2030 as per CAT.
- Further, the U.S must adhere to the recommendations of Fair Share NDC analysis. It recommends:
 - A climate finance contribution of \$800 billion between 2021-2030
 - Use of Special Drawing Rights (SDR) of \$3 trillion to help developing countries

78. How to Prevent 3rd Wave of Covid-19?

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources

Synopsis: Mass vaccination will be the best solution to contain Covid19. However, to prevent the 3rd wave of Covid19, measures such as **mask-wearing, physical distancing, hand hygiene** need to adhere.

Background

- International experience from other countries such as the UK, South Africa, United States already indicated to us about the possibility of recurrence of Second-wave in India.
- However, preparedness to tackle the second wave was largely ignored.
- And there is a high possibility of a third wave once the second wave recedes if active measures are not taken to control the spread.

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- Hence, India needs to plan effectively to contain the possibility of a 3rd wave.

How the possibility of a third wave can be Prevented?

- Mass vaccination is the right option. It will help achieve herd immunity and will bring the Pandemic under control.
- However, vaccinating the entire population will take a considerable amount of time due to the following challenges:
 - Slow pace of vaccination,
 - Inelastic vaccine supplies
 - limited finances with State governments
- So, along with mass vaccination drive, India needs to follow other methods such as mask-wearing, physical distancing, hand hygiene, ban on mass gatherings to reduce **community transmission. For instance,**
 - According to a study on Beijing households, face masks were 79% effective in preventing transmission when they were used by all household members.
 - Similarly, according to the **National Academy of Sciences**, near-universal adoption of nonmedical masks in combination with complementary public health measures could reduce community spread.

How to persuade people to wear masks?

- An experimental study in Bangladesh provides an understanding of how to persuade people to wear masks voluntarily.
- **According to the study by Mushfiq Mobarak of Yale University**, the following interventions helped to increase the percentage of people using masks three-fold.
 - Providing Free masks along with well-designed instructional material.
 - Improvements in mask Quality. Masks should be comfortable to wear in hot and humid conditions, along with effective filters.
 - Reminders from religious and community leaders and volunteers.

How India can replicate this model to Nudge Mask wearing?

- **First**, need to allocate budgetary resource for the cost of supplying free reusable masks.
- **Second**, imaginative and creative communication campaigns are needed to explain the reasons for mask wearing as well as the right way to wear a mask.
- **Third**, community-level leaders, networks of health workers at the village and community levels should be involved in health campaigns.

If the country is to reduce the impact of future waves, it is essential that the above measures are put in place.

79. A Case for State repression on Civil societies

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Development Processes and the Development Industry — the Role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations.

Synopsis: Telangana government's decision to ban 16 civil organisations is an act of state repression on citizens demanding state accountability.

Background

- Recently, The Government of Telangana banned 16 organisations under the Telangana Public Security Act, 1992 (TPSA).
- These 16 organizations include workers' organisation, women's groups, students' groups, **Adivasi association groups**, and **civil liberties groups**.

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- They were declared as '**unlawful associations**' and 'new front organisations linked to Communist Party of India (Maoist) and **urban guerillas**.'
- The timing of this notification indicates that the government wants to scare people demanding governmental accountability.

What led to the ban on these organisations?

1. The activists were involved in highlighting various issues against the State and Central Governments through meetings and rallies.
2. Besides, they were also demanding the release of leaders who were arrested in the **Bhima Koregaon case**, and '**repealing of UAPA Act, Farm Laws, CAA/NRC**'.
3. However, the state labeled the following charges against the activists to invoke a ban on these organizations, under Telangana Public Security Act, 1992.

One, activists are invading urban areas by adopting various guerilla tactics to wage war against the state.

Two, they were interfering with the public administration or the maintenance of supplies and services essential to the life of the community. It amounts to a danger to public peace.

Why the ban on these organisations is viewed as a misuse of the Telangana Public Security Act, 1992?

- **First**, protesting against the UAPA or seeking its repeal cannot in itself be interpreted as an unlawful activity. The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, or UAPA, is widely challenged in many courts due to its infringement on the fundamental rights of the citizens.
- **Second**, Since the investigations are ongoing, supporting the release of **Bhima Koregaon** accused cannot be framed as a crime under the TPSA.
- **Third**, protesting against CAA and farm laws also cannot be dubbed as an unlawful activity.
 - Because the state government itself has not taken a definite stand on the issue of Farm laws.
 - More interestingly, the State Legislature had itself passed a resolution against the CAA, the National Register of Citizens (NRC), and the National Population Register.
 - The resolution stated that the CAA violated the constitutional guarantees of equality, non-discrimination, and secularism. Further, it will endanger the lives of vulnerable groups who do not possess adequate documentary proof of citizenship.

Way forward

- Telangana state performance to control the Pandemic has been so far very poor. Even the Telangana high court has criticised the state's response to control the Pandemic as disappointing and failure in governance.
- Hence, the government should strive towards fulfilling its constitutional obligations under Part IV of the Constitution by effectively managing the public health crisis.

80. Exploring Alternatives for Assessing Student Learning

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- **GS 2** – Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to education.

Synopsis- There is a need to explore alternatives for assessing student learning instead of holding or postponing board exams in this unprecedented situation.

Introduction-

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- The pandemic provides an opportunity to reconsider educational assessments and evaluations.
- However, the government is considering Postponing or Holding in person board exams.
- Instead, alternative forms of assessment must be found for promoting students. It's time to come up with new approaches to evaluate student learning.

Challenges related to upcoming board exams-

- **First, Students' future will be harmed if board exams are postponed-** Postponing board exams will further disturb the schedule for further courses which include admissions to higher educational institutions.
- **Second, Student safety-** Student gathering during offline board exams is also not a viable option due to rising COVID-19 cases.
- **Third, The possibility of cheating during online examinations –** Online exams are not reliable as most of the students have cheated in exams.

What are proposed approaches to assessing student learning?

- **Make academic evaluation more rigorous and sustainable**
- **Encouraging students to write creatively-** The question paper should be structured in such a way that students critically engaged with the subject and assess their analytical ability to solve questions based on their previous experience and knowledge from the book.
- **Formative assessments throughout the year-** Teachers could assess students' progress through the year. This will make an evaluation and learning much more holistic.
- **Inviting higher educational institutions to facilitate online entrance exams.**
- **Instead of rote learning, more pragmatic-based learning can be pursued-** The mentality that academic achievement is the primary reflection of student progress must be changed and student development must be redefined in terms of social, emotional, and spiritual growth.

Way forward-

To avoid students being stuck in the present model of cramming, rote learning, and fear, it is time to re-evaluate student learning methods. To do this –

- The government needs to give complete autonomy to educational committees so that they can enforce this reform.
- Improving the standard of educational assessments and evaluations by including higher educational institutions. This can also deter a mass migration to foreign universities.

General Studies Paper - 3

General Studies - 3

1. Sustainable Agriculture demands Optimum Water Management

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country, – different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage

Synopsis:

The declining availability and accessibility of water necessitate strengthening the water management measures. In this regard, the focus should be drawn on Sustainable Agriculture.

Background

- On March 22 (World Water Day), Prime Minister launched the ‘**Catch the rain Campaign**’ under Jal Shakti Abhiyan.
- The campaign focuses on robust rainwater conservation including the use of MGNREGA funds to conserve water.
- These types of campaigns are desired as water demand is going to rise in future – 843 billion cubic metres (BCM) by 2025 and 1180 BCM by 2050.

Current Situation of Water:

- **National Estimates:**
 - NITI Aayog’s Composite Water Management Index (2019) shows 75% of Indian households don’t have access to drinking water on their premises.
 - The Central Water Commission’s reassessment of water availability using space inputs (2019) shows India **utilises only 18%** of its annual precipitation. This means 699 billion cubic metres (BCM) is utilised, out of the total 3880 BCM received.
- **International Estimates:**
 - **UN’s report on Sustainable Development Goal-6 (SDG-6)** on “Clean water and sanitation for all by 2030” states that India achieved only 56.6 per cent of the target by 2019.
 - The **Water Quality Index** has placed India at the 120th position amongst 122 countries.
 - India is identified as a **water-stressed country**. As the per capita water availability declined from 5,178 cubic metre (m³)/year in 1951 to 1,544 m³ in 2011. It is expected that it will reach 1,140 cubic metre by 2050.

Why do we need to focus on the agriculture sector?

1. **High Usage of water:** The Agriculture Sector uses 78% of freshwater resources and the rest is used by industry and households.
2. **Skewed Irrigation Distribution:** Only about half of India’s gross cropped area (198 million hectares) is irrigated. Groundwater contributes about 64 per cent, canals 23 per cent, tanks 2 per cent and other sources 11 per cent to irrigation.
3. **Inefficient usage of water:** Groundwater is the primary source of irrigation. Various subsidies and incentives are given to support it. However, it has led to over-exploitation of water especially in the north-west region.
 - This helped the region to leverage maximum benefits of the green revolution at subsidized water and power tariffs.
 - But today the region is amongst the three highest water risk hotspots of the world along with northeastern China and the southwestern USA (California).

Two Crops use maximum water: As per a NABARD-ICRIER study on **Water Productivity Mapping**; rice and sugarcane alone consume almost 60 % of India's irrigation water.

Figure 1: LAND AND APPLIED IRRIGATION PRODUCTIVITY FOR RICE

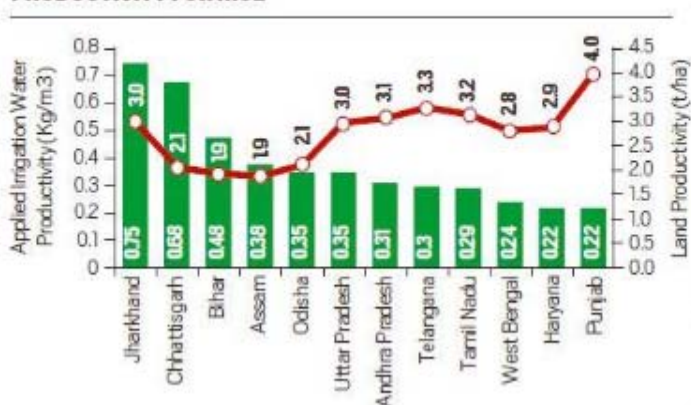
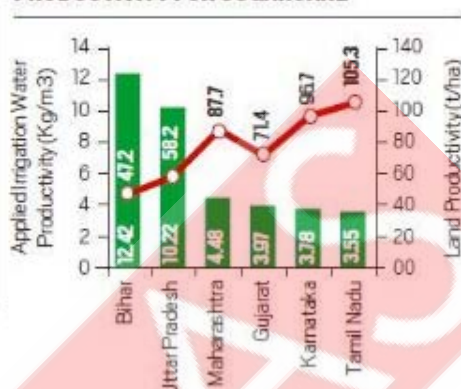


Figure 2: LAND AND APPLIED IRRIGATION PRODUCTIVITY FOR SUGARCANE



Source: Indian Express

- Punjab performs well inland productivity of rice but takes the last spot in terms of irrigation water productivity. This shows inefficient usage.
- Similarly, irrigation water productivity of sugarcane in Karnataka and Maharashtra is only 1/3rd of Bihar and U.P.
- Land Productivity means output produced per unit of land.
- Irrigation water productivity means output produced per unit of irrigation water used.

Therefore, there is a need to realign the cropping patterns based on per unit of applied irrigation water productivity.

Way Forward

- **Technologies** like **Drip irrigation**, Direct Seeded Rice (DSR), drip with fertigation etc. can be adopted.
 - Jain Irrigation has demonstrated the potential of water conservation by growing 1 kg paddy with 842 litres using drip irrigation. This is way less than the traditional flood irrigation method that uses 3065 litres.
 - Similarly, drip with fertigation method for sugarcane has given a benefit-cost ratio of 2.64 in Karnataka.
 - Netafim, an Israel based company, has shown the potential of a family drip irrigation system at Ramthal, Karnataka.
- **Pricing policies for agricultural inputs like water and electricity** should be sustainable.
 - The “**PaaniBachaoPaiseKamao**” initiative of the Punjab government along with the World Bank and J-PAL can be a good initiative in this regard.
 - It encourages rational use of water amongst farmers by providing them monetary incentives for saving water in comparison to their traditional usage.
- Further, from highly subsidised policies, a paradigm change towards direct income support and greater agricultural investment is desired.
- The focus should be on conserving, using and managing the water in such a way that the objective of per drop more crop is duly achieved.

2. Suggestions for Inclusive growth in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS3: Inclusive Growth and issues arising from it.

Synopsis: India lags behind many Human development indicators. India's economic growth is not benefitting the poor. There is a need to create a new framework for measuring the inclusiveness of growth.

Why India's Economic growth is not inclusive?

1. **One, Rising hunger**, according to the **Global Hunger Index 2020** India ranks **94th** amongst 107 countries.
2. **Two**, Indian citizens are amongst the least happy in the world. According to the **World Happiness Report of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network**, India ranks **144th** amongst 153 countries.
3. **Three**, the Pandemic has increased the inequality gap further by pushing many poor people into poverty. According to a **World Bank report**, during the pandemic the very rich became even richer. Whereas the number of poor people in India (with incomes of \$2 or less a day) is estimated to have increased by 75 million.
4. **Four, unsustainable economic growth**. According to global assessments, India ranks **120** out of 122 countries in **water quality**, and **179** out of 180 in **air quality**.

Suggestions for more inclusive growth

- **First**, India needs a new strategy for growth, founded on new pillars. Because the older economic growth strategy of relying on Foreign capital has made “**ease of living**” difficult, while the “**ease of doing business**” improved. The new economic strategy should be based on the following two pillars,
 - **One**, Economic growth must no longer be at the cost of the environment.
 - **Two, the** benefits of Economic growth should be made equitable. Thus creating more incomes for its billion-plus citizens
- **Second**, there is a need for **local solutions to measure the wellbeing of people**, rather than relying on universal, standard progress measure frameworks.
 - While GDP does not account for vital environmental and social conditions that contribute to human well-being.
 - Many countries are developing universally acceptable frameworks.
 - They are trying to incorporate the health of the environment, public services, equal access to opportunities, etc. to make it universal, more scientific, and objective.
 - However, experiences have shown that this ‘scientific’ approach does enable objective rankings of countries. For example, **World Happiness Report misses the point that happiness and well-being are always ‘subjective’**.
 - Standard global solutions will neither make their conditions better nor make them happier. So, local communities need to find their own solutions within their countries, and in their villages and towns to measure their well-being.
- **Third**, We need to start recognizing the role of societal conditions that are responsible for the difficulties of the poor. **For example**, Caste system, Patriarchy, indifferent attitude towards the disabled, transgender, etc.,
 - This way of looking at things also equally contributes to the increasing Inequality.
- **Fourth**, move away from centralised Governance model **towards decentralized form of governance**. Because Governance of the many by a few politically and economically powerful persons may work for a few.

- Whereas, decentralized system of governance will allow communities to find their own solutions to complex problems.

India's growth should be measured on its sustainability and the improvements made in the lives of hundreds of millions of its citizens. It should be based on the size of GDP, the numbers of billionaires, the numbers of Indian multinationals

3. Importance of Land Record Modernisation

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS – 3: [Land Reforms](#)

Synopsis: The importance of land records became more evident during the pandemic. For access to formal loans and government relief programmes, land records are important. However, the poor availability of clear and updated land titles remains a problem.

Background

The land is both an **asset and a source of livelihood** for poor people in rural areas. Many informal jobs in the urban areas were lost due to the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. This resulted in **reverse migration**, leading to greater demands for household resources in rural areas.

How the government is improving the land records?

- The government of India's **Digital India Land Records Modernisation Programme (DI-LRMP) scheme** is the most recent effort to update land records.
- The poor state of land records is due to the failure of the Indian administration to evolve from British-era land policies.
- Further, the Land record regulations and policies vary widely across Indian states/union territories.
- DI-LRMP provides a common framework for reporting the progress of land record management by states/UTs. But the diverse nature of regulations/guidelines for land record management in India makes the progress non-uniform.

Observations by NCAER Land Records and Services Index:

1. NCAER(National Council of Applied Economic Research) made an innovative effort by launching **NCAER Land Records and Services Index (N-LRSI)** in 2020. The index evaluates states' performance on digitisation and quality of land records.
2. States/UTs have made various efforts to make improvements in various parameters of the N-LRSI index. These improvements are clearly recorded in the N-LRSI 2021 findings.
 - Bihar jumped from the 23rd to 8th position in the index. It achieved significant progress in the digitisation of maps, textual records and the registration process.

Challenges in land records pointed out by the N-LRSI study:

1. **Firstly, The lack of skilled manpower in the departments of land records. It is** one of the major barriers in ensuring regular updating of land records.
2. **Secondly, the N-LRSI study has brought out poor cooperation** across land record departments. These are,
 - a. **Revenue department** as the custodian of textual records,
 - b. **The survey and settlement department** managing the spatial records
 - c. **The registration department** is responsible for registering land transactions.
3. **Thirdly, the information from the sources reveals that no state/UT has the facility for online modification of records** on the same day as the registration.

4. **Fourthly**, there is a **weak linkage between the revenue department and the survey and settlement department**. This creates a huge difference between the land area reported by the textual and spatial record. This can increase the chances of legal disputes over the definition of boundaries and the extent of a land plot.

All these challenges **create hindrances in achieving updated and accurate land records**.

Suggestions to improve Land records in India:

- **Strengthening of various institutions concerned with Land records**. It will achieve the desired quality of land records. This can be attained by removing structural rigidities in the system.
- The **easing of the land transactions can also be tried for improvement in land records**. For example, Maharashtra **lowering stamp duties** to meet its increasing demand for housing, infrastructure. These efforts are going to be helpful for the health of India's rural economy.

4. Carbon neutrality is against the interest of Developing countries

Source: [Indian Express](#)

GS3: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment

Synopsis: Developed countries are using the call for [net zero emissions](#) or carbon neutrality by 2050, to evade the historical responsibility. Further, they are using such targets to transfer their burdens to developing countries.

Background

- Many countries are supporting the idea of becoming Carbon neutral (net-zero emissions) by 2050.
- However, the idea of developing Carbon neutrality has the following issue,
 - One, the feasibility and efficacy of such a strategy for all countries is doubtful
 - Two, it is against the basic tenets of the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**. **Common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC)** based on historical responsibility have been the bedrock of climate actions under the UNFCCC.
 - CBDR-RC is also the central pillar of India's claim for climate justice.

Climate justice in India

- India is a shining example of climate justice. While the rich were nudged to move towards sustainable living. The poor on the other hand, were provided with safety nets to fight climate change.
- **The climate sensitivity** principle was introduced in domestic policies through interventions like energy for all, housing for all, health insurance, and crop insurance.
- Further, the mission "**Clean India**" and "give it up" campaigns also aim towards Climate Justice. Also, the efforts to popularise yoga and sustainable lifestyle practices will ensure climate justice to the vulnerable and poor sections.

How developed countries are deferring their climate justice responsibilities?

Aristotle has distinguished three forms of justice, namely **distributive, commutative and corrective**. An assessment of climate justice based on these three aspects of justice reveals the following,

First, Distributive justice. It says resources should be distributed in terms of principles of equality, equity, and merit. In the context of Carbon neutrality, the current efforts made by

developed countries do not ensure **Distributive climate justice**. This is for the following reasons,

1. One, industrialization in the developed countries is responsible for a large part of climate change issues. However, people of the developing countries are suffering disproportionately more from its impacts,
2. Two, while the developed countries have used much of the carbon space for their development, they are arguing to cut their emissions emanating from even basic needs of the developing countries.
3. Three, according to Climate Action Tracker reports, the climate action of major developed countries is incompatible with the goals of the Paris Agreement.
4. Therefore, to ensure distributive climate justice the global communities need to ensure ambitious climate action by developed countries in the near term.

The second, Commutative justice. It refers to the honoring of past commitments such as agreements or commitments, and other kinds of social contracts in good faith. In the context of Carbon neutrality, the current efforts made by developed countries do not ensure Commutative climate justice. It is because of the following reasons,

1. **One**, the second commitment period of Kyoto Protocol commits developed countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 18 percent below 1990 levels by the year 2020. However, it entered into force just one day before its expiry.
2. **Two**, the effort made by developed countries to deliver finance, technology transfer, and capacity-building support to developing countries is also ineffective. They have **failed to mobilise at least \$100 billion per year** by 2020 that they agreed for.

Third, corrective justice. It means efforts made to correct the wrongs. Based on this, developed countries need to repay the climate debt by taking greater responsibility in mitigation. Further, they should also provide finance, technology and capacity-building support. However, the developed countries are not talking about corrective actions. Instead, they are now focussing on a new concept like Carbon neutrality.

5. Governance Issues facing Private Education Institutions

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Effects of liberalization on the economy

Synopsis: The private educational institutions are failing to deliver optimum results. Thus, the role of the state in providing accessibility in educational institutions can't be ignored.

Background:

- The two renowned faculties of Ashoka University (Pratap Bhanu Mehta and Arvind Subramanian) have recently resigned. Allegedly, the owners of the institution were cautious of their outspoken criticism of the government.
- This instance questions the ability of private institutions to withstand government's pressure and deliver optimum results in the field of education.

Rationale behind privatisation:

- They promise to possess **greater academic freedom** as the government plays no role in the appointment of faculty and staff. Further they are not dependent on government aid for carrying out day-to-day activities.
 - For instance, JNU's freedom has been curtailed by the appointment of a favourable Vice-Chancellor by Govt. Stricter norms, budget cuts, and frequent student clashes have been seen after the appointment.
- They promise **better academic performance** of students by providing better infrastructure and good quality teachers. They use this as a crucial factor for attracting parents towards them.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of April, 2021

- Likewise, they **complement the government schools and universities** that don't have the capacity to solely accommodate the huge Indian population.

Concerns with Privatisation:

- **Rising Inequalities:** Private institutions create a class divide. They are costly and expensive thus beyond the scope of many people. Further gender and caste inequalities are also prevalent in them.
 - The boys and students from upper-caste backgrounds are overwhelmingly represented in private institutions relative to public ones.
- **Profit Motive:** Many private institutions are established by Businessmen who also need to protect their business interests. This leads to moulding of the institution's policy in line with the government's interest or the popular sentiment in society.
 - For instance, historian Ramachandra Guha had to decline to join Ahmedabad University after a religious group's protest over his appointment.
- **Overnight Closures:** Many private institutions promise good quality education at low rates. Less fees results in poor infrastructure and inefficient teachers, thereby threatening their survival and leading to overnight closures. This puts many children out of the education map.
- **Security of Tenure:** This is not available in private institutions due to which teachers have to surrender towards the wishes of private management.
 - For instance, even with frequent clashes between VC and teachers, no full-time faculty was forced to resign from JNU.
- **Flawed Results:** Better results are generated due to the privileged children studying in them and not the quality of resources offered by them.

Way Forward:

- There should be **democratic decision-making** within the private universities. This will provide greater resilience against the government's pressure and strengthen academic freedom. For instance, Vice-Chancellors in the private universities should be made part of the decision-making process.
- Recommendations of **the Central Square Foundation report on private participation** can be implemented. It's recommendations includes:
 - Reviewing the non-profit mandate for the education sector and existing fee regulations
 - Opening corporate governance structures to private schools
 - Classifying private schools as micro, small, or medium enterprises
- There should be **proper implementation of Right to Education act**. So that, at least 25% of students in private institutions come from diverse backgrounds.
- Apart from reforming the private sector, the role of state can't be ignored for maintaining a just and equal educational system.

6. Need of Continuing with Inflation Targeting

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS- 3 Economy

Synopsis: Inflation is still a big worry for policymakers. That is why the government is still willing to retain the inflation targeting.

Introduction

The Finance Ministry will continue with the inflation-targeting framework. It will guide the interest rate decisions of the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee over the five-year period.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of April, 2021

- The Department of Economic Affairs notified that the inflation target for the next five years ending on March 31, 2026, will be 4%. The upper tolerance level will be 6% and a lower tolerance level will be 2%.
- It means no change has been introduced to the framework.

How will the announcement by the department of economic affairs be perceived?

The announcement indicates that price stability will be the base for all macro-economic development.

1. **Firstly, the announcement is a relief** as inflation pressure is rising. The recent Consumer Price Index data show retail inflation increased by almost 100 basis points in February. Food and fuel costs remain volatile till now.
 - As per IHS Markit India Business Outlook survey companies are planning to raise selling prices in the coming 12 months to cope with rising costs of raw materials.
2. **Secondly, the RBI's officials have emphasised on the need to preserve the flexible inflation** targeting framework. In a paper titled 'Measuring Trend Inflation in India', Deputy Governor Michael Debabrata Patra, and a colleague highlighted the importance of guaranteeing the inflation target.
3. **Thirdly, there has been a steady decline in trend inflation** to a 4.1%-4.3% band since 2014. The officials said that a target lower than the trend had the risk of imparting a deflationary bias. This bias would reduce economic momentum.
 - A goal much above the trend could cause expansionary monetary conditions that would likely lead to inflation shocks.

The conclusion

The RBI's researchers Report on Currency made it clear that the framework had served the economy well. The government's economic officials have noticed that it will certainly reassure investors and savers that inflation remains a central concern for all policymakers.

7. Forest Fires in India – An analysis.

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS:3 Disaster Management

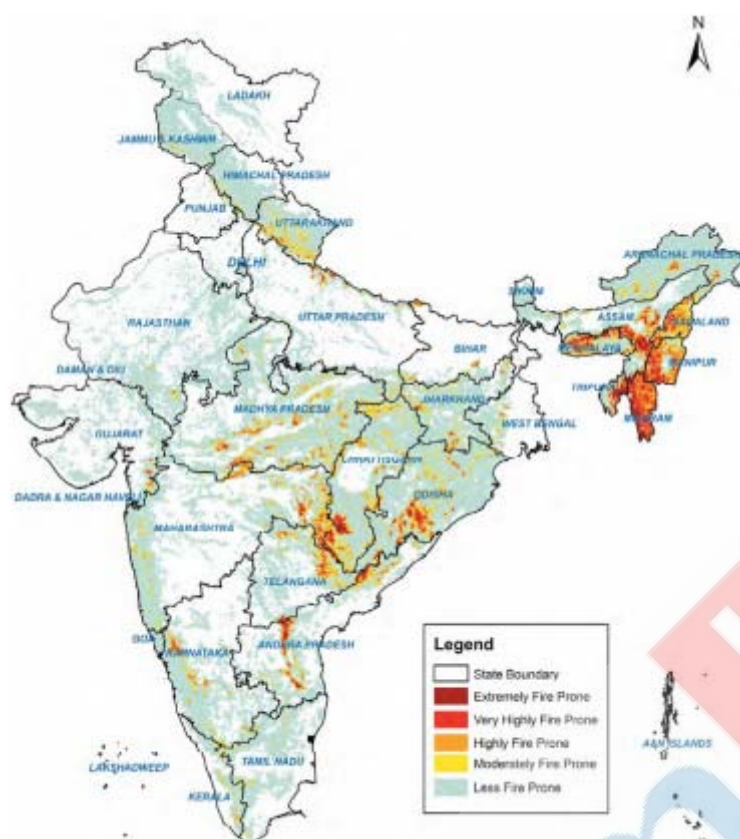
Synopsis: Forest fires in India occurring more frequently. But India is facing challenges in controlling them.

Introduction:

Most forest fires in India appeared between the April-May months. In recent years the forest fires have been more frequent than usual. For example, in few areas, forest fires occurred in the **winter months also**.

Uttarakhand alone witnessed more than 1000 forest fire incidents in the past six months. Since the start of 2021 forest fires has been seen in Himachal Pradesh, Nagaland-Manipur border, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat.

Prime hotspots of Forest Fires in India:



Forest Fires in India (Source:

ISFR-2019)

According to the India State Forest Report 2019, India's 21.67% of its geographical area is forest. Forests in Assam, Mizoram and Tripura have been identified as 'extremely prone to the forest fires.

States with large forest areas under the 'very highly prone' category include Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, etc.

Since the start of this year, prolonged fires are recorded in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh (Kullu Valley) and Nagaland-Manipur border (Dzukou Valley). Further in recent months forest fires also occurred in Simlipal National Park in Odisha, Bandhavgarh Forest Reserve in Madhya Pradesh and in sanctuaries for the Asiatic lion and the great Indian bustard in Gujarat.

The present forest fire in Nainital started in March end.

Reason for Forest Fires in India:

Forest fires occur in India both due to Natural and Man-made causes.

Natural causes for Forest Fires in India:

1. Massive fires in the Amazon forests in Brazil and in Australia are primarily due to Climate Change. The fires due to climate change have certain characteristics in common. It is also applicable to India. They are,
 - a. Longer duration of fires
 - b. High-intensity fires
 - c. Fires of high-frequency
2. In India the march and April month see more forest fires. This is due to the availability of large quantities of dry wood, logs, stumps, dead leaves, dry grass and weeds in forest lands.

3. Lack of soil moisture is also seen as a key factor. For example, the recent Uttarakhand forest fires are due to this.

Man-Made causes for Forest Fires in India:

But many major fires in India are triggered mainly by human activities.

1. Manmade fires are high particularly in places where people visit forests. People leave burning bidis, cigarette stubs or other inflammable materials inside the forest.
2. In some places, people deliberately cause a fire. For example, the recent fire in Simlipal National Park in Odisha is due to deliberation. Villagers set dry leaves to fire in order to collect mahua flowers. (The local people use these flowers in preparation for a local drink).

Control of Forest Fires in India:

Forest fires are difficult to control due to the following reasons.

1. **The locality of the forest and access** to the specific location is hard for firefighters.
2. **Shortage of Firefighters:** This creates challenges in the timely mobilisation of forest staff, fuel and fire fighting equipment, etc.
3. Impossible to **transport heavy vehicles** loaded with water into the thick forests. So, in extreme places helicopters are used.
4. **Wind speed and direction** can also play a crucial role in fire fighting.

Importance of preventing Forest Fires in India:

1. A healthy forest stores and sequesters more carbon than any other terrestrial ecosystem.
2. According to the 2011 census, 1.70 lakh villages in India have proximity to forests. The livelihood of several crores of people is dependent on fuelwood, bamboo, fodder, and small timber.
3. Forest fires can have multiple adverse effects on the forest. For example, forest cover, soil, tree growth, vegetation, and the overall flora and fauna all get impact due to forest fires.
 - o The heat generated during the fire destroys animal habitats.
 - o Soil quality decreases with the alteration in their compositions.
 - o The trees that survive fire often remain stunted and growth is severely affected.
 - o Soil moisture and fertility gets affected. Thus forests can shrink in size in the future.

Government Initiatives to prevent Forest Fires in India:

1. Since 2004, the Forest Survey of India(FSI) developed a Fire Alert System. The system will monitor forest fires in real-time. In 2019, an advanced version of the system was also launched.
2. Using the MODIS sensors(Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer) Real-time fire information of fire hotspots is collected and sent to FSI. This is then forwarded by email to state, district, circle, division, range and beat levels. People in the locality will also receive SMS alerts.

8. Alternatives to Inflation Targeting

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis: Many economists are criticizing the RBI's role in inflation targeting. They are suggesting alternatives to inflation targeting. Let's have a look at them.

Background

1. The central government confirmed the continuance of inflation targeting as a tool to monitor inflation within the same bandwidth.
2. The “inflation targeting” regime came into force in 2016. Recently [inflation targeting has been renewed](#) for another five years.
3. Following this, the RBI will continue to target maintaining retail inflation within the band of 2% to 6%.
4. RBI will use the **headline inflation** to control the inflation as it reflects the prices of essential consumer goods.
5. **Retail core inflation**, is the inflation rate without taking into account the fluctuations in the prices of fuel and food items.

Why many people have criticised RBI's role in inflation targeting?

Many have criticised the RBI's mandate of inflation targeting because of its contradictory role.

- RBI acts as a regulator to maintain financial stability and control prices in the economy by increasing interest rates. But this has a negative consequence on economic growth.
- Also, RBI is responsible to boost the economy by reducing repo rates. Because Cheaper loans will make it easier for firms and governments to borrow and spend/invest thus leading to economic growth.
- Between 2016 and 2020, many times RBI focused more on keeping retail inflation low by setting high interest. This has affected India's economic growth.

What are the alternatives suggested to inflation targeting?

1. **First, instead of headline retail inflation**, the RBI should **focus on the retail core inflation** rate. Because fuel and food prices often shoot up in the short-term due to supply disruption.
2. **Second**, RBI should not be looking at retail inflation. Instead, it should look at **wholesale inflation**. Because RBI's move to tweak interest rate affects the credit available to businesses. This, in turn, is affected by wholesale inflation, and not retail inflation.
3. **Third**, RBI should neither use the wholesale nor retail inflation rate as targets. Instead, the RBI should create a **Producer Price Index** to suit the RBI's need.
4. **Fourth**, a singular focus on maintaining price stability will be counter-productive for a developing economy such as India. They argue that the RBI should be working with the government towards ensuring fast economic growth rather than focusing on inflation targeting. Their argument is that inflation targeting is not the only way to be prudent about **macro-financial stability**.

Why RBI should continue Inflation targeting?

There are many [benefits associated with Inflation Targeting](#). They are,

1. **First**, a high inflation rate is the most **regressive kind of tax**. The poorest people suffer the most. By targeting inflation India can avoid hurting poor people.
2. **Second**, as NPA's or bad loans are being recognised by banks, macro-financial stability will come into sharp focus. Inflation targeting can provide such macro-financial stability.
3. **Third**, Inflation targeting also takes care of supply-side bottlenecks. For example, India's inflation rate remains somewhat constant despite the [increasing fuel prices](#) and Covid-induced lockdowns in India.

But, Under the given circumstances, it is a wise decision by the government to allow RBI to focus on targeting retail inflation. This will ensure that India's poorest, who are the most hit by the pandemic will not be affected further.

9. An Overview of Kerala Model of Governance

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS3: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Synopsis: Kerala's model of Governance prioritise spending on Social infrastructure. It provides greater Economic security even during the time of adversities.

Background

- **'Kerala model' of governance** highlights that Human development welfare measures are effective even with low Economic growth.
- It has also highlighted the importance of the role of the People's movement. It pressurizes the government to adopt redistributive measures.

Kerala's growth story

- Many **economists predicted the failure of Kerala model of governance** during the economic stagnation in the 1970's and 1980's. The reason was that a slow-growing economy will not have enough fiscal capacity to fund its welfare programs.
- But after the 1980s, the growth in Agricultural income and remittance increased. It provided a long period for economic growth. During this growth period,
 - the workforce engaged in the secondary sector increased from 20% (1988) to 32% (2018-19).
 - The per capita income that was 10% lower than national average during 1990, raised to more than 65% of national average by (2019-20)
 - Health and education indicators improved, social security schemes were expanded.

One issue was the quality of infrastructure of public schools and public hospitals. The inadequate facilities forced many people towards the private sector.

Innovativeness to raise Funding

1. Kerala's welfare policies were hampered due to a lack of adequate financial resources due to harsh limits on state borrowings. The passage of **GST** disallowed states to tax commodities based on their priorities. It affected their avenues for resource mobilization.
2. In this context, KIFB was set up to raise funding from the financial market. The idea was that greater public spending will increase tax revenues by stimulating growth.
3. The government assured repayment of loans by legally committing to pay portion of its revenue from motor vehicle tax and petroleum Cess.

Public Spending on Social infrastructure

- In the last 5 years, Kerala invested large amount in building up infrastructure for public schools and hospitals. For example, greater than 45000 classrooms were made 'Hi-tech' classrooms.
- The investments were sourced through **'Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board'** (KIFB).
- The result was, the number of students in public schools increased. The effectiveness of Kerala public hospitals were witnessed during the Pandemic.

- Apart from public schools, KIFB funding was used to build economic infrastructure such as industrial parks, bridges, Kerala fiber-optic network (K-FON), TRANSGRID 2.0.

Implications of Investing in Social Infrastructure

- There are concerns over Kerala's unsustainable levels of Debt. For example, the debt to gross state domestic product is 36%
- Further, Kerala is very much vulnerable to shocks of the economy such as natural disaster (floods in 2018,2019 & the pandemic), job losses in west Asian countries, contradictory fiscal policy of center. All these can adversely impact its economic growth.
- However, public spending in social and economic infrastructure will create a more skilled, educated, healthier workforce along with quality infrastructure. This will ensure that even at times of adversities Kerala will be in a better position to absorb the shocks of the Economy.

10. Measures to address Inequality in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Inclusive Growth and issues arising from it

Synopsis: Inequality in India is increasing. It needs an immediate solution to enable sustainable economic growth.

Background

- According to a recent [Pew Research Report](#), one-third of India's middle-class has become poor due to the Pandemic. Whereas, poor people earning less than ₹150 per day have doubled.
- International organizations like the **World Bank**, the **International Monetary Fund**, and the **International Labour Organization** have also warned about [rising inequalities in India due to the pandemic](#).
- Also, many economists suggest India is witnessing a **k-shaped recovery** with rising inequalities.

Why India is said to be witnessing a **K-shaped recovery**?

K-shaped recovery happens when, following a recession, different sections of an economy recover at starkly different rates or magnitudes. Some sections benefit from it and some bear a loss.

While the economy was slowing down even before the Pandemic, the impact of COVID-19 has further increased the inequality gap.

- **First**, the Covid-19 intensified the problems of unemployment, low incomes, rural distress, malnutrition, and inequality.
 - **For example**, the share of wages declined as compared to that of profits. The quarterly net profit of the BSE200 companies reached a record high of ₹1.67 trillion in the third quarter of FY21.
 - Whereas the informal sector and workers suffered the loss of incomes and employment in the last year. Women lost more jobs and many are out of the workforce. Inequalities also increased in health care and education.
- **Second**, the impact of the Pandemic is more on India's large informal sector than any other sector.

What needs to be done to reduce Inequality in India?

To reduce inequalities, we need to concentrate on three basic parameters,

- Focus on increasing employment and wages,
 - Focussing on human development,
 - Also, Providing social security net through quasi-universal basic income
1. **First**, increasing employment and wages is central to the inclusive growth approach. Investment in infrastructure including construction can create employment. Further, we need to take measures to address the following seven challenges in employment,
 - i. Creating 7 to 8 million productive jobs per year.
 - ii. Correcting the mismatch between demand and supply of labor. For example, only 2.3% of India's workforce has formal skill training as compared to 96% in South Korea.
 - iii. Need to make manufacturing the growth engine to facilitate labour-intensive exports.
 - iv. Also, Focus on micro, small & medium enterprises and informal sectors including rights of migrants.
 - v. Furthermore, Preparedness for automation and technology revolution
 - vi. Social security and decent working conditions for all.
 - vii. Raising real wages of rural and urban workers and guaranteeing minimum wages.
 2. **Second**, improving human development by fixing the gap in health and education. Increasing public expenditure on health and education should be the way forward. Need to Prioritise universal **health care** and increase spending on health to 2%-3% of GDP.
 3. **Third**, providing **social safety nets** to absorb shocks in the economy. It can be done by providing a combination of cash transfers and an expanded guarantee scheme. For example,
 - i. Cash transfers to all women above the age of 20 years.
 - ii. Expanding the number of days provided under the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act** and a **national employment guarantee scheme** for urban areas.
 4. **Fourth**, increase the income of small and marginal farmers. For that, Farmer producer organizations should be strengthened. States should have a bigger role in agri-marketing reforms.
 5. **Fifth**, the tax/GDP ratio has to be raised, with a wider tax base to increase governments' revenue. It can be used for spending for the above programs.
 6. **Sixth**, resorting to fiscal federalism by reducing the inequalities between the Centre and States in finances. State budgets must be strengthened to improve capital expenditures on physical infrastructure and spending on health, education, and social safety nets.
 7. **Seventh**, deepening democracy and decentralization can reduce inequalities. Unequal distribution of development is rooted in the inequalities of political, social, and economic power.

Reducing income inequalities is also important for improving demand that can raise private investment, consumption, and exports for higher and sustainable economic growth.

11. Tarrem attack – How Maoists Still Manage to Attack Security Forces?

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3

Synopsis: Tarrem attack points out that the declining Maoists remain a strong military threat.

Introduction

Over 20 paramilitary personnel died in an encounter with the Maoists in the Tarrem area near Chhattisgarh's Sukma district. There is a long-running conflict in this remote tribal region.

- **Reports point out a Maoist surprise attack** on the paramilitary personnel.
- Forces were performing **search operations in Maoist strongholds**. The timing of these search operations matches with the Maoists' attempt to disrupt the construction of a road near Silger-Jagargunda.

How has the Maoist presence evolved over the years in the impacted area?

The Maoist insurgency first began as the Naxalite movement in the 1970s and then intensified after 2004. Later two prominent insurgent groups merged together and this remains a mindless guerrilla-driven militant movement.

Security forces managed to clear the majority of the areas of the Maoists. The majority of their leaders are either killed or caught. However, their stronghold in the south Bastar is still intact. It is due to the following reasons:

1. **First**, there is a lack of road and telecommunications infrastructure in these remote areas. Maoists are able to use the terrain to their advantage.
2. **Second**, These groups still manage to recruit people from these remote areas. People living in these tribal areas either untouched by welfare or there are discontents due to state repression.
3. **Third**, Maoists also know that state crackdown after the violence provides them with more recruits. Thus, violence is useful for them.

Suggestions

- The State also knows that the route to violence provides Maoists with new supporters. Thus, methods other than the crackdown are required.
- Before Tarrem attacks came right after a recent peace march held by civil society activists. They were asking for a dialogue between the Maoists and the Chhattisgarh government to end the violence. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal the violence has claimed more than 10,000 lives since 2000 alone.
- Thus, the Civil Society's call for peace should not be ignored. This is the only way for lasting peace in the region.

12. Net Zero Emission Principle is not in line with India's National Ambitions

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Conservation, Environmental Pollution, and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment

Synopsis: The principle of Net Zero emission is against Climate Justice. It needs to be reworked considering the national priorities of developing countries like India.

Background

- The Paris Agreement, explicitly recognized that the peak of emissions will take longer for developing countries. It is to be achieved in the context of "sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty".

- However, this balance enshrined in the Paris Agreement is being upset by enforcing a common '**Net Zero emission**' targets on all countries.

What are the issues in the Paris treaty?

- **First**, the Paris Climate Treaty does not consider the equity principle. For example,
 - India annual carbon emissions is just 3% compared with 26% for the United States and 13% for China.
 - According to the United Nations, the richest 1% of the global population emits more than two times the emissions of the bottom 50%.
 - Yet, developing countries like India needs to contribute equally in controlling carbon emission.
- **Second**, the treaty does not focus on the cause of the problem that is the excessive use of energy for high levels of well-being. For instance,
 - It focuses on physical quantities such as, emissions of carbon dioxide, increase in global temperature, impacts on nature. And It suggests finance and technology transfer as solutions to solve the problem.
 - But the solutions require an analysis of drivers, trends and patterns of resource use.
- **Third**, the recommendations ignore the costs for the poor. It states that early capping of energy use will not affect the growth of the poor.

Why adopting Net zero emission targets will be disastrous for India?

For developed countries, peaking of emissions came 20 years after infrastructure saturation levels were reached. However, developing countries cannot adopt Zero emissions because;

1. First, the development of infrastructure is vital for developing countries. It will contribute to carbon emissions. For example, China's emissions increased three times in the period 2000-2015, driven largely by infrastructure.
2. Second, the middle class of developing countries requires infrastructure, mobility, buildings, and diet. There will be a need for half the available carbon space for their development.
3. Third, India has a young population and much of the future emissions in India will come from infrastructure, buildings and industry. This cannot be altered much if India wants to reach comparable levels of well-being with major economies.

What needs to be done?

India must highlight unique national circumstances with respect to the food, energy and transportation systems that have to change. For example,

1. First, India should stress on change in dietary patterns of western countries. Consumption of meat contributes to a third of global emissions. Indians eat just 4 kg a year compared with around 68 kg in the European Union and twice of that in the U.S.
2. Second, India should stress on cutting down the Transport emissions. Because transport emissions account for a quarter of global emissions. For example, transport emissions have surpassed emissions from generation of electricity in the US
3. Third, India should stress on finding alternatives for coal use. Need to shift focus on renewable energy and hydrogen as a fuel for electrification.

What changes should be brought to the Paris treaty?

1. First, the Paris Agreement should have changes in line with the sustainable development of countries with per capita emissions below the global average
2. Second, the verifiable measure should be well-being within ecological limits.

3. Third, international cooperation to facilitate sharing technology of electric vehicles and hydrogen as a fuel.

13. Suggestions to Improve India-Pakistan Relations

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: India and Neighbourhood relations

Synopsis: India and Pakistan have to improve their engagement further if they want to improve bilateral ties.

Introduction:

India and Pakistan have improved their engagement in recent times. For example,

1. India and Pakistan issued a joint statement to strictly **observe all the agreements on a ceasefire** along the LoC and other sectors
2. [Permanent Indus Commission](#) meeting on the [Indus Water treaty](#),
3. [Resuming trade with India](#). Under this, Pakistan allows the import of sugar and cotton from India. However, later retracted from this stand.
4. Issuing of sporting visas and other measures like official speech on regional rapprochement, etc.

The U-turn of Pakistan:

Despite the development, the External Affairs Ministers of both sides did not meet and greet each other at the [Heart of Asia conference](#) held last week. Further, Last week reversed few earlier developments as well. Such as,

1. Pakistan's foreign minister was the one who led the charge of Cabinet Ministers. He and his colleagues opposed the move of Pakistan's Economic Coordination Committee to reopen imports of Indian cotton and sugar.
2. He was of the opinion that the move would violate Pakistan's commitments to Kashmir.
3. Further, the Pakistan Army General also stressed the need for **Geo-economics**.
4. Following these developments, the Pakistan **cabinet rejected the import proposal of Cotton last week**.
5. Apart from that, the Pakistan cabinet also announced that they will not normalize India Pakistan ties until the revocation of steps of August 2019. (on Jammu and Kashmir and Article 370).

The U-turn in India Pakistan relations is not a new one. India did not comment on the unworkable demand on Article 370.

Suggestions:

Pakistan has to explore options for more ties with India. This can be achieved by steps such as,

1. Restoration of High Commissioners in each other's capitals.
2. Opening up of [cross border LoC trade](#) that was suspended for security reasons in 2019
3. Valuable commitments from Pakistan on issues such as cross-border terrorism, etc.

Both India and Pakistan have to capitalise on the nascent re-engagement. But the only solution is to improve their engagement further.

14. Ways to Restore Democracy in Myanmar

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: India and its neighbourhood- relations

Synopsis: Myanmar's military is unwilling to give power to the democratically elected government. It is time for the regional countries to put pressure to end the military rule in Myanmar.

Introduction:

Myanmar celebrated its Armed Forces Day on March 27. But violence broke out during the celebration. It led to the killing of more than 100 protesters. [After the military coup in February](#), this once again brought back the demand for Rule of Law in Myanmar.

India and Myanmar:

[India maintains a cordial relationship with Myanmar](#). An Indian representative was sent to attend the Armed forces Day. Along with India, 7 other countries sent representatives to attend the Armed forces' day celebrations in Naypyidaw. This includes China, Pakistan, Russia, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand.

When the military conducted parades, the police and soldiers in other parts of Myanmar used lethal force [against unarmed people](#). This resulted in the killing of more than 100 unarmed protesters.

India condemned the "use of violence". Further, India also asked Myanmar for the "restoration of democracy".

Difference between past and present protests:

The [history of Independent Myanmar](#) is a swing between democratic and military rule. Earlier the military rule relied on swift actions to curb protesters in 1988 and 2007.

According to independent agencies, the military has so far killed more than 570 civilians, including 46 children, since the coup. But the protests are increasing day by day and not reducing like the past ones. This is due to the following reasons,

1. The **military rule at present followed after a decade of partial democracy**. The people enjoyed their freedoms under the elected government for a decade. So, people are opposing military rule at present.
2. The **challenge with the banking system**. Apart from street protests, the banks in Myanmar are also on the brink of collapse. Most of the bank staff are on strike against military rule. This resulted in a **shortage of cash and inflation** of essential goods.
3. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was also intensified by the **protests of the Industrial Workers**.
4. **Support of armed insurgent groups for protesters**. The insurgent groups oppose the military as they are they take strict measures to control the insurgents. So, the insurgent groups provide support to the protesters.

Suggestions to bring back normalcy:

India and China initially remained silent on the Coup. However, now their stand is changing as unstable Myanmar is not in the interest of any country.

So far, the military Generals are unwilling to give up power. The only way is the involvement of India, China, and other countries in ASEAN to put pressure on the military to [restore democracy in Myanmar](#).

15. Flaws in India's Internal Security Management

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security

Synopsis:

The recent attack in tekulgada area in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh exposed flaws in India's internal security management. Hence, there is a need to bring robust reforms in the security architecture that can prevent attacks by Left Wing Extremists in the future.

Background:

- Recently a combing operation by local police and central police forces in the Bastar region turned into a grave Maoist attack. The attack took the lives of around 22 security personnel while several others got wounded.
 - Combing operations involves searching a place or an area very carefully in order to find something.
 - The operation was carried on to find a local Maoist leader (Madvi Hidma) and his syndicates.
- This has highlighted the flaws in India's internal security management especially in the case of Left Wing Extremism (LWE).

About Left Wing Extremism:

- LWE or Naxal-Maoist insurgency is prevalent in India for decades in the region denoted by the red corridor. The corridor includes states from eastern, southern, and central India.
- The Maoists aim to capture State power through a combination of armed insurgency, mass mobilization, and strategic alliances.
- It is one of the 3 major internal security challenges. The other two being
 - a proxy war and terrorism in Kashmir,
 - sub-national separatist movements in the Northeast
- The government has been able to contain these but little progress is achieved in the domain of combating Left Wing Extremism (LWE).
- Around 15,000 lives have been lost due to LWE violence over the last three decades.

Rationale behind origin and sustenance of LWE:

- **First**, the poor nature of governance has resulted in the persistent neglect of tribal populations in LWE regions. This has deprived them of the fruits of development.
- **Second**, an oppressive/exploitative hierarchy of the state and society has pushed the residents in these regions to the margins of survival.

Flaws in Internal Security Management:

- **Operational Challenges:**
 - **Leadership failure** was seen in recent attacks. Security personnel left their dead comrades in the grip of Maoists rather than trying to regroup and attack the Maoists.
 - **Lacunae in the intelligence network** were also unearthed as the security personnel got trapped in the plan of Maoists.
 - **Use of large and diverse forces** (CAPF, COBRA commandos, local police) adversely impacted the covert nature of the operation. It made detection easier.

• **Strategic Challenges:**

- There has been **no meaningful policy review** of the IS (internal security) challenge. However, LWE was recognized as the most important security challenge by the PM in 2005.
- Further, there has been ignorance of Kargil review committee (1999) recommendations that show a **deficiency in higher IS management**.
 - The committee desired the restructuring of command, control, and leadership functions of paramilitary forces in situations of proxy war and large-scale terrorism.
 - Till date, many police officers inducted into leadership positions into paramilitary forces. They have good training to maintain law and order. However, they lack the skill set to manage an insurgent operation which results in grave tragedies like the recent Bastar attack.

Way Forward:

- A detailed investigation should be carried out to find out the real reason behind the tragedy.
- There is a need to enhance cooperation between center and state government in the security domain. This will prevent such grave attacks in the future.
- The political leadership of the country must realize its responsibility towards internal security challenges. They must inculcate a will to revamp the capacity of security personnel and usher in the desired reforms.

16. Need of State Support for Agricultural development

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country.

Synopsis: The current situation of the agricultural sector demands state support to tackle future challenges. This will ensure sustainable benefits for both – farmers and consumers.

Background:

- Countries across the globe are focusing on the gradual reduction of state's role in almost every sector (including agriculture). Their objective is to bring greater economic development.
- In India, the government's focus is more on developing the industrial and service sector since the 2nd five-year plan of 1956. Its aim is to move excess people from agriculture into other sectors and attain better growth.
- However, some experts still believe that state support is necessary for agricultural development.

Factors inducing the state support:

1. **Poor State of Resources:** The fertility of agricultural land is declining coupled with scarce water availability.
2. **Resistance to other occupation:** People in agriculture don't shut down their farming in case of rising costs. Rather they employ family labour in farm and non-farm activities. This allows them to stick to farming despite lower returns and excessive work.
3. **Difficult to streamline the production:** The production process can't be strengthened by building an assembly line. It is connected to the annual climatic cycle which is volatile and makes farming difficult.

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4. **Size of Farmers:** Around 86% of farmers are small and medium. They can't access good storage, transportation and marketing facilities. This leads to distress sales in agriculture.
5. **Price Inelastic nature:** It means demand for Agri products will not witness a major change with a change in the price of Agri products.
 - **For instance,** a bumper crop reduces the price of Agri product as supply gets increased. This is not followed by a corresponding increase in demand that can push the price upwards. Hence, less income is generated by farmers.
6. **Tackling Emergencies:** State support is desirable to provide quality food grains at affordable price in case of emergencies like drought, pandemic etc.
7. **Accommodating the Demographic profile:** Despite the push towards urbanization, the UN estimates that around 800 million people will reside in rural areas in 2050. It requires proactive action by the state.

Past Performance with State support:

The state initiated the green revolution in the 1960s. It established the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and Agricultural Prices Commission in 1965.

Positives:

- Surplus production allowed India to attain food security.
- Farmers were incentivised to grow as they enjoy a safety cushion based on FCI's procurement guarantee.
- Quality grains at low prices through the [PDS](#) enhanced consumer welfare.

Concerns:

- Post green revolution, a decline in quantity as well quality of water is witnessed.
- The yield from chemical-based farming is also declining.
- The sector is mainly growing rice and wheat due to MSP (minimum assured price) availability. This is hampering crop diversification and encouraging more water usage as they are water-intensive crops.
- Agriculture became unviable in some regions. It led to over 3 lakh farmer suicides in the last 3 decades. This is an unprecedented event for the country.

Way Forward

1. The **government should diversify the procurement basket.** It should include more crops (like pulses, millets etc.) and more regions.
 - It can procure 25% of the actual production of the commodity for that particular season. This was proposed under the 2018 Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay SanraksHan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA) scheme.
2. Further the **procurement process should respect the regional agroecology.** Eg – don't procure water-intensive crops from water-stressed regions.
3. The **locally procured crops must be linked to Anganwadi and mid-meal centres.** This will give a good market to farmers and improve nutrition of children.
4. The government should do **greater investment in specific infrastructure** for pulses, millets, etc. crops that are low-priced and provide better nutrition.
5. The **network of Mandis should be expanded.** This will protect farmers from exploitation of large retailers.
 - Currently, there are 2,477 mandis and 4,843 sub-mandis and only 17% of farm produce pass through them. However, the need is to create a network of 42000 mandis that will enable the selling of goods within a 5 km radius.

17. India's policy towards Climate change

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Synopsis: India adopted a liberal policy towards climate change in the pandemic era. This might generate significant negative impacts, thus demanding a comprehensive review.

Background:

- Recently a meeting took place between U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, John Kerry and PM Narendra Modi. The U.S has shown commitment to support India's initiatives to combat climate change.
- After this, demand is raised to review India's policy towards climate change and consider the proposal of adopting a net-zero emission target.
 - It is a situation in which a country balances its emissions with sufficient removal measures.

Should India adopt Net Zero Emission Target?

- **Arguments in Favour:**
 - India is among the top 5 largest emitters of carbon dioxide.
 - An increase in intense storms, drought, and heat waves is seen in India due to enhanced climate change.

Arguments against adoption:

- A substantial cost would be incurred towards this strategy. It can hamper India's socio-economic programs. The country needs to focus on millions of people that live in energy poverty and underdevelopment.
- India is not a legacy emitter like the U.S, U.K, etc. Legacy emitters have a greater responsibility towards climate change.

However, whether it adopts a net-zero emission target or not, a review of the present approach is desired.

Why Government needs to review its policies?

- The government took various decisions (especially during the Covid pandemic) that will hamper the environment and enhance climate change. This includes:
 - Giving approval to projects that might hamper the environment.
 - Extending the deadline for coal plants to adopt strict pollution control.
 - Drafting liberal environmental impact assessment norms.

Similarly, the strategy of imposing a higher tax on fuel prices is not paying a significant environmental dividend. Rather the poor are facing undue problems due to rising inflationary pressures.

Way Forward:

- India should come up with a **comprehensive domestic climate plan** before the next UN Convention on Climate Change.
 - It should have reduction targets for every sector
 - It should enlighten the citizens towards the government's green development path for the next decade
- Such a plan will induce the biggest historical contributors (U.S, U.K, Europe, etc.) to do more reduction. It will provide greater support to the developing countries.
 - They should provide more funds and technology as per the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

- In the meanwhile, India can impose an **emission tax** on luxury items like air conditioners, big properties or aviation, etc. The collected proceeds can then be used for specified green development outcomes.

18. Rupee depreciation and its management

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis: Rupee depreciation and its impact and solutions to protect from currency volatility risks.

Background of Rupee depreciation

- Recently, the rupee fell sharply by 105 paise. It is considered as one of the biggest single-session falls in 20 months.
- Currently, the rupee stands at 74.47 against the US dollar.

What are the reasons for rupee depreciation?

A combination of factors are responsible for rupee depreciation, such as

1. One, concerns over Covid-19 has created **uncertainty in the market**. This affected the FDI(Foreign Direct Investment) and FII(Foreign Institutional Investment). So the rupee weakens further.
2. Two, RBI's **Government Securities Acquisition Programme** (G-SAP) that seeks to buy bonds worth Rs 1 lakh crore might be one of the reasons. It is a **quantitative easing policy** followed by RBI. The policy supported the government's increased borrowing Programme through the infusion of liquidity.
3. Three, the **strengthening of the dollar against the euro** also contributed to rupee depreciation.
4. Four, RBI's **status-quo on policy rates** is not helping to increase demand in the local economy. This will further impact the rupee.
5. Further, the value of the rupee will also be impacted by the **high bond yields in the US** and the inflow of dollars into the US.

What are the impacts of Rupee depreciation?

It has both positive and negative impacts. For instance,

1. Depreciation has a positive impact for an NRI. As they are sending money back home they will get more rupees per dollar.
2. Similarly, Depreciation will have negative impacts on fuel costs and education cost in abroad. For example,
 - One, A depreciating rupee increases the cost of crude import. A rise in cost of crude raises fuel prices and inflation. Crude import accounts for almost 20% of India's imports.
 - Two, higher education in the US might cost an annual fee of US\$ 50,000. A 5% depreciation in the rupee (For example, from 72.5 to 76.125) will raise the cost for one year from Rs 36.26 lakh to Rs 38.06 lakh (Net loss Rs 1.8 lakh)

How to eliminate the Rupee depreciation and currency risk?

There are multiple options to cover the currency volatility risk. They are,

1. **Investing in international funds** that invest in global markets through fund of funds. While the Indian investors invest in rupees, in the fund of funds the money gets invested in dollars at the current exchange rate. In case of rupee depreciation, this fund will fully protect against the currency depreciation risk.

2. In this case, if a person planning for a quick investment (4-5 months) in foreign currency, there are two options to eliminate currency risk.
 - o One, **creating a deposit account in the US** and transferring the fund abroad.
 - o Two, **going for a currency hedge** in the exchanges **by investing in future contracts** that will mature in 4-5 months. For example,
 - o A future contract worth \$50,000, maturing in July at the rate of 74.5, will pay Rs 37.25 lakh.
 - o If in December, the rupee depreciates to \$77, Then the contract will yield a profit of Rs 1.25 lakh.

19. Why India should avoid Carbon Neutrality targets?

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.

Synopsis: India must reject carbon neutrality as it would lead India into a low-development trap.

Background

- Achieving [carbon neutrality by midcentury](#) is conceived as a scientific approach to limit temperature rise by 2°C
- According to **the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit (ECIU)**, nearly 32 countries had declared their intention to achieve carbon-neutral status by 2050.
- Many global civil society organisations are persuading all countries, especially India, to make explicit declarations on achieving Carbon Neutrality.
- Article 4.1 of the Paris Agreement gives impetus for pushing towards carbon-neutral economies.
 - o It states that to achieve the long-term temperature goal, Parties should aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible.
 - o Since peaking will take longer for developing countries, countries should take initiatives to achieve the removal of greenhouse gas emissions at least in the second half of this century. (Carbon Neutrality might come under this article).
 - o Further, the article also mentions that this will be on the basis of **equity**. Apart from that, it should also aim to achieve **sustainable development** and efforts to eradicate poverty.

What are the issues in achieving Carbon neutrality?

- **First, the** achievement of carbon neutrality is not compatible with achieving 1.5°C or 2 °C goals of the Paris agreement. The current pledges are highly inadequate. For example,
 - o The **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change** Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C mentions some key points. Such as the World now left with only 480 Giga-tonnes or Gt (billion tonnes) of carbon space for restricting to 1.5 °C targets.
 - o At the current rate of emissions of about 42 Gt of CO₂(GtCO₂) equivalent per year. The world will reach this in just 12 years.
 - o So, to keep within the 480 Gt budget, global carbon neutrality must be reached by 2039.
- **Second,** the commitments made by the US and the European Union to achieve carbon neutrality targets is not compatible with achieving the 1.5 °C or 2 °C goals. For example,

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- In the case of the US, even if it reaches carbon neutrality by 2050, it will consume 106 GtCO₂ carbon space. That is 22% of the total remaining carbon budget for the whole world.
- To stay within its fair share of the remaining carbon budget, the US has to reach net-zero emissions by 2025.
- Even then it has to owe a carbon debt of 470 GtCO₂ ((\$14 trillion) to the rest of the world. This is for its past usage and providing a fair share of carbon space.
- This is applicable to the EU also. The EU has to reach net-zero by 2033. And the EU owes the world a carbon debt of about \$9.3 trillion for its past emissions.

Why India should not join Carbon Neutrality?

India has [many reasons to avoid Carbon neutrality](#). These are,

- **First, India needs to focus on development** and its aspirational goal. Though sustainable development is feasible, the question of how low India's future carbon emission will look is highly uncertain.
- **Second, India does not owe a carbon debt to the world.** Further, India's current per capita emissions are very low compared to the developed countries. Also, India's mitigation efforts are quite compatible with a 2 °C target.
- **Third, India has a twin burden of low-carbon development and adaptation to climate impacts.** So, If India announces Carbon-neutrality now, then it will become a triple burden.

In conclusion, India should avoid announcing such carbon neutrality targets. That too, without making the developed countries liable for their past emission is risky. Further, It will also lead India into a low-development trap.

20. Strengthening the National small savings schemes

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs3: Inclusive Growth and issues arising from it.

Synopsis: The government need to implement the recommendation of high-level committees in determining the interest rate of small saving schemes

Background

- Recently, the government notified on reducing the interest rates on **National small savings schemes**.
- However, the decision to reduce the interest rates on small savings schemes was reversed within 12 hours of notification.
- Reducing the interest rate of **National small savings schemes** will adversely impact middle class, lower middle class and lower-income groups. As they are already facing the crisis of job losses and higher food price due to the Pandemic.

Types of Small saving schemes in India

1. **Post office Deposits**
2. **Savings Certificates: National Savings Certificate and Kisan Vikas Patra**
3. **Social Security Schemes: Public Provident Fund, Senior Citizens Savings Scheme and Sukanya Samridhi Account.**

Significance of Small Saving schemes;

- One, Small savings schemes (SSS) have contributed to overall economic growth. Because, money pooled from SSS have been used by centre and state governments to fund development programmes.
- Two, they are an important source of household savings. (social security net)
- Three, they offer a safe and secure source of income to senior citizens.

How the Interest rate of National small savings schemes are decided currently?

- The small savings rates are linked to **G-sec yields** (the rate at which the government borrows money through sovereign bonds) currently. Further, it is revised quarterly.
- The rationale for linking small savings rates to G-sec is that money collected through these schemes is invested in central and state government securities.

What are the recommendations of various high-level committees in this regard?

1. Various committees such as **Y V Reddy committee**, the **Rakesh Mohan committee**, **Shyamala Gopinath Committee** have recommended **linking small savings rates to G-sec yields**.
2. The important recommendations of these committees are, For example,
 - One, The Reddy committee suggested small savings rates should be reset once a year. Instead of the current practice of revising it quarterly.
 - Two, the Reddy Committee recommended that the **rates should never be revised more than 50 basis points**. On the other hand, the Gopinath Committee recommended that the **rates should never be revised more than 100 basis points** in a year.
 - However, due to quarterly revisions, many times the basis points have reduced by more than 100 owing to low G-sec yields.
 - For example, Interest in the Senior Citizens' Saving Scheme was cut to 7.4 per cent, effective from April 2020, from 8.7 per cent before.
 - **Rakesh Mohan Committee** recommended using a weighted average of G-sec yields over the preceding two years in calculating interest rates of SSS.
3. However, the present move is contradictory to the current approach of the Finance ministry.

The justification given by the government for reducing the interest rate of SSS:

- One, people's dependence on small savings schemes had significantly declined due to the expansion of the banking sector.
- Two, for those who used small savings as safety nets there were other alternatives such as an old-age pension scheme.
- Three, a market-determined rate will provide a fair outcome. But this is not true because many times **RBI has intervened in the market to reduce G-sec yields** that directly affect the interest rate of SSS.

What is the way forward?

- One, the government Should **reset the rates annually** in line with various high-level committee recommendations.
- Two, the government **should keep the revision under 100 basis points** and allowing small savings rates a spread of at least 50 basis points over and above the G-sec yields.
- Revisiting the suggestion made by the **Rakesh Mohan Committee** to use a weighted average of G-sec yields over the preceding two years.

21. Need for a robust Personal Data Protection Bill

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs-3: Basics of Cyber Security

Synopsis: Some concerns in the draft **Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019** needs to be addressed to make it more effective.

Background

- After the Pandemic, many people are participating in the digital economy. For example, online purchase of groceries, telemedicine, e-education, etc.,
- During the same period, the number of personal data breaches from major digital service providers has increased. For example, The recent alleged data breach at **MobiKwik** (data of 9.9 crore users at risk).
- Hence, robust data protection regulations are necessary to prevent such events and the existing data protection regulations in India have become inadequate.
- The K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd) v. Union of India case, established the right to privacy as a fundamental right. Thus, a more robust data protection legislation is desirable.
- Currently, a revised version of **The Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019**, is under scrutiny by a Joint Parliamentary Committee. It can provide adequate protection to users and their personal data.

What are the issues in the existing data protection regulations?

In India, at present, data protection is governed by the Information Technology Act, 2000, and various other sectoral regulations. However, they are inadequate because of the following reasons,

1. First, by obtaining users' consent to processing personal data, entities are able to override the data protection rules.
 - This is problematic because users might not understand the terms and conditions or the implications of giving consent.
2. Second, the current framework while emphasizes **data security** it does not give importance to **data privacy**. For example, the provision on users' preferences on how his personal data can be processed is unclear. As a result, entities could use the data for purposes different to those that the user consented to.
3. Third, the data protection provisions under the IT Act does not apply to government agencies. This limits the efficacy of data protection framework since governments are collecting and processing large amounts of personal data.
4. Fourth, the current regime has become inadequate in addressing risks emerging from new developments in data processing technology.

How the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 can be more effective than the current regulations in place?

1. **First**, the Bill seeks to apply the data protection regime to both government and private entities across all sectors.
2. **Second**, the Bill emphasizes data security and data privacy equally. For example, to protect personal data the entities will have to maintain security safeguards. Similarly, to protect the data privacy of its users, the entities will have to fulfill a set of data protection obligations and transparency and accountability measures that govern how entities can process personal data.
3. **Third**, the Bill gives users a set of rights over their personal data and means to exercise those rights. For instance, a user will be able to obtain information about the different kinds of personal data that an entity has about them and how the entity is processing that data.

4. **Fourth**, the Bill seeks to create an independent regulator known as the **Data Protection Authority (DPA)** to monitor and regulate data processing activities. The DPA will grievance redressal authority when entities do not comply with their obligations under the regime.

Concerns regarding Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019

However, there are few concerns regarding the draft bill that needs to be addressed.

1. One, it gives wide exemptions to government agencies, and thereby it dilutes user protection safeguards.
 - For example, under clause 35, the Central government can exempt any government agency from complying with the Bill. This allows Government agencies to process personal data without following any safeguard under the Bill. This could create severe privacy risks for users.
2. Two, enforcement of various user protection safeguards such as rights and remedies could be difficult for users. For instance, the Bill threatens legal consequences for users who withdraw their consent for a data processing activity. In practice, this could discourage users from withdrawing consent for processing activities that they want to opt-out.

The above-mentioned concerns should be addressed to bring a stronger and more effective data protection regime in India.

22. India should Ensure Climate Justice in Net Zero Target Debate

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Conservation, Environmental Pollution, and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.

Synopsis: India needs to propose an alternative formulation that ensures Climate Justice in achieving the 'net-zero target'.

Background

- Recently, the United States Special Presidential Envoy for Climate visited India. Both sides discussed briefly about their cooperation on climate change and strategy for long term priorities and long-term targets.
- Also, S. President Joe Biden's '**Leaders' Summit on Climate**' is scheduled on April 22-23. This summit is expected to set a stage for major countries to outline their climate plans.
- Today, climate action to reduce GHG emissions has become equal to achieving a **net-zero** emission target by 2050.
- However, achieving net zero emissions have created a dilemma for the fast-growing developing countries like India. Because, these countries need carbon space to develop, and they are also among the most vulnerable countries to climate change.

What are the different views on adopting Net zero emission targets in India?

- The debate on whether India should declare a net-zero target or not has centred around two alternative strategies.
 - One view supports delegitimizing long-term targets and to focus on measurable near-term progress.
 - Whereas the other view argues that without long-term targets, the path to decarbonization has little value.

Which way to decide?

- Neither the short- nor the long-term targets delink from the climate action plan.

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- Because a short-term target such as improvements in energy efficiency and fast penetration of electric vehicles cannot substitute a clear long-term target. Also, avoiding net zero emission targets will make India look like a climate laggard.
- Rather, India should attempt to reframe the net-zero debate on the basis of **climate justice**. Climate justice ensures that countries are equitably responsible based on their past and future emission.
- This approach will facilitate economic advancement and climate responsibility on parallel lines without compromising one another.

How climate justice can be ensured?

To ensure principles of climate justice, a formula that combines **per capita income** and **aggregate emissions** is required.

1. First, high-income countries (i.e., per capita income of \$12,536 or more in 2019 prices) should achieve net-zero emissions within 15-20 Years. For instance,
 - European Union or the United States needs to achieve net-zero emissions by 2035-40, rather than 2050.
 - Whereas India, which may become a high-income economy around 2050, should need to achieve net-zero emissions by 2070.
 - Even by this method, high-income countries will have a longer transition period between peaking emissions and net-zero compared to India, according to **Council on Energy, Environment and Water report**.
2. **Second**, Countries that are not in the high-income category should aim to reduce their Aggregate emissions (historical emission + future emission) compared to high-income countries. Because this idea accounts for the advantages enjoyed by developing countries to tap into technological advances and cost reductions.
 - For example, India benefited from falling solar costs and was able to aim higher for its renewable energy ambitions.
 - This will also create the conditions for further innovation and investment in climate-friendly infrastructure, technologies, business models, and behavioral changes.
 - As climate mitigation technologies become more widely available and cheaper, all countries will be able to achieve net-zero much earlier.

Countries need both short-term and long-term targets to establish certainty of action, the credibility of promises and create incentives for markets to respond.

23. Chenab Bridge – An Icon of Indian Railways Heritage

Source- [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- **GS 3** – Economy – Infrastructure.

Synopsis – Indian Railway is building modern engineering marvels such as **Chenab Bridge** and **Anji Khad Bridge**. Decades from now, they will serve as the Railways' heritage.

Introduction-

- Over the last 160 years, railway engineers built a number of 'Mega Structures,' including railway bridges.
- The Indian Railway has 1,50,390 Bridges, out of which 702 are important, 12,256 major and 1,37,432 minor bridges.
- According to 2015 CAG report there are 36,470 Bridges which are more than 100 years old and 6,680 Bridges more than 140 years old.
- **Causey Arch in England**, designed in 1725-26, is the world's oldest surviving railway bridge.

Challenges during construction of Railway bridge in Hilly areas

Tough Terrain- Bridge building in a hilly area presents its own set of challenges. The climatic conditions, geological features, and hydrological parameters differ greatly in a hilly environment. It makes construction conditions difficult.

- Deep gorges, severely cold temperatures, rivers with bouldery beds, strong winds, landslides are some example of obstacles in building bridges in hilly areas.

Examples of modern marvel of Indian Bridge-

- **Irang Bridge** – In Manipur, Indian Railways is building **the world's tallest pier bridge** across the river Ijai. The pier bridge will be 141 metres tall surpassing the existing record of 139 metres of the Mala-Rijeka Viaduct in Europe.
- **New Pamban bridge** – Indian Railways first vertical lift rail-sea bridge. The New Pamban Bridge will be over 2 kilometers long when completed. It will allow ships and steamers to pass.
- **Bogibeel Bridge** – Bogibeel Bridge, on the Brahmaputra River in Assam, is **India's longest rail-road bridge**.
- **Chenab Bridge** – Across the Chenab river, the world's highest steel arch bridge is being built. It has a height of 359 metres from the bed level to the centre of the arch. Chenab Bridge will term as a future icon of Indian Railways heritage.

What is the difference between Tallest Bridge and Highest Bridge?

- **Tallest Bridge** – Distance from the highest portion of the bridge to the surface of the water.
- **Highest Bridge-** The highest Bridge is defined in terms of deck height. The deck height of a bridge is the maximum vertical drop distance between the bridge deck and the ground or water surface beneath the bridge span.

24. Challenges Posed by Phasing Out Coal Use in India

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Conservation, Environmental Pollution, and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment

Synopsis:

India is considering a proposal to adopt a net-zero emission target. This demands a [phase-out of coal use](#) which would pose numerous challenges.

Background:

- The UN has urged wealthy nations to end coal use by 2030.
- Similarly, a private member bill was introduced in Lok Sabha in March 2021. The bill aims to adopt a net-zero emission target by 2050.
- A lot of debates after this, have **given surety of a coal use phase-out in near future**.
 - As the conversation on net-zero emissions has almost always come after or gone hand-in-hand with a coal phaseout plan.

Challenges posed by ending coal use:

1. **Energy Security:** As currently 70% of India's energy needs are fulfilled by coal. In 2019-20, the country consumed approximately 942 million tonnes (MT) of coal. Out of this, 730 MT was produced domestically.
2. **Social Challenges:** There would be **significant job losses** post the phase-out. Coal India Limited and Singareni Collieries Company Limited employ 2.24 lakh workers. Their job loss will impact almost 9 lakh people considering a four-person household.

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- Further, a setback to workers in coal-consuming sectors like power, steel, sponge iron, etc. will also be seen.
3. **Economic Challenges:** In FY20, the Centre alone collected approximately Rs 29,200 crore in GST compensation cess from coal. The revenue from coal allows centre and states to undertake various development activities.
- Similarly, 40 percent of total freight revenues in railways are generated from coal.
4. **Data Discrepancies:** This will hinder prudent policy formulation and adaptation plans in the future.
- For instance, robust data on contract employees working for mine development operators (MDOs) is not available.
 - Similarly, there is a lack of data for statecraft coal and subsistence coal economies.
 - Statecraft Coal – non-legal small scale coal mines in the northeast
 - Subsistence Coal – small-scale collieries run on village commons usually bordering formal mines.
 - Data on workers' skill set, education parameters, caste, and willingness to migrate is also not available.

Way Forward:

- India must ensure adequate support for people and communities dependent on the sector. It can learn from plans of other countries like:
 - **German coal phaseout plan:** It seeks to end coal burning by 2038. It also involves an investment of more than 50 billion euros for mining and plant operators, impacted regions, and employees.
 - **US's Interagency Working Group:** It is supposed to deliver resources that will revitalise the coal, oil, and gas communities.
 - **Canada's coal phase-out plan:** As per the plan, the phase-out will happen by 2030. A **Just Transition Task Force** has been created for the welfare of dependent communities.
- The phase-out plan should also ensure social, climate, economic and environmental justice.

25. Prospects of India's Automotive industry

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs3: Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment Prospects of India's Automotive industry

Synopsis: Automotive Industry will help India achieve a \$5 trillion economy. A favourable government policy can support the Auto industry to grow by 10-12 per cent per year for the next 10 years.

Recent developments in India's automotive industry

- **Increase in Demand:** for example, in the last 3 decades passenger vehicle volume increased 15 times, the SUV 24 times, and the two-wheeler 12 times.
- **Improvement in Quality and efficiency:** The technology features, the safety, the comfort, the emissions, and the energy consumption have improved much better than 3 decades ago.
- **Developments in supply chain ecosystem:**
 - India's Indigenous supplier base has become globally competitive.
 - Quality defects have been reduced by 90 percent.

- India's engineering capabilities like their ability to design, engineer, and develop world-class products completely in India, improved a lot.

This has contributed to the increase in the global rank of the industry from 16th then to 5th now.

Significance of Automotive Industry to India's economic growth

1. **First, contributes to the development of the MSME sector.** For example, The MSME share of value-addition to a car is 35 percent. Further the automotive after market provides economic opportunities to thousands of MSMEs engaged in the auto value chain.
2. **Second, boost to the manufacturing sector.** The industry contributes 6.4 percent to GDP and around 35 percent to manufacturing GDP.
3. **Third, provides employment.** It supports over 8 million jobs directly and as many as 30 million more in the value chain.
4. **Fourth, attracts significant investments.** For instance, it has attracted \$35 billion over the last 10 years.
5. **Fifth, source of foreign capital. For example,** it generates export revenue of \$27 billion that is nearly 8 percent of the total merchandise exports from India.

Suggestions to support the growth of the Automotive industry

India's automotive industry contribution to GDP is low compared to countries like Korea, Germany, Thailand, Germany, and Japan. The contribution, there, is more than 10 percent of the country's GDP. The following measures need to be taken

1. **First,** India needs to make a niche for itself in EV tech mobility through rapid localization of EV tech in the production and supply chain.
2. **Second,** need to enhance local value addition to invest more in skill development and R&D. It will make it globally competitive in cost, quality, and technology.
3. **Three,** to improve exports India needs to sign bilateral treaties to get favorable tariff regimes.
4. **Four,** Also, there is a need to rationalize the extremely high GST rates on automobiles in a phase-wise manner.
5. **Five,** the **Automotive Mission Plan 2026** released by the government needs to revise in the current context by taking inputs from the industry.

If the above steps are implemented with a will, India's automotive industry will become a \$200 billion industry with exports of \$50 billion by 2026.

26. IMD's new Dynamical Forecast Model

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- GS 3 – Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

Synopsis – IMD recently updated the status of the monsoon and predicted a normal monsoon this year. IMD has adopted a new forecast dynamical model. It will allow farmers, government officials, disaster managers, and other stakeholders to better prepare for their activities.

Introduction-

- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast a normal monsoon for this year.
- The southwest monsoon in 2021, which will begin in June, is forecast to be regular, with 98 percent of the Long Period Average rainfall (LPA).
- During the monsoon season, weak El Nino conditions are likely to prevail, with severity decreasing as the season progresses.

- Rainfall between 96 and 104 percent of the **Long Period Average** [LPA] is considered normal.

What is the importance of the new Dynamical monsoon Model?

New Dynamical Monsoon Model uses the evolving weather patterns to predict monsoon. It is unlike the traditional method, in which the forecast was based on a fixed set of meteorological variables.

- Also, dynamic models are useful for predicting rainfall over smaller spatial and temporal scales. It is not possible with IMD's previous statistical forecasting method.
- IMD will forecast rainfall for June and September, using this model. It was previously difficult to predict due to the monsoon's arrival and departure.
- There will also be forecasts for the monsoon core zone [MCZ]. It represents most of the rain-fed agriculture regions in the country.

Why is it important to correctly forecast rainfall?

1. **For disaster preparedness** – Accurate forecasts will aid in the implementation of preventative measures, the reduction of vulnerabilities. It can also prevent extreme events from turning into disasters.
 - **For example-** Preparation of a heat plan/forest fires plan in case of hot summer.
2. **For agriculture purposes** – Farmers can decide on sowing time based on local conditions. Also, they can decide the type of crop that is best suited to the conditions, using accurate forecasting.
3. **For Government planning-** the Centre and states can prepare better joint plans with respect to agriculture; such as drought action plan, MSP and buffer creation. It can better use and optimize government schemes
4. **For several business and service sector industries** which need weather products.

Way forward-

IMD's move from a statistical to Dynamical model will improve the accuracy of its forecast. So that farmers, policymakers, local administration, scientists & aid organizations can make most of it.

27. Introducing Green Targets for Corporates

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: **GS-3:** Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation

Synopsis: The government can introduce green targets and obligations on corporates. Adoption of such targets will help the global fight in Climate change.

Introduction:

The massive levels of production, consumption, and disposal of goods and services benefited economic growth. But it slowed the replenishment cycle of limited resources. This is evident from the impacts of [Climate Change](#).

Both the consumers and corporations have to equally bear the growth of large-scale manufacturing and services and their impact on Climate Change. So the loss of resources and increase in greenhouse gas emissions is the responsibility of both the consumers and corporations.

Consumers can reduce their usage through awareness campaigns. But so far, everyone is focussing on sustainable efforts by the government and their policies. But the impact of corporations is neglected. Indian corporations can become a major help in India's story of sustainable growth by achieving 'green targets'.

What are Green targets?

These are commercial contracts. Under this, the contracting parties set a mandate to cut down greenhouse gas emissions at different stages of delivery of goods/services. This includes all the phases of industry such as design, manufacturing, transportation, operations, and waste disposal.

How India can enforce Green Targets?

1. The government can introduce the green targets when the companies participate in the tender process. During these '**green tenders**,' the government can introduce '**Green qualifications**'. This includes a range of qualifications from pre-defined usage of 'green energy' to adequate on-site waste management, reducing carbon emissions, etc.
2. Once the bidding process is complete, then the government can sign a contracting agreement (**green contract**). Under this, the government can prescribe the '**green obligations**'.
3. These green contracts are necessary as this makes the obligations binding and legally enforceable for the corporates. Further, these green contracts will vary from one industry to another.
4. Thus, the green targets can help in cutting down emissions. The targets can provide good quality and energy-efficient infrastructure, reducing noise, air, and water pollution and ensuring eco-friendly means of transportation within corporates like bicycles, etc.

How to enforce these 'green obligations' and achieve 'green targets'?

1. The government can formulate measurement criteria and conduct performance audits against these 'green obligations'.
2. During these, the government has to identify the non-performer. Further, the government has to prescribe penalties for non-compliance with such green obligations.
3. The government can also make the green obligations trickle down to all levels of the supply chain.

The economic cost of executing green contracts may be greater than normal contracts. But the corporates have to undertake such green targets to attain greater benefit to the environment.

28. India needs to be cautious before joining Global Minimum Tax rate

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis: A Global minimum tax rate

<https://blog.forumias.com/india-needs-to-be-cautious-before-joining-global-minimum-tax-rate/> is beneficial for the US. But India need to rethink before joining such international tax proposals

Introduction:

The US Treasury's call for a [global minimum tax rate](#) is gaining a global endorsement. But the goal of a global minimum tax is not only to end the race to the corporate tax but also to end the right to the tax of developing countries.

Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) Programme:

1. Big tech companies are able to conduct economic activities in countries without their physical presence. Further, they also move profits to low-tax jurisdictions.

2. The **Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) programme** were **initiated in 2013**. It aims to curb practices that allowed companies to reduce their tax liabilities by exploiting loopholes in the tax law. But to tax Big tech companies the countries have to sign a BEPS agreement among themselves.
3. So the OECD also asked the countries in the BEPS framework to adopt a consensus-based outcome instead of the country's individual moves.

Challenges to BEPS Programme:

But there are few countries that are not ready to sign BEPS agreements.

1. Over the past decades, there are many countries that enacted tax policies specifically aimed at attracting multinational business. These countries **attract investment by lowering corporate tax rates**. This, in turn, has pushed other countries to lower their rates as well to remain competitive.
2. Also, there are few Developing countries as well that are not sure if they will receive the right to tax the mobile incomes of Big tech companies

The OECD policy to solve BEPS issues:

Addressing this concern, the OECD published a policy note. In that, it bifurcated the challenge of BEPS into two pillars.

- a. **Pillar 1:** It addresses the issue of reallocation of taxing rights to all the countries
- b. **Pillar 2:** This pillar aims to address all the remaining issues in the BEPS program.

Concerns with the OECD policy proposal:

The blueprints of this policy proposal were released in October 2020. But, the experts mention few concerns with the OECD policy note. Such as,

- **Complexity in taxing Big techs:** The experts found the policy of OECD as a more complex one to implement.
- **Profit allocation:** This is the most contentious provision of the policy. As the policy allocated only a fraction of the profits of Big Techs to the markets (Operating country of Big techs). The policy also allocated more profits to the source country.

Intermediate Taxation of Big Tech:

- With the blueprints are under consideration, the Big techs gained profits. On the other hand, the tax base of countries, including India, remains exposed to the risk of under or non-taxation.
- To fix this situation, countries implemented digital services tax on revenues of Big tech companies.
- But the US on the other hand launched inquiries on these countries under their Trade Act 1974.

The path to global minimum tax rate:

After the Biden administration came into force in the US, it agreed to work on a consensus-based solution.

1. Further, the US Treasury suggested that it will apply the **pillar 1 proposal** to the top 100 companies. This includes showing a non-discriminatory policy to the US companies in the top 100. Further, the US also working on simplification of the proposal.
2. With regard to **pillar 2 proposals**, the US decided to raise the corporate tax rate to 28 percent. This is decided along with the **harmonisation of rates across countries**. This includes,

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- **Defining minimum tax rate** for the world, **after the global consensus** on the effective tax rate for companies. (So, the minimum tax rate is not yet decided)
- After fixing the minimum tax rate, the countries will compare the multinational enterprise's effective tax rate in each jurisdiction. Especially in places where the low tax rate is paid.
- A **top-up tax** will apply for the remaining profits. But there is an ambiguity on who will tax these remaining profits?
- In general, the country, where the ultimate parent entity resides, is where the tax is first applicable. Applying that concept, then **30 percent of the Forbes 2000 companies are located in the US**. So, the **implementation of this proposal best serves the needs of the US**.

Can India join the minimum tax rate proposal?

1. India needs to assess the situation carefully. Because the proposal will apply to companies with global revenues above Euro 750 million. So, committing wrongly will lose India's taxing rights.
2. Moreover, India also witnessed a consistent rise in the effective tax rate, which is now close to 26 percent.
3. Further, committing such a minimum tax rate also need India to reform its tax systems accordingly. Especially allowing foreign countries to tax the incomes that are perceived to be under-taxed in India.

For the past few years, India adopted **legal measures** to tax incomes of companies that avoid physical presence in India. But if global consensus is there for a minimum tax rate, then it is necessary for India to reflect the two pillars of international tax reform.

29. Measures to Create Safe Online Spaces For Children

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Science and Technology- Developments and their Applications and Effects in Everyday Life.

Synopsis: This article explains the concerns about child safety in online spaces and suggests measures to create safe online spaces for children.

Background

- The children of the current generation are exposed to a world that is increasingly powered by **virtual reality** and **artificial intelligence** (AI). For example, **Alexa, YouTube wormholes**,
- The Industrial revolution 4.0 has brought two main concerns towards Child's safety and growth opportunities.
 - One, universal access to digital connectivity
 - Second, secured digital space for Children

What are the possible threats to Children due to their premature exposure to AI?

- **First, concerns over Child safety**. For instance, many digital platforms such as Fortnite, Battle Royale, provide online space for children to socialise with their friends. But such platforms also serve as "honeypots" for child predators. Surveillance or supervision by parents over Child's Online activity has also become more difficult due to the Digitalisation of education.
- **Second, digital addiction** is another major concern among children. The AI-driven video games and social networks are designed to keep Children attracted to their online sites. This makes them prey to digital addiction.

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- **Third, it disturbs their cognitive growth** at a very young age. For instance, their earlier exposure to the negative side of the digital space (such as fake news, conspiracy theories, hype, online bullying, hate speech) disturbs their understanding of this world.
- **Fourth, concern over hacking and spying on children.** For instance, many AI toys are used to promote enhanced literacy, social skills, and language development. However, they also collect data on the children in the absence of any regulatory framework. Recently, Germany banned **Cayla**, an Internet-connected doll, because of concerns that it could be hacked and used to spy on children.
- **Fifth**, though the usage of [AI in education](#) improves educational outcomes it also brings new challenges. **For instance**, pedagogical approaches to the child's needs such as intelligent tutoring systems, tailored curriculum plans, engaging interactive learning experiences can improve educational outcomes. However, algorithms can also amplify existing problems with education systems. For example,
 - **One**, failure in AI's algorithm can deprive thousands of students of college admissions and scholarships.
 - **Two**, open access to educational and performance data on children can harm their future opportunities

What needs to be done?

- **First**, need to reduce the **digital divide gap** by providing Internet access to all children. According to UNICEF and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), nearly two-thirds of the world's children do not have access to the Internet at home.
- **Second**, need for legal and technological safeguards to regulate AI products. For example,
 - **Technological safeguards like**— trustworthy certification and rating systems,
 - **Legal safeguards like**— banning anonymous accounts, restriction on algorithmic manipulation, profiling and data collection, etc.,
- **Third, the need** to create greater awareness among parents, guardians, and children on how AI works to prevent them from future online risks.
- **Fourth**, enforcing ethical principles of **non-discrimination and fairness** in the policy and design of the AI system.
- **Fifth**, need to develop online culture tools that help prevent addiction and also promote attention-building skills, social-emotional learning capabilities.
- **Sixth**, Laws and policies to prevent a range of abuses and violence, such as the National Policy for Children (2013), can be extended for children in a digital space.
- A recent, landmark decision by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and fulfilling all children's rights in the digital environment is a step in the right direction towards ensuring **Ethical AI for Generation AI**.

30. Concerns Associated to Ken-Betwa Link project

Source – [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus – **GS 3** – Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Synopsis –The Ken-Betwa link project raised serious concerns about the project's benefits and the massive environmental impact it would have.

Introduction-

- On **World Water Day (March 22nd)**, MP and UP signed a tripartite agreement with the Centre to introduce the Ken-Betwa link Project (KBLP).

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- But the project will have a significant environmental impact, and its benefits are uncertain.
- The project would be wasting significant sums of public funds. Whereas the project will do little to address Bundelkhand's water shortages.

What is KEN-Betwa Project?

The Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP) **aims to transfer surplus water** from the Ken river in MP to Betwa in UP. It will provide water to irrigate the drought-prone Bundelkhand area, which is spread across two states' districts.

- Ken-Betwa Link Project is the first project under the National Perspective Plan for **the interlinking of rivers**.
- The central government has proposed a 90:10 funding pattern for the Ken Betwa Interlinking Project. The centre bearing 90 percent of the total estimated cost.

Advantage of Interlining of Ken-Betwa Rivers-

1. **First, Irrigation** – The project will provide sustainable means of irrigation water to the Bundelkhand region in U.P. and M.P. It will reduce excessive dependence on groundwater.
 - a. The to-be-built Daudhan dam will irrigate nearly 6,00,000 hectares in four districts in M.P. and 2,51,000 hectares in four districts in U.P.
2. **Second, Disaster mitigation**- The river linking project will be a solution to recurring droughts in the Bundelkhand region.
3. **Third, Electricity Production**- The project will generate 103 MW of hydropower and provide drinking water to 62 lakh people.

Concern related to the project

- **First, Environmental concern-**
 - The **12,500 hectares of land will submerge** by the project.
 - The project would harm **Panna tiger reserve**. It will cause irreversible damage to around 40% of the tiger reserve's area.
 - **Disrupting ecosystems** – Approximately 7.2 lakh trees will cut down. This will have an impact on the rainfall of the region.
- **Second, The project is not economically viable-**
 - In the past few years, the river did not always flow in a steady stream.
 - There is a significant financial expense associated with project implementation and maintenance. It is increasing as a result of project delays.
 - Another challenge would be that the Ken River flows 60-70 feet lower than the Betwa River. It requires at least 30% of the 103 MW produced power to pump the water up.
- **Third, Clearance issue**- The Supreme Court's Central Empowered Committee, which had raised questions about the Ken-Betwa project, did not issue a clearance.

Way forward-

The sustainable and cost-effective alternatives to the Ken-Betwa project have not been considered.

- Government should consider **multiple water-harvesting** and **water-conservation methods**. It could adequately store and efficiently make use of rainfall the region receives annually, without the need for building a reservoir and dam.

31. Short Term Targeted Approach to Achieve Net Zero Emissions Target

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Conservation, Environmental Pollution, and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment

Synopsis: India needs to follow a sector-wise Short term targeted approach with a focus on achieving short-term targets. Rather than admitting the long-term goal of achieving Net-Zero emissions target by 2050.

Background

- The **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 1.5 °C report** called for global carbon emissions to reach net-zero by 2050.
- Presently, the target to achieve the net-zero target by 2050 is strongly put forward as the solution to achieve **Paris climate targets**.
- The US will organize the 'Leaders' **Climate Summit** this week, consequently, India is under pressure to adopt a net-zero target by 2050.

Should India adopt net-zero target by 2050?

- India is a climate-vulnerable country and therefore India must also contribute to limit global temperature rise.
- However, India should factor in the history of global climate negotiations and its own developmental needs before announcing its contributions. For example,
 - India is still a very poor country with a significant development deficit. Further, India's per-capita carbon emissions are less than half the world average.

Further, India should compel developed countries to reach net-zero before 2050. Since developed countries made use of a larger portion of the carbon space.

How India Could Contribute?

- India needs to focus on Short term targeted approach of low-carbon development pathways that combine competitiveness, job-creation, distributional justice, and low pollution. This approach will be consistent with India moving towards net-zero emissions.
- A pragmatic approach towards low carbon development in the Power sector is illustrated as an example below. A similar approach to other sectors can be adopted.

What changes the power sector requires?

- De-carbonizing power sector will help India achieve its net-zero emissions. Since it is the single largest source (about 40%) of India's greenhouse gas emissions.
- Till now, India has focused only on expanding renewable electricity capacity. For instance, 175GW of renewable capacity by 2022 and 450GW of renewable capacity by 2030.
- But India should also aim at limiting the expansion of coal-based electricity capacity. Coal accounts for roughly 75% of the electricity today.

How to bring about those changes?

1. **First**, India needs to pledge that it will reach peak coal electricity capacity by 2030. It would be beneficial for India, since coal is increasingly uneconomic, and phasing it out will bring local gains, such as reduced air pollution, climate mitigation, etc.,
2. **Second**, the creation of a multi-stakeholder **Just Transition Commission** representing all levels of government and the affected communities. This is necessary because the transition costs of a low-carbon future should not affect India's poor.

3. **Third**, address existing problems of the Power sector such as the poor finances and management of distribution companies.
4. **Fourth**, India should aim to become a leader in technologies of the future such as electricity storage, smart grids through a partnership with the private sector.
5. **Fifth**, India's electricity transition should couple with job creation and global competitiveness.
6. **Sixth**, Enhancing the efficiency of electricity use is important to decarbonize the electricity supply. For instance, Air conditioners, fans, and refrigerators together consume about 60% of the electricity in households. Increasing the efficiency of electric appliances will not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions will also lower consumer electricity bills.

Way forward

1. Such a sector-by-sector approach can be developed for other sectors to set India on the path toward net-zero emissions target.
2. Going further, India may even consider committing to submit plausible pathways and timelines to achieving net-zero emissions target as part of its future pledges. It will give India adequate time to
 - o One, undertake detailed assessments of its development needs and low-carbon opportunities.
 - o Two, to assess the seriousness of the net-zero actions by developed countries,
 - o Three, to assess the potential geopolitical and geo-economic risks of over-dependence on certain countries for technologies or materials.
 - o Four, to develop a strategic road map to enhance its own technology and manufacturing competence as part of the global clean energy supply chain.

32. Data Revolution and New Global Order

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security

Synopsis:

The Digital Data Revolution will shape the new global order. It would give Asia a strategic advantage in the world. India must also be prepared to play a key role in the hyper-connected world.

Background:

- There has been a shift of global power from the Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific in recent times.
- This shift is marked by advancement in “Digital Data Revolution’ while the earlier order was created by the Industrial Revolution.
- However, this data revolution has created some strategic implications.

Strategic Implications of the Data revolution:

- Data has created a symbiotic (mutually beneficial) relationship between military and civilian systems. Today cyber security has become national security. Thus, it demands a new military doctrine and a diplomatic framework.
- Data has **blurred the line between domestic and foreign policy** and calls for establishing new global rules.
- Further, a growth in smart phone-based e-commerce is generating massive amounts of data. It would give a **sustained productivity advantage to Asia**.

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- Data streams have acquired a central position in Global trade. Further, a country's economic and national power is dependent on data.

These factors allow India to negotiate new rules as an equal with the U.S. and China. The rules must be formulated keeping in mind the new dynamics.

New Dynamics:

- **China**
 - It has made use of data streams and emerged as the second-largest economy.
 - It also has a \$ 53 trillion mobile payments market and acquires a global share of 50%.
 - Furthermore, It has formed a joint venture with SWIFT for cross-border payments. The country also suggested foundational principles for interoperability between central bank digital currencies at the Bank for International Settlement.
 - However, it is still highly dependent on semiconductors and unable to avoid US sanctions on banks, 5G, and cloud computing companies.
 - Thus, it is trying hard to overcome this weakness by
 - Distorting dollar-based trade through its e-yuan
 - Launching a \$1.4 trillion science and technology strategy
- **U.S**
 - The conventional deterrence capabilities of US have reduced. It now puts more focus on diplomacy than military power to resolve conflicts with China.
 - In the mobile payments market, only around 30% of consumers use digital means and the total volume of mobile payments is less than \$100 billion.
 - The country appears to be losing its dominant position to China in the global order.
- **India**
 - In the mobile payments' sphere, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) volume is expected to cross \$1 trillion by 2025.
 - The goal is to create a \$5-trillion economy by 2025.
 - It faces a challenge of :
 - Balancing engagement with major powers and
 - Retaining its data for innovation and competitive advantage.

Factors showing India's crucial position in shaping the new global order:

- China is India's largest trading partner despite recent border clashes. Also, both the countries are uncomfortable with:
 - Treating Western values as universal values
 - The U.S. interpretation of Freedom of Navigation rules in others' territorial waters
- The US wants to invest heavily in India and leverage the Indian markets, a strategy similar to China's belt and initiative. Further India is seen as a reliable partner to curb Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific.
- New Delhi's Indo-Pacific vision is premised on 'ASEAN centrality and the common pursuit of prosperity'.
- The EU is also determined to enhance its influence in the Indo-Pacific region. This automatically induces the grouping to improve its relation with India.

Way Forward:

- India is part of both U.S. and China-led strategic groupings which gives it a robust development potential.

- Further, the country must be prepared to play a key role in moulding rules for the hyper-connected world. This would help it in realising its potential of becoming the 2nd largest economy.

33. Need to Prioritise Vaccination for Migrant workers

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis: The migrant workers contribute significantly to the economy, however, they are also more vulnerable to the Covid crisis. Hence, the government needs to prioritize Vaccination for the migrant population.

Background

- COVID-19 vaccines are being rolled out across the nation and nearly 105 million Indians have been vaccinated so far.
- Priorities for vaccination in India are based on occupation, age and health conditions.
- But the migrant community with no specific definitions based on any criteria, are not on the priority list for vaccination

Why Migrant population needs to be added in the priority list for vaccination?

First, the Migrant Population is more vulnerable to the Covid crisis than any other community. For instance,

- One, Covid crisis has severely impacted their livelihood opportunities. During lockdown, millions of migrant workers lost their jobs, forcing them and their families to poverty.
- Two, owing to their informal employment, they lack access to adequate healthcare, nutrition, housing as well as sanitation facilities.
- Three, the COVID-19 crisis displaced nearly 200 million migrants. It was the second-largest population displacement since Partition

Second, despite their informal nature they contribute significantly to the Indian economy. For instance,

- Out of 90 percent of work in the informal sector, 75 percent of work comes from migrants. Further, vulnerable circular migrants manage most of the essential services.

Third, lack of access to vaccination will deprive them of employment opportunities. This will result in a drop in developmental indicators such as the health and education of migrant families. The migrant community needs an adequate support system to survive this Pandemic.

Fourth, further, failure to prioritize their vaccination will result in an economic crisis such as Low productivity, increasing unemployment, and breakdown of the critical informal services.

Welfare measures for the migrant population

To ensure food security, the government announced a Rs 1.7 lakh crore spending plan for the poor through cash transfers and other measures.

- One, the average daily wages under the MGNREGA were increased to Rs 202 from the earlier Rs 182.
- Two, free food grains for 80 million migrant workers through PDS were also announced.
- Three, the government-operated separate buses for the stranded migrants.

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- Four, the Centre issued an order instructing landlords not to demand rent and employers to pay wages without deduction during the lockdown period. (the order regarding payment of wages was later withdrawn)

Issues in welfare measure for migrants

Despite these efforts, the welfare measures have not been able to effectively address the problems of the migrant population.

- One, migrants were unable to benefit from the food security schemes. Because ration cards were area-specific and some fair-price stores were inaccessible during the lockdown. Further, lack of awareness about One Nation, One Ration Card schemes denied them access to free food grains.
- Two, the Supreme Court denied a plea requiring payment of the minimum wage to the migrant population. It stated that labourers had already been supplied with free food at the relief camps.

34. Future of Cryptocurrencies in India

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Money and Banking

Synopsis: The Government is planning to ban all private cryptocurrencies in India while supporting an RBI-backed cryptocurrency.

Background:

- The proposed Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2021 bans all private cryptocurrencies.
 - It lays down the regulatory framework for the launch of an “official digital currency”.
 - Further holders of private cryptocurrencies will have a 3-6 month exit period before banning the trading, mining, and issuing of cryptos.
- The Reserve Bank of India is also working on a Central Bank digital currency (CBDC) using DLT (Distributed Ledger Technology).
 - DLT is a digital system for recording the transaction of assets. It records the transactions and their details in multiple places at the same time.
 - Unlike traditional databases, distributed ledgers have no central data store or administration functionality.

Rationale behind such proposals:

- **Check on Volatility:** Private Cryptocurrencies are too volatile and pose a threat to India’s financial stability. A fiat currency shouldn’t portray such volatility. For instance, Bitcoin’s price has risen more than 10-fold over the last year due to:
 - Increased institutional exposure to Bitcoin
 - Global progress in fostering a friendlier legislative environment for cryptocurrencies
 - Supply reduction coupled with increasing demand.
- **Curb Illegal Activities:** In April 2018, RBI banned banks and other regulated entities from supporting crypto transactions after digital currencies were used for frauds. In March 2020, the Supreme Court clarified that crypto transactions were not illegal in India.
- **Ascertaining the Magnitude of Undisclosed Holdings:** Once private currencies are banned, then all investors would have to declare their true digital holdings in order to exit within the permissible window.

- As per an unofficial estimate, Indian investors hold around \$1.5 billion (Rs 10,000 crore) in digital currencies.

Way Forward:

- The government needs to clear the uncertainty regarding the legal status of cryptocurrencies in the minds of Indian investors.
- Further, it also needs to ascertain the economic and social impact of closing startups that function on private cryptocurrencies like Unocoin, Zebpay, etc.

35. National Hydrogen Energy Mission (NHEM)

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- GS 3 – Energy and Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

Synopsis – Challenges and suggestion to enhance commercial scale operation of green hydrogen in India.

National Hydrogen Energy Mission NHEM-

Indian prepares to launch the National Hydrogen Energy Mission (NHEM).

- The global target is to produce 1.45 million tonnes of green hydrogen by 2023.
- India currently consumes approximately 5.5 million tonnes of hydrogen, which is mainly derived from imported fossil fuels. With NHEM, India will be able to reduce its reliance on fossil fuel imports.
- **Steel, chemical, and transportation industries** are among the industries that will benefit from the NHEM. Owing to the amount of fossil fuels they consume, which can be directly substituted with hydrogen, they contribute to one-third of greenhouse gas emissions.

What is green hydrogen?

Green Hydrogen is pure hydrogen generated by using renewable energy such as solar power and wind energy. The by products are water and water vapour.

Challenges-

- **Transportation cost** – Majority of low-cost renewable energy resources are located far from potential demand centres. As a result, the cost of transportation from the plant to the demand centre rises.
- **High cost of production** – The technology used in production of green hydrogen is still in its early stages and is costly, which raises the cost of production.
- **Storage related issues**

Recommendations for scaling up commercial scale operation of green hydrogen in India-

- First, **Decentralized hydrogen production** – Decentralization must be promoted through open access of renewable power to an electrolyser (which splits water to form H₂ and O₂ using electricity).
 - This can be done by **transporting renewable energy directly from the plant to the refinery**, which will reduce transportation costs by 60% compared to shipping hydrogen through trucks.
- Second, **Continuous access to renewable energy for decentralized hydrogen production.**
- Third, **Need to blend green Hydrogen into existing conventional hydrogen process-**

- This would also aid in the development of a scientific understanding of the processes involved in large-scale hydrogen handling.
- Fourth, **Investment for R&D on green Hydrogen technology is required**– Green hydrogen processing technology is still in its early stages, requiring extensive research and development to advance.
 - This requires substantial investment in the research and development of hydrogen technologies. Policymakers need to facilitate investments.
- Lastly, **Focus on domestic manufacturing**
 - Need to establish an end-to-end electrolyser manufacturing facility.
 - Needs to secure supplies of raw materials.
 - Need manufacturing strategy that integrates with the global value chain and can maximize existing strengths.

Way forward-

With decentralized hydrogen production, continuous access to renewable energy, increased investment in R&D, capacity building, compatible legislation, and the ability to create demand among its vast population, India can be in a unique position to benefit from the green Hydrogen.

36. Important of Stepping Up National Climate Action Plans

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3

Synopsis: Governments must effectively step up their national climate action plans. There is an opportunity to bring consensus for that in the upcoming Leaders' Summit hosted by the United States.

Introduction

It is time for bold climate action. We need to limit global heating to 1.5 degrees Celsius to stop the climate crisis from becoming a permanent disaster.

- Reaching net-zero emissions of greenhouse gases by mid-century is needed. Every country, city, business, and the financial institution needs to join this league and adopt solid plans for reaching net-zero.
- The governments should be able to match this long-term ambition with solid actions to re-engineer our future.
- Under the Paris Agreement, all countries are committed to set their own national climate action plans and strengthen them every five years. To achieve them, decisive and effective actions are required.

What actions should be taken?

The new national plans must reduce global greenhouse gas pollution by at least 45 percent by 2030. Clearer policies should be set up to adapt to the effects of climate change and lift access to renewable energy.

- **Firstly, governments must step up their ambitions**, mainly the biggest-emitting countries. Removing coal from the electricity sector is a very important step to achieve the 1.5-degree goal.
 - Global coal use in electricity production must reduce by 80 percent below 2010 levels by 2030. This means developed nations have to phase out coal by 2030 and other countries must do this by 2040.
- **Secondly, no new coal plants should be built anywhere.** One-third of the global coal task force is more costly to run than building new renewables and storage. COP26 must indicate an end to coal.

- **Thirdly, workers in affected industries and the informal sector should be supported** as they switch jobs. Women and girls must be supported to drive transformation.
- **Fourthly, the developed nations should commit to provide** and assemble \$100 billion yearly by:
 - Doubling current levels of climate finance.
 - Devoting half of all climate finance to adaptation.
 - Stopping the international funding of coal.
 - Shifting subsidies from fossil fuels to renewable energy.
- **Fifthly, the G7 Summit in June provides an opportunity** for the world's richest nations to step up the needed financial commitments. It will confirm the success of COP26.
- **Lastly, the decision-makers everywhere have an important role to play.** By COP26, all multilateral and national development banks must have clear policies in place to fund the COVID recovery and change into strong economies in developing countries.
 - This should be done taking into account crippling debt levels and huge pressures on national budgets.

37. Green Hydrogen – The Fuel of the Future

Source – [Down To Earth](#)

Syllabus – GS 3 – Energy and Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation.

Synopsis – Green hydrogen is becoming a new alternative to fossil fuel. Currently, many countries are taking steps to move towards a hydrogen economy.

Introduction-

- Hydrogen is an energy carrier. It is converted into electricity by fuel cells, which generate electricity by mixing hydrogen and oxygen atoms.
- It will play an important role in delivering zero-emission transport. The pathway to use hydrogen economy includes **hydrogen production, storage, transport, and utilization.**

Importance of Hydrogen as a fuel

1. **Environment friendly-** Hydrogen is a clean fuel that, when consumed in a fuel cell, releases only water as a by-product. Due to their high efficiency and zero-or near zero-emissions operation, hydrogen has the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emission.
2. **Readily available** –It is a basic earth element and is very abundant, but challenging to separate hydrogen gas from its companion substances.
3. **Alternative to fuel** – It produces three times more energy than other fossil fuels.
4. **Hydrogen as an Energy Storage System-**
5. **Future' fuel** – Fossil fuels can no longer be used to meet the world's energy needs.

Concerns-

1. **Cost** – The greatest challenge for hydrogen production, particularly from renewable resources, is providing hydrogen at lower cost.
2. **Storage-** Moving even small amounts of Hydrogen is a very expensive matter. For that reason alone, the transport and storage of such a substance looks impractical.
3. **External energy source is required to isolate hydrogen** – It does not occur naturally as a gas on the Earth. It is always in combination with other elements such as water (H₂O).

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4. **Lesser production of green hydrogen** – Around 120 tons of hydrogen are produced annually and less than one per cent is green hydrogen.
5. **Low production of Electrolysers** – There is currently no major Indian manufacturer of **Electrolysers [splits water into hydrogen and oxygen]**. As a result, India is reportedly importing electrolysers, which makes the cost uneconomical.
6. **Limited technology for** compressing and storing hydrogen for automobiles.

Initiative taken by different nations and global companies in field of green hydrogen-

- **European Union-**
 - In June 2020, EU announced to install 40GW of renewable hydrogen electrolysers. It will produce up to 10 million tons of renewable hydrogen by 2030.
- **Saudi Arabia-**
 - Saudi Arabia is setting up a \$5 billion solar and wind energy plant to produce green hydrogen. On completion the plant will be the world's largest green hydrogen facility, producing 650 tons of green hydrogen.
- **India-**
 - During Budget 2021-22, FM launches the **National Hydrogen Energy Mission (NHEM)**. The goal is to produce 175GW of green hydrogen by 2022. It has set aside Rs 1,500 crore for the mission.
- **7 global companies launch Green Hydrogen catapult initiative-**
 - World's leading green hydrogen companies unite to drive 50-fold scale-up in six years. The New initiative aims to reduce costs to below \$2 per Kg, to transform energy across most carbon intensive industries, speeding the race to zero emissions.

Way forward-

- Green Hydrogen must be cost-competitive with conventional fuels. To reduce overall hydrogen cost, research must focus on improving technologies related to compressing and storing hydrogen for automobiles.
- Electrolyser manufacturing and deployment must be scaled up from the current capacity of 0.3 GW to nearly 5,000 GW by 2050.
- India should focus on pilot projects to get better understanding of the usage.

38. Importance of Decentralised Approach in Tackling the Pandemic

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

Synopsis:

The first wave of Covid 19 highlighted the importance of a local and decentralised approach in tackling the adverse impact of the Pandemic. The government should focus on this approach to minimize the vulnerabilities for the poor and marginalized in the second wave.

Background:

- Under the second wave of Covid 19 pandemic, the marginalised and vulnerable people are craving for the government's support.
- The pandemic struck the country in 2020 and highlighted the poor condition of India's economic system. This was followed by a series of lockdowns that brutally impacted the informal sector.

Dismal State of Indian Economy:

- 90% of the Indian economy is composed of the informal sector that provides no social security benefits or job security.
- Since 1991, there has been “jobless growth” in the formal sector and the new liberalisation policies showed little respect to ecological needs.
- A surge in the size of the informal workforce has been occurred as:
 - State policies have been formulated to serve the interests of the capitalist/industrial class. This is proven as the richest 5 percent of Indians now earn as much as the remaining 95 per cent.
 - The caste, class, and gender discrimination in society doesn't allow social mobility.
 - Lack of governmental efforts to make agriculture a lucrative profession
 - Displacement of people due to dams, mining, express ways, etc. projects with poor or no rehabilitation
- Very few informal workers enjoy some degree of security. These include the ones whose resource base (land, nature, tools, etc.) is intact or those who are able to access the benefits of the MGNREGA scheme.
- Despite such poor conditions, some alternate local models provided a ray of hope for poor people.

Successful Alternate Local Models during the Pandemic:

- Dalit women of the Deccan Development Society (DDS) ensured sustained food access for numerous villages of Telangana in 2020.
- Community health systems in Sittilingi panchayat, Tamil Nadu played a pivotal role in reducing the Covid spread.
- In Assam, Farm2Food worked with several thousand students to continue local food growing in schools and communities.
- Beejotsav Nagpur, the Gurgaon Organic Farmers' Market, and others ensured that farm produce reached a local consumer base. This averted economic collapse for thousands of farmers.

Lessons from these models:

- **Local Self-reliance and Localised exchange of goods** are more effective in giving livelihood security than encouraging inter-state migrations.
- The focus should be on **incentivizing local communities**. While the present focus is on big industry players producing household goods like soaps, footwear, furniture, etc.
 - This will generate additional sources of livelihood apart from agriculture and would create cheaper goods.
- **Creation of buffer opportunities** is desirable to relieve the communities from undue stress in difficult times.
 - For instance, Maati (a women's collective) has created a buffer of ecotourism for farmers and craftspersons in Uttarakhand.

Way Forward:

- The government should reconsider its current industry-centric approach.
 - For instance, reconsidering the three farm laws which may give agricultural control to corporates. It will create an even bigger pool of exploitable labour.
 - The model of Aatma Nirbhar Bharat needs reconsideration. It is actually increasing the control of distant markets and companies over people's lives.
- The focus must be on decentralized and localized models.

- For instance, Kerala's Kudumbashree programme enabled dignified livelihoods for several million women. This resulted in the rural revitalization and reduced outmigration.
- Further, the Local self-reliance has to go along with worker control over the means of production, more direct forms of democracy (swaraj), and struggles to eliminate casteism and gender discrimination. This would imply –
 - Better implementation of 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendment to strengthen local democracy
 - Better implementation of laws like the Forest Rights Act that provide greater ownership of forest resources to the tribals
 - In central India, some communities had legal control over surrounding forests, and mobilised towards adivasi swasathan (self-rule). They survived the COVID lockdown much better than those who did not have such control.

Adherence to the above steps will ensure economic security in one's own village and town. This would prevent millions from going back to insecure, undignified jobs in cities and industrial zones.

39. Issues in Pricing Mechanism of Covid-19 vaccines

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3

Synopsis: A single price for Covid-19 vaccines will fuel production and ensure efficient vaccination.

Introduction

Economists suggest market-based solutions for covid-19 vaccines due to their claimed efficiency. The market depends on the price mechanism and the forces of supply and demand.

- Increased competition pushes up supply and pushes down prices. This combination leads to an efficient allocation of scarce resources.
- However, the Market mechanism works well, when there is no **externality** is associated with the good.
 - An externality occurs when the production or consumption of a good results in the cost or benefit to an unrelated third party.
- Vaccines have a positive externality because their use benefits the vaccinated person and also reduces transmission to others.
- Almost everyone ignores the full set of benefits from goods with positive/negative externalities. Thus, the market isn't the most suitable tool for the distribution of such goods.

How the new Vaccine policy could result in vaccine failure?

The government is not considering the large positive externality attached to vaccination. This may result in inefficiency in vaccine delivery.

- **Firstly**, manufacturers have to declare their prices in advance for their 50 percent supply to the open market. However, there is **no limit on the retail price** they would charge. This might result in **vaccine inequality**.
- **Secondly, low-income people are naturally prone to infect others** because of their nature of work. Low income has a higher negative externality and thus vaccinating them first is more beneficial to society. However, these **people cannot ordinarily afford the vaccine**.
- **Lastly**, when the market is allowed to deliver vaccines, richer people will be prepared to pay more and **will have better access**.

- The market will **ignore those with lower purchasing power**, in spite of them having a higher chance of spreading the disease. The bigger the income difference between the two sections, the larger will be the degree of market failure.

What is the solution?

The new policy could lead to possible efficiency loss. The effective solution for addressing market failure is that a **single price can be paid to vaccine makers for all the doses that they supply**. The price should be high enough to fuel them to rapidly increase production.

- **The government will have to pay the vaccine maker** or the hospital managing the dose. The suggested solution is similar to the fertiliser subsidy, which is now paid to companies only after actual sales to farmers.
 - A subsidy is not paid on any bag unless the purchase, along with the farmer's biometric authentication and other details, is captured on a point-of-sale machine at the retail outlet linked to a central server.
- **The vaccine producer gets the full market price** after a person gets vaccinated. It will also ensure no deviation or grey market. It is in our own interest to get not just ourselves, but also others vaccinated.

40. Impact of Groundwater Depletion on Cropping Intensity

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: : GS-3, Agriculture

Synopsis: An International team conducted a study to understand the impact of Groundwater depletion on Cropping Intensity in India.

About the study:

- **The International team studied the** impact of groundwater depletion on cropping intensity in India.
- **It analysed India's three main irrigation types** of winter cropped areas: dug wells, tube wells, canals. It also analyzed the groundwater data from the Central Ground Water Board.

Key Findings:

Impact on Cropping Intensity:

- India is the world's largest consumer of groundwater. India is also the second-largest producer of wheat in the world with over 30 million hectares in the country dedicated to producing this crop.
- But with severe groundwater depletion, the cropping intensity or the amount of land planted in winter may decrease by up to 20% by 2025.

Most Impacted Region:

- **The study** found that 13% of the villages in which farmers plant a winter crop are located in critically water-depleted regions.
- **These villages** may lose 68% of their cropped area in the future if access to all groundwater irrigation is lost. The losses will largely occur in northwest and central India.
- **Alternative Sources of Irrigation:**
- **The study analysed** whether irrigation canals that divert surface water from lakes and rivers can make up for groundwater depletion.
- **It found that switching to irrigation canal** would favour farms close to canals, leading to unequal access.

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- **Further**, even if all regions that are currently using depleted groundwater for irrigation will switch to using canal irrigation, cropping intensity may decline by 7% nationally.
- **Hence, the study suggests the adoption of** water-saving technologies. For instance, sprinkler, drip irrigation. Also, switching to less water-intensive crops may help use the limited groundwater resources more effectively.

Reasons for Groundwater Depletion in India:

- **The Green Revolution** enabled the cropping of water-intensive crops like rice in water deficit regions such as Haryana and Punjab. It was ecologically less suitable for rice cultivation due to predominantly light soils.
 - This led to unsustainable groundwater use for irrigation and in turn groundwater scarcity.
- **Increased demand for water** for domestic, industrial, and agricultural needs together with limited surface water led to the over-exploitation of groundwater resources.
- **Frequent pumping of water from the ground** without waiting for its replenishment leads to quick depletion.
- **Subsidies on electricity and high Minimum Support Price(MSP)** for water intensive crops.
- **Inadequate regulation of groundwater laws** encourages the exhaustion of groundwater resources without any penalty.
- **Post harvest burning of crops**, deforestation, unscientific methods of agriculture, chemical effluents from industries. It also led to pollution of groundwater making it unusable.

Way Forward:

- There are enough groundwater resources with higher monsoon rainfall in eastern Indian states like Bihar.
- But due to lack of enough irrigation infrastructure, farmers are not able to make use of natural resources there.
- Hence, we need better policies in eastern India to expand irrigation and thus increase agriculture productivity. This will also release some pressure from northwestern Indian states.

41. Understanding Herd Immunity and Rising Covid Cases in India

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis:

Herd Immunity can't be attained solely by a rise in Covid-19 positive people. It is also dependent on the absolute number of susceptible individuals and the rate of transmission of the virus.

Background:

- The data from various serological surveys in metro cities shows high immunity levels in the metro cities. As per them, Covid-19 had touched:
 - 56% of population in Delhi by January 2021.
 - 75% in some slums in Mumbai in November 2020.
 - About 30% in Bengaluru in November 2020.
- This indicates attainment of herd immunity but still, the Covid-19 cases are rising.

What is Herd immunity?

- It is a stage of an epidemic in which some members of a population group remain protected from infection.
- This happens as the majority of those around them have already developed immunity either through vaccination or prior infection.

What is a Serological Survey?

- It is a blood test that seeks to assess the prevalence of disease in a population by detecting the presence of specific antibodies against the virus.
- The test only indicates past infections (which triggered an immune response) and is not used to detect active infections.

Understanding the current spread: –

- The number of daily cases depends on 3 factors:
 - Number of infectious people in the population (those who have developed immunity)
 - Number of susceptible individuals (those who are not infected)
 - Rate of transmission of the virus – It depends on the nature of the virus and the extent of contact between individuals.
- As per experts, the cases are rising due to:
 - **Increased interaction and contact among the population** since February 2021. This increased the virus in circulation and led to increased cases in the susceptible population.
 - **The high absolute number of Susceptible population** among which the virus is circulating. For instance, in this second wave, the affluent class and youth are getting more infected who were less targeted in the first wave.
- Therefore, solely relying on the first factor to check the virus spread will not yield rational results.

Future Trajectory:

- A decline would be observed if it is proved that the virus (even the new strain) is infecting the susceptible population more.
- However, a greater surge would occur if the new strain is again infecting the previously infected individuals. This scenario would also question the efficacy of our vaccines in fighting the virus.

42. Intellectual Property Rights vs Right to Access Basic Healthcare

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Important International Institutions, agencies, and fora – their Structure, Mandate (WTO)

Synopsis: Intellectual Property rules governed by TRIPS agreement are still hindering equal access to basic healthcare. Even a crisis like Covid-19 Pandemic could not bring any relief from this regime.

Background

- Quick and efficient vaccination is the most appropriate way to achieve global **herd immunity** against the virus.
- However, compliance with **TRIPS agreement** deprives developing and least developed countries of their right to access affordable medical products.
- Hence, countries like India and South Africa requested a temporary suspension of rules under the **1995 TRIPS Agreement**.

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- But a group of states, the U.S., the European Union, the U.K., and Canada continues to block the waiver requested by India and South Africa in WTO.
- Compliance with the TRIPS agreement will hamper global efforts to eradicate Covid-19 at the earliest.

India and Patent laws

1. India adopted the colonial-era laws that allowed for pharmaceutical patents.
2. But in 1959, a committee chaired by Justice **Rajagopala Ayyangar** objected to this on ethical grounds.
3. The committee stated that access to drugs at affordable prices is affected due to patent protection for pharmaceutical drugs.
4. It also found that foreign corporations are misusing patent laws to avoid competition and to maintain monopolies. Further, lack of competition has given rise to exorbitant rates charged for essential medical drugs.
5. With this backdrop, **the Patents Act, 1970**, was passed. It offered **protection only over claims to process**, and it helped to remove monopolies in pharmaceutical drugs.
6. Further, it also **allowed for the growth of generic manufacturers** in India. As a result, life-saving drugs were made available to people at more affordable prices.
7. For instance, drugs that reduce AIDS deaths in developed nations were made non-accessible for the rest of the world due to high costs.
8. However, generic versions of these medicines manufactured in India helped to lower the price of AIDS drugs.
9. But, with the advent of the TRIPS agreement in 1995, patent laws were again strengthened. Under WTO's TRIPS agreement, countries violating patent laws are penalized by sanctions.

What are the arguments in support of protecting Patents?

- A patent is an exclusive right that a state gives to an innovator to make, use and sell an inventive product or process.
- Patent laws are usually justified on three distinct grounds:
 1. One, it is the **natural and moral right** of the people to claim control over their inventions.
 2. Two, exclusive licences promote invention and therefore **benefit society as a whole (Utilitarianism)**
 3. Three, individuals should be allowed to benefit from the fruits of their labor and merit

Why the above arguments are refuted?

- **First**, the claim that the removal of patent protection will incur a loss to the company involved in research and development is untrue.
 - For instance, public money accounted for more than 97% of the funding towards the development of the **Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine**.
- **Second**, the idea that patents are the only means available to promote innovation undermines other alternatives to promote innovation. For instance,
 - According to famous economist **Joseph Stiglitz**, the **prize funds** for medical research can replace the patent system.
 - It will be more efficient and more equitable as public funds will incentivize research while ensuring affordable medicines.

TRIPS regime is an example of inequitable existing world order. There is a need for a global collective action to replace the existing rules that place **the right to access basic healthcare** in danger.

43. Rising fiscal deficit and Expenditure Need during Pandemic

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis:

The pandemic time demands enhanced government expenditure to support the vulnerable masses and ensuring their survival. Considering this, the government should enhance the spending on physical and human capital formation without worrying about a rising fiscal deficit.

Background:

- The International Monetary Fund in its World Economic Outlook report had raised the growth forecast for Indian economy. The report expected growth of 11.5 – 12.5% in the financial year 2021-22.
- However, the country is now witnessing a second wave of Covid 19 that demands greater government support for the vulnerable masses.
- Many experts believe that a deviation from fiscal targets and reduced growth rate is justified under the extraordinary time of Pandemic.

About Fiscal Deficit:

- A fiscal deficit (FD) situation occurs when the government's expenditure exceeds its income. It is the difference between the total expenditure of the government and its total revenue (excluding borrowings).
- It is estimated to moderate from 9.5 percent of GDP in FY21 to 6.8 percent of GDP in FY22. The estimation is based on an increase in revenue receipts by 15% and an increase in fiscal spending by 1% in the current fiscal year.

Rationale for raising government expenditure and deviating from FD target:

- **Rising Unemployment:** The second wave has resulted in imposition of lockdowns and curfews across multiple states. This has suspended economic activities leading to greater job losses.
 - In the previous lockdown of 2020, the unemployment rate increased by nearly 14.8 percentage points, rising to 23.5 per cent in Apr 2020.
- **Accommodative Monetary Policy:** The policy is already accommodative and may not have enough room to further boost the economy.
 - RBI reduced the repo rate by 115 basis points since 2020. The inflation level is rising in the economy which may deter it to reduce further interest rate.
 - Nonetheless, the RBI may raise interest rates if inflation levels breach the 6% upper band threshold.
- **Providing a Safety Cushion:** Extraordinary times demand greater support from the welfare state for its citizens. Further, stringent measures (like Lockdown) have made social security schemes (like MGNREGA) ineffective.
- **Supporting the Health system:** The pandemic has exposed the lacunae of our health system. Significant fiscal support is needed to provide free vaccinations to all.
 - This is highly desired as the benefits of faster and wider vaccine coverage enormously outweighs its monetary cost.

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- **Global Scenario:** Other countries are also providing significant fiscal stimulus to revive their economic growth as seen in the case of the U.S.
 - The country has adopted an easy monetary policy combined with a huge fiscal stimulus to catalyze its economic growth to pre-pandemic levels.

Way Forward:

- The central government should:
 - Enhance the limit of promised food grains under the National Food Security Act. The government recently promised an additional five kg of grain to the 800 million beneficiaries under the Act.
 - Consider transferring cash to the bank accounts of the poor
 - Reduce non-essential government expenditures and use them for COVID-related expenditure
- Further, it may raise additional funds through borrowings from the market. This may worsen FD in the short run but would generate additional growth that may make debt consolidation easier when things normalise.