

9pm Compilation

May, 2021

General Studies - 1

1. Recent Communal Riots in Northern Ireland have Lessons For India

General Studies - 2

1. CBSE's New Assessment System for Class 10 Students
2. US forces in Afghanistan Starts their Final Phase of Withdrawal
3. Managing Vaccine Shortage by Proper Gap Between Vaccinations
4. Opportunities in India-UK relations
5. One Health Approach – Significance and Steps Taken by India
6. Government's Apathy towards Migrant communities
7. Impact of the Pandemic on India's foreign Policy
8. West Bengal Housing Industry Regulation Act (WB HIRA) is Unconstitutional: SC
9. The Case of EC's Demand for Restriction on Media
10. Use of CT scan for testing Covid is not Correct
11. Reason behind Covid Vaccine Shortage Crisis
12. Poor State of Delhi Prisons Demand Urgent Attention
13. SC struck down the Maharashtra State Reservation for SEBC Act, 2018
14. What is Social Murder and How to Ensure Accountability in Patrimonial state?
15. Significance of Rent Waiver in tackling Reverse Migration
16. Critical Analysis of U.S Support to temporary Patent Waiver for Covid Vaccines
17. How India's Diaspora in US helped India in COVID Crisis
18. Why the Taiwan Covid-19 Model Works?
19. Nation wide lockdown is an Opportunity to Improve Health Infrastructure
20. US Support to TRIPS Waiver – Challenges Ahead
21. National Task Force for Transparent Oxygen Allocation
22. U.S Exit from Greater Middle East Will Alter Regional Relations
23. Time to Revive the Plan for Indian National Health Services
24. Impacts of Digital inequality on Health and Education
25. **Why Safeguards for Child adoptions Needs to be Followed Strictly?**
26. **Lessons learnt from the Ladakh crisis**
27. **Importance of Parliamentary Proceedings**
28. **Links between Crisis and Economic Reforms**
29. **UGC Advises Universities to Include NCC as an Elective Subject**
30. Expansion of Social Security Net is Need of the Hour
31. Centre Should Relook its Vaccine Policy
32. Gauhati High Court Questions FCRA Amendment Act
33. ASEAN's Initiative to End Political Crisis in Myanmar
34. India's Vaccine exports are guided by good diplomacy and good epidemiology
35. Measures to control the impact of Pandemic in rural India
36. Treating Israel-Palestine issue with a humanitarian response
37. State should form a joint committee to negotiate COVID vaccine price
38. Laws and Initiatives for Welfare Orphaned Children
39. Bad Policy Making Aggravated the Pandemic Disaster in India
40. Issues With Technocratic Approach to Vaccination Drive
41. Need of Constituting National Tribunal Commission in India
42. Central Vista Project – Demolition of National Institutions
43. China-India Relations and India's Weakening Geo-Political Position
44. Systemic Issues affecting Women's Participation in labour Market
45. India's Palestine policy
46. Method to Estimate Covid Deaths in India
47. West Asia's Diplomatic Resets
48. Misuse of Sedition law in India

49. Role of ICMR in Facilitating Evidence-based Treatment
50. Measures to Prevent Future Waves of Pandemic Disaster
51. Significance of India's Diaspora
52. Rising Cyclone Intensity and Frequency due to Micro-Climatic Changes
53. India Needs an Effective Vaccine Policy
54. VIP Security Cover to West Bengal MLAs – Associated Issues
55. Future of India – Pakistan Trade Relations
56. Analysing the Social security code 2020 for Informal Workforce
57. Significance of Citizen-led Fact-Finding Missions
58. Collaborative Governance Should be the future of Governance
59. Concerns Associated with demolition of National Archives of India's Building
60. Maratha Reservation Case Judgment and Federalism
61. Issues and Significance of Longer Vaccine Gaps
62. WhatsApp's Privacy Policy and Data Protection law in India
63. Why IITs Demand for Priority Vaccination is not Justified?
64. Voluntary Licensing Mechanism for Vaccines Will Ensure Social Justice
65. India's Stand on Palestine and Israel Conflict
66. Public Expenditure on Health Needs to be Reprioritised
67. WhatsApp Privacy Policy Comes into Effect : Issues and Challenges
68. Historical Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse under POCSO Act
69. Issues in Present Policy of Vaccine Procurement
70. The U.S exit from Afghanistan and Its Implications on South Asia
71. Significance of Community Efforts in Tackling the Pandemic
72. Indo-US Synergy on Regional, Bilateral and Multilateral issues
73. One State Solution for Palestine
74. India's Mucormycosis Threat
75. Must Needed Reforms for Online Higher Education
76. Controversies Surrounding Administrator of Lakshadweep
77. Cooperative Federalism is Necessary for the Success of GST in India
78. Continuing Political Turmoil in Nepal and Opportunity for India
79. New IT Rules 2021- No protection under the Section 79 of IT Act upon Non compliance
80. Challenges involved in Shifting the National Museum of India
81. Need to Reform the Information Technology Rules, 2021
82. India's Nepal policy needs to change for ensuring long-lasting friendship
83. Need for real-time data on public health
84. Resolving bottlenecks in procuring Pfizer's vaccine
85. Effects of Pandemic on Young Healthcare Workers
86. Issues with Tarun Tejpal case judgment

General Studies - 3

1. Guidelines of National Building Code to Ensure Fire Safety in Public buildings
2. Natural Gas Can be India's Alternative Road to Clean Energy
3. Climate Change is Shifting Earth's Axis of Rotation
4. New Malaria Vaccine Can be a Game Changer in Curtailing Malaria
5. Frequent Hospital Fires during COVID Time in India- Cause and Way forward
6. IPR Waiver For Covid 19 Vaccines
7. Indian Offshore Model will Dominate Global IT Sector
8. EAC Recommends the Great Nicobar Development Plan for EIA Study
9. Solving Present Health Care Crisis With Lessons from Green Revolution
10. Issues Associated with IPR Waiver to Covid Vaccine
11. Consequences of Neglecting Science Education

9 PM Compilation for the Month of May, 2021

12. Kerala Model to tackle the Covid-19 Pandemic in India
13. Government Must Ensure 'Right to Life' for Economic Recovery
14. Need of Global Rules to protect the Cyberspace
15. Steps and Suggestions to Handle Cyclone related Disasters
16. Significance of SC Ruling on Personal Guarantors for Corporate Loans
17. Need for Eco Tax in India
18. Issues with New IT rules for Social Media
19. Prioritise food and work for all
20. Improving Resilience to Cyclones Disasters in India
21. Dairy Sector in India Needs Urgent Attention
22. Tussle between Government and Social Media companies
23. The increasing prices of edible oil needs government intervention
24. Highlights of 43rd GST Council Meeting
25. Factors Affecting Growth of Block Chain technology in India
26. Need to revive the Cultural Mapping project

General Studies Paper - 1

General Studies - 1

1. Recent Communal Riots in Northern Ireland have Lessons For India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs1: Social Empowerment, Communalism, Regionalism & Secularism.

Synopsis: Recently, communal riots broke out in Ireland. India can take a few lessons from that. A committed political leadership should take responsibility for peoples' social and economic problems and should make efforts to alleviate their miseries.

Background

- Recently, communal clashes broke out in Ireland between the Protestant pro-British loyalist unionists and the Catholic pro-Irish nationalists.
- The Protestant pro-British loyalist unionists wanted that Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom forever.
- Whereas, the Catholic pro-Irish nationalists, wanted that Northern Ireland to become part of the Republic of Ireland.

What are the reasons for the riot?

The riot is a result of many problems such as ideology towards change, resistance to change, and sustained political and social inertia towards the misery of vulnerable sections.

- **First**, political leadership's apathy towards addressing social issues.
 - Even after the signing of the **Anglo-Irish Good Friday Agreement** in 1998, both religious communities experienced little or no peace.
 - Poverty, deprivation, lack of social and economic opportunities and persistent high unemployment affects both nationalist and loyalist similarly in Northern Ireland.
 - It has also resulted in an abnormal number of suicides between 1998 and 2014.
 - The localities most deprived during the pre-agreement communal riots remain the most deprived areas within Northern Ireland today.
- **Second**, differences in ideologies towards change (**Brexit**). While the Catholic pro-Irish nationalists wanted to stay with European Union, the Protestant pro-British loyalist unionists campaigned for Brexit.
 - However, 56% of electorates in Northern Ireland voted to remain in the European Union. This has resulted in a special protocol for Northern Ireland.
 - It provided for the territory to remain in the customs union and single market of the European Union while protecting its status as part of the United Kingdom. Much of the present anger relates to this specific protocol.

What lessons can India learn from this?

- **First**, a functioning democracy must ensure a daily commitment to address communal issues with vigilance, tolerance, and compromise.
- **Second**, Political leadership should take responsibility for peoples' social and economic problems and work towards eliminating prejudices within communities.
- **Third**, Political parties should be aware that, creating religious tensions between communities will severely damage every section of society as well as political and national institutions.

General Studies Paper - 2

General Studies - 2

1. CBSE's New Assessment System for Class 10 Students

Source: [Indian Express](#)

GS-2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Synopsis: CBSE has canceled the board examinations for 10th class students. CBSE's new assessment system will be the new system based on objective criteria to assess their academic performance.

How marks are awarded for students as per CBSE's new assessment system?

The basic break-up of marks provided by the board is as follows;

- I. **Internal Assessment – 20 marks**
- II. **Periodic/Unit Test – 10 marks**
- III. **Half Yearly/Mid-Term Examination – 30 marks**
- IV. **Pre-Board Examinations – 40 marks**

However, there is no uniformity between schools regarding the number of tests conducted and the mode of examination. For instance,

- One or more schools have not conducted the above three categories of tests/exams.
- Also, some schools have resorted to Online exams while others have conducted exams Offline.
- Further, there are possibilities that some students might have not appeared in some of the examinations conducted by schools.

How are these irregularities bridged by the assessment process?

- The board proposes the formation of '**Result Committees**' in every school. They are required to prepare a criterion of 80 marks through a 'rationale document'.
- It will be used to assess students belonging to schools where all tests have not been conducted or where students have not appeared for the assessment.
- The committees will consist of the principal, five teachers from mathematics, social sciences, science, and two languages, and two teachers from neighboring schools as external members.

How objectivity is ensured in the assessment process?

- To achieve objectivity, the board prescribes a system of **internal moderation** by all schools based on the historical performance of a school.
 1. One, the best performance of a school in the last three years' board examinations is taken as the 'reference year'
 2. Two, **subject-wise marks** assessed by the school for 2021 should be within a range of 2 marks obtained by the school in the reference year.
 3. Three, the overall **average marks for the school** assessed in 2021, for all 5 main subjects, should not exceed the overall average marks obtained by the school in the reference year.
- This system of assessment will provide a reliable, unbiased, and fair reference standard based on the school's own past performance.

Options available for students who do not achieve the qualifying marks?

1. The board proposes the **policy of awarding grace marks** to those who do not meet the qualifying criteria.
2. Students who are not able to meet the criterion after grace marks will be placed in the "**Essential Repeat**" or "**Compartment**" category.

3. Students placed in the "Compartment" category are required to write the compartment exam held by the school.
4. It will be an objective type online or offline exam based on sample question papers provided by the CBSE.
5. Students will be allowed to continue in class XI till the compartment results are released.

2. US forces in Afghanistan Starts their Final Phase of Withdrawal

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: The US President has formally started the final phase of withdrawal of US forces in Afghanistan. The President has also set September 11 as the deadline for withdrawal.

Why are US forces in Afghanistan?

- On 11 September 2001, attacks in the United States killed nearly 3,000 people.
- Osama bin Laden, the head of al-Qaeda was identified as the man responsible.
- The Taliban ran Afghanistan at that time. They protected Bin Laden and refused to hand him over. So, a month after 9/11, the US launched airstrikes against Afghanistan.
- As other countries joined the war, the Taliban was removed from power. But the Taliban didn't disappear and its influence regrew after some time.
- Since then, the US and its allies have struggled to stop Afghanistan's government from collapsing. Further, they also [fail to end the deadly attacks by the Taliban](#).
- Also, it is estimated that the US has spent more than \$2 trillion in Afghanistan in the past two decades.

U.S. troops Withdrawal from Afghanistan:

- In February 2020, the United States and the Taliban had signed a peace agreement titled the [Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan](#). The main provisions of this agreement are,
 - **Troops Withdrawal:** The US will withdraw its troops from Afghanistan. Further, the NATO or coalition troop numbers will also be brought down simultaneously. At last, all the troops will be out of Afghanistan within 14 months.
 - **Taliban:** Taliban will not allow any of its members, other individuals or groups including al-Qaeda to use the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies.
 - **Sanctions Removal:** In turn, the US and UN sanctions on the Taliban leaders will be removed.
- The 2021 withdrawal of U.S. troops is scheduled. By 11 September 2021, all the US troops will be removed from Afghanistan.
- However, the Taliban has accused the US of breaching the deal. In the peace agreement, the US had said it would have all troops out by May 1, 2021.

Way Forward:

- The withdrawal of US troops has started against a backdrop of fierce clashes between the Taliban and government forces.
- There is no interim peace agreement reached between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

- Hence, it is expected that Afghanistan's security forces will come under increasing pressure from the Taliban after the withdrawal.

3. Managing Vaccine Shortage by Proper Gap Between Vaccinations

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: To achieve universal vaccination, India needs to work on a few out-of-the-box solutions for vaccine shortage. For example, increasing the gap between vaccination effectively.

Introduction:

The [New Vaccine Policy](#) aims to [vaccinate people above 18 years](#). The Policy came into force on May 1. But a few states have postponed the vaccination program citing a shortage of the vaccine.

Vaccine shortage:

- According to the [Co-WIN portal](#), India is producing roughly 2 million vaccines a day. And the number of vaccines administered daily is roughly 2.3 million to 2.5 million. So, technically the production capacity falls below even the daily requirement.
- As of April 29, India's 9.1 % of the population received one dose of vaccine. Similarly, only 1.9 % of the population received both doses.
- Since India announced the new vaccination policy, the demand for vaccines has increased three times, but the supply of vaccines remains the same.

How India expected to tackle the vaccine shortage?

- At present, India is expecting a few million doses of Russian vaccine Sputnik.
- Similarly, [Covishield](#) vaccine maker Serum Institute of India also going to improve their scale-up production to 100 million doses per month soon.
- Also, the Covaxin manufacturer Bharat Biotech is expecting to scale up the production to 50-60 million doses a month.
- Despite these developments, the next few month's production is unlikely to go beyond 150 million doses a month.

Interval between two doses:

- Covishield:** [Phase 3 trials](#) of the Covishield vaccine found out that the second dose offered after 12 weeks of the first dose will provide the best result and protection. So the best option to take the second dose of vaccine is 12 weeks for Covishield.
 - However, due to urgency, second doses administered after six to eight weeks also improved efficacy over time.
- Covaxin:** The second dose of Covaxin can be taken four to six weeks after the first.

Present condition of vaccination in India:

At present India's routine immunisation programmes for children are administered at a four-week gap in India. But globally they follow an eight-week gap. The reason for the lower gap between vaccination in India is due to,

- Operational reasons:** India's distribution of vaccines in two phases with a long gap might create a delay in vaccination.
- Low coverage:** If the gap between vaccination is increased then people might not vaccinate at the correct time.
- Suggestions to avoid vaccine shortage:**

- India should **increase the gap for Covishield to 12 weeks**. This is because India needs to control the progress of the pandemic. The Covishield trials have shown that the higher the gap, the greater the proven efficacy. Furthermore, it has other advantages as well. Such as,
 - Increasing the gap between vaccination will **give some time to manufacturers** to produce the vaccine.
 - It allows more people to take at least one shot of the vaccine. Immunologically, it is understood that even one dose can activate the immune system. Here, the vaccine will make the natural infection a sort of booster infection and protect people for a longer time than the non-vaccinated individual.
- Like the US, India also needs to ensure **evolving guidelines on vaccination**. This will ensure more vaccination of single dose.
 - The United States's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention(CDC) initially came up with a vaccination gap of three-month. Later the CDC reduced this gap to one month.

4. Opportunities in India-UK relations

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis: Through this article, we will discuss the contentious issue hampering India-U. K relation as well as possible opportunities of convergence for mutual development.

Background

India- Britain summit is set to take place digitally. The two leaders are expected to announce a 10-year roadmap to transform the bilateral relationship that will cover a range of areas.

What are the contentious issues hampering India-U. K relation?

While India's relations with western countries such as the US and France have dramatically improved in recent years. However, ties with Britain have lagged because of the following reasons,

- **First**, mistrust between the two countries owing to the **colonial legacy**. The bitter experience of the Partition and Britain's perceived tilt to Pakistan have hampered India-U. K relation.
- **Second**, the British Labour Party's growing political negativity towards India. For instance,
 - Supporting for **self-determination** for Kashmiris.
 - Criticism of government over recent **farmers' agitation**.

What are the possible areas of convergence for mutual development?

India and Britain need each other to achieve their larger goals.

- **First, Cooperation in the health sector. Bilateral strategic cooperation in the health sector** can help India to benefit from the enormous potential of U.K in public health sector.
 - Further, both nations should work towards building a resilient medical supply chain to control the global Pandemic.
 - Britain along with the G-7 countries can help transform India's internal capabilities in the Health sector.

- **Second, building new global economic partnerships.** Since both the countries have moved away from their regional blocs (**India-RCEP, Britain-EU**) a new economic partnership will benefit both the nations immensely.
- **Third, cooperation in geopolitical issues. For instance,** Britain is tilting to the Indo-Pacific, where India is a natural ally. Whereas, India needs a wider coalition as possible to balance aggressive China.
- **Fourth, Cooperation in mitigation of Climate change.** The U.K Can support India for the adoption of a Clean mechanism and e-mobility in the transport sector.
- **Fifth, cooperation in labour movement.** Agreement on “migration and mobility” to facilitate the legal movement of Indians into Britain can benefit India’s skilled workforce.

5. One Health Approach – Significance and Steps Taken by India

Source: The Hindu

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

Synopsis:

Covid-19 has once again shown the degree of chaos that can be spread by zoonotic diseases. This gives India an opportunity to work on the One Health approach.

Background

- In 1856, the father of modern pathology (Rudolf Virchow) observed that there are no dividing lines between animal and human medicine.
- The Covid-19 pandemic once again highlighted the interconnectedness of the systems.
- The havoc caused by the pandemic induced the experts to sensitize countries towards the ‘One Health’ approach on the occasion of World Veterinary Day (April 24th).

What is the One Health Approach?

- It is a collaborative, multisectoral, coordinated, and transdisciplinary approach. It recognizes the interconnection between **people, animals, and the environment**.
- It calls for working at the **local, regional, national, and global levels** with the goal of achieving optimal health outcomes.

Need for focusing on ‘One Health’:

- **High Prevalence of Zoonotic Diseases:** More than two-thirds of existing and emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic. Experts believe that there are more than 1.7 million viruses circulating in wildlife, and many of them are likely to be zoonotic.
 - It is an infectious disease that jumps from animal to humans.
 - Anthroozoonotic infections get transferred from humans to animals.
- **Transboundary impact:** The transboundary impact of viral outbreaks such as the Nipah virus, Ebola, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), etc. were alarming for the world. It has made it imperative for the world to focus on one health.
- **Huge Economic Cost:** Zoonotic diseases place a heavy burden on the economy of countries.
 - For instance, the WHO estimates that rabies (also a zoonotic disease) costs the global economy approximately \$6 billion annually.
- **India and one health approach:**
- India’s ‘One Health’ vision derives its blueprint from the agreement between the tripartite-plus alliance towards ‘One World, One Health’.
- The alliance includes:
 - the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO),

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- the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE),
- the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP).

Steps taken by India towards 'One Health':

- The country established a **National Standing Committee on Zoonoses** in the 1980s.
- The Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD) has launched several schemes to mitigate the prevalence of animal diseases since 2015.
- For instance, under the **National Animal Disease Control Program**, 13,343 crore rupees have been sanctioned for Foot and Mouth disease and Brucellosis control.
- DAHD has partnered with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in the National Action Plan for Eliminating Dog-Mediated Rabies.
- Further DAHD will soon establish a 'One Health' unit within the Ministry.
- A **Center for One Health** will soon be established at Nagpur.
- Efforts are being made to revamp programs that focus on **capacity building for veterinarians**.
- The government is also upgrading the animal health diagnostic system such as Assistance to States for Control of Animal Diseases (ASCAD).

Challenges hindering the success of one health approach:

- Veterinary manpower shortages make the early detection of zoonotic diseases difficult.
- Lack of information sharing between human and animal health institutions
- Inadequate coordination on food safety at slaughter, distribution, and retail facilities

Way Forward:

- The focus should be on **increasing investments and augmenting awareness generation** towards the 'One Health' approach.
- There must be the **integration of existing animal health and disease surveillance** systems.
 - For instance, the Information Network for Animal Productivity and Health, and the National Animal Disease Reporting System can be integrated.
- The government needs to **formulate best-practice guidelines** for informal market and slaughterhouse operations. This would improve inspections, disease prevalence assessments, etc.
- Further, it must create **mechanisms to operationalize** 'One Health' at every stage from top to grassroots level.

6. Government's Apathy towards Migrant communities

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: The government is not showing any Apathy towards Migrant communities to address the challenges faced by them. It is despite their increased vulnerability to the shocks in the economy.

Background

- The second wave of the Pandemic has once again led to the enforcement of Strict to moderate lockdowns in states.

- This has resulted in a loss of jobs for Informal workers employed in many industries. Majority of the migrants work in the informal sector.
- Despite their increased vulnerability in the informal sector, government efforts to support them through policymaking have been inadequate.

About Migrants

- Migrants are 'mobile by default', They are a product of growing **rural distress** and inadequate official policies failing to support the ailing rural economy.
- They benefit the urban economy by providing cheap labor to manufacturing units and cheap services to households.

What are the challenges faced by the migrant population?

- Unemployment in urban areas due to Pandemic induced Economic distress.
- Lack of access to accommodation.
- A lack of sustainable income and savings to ensure food due to near insolvency.
- **Reverse migration** by paying exorbitant costs for travel.
- Falling victim to COVID-19.
- Lack of livelihood opportunities in their hometowns in the rural economies.
- Lack of new job opportunities, due to shrinking **National Rural Employment Guarantee Act** allotments by the government.
- Lastly, Lack of legal status as a working population.

What needs to be done?

The recent official announcement of a free ration of 5 kg cereals to 80 crore families is the only benefit visible so far. However, it is not sufficient;

- Government should strive to calculate the official estimate of migrant workers, either incoming or reverse. This will help in objective policy planning.
- Need to alleviate rural distress by providing support to the ailing agriculture economy.
- There is a need to provide some short-term relief for migrant workers and their families to support their livelihood during the Pandemic.
- Migrant workers should be provided with legal backing.
- Modifications in the **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020** are required to strengthen the health and safety conditions of workers in establishments

7. Impact of the Pandemic on India's foreign Policy

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Synopsis: The consequences of the Covid 19 pandemic second wave have far-reaching strategic implications on India's Foreign policy.

What are the likely impacts on India's foreign policy?

- **First**, India's Supremacy at the regional level (in South Asia) will decline in the future.
 - India's traditional primacy in the region was built on a mix of material aid, political influence, and historical ties.
 - The Pandemic has reduced India's ability to materially help its immediate neighborhood for development assistance and political autonomy.

- As a result, South Asian states are likely to shift towards China for financial support.
- **Second**, India's geopolitical ambitions to become a leading power will be impacted.
 - The pandemic could adversely impact India's ability to contribute to the **Indo-Pacific** and the **Quad**
 - **For instance**, COVID-19 will prevent any ambitious military spending or modernization plan.
 - It further limits the country's attention on global diplomacy and regional geopolitics.
 - With reduced military spending and lesser diplomatic attention to regional geopolitics, India's ability to project power and contribute to the growth of the Quad will be uncertain.
 - India's inability to take a lead role and China attracting smaller states away from the Indo-Pacific with aid and threats can change the balance of power in favor of China.
- **Third**, the shift in focus on domestic politics in the coming years by the ruling government will reduce India's willingness for new foreign policy innovation or initiatives.
 - **For instance**, Economic distress, a fall in foreign direct investment and industrial production, and a rise in unemployment will compel the center to focus on COVID-19 recovery. This will limit India's strategic ambitions in global space.
- **Fourth**, India might become more appeasing towards China. The mismanagement of the second wave has limited India's ability to stand up against China.
- **Fifth**, India's foreign policy may also become more accommodative, reconciliatory, and cooperative in the neighborhood. (**SAARC nations**).
 - The Pandemic has forced India to reimagine, the friend-enemy equations in global geopolitics. While the US was hesitant to assist India during the pandemic Pakistan and China offered aid to India.
- **Sixth**, India's freedom to pursue Strategic autonomy might be reduced. For instance, a post-COVID-19 India might find it harder to resist demands of a closer military relationship with the U.S.
- **Seventh**, as every crisis opens up the possibility for change, one good outcome will be the opening up of new regional opportunities for cooperation under the **SAARC framework**.
 - SAARC nations should collectively focus on 'regional health multilateralism' to promote mutual assistance and joint action on health emergencies.
 - Further, geopolitics should be brought in par with health diplomacy, environmental concerns, and regional connectivity in South Asia.

8. West Bengal Housing Industry Regulation Act (WB HIRA) is Unconstitutional: SC

Source: [The Times of India](#)

Syllabus: **GS-2:** Separation of Powers between various organs Dispute Redressal Mechanisms and Institutions.

Synopsis: The court struck down the West Bengal Housing Industry Regulation Act (WB HIRA), 2017 as unconstitutional. The court also clarified that the legislations by the Parliament and state government are on the concurrent list.

Introduction:

The central government enacted the [Real Estate \(Regulation and Development\) Act](#) to regulate the Real Estate sector in India. West Bengal government also enacted a parallel Act

known as the West Bengal Housing Industry Regulation Act (WB HIRA), 2017. Recently the Supreme Court held the West Bengal legislation Unconstitutional.

Background of both legislations:

Contracts and the transfer of property falls under the **Concurrent List** of the Seventh Schedule.

- In 1993 West Bengal government has enacted the West Bengal Housing Industry Regulation Act on the above two subjects.
- But, to bring transparency and safety in the market for consumers of residential and commercial projects the Central government enacted RERA in 2016. With the enactment of RERA, the 1993 Act was repealed.
- In the same year, West Bengal notified the draft Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Rules, 2016.
- Instead of finalizing the rules the state government went ahead and enacted West Bengal Housing Industry Regulation Act (WBHIRA) in 2017.
- Forum for Peoples Collective Efforts filed a case against the State of West Bengal regarding the WB HIRA

Recent Supreme Court Judgement on West Bengal Housing Industry Regulation Act:

The Supreme Court held in Forum for Peoples Collective Efforts v. State of West Bengal case held that the WB HIRA was unconstitutional. Further, the court also mentioned the following things.

- Both the statutes refer to the same subjects (**contracts and the transfer of property**) in the concurrent list.
- **Article 254 (2)** allows for a conflicting State law on a concurrent list subject to prevail over a central law if it receives the assent of the President. But the WB HIRA neither reserved for the consideration of the President nor the Presidential assent was obtained.
- The court also held that If any areas have been left out in the central legislation, the state legislatures can provide cognate(related) legislation. Such State legislation can incidentally deal with the provisions of Central legislation. But, The HIRA encroaches upon the authority of the Parliament.
- But in the case of clause-by-clause comparison between the two laws, the court observed that 95 to 98%, the WB HIRA is a complete copy-paste of the RERA. This is an attempt to establish a parallel regime by the State government.
- Furthermore, the court also observed that in a few critical aspects, WB HIRA is in direct conflict with RERA.
- The court also observed that there was a “doctrine of repugnancy” between WB-HIRA and RERA. (Repugnancy – inconsistency or contradiction between two or more parts of a legal instrument.) Such as,
 1. WB HIRA has failed to incorporate valuable institutional safeguards
 2. The WB HIRA does not have provisions intended to [protect the interest of homebuyers](#)
 3. The court observed these repugnancies of the state legislature as against the public interest.
- The court also elaborated on the **tests of repugnancy**. The three tests of Repugnancy as stated by the court are
 1. Where the provision of State legislation is directly in conflict with a law enacted by Parliament. In such cases, **compliance with one is impossible along with obedience to the other.**
 2. The second test of repugnancy is based on the **intent of Parliament to occupy the whole field**(contracts and the transfer of property) covered by the legislation.

3. The subject of the legislation enacted by the State is identical to Parliament, then does the State law enacted prior or later to the central law.
- Since the State law is completely repugnant to the Central law, it was constitutionally impermissible

Conclusion:

The court based on the above explanations struck down the West Bengal Housing Industry Regulation Act (WB HIRA), 2017, as unconstitutional. Further, the court also held that striking down the present law will not result in the revival of the 1993 WB HIRA. This is because the 1993 Act was repealed after the enactment of RERA.

The Court also clarified that the striking down of WBHIRA will not affect the sanctions permissions granted prior to the delivery of the judgement.

9. The Case of EC's Demand for Restriction on Media

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: The Election Commission had asked the court to not let the media cover its verbal hearing. It should withdraw its request to recover some of its moral high ground.

Introduction

The Election Commission of India is a constitutional body that draws its mandate to conduct free and fair elections from Article 324. It has built a desirable reputation for impartiality and public trust. However, the EC has appeared too weak to political pressures amid a pandemic.

- The election commission approached the Supreme Court against the sharply critical observations by the Madras High Court about its management of elections.
- The HC said that possibly EC should face murder charges. EC complained in the apex court by stating that these comments are blatantly critical and derogatory. It further suggested that a line should be drawn so that such remarks are not reported by the media.
 - The complaint shows disregard for an open and democratic public sphere.
- The Supreme Court in its response rightly said that it is essential for constitutional bodies to take criticism from other constitutional bodies in the right spirit.
 - The people have a right to be informed. The media has a duty to cover the unfolding of debate in the court of law not just its final verdict.

Where did the election commission go wrong?

The EC should take a moment to pause and do an honest introspection. It has invited serious questions from the start of the poll exercise.

- **Firstly, the eight-phase schedule for the West Bengal polls was overstretched** especially during a pandemic. **The EC ignored requests by opposition parties** to shorten the election duration by clubbing together the last few phases.
- Moreover, the segregation of phases and geographies seemed to favor a specific political party.
- **Secondly, the EC made only casual attempts to make sure that COVID protocols** were followed by candidates and parties. The COVID curve rose up in West Bengal and the rest of India.
 - India crossed daily cases of 1 lakh on April 4. The daily cases to over 3 lakhs by registering 3,32,730 on April 22.

- **Thirdly**, the EC only banned roadshows and public meetings of over 500 **after the Prime Minister's announcement of the cancellation** of his election meetings scheduled for the next day.

What should the election commission do?

- The EC had gained the trust of people over the years. **It should focus on maintaining** it. This will require constant awareness and work. The EC must know that the impression is growing of late that it has let itself go.
 - The EC needs to act to regain and restore its hard-earned **credibility**. It should begin by **withdrawing its self-indulgent and ill-conceived petition from the Supreme Court**.
- In a time when a stout executive does not hesitate to weaponize its mandate, the independence of monitorial institutions is especially precious and needed.

10. Use of CT scan for testing Covid is not Correct

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: The available data and the risk factors suggest that the widespread use of CT scans in diagnosing infectious diseases needs to be sidelined.

Background

- There are mainly three reasons why tests in clinical medicine are performed.
 - **Diagnosis:** To identify the disease
 - **Etiognosis:** To identify the causative factor of the disease.
 - **Prognosis:** To find out the future development of a particular disease.
- In this context, the use of **computerised tomography (CT)** scans for COVID does not satisfy all the above criteria, for an accurate diagnostic test.

Validation on the effectiveness of CT scan test for Covid

- **First**, CT scans are not accurate enough to diagnose COVID-19. **For instance**, according to a study by The Cochrane, CT scan can accurately diagnose COVID-19 in about 88% of individuals with a positive RT-PCR.
 - Since an RT-PCR itself misses 30% of people who have COVID-19, a chest CT is likely to diagnose only 62% of all individuals having COVID-19. It makes it a relatively inaccurate test for diagnosis.
- **Second**, CT scans are also not accurate enough to identify the causing factor of the disease (**Etiognosis**). **For instance**, according to a study by The Cochrane, radiologists have mislabelled 20% of those who did not have the disease as having COVID-19.
 - This has serious consequences on an individual's health.
 - One, the real causative factor for the disease is left undetected.
 - Two, individuals are subjected to unwanted psychological stress.
- **Third**, using a CT scan to identify the future course of the Covid disease is also unlikely. For instance,
 - A CT scan can only show the infection in the lungs at that particular point in time.
 - This suggests that a CT is unlikely to give a physician more information than a simple tool such as an oximeter.
- **Finally**, the risks involved in getting a CT of the chest done are high.

- According to a study published by The New England Journal of Medicine, in 2007, 4% of all cancers in the United States may be attributed to the **radiation from CT studies**.
- Also, apart from the risk caused to individuals, there are risks to radiology technicians, staff, and doctors.
- Further, Since CT scans are needed to be kept in closed air-conditioned spaces, there is a high risk of transmission of the virus at such centers.

Way forward

- For diagnosis of Covid, RT-PCR tests, which have higher accuracy compared to CT scans, can be done.
- Individuals should make an informed decision by evaluating the potential risks involved in getting the CT done.
- Further, patients with two negative RT-PCR swabs tests need to be evaluated for the possibility of other lung diseases

11. Reason behind Covid Vaccine Shortage Crisis

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis: Lack of firefight and planning are the main reasons responsible for the current Covid vaccine shortage crisis. Some extra efforts are required from center to address the challenges.

What are the reasons for the current Covid crisis?

- **First, the** delayed decision to make the vaccine available in the open market. Though now the government has allowed recently, the withdrawal of the price cap on vaccines can lead to a disparity among states to ensure **universal vaccination** for its citizens.
 - The Indian-made Covaxin, which was being distributed free, will now cost Rs 400 to the states and Rs 1,200 to private hospitals.
 - The financial position of many states is so weak that they can hardly buy two doses for every person at the rate of Rs 400 per vaccine.
 - Further, removal of price cap may lead to Exorbitant profiteering at the cost of people's lives.
- **Second, inadequate availability of vaccines** across the country due to lack of planning. This has delayed our fight against Covid pandemic. For example, Maharashtra has announced a stop to vaccinations for three days.
 - Further, no steps were taken to increase their availability. While other countries such as the US and EU advanced funding to companies researching the vaccine, India did nothing.
 - The US and the EU also booked 40 crore doses and 80 crore doses respectively in advance. While India placed its first order of vaccine in January 2021 and that too only for 1.60 crore doses. (less than 1 percent of its population).
- **Third,** lack of vision from our authorities to ensure ample availability of oxygen by anticipating the possibility of the second wave.
- **Fourth,** Lack of access to life-saving drugs due to profiteering by companies and middlemen.

What can be done?

- **One**, to provide universal vaccination, the Centre should bear the cost of vaccination. Also, a one-time tax can also be levied to mobilize funds.
- **Two, a zero-tolerance policy** should be adopted towards the black marketing of medicine. Further, Remdesivir should be procured and disbursed directly based on the assessment of the **Disaster Management Group**.
- **Three**, micro-planning at the local level should be carried out and a website for every district to dispense complete information from beds to oxygen, medicines, and ventilators should be enabled.

12. Poor State of Delhi Prisons Demand Urgent Attention

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis:

The condition of Delhi prisons has become immensely poor amidst the second wave of Covid 19. They have exceeded their sanctioned capacity and are on the verge of becoming hotspots for mass infections. Considering this, the government should take effective measures for decongesting prisons.

Background:

- Delhi is currently observing over 25000 new Covid 19 cases and 300 deaths every day.
- The virus has spread enormously across the state and the situation in Delhi prisons is even worse.

Poor state of Delhi Prisons:

- In April 2021, around 115 positive cases were reported among jail staff and 284 among inmates.
- Further, they have the highest occupancy rate in the country thereby possessing a high probability of virus spread and greater deaths.
 - As of April 2021, the prison population has crossed 20,500. This is twice the sanctioned capacity.

Steps taken for Decongest prisons:

- The Supreme Court directed the states to set up High-Powered Committees (**HPC**) in March 2020. The objective of HPC was to determine which inmates could be temporarily released.
- Around 3,499 under-trial prisoners in Delhi had been granted interim bail, and 1,184 convicts had been released on emergency parole till February 2021.
- However, the HPCs refused to extend the relaxation after this as the number of cases had come down. This again created a burden on Delhi prisons.
- The government now again wants to decongest the prisons however some issues would make the process more difficult.

Challenges in decongesting prisons:

- **Unwillingness of Prisoners:** Some prisoners feel more safe and secure in prisons. They are unwilling to leave the premises at a time of critical shortages in hospital infrastructure and greater difficulties in finding work.
- **Reluctance of Criminal Justice system:** The system failed to adjust as per the circumstances of pandemic-

- There were a high number of arrests by police during lockdown months.
- Similarly, reduced functioning of courts delayed trials and enhanced pressure on prisons.
- Further, bails were granted based on regular bail jurisprudence. This focuses on individual prisoners and not overall prison conditions.
- **Inadequate Data:** There is a dearth of data on the current prevalence of infection in jails. Effective decongesting is possible only when the government knows the degree of infection spread in jails.
- **Lack of Priority:** The authorities have shown very less concern towards the health and safety of prisoners-
 - **For instance**, HPC did not reconvene till May 4, and the minutes from this meeting are not yet public.
 - The last assessment of oxygen concentrators and other medical equipment within jails was done in January 2021.
 - The higher courts have not acted on petitions demanding the safety of prisoners in jails.

Way Forward:

- The government must **take robust steps for decongestion**. This includes setting up temporary prisons, relaxing criteria for releasing prisoners, etc.
 - The government should **restrict the interaction of inmates with jail staff**. As it is believed that asymptomatic jail officials may have contributed to the spread of the virus.
 - Further, the government must **release data on the prevalence** of testing, infection, and vaccination in jails periodically. This will improve public monitoring.
- To conclude, we can say that the above steps will help in safeguarding the fundamental right to life of prisoners.

13. SC struck down the Maharashtra State Reservation for SEBC Act, 2018

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Mechanisms, Laws, Institutions, and Bodies constituted for the Protection and Betterment of these Vulnerable Sections.

Synopsis:

The SC has struck down the Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act, 2018. The judgment would prevent realization of unjust benefits by the reservation. It would also encourage states to work on core supply-side issues in education and public employment which would curtail unnecessary demand for reservation.

Background:

- The five-judge bench of SC has struck down the Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act, 2018.
- The act provided reservations for the Maratha community in public education and employment.

About the SEBC Act 2018:

- It provides 16 percent reservation to the Maratha community in jobs and admissions.
- The law views the Maratha community as a socially and educationally backward class (SEBC).

Genesis of SEBC Act 2018:

- It was an outcome of a prolonged political campaign by the dominant Maratha community and significant support by the political parties. The community possesses a strong foothold in state politics, the running of cooperatives and educational institutions, and ownership of land.
- The issue of reservation was rejected by at least three national commissions and three state commissions in the past.
- However, in 2018, the Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission (headed by Justice M.G. Gaikwad) recommended reservation for the Marathas. The Commission believed that extraordinary circumstances existed for a Maratha quota.

Judgment of SC:

- The court held that the 2018 act goes against Articles 14 and 15 (right to equality and protection against discrimination) of the Indian Constitution. It **exceeds the ceiling of 50% reservation** set by the 1992 Indra Sawhney judgment.
- Further, the act **fails to prove the existence of 'extraordinary circumstances'** under which the 50% limit can be breached. The data collected and presented by the (Justice Gaikwad) Commission proves that the Marathas are not socially and educationally backward.
- The court held that the **102nd Constitution Amendment has taken away the power of states** to identify Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBCs). It means that the Centre alone is empowered to identify SEBC.
 - The States could only make suggestions to the President or the statutory commissions for inclusion, exclusion, or modification in the SEBC List.

Way Forward:

- The judgment should act as an eye-opener for other dominant communities that are demanding reservation. Eg – Patidars in Gujarat.
- The Maharashtra Government can undertake a fresh study to support the Maratha claim for backward status and affirmative action. However, a more prudent approach would be to solve supply-side issues in education and employment. This would curtail unnecessary demand for reservation.
- A review of inclusion/exclusion power in the SEBC list can be held as some experts believe that participation of states ensures better recognition.

14. What is Social Murder and How to Ensure Accountability in Patrimonial state?

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS2: Important Aspects of Governance, Transparency and Accountability

Synopsis: The lack of political attention to social determinants and inequities that exacerbate the pandemic in India is a classic case of '**Social Murder**'.

What is Social Murder?

- **Friedrich Engels**, used this phrase to describe the death of the worker population in England during the Industrial revolution era.
- Lack of access to basic necessities of life along with poor working and living conditions for the workers resulted in ill health and early deaths. Engels calls this social murder.
- It is the same as murder by an individual, but the only difference is that death appears to be a "natural one".
- Similarly, according to the author, the inability to make the state accountable for the loss of lives in the Pandemic is social murder.

- A classic case of social murder is the reverse migration of millions of inter-State migrant labor walking thousands of kilometers.

What fosters the conditions for social murder?

The state's neglect of its responsibility towards its citizens will perpetuate conditions for social murder. For instance,

- Holding elections in Bengal by the Election Commission of India,
- The Uttarakhand Chief Minister justifying **the Kumbh mela**.
- The inability of the State to Provide oxygen supply for Covid-19 Patients.
- Prohibition on media to telecast Cremation grounds.

What is the relation between Patrimonial state, accountability, Social murder?

1. **A patrimonial state** according to **Max Weber**, is a state in which the ruler exercises a traditional form of authority in contrast to a rule-based authority.
2. Here, the **centralised rule** is based on an ideology of religious majoritarianism as well as nationalism. It is further legitimized by the election wins.
3. The **patrimonial State** is benevolent towards its subjects. The author views India currently as a Patrimonial state.
4. But, the fundamental problem in patrimonialism is **ensuring accountability** of the government.
 1. For instance, recently, the Swedish Prime Minister was subjected to questioning by a constitutional committee on COVID-19 handling.
 2. Whereas, in India, there is **no mechanism for ensuring critical scrutiny** on the government decisions that led to the current crisis.
5. Also, there is **no accountability mechanism** when the state moves away from its benevolence posture. For instance, shifting the responsibility of procuring oxygen cylinders or arranging ambulances on citizens. Also, The Uttar Pradesh government charging people with First Information Reports (FIRs) for requesting oxygen.
6. All these acts of the state that are undemocratic cannot be made accountable in a Patrimonial state as the Citizens are seen as a subject of the state.
7. Further, the prejudice, preconceived opinions cultivated by the ruling class to hold power is sanctioning social murder by turning the citizen blind to social realities. Unless people become citizens and not subjects under patrimonial rule, the pandemic will pose a threat to Indian democracy as well.

15. Significance of Rent Waiver in tackling Reverse Migration

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: State support for food and income along with rent waiver during the pandemic to workers and migrants can stop reverse migration.

Why rent should be waived for Migrants during the Pandemic crisis?

- **One**, According to the findings by the RMKU and the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS) in Jaipur, on a survey of 500 domestic workers, rent formed the majority component of debt post lockdowns.
- **Two**, it is one of the leading causes of mass **reverse migration**, according to the reports by the Stranded Workers Action Network.

Why the steps taken by the government to waive rent for migrants failed during the first covid wave?

Last year, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs in an order stated that the landlords should not demand rent from the workers, including the migrants for a period of 1 month. However, this measure was largely a failure due to the following reasons.

- **One, lack of clarity.** The order did not state clearly whether the rent to be waived or just deferred.
- **Two, no incentives for Landlords.** Many landlords, especially the **old-aged population** rely on rent for their sustenance. Thus, lack of incentives from the government for the needy resulted in noncompliance.
- **Three, lack of enforceable mechanism.** There was no regulation body created to monitor the enforcement of this order.

Solutions to address this issue?

- First, a moratorium should be announced with a clearer enforcement mechanism, with a clear distinction between deferment and rent waivers.
- Second, the state should provide compensation to Landlords for lost rent, at least a partial amount.
- Third, direct cash transfer for rent support based on rental market conditions can be a part of the solution.
- Fourth, limited waivers on utility expenses of workers. For example, partial waiver on electricity bills and penalties charged on non-payment.

Returning to their villages is not a willful choice for migrants, as villages are lacking employment, no skills for agricultural employment, and the absence of social ties. Yet, they are forced to take this painful journey due to a lack of livelihood options in urban areas. State support for basic food (PDS), shelter (Rent waiver), and direct cash transfer for basic sustenance can halt the reverse migration of migrants.

16. Critical Analysis of U.S Support to temporary Patent Waiver for Covid Vaccines

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: Arguments, provided by MNC's against Patent waiver on Covid technologies, are baseless. WTO should make efforts to bring consensus among nations for a temporary waiver.

Background

- Last year, India and South Africa proposed in WTO for a waiver on patent protection for technologies needed to combat COVID-19.
- While many low- and middle-income countries supported it, resistance came from the high-income countries (U.S., U.K, E U etc.,) and the Pharmaceuticals industry.
- Currently, the United States president, Joe Biden, has decided to support the India-South Africa proposal.
- However, the process may get delayed, despite U.S. intervention. Because, the WTO works on a **consensus-based approach**. i.e., The World Trade Organization resolves debates by consensus and not by voting.

Why the reasons, given for not accepting the Patent waiver proposal, are baseless?

Many arguments against providing a Patent waiver were put forward. However, all such reasons are found to be baseless.

- **First**, critics argue that, the capacity for producing vaccines of assured quality and safety is limited to some laboratories. Further, it may be hazardous to permit manufacturers in low- and middle-income countries to work with technologies that they cannot handle.
 - This argument is not valid, for many years multinational firms have subcontracted their patented pharmaceutical products to industries with low production costs in developing countries.
- **Second**, Critics argue that there is no evidence that extra capacity exists for producing vaccines outside of firms undertaking them now.
 - But even this argument is not valid. For example, The World Health Organization's **mRNA vaccine technology transfer hub** has already drawn interest from over 50 firms to produce the approved vaccines.
- **Third**, critics argue that the time taken for their utilization by new firms will be too long to help combat the present pandemic.
 - Even this argument is baseless as nobody knows when the Pandemic will come to end. Further, combined with low vaccination rates and emerging Mutant variation in Covid virus makes it much more difficult to predict the end of the Pandemic.
- **Fourth**, multinational pharmaceutical firms argue that Patent waiver will allow China to steal their technologies, now and in the future.
 - However, MNC's forget to remember that the original genomic sequence openly shared by China, gave these firms a head start in developing vaccines.
- **Fifth**, the most common argument by all MNC's is that innovation and investment by industry will have to be financially rewarded to incentivise them to develop new products.
 - But, even through **compulsory licensing** industry will be financially rewarded. Because royalties are paid to the original innovators and patent holders even if compulsory issues are issued bypassing patent restrictions.
 - Further, much of the foundational science that built the path for vaccine production came from public-funded universities and research institutes.

What are the other alternatives proposed for Patent waiver?

- **One**, giving license to manufacturers in developing countries, while retaining patent rights. However, it will not guarantee equity in access to the products at affordable prices.
- **Two**, supplying vaccines to developing countries through the **COVAX facility**. However, this mechanism has failed to deliver on its promise. For example, U.S. States have received more vaccines than the entire Africa has from COVAX.

What is the way forward?

- **First**, considering the positive development from the U.S, developing countries must start issuing compulsory licences. Even, **The Doha declaration on TRIPS** permits their use in a public health emergency.
- **Second**, High-income countries and multilateral agencies should provide financial and technical support to enable expansion of global production capacity.
- **Third**, Efficacy and safety of their products can be assessed by credible regulatory agencies and the World Health Organization.

17. How India's Diaspora in US helped India in COVID Crisis

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- GS 2- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Synopsis – The Indian diaspora contributed to the US's decision to allow raw materials for COVID-19 vaccines for India.

Introduction-

- The US in a decision had denied India the raw material for vaccine preparation. It justified this decision with its America First policy.
- The US was criticized for not doing enough to aid India, which had helped the US, when COVID was raging there.
- However, after the collective outrage of the Indian diaspora or prominent members of the US political and corporate elite, the US government allowed India with raw material supply.

Other assistance announced by US

The diaspora has played an important role in ensuring that the US administration prioritizes India's COVID crisis, and the following are the results of the diaspora outrage-

- **First, the US Defence Production Act's provisions are being reconsidered** – By approving the supply of filters required for the Covishield vaccine's production.
- **Second, excess doses will be released to other countries**– the US is likely to give away 60 million surplus doses of AstraZeneca vaccine by June to other countries [subject to FDA clearance].
- **Third, a comprehensive plan has been prepared**- The US government has prepared a detailed plan for supply of oxygen and associated equipment, besides setting up field hospitals with oxygen beds.
- **Four, The US government has also ramped up supplies of medicine** [Commercial supplies of therapeutics] especially remdesivir.
- **Five, the US Development Corporation will fund the BioE** [Indian vaccine firm] to expand its manufacturing potential. By the end of 2022, India and the other three QUAD partners will have generated and distributed at least one crore doses.

Way forward-

- The reason behind the US response went from radio silence to rapid-fire in quick succession was the outrage from the Indian Diaspora.
- In health-related cooperation, the US must recognize that assisting India helps the whole world. India-made vaccines would benefit people in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.
- Influential figures in the US should back **India and South Africa's IPR waiver proposal** under the TRIPS agreement.

18. Why the Taiwan Covid-19 Model Works?

Source: [Click here](#)

Syllabus: GS-2, Social Issues, Health related Issues

Synopsis: Taiwan detected its 1st case of Covid-19 in January 2020. However, it managed to control the pandemic effectively despite the adverse circumstances. With India suffering heavily from Covid-19, it becomes important to have a good look at the Taiwan Covid-19 model.

Introduction

- A novel form of pneumonia was first emerged in Wuhan, China, in 2019, and is called coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19). It has caused more than 150 million cases and more than 3.1 million deaths worldwide.
- The disease has a huge medical, economic, and social impact across the globe. It has considerably threatened global efforts to attain the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
- Taiwan was expected to be one of the most severely affected countries by the virus because of its proximity to China. Taiwan did not ignore the Covid-19 alarms, given its experience of fighting the 2003 SARS outbreak.

Explain the Taiwan Covid-19 model

Taiwan gathered information from evolving official and unofficial accounts to understand the emerging disease i.e. Covid-19. It helped them in understanding the scope and severity worse than what the global public view suggested.

1. **Firstly, the system used this information to launch superior monitoring** in December 2019. They have vigorously implemented public health control methods ever since Taiwan's first case was detected. They didn't ignore warnings or public health containment measures unlike many other countries.
2. **Secondly, Taiwan was benefitted by its experience in handling the 2003 SARS outbreak.** It had an **established nationwide infectious disease healthcare network.** This network provides the **legal authority for shifting patients** with highly infectious diseases to chosen facilities.
 - This has helped protect health systems and health professionals from being overburdened. It also allowed most non-Covid-19 health services to continue.
3. **Thirdly, Taiwan diminished the economic impact of Covid-19** by acting early and effectively. Taiwan implemented flexible measures to maintain vital international, social, economic, and trade activities.
 - **It applied flexible quarantine measures for vessels and aircraft** so that fisheries, offshore wind farms, and air transport industries could continue operations.
4. **Fourthly, public trust and cooperation with the government's response** was equally important in successfully containing Covid-19. The government followed the principles of rational response, minimum damage, and steady adoption while framing disease control rules.
5. **Fifthly, Taiwan has stressed the right to health and associated protections** and strong opposition to human rights abuses. **It prioritized the protection of disadvantaged groups**, including migrant workers.
 - Taiwan's response to Covid-19 has been very successful. It has proven that Taiwan cannot remain outside the global health network. **It plays a key role in the global monitoring and early warning systems** that detect the threat of emerging infectious diseases.

Way forward

- The Taiwan model has proven that it is capable of containing Covid-19. Taiwan will be able to work with the rest of the world by contributing to international Covid-19 supply chain systems, global diagnostics, vaccines, and therapeutics platforms.
- WHO and related parties should acknowledge Taiwan's age-old contributions to the international community in public health, disease prevention, and the human right to health. Taiwan should be included in WHO meetings, mechanisms, and activities.
- As a result, Taiwan will work with the rest of the world to safeguard that all enjoy the fundamental human right to health as specified in the WHO constitution.

Resonating with the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals mantra, no one should be left behind.

19. Nation wide lockdown is an Opportunity to Improve Health Infrastructure

Source – [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis – At last, states are implementing strict lockdowns. It is to handle the out-of-control spread of Coronavirus infection. Now, states should use this opportunity to improve health infrastructure in the country.

Introduction

- Life threat from a mutating virus has aggravated manifold. An increase in Covid cases from 9,000 new daily in early February to over 4,00,000 in May, is mostly caused by incorrect messaging, political rallies, and religious gatherings.
- To curb the transmission of the virus, there is a need to impose national wide lockdown. However, lockdown should be used to improve the health infrastructure.

Benefits of a lockdown

- **Break the chain of transmission of COVID-19** – The lockdown will help to break the chain of transmission of the virus so that number of cases falls.
- **Lockdown will provide breathing time-**
 - **The chance of respite for the overburdened medical community** – The lockdown will help healthcare professionals to manage existing cases.
 - In the meantime, the **government should increase essential health supplies** such as oxygen concentrators, ICU beds, and ventilators. It is necessary to treat Covid-19 patients.
 - The lockdown provided a breathing space for **the government to ramp up COVID-19 testing facilities** to assess the true scale of the pandemic.
 - The lockdown would provide the Centre government time and capacity to boost vaccine's domestic production.

Way forward

- Government should avoid shut out employment and services completely. Home delivery services and some vending should be permitted.
- The state government should ensure proper social distancing during ration distribution. Online payment for ration and consumer goods and doorstep delivery can be used.
- Travel for emergencies must be facilitated without harassment.
- People should focus on wearing quality good masks, keeping a safe distance, and avoiding big gathering

20. US Support to TRIPS Waiver – Challenges Ahead

Source- [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis – US is supporting the TRIPS waiver on Covid-19 Vaccines. However, it may take much more time and effort to take benefits out of it.

Introduction

- The US is supporting a temporary waiver of the TRIPS agreement [patent protection rules] on Covid-19 vaccines proposed by India and South Africa.
- Article IX of the WTO Agreement allows for waiving obligations in exceptional circumstances.

- However, developed nations [home to the big pharmaceutical companies] oppose the TRIPS waiver.

Why developed countries were against the proposal to waive TRIPS?

According to some developed countries-

- If IP (intellectual property) not properly protected, investment in the medical field, especially in the area of infectious diseases, would be reduced.
- It will also add a risk factor for the growth of medical technology which will be hindered, and essential products may not be developed in future crises.
- Hopefully, just support for the waiver is not sufficient. There are many more challenges in achieving the final goal of mass production of vaccines in every country.

TRIPS Waiver Challenges-

- **First, Previous experience-** TRIPS Agreement contains flexibilities. These include the freedom to use parallel imports and compulsory licenses that help countries get access to medicines. Yet such flexibilities are not always easy to use.
 - **For example-** Following the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa in the 1990s, the WTO adopted a decision in 2003 to waive certain TRIPS obligations.
 - In 2003, a mechanism was developed that enables countries with no pharmaceutical manufacturing capability to use and benefit from compulsory licenses. However, it was subject to so many conditions that poor countries could not get the benefit of this waiver, such as
 - The exporting country must ensure that the drugs so manufactured are exported to that nation only.
 - The medicines should be readily identifiable through different colours, or shapes.
 - Only the amount necessary to meet the requirements of the eligible importing country are manufactured
 - The importing country has to notify the WTO's TRIPS Council.
- **Second, Time-taking process-** Given the WTO's consensus-based decision-making process and the complexities of the issues involved, negotiations on the text of the waiver will take time.
- **Third, the limited scope of the waiver- The US only supports waiving IP protection on Covid-19 vaccines.** While medicines and other therapeutics and technologies related to the treatment of COVID-19 are being ignored.
- **Forth, Non-IP challenges-** The lack of access to technological know-how related to manufacturing COVID-19 vaccines will not be solved by TRIPS waiver.
 - IP Waiver does not impose a legal requirement on pharmaceutical companies to transfer or share technology.

Recommendations-

- Governments must negotiate with big-pharma firms for technology transfer by offering additional financial benefits and establishing a favorable policy environment.
- Countries should start working towards making suitable amendments to their domestic legal framework to operationalize and enforce the TRIPS waiver.
- Developed countries should consider waiving medicines and other therapeutics and technologies related to the treatment of COVID-19.

21. National Task Force for Transparent Oxygen Allocation

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis

The supreme court has constituted a National Task Force for transparent oxygen allocation. It is a 12 member body constituted to guide the central government allocation of medical oxygen to the states. Further, it will also recommend a framework for broader pandemic preparedness and response.

Background

- The second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic has crippled the healthcare system in India.
- The situation is worse in the domain of oxygen supply. Due to acute shortages, the toll of preventable deaths has increased.
- In this scenario, the supreme court has set up a National Task Force for transparent oxygen allocation.

About the National Task Force for transparent oxygen allocation:

- It is a 12 member body constituted to guide the central government's allocation of medical oxygen to the states.
- It has 10 members who are leading clinicians, critical care specialists, and virologists. Along with this, there are 2 government officials – Secretary, Ministry of Health, and Cabinet Secretary.
- It is established for a period of six months.

Working and Mandate of Task Force:

- It will work **as per its 12 point terms of reference.**
- The first five points focus on oxygen supply. This includes:
 - Deciding on a methodology for the scientific allocation of oxygen to states
 - Facilitating audits (of oxygen supply, distribution, and utilization) by sub-groups within each state and UTs.
- The 6th point allows it to review and suggest measures necessary for ensuring the availability of essential drugs and medicines.
- The remaining 6 points are aimed at the broader pandemic preparedness and response. This includes planning and adopting remedial measures:
 - To ensure preparedness for present and future emergencies;
 - To facilitate the use of technology;
 - Furthermore, to suggest augmenting the availability of trained doctors, nurses, and paramedical staff;
 - Also, to promote evidence-based research and enhance effective response to the pandemic;
 - To facilitate sharing of best practices across the nation to promote knowledge about management of the pandemic
 - Lastly, to make recommendations in regard to other issues of pressing national concerns.
- It can constitute more sub-groups in specialized areas or regions to assist in its work.
- It can seek assistance from experts both within and outside government in areas such as clinical virology and immunology, epidemiology/ public health, etc.

Benefits of Creating such a task force:

- **First**, it will facilitate a public health response to the pandemic based upon **scientific and specialized domain knowledge**.
- **Second**, it will give inputs to decision-makers. These inputs will enable them to **go beyond ad hoc solutions** to unprecedented challenges.
- **Third**, it will **alter the techno-bureaucratic nature** of policy decisions by ensuring the participation of independent subject experts.
- **Fourth**, it will **give suggestions to improve state-level public healthcare systems**. As it looks at the shortage of medical oxygen through a broader lens of pandemic preparedness and response.
 - The state-level health care system currently has:
 - Insufficient planning, delayed procurement, and weakness of supply chain management.
 - Insufficient government funding
 - absence of sufficient and trained human resources
 - high out-of-pocket expenditure (around 30-40%)

Way Forward:

- The members of NTF have the needed qualification and expertise to advise on clinical matters and oxygen supply. However, they may need to **proactively co-opt experts** from other fields for giving suggestions on broad issues in a short time. This involves experts from medical procurement and supply; pharmacology, free medicines, and diagnostics, etc.
- Further, the task force should refrain from giving a mere medicalized response to a public health challenge. The focus should be on creating a healthcare system that can keep people healthy and respond to future epidemics and pandemics.

22. U.S Exit from Greater Middle East Will Alter Regional Relations

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis: The future US exit from the greater Middle East region is altering the relationships among the regional powers. In this regard, both India and Pakistan must come to terms with the changing dynamics.

Background

- The US will soon **withdraw its last forces from Afghanistan** in September 2021. The country is also shifting its focus from the Middle East region to Indo-Pacific.
- The US has played a pivotal role in the **greater Middle East region** in the last 50 years.
 - It is a vaguely defined region comprising the “Arab world” plus Afghanistan, Iran, Israel, and Turkey.
- Many regional actors sought **alliances with America** to secure themselves against ambitious or troublesome neighbors (like Saudi Arabia, U.A.E). Similarly, others (like Russia, China) sought to balance against America.
- The withdrawal will simply alter the regional equations and induce the creation of new realignments.

Why is the US withdrawing?

- **First**, the country has failed to solve centuries-old conflicts in the region even after decades of presence.

- **Second**, there are very few compelling factors that can compel the US to incur huge military, political and diplomatic investments in the region.
- **Third**, the rising Chinese assertiveness has compelled it to focus its resources on the Indo-Pacific region.
- Realizing the reality of withdrawal, countries have started to alter their relationship with neighboring countries or search for alternate patrons.

Attempts towards improving the relationship among the Middle East countries:

- Turkey is focusing on establishing peace with Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Although it had tried to trouble them using other Muslim countries.
- Saudi Arabia and Iran are now exploring means to reduce bilateral tensions and moderate their proxy wars in the region.
- Saudi Arabia has also refrained from isolating Qatar from the Gulf region.
- Similarly, UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan are trying to normalize their hostilities with Israel. These 4 Arab states recognized Israel as an independent state in 2020.
- **How India and Pakistan have responded?**
- **India's approach towards Middle East countries:**
 - The country has maintained its approach of dealing with all the Gulf countries, without focusing on their regional rivalries.
 - There has been a little friction in the relationship with Turkey owing to the policies of President Erdogan. However, India is hopeful of improving the relations post the withdrawal.
- **Pakistan's Approach towards Middle East countries:**
 - The country has struggled to adopt a pragmatic policy due to domestic politics and ideological considerations.
 - For instance, it has not established diplomatic ties with Israel. Despite knowing that a normal relationship with the Jewish state serves Pakistan's interest.
 - Earlier, the country tried to construct a new Islamic bloc with Turkey and Malaysia in order to overpower the Saudi-led bloc. However, its huge economic dependence on Saudi Arabia and UAE induced it to establish good relations with them.
- **Bilateral Relations:**
 - Some experts believe that Pakistan is now adopting a softer stance towards India as its relevance will get reduced post-U.S withdrawal.
 - Both the countries have maintained the February 2021 ceasefire along the Line of Control.
 - Pakistan is also trying to delink the question of India's 2019 constitutional changes in Kashmir from the normalization of bilateral relations.
- Despite improvement in bilateral relations, both countries want US forces to stay in Afghanistan.

Why do India and Pakistan want the U.S forces to stay in Afghanistan?

- **India** – The presence would keep a check on the rise of extremist forces like the Taliban. This would have enabled India to play a greater role in Afghanistan.
- **Pakistan** – The presence would sustain the dependence of the US on Pakistan for geographic access and operational support in combating terrorism. This dependence can, later on, be used as a bargaining chip in International relations.
- Further, the **trans-border links** between the Taliban and other extremist forces in South Asia would be strengthened without US forces. It is extremely worrisome as

the region is already surrounded by a significant degree of terrorism as testified by the May 2021 attack on the former president of the Maldives.

Way Forward:

- The South Asian states must collaborate on countering extremism and terrorism, else every one of them will be weakened.
- They should realize that the national interest of the state must prevail over all other considerations, including religious ones.
- The middle eastern countries should also cooperate on pragmatic lines rather than working on old ideological tropes like pan-Islamism, pan-Arabism, or anti-Americanism.

23. Time to Revive the Plan for Indian National Health Services

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: The pandemic has broadly highlighted the inadequacy in our health care system and has brought serious consideration for the formation of the Indian national health services.

Background

- There has been a coordinated effort from medical staff, the Centre, the state, and other state institutions to control the Pandemic. For instance,
 - The railways are running special trains carrying oxygen supplies.
 - The military is involved in medical supply chains.
 - The Karnataka government has ordered private hospitals above a certain size to reserve 75% of their beds for COVID-19 patients, who will be paid for under a public scheme
- Despite these measures, the Indian healthcare system is struggling to control the Pandemic.

Issues in the Indian health care system

- **Inadequate public health expenditure:** India spends nearly 1% of GDP.
- **Inadequate public health providers: for instance,** in certain rural areas the doctor-population ratio is over 1:40,000
- **High out-of-pocket expenditure:** Medical expenses constitute the major reason for personal debt in India.
- **Systemic issues:** Highly fragmented, corruption, urban-centered, elite-focused.
- To address the issues ailing our health care system, India needs to form Indian National Health services, in line with British National Health Service.

How the British National Health Service function?

- The service is **funded entirely from Public money** (Taxation). The budget includes a payment to general practitioners, most of whom remain private providers but are paid by the state for treating NHS patients
- All hospital treatment and **medicines are free**, as are outpatient and follow-up appointments.
- The NHS is the **largest employer in the U.K.** and Its current budget is about 7.6% of GDP. Despite being large in scale, it provides **highly localized access** to care.
- The formation of the British National Health Service has resulted in providing top-class universal healthcare, including training and research. However, some issues like subjective preference to patients of different social classes still exist.

- In India, during 1946, the civil servant **Sir Joseph Bhore** proposed Indian national health services broadly modeled on the lines of the British National Health Service or NHS.
- He further recommended the integration of preventive and curative medicines at all levels.

24. Impacts of Digital inequality on Health and Education

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: **Digital inequality** or Unequal access to digital platform is worsening inequalities in accessing public goods such as Education and Health.

Facts on Digital inequality in India

- **Inequality in access to digital devices:** According to **National Sample Survey (2017)**, only 6% of rural households and 25% of urban households have a computer.
- **Inequality in access to Internet Services:** Only 17% in rural areas and 42% in urban areas have access to internet.
- Due to the prevailing inequality in digital access, the digital solutions offered for providing basic services such as health and education have failed.

Reasons behind Digital inequality in education

- **Lack of access to online classes:** According to the **Azim Premji Foundation, ASER and Oxfam** report, between 27% and 60% could not access online classes, due to lack of devices, shared devices, inability to buy “data packs”, etc.
- **Loss of Lives:** a college student studying in Delhi and a 16-year-old in Goa committed suicide as their family could not afford to repair the phone they used.
- **Lack of learning environment at home:** a quiet space to study is a luxury for many. For instance, 25% of Indians lived in single-room dwellings in 2017-19. Further, girls at home are burdened with domestic chores.
- **Advantages in Peer learning is forgiven:** For instance, even students with issues in English language found easy to pick up the language with the help of peers. Now, online education has deprived them this advantage.

Reasons behind Digital inequality in health

India's Poor population is at a disadvantage in accessing good health care due to the following reasons,

- **One,** very low public spending on health (nearly 1% of GDP). This has contributed to the high share of ‘**out of pocket**’ (**OOP**) **health expenditure** in India was over 60% in 2018.
 - Even in the United States, where health system is highly privatised, OOP was merely 10%.
- **Two,** the private health sector in India is poorly regulated. As a result, they charge exorbitant prices and has contributed towards the development of black market for scarce services
- **Three,** shortage of essentials such as drugs, hospital beds, oxygen, vaccines etc.,
- To overcome the above challenges, the government chose to promote Digital health services as a solution. However, digital health services have resulted in unequal access to health care due to the following reason.
- **Exclusion:** Platform- and app-based solutions can exclude the poor entirely thereby denying their right to access health care. For instance,

- People with knowledge of technology are at advantage to access digital health services, compared to the vulnerable populations without digital knowledge. For example, in the case of **CoWIN**, it is much harder for people without phones, computers, and the Internet to book slots.
- **Language barrier:** The website is only available in English, restricting the use for the mass non-English population.
- **Privacy violation:** For example, the push towards **digital health ID databases** may result in health records being used by private entities without our consent.

Way forward

- Need to increase spending on health to 3% of GDP to reduce 50% of out-of-pocket expenditure as per **Economic survey 2021**.
- Need to enforce laws against medical malpractices strictly.
- To ensure Patient privacy, decentralized digital storage followed in countries like France and Taiwan should be created rather than creating a centralized database for digital health records.

25. Why Safeguards for Child adoptions Needs to be Followed Strictly?

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Mechanisms, Laws, Institutions and Bodies constituted for the Protection and Betterment of these Vulnerable Sections.

Synopsis: In India Pandemic has increased the number of orphans in the country. Negligence for legal procedures of Child adoption creates a ground for Child trafficking of these orphans.

Background

- According to **UNICEF**, India has over 30 million orphan and abandoned children.
- The Pandemic has left many more children orphaned due to the death of their parents by Covid-19 infection.
- Today, some people are offering such infants for instant adoption without following proper legal safeguards.
- Moreover, some child trafficking rackets are exploiting negligence for legal procedures of adoption and hasty sentimental considerations by people.

Child Adoption laws in India

- **The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) law was enacted in 2015.**
 - It is a secular law and all persons are free to adopt children under this law. It also allows the adoption of Children of relatives.
 - Only, those children can be adopted who are declared legally eligible for adoption under the Juvenile Justice Act.
- **Adoption Regulations of 2017:**
 - Rehabilitation of all orphaned, abandoned, and surrendered children is regulated by the strict mandatory procedures of the Adoption Regulations.
 - Violation of the Juvenile Justice Act and the Adoption Regulations invites punishment up to three years and a fine of ₹1 lakh, or both.
- **CARA (The Central Adoption Resource Authority):**
 - The Juvenile Justice Rules of 2016 and the Adoption Regulations of 2017 provided for the creation of CARA.
 - It is a statutory body, and it looks after the regulation, monitoring, and control of all intra-country and inter-country adoptions.

- India became the signatory to the **Hague Convention on Protection of Children** and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-country Adoptions. Thus, CARA was designated as the nodal agency to grant a no-objection certificate for all inter-country adoptions.
- **India is also a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:** It provides a legal mandate of all authorities and courts to offer protection to children.
- **Procedure for legal Adoption in India**
- **First**, parents willing to adopt children should register on the Child Adoption Resource Information and Guidance System (**CARINGS**)
- Then, specialized adoption agencies will be adjudging the eligibility of prospective adoptive parents living in India based on home study reports.
- If approved, prospective children are offered as per seniority in the adoption list and pre-adoption foster care follows.
- The specialized adoption agency then secures court orders approving the adoption.
- For NRI's,
- They need to approach authorised adoption agencies in their foreign country of residence for registration under CARINGS.
- Their eligibility is adjudged by authorised foreign adoption agencies through home study reports.
- As per seniority, they are offered profiles of children, and child study reports are finalized.
- CARA then issues a pre-adoption 'no objection' certificate for foster care, followed by a court adoption order. No objection certificate from CARA is mandatory for a passport and visa to leave India.

What needs to be done to prevent the child trafficking rackets from misusing child adoption system?

- **One, CARA** needs to conduct an **outreach program** to inform citizens about misuse of illegal adoption.
- **Two**, the legal process of adoption must be adequately publicized.
- **Three**, The **National and State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights** are empowered by law to take effective action against those engaging in illegal activities. They need to ensure safety of Children through increased Vigilance.
- **Four**, Social activists, NGOs and enlightened individuals must report all the incidents that come to their notice.
- **Five**, Media shaming of those involved in Child trafficking can deter the crime to some extent.

26. Lessons learnt from the Ladakh crisis

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Synopsis: A critical evaluation of the Ladakh crisis, may help India to achieve advantageous position against China at LAC in long term.

Background

- Even after a year of **Ladakh crisis**, the stand-off between Indian and Chinese troops in eastern Ladakh shows no signs of resolution. Disengagement has been stalled and China continues to reinforce its troops.
- Even in the future, the relationship between the two countries is set to remain vulnerable to destabilizing disruptions.

- In this context, it's important for our military and political leaders to learn the right lessons from Ladakh. It will ensure that India is rightly prepared to meet the challenge of Chinese coercion in the future.

What are the lessons learnt from the Ladakh crisis?

According to a recent study published by the **Lowy Institute**, the Ladakh crisis offers India three key lessons in managing the strategic competition with China.

- **First**, India's military strategy doctrine based on denial has been more successful than the retaliation strategy. **For example**, India's occupation of the Kailash Range provided it a strategic advantage in case of further advance of Chinese.
 - Focus on denial strategy will enhance the Indian military capacity to thwart future land grabs across the LAC.
 - Further, improved denial capabilities will allow India to reduce the resource drain of the increased militarization of the LAC.
- **Second**, the threat of political costs will work more in India's favor rather than the material threat of material costs.
 - Because, China's military spending is three to four times larger than India's. Any material cost incurred, will not disrupt its existing priorities.
 - However, China will not be interested in destabilizing its political relationship with India owing to its pre-occupation in many territorial disputes.
- **Third**, India should persist with its strategies to secure the Indian Ocean even if threats at LAC increases.
 - Because the future of the Indian Ocean Region is more consequential and more uncertain than the Himalayan frontier.
 - The Ladakh crisis has highlighted the need for increased militarisation at the LAC. However, pursuing the strategy of increased militarisation at the LAC will delay India's plan for military modernization and maritime expansion in the Indian Ocean.
 - India needs to make tough-minded strategic trade-offs. India needs to prioritize military modernization over increasing militarisation at the LAC.
 - However, rebalancing India's strategic priorities is politically challenging. Here, the chief of Defence staff should step in to issue firm strategic guidance to the military services.

27. Importance of Parliamentary Proceedings

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: Parliamentary proceedings should operate virtually to ensure the voices of all sections of the country are heard. Many other countries are doing the same.

Introduction

The legislature which is the third arm of the state seems to be missing when there are as many as 306 districts now with a positivity of 20 percent or higher. The executive and the judiciary can be seen and heard in the public health emergency.

- Recently, Congress MP and its leader in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury have written a letter to President and the LS Speaker. They asked for a special session to discuss the response to Covid. This marked Parliament's absence in the crisis.
- Earlier, Mallikarjun Kharge had sent a letter to Prime Minister and RS chairman. He asked for virtual parliamentary standing committee meetings.

How has the world responded to the functioning of parliament and opposition suggestions amid a pandemic?

For instance, many other democracies across the world have found ways for their parliaments to carry on gathering amid the pandemic.

- **Firstly, some democracies used conventional ways** and continued to meet physically, but with restrictions. **Some switched to virtual meetings** with the help of technologies that allow remote working.
- **Secondly, the UK has adopted hybrid models.** In this, a mix of members is present in the chamber and others participate by video conference. Many states have had to change laws and relax procedures, reset minimum number rules, and rearrange venues.
- **India's response:**
- **Thirdly, in India, the government shows little or no urgency for parliamentary proceedings.** It has shown high resistance to suggestions and interferences by Opposition leaders.
 - **For example,** former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's suggestions were quickly disregarded by Health Minister Harsh Vardhan earlier.

Suggestions

- **It is very important for governments to listen, learn and correct errors** to find the best way forward. The response to a national health crisis needs the participation of all the people's representatives, across states and party.
- The virus has brought death and distress to every constituency. To battle this, **MPs must group ideas and resources**, ask questions and apply the check and balance.
- **The House should reopen its doors virtually** to ensure that the executive does not remain limited to echo chambers of its own making.

The conclusion

- In a shared crisis, one-sided responses are terribly insufficient and even counter-productive. Parliament must return as a space for a wider discussion. The government must take the lead and make this happen.

28. Links between Crisis and Economic Reforms

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis:

The 1991 economic crisis indicates that the crisis is a good opportunity for economic reforms. But that is not true, specifically in the case of 2021 crisis. Thus, not all crisis results in economic reforms.

Introduction:

2021 marks 30 years of 1991 economic reforms. The 1991 reforms permanently altered the production and distribution structures of the Indian economy. But during the pandemic, the government introduced few reforms as well.

Both 1991 and 2021 have one thing in common. Both reforms came after the [economy faces a severe growth crisis](#). This raises a few important questions.

1. Is the crisis a prerequisite for reforms?
2. Are reforms capable of stimulating the economy?

The link between Crisis and economic reforms:

Big economic policy reforms often face hurdles in terms of rules and routines. This is because these reforms generally depart from existing economic policies. So the fundamental shifts will always face criticisms.

But the **Crisis** situation **provides an opportunity for the government** to introduce radical economic reforms due to the following reasons,

- The crisis situation **challenges the legitimacy of existing policy**. So, many experts suggest new proposals and possibilities to overcome the crisis.
- **Delivery of services** will also face challenges during the crisis. So to meet the societal expectations institutional reforms are necessary.
- **For the policymaker**, crises can generate increased demand for changing the policy.
- However, not all crises end in reforms. But all crisis will provide an opportunity for reforms.
- **Converting a crisis into an opportunity:**

Reforms can be feasible during a crisis on three factors.

1. During a crisis, the economic modes of interactions will change and set a suitable background for economic reforms
2. In a crisis situation authority replaces rules. (Authorities will change the rules frequently to tackle the crisis situation). This makes it easier for authorities to push the economic policies in a short time span.
3. During the crisis period, the legitimacy of prevailing rules and routines diminish. This will make it easier for the government to depart from them.

Difference between two crisis:

Even though the existent of crisis in 1991 and 2021, both the crisis have **differences in terms of character and consequence.**

1991 Economic crisis:

- **Cause:** The 1991 crisis was a product of India's economic policies(Internal).
- **Effect:** The economy was forced to adjust to the internal shock.
- **Policies:**
 - India specific policies are implemented. The world never went through any drastic policy shift.
 - There was also a semi-fixed template for reforms available. These generic measures were the result of various economies experienced external sector imbalances. So, a tried, and tested policy was available to India.

2021 Pandemic crisis:

- **Cause:** The 2021 crisis is a product of a pandemic. This is outside the economic system.
- **Effect:** The economy is forced to adjust to this external shock.
- **Policies:** The economic effect of the crisis is global in nature.
 - This makes policy responses very challenging.
 - India specific policies have tempered with the dynamics of the rest of the world.
 - Availability of a semi-fixed template for reforms was not available to the global community.

The challenges of 2021 crisis:

Two uncertainties pose serious problems in creating economic reforms.

- Firstly, the **uncertainty with regard to the government's own revenues**. A prolonged pandemic limits the government revenue. This will limit the policy interventions of the government. Further, the government cannot practice Expenditure reduction. As the government has to enhance the demand of people and also invest massively to create necessary health infrastructure.
- Secondly, **Unpredictability of global factors**. India's dependence on the global economy has increased manifold after the 1991 reforms. Both these uncertainties have the potential to jeopardise the implementation of any strategic changes.

The intensity of 2021 crisis:

The magnitude and intensity of the crisis of 2021 are manifold compared to the 1991 economic crisis. According to [Pew Research Center](#),

- A large section of India's population would be pushed into poverty
- The number of [Poor people in India increased by 7.5 crores](#). This accounts for nearly 60% of the global increase in poverty.
- India introduced a rural employment programme to combat poverty in agricultural areas. These schemes saw [spikes in people participation in rural employment schemes](#).
- **Conclusion:**
- The difference, intensity and challenges show the **non-suitability of this crisis for radical reforms**. In conclusion, **all crises do not inevitably lead to reforms, despite creating opportunities**.
- So to turn crisis into opportunities requires an in-depth understanding of the factors that led to the crisis.
- Apart from that, all crucial agents in the policy process need to have a shared vision. This includes political leaders, policymakers, implementers and stakeholders.

29. [UGC Advises Universities to Include NCC as an Elective Subject](#)

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis – The UGC has forwarded the proposal to universities to introduce NCC as an elective subject in the curriculum.

Introduction-

- Recently, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has issued an advisory to the vice-chancellors of all universities to include NCC as an elective subject.
- If implemented, NCC will be a part of the **Choice-Based Credit System (CBCS)** envisioned in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

National Cadet Corps (NCC)

The NCC was formed in 1948 on the recommendation of the H. N. Kunzru Committee [1946].

- **Significance of NCC-**
 - NCC is the world's largest uniformed youth volunteer service organization.
 - The NCC cadets undergo basic military training at various levels and as well as academic curriculum basics related to the Armed forces and their functioning.

- Its gender ratio is higher than any other uniformed organization in the world. With female cadets responsible for one-third of the number.

Why universities should consider UGS's proposal to include NCC as an elective subject?

UGS's proposal would aid in the expansion of the NCC and will provide students with the following benefits

- **Academic benefit**- Students who enrolled as NCC cadets will receive academic credits for NCC training on successful completion of the course. Also, they will receive the NCC "B" and "C" certificates.
- **Employment incentives** – Cadets can also avail of employment incentives and benefits offered in various central and state government schemes.

Issues related to NCC structure-

- **Lack of funding**- States do not provide adequate infrastructure for training and administrative functions of NCC. It is despite the huge support provided by the Centre.
- **Attitude of the armed forces toward NCC**- In armed force, An NCC posting is regarded as being sidelined. It is because forces do not deploy the best and brightest with the NCC. There is a trend toward deploying those who are medically unfit.
- **The majority of NCC cadets join the armed forces as jawans**, with just a few joining the officer stream. 99 percent of NCC cadets join only as jawans in the armed forces.

What needs to be done to expand the NCC?

NCC structure must evolve in such a way that youth, regardless of socio-economic background, are attracted to it as a means of advancing both character and career-

- **Needs to change the perception** – The general attitude in the armed forces that the NCC is a dumping ground needs to change.
 - NCC tenures should result in additional credit in promotions for deployed military officers or personnel.
- **Proper utilization of funds**- The Central government must ensure that the states provide proper infrastructure for training, administrative functions, and logistical support to the NCC.
- The quality of the local training staff such as the Associate National Cadet Corps Officers (ANOs), and their career advancement must also be assured.
- The above reforms in NCC structure may result in better intake into the officer stream of the armed forces and higher management in other public and private sectors.

30. Expansion of Social Security Net is Need of the Hour

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis:

The pandemic and subsequent lockdown have hurt the poor on multiple fronts of healthcare, livelihood and hunger. Both urban and rural regions are facing difficulties, however, miseries in rural regions were less due to wide coverage of social security net. This calls for expanding social security nets across the country.

Background:

- The April 2020 lockdown brought immense misery for the people of India. It's been almost a year and masses have now learned to adapt to the new normal.
- Nonetheless, the situation for the poor has been worse as they were hit on multiple fronts including healthcare, livelihood and hunger.

Dismal State of Affairs:

- The **State of Working India report 2021** shows that nearly half of formal salaried workers moved into informal work between late 2019 and late 2020. Further, the poorest 20% of the households lost their entire income in April and May 2020.
- **Greater Hardships for Urban Regions:** Hunger Watch (HW) Survey 2021 was conducted in 11 States in October 2020. It found that:
 - In October, 26% had no income in rural areas while 30% had no income in urban areas.
 - While 54% in urban areas had to borrow money for food, it was 16% lower for rural respondents.
 - Urban respondents were 15 percentage points worse off compared to their rural counterparts across 13 key parameters.
- **Disproportionate impact on Vulnerable sections:** As per HW survey, the situation is worse when data is observed in terms of caste, religion, and other special forms of vulnerability.
 - For instance, 60% of Muslims, 51% of Dalits, and 56% of single women-headed households went to bed without a meal at least once.
- However, some form of relief was provided by social security nets during these turbulent times.

Relief provided:

- **National Food Security Act:** Under this, 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population are entitled to 5 kg of foodgrains each month at subsidised prices.
 - The government announced additional grains for the poor under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana.
 - Further, an additional entitlement of 5 kg of foodgrains per individual and 1 kg of pulses per household for free was available. Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) cardholders under the NFSA, were eligible for this benefit.
- **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA):** It guarantees 100 days of work a year to every rural household with an aim to enhance the livelihood security of people.
 - There was a 47% increase in person-days of work under MGNREGA in 2020-21 in comparison to 2019-20. Further, a record 72 lakh households completed 100 days of work in one year.
- **Reasons behind less distress for Rural areas:**
- **First**, employment guarantee schemes like MGNREGA are not available for urban regions.
- **Second**, the coverage of rural regions is more under NFSA in comparison to urban areas i.e. 75% versus 50%.
- **Third**, the availability of ration cards was higher in rural regions than urban areas. Around 56% of respondents had NFSA cards in rural regions while only 27% had them in urban areas.

Way Forward:

- The Central government must immediately expand the coverage and quantity under the NFSA for at least one year.
- It should increase MGNREGA entitlements to 200 days per household from the current 100 days commitment.
 - States like Odisha and Himachal Pradesh have already added 50 days and increased it to 150 days in a year.
- A guaranteed urban employment programme on the lines of MGNREGA can provide protection to the urban poor.
- Further, the government must offer a wage compensation of Rs. 7,000 per poor household for the next few months.
- In a nutshell, we need to expand the social security net in order to meet basic requirements of at least 33 crore poor households in India.

31. Centre Should Relook its Vaccine Policy

Source: [Click Here](#)

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

Synopsis: The vaccine policy of the government would enhance the difficulties of states and the vulnerable population. It would give greater benefit to the affluent class and the urban regions. Therefore, the center must relook it in order to make it more equitable.

Background:

- The Centre government has filed an affidavit in Supreme Court with reference to the COVID-19 management case. It has insisted on the continuation of its revamped vaccine policy that was introduced for vaccinating the 18+ population.
- The policy was revamped after the demand to universalize the vaccination program among all adults came from various states.

About the Vaccine Policy:

- The center has put forward a more liberalized policy under which it will procure 50% of the total vaccine production. While the states and private sector will be allowed procurement of 25% each in every state.
- Each state will get vaccines based on a quota decided by the Centre government and there would be a uniform price of vaccines across all the states.
- The policy would **increase the vaccine maker's revenue** as Covaxin will fetch a weighted price of Rs. 477 per dose. Similarly, Covishield would be priced at Rs. 302 per dose.
 - The weighted average is calculated based on a share of 50% for the Centre, 25% for States, and 25% for the private sector for both vaccines.

Procurement Price	Covaxin	Covishield
Centre	154	154
States	400	300
Private	1200	600

However, many experts are demanding a relook of this policy as it may not deliver the desired results.

Issues with vaccine policy that demands a relook:

- **Bias against the Vulnerable population:** The private players will sell vaccines at higher prices that may not be affordable for the vulnerable population. Further, the

addition of 600 million (18-44 age category) people, has created extreme vaccine shortages thereby leading to more exclusion under the current program.

- **Against International Practice:** The national government is solely buying the vaccines in every other country. Although there are some exceptions like Indonesia and the Philippines. Here the corporates are allowed to buy internationally, to vaccinate their workers for free.
- **Inconsistent Nature:** The policy is based on the principle of liberalization. However, the center is controlling both price and quantity for every State. This is against liberalization.
 - It is also ironic that on one hand, the center is deciding which manufacturer of Remdesivir will sell how much to which State and at what price.
 - While on the other hand, it is deregulating the Covid vaccine market which currently has just two suppliers.
- **Burden on States:** Instead of the full production at zero cost, the States now got one-quarter of the production at twice or more the price paid by the Centre.
- **Problems with Private Participation:** It is not clear how to define the private sector in a specific state. Procurement contracts by private participants are done at a corporate level and not by State units. This may benefit large urban areas, where there is a greater presence of the private sector.

Way Forward:

- The centre **should procure 100% doses** and equitably distribute them among the states. Its ability to give bulk orders allows it to buy vaccines cheaper than States or the private sector.
 - It can increase its procurement price from 154 in order to raise the revenue of vaccine producers.
 - Further, the companies must be given large long-term orders for 100% of India's needs. This would enable them to invest more and sell globally.
- The government should also **widely licence** Covaxin in order to boost production and tackle vaccine shortages. Most of the core work in developing the vaccine was done at the ICMR-NIV in Pune, indicating the use of public funds for development.
- It should **arrange more supplies** by negotiating with global suppliers through the diplomatic route. This would also help in converting the idea of the door to door campaign into a reality.
- It should give **special interest-free 50-year loans to States** in order to bear the additional burden of the vaccine program.

32. Gauhati High Court Questions FCRA Amendment Act

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: **GS-2:** the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.

Synopsis: The Gauhati High Court questions the new FCRA Amendment Act.

Introduction:

An Assam-based NGO has filed a petition in the Gauhati High Court against an amended provision of the [Foreign Contribution \(Regulation\) Act\(FCRA\)](#). As the amendment makes [Aadhaar mandatory for opening and operating the account](#) in Delhi.

FCRA Amendment Act, 2020:

- **The FCRA amendment** has made it compulsory for the NGOs to open an exclusive Bank account with the State Bank of India in New Delhi to receive foreign donations.

- **The amendments also make** it mandatory to provide the Aadhaar details of the chief functionaries, trustees and office-bearers. This is for opening and operating a bank account in Delhi.
- **The Ministry of Home Affairs** has given the deadline of March 31st, 2021 to open this bank account.
- **However, if the NGOs failed to open the bank account** before the deadline. Then they will not be able to receive fresh foreign funds from April 1, 2021 in the existing accounts. But they could utilise the money that already exists in the old account.

What are the issues with these FCRA Amendments?

- Several NGOs have filed a petition in the Gauhati High Court against making Aadhaar mandatory for opening and operating the account in Delhi.
- They have said that they are not able to open bank accounts as they do not fulfil the eligibility criteria (since they don't have an Aadhaar card).
- Further, several NGOs have also asked for an exemption from the Union Home Ministry deadline to open an FCRA account with the SBI branch in New Delhi.
- It said that only 16% of registered NGOs have active bank accounts with the State Bank of India's main branch in Delhi.

What has the Gauhati High Court said on FCRA Amendments?

- **The Gauhati High Court** has sent a notice to the State Bank of India(SBI) asking it to explain why Aadhaar was necessary to open a bank account.
- **The Court also referred to the 2018 Supreme Court judgement** in the K.S. Puttaswamy (Aadhaar) case. During this case, the apex court had ruled that mandatorily linking Aadhaar to a bank account "does not satisfy the Doctrine of proportionality".

Note: The Doctrine of proportionality: It is a principle where courts would examine priorities and processes of the administration for reaching or recalling a decision. Proportionality means that the administrative action should not be more drastic than it ought to be for obtaining the desired result. This implies that a missile should not be used to shoot a sparrow. Thus, this doctrine tries to balance means with ends.

33. ASEAN's Initiative to End Political Crisis in Myanmar

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: ASEAN's initiative is trying to resolve the [political crisis in Myanmar](#) through peaceful mediation. It is a shining example of how regional grouping can be helpful in diffusing crises in its member countries.

Background

- People in Myanmar organized a **civil disobedience movement** against the military. They demanded the release of their elected leaders and the return of freedoms and democracy.
- However, the people's movement was controlled using brute military power. 750 were killed, thousands injured, and over 2,500 detained.
- The opposition is demanding the rejection of the 2008 constitution. Also, adoption of a new Federal Democracy Charter, and announcement of the 'national unity government' with representation from the majority **Bamar and ethnic minority communities. But the army didn't accept their demands too.**
- Further, the army set aside the results of the 2020 elections and promised for new elections in a year or two and a **disciplined democracy**.

How the international community responded to the derailment of Democracy in Myanmar?

The international community was divided on their response. There was no united action taken by the international community to settle the crisis in Myanmar. For instance,

- The U.S., the U.K., and the European Union advocated strong sanctions against the military regime.
- Whereas, China and Russia were determined to protect Myanmar's army from excessive censure and opposition as greater instability would affect their interests.
- Asian powers, mainly India and Japan, preferred to support reconciliation.
- However, the ASEAN, regional grouping of Southeast Asian nations has taken a bold initiative to settle the crisis.

ASEAN's Mediation Process

- Myanmar is a member of the ASEAN grouping. Though ASEAN is built on the values **of non-interference in the internal affairs of its member states**, ASEAN decided to mediate with Myanmar for the region's larger good.
- After that, the ASEAN member countries organized the **Jakarta Summit** to discuss Myanmar's governance crisis along with Myanmar's army general.
- The Jakarta Summit ended with two major outcomes.
 1. One, **the Five-Point Consensus** with the acceptance of Myanmar's military general on the following demands
 - Immediate cessation of violence
 - Supply of humanitarian assistance and Constructive dialogue.
 - ASEAN's mediation through the visit by a special envoy of ASEAN's chair and the ASEAN secretary general.
 2. Two, however, the Myanmar military had reservations on the following two elements
 - One, repatriation of Rohingya's from Bangladesh.
 - Two, the release of all political prisoners including foreigners. This makes clear that leaders will be released only when the situation normalizes.

ASEAN's initiative to resolve its issues peacefully has been largely appreciated by the international community. India too welcomed the ASEAN initiative. Myanmar's leaders should work for a lasting reconciliation, deriving inspiration from Lord Buddha's '**Middle Path**'.

34. India's Vaccine exports are guided by good diplomacy and good epidemiology

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis:

The vaccine exports by India have not obstructed its efforts in tackling the Covid-19 outbreak. Rather it is a strategy guided by good diplomacy, good economics and good epidemiology. That is immensely beneficial for the country.

Background:

- As of May 11, India exported 663.698 lakh vaccine doses to foreign countries. Out of this, 16% was sent as aid, 54% as commercial supplies and 30% as part of WHO's COVAX program.
- These exports have drawn criticism from various experts. As they believe that [exports are creating vaccine shortages](#) in India. However, there exist multiple reasons which induced the government to export vaccines.

Reasons behind vaccine exports:

- **First**, out of the 107.15 lakh doses sent as aid, 78.5 lakh doses (73.26 per cent) have been sent to just seven neighbouring countries. This is **good epidemiology**. As it is essential to vaccinate India's immediate neighbours for its own pandemic control measures.
- **Second**, approximately 14% of commercial supplies are sent to the U.K. India **not only has a legal duty but also a moral duty** to supply the vaccine. As the Covishield vaccine is manufactured by India based on a licence granted by Oxford – AstraZeneca partnership.
- **Third**, two lakh doses are sent as aid to the UN peacekeeping force. This will help in the **vaccination of 6600 Indians deployed** there. Similarly, 12.5% of commercial supplies are sent to Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia possesses a large Indian diaspora.
- **Fourth**, there is **an international obligation** to supply the vaccines under COVAX initiative of WHO.
 - The COVAX program aims to ensure rapid, fair and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for all the countries around the world.
 - Being a participant, India is **itself entitled to receive nearly 97 million doses** of Covishield through the COVAX facility at affordable prices.
- **Fifth**, vaccine production requires imports of various inputs from multiple countries that are part of the complex supply chain network. Hence, the suppliers of raw materials will also deserve some portion of the final product.
- This is why India's vaccine exports are considered as good diplomacy, good economics and good epidemiology.

Various steps to enhance vaccine availability in India:

- The government has provided support of approximately **Rs 200 crore to boost vaccine production**. This will help to improve the current manufacturing rate of Covaxin by 10 times in the coming months. Currently, 10 million doses are produced in a month.
- The government has also provided **special regulatory dispensation**. This allows emergency use authorisation of foreign-made Covid-19 vaccines. This facility will be available only for Covid-19 vaccines approved for emergency use by credible foreign regulators.
- Going forward, India can make an open commitment to supply a certain percentage of production as commercial/COVAX exports. This allows other countries to plan and execute their own vaccination drives. Further, it will be in consonance with good diplomacy, good economics and good epidemiology.

35. Measures to control the impact of Pandemic in rural India

Source: Indian Express

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

Synopsis: To limit the impact of Pandemic in rural India, states must produce reliable data on Covid-19 infection. State governments need to build capacities and involve panchayats in Covid-19 response.

Background of Pandemic in rural India

- To tackle the second wave, active coordination between all three tiers of Government (The union, the State and Panchayat) is necessary.
- The second Covid-19 wave has impacted Rural India equally. This necessitates the need to implement the delivery of vaccines and healthcare services on a war footing in rural areas.

- However, ensuring access to health services for all in rural India is a big challenge due to various reasons.

Challenges in tackling Pandemic in rural India:

- **Disparities in access to health care between urban and rural India is high:** For instance, 75 per cent of hospitals are in urban areas.
- **Denial attitude:** People in rural India are hesitant to test themselves. Further, they are not willing to admit that they have the disease. This denial attitude is leading to the loss of lives.
- **Lack of Medical Kits for testing:** Many in Rural India lack access to medicine, thermometers and oximeters.
- All the above problems have complicated the availability of reliable data on the number of infected persons as well as the death caused by Covid-19. This resulted in ineffective planning. **For instance, hurdles in Oxygen availability and allocation.**
- **Suggestions to tackle Pandemic in rural India**
- **First,** State officials and district commissioners **should actively report both positive numbers and deaths.** As it is important to have the right data. For this, mobile testing vans need to be introduced immediately.
- **Second,** families with Covid-positive members **should be given kits** consisting of medicine, thermometers and oximeters. The delivery of the kits can be supplied through the **panchayats**.
- **Third,** a task force, consisting of all ward officers, district and municipal commissioners, should map out the demand for health care equipment. This will help Epidemiologists, experts and doctors to predict better the requirement of oxygen, medical devices, etc.
- **Fourth, learning from the best practices of Mumbai administration.**
 - **Mobilisation of human resource:** Mumbai used the food and drug administration department for planning the demand and ensuring the supply in the city.
 - **Foresighted Planning:** Every ward in the city of Mumbai also created an emergency stock of oxygen. This reduced the time to send supplies to hospitals running out of oxygen.
 - **Building additional capacity rationally:** One of the important lessons to be learnt from Mumbai is that hospitals should only increase beds if they can provide oxygen.
 - The state should also increase hospital capacity by creating additional oxygen plants with adequate ICU beds.
- **Fifth, Decentralised decision-making and planning.** The Union government should decentralise crucial decisions to the state governments.
- These steps can ensure a better reduction rate of Covid-19 Pandemic in rural India.

36. Treating Israel-Palestine issue with a humanitarian response

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis:

The Israel-Palestine issue should be looked beyond geopolitical opportunities. The world leaders must come forward and treat the issue with basic dignity and justice.

Background:

- The [Israel-Palestine issue](#) is one of the world's longest-running and most controversial conflicts.
 - It is a conflict between two self-determination movements — the Jewish Zionist project and the Palestinian nationalist project towards the same territory.
- The issue was recently triggered by Israel. As they tried to dispossess and oppress the Palestinians. This resulted in deadly riots in Israel and the exchange of rockets between the two sides.
- Experts believe that this instance is going to attract 3 kinds of responses – indifferent, imperial and humanitarian. Amongst them, the imperial response is likely to overpower the other two.

Indifferent Response :

- **The majority of the global countries will adopt** an indifferent response to the situation. They believe that both Israelis and Palestinians have their share of rights and wrongs.
 - Israelis and Hamas infuse terror in the region. Similarly, places and Monuments are targeted by both sides.
- This indifferent attitude towards the issue is the result of geopolitical self-interest shown by the US and Arab states towards the Palestinians.
 - Their approach has only internationalised the issue and not helped in resolving the issue. The global countries have forgotten that **injustice to Palestinians and denial of human rights forms the core** issue.

Imperial Response to Israel-Palestine issue:

- **Israel will adopt an imperialist response** towards the Palestinians. This is because its past actions have the characteristics of imperial modes of governance. This includes measures such as,
 - Eviction of (Palestinian) people from property,
 - Creation of second-class citizens to fight Palestine,
 - Maintenance of oppressively governed enclaves
- Israel has been pushing out Palestinians from the territory Israel wants to claim. The country managed to evict as it enjoyed **considerable support from big powers** like the US and U.K.
 - The process began with Nakba(catastrophe) in 1947. Under this, more than half a million Palestinians were evicted.
 - Since then, it has been doing consistent evictions by following a policy of thousand cuts to dispossess Palestinians of their homes.
- It is believed that reducing Palestinian presence in [East Jerusalem is likely to be the next objective of Israel](#).

Humanitarian Response to Israel-Palestine issue:

- This response calls for **focusing on mutual sufferings** observed by both the communities.
- It involves taking measures guided by shared humanity rather than ambitious political objectives.
- Peace movements in the past have focused on this approach. This approach uses the culture and a history of shared suffering to build bridges. They emphasise that dispossession and exile is something both communities share.

- This approach has met with limited success. This is because there is an absence of serious political solutions.

Suggestions to resolve Israel-Palestine issue:

- The Israel Palestine issue must be looked at as an **unfinished task of decolonisation**, and a **human rights catastrophe**. Future negotiations must be based on the pillars of justice and human dignity.
- Israel must realise that it cannot be safe unless the Palestinians are safe. Further, Israel must forgo its adamant zeal of occupying three million people. Instead, it should work on a two-state solution.
- Friendly countries including India must remind Israel about the brutal consequences of adhering to imperial politics. This includes the destruction of the moral legitimacy of one's own claims, undermining of human rights and justice etc.

37. State should form a joint committee to negotiate COVID vaccine price

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis- Vaccine Price, availability and affordability [for 18-44 age group] would require a coordinated effort from state governments.

Introduction-

- The central government has pulled out from the third phase of the vaccination drive. The center has provided state governments' the full responsibility for vaccinating [a group that constitutes about 40 per cent of the population].
- Now state governments have to procure vaccines directly. Further, they also need to compete with private players at the same time for a better price. As there is only a limited number of capacity and vaccine suppliers.

How can the state bring down vaccine prices?

In contrast to a market with multiple buyers, a single buyer can always negotiate a lower price for a product with one or more sellers. Thus, to bring down vaccine price, **So, the State governments should form a consortium**. There are some factors related to this. Such as,

- **Involvement of Pre-purchase agreements-** This would tackle any uncertainties from the point of view of vaccine manufacturers. It will also allow for faster expansion of production capacity.
- **Delay in the formation of the consortium will impact the procurement** – Any delays will strengthen the potential private buyers' position. It will automatically weaken the position of the consortium to negotiate a lower price. This will result in,
 - **Further, widening of vaccination gap between the rich and the poor** – The price difference between the consortium's agreed prices and private sellers is likely to encourage inequity and black marketing
- Thus, the formation of a consortium provides a mechanism to achieve affordable prices in India. Further, there is also a survey conducted on **willingness to pay (WTP) for Covid-19 vaccines**.

Key highlights of a survey on willingness to pay (WTP) for Covid-19 vaccines

- The survey is conducted for WTP for two possible vaccine choice [one is 100 percent effective and the other is 70 percent effective]
 - The maximum WTP on average stood at **Rs 140 for a 100 % effective vaccine**, and at about **Rs 109 for one with 70 % effectiveness**.

- Only **2 % were willing to pay Rs 600 or more to 100 % effective vaccine** and 1.5 % were willing to pay the same amount for the other vaccine.
- Nearly 66 % of the respondents experienced an income reduction of more than 50 percent as compared to the last year's income levels. **WTP also declined uniformly with the level of economic shock experienced.**
- So, the economic ability of these households to afford vaccination is severely restricted.
- Apart from that, leaving sections of the eligible population out of vaccine coverage poses further risks of mutations in the virus.

Suggestions to reduce Vaccine price and provide universal vaccination

Shortage of the vaccine, poor administration and vaccine hesitancy is the reason for low rate of vaccination, therefore-

- State governments must take immediate action to form a consortium and make provisions for further subsidization of the vaccine.
- Implementing budgetary solutions like **public health bonds** will help to improve public finances.
- Further, the government must focus on [Universal vaccination](#). To achieve this, the center can allow State governments to exceed budget deficit targets.

38. Laws and Initiatives for Welfare Orphaned Children

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Mechanisms, Laws, Institutions and Bodies constituted for the Protection and Betterment of these Vulnerable Sections.

Synopsis: This article provides information on the available legal means to report about orphaned children and protections available under the state.

Introduction

2nd wave of the pandemic has taken the lives of many young mothers and fathers. It has left many children orphaned and vulnerable. It is usual to see requests to adopt a child on social media.

Some NGOs are helping such children. However, legal procedures need to be followed in adopting such children. It ensures the safety and security of children,

What are the available options to help orphaned or abandoned children?

There are many legal options available for an individual to help the orphaned children who need care and protection.

- **Option 1, Toll free Childline number 1098:** Managed by the Women and Child Development department's nodal agency, the Childline India Foundation.
- **Option2,** informing the concerned **District protection officer**. Contact details can be found on the **National Tracking System for Missing and Vulnerable Children portal**. It is maintained by the Women and Child Development department.
- **Option3:** The third alternative is to approach the nearest police station or its child welfare police officer. Such officers are specially trained to exclusively deal with children, either victims or juveniles.
- **Option 4:** Calling the **Emergency Response Support System (ERSS)**. It is a pan-India single number (112) based emergency response system for citizens in emergencies.

How the state provides support for children who are in need of care?

- Once an outreach agency recovers the orphaned child, they need to produce the child within 24 hours before the **Child Welfare Committee (CWC)** of the district.

- The CWC, after an inquiry, decides whether to send the child to a children's home or a fit facility or fit person.
- If the child is below six years, he or she shall be placed in a specialized adoption agency.
- It is the duty of the state to take care of all such children who are in need of care and protection, till they turn 18 years.
- Once a child is declared legally free for adoption by the CWC, adoption can be done either by Indian prospective adoptive parents or non-resident Indians or foreigners.

What are the safeguards provided for orphaned children by the state?

- **One**, an orphan child kept by an unlawful authority is punishable. According to the **Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956**, the father, and in his absence the mother, is the natural guardian. Not even a close relative is allowed to look after the child without authorization.
- **Two**, In **Sampurna Behrua vs Union of India** (2018), the Supreme Court of India directed States and Union Territories to ensure that all child care institutions are to be registered.
 - Hence, according to **The Juvenile Justice Act**, an NGO, which is not registered, cannot house children in need of care and protection.
- **Three**, the Supreme Court in **Bachpan Bachao Andolan vs Union of India** directed all Directors General of Police, to register a first information report as a case of trafficking or abduction in every case of a missing child.
 - Further, it mandated at least one police officer not below the rank of assistant sub-inspector in each police station to undergo training. So that they can deal with children in conflict with the law and in need of care and protection.
- **Four**, each district should have its **special juvenile police unit**, headed by an officer, not below the rank of a DSP.
- **Five**, The Supreme Court in **Re: Exploitation of children in Orphanages in the State of Tamil Nadu (2017)**, specifically asked the National Police Academy, Hyderabad, and police training academies in every State to prepare training courses on the JJA and provide regular training to police officers in terms of sensitization.
- **Six**, recently **The NCPCR** requested the state to intimate about any information received about any, abandoned or orphaned child to it by email or over the telephone.
- Children are an important national asset. Their wellbeing is directly related to the growth of the nation. Also, DPSP (Article 39) of the Constitution prohibits children from being abused. Hence, it is the duty of the state to provided necessities to the children in need of care.

39. Bad Policy Making Aggravated the Pandemic Disaster in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: Bad Policy-Making by the government during and before pandemic aggravated the Pandemic Disaster in India. Adherence to Key Principles of Healthcare, Economy, Data integrity, and Science would have limited the impact of the Pandemic in India.

What are the key principles forgone by the government?

- **First, prioritizing** universal health coverage instead of strengthening Public health facilities

- India prioritized insurance coverage after 2014, for example, Ayushman Bharat. Whereas, international experience showed strengthening public health care is the right way.
- For instance,
 - UK's **National Health Service Act** revolutionized health care in the United Kingdom by delinking it from a person's income.
 - Kerala's heavy investment in public health care in the 1950s increased the capability of Human resources.
- Even, the high-level expert group appointed by the **Planning Commission** concluded that progressive strengthening of public facilities is the only way to achieve **universal health care**.
- **Second**, discarding the principles of Science worsened the Pandemic situation. There are instances when Science was least prioritized by the government,
 - Government representatives supporting Patanjali's Ayurvedic cure for COVID-19.
 - Ignoring the Suggestions of public health expert or Scientists in Public policymaking related to Lockdown, organizing Kumbh mela, Election rallies
- **Third**, Government's apathy towards prioritising **Data integrity**. For instance,
 - One, evasion of Economic data: For example, Maximizing GDP numbers, employment statistics changing baselines, withholding periodic labor force surveys.
 - Two, under-reporting of Covid-19 infection and Deaths.
- **Fourth**, negligence of Good economics principles. For instance, relying on Freebies rather than prioritizing sound Welfare economics like Institutionalising social security net.
 - According to the latest report by the **Azim Premji University**, 230 million Indians slipped below the poverty line during the pandemic.
 - Providing Social security net to the BPL population would have limited the Pandemic disaster in India.
 - Even the global experience from US, UK, Germany, and China proved the same. Yet, India discarded the global experience.
- Adherence to basic scientific and rational principles, helped India to effectively fight against smallpox and polio. This needs to be replicated now.

40. Issues With Technocratic Approach to Vaccination Drive

Source-[The Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis – The current technocratic-based vaccination drive in India excludes the digitally illiterate population of the country. It is leading to substantial biases and inequality.

Introduction-

- The GOI launched CoWin portal to digitize the vaccination drive and made online registration mandatory for vaccination booking [18-44 age groups].
- The approach has resulted in a digital divide among the rural population. Moreover, it also brought several other issues, such as vaccine exclusion and lack of privacy, with it.

Key issues with the current technocratic based vaccination drive

- **Lack of technical literacy** –With no internet access and understanding of CoWin portal functions, the majority of India's rural population is left out of COVID vaccination efforts.

- **Concerns-**
 - **Digital divide-** Only 34.60 percent of the rural population has access to the internet.
 - **Lesser registration through CoWin portal-** According to CoWin data, only 2,52,96,511 of the 14,42,10,652 vaccine registrations [for 45-plus age group] were done through CoWin.
- **The COWIN portal ignores data protection and cybersecurity-** The CoWin website lacks a privacy policy, putting medical healthcare data at risk of disclosure through third-party providers.
 - **The CoWin website is contrary to-**
 - The **Supreme Court's right to privacy judgment**
 - **Also, the GOI's departmental guidelines for official websites** states that while collecting data, government websites "must incorporate a prominently displayed privacy statement..."
- **Use of Facial recognition technologies FRT also poses a threat to privacy** – The CEO of the National Health Authority said that Aadhaar-based FRT will soon replace biometric fingerprint or iris scan machines at Covid-19 vaccination centres. It will avoid infections.
 - The FRT will increase the risk of exclusion and discriminatory outcomes. Moreover, FRT is not an accurate mode of identification, thus affecting the proper dispensation of the shots.

The technocratic approach is prioritizing data collection and efficiency over vaccine equity. It disregards the experience of public healthcare and digital rights experts. The present deployment of CoWin, is undermining the right to health, instead of augmenting it.

41. Need of Constituting National Tribunal Commission in India

Source- [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis- The formation of the National Tribunal commission could transform the present tribunal system in India.

Introduction-

- Recently, the Centre government has issued the [Tribunals Reforms \(Rationalization and Conditions of Service\) Ordinance 2021](#).
- The ordinance aims to abolish certain existing appellate tribunals and transferred their functions to other existing judicial bodies.
- The ordinance also shortened the period for members of the tribunals to 4 years.
- However, the ordinance has been widely criticized and is being challenged in the Supreme Court.

Reason for Criticism of the ordinance-

1. **Firstly, the ordinance bypasses the usual legislative process.**
2. **Secondly, the Center abolished tribunals** such as the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal and the Intellectual Property Appellate Board, **without any stakeholder consultation.**
3. **Third, No Judicial Impact Assessment** (JIA) was conducted, before abolishing tribunals. Whereas, in *Roger Mathew v. South Indian Bank* (2019) SC directed the government for JIA before any such step.
4. **Fourth,** the ordinance has fixed a four-year tenure for Chairpersons and members of the tribunal. It is against the SC direction of fixing the 5- year term.
5. **Lastly,** No National Tribunals Commission (NTC) was constituted for supervising tribunals. This idea was proposed in the *L. Chandra Kumar v. Union of India* (1997).

Need of National Tribunals Commission

- **Executive interference**– executive interference in the functioning of tribunals is common, especially in the appointment and removal of tribunal members, provision of finances, infrastructure, etc. Thus, the formation of NTC can remove this possibility.
- **Lack of independent supervisory body** [such as NTC] to support the uniform functioning of the tribunals.
- Inadequate infrastructure, lack of judicial independence, and sluggish conflict settlement. All of these issues necessitated the establishment of the National tribunal Commission. It will be an independent umbrella body to supervise the functioning of tribunals, including the recruitment of members and disciplinary processes against them as well as the administrative and infrastructural needs of the tribunals.

Benefits of National Tribunals Commission (NTC)

- It will provide administrative support across all tribunals.
- It could separate the administrative and judicial functions carried out by various tribunals.
- Further, it would set performance standards for the efficiency of tribunals and their own administrative processes.
- Also, it will function as an independent recruitment body to develop and operationalize the procedure for disciplinary proceedings and tribunal member appointments.
- Lastly, Speedy resolution of disputes.

Way forward-

- NTC may ensure the functional, operational, and financial independence of tribunals.
- Till the time NTC does not come into existence, the FM should come up with a transition plan.

42. Central Vista Project – Demolition of National Institutions

Source: [Click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: Demolition of national institutions for Central Vista Project require thorough analysis.

Introduction

- The Government of India's Central Vista redevelopment project is being treated as a national priority amid a pandemic. This is very debatable. The project comprises the construction of a new Parliament building and new residences for the Prime Minister and the Vice President.
- A new Parliament building is certainly required. There is a strong case for restructuring the existing offices of the central government. However, it is not the right time for giving priority to a development project over public good.
- Moreover, 76 scholars, artists, writers, curators, and museum professionals highlighted a major concerning facet of the project last week. The National Museum of India, the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), and **the National Archives are set to be smashed to make way for new buildings.**

Why demolition of national institutions has been criticised?

- **Firstly, these experts have asked for a speedy suspension of the project.** Their concern is valid about the preservation of the collections kept at these centers.
- **Secondly, transfer of the materials** at the National Museum, archival accounts at the National Archives, and manuscript holdings at the IGNCA can be a very perplexing task. **It is a difficult task that needs thorough planning and knowledge.**
- **Thirdly, such major changes around chief institutions take place only after extensive talks** in any part of the world. Not in an opaque and casual manner as it is being planned here.
- **Fourthly, the experts have pointed out that articles at the National Museum still lack a complete inventory. This could lead to a risk of loss or mishandling.**
- **Lastly, the Central Vista redevelopment project is clearly being implemented in a hurry.** The government's intolerance towards any public analysis of the project is evident. They have even banned the photography of the construction.
- The country is facing an unmatched health crisis. The impact of the crisis can also be felt on the economic, social, and political spheres. The government should suspend the project, and take the Opposition and the public into confidence on the future course, in calmer times.

43. China-India Relations and India's Weakening Geo-Political Position

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: India and its Neighborhood- Relations

Synopsis: The unsettled border crisis at LAC, India's weakening global status, unfriendly Pakistan will only escalate issues in India-China relations.

Background

- **Last year, ingress by the Chinese army led to a standoff between India and China at the LAC (Line of Actual control).**
- The seven hotspots were **Depsang plains, Galwan, Gogra, Hot Springs, North bank of Pangong Tso, Kailash range and Demchok.**
- **At Galwan valley,** a violent clash broke out that resulted in the death of 20 Indian soldiers.
- Sooner, the situation at Galwan was resolved by the two sides through disengagement from the face-off sites.
- After that, India and China agreed to disengage from the **Kailash range and north bank of Pangong Tso.**
- Further, it was stated by the Indian defense minister that, both sides will address and resolve all other remaining issues sooner than later. However, China refused to even discuss the remaining issues.

Concerns over growing tensions between India and China

1. **First,** peace achieved on the border is both unstable and unsustainable.
 - Hopes for Peace is defied as there are massive deployments on each side after the disengagement.
 - Similarly, the Kailash range has seen neither de-escalation nor de-induction so far.
 - Also, India's aim of restoring the status quo ante as of April 2020 remains unfulfilled.
 - By resorting to deal with issues on individual basis, India had lost the opportunity to simultaneously resolve all the flashpoints in Ladakh.

2. **Second**, geopolitical concerns over the border crisis have been enlarged by the devastation caused by the mismanagement of COVID-19.
 - Very recently, India was seen as a better alternative to Beijing's vaccine diplomacy, particularly in South Asia.
 - Even the QUAD pledge to deliver a billion doses of COVID-19 vaccine throughout the Indo-Pacific by the end of 2022 was focused on India's capabilities to produce Vaccines.
 - India also made commitments to poor countries to supply vaccines through GAVI's **COVAX scheme**.
 - **However**, India backtracked on its existing contractual commitments to supply vaccines to its friendly neighbors due to intense public criticism over the shortage of vaccines for its own population.
 - This has created doubts on India's reliability as a partner and its ability to act as a counter to China.
 - Further, a weaker India will make India more dependent on the United States to deal with China. This would further strain India-China ties.
3. **Third**, the Possibility of Two front collusion at Indian borders.
 - India sought peace with Pakistan to avoid a two-front collusive threat after the Ladakh crisis.
 - However, American military withdrawal from Afghanistan and a win for the Taliban, and the backing of assertive china might make ground for Pakistan to attack India.
4. **Fourth**, the recent disagreement over Chinese supplies to India also reflects the poor state of bilateral ties.
 - Beijing's efforts have been largely confined to private companies and donations from the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. It is unlike other countries which have pledged government help to India.
 - While the Chinese media ambiguously frames it as Chinese aid, India maintains that these are largely commercial contracts between private companies.
 - The opportunity provided by the Pandemic for the two Asian giants to work together has been lost as both governments have focused on point scoring.

44. Systemic Issues affecting Women's Participation in labour Market

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Welfare Schemes for Vulnerable Sections of the population by the Centre and States and the Performance of these Schemes.

Synopsis: The burden on Women during the Pandemic increased disproportionately due to Societal norms, a male-dominated job market, and a lack of gender-sensitive policymaking. This article provides a solution to address these issues.

Background

- **Gender inequality** in terms of employment is high in India. For instance, only 18% of working-age women were employed as compared to 75% of men.
- Lack of good jobs, **restrictive social norms**, and the **burden of household work** are the main reasons for this widening Gender divide in employment.
- After the Pandemic, the **Gender gap in employment** has further widened. Women workers, in particular, have borne a disproportionate burden.

What factors are affecting Women's participation in labour market?

The data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy has revealed the following.

- **First**, during the lockdown, job losses were disproportionately high for women as compared to men. The reasons were,
 - **Job security for men is high**: 61% of male workers were unaffected during the lockdown while only 19% of women experienced this kind of security.
 - **Male-dominated work culture**: 47% of employed women who had lost jobs during the lockdown, had not returned to work whereas it was only 7%, in the case of Men.
 - **Further**, Despite the nature of Industry, Women lost a greater number of Jobs compared to Men. For instance, in the education and Health industry.
 - **More fallback options for men**: Between 2019-2020, 33% of formal salaried men moved into self-employment and 9% into daily wage work. In contrast, only 4% and 3% of formal salaried women moved into self-employment and daily wage work.
 - **Burden of care**: This is one of the major reasons for poor employment recovery among Women.
- **Second**, during the lockdown, women's domestic work increased manifold. According to the **India Working Survey 2020**, among employed men, the number of hours spent on paid work remained more or less unchanged after the pandemic.
 - But for women, the number of hours spent in domestic work increased manifold. This increase in hours came without any accompanying relief in the hours spent on paid work.

What needs to be done?

- **First, increase employment opportunities**. It can be done by,
 - Expanding the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)**
 - Introduction of an urban employment guarantee targeted towards women.
 - **Setting up of community kitchens.**
 - **Prioritizing the opening of schools and Anganwadi centers**
 - **Engagement with self-help groups for the production of personal protective equipment kits**
- **Second, direct income support**. A COVID-19 hardship allowance of ₹5,000 per month for six months can be announced for 2.5 million **accredited social health activists** and Anganwadi workers, most of whom are women.
- **Third, Policy support to address issues related to Women workforce.**
 - **The National Employment Policy** should systematically address the issues related to the availability of work and household responsibilities.
 - Envisioning **universal basic services Programme**. It not only fills existing vacancies in the social sector but also expands public investments in health, education, child and elderly care.
 - It can also alleviate Women's problems such as nutritional and educational deficits and domestic work burdens.

45. India's Palestine policy

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Foreign Policy of India

Synopsis:

India's statement at the recent UNSC meeting points towards the evolving nature of India's Palestine policy. The country backed Palestine but without any reference to Jerusalem or its borders.

Background:

- The violence between Israel and Hamas has intensified since the May 11 encounter. It involved the exchange of rockets [between Hamas and Israel](#).
- A meeting of UNSC was convened to bring about a ceasefire of the situation, although no concrete outcome was achieved. The US blocked a joint statement calling for an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Hamas.
- Being a non-permanent member, India gave its statement in the meeting.

India's Palestine Policy

- India recently issued a statement on the Israel-Palestine conflict. In this statement;
- It showed **strong support for the just Palestinian cause**. Further, India supported the two-state solution for solving the conflict.
- The country expressed deep concern over violence in Jerusalem especially on Haram esh-Sharif/Temple Mount during the holy month of Ramzan. Further, the possible eviction process in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighborhood in East Jerusalem was also criticized.
- The statement pointed towards the clashes in the Al-Aqsa compound and East Jerusalem's neighborhood as the trigger point of conflict. Rather than May 10 rocket strikes by the Hamas group over Israel.
- The country requested both sides to refrain from attempts to unilaterally change the existing status quo, including in East Jerusalem and its neighborhood.
 - This means Israel should stop the eviction process of Palestinians and restore the status quo ante at the Al Aqsa compound.

Evolving Nature of India's Palestine policy:

- In the statement, there was no direct reference to the status of Jerusalem or the future Israel-Palestine borders.
 - The statement fails to mention east Jerusalem as the future capital of Palestine under the two-state solution. Although, this has been the traditional stance of India.
 - Until 2017, India called for creating secure and recognized borders, side by side at peace with Israel. However, now the focus is only on peaceful coexistence with Israel.
- Earlier India used to use the term Haram esh-Sharif, but now it has been using the term Haram esh-Sharif/Temple Mount. The Former term meant exclusive Islamic control and ownership but the latter makes it a Jewish as well as Islamic issue.
- Further, as a part of the Link West Policy, India has de-hyphenated its relationship with Israel and Palestine in 2018. This allows it to treat both the countries as mutually independent and exclusive.

46. Method to Estimate Covid Deaths in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: Instead, of calculating the 'excess' death at the national level, Excess death calculated at the District level will provide a more accurate estimation of Covid19 deaths in India.

Background

- To understand the magnitude of the pandemic there is a need for estimating COVID-19 deaths globally and in India.
- The most commonly used approach is the “**excess**” **death approach**. It is the difference between death in Normal years and deaths during the Covid-19 period.
- It includes deaths directly caused by COVID-19 as well as deaths indirectly caused due to the lack of access to care for other diseases during the pandemic and the lockdown.
- Based on the **excess**” **death approach** estimates have been released globally. However, India's reported deaths contradict Global estimates.
- At present India needs to rely on global estimates rather than India-specific data.
- This is because of poor data availability for COVID-19 excess deaths, India has been classified in category 3 countries by WHO.
- Category 3 constitutes countries where the data on deaths are not available or usable. Hence, they are forced to adopt an indirect approach of using data from other countries.
- So, to have a reliable estimate for India on Covid deaths, India needs to calculate Excess death at the District level by analyzing the data from the **Civil Registration System (CRS)**.

What do the global estimates reveal about the Covid deaths?

As far as now two estimates have been released globally.

- **One, the World Mortality Dataset.** It is the largest international dataset of all-cause mortality in 89 countries. According to this dataset, researchers conclude that excess mortality exceeds the number of reported COVID-19 deaths in these countries by over 1.6 times.
- **Two, The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME).** According to their findings, global COVID-19 deaths by May 3, 2021 is at 6.93 million. This is two times higher than the reported number of deaths of 3.24 million.
 - India accounted for about 10% of them at 6,54,395. This is about three times higher than the reported official figure.

What needs to be done?

India currently has only crude estimates based on the number of extra deaths reported as compared to previous years. To improve the accuracy of Covid death estimation, we need to do the following.

- **First**, before estimating excess deaths a probable baseline should be defined. It can be done by estimating the mean and standard error based on data for the last five years to provide a probable range for a baseline.
- **Second, Civil Registration System (CRS) data** of districts with an acceptable quality of registration should be analyzed to estimate the excess deaths in a given period.

- Since there are enormous differences in the severity and timing of the epidemic and its health system capacity within India combining data at higher levels is likely to lead to errors in estimation
- **Third**, for districts that lack an acceptable quality of registration, we could use alternative approaches.
- **Finally**, the long-term way out for India is to address the data limitations while academics work on refining their statistical approaches.

47. West Asia's Diplomatic Resets

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: Factors responsible for the diplomatic engagements between West Asian rivals and India's opportunity to assist West Asia in providing regional security.

Background

- In the last few months, many West Asian nations have made efforts to bridge their diplomatic ties with their rival nations.
 - **One**, the most significant one is the recent interaction between **Saudi and Iranian officials**.
 - **Two**, the removal of the diplomatic and economic blockade on Qatar that was imposed by Saudi Arabia.
 - **Three**, similarly, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt, Qatar has made efforts to bridge ties with both Saudi Arabia and Egypt.
 - **Four**, most recently Turkey and Egypt had their first diplomatic meeting in Cairo after they had broken diplomatic ties in 2013.
- Diplomatic engagements have provided an opportunity for countries, to address their differences. It could realign the existing regional alignments and possibly end ongoing conflicts.

What are the reasons for resetting diplomatic ties between rival west Asian countries?

- **First**, the change in the U.S. approach towards West Asian affairs is a major factor compelling the need for diplomatic engagements. Some Changed US approaches are,
 - **One, US's non-lenient approach towards Saudi Arabia**. For instance, the US has called for closer scrutiny of its human rights record and has strongly opposed the war in Yemen. Egypt too has concerns on the human rights issue,
 - **Two, appealing attitude towards Iran**. The US could re-enter the nuclear agreement and sanctions on Iran could be revoked.
 - **Three, increasing distrust in U.S - Turkey relations**. Turkey under **President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan** has built close ties with Russia, while threatening U.S. allies in Syria, the Kurds, with military force. Compounding to the problem, the US recognition of the Armenian "genocide" has created more distrust between the two allies.
 - **Fourth**, S decision to depart away from its responsibility of providing regional security to West Asian nations. The US wants regional states to be responsible for their regional security.
- **Second, the novel coronavirus pandemic is devastating West Asia**. The epidemic has severely damaged regional economies and has impacted oil prices creating uncertainties for the producer states.

- **Third, the West Asian nations have recognised that Peaceful resolution of disputes is the better solution.** For instance, the ongoing regional conflicts, in Syria, Yemen, and Libya, despite the massive death and destruction, have yielded no military outcome. The priority for Saudi Arabia is to end the Yemen conflict.
- **Fourth, conflicts impose huge economic costs on Nations. For instance,** Iran's role in Syria costs its exchequer a few billion dollars every month. Whereas Saudi Arabia has spent several hundred billion dollars in buying weaponry to sustain its partnership with the U.S.

Opportunity for India

- Currently, West Asian nations are preparing to negotiate their strategic interests without outside intrusion.
- However, given that the regional contentions are inter-connected, third-party facilitators are needed to promote mutual confidence and prepare the ground for a comprehensive regional security arrangement.
- This arrangement will have provisions for participating states to uphold regional peace and promote mutually beneficial cooperation in energy, economic and logistical connectivity areas.
- Given India's close ties with all the regional states, India is well-placed to build an association of like-minded states with Japan, Russia, South Korea to shape the West Asian peace process

48. Misuse of Sedition law in India

Source- [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis – Unwarranted arrest of MP in Andhra Pradesh is another example of the misuse of the Sedition law in India relating to exciting disaffection against the government.

Introduction-

- Section 124-A [which deals with sedition law] has been misused in a number of cases in India. One of them is the unwarranted arrest of K. Raghu Ramakrishna Raju, an MP from Andhra Pradesh.
- Raju was arrested for allegedly acting in a manner that harmed the state government's reputation.
- He has been charged under Sections 124A (sedition), 153A (Promoting enmity between different groups), and 505 (conducting public mischief).

What is the sedition act and the issues related to it?

Section 124A of the IPC, which deals with sedition states – Any offense committed with the intent to bring hatred or contempt or attempt to spread disaffection toward the government, shall be punished.

Punishment under sedition law- Sedition is a non-bailable offense. The punishment under the law varies from imprisonment up to three years to a life term and fine.

Issues with the act-

- **Against fundamental right to speech** – The law often goes against the fundamental right to free speech and expressions. Which are essential parts of democracy. The sedition law has a chilling effect on people who think and speak freely.
 - **For example-** Raju was accused of only speech-based offenses relating to his diatribe against his party leader and CM.

- **Sedition law is a relic of colonial legacy** – The law of sedition [British legacy] is an outdated and archaic rule that stands in the way of the Constitution's provision of freedom of speech.
- **Low conviction rate**- Most cases that are filed do not end in a conviction if Section 124A is applied.
- **The sedition law is overly wide and loosely defined**- The terminology used under Section 124-A, such as **disaffection**, is unclear and open to multiple interpretations depending on the investigating officers.

How K. Raghu Ramakrishna Raju's arrest was unjust?

According to the Supreme Court's Arunesh Kumar judgment (2014), there is no need to arrest someone for a crime that carries a sentence of seven years or less.

- Prison time for Sections 153A and Sections 505 is less than seven years.
- And Sections 124A (sedition), which has a maximum sentence of life imprisonment, also prescribes an alternative jail term of three years.

Way forward-

- The definition of sedition should be narrowed down and properly defined.
- Section 124A should not be misused as a tool to curb free speech and expression and it would be even more protective of free speech if the Centre abolished the provision.

49. Role of ICMR in Facilitating Evidence-based Treatment

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: ICMR must assess evidence and provide specific recommendation on treatment. An Evidence-based Treatment will build public trust in the health care system.

Background

- Drugs and therapies are being used for the Covid-19 treatment, without clear evidence. For instance, **convalescent plasma therapy (CPT)**, Hydroxychloroquine, and the anti-parasitic drug, ivermectin.
- Evidence-based ICMR guidelines can control this issue effectively.

The case for non-evidence-based treatment: The Use of convalescent plasma therapy (CPT)

1. Last year, the ICMR, based on its clinical trial results, demonstrated that CPT neither saves lives nor improves the patient's condition. However, ICMR was ineffective in informing the public about the issue. This led to the widespread use of CPT in many states.
2. In a recent statement, the ICMR recommended that the use of CPT is advisable only in early moderate disease, or within seven days of symptoms.
3. Finally, in its latest guidelines, The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has finally dropped its recommendation on use of convalescent plasma therapy (CPT) as treatment for moderate COVID-19.
4. This comes after the results published by **The Lancet**. It found no effect of the use of CPT.
5. Further, evidence is emerging that CPT may be contributing to the evolution of coronavirus mutations.

What needs to be done?

- Not only CPT, but many drugs such as Hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin also, continue to find a place for the treatment of mild disease. It is also despite a specific mention of “low certainty of evidence.”
- So, to avoid such situations in future, the ICMR task force has to qualitatively assess evidence and be very specific with its recommendations.
- Further, ICMR should publicize these guidelines at regular intervals to educate the public about the evolving nature of the treatment.
- This will work better towards easing the pressure on doctors as well as in improving trust in systems

50. Measures to Prevent Future Waves of Pandemic Disaster

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: India needs to enhance its surveillance system, vaccinate its population, and reprioritise healthcare services. It will prevent future waves of pandemics.

What measures should be taken to prevent future waves of pandemic disaster?

- **First**, inputs of a **strong surveillance system** are needed to identify or predict future waves. Identifying upcoming waves is very important in mitigating a catastrophe. The current disaster is mainly because of our failure to predict waves due to unreliable testing and under-reporting of cases and deaths. Hence, we need to improve on the following,
 - The Central and State government should use real-time data by encouraging **reliable reporting and initiating standardised definitions**.
 - **Review mechanisms** should be strengthened. It will detect the outbreak in the initial stages and extinguish it before the pandemic spreads to other areas.
 - Simultaneously, **genomic sequencing** in real-time in the fixed proportion of samples needs to be prioritized. It will identify the Mutant variants causing outbreaks.
- **Second**, ramping up vaccination manufacturing to ensure universal vaccination for all not only in India but globally. India has a proven capacity to scale up testing facilities within a short period of time. Thus,
 - The Central government should invite foreign manufacturing firms to collaborate with Indian firms under the ‘Make in India’ Programme’.
 - Fast-tracking the manufacture of all vaccines that has been approved for use by various regulatory authorities through a single-window clearance.
- **Third**, since 2009, WHO had declared six public health emergencies of international concern. India cannot always rely on reactive systems for each pandemic. Hence, India needs to plan for preventing and managing pandemics in the future. Future plan should focus on,
 - Nearly 60% of known infectious diseases and up to 75% of new or emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic in origin. Adopting the ‘**One Health**’ agenda can prevent future pandemics. Because it ensures that environmental health and animal health are given similar priority as human health.
 - Greater financial allocations, increasing vaccination capacity, applied research, enhancing effective communication, and monitoring effectiveness will strengthen India’s role in the future for preventing and managing pandemics.

- **Finally**, need to build a robust public health workforce to provide efficient public health responses.
 - Front-line workers play an indispensable part in surveillance, contract-tracing, and mobilising people for primary healthcare services, including vaccination. Hence, we need to ensure that one Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) worker is hired for every 1,000 people. Further, an Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) and nurse practitioner are hired for every 5,000 people.
 - To provide access to critical care capacity for all, we need to ensure at least one hospital with 100 beds. It should include beds with emergency and critical care services that caters to a population of 30,000-50,000.

51. Significance of India's Diaspora

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: India needs to remain engaged with the members of the Progressive Democratic Party in the US, despite a difference of opinions.

Background

- India and South Africa proposed a temporary TRIPS waiver at WTO to waive Intellectual Property Rights on Covid-related innovations.
- Relaxation in IPR will boost the manufacturing of Covid related medical kits including vaccines. However, many western countries and business corporations opposed this.
- In this context, The U. S has recently announced its support for a TRIPS waiver. Further, the US is providing Covid-19 related aid to India.
- It has been said that the Change in U. S's Positive approach towards India is a result of continued efforts by the political and business class, civil society, Indian Americans. More importantly, the Progressive Democratic Party's efforts.

Indian diaspora in the Progressive Democratic Party

- The notable persons are Congresswoman **Pramila Jayapal**, Congressman **Rohit 'Ro' Khanna** Congressman **Raja Krishnamoorthy**.
- Earlier they were instrumental in voicing against Human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir and supported in favour of Peaceful Farmers protest.
- Irrespective of these positions, they were instrumental in pursuing the US government to support India through aid and TRIPS waiver.

52. Rising Cyclone Intensity and Frequency due to Micro-Climatic Changes

Synopsis: According to the Council on Energy, Environment and Water(CEEW) report the cyclone frequency has doubled after 2005 in India. Micro Climatic Changes are contributing to this change.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Key Findings of the report:

- **In the last 50 years**, India has recorded a 12-fold increase in the number of cyclonic events such as extreme rainfall, floods, sea-level rise, and thunderstorms.
- **The frequency of extreme weather events** is far more severe on the western coast of India. This is expected to increase further in the coming decades.

- **Concern:** This is a worrying sign for India. This is because Arabian Sea cyclones have been impacting India's west coast at the rate of one per year since 2018. This frequency is not seen before in five decades.

Reasons behind the increasing intensity of cyclones on western coastal areas

- **Microclimatic changes** triggered by local climate change drivers are the reasons behind it. Changes include land-use-surface change, deforestation, encroachments upon wetlands and water bodies, which are contributing to this change.
- These factors are contributing to excessive heating of land areas. This heat is further pulled into the ocean, which is in excess of the heating of oceans due to global warming. It intensifies storms into cyclones.

Vulnerable States:

Gujarat:

- **In Gujarat**, as many as 29 districts are vulnerable to extreme climate events. These extreme events have increased three-fold between 1970 and 2019.
- **Moreover, Gujarat is becoming increasingly common** to have droughts in one set of districts and floods in other sets of districts in the same season.

Other States:

- **Maharashtra:** The analysis also points to Maharashtra as a vulnerable state which has been affected most by droughts. The state has seen a seven-fold increase in the past 50 years affecting more than 80% of its districts.
- **Goa:** There has been a four-fold increase in storm surge and cyclone events in the last 50 years in Goa. Cyclone-associated events have also increased six-fold since 2005.
- **Initiatives by the government:**
- **The Government of India** launched the second phase of the [National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project](#) in 2015.
- **The programme is being implemented** successfully in the Eastern coast of India and especially states like Odisha.
- **However, the projects along the western coast** are lagging. The projects were to be completed by 2019, but the states here have missed this deadline, Hence, the deadline has now been extended to 2022.

Recommendations:

- **Climate-vulnerable states** such as Gujarat need to focus more on building climate resilience, especially at the local and regional levels.
- **States must invest** in cost-effective (and nature-based) resilient infrastructure.
- **Governments should develop decentralised capacity** to respond to climate shocks and design salient public information campaigns to prepare vulnerable communities against climate risks.
- **At the national level, a Climate Risk Commission** with statutory status is required. The commission should be supported by a Climate Risk Atlas with district-level information.
- **New insurance schemes** should be launched to provide the safety net for livelihoods and not just the saving of lives.

53. India Needs an Effective Vaccine Policy

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: The surge in Covid-19 cases coupled with a limited supply of vaccines warrants the adoption of an effective vaccine policy by the country. The policy should prioritize groups, address hesitancy and formulate a more equitable distribution plan.

Background:

- The second wave of Covid-19 has shown that the virus is not going away in a short time. It may strike the country multiple times in the coming years.
- In this scenario, the best possible way is to vaccinate the population in order to build effective immunity against the virus and reduce the death tolls. However, there are multiple concerns that demand changes to make vaccination policy effective.

Concerns regarding vaccine policy:

- **Limited Supply of Vaccines:** The country is facing a shortage of vaccines due to production constraints and import resistances.
 - Technicalities of vaccine production make it likely that indigenous manufacturers will require 3 to 6 months to increase capacity significantly.
 - For instance, the novel mRNA vaccine candidate (HGC019) can't be developed by Gennova Biopharmaceuticals Ltd. without support from HDT Biotech corporation, U.S.
 - Similarly, the import of vaccines can be enhanced only after August 2021. It is when wealthy nations would have made substantial progress in the immunization of their populations.
- **Vaccine Hesitancy:** People are showing unwillingness to vaccinate themselves as they doubt the efficacy of vaccines.
 - One of the reasons is the halt in the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine (Covishield) by some countries due to concerns over blood clots, etc. It contributed to doubts about the safety of vaccines in India.
- **Target Groups:** The limited supply has created a challenge of choosing amongst the multiple groups for vaccination. India needs to choose between the most vulnerable (elders, comorbidities patients) and the most valuable (working population). The former will reduce the death toll and the latter would be more beneficial for economic revival.
- **Distribution Concerns:** The current policy has allowed vaccination for all adults however it does not tell the order of distribution.
 - The state governments are now compelled to bear all the costs of vaccination. This may give an advantage to wealthier states over poor states.
 - Further, it allows market forces to decide on vaccine access for a substantial part of the population and calls for using technology (Co win portal) to get vaccinated.
 - This has allowed the least vulnerable to get vaccinated early as they possess more resources.

Way Forward:

- The central government should pioneer in both – enhancing the supply and formulating a policy to ensure equitable access to vaccines.
 - It should avoid transferring expenses to State governments and shouldn't allow the private sector to decide vaccine access.

- The country should take the help of **behavioral scientists** to combat vaccine hesitancy and ensure that the population is vaccinated.
- The target groups must be selected on the basis of vulnerability. However, if this is impractical, then some combination of the vulnerable and working population should be chosen. This should be worked out using data and the basis of the decision should be made public.

54. VIP Security Cover to West Bengal MLAs – Associated Issues

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis:

The Ministry of Home Affairs recently extended security cover to all 77 BJP MLAs in the West Bengal assembly. It appears to be a politically motivated and unprecedented move. It should be reconsidered as it is suffering from multiple issues.

Background:

- The BJP MLAs were facing a threat of persecution post the West Bengal assembly verdict. The party lost the elections and became the opposition party by winning only 77 seats in 294 member assembly.
- The MHA has ordered a security cover of X- category security to 61 MLAs while the remaining 16 will get or are already enjoying a higher cover.

About Security Cover:

- There are six kinds of central security covers: X, Y, Y plus, Z, Z plus, and SPG.
- The Special Protection Group protects only the Prime Minister while the other type of securities can be provided to anyone based on the Centre's assessment.
- The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) are the two forces tasked with providing security to VIPs.

How is a security cover provided?

- An MHA committee decides regarding the security cover.
- It comprises officials from the Home Ministry, the Intelligence Bureau, Delhi Police, and senior officials of the Central Armed Police Forces.
- The Intelligence Bureau prepares the list of persons under threat and the degree of threat. Whereas the committee decides on the force to be deployed depending upon the place where the person is located.
- The threat perception of every person is discussed one by one and not collectively for any group.

Issues in the recent decision:

1. **First**, it appears to be a **politically motivated decision** as threat perception for each person was not discussed.
2. **Second**, the **degree of threat was not large enough** to provide such a big security cover. For instance, such blanket covers were given in the past in the case of the Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir elections. These regions were witnessing militant unrest at that time.
3. **Third**, such actions **deteriorate Centre-State relations** as law and order is a state subject. Further, the order also questions the integrity of West Bengal police officers of being aligned to a particular political party.

4. **Fourth**, the forces are already **over deployed** in the protection of VIPs. In 2019, 66,043 police and CAPF personnel were deployed to protect 19,467 Ministers, MPs, judges, and bureaucrats. Although the sanctioned strength was 43,556 personnel as per the Data on Police Organisations.
5. **Fifth**, constant deployment **impacts the training schedule** of CAPF personnel. After the initial eight-week training for VIP protection, the forces have to take a periodic two-week refresher training for improving their skills.
6. Thus, there is a need to charge a fee for the security personnel deployed to protect legislators and other prominent persons. This would curb the tendency of unnecessarily demanding security personnel around themselves.

55. Future of India – Pakistan Trade Relations

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – India and its neighbourhood- relations

Synopsis:

The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of Pakistan put forward a proposal to import sugar, cotton, and cotton yarn from India. Although the proposal was rejected by Pakistan's government, it is definitely an indication of improving the future course of India-Pakistan trade relations.

Background:

- The two countries are undergoing restrictive trade since 2019. The Pulwama Terror attack in Kashmir and cross-border airstrikes in 2019 induced India to impose trade restrictions. It withdrew the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status of Pakistan and imposed a customs duty hike of 200% on imports.
- Similarly, Pakistan imposed a complete ban on trade when India revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir.
- The Pakistani ECC's recent proposal of importing Indian goods shows a softness in attitude. Thus, it would help in improving the future course of trade relations.
- **Factors indicating future improvement in India-Pakistan Trade Relations:**
- **First**, the **past precedent** shows that trade restrictions are lifted after some time for mutual benefit.
 - For instance, the protocol on resumption of trade was invoked in 1974 after a suspension of nine years due to the 1965 war. The trade was started in essential items like agricultural commodities and expanded over the years.
- **Second**, Pakistan **deviated from the complete ban within a month of suspension**. It lifted the ban on the import of medicines and raw materials from India. The aim was to avert any crises and ensure that there is no shortage of essential drugs.
 - Similarly, now its own Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) is suggesting to import sugar, cotton, and cotton yarn from India.
- **Third**, Indian trade data shows that despite a ban from Pakistan's side, **the trade has been ongoing**. During 2020-21 (April-February), the recorded bilateral trade was \$280 million. Out of this, India exported goods worth \$278 million and imported goods worth \$2 million.
 - The biggest component of export (77%) were vaccines and pharmaceutical products. After this, the second position was occupied by sugar at 15%.
- **Fourth**, there exists a **significant cost of refraining from the trade**. A healthy trade allows both countries to stabilize domestic prices and take care of seasonal shortages in the home country.

- Further, a severe restriction allows **the trader to shift to informal channels** of trade that reduce the potential tax revenue of the government.

Way Forward:

- The countries should cooperate on creating a positive list for trade as the first step towards normalisation.
- Business organisations on both sides can create a strong lobby. This could be used to build momentum in opening channels and influence the shaping of the India-Pakistan trade policy.

56. Analysing the Social security code 2020 for Informal Workforce

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: Critical analysis of the social security code 2020 reveals that it is short of providing universal social security for informal workers.

Background

- Informal workers constitute 91% of the workforce. The Pandemic had pushed them into severe poverty and debt burden due to loss of livelihoods.
- Social security arrangements could have saved them from the misery. Such as
 - Free basic curative care in public clinics and hospitals,
 - The elderly had old-age pensions,
 - Disability insurance or life insurance,
 - Minimum income guarantee
- However, an unprepared government had made them helpless.
- Even the social security code 2020 passed in parliament in September 2020 is short of providing universal social security for informal workers.

What are the Issues in Social security code 2020?

- **First**, it is just a merger of existing social security laws and does little to provide universal social security for informal workers.
 - The SS Code 2020 amalgamates and rationalizes the provisions of eight existing central labour laws.
 - Even in the new scheme the employee's **provident fund, employees state insurance (ESI), maternity benefit, gratuity** still remain only for organised sector workers.
 - Only a subtle change has been done to include informal workers within the ambit of social security administration. **For example**,
 - In **employees' state insurance**, the existing employee threshold has been withdrawn. Now the central government can extend ESI benefits to any organisation irrespective of the number of workers employed.
- **Second**, the SS 2020 scheme takes little consideration to solve the existing hurdles for informal workers in accessing Social security schemes. **For instance**,
 - The legal framework, as proposed in the Code and Rules, implies that the basic onus lies on informal workers registering as beneficiaries. It makes registration a prerequisite for universal coverage to avail social security.
 - However, it has failed to understand the underlying problem faced by the informal workers while making registration.

- **One**, most informal workers **lack digital literacy and connectivity**. Hence, providing them the option for Online registration will make the Social security scheme a failure.
 - **Two**, most informal workers are **footloose casual workers** (26% of all workers) and self-employed (46% of all). This makes it difficult for them to furnish all documentary papers required as part of the registration process.
 - Further, furnishing proof of livelihood and income details in the absence of tangible employer-employee relations is also very difficult.
 - **Three**, Similar provisions are already there in existing social security schemes run by State governments under the **Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008**.
 - Yet, many informal workers are outside the ambit of any social security because of the failure to address their concerns.
- **Third**, unorganised workers are spread across the length and breadth of India. However, the code does not address the need for inter-State arrangements and cooperation for providing social security net.
 - **Fourth**, Under the SS Code, the provision of **maternity benefits** has not been made universal. Maternity benefit is presently applicable for establishments employing 10 workers or more. The definition of 'Establishment' in the proposed code did not include the unorganised sector. Hence, women engaged in the unorganised sector would remain outside the purview of maternity benefit.
 - **Fifth**, The SS Code maintains that the **Employees' Provident Fund Scheme** will remain applicable, as before, to every establishment in which 20 or more employees are employed.
 - Thus, for informal sector workers, access to employees' provident fund remains unfulfilled in the new code.
 - **Sixth**, although **payment of gratuity** was expanded in the new Code, it still remains inaccessible for a vast majority of informal workers.
 - The code fails to recognise that **India is aging without social security**. The **demographic dividend** of the young workforce that could support the aging will also end in 15 years. Hence, it's a priority for India to institutionalize a Universal social security arrangement for all including the informal workforce by removing the above-mentioned challenges.

57. Significance of Citizen-led Fact-Finding Missions

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.

Synopsis:

Citizen-led fact-finding missions play a significant role in a democracy. They provide an alternative opinion on things, empower citizens on critical issues and enrich the judicial process.

Background:

- Recently, citizen-led fact-finding missions came in the news in a Delhi High Court case pertaining to the North East Delhi riots of 2020.

- The solicitor-general of India challenged five fact-finding reports conducted on the riots.
 - He called such inquiries as examples of self-constituted parallel judicial systems that have no authority in the court of law.
- However, these missions have been an integral part of Indian and world polity since colonial times.

Citizen-led fact-finding missions/inquiries in Colonial India:

- The **Champaran Satyagraha of 1917** started as an extensive fact-finding exercise.
 - Gandhi carried out a detailed investigation with a team of volunteers to inquire into the plight of indigo planters.
 - It was found that they were compelled to grow Indigo and charged with high taxes.
 - This exercise forced the Lieutenant Governor of Bihar to set up a formal inquiry committee with Gandhi as one of its members.
- The Congress set up a **Punjab sub-committee** to inquire into the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre of 1919.
 - The leaders were disappointed with the work and political motivations of the Hunter Commission that was initially set up by the government to investigate the massacre.
- A fact-finding exercise was undertaken to find out the authenticity of the **Kanpur Cotton mills incident of 1924** in which 6 workers were killed and 58 injured. The inquiry exposed the collusion between the mill management and the police.

Significance of Citizen-led Fact-Finding Missions:

- **Rights Advocacy:** It is a tool that helps to do rights advocacy. The process highlights the denial of rights to the target group and demands justice for them.
- **Enrich the Judicial Process:** It complements the judicial process by presenting to it an authentic view of facts. It often lays the groundwork for prosecution if a court of law finds their evidence admissible.
 - For instance, **a group of lawyers from the Alternative Law Forum** undertook a fact finding study on deaths of several workers in manholes in 2008.
 - The group submitted a PIL and its report in Karnataka High Court. The court later instructed the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board to procure manhole cleaning machines. It also issued orders for compensation to the victims' families.
- **Breed Accountability:** They help to highlight the lacunas of government institutions and personnel in fulfilling their duty.
 - For instance, **the Andhra Pradesh Civil Rights Committee (APCRC)** conducted an enquiry of Naxalite encounters in 1977. The report of the committee induced the government to institute a judicial enquiry under Justice Vashist Bhargava.
- **Alternative Opinion:** They provide citizens a medium to state their side of the story. It would be dangerous if official information was the only information available in the public domain.
 - For instance, **people's tribunals** were set up in the wake of the 1992-93 Mumbai riots after the Babri Masjid demolition. They revealed shocking ground realities that were not recorded by the official enquiry committee.
- Thus, Citizen led fact-finding missions are cost-effective, rapidly mobilised, and encourage civic participation. Due to this, there has been a surge in their numbers

in the last few decades. Fact-finding reports should be verified and criticized rather than dismissing them outrightly because these are self-constituted by the citizens.

58. Collaborative Governance Should be the future of Governance

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Important Aspects of Governance, Role of Civil Services in a Democracy

Synopsis: Outdated nature of public bureaucracy has to be accounted for the ineffective response to the COVID-19 crisis in India. A new public governance model based on collaborative governance need to be institutionalised.

What are the issues with Weberian model of Bureaucracy?

The **Weberian bureaucracy model** that India follows suffers from the following challenges. It needs improvements to make Indian bureaucracy more efficient.

- **One**, Weberian bureaucracy still prefers a generalist bureaucracy over a specialist.
- **Two**, Weberian bureaucracy prefers **leadership based on position** over **leadership of function**.
 - Leadership of function is when a person has expert knowledge of a particular responsibility in a particular situation.
 - In leadership of function, every official involved in a particular role responds to the situation rather than relying on directions from above authority.

Implications of Weberian model of Bureaucracy

- **First**, the rigid adherence to rules has resulted in the rejection of innovation.
- **Second**, the hierarchical nature of work flow and cumbersome clearance processes even during the period of crisis results in delayed efforts.
- **Third**, negligent of Specialist role results in policy failure and ineffective planning

What are the reforms suggested to address the issue?

- The reform often suggested in India is **new public management**. It promotes privatisation and managerial techniques of the private sector as an effective tool to improve public service delivery and governance.
- However, failure of private sector in public service delivery as witnessed during Covid19 and wide spread social inequality and regional variations in development had made this idea infeasible in India.

What is the Way forward?

- The model of **new public governance** based on **collaborative governance** will be the most appropriate solution.
- In this model, the public sector, private players and civil society, especially public service organisations (NGOs), work together for effective public service delivery
- All agencies will be involved in policy formulation and implementation.
- To institutionalise the model of new public governance, the behaviour of bureaucracy needs to change. It needs flexibility in hierarchy, a relook at the generalist versus specialist debate, and an openness to reforms such as lateral entry and collaboration with a network of social actors

All major revolutions with huge implications on public service delivery have come through the collaboration of public bureaucracy with so-called outsiders. These include the Green Revolution (**M.S. Swaminathan**), the White Revolution (**Vergheese Kurien**), Aadhaar-enabled services (**Nandan Nilekani**) and the IT revolution (**Sam Pitroda**).

59. Concerns Associated with demolition of National Archives of India's Building

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs2: Important Aspects of Governance, Transparency and Accountability

Synopsis: Many experts have raised their concerns on the demolition of the National Archives of India's Annexe building. There is a need for public scrutiny and public consultation on this matter.

Background

- A part of the National Archives of India (NAI) complex, Annexe building, is planned to be demolished during the **Central Vista redevelopment project**.
- The lack of clarity around the plans for preservation, transfer, and access of these national records is the cause of concern.

Significance of National Archives of India

- The National record archives reportedly houses several public records, private papers, departmental records etc.
- Archives are essential to the relationship between a state and its citizens. **For instance**, the production, storage, and use of information about the population is central to the work of governance.
- The NAI has a broader, material relevance. **For instance**, people looking for land records, bureaucrats looking for an older government order, a lawyer seeking a legal precedent are dependent on NAI.
- Finally, it supports Historical research. Thus, any changes to the National Archives of India (NAI) will impact the future of historical research.

What is the current issue?

- **Lack of Transparency:** **For example**, the National Archives' website does not have notification about the pending demolition, plans for the safe removal of materials etc.,
- **Lack of Public consultation:** **For instance**, when the Federal Government of the United States decided to move the National Archive, there were extensive public consultations. No such measures were taken in India.
- **Lack of public access:** The British Library is the only alternative repositories for archival resources for colonial India. If the NAI is inaccessible for an indefinite period, scholars who have the privilege of access to the British Library, will have exclusive rights to write about Indian history. It perpetuates differential access among students, researchers and scholars located in India and abroad.

60. Maratha Reservation Case Judgment and Federalism

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure

Synopsis: Recently Supreme Court declared the reservation to the Maratha community in education and public employment as unconstitutional. This judgment is against federalism.

What were the reasons given by the Supreme Courts' five-judge Bench?

- **One**, the Maratha community did not constitute a socially and educationally backward class.
- **Two**, the law is against **Indra Sawhney judgment**. In Indra Sawhney case the court has disallowed reservations made in excess of 50% of the total available positions.

- **Third**, the State governments had no independent power to declare a group as a backward class.

What are the issues in the interpretation provided by the Supreme Courts' five-judge Bench?

The reasoning that it violates **Indra Sawhney judgment** and State governments had no independent power to declare a group as a backward class is against the values of **equality and federalism**.

- **First, the cap of 50% on the reservation of Indra Sawhney judgment** does not come from the constitution. **Articles 16(4) and 15(4)** confer power on the government to make reservations, contains no such limitation.
 - **Also, in State of Kerala vs N.M. Thomas (1975)**, the seven-judge bench held that reservation was inherent in the Constitution's basic guarantee of equal treatment. This statement by the state high court contradicts the principle of capping reservation at 50%.
- **Second**, the court's interpretation that states do not have the power to declare groups as backward classes is misleading.
 - The **102nd Constitutional Amendment Act** forms the basis of court's ruling.
 - After the **102nd Constitutional Amendment Act** granted constitutional status to the **National Commission for Backward Classes, Article 342A, Article 366(26C)** were introduced.
 - **Article 342A** stipulates that President may, notify groups of persons within a State deemed to be socially and educationally backward, after consultation with the state.
 - Further, **Article 342A** states that Central lists could be altered only by the Parliament.
 - **Article 366(26C)** defines "socially and educationally backward classes" as such backward classes identified under **Article 342A**.
 - Based on the provision of **Article 342A**, a majority on the Bench had made **erroneous** interpretation that, the Centre is empowered to identify socially and educationally backward classes similar to the preparation of the lists of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and not the states.
 - However, the five-bench ruling of the supreme court has overlooked two essential factors,
 - One, the term "Central List" in Article 342A refers to the categorisation of groups as backward for the purposes of reservation of posts and seats under the Union government's control only. It does not affect states power to categorise backward classes for promoting reservations in State's domain.
 - Two, the Union Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment had earlier clarified that Article 342 doesn't take away the state's right to include or remove classes from the List.

Way forward

- The court's decision in denying the right to recognize backward classes by states directly impede their ability to secure just social order.
- Hence, the Parliament should amend the Constitution and grants to States an express power to determine backwardness.

61. Issues and Significance of Longer Vaccine Gaps

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: Recently, the government introduced longer vaccine gaps for few reasons. But it fails to take other things into account.

Introduction:

Recently the Indian government recommended a higher interval between two doses of the Covishield vaccine. Apart from that, the government also introduced few other changes. Such as,

- Encouraging lactating women to take vaccines
- 3-month waiting period before taking vaccines for the Covid-19 recovered persons (earlier it was four to eight weeks).
- If the person gets Covid-19 infections after the first dose, s/he also needs to go through a three-month waiting period before taking the second dose of Covid-19 vaccine.
- Increasing the [vaccine gap](#) between two doses from 12-16 weeks for Covishield.

Two underlying principles behind longer vaccine gaps:

1. **To tackle the shortage in the vaccine:**
 - Prior to second-wave, the government focussed on vaccinating vulnerable sections and frontline workers.
 - But [during the second wave](#), the government allowed vaccine manufacturers to [‘free up’ vaccine supply](#). Under this, they can sell only 50% to Center and the rest on their own. But this policy [did not improve access to all citizens](#).
 - So, the government introduced the higher vaccine gap.
2. **Best timing of the second dose for an optimal boost to the immune system:**
 - Clinical trials of the AstraZeneca vaccine in the UK (18-55 years) showed that the binding antibodies (the ones that actually block viruses) were nearly twice high for persons who got their vaccine shots after 12 or more weeks.
 - Further, the vaccine also appeared to be **more protective** for persons above 18 with a longer dose interval.

Challenges with longer vaccine gaps:

A general policy for childhood vaccines in India is 4 to 8-week intervals. So, the 12-16 week difference is not a general one. Further, it also has many concerns. Such as,

- Antibody levels are one of the key markers of protection. But, they are not the only ones. **Cell-based immunity** (immune system confers long-lived immunity) is not considered in scientific studies.
- **Duration of protection:** At present, there is **huge uncertainty** about the duration of protection given by vaccines. For example, there are many pieces of evidence that exist for **breakthrough infections and Covid-19 related deaths even after the second dose** of vaccination. So, only more vaccination will provide greater clarity on the degree of protection.

Way forward:

The death tolls from India's second wave continue to surpass similar daily figures from the U.S. and Brazil. Further, the policymakers have to remember that many Indians have still not been exposed to the virus and newer threatening variants are on the line.

So the government has to [aim for universal vaccination](#) to [prevent disease spread and death toll](#). The government has to [accelerate vaccination drives](#) and policy recommendations geared towards that goal.

62. WhatsApp's Privacy Policy and Data Protection law in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus:

Synopsis: The government sought a response against [WhatsApp's Privacy policy](#), but it is just a short-sighted one. The government should focus on long-term solutions like [enacting data protection law](#).

Introduction:

The central government recently issued a [notice to WhatsApp to withdraw](#) its updated privacy policy. But this is a clear government intervention into a legitimate business decision.

The development of WhatsApp's privacy policy:

- [WhatsApp updated its privacy policy](#) earlier this year. Under this policy, WhatsApp can share data (such as location and number) with its parent company Facebook unless they delete their accounts altogether. The App initially proposed a February 8 deadline.
- This **attracted harsh criticisms** from the government and experts. Further, there was also an **exodus of user migration** to rival platforms such as, Signal.
- WhatsApp moved the deadline to May 15. Eventually, WhatsApp decided not to enforce the policy itself.

Reason behind WhatsApp's Privacy policy:

- The App has more than two billion users in the world. Among them, about half a billion are Indians. The privacy policy aims to **make business interactions easier**. At the same time, the policy aims to **create personalised ads** on Facebook.
- In its affidavit in the Delhi High Court, WhatsApp has reportedly said that it is **not forcing users to accept** the updated privacy policy. As the users have the **option to delete their accounts**.

The Government response:

Ministry of Electronics and IT (MEITY) has sought a response from WhatsApp within seven days. Due to the following reasons,

- The MEITY thought that the Privacy policy is discriminating against Indian users as Indians depend on WhatsApp for communication.
- The ministry is also of the opinion that WhatsApp is imposing unfair terms and conditions. As the similar policy is not applicable for WhatsApp's European users.

Concerns with government decision:

- **It is a business decision:** The privacy policy reflects WhatsApp's strong business decision. The users can avoid accepting the policy and delete their accounts. Even WhatsApp is **ready to take the risk of user migrations** to other Apps. This is also reflected in the WhatsApp affidavit.
- **WhatsApp is not the only one:** Private apps such as Google, BigBasket, Koo, and public apps such as Aarogya Setu, Bhim, IRCTC, and others also use similar privacy policies.

- India did not have [General Data Protection Regulation or GDPR](#) like the EU: The government instead of seeking a response from companies has to enact a [data protection law](#) in line with the GDPR.

63. Why IITs Demand for Priority Vaccination is not Justified?

Source: [Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis: IITs are demanding priority vaccination. Their demand for vaccinating their staff and students against Covid-19 on a should not be encouraged.

Background

- In a recent meeting with the Union education minister, the IIT directors have demanded for vaccinating their staff and students against Covid on a priority basis, so that they can resume classes.

Why IIT's demands should not be encouraged?

- **First**, no person's **right to life** is bigger than other persons. Though IITs are largely residential institutions, there are many other similar institutions. The risk of community infection is the same for all.
- **Second**, IITs cannot demand priority on grounds of the nature of their work. They are not a frontline sector. Also, equally, everyone's work is essential for the functioning and well-being of the community.
- **Third**, to grant priority to a single interest group would open the floodgates to more such demands. With India facing a shortage of vaccines, such demands will reduce our vaccine distribution to complete chaos.
- **Fourth**, vaccination is not a private but a public good. Vaccination protects not only the individual receiving it but everybody around them. India can be Pandemic free only when every individual is safe from the threat of the virus.
- **Fifth**, it will deepen the endemic divisions of our society. For instance, distribution and administration of Covid vaccines are already heavily skewed in favour of the urban over the rural, the affluent over the poor, the digitally-enabled over the digitally-deprived. Any decision to promote subgroup interest will widen this gap further.
- IITs need to employ their combined expertise and authority more effectively to guide the nation's struggle against Covid to general benefit, thus lessening the need for sectarian demands.

64. [Voluntary Licensing Mechanism for Vaccines Will Ensure Social Justice](#)

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: Other alternatives available to boost Vaccine supply are less effective. But Voluntary licensing Mechanism for Covid 19 vaccines will lead to affordable and accessible vaccines.

Background

- Affordable vaccination is the key to achieve global herd immunity and to prevent new strains of COVID-19.
- To make vaccines affordable there are multiple arrangements globally. Such as

- **Voluntarily licensing:** Manufacturers can place their licensing agreements for which they owned patent rights in the **UN-affiliated Medicines Patent Pool**.
- **Compulsory licensing:** Through **TRIPS Waiver on Patent rights**, for Covid-19 vaccines under WTO TRIPS agreement.
- **COVAX Program:** It was established to purchase vaccine doses and donate them to low-income countries but does not involve modifying patent rights
- **WHO's COVID-19 Technology Access Pool:** a patent-sharing pool for Covid-19 products.
- However, a voluntary licensing mechanism will be more effective in achieving the target of affordable and universal vaccination. Further, it has been successfully demonstrated in making AIDS drugs more affordable.

How voluntary licensing can make medical drugs affordable?

- The case study of AIDS drugs can better explain how voluntary licensing can make medical drugs/ vaccines more affordable.
- During the 1990s, the WTO started implementing a global intellectual property regime known as the **Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights agreement** (TRIPS).
- After that, there was anti-TRIPS activism around the globe due to fear of price rise of essential medicines because of the TRIPS agreement.
- Responding to anti-TRIPS activism from low-income countries, some manufacturers who owned patent rights to produce AIDS drugs placed their licensing agreements in the **UN-affiliated Medicines Patent Pool**.
- This allowed Several India-based companies to use the voluntary licences to manufacture these drugs on a massive scale and sell them at prices they determine.
- This effort brought down the price of key AIDS medications in low-income countries. For instance, tenofovir, the first-line treatment for HIV/AIDS, has come down in price from \$200-\$500 per person per year to \$39 per person per year in low-income countries.

What are the issues in other alternative mechanisms?

1. **First**, the Voluntary licensing mechanism will reduce the cost and time taken to manufacture vaccines compared to producing vaccines through a 'Compulsory licensing agreement'.
 - a. Voluntary licensing enables goodwill among Patent right holding companies and general manufacturers.
 - b. It will enable easy flow of "technology transfer" thereby reducing the cost and time taken to manufacture vaccines.
 - i. **About Compulsory licensing:**
 - ii. Compulsory licenses is a mechanism to override patent rights. It allows local production or import of drugs by generic manufacturers in the event of a public health crisis.
 - iii. This right has been enshrined in the **Doha Declaration** addendum to the WTO's TRIPS agreement.
 - iv. This is what India and South Africa are lobbying for in the WTO, having recently been joined by the United States.
2. **Second, COVAX Programme** faces the issue of underfunding. Also, Similar attempts like COVAX Programme during the AIDS crisis were chronically underfunded and had only minor effects on that pandemic compared to the voluntary licensing.

3. **Third, the WHO's COVID-19 Technology Access Pool too faces issues similar to COVAX Programme.** For instance, no patent holders have joined this effort. This is the reason why India and South Africa called on the WTO to temporarily waive patent protections for COVID-19.

Way forward

- Patents are not absolute ownership rights. They are a temporary contract that balances the public interest with the claims of the innovator.
- Further, billions of dollars are spent through public money to develop COVID-19 vaccines.
- Considering the above facts, patent owners should enable the mass production of affordable vaccines by granting voluntary licensing for Covid-19 vaccines.

65. India's Stand on Palestine and Israel Conflict

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: In its recent statement, India tried to maintain a balance between its relations with Israel and Palestine. Why is it difficult for India to take sides in this conflict?

Introduction

India is a non-permanent at the UN Security Council. It attempted a subtle balancing act by repeating its traditional support for the Palestine cause. However, it didn't either desert its new friend Israel at a session held for the Gaza conflict.

- India's Permanent Representative at the UN conveyed distress over the violence in Jerusalem and the possible expulsion of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah. He advised against efforts to change the status quo in Jerusalem.
 - He restated India's strong support for the Palestinian cause and its firm pledge to the two-state solution.
- India was cautious of not upsetting Israel's feelings. It directly disapproved of the rocket attacks from Gaza. However, no direct reference was made regarding the uneven bombing by Israel on the Gaza Belt since May 10.
 - India also did not make any mention of the status of Jerusalem or the future borders of the two states, in line with a recent change in its policy.

How are the relations that India shares with Palestine and Israel?

India supported the creation of an independent, sovereign Palestine state based on the 1967 border with East Jerusalem as its capital until 2017. India's stance this time did not appear to have gone down well with the Israeli side.

- **Firstly**, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu thanked 25 countries that stood with Israel, he did not mention India. **India voted against the creation of Israel in historic Palestine in 1947** in the UN General Assembly. Their links with Israel have changed since the early 1990s.
 - In 2017, Mr. Modi was the first Indian PM to visit Israel and Mr. Netanyahu traveled to India in 2018.
- **Secondly, even though India has good relations with Israel, it cannot ignore the Palestinians for historic, moral, legal, and realist reasons.** Historically, India opposed the partition of Palestine. Throughout the Cold War, it stayed a strong ally of Palestinian freedom.
 - It took a moral and legal stance against the Israeli occupation, in line with international laws and norms.
- **Thirdly, India established full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992.** But India never abandoned the Palestinians.

- India's Palestine policy had radical footings too. It has been dependent on the Arab world for energy. It cannot isolate the Arab voices or be isolated in the General Assembly, where most member countries oppose the occupation.

Several lives have lost in this conflict. However, it is not easy for India to choose between its stand for Palestine since independence and its new ally Israel. Only a pragmatic approach can solve this dilemma of India.

66. Public Expenditure on Health Needs to be Reprioritised

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: Stimulating Economic growth and Mass vaccination are key to overcome the pandemic-induced economic crisis in India. Increasing public expenditure on health can help India recover from the economic crisis.

Background

- A nominal growth of 14.4% was assumed in the Union Budget. However, because of a prolonged lockdown, India will witness a fall in the nominal GDP numbers assumed in the Budget.
- A reduction in nominal GDP numbers will lead to a lowering of **tax and non-tax revenues**. Whereas an increase in the fiscal deficit as compared to the budgeted magnitudes.
- Hence, the fiscal projections of Centre's 2021-22 Budget require recalibration. Further, the center needs to reprioritize expenditures.
- The allocation for the health sector should be increased substantially by reprioritizing expenditures.

Why the allocation for the health sector should be increased?

- **First, need to strengthen the health care infrastructure in the country.**
 - The second wave of the Covid19 has exposed India's serious under-capacity in health infrastructure.
 - Given the possibility of a third COVID-19 wave, there is an urgent need to increase the health and related infrastructure. Such as the number of hospitals and hospital beds, sources of oxygen supplies, and the manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines and drugs.
- **Second, inadequate budgeting for health care.**
 - Centre's 2021-22 Budget for the Department of Health and Family Welfare is ₹7,597 crore less than the 2020-21 budget for Department of Health and Family Welfare.
 - The budget 2021-22 for health care is quite inadequate for an economy challenged by COVID-19 for two successive years.
 - Hence, the allocation for the health sector needs to be increased substantially by reprioritising expenditures.
- **Third**, investment in health care will have a multiplier **effect** on the economy. For example, Construction activities within the health sector will have high multipliers. Will benefit vulnerable groups of the society including migrant labour and the rural and urban unemployed
- **Fourth**, Speedy and larger vaccination coverage of the vulnerable population is key to minimise economic damage.

Why Centre government should procure vaccines?

- **One**, COVID-19 vaccination is characterised by strong inter-State positive externalities. This makes it primarily the responsibility of the central government.
- **Two**, if the center becomes the sole agency for vaccine procurement, the **economies of scale** and the Centre's **bargaining power** would keep the average vaccine price low.
- **Three**, some smaller States may find procuring vaccines through a global tender a quite challenging.
- The Centre has had allocated ₹35,000 crore for vaccination as an amount to be transferred to the States. Rather than transferring the money to states, the central government should transfer the vaccines by acting as a single procurement agency for India.

67. WhatsApp Privacy Policy Comes into Effect : Issues and Challenges

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS

Synopsis: Whatsapp's new privacy policy came into effect from May 15, 2021. Whatsapp suggested users, who do not want to agree with their policy, should discontinue. It also claims that the new privacy policy is relevant to only the business version of the app, which is not satisfying.

Introduction

The senior advocates Kapil Sibal and Arvind Datar reached to the Delhi High Court against WhatsApp's new privacy policy that came into effect from May 15, 2021.

WhatsApp defended its privacy policy in its affidavit to the Delhi High Court. It openly named Google, Microsoft, Zoom, Zomato, Republic World, and Public Companies such as Aarogya Setu, Bhim, Air India. It said that these apps have similar policies, depending on collecting user data.

What are the advantages of WhatsApp over other platforms?

- WhatsApp proposed that users who did **not agree to its terms and conditions could stop using the app. Apps such as Signal and Telegram** offer alternate dependable communication services.
- However, researchers working in rural and alienated sections have pointed out the **dependence on WhatsApp. It is because of the design of the app and facilities.**
- **WhatsApp has an advantage** with its messaging and audio-video calling even **in low-bandwidth Internet areas.** It also offers WhatsApp Pay which allows users to transfer money.

What are the issues with WhatsApp's stand?

The Competition Commission of India observed that WhatsApp is abusing its dominant position. It seems relevant here due to the following reasons.

- **Firstly, the claim that the new privacy policy is only for the business version of the app is not satisfying.** Metadata, from the non-business versions, is already being exchanged with other services of Facebook.
- **Secondly, people using WhatsApp for businesses** will expect the **services to be more secure than the normal version.** Thus, there will be less privacy due to security-related features.
 - Now, less privacy increases the possibility that the exchange of important documents or ideas on the platform will be prone to be leaked. It can be either company or a third party.

- It is also more likely because due to increasing competition, big companies either acquire or copy the innovative processes.
- For example, the lessons learned from the United States v. Microsoft Corporation antitrust case from early 2000 would appear relevant in this context.
- **Third, issue of a potential violation of the privacy of children through Ed-Tech apps.** It is due to the lack of complete ethics policy and a data privacy law like the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- **Lastly, the Personal Data Protection Bill of 2019** does not even attempt to provide a little protection to users for availing above-mentioned services.

The way forward

- The data protection Bill needs to be reformulated to make sure that it focuses on user rights with an emphasis on user privacy.
- A privacy commission should be established to enforce these rights. The government should respect the privacy of the citizens and strengthen the right to information. There is a central need for a strong data protection Bill.

68. Historical Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse under POCSO Act

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- GS 2 – Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable section

Synopsis – There is an urgent need to reform POSCO Act to enable historical reporting of child sexual abuse.

Introduction-

- The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012 enacted by the government to deal with child sexual abuse cases.
- The law made a significant contribution in dealing with the issues of child sexual abuse. It also protects children from offences like sexual assault, sexual harassment, and pornography.
- But the POSCO Act is unable to deal with historical cases of child abuse faced by a person.

What is historical child sexual abuse?

The term used to describe the cases of child sexual abuse that are reported or came into light very late after the actual incident. This could mean months, years, or decades ago.

The delay in reporting child sexual abuse may be due to the following factors-

- **Threats from the perpetrator**
- **Fear of public humiliation**
- **Absence of trustworthy confidant**
- **Intra-familial abuse** – Sometimes, it is difficult for the child to report the offense or offender at the earliest.
- **The accommodation syndrome** – Where the child does not reveal the abuse for fear that no one would believe it, which leads to accommodative behavior.

Why reporting historical child sexual abuse is difficult?

POCSO Act was enacted in 2012. Now if a person wants to file a report of **historical child sexual abuse that took place before 2012, i.e. before the POCSO act, it would be challenging.**

1. Firstly, Section 376 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) does not recognize, cases involving child sexual abuse, as rape.

- Thus the case will be filed under the lesser offense of outraging the modesty of a woman (Section 354 of the IPC).
- 2. Secondly, under Section 354 of the IPC, CrPC bars any reporting of an offense, after more than three years of the date of the incident.

What are the drawbacks of delayed reporting of child sexual abuse?

- **Lack of evidence to advance prosecution** – According to data, there would be less than 5% chance for gathering direct physical and medical evidence in delayed reporting child sexual abuse cases.
- **Lack of procedural guidance** – In India, there no detailed procedural guidelines on prosecuting historical cases.

Way forward-

- Child sexual abuse cannot and must not be viewed in the same manner as other criminal offenses.
- India must revise its legal and procedural methods to deal with historical child sexual abuse cases, in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- There is a need to frame guidelines to direct effective and purposeful prosecution in cases that POCSO does not cover.

69. Issues in Present Policy of Vaccine Procurement

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: Analysis on issues associated with the Liberalised and Accelerated Phase 3 Strategy of COVID-19 Vaccination

Background

- Many State governments have resorted to floating global tenders for COVID-19 vaccines due to Covid vaccine shortage in India.
- The Liberalised and Accelerated Phase 3 Strategy of COVID-19 Vaccination allows states to procure COVID-19 vaccines independently of the global market for people above the age of 18 years.
- However, the Liberalised and Accelerated Phase 3 Strategy of COVID-19 Vaccination has many disadvantages.
- A single global tender for vaccine procurement through the center will be more effective in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

What are the issues in the Liberalised and Accelerated Phase 3 Strategy of COVID-19 Vaccination?

- **First**, the Liberalised and Accelerated Phase 3 Strategy of COVID-19 Vaccination allows all persons, above 18 years of age to get COVID-19 vaccine doses.
 - However, expanding eligibility in the absence of sufficient vaccine supplies will only spread vaccines thinly.
- **Second**, the burden to procure vaccines for the population of the 18-44 years age group has been shifted to the States. This has many disadvantages,
 - **One**, determination of prices by an oligopolistic market favours unhealthy competition among States.

- **Two**, States will have to procure doses at higher rates than a single national purchaser. As a result of the new strategy, each vaccine dose will be costlier in India than in any other part of the world.
- All these issues will result in unequal distribution of vaccines among states (**Vaccine inequity**).

What needs to be done?

- **One**, government needs to revisit the vaccine policy and use the limited vaccine supply for the adult high-risk and vulnerable group of population.
- **Two**, vaccination for the 18-44 years age group can be reconsidered when vaccine supply is likely to stabilise.
- **Three**, Central government should coordinate with the States and make efforts to float a single global tender for vaccine procurement.
 - The fact that the federal government has provided vaccines free to all, even in the United States, should be an eye-opener for India.
 - Further, procurement of vaccines by the center and administration of vaccines by the states will ensure effective vaccine delivery. For instance, Polio.
 - This mechanism of division of labour among centre-state should not be disturbed. The current vaccine strategy burdens States with additional procurement responsibilities that need to be done away with.

Article 21 of the Constitution guarantees the right to health. Right to health encompasses accessible, available, and affordable health care. Hence, it is the duty of the central government to ensure that COVID-19 vaccines are accessible, available, and affordable.

70. The U.S exit from Afghanistan and Its Implications on South Asia

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: The U.S withdrawal from Afghanistan will impact the peace and security in south Asia.

Background

- The **Afghanistan peace process** was set to be discussed in the **Istanbul conference** hosted by the United Nations. However, it remains suspended due to the reluctance of the Taliban.
- Further, the US under President Joe Biden, is insistent on withdrawing the troops on September 11, even without any power-sharing deal between the rival parties.
- The US withdrawing its forces from Afghanistan will have many consequences on Afghanistan's neighborhood and in Afghanistan. (India, China, Pakistan)

What are the impacts of the US withdrawing its forces from Afghanistan?

1. **First, Impact on Afghanistan.** Violence in Afghanistan will increase. Since the announcement of an exit date, Afghanistan continues to witness deadly attacks across its provinces. For instance, multiple blasts outside a girl's school in Kabul recently.
2. **Second, Impact on Pakistan.**
 - **One**, The US's unconditional support towards Pakistan will end. The U.S. military in Afghanistan for almost two decades was reliant on Pakistan for operational and other support. Pakistan smartly used this factor against

India. However, With the US withdrawing its forces from Afghanistan, this dependency will disappear.

- **Two**, Pakistan will be facing unconstrained refugee flows and terror attacks inside its territory if there is another cycle of violence in Afghanistan.
- 3. **Third, impact on China.** America's military presence in Afghanistan has suppressed many terrorist groups that threaten China directly or indirectly in Central Asia. It would now leave Beijing vulnerable to its spillover effects, particularly in the restive **Xinjiang province**.
- 4. **Fourth, Impact on India.** India had underlined the need for "a genuine double peace" (within and around Afghanistan). Thus, India supports an "Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled" peace process. Similarly, India is worried that a Taliban-dominated regime in Afghanistan might allow Pakistan to dictate Afghanistan's India policy.

71. Significance of Community Efforts in Tackling the Pandemic

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Development processes and the development industry

Synopsis: The government should support community efforts in tackling the pandemic. It should recognize the best efforts and help them scale to a bigger level to make a larger impact.

Background:

- Community efforts have been immensely helpful in tackling social problems as the government or market can't always meet the needs of citizens.
- In the initial years of independence, community groups collected money and supplemented government efforts for development. However, with the passage of time, they took more institutional forms like NGOs who used to directly help the citizens.
- India's ethos, value systems, and cultural strengths have automatically generated new community groups. They are playing an active role in tackling the second wave of pandemic.

Positive Role played by Community Efforts:

- **Breathe India and HelpNow** apps are facilitating access to oxygen concentrators, hospitals, and ambulances. Both the apps have been developed by IITians.
 - BreatheIndia managed to get nearly 200 concentrators and raise an amount of Rs 2.41 crore.
 - Similarly, HelpNow has a mission to save lives by providing timely and quality medical help with neat and sanitised ambulances.

Challenges associated with Community Efforts:

- **First**, they are facing **information asymmetry** over various medical equipment and hospital delivery strategies. Which is hampering their efforts. Further, they lack clarity over the ever-changing rules and regulations by governments.
- **Second**, many NGOs are **not able to obtain foreign assistance** due to stringent FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act) restrictions.
- **Third**, the **dearth of resources and support** prevent the scaling up of community initiatives at a macro level.

Way Forward:

- NITI Aayog should take multiple steps for supporting community efforts.
 - It should engage with government institutions that encourage public participation.
 - It should look into the weaknesses and failures of the existing framework in attracting community participation.
 - **The use of advanced technologies (ABCD** — artificial intelligence, blockchain, cloud computing, and data analytics) can bridge demand-supply gaps.
 - It should partner with state governments to explore the launch of platforms that promote cross-learning and experience-sharing. This would help in scaling the community initiatives and prevent the asymmetric flow of information.
 - The Aayog currently has a **DARPAN portal** that creates and promotes a healthy partnership between VOs/NGOs and the Government of India.
- The focus should also be placed on **good local-level government initiatives**.
 - For instance, the **Nandurbar district of Maharashtra** robustly tackled the second wave due to the efficient work of their district collector (Rajendra Bharud). The efforts made the region an oxygen and hospital bed surplus district.
- The **newspapers should report community efforts** on a larger scale for motivating people in depressing times.
 - Heart-breaking pictures and reports have contributed to Takotsubo cardiomyopathy. A temporary heart condition that is brought on by stress.

72. Indo-US Synergy on Regional, Bilateral and Multilateral issues

Source: [Click Here](#)

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

Synopsis:

The visit of the Indian Foreign Minister to the US presents an opportunity to improve the strategic partnership. It highlights the India-US synergy on bilateral, regional, and multilateral issues.

Background:

- Indo-U.S ties are improving under the Biden administration. The relationship is now showing synergy on bilateral, regional, and multilateral issues. Earlier, They used to look at it as separate domains.
- The recent visit of Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar to New York presents an opportunity to deepen the same.

Synergy between bilateral, regional, and multilateral issues:

- The Indo-U.S defence cooperation laid the foundation of the QUAD group. It aims to ensure a peaceful and stable Indo-Pacific region.
 - Earlier there used to be constant friction over regional issues between the two countries.
- The US is supplying essential items for vaccine production and delivering significant relief supplies to India post 2nd wave. This support is crucial for kick-starting the strategy to vaccinate the Indo-Pacific as agreed in the 1st QUAD meeting.
- Both the countries are currently the members of UNSC (United Nations Security Council). This establishes a synergy between bilateral and multilateral security.

- The US led the charge to end India's nuclear isolation and helped India in getting a Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG) waiver. This allowed the supply of nuclear fuel to India for civilian purposes.

Factors behind such synergy:

- **New Leadership in the U.S:** The new President (Joe Biden) discards America's unilateralism impulses that came to the fore under his predecessor Donald Trump.
 - Biden is keener to cooperate on multilateral agreements on trade, health, and climate change.
- **Common Rival:** China has emerged as a common troubling rival for both countries.
 - The US doesn't want to lose its top position to Beijing, especially in the economic domain. Overexposure to China has impacted their domestic manufacturing.
 - Similarly, India is also unhappy with China as:
 - It blocked India's entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group and Delhi's quest for a permanent seat at the UNSC.
 - It asked for the UNSC intervention against India's constitutional changes in Jammu and Kashmir.
 - It protects Islamabad from international pressure on the question of Pakistan's continuing support for cross-border terrorism in the region.
- **Geographical Proximity:** The Indo-Pacific vision covers the geographical boundaries of both countries. It automatically breeds regional cooperation.

Way Forward:

- Both the countries should now revive the strategy to vaccinate the Indo-Pacific as the second wave begins to recede in India.
- Further, the countries should cooperate in boosting the global resilience against the pandemics and frame new international norms.
- Convergence must be established over trade and climate change. India must take support of the US to achieve green growth and reduce its dependence on China. India is showing a keen interest to cooperate with the west as proved by its active support towards the European Alliance for Multilateralism. The change of leadership in the US presents India an opportunity to make multilateralism an important part of the India-US strategic partnership.

73. One State Solution for Palestine

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: The whole premise of the two-state solution is misplaced. The only alternative is that settlers (Jews) and natives (Palestinians) should together build a new state that is democratic and not against the Arab world.

Background

- Many world countries through the United Nations insist on a **two-state solution** to end the Israel-Palestine conflict.
- The support for the two-state solution is based on the reasoning that once two states become a reality, Israel will stop severe violations of the Palestinian civil and human rights.

- However, it is not a “conflict” as such rather it is a settler-colonial reality that began in the late 19th century.
- Late scholar, **Patrick Wolfe**, states that settler colonial movements are motivated by a logic called “the elimination of the native”.
- Sometimes it may lead to genocide, as it happened in North America, sometimes it gets translated to an ongoing ethnic cleansing operation as unfolded in Palestine.
- So, the two-state solution is not going to stop the ethnic cleansing instead, talking about it provides Israel international immunity to continue it.

How Israel has worked towards eliminating the native population so far?

World nations are insisting on the two-state solution to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict. However, Palestinians fear that the Israelis would not be content and will try to occupy as much of its territory as possible. This Prediction became true after a year.

- First, in 1948, the UN insisted that partition was the only solution for Palestine. Under the UN support, the new Jewish state took over nearly 80% of historical Palestine and ethnically cleansed almost a million Palestinians.
- Second, in 1967, Israel occupied the rest of historical Palestine, and in the process expelled another 300,000 Palestinians.
- Third, apart from Incremental ethnic cleansing, Israel also employed other means to achieve the old Zionist goal of turning historical Palestine into a Jewish state. Such as
 - One, Imposing military rule in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to restrict people’s basic human and civil rights.
 - Two, Imposing a version of an Apartheid regime on the Palestinian minority in Israel.
 - Three, disregarding the demographic reality by refusing the 1948 refugees to return.
- Fourth, Israel passed a citizenship law in 2018. It *was* known as the nationality law to complete its strategy that included the partition of the West Bank, its Bantustanisation, and the siege of Gaza.
 - The law made sure that the Palestinian citizens become 2nd class citizens like the “Africans”, in a new Israeli Jewish apartheid state.

Way forward

- The only alternative is to decolonise historical Palestine and build one single state for all its citizens all over the country.
- It should be based on the dismantlement of colonialist institutions, fair redistribution of the country’s natural resources, compensation of the victims of the ethnic cleansing and allowing their repatriation.
- This will be an inspiration for the rest of the region which desperately needs such models.

74. India’s Mucormycosis Threat

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: There is a high incidence of Mucormycosis in India. Government should urgently look for solutions to limit the incidence of the disease.

Background

- The incidence of **mucormycosis** (a rare fungal infection) in patients who have been diagnosed and treated for COVID-19 is rising alarmingly in India.
- For instance, according to a study published in **Current Fungal Infection Reports** the estimated **burden of mucormycosis** in India is 14 per 100,000. This is almost 70 times higher than what is reported in other countries.
- Even, some States, including Tamil Nadu, have declared mucormycosis as a notifiable disease under the **Epidemic Diseases Act**.
- A common use of Steroids such as Dexamethasone, methylprednisolone, etc., in the treatment of COVID-19, is one of the major reasons.
- So, to arrest this growing epidemic, Guidelines and protocols need to be adapted and modified rapidly.

About Mucormycosis

- **Causes:**
 - The most common cause is uncontrolled diabetes mellitus (raised blood sugars).
 - Other causes include the treatment of some cancers, steroids, chemotherapy or immunotherapy, and solid organ or stem-cell transplantations.
- **Occurrence:**
 - The common sites of occurrence include **rhino-cerebral involvement** (i.e., the fungus can damage the nose, paranasal sinuses, the eyes, and the brain), and **pulmonary involvement** (i.e., the fungus can cause pneumonia).
- **Non-contagious:**
 - Mucormycosis is not transmitted from one individual to the other.
- **Symptoms:**
 - Facial swelling on one side,
 - Protrusion of the eyeball,
 - New-onset visual disturbances,
 - Headache and vomiting,
 - New onset swelling or ulcers with blackish discoloration, and prolonged fever.
- **Morbidity:**
 - Mucormycosis is associated with very high morbidity and mortality.
- **Treatment:**
 - Treatment requires a multi-disciplinary team approach that includes microbiology, pathology, radiology, and other disciplines.
 - Treatment includes Surgery along with administering Anti-fungal drugs.

Why Mucormycosis is a concern for India?

1. **First**, one of the significant causes for mucormycosis is raised blood sugars and India is home to a large number of Diabetic patients.
 - For instance, according to a study in **The Lancet**, people with diabetes increased to 65 million in 2016 in India,
 - The highest prevalence of diabetes was observed in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Delhi. Further, there is an underlying higher genetic susceptibility to diabetes in Indians.
2. **Second**, apart from this natural cause of Diabetes, SARS-CoV-2 can potentially multiply in pancreatic cells and contribute to increased blood sugar levels in COVID-19 patients.

3. **Third**, during the treatment for Covid-19, Steroids are administered to lower death rates by reducing the cytokine storm phase. However, steroids when used excessively or prematurely, and without medical supervision can also increase blood sugar levels.
4. **Fourth**, treatment for **mucormycosis** requires a multi-disciplinary team approach. However, a multi-disciplinary approach is not feasible on a large scale, especially in areas with limited medical access
5. **Fifth**, drugs available are either costly and out of access for the majority of Indians or produce side effects.
 - For instance, the standard drug is **liposomal amphotericin B**, which is heavily priced. Whereas, cheap drugs like Amphotericin B deoxycholate are associated with unfavourable toxicity, including kidney problems.

What needs to be done?

- **One**, Steroid use at home for COVID-19 should be only under the supervision of a healthcare worker.
- **Two**, monitoring of capillary blood glucose is essential while administering steroids. Health authorities should arrange for blood glucose monitoring for patients at home on steroids.
 - Further, awareness campaigns on the importance of controlled blood sugar levels need to be promoted.
- **Three**, widespread training of healthcare personnel including **Accredited Social Health Activists** (ASHAs) to raise awareness on mucormycosis while educating people locally.

75. Must Needed Reforms for Online Higher Education

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis:

There are many [issues associated with school-level online education](#). But there are similar issues associated with online higher education as well. But, these can be removed with proper suggestions.

Introduction:

The government spent merely 3.2% of its GDP on education in 2020-21. Online education started in India, without any changes in infrastructure, training, etc. The government directed the higher education institutions to shift from classroom education to online education. The University administrations also followed the suit towards online education.

Online higher education in India:

Earlier teachers and students in higher educational institutions faced a lot of issues. Especially during their shift from the annual scheme of teaching to the semester scheme of teaching and the choice-based credit system. A similar issue happened during their shift from regular education to online education.

1. Centrally funded elite institutes such as the IITs, IIMs, NITs and Central universities **launched video channels and uploaded e-content** on institutional websites and digital platforms
2. On the other hand, **State universities struggle** without proper **Internet connectivity and bandwidth** on their campuses. There are several **vacant faculty positions** in universities. So, online education increased the work of already overburdened teachers.

3. **Problems for students:** Many of the students lacked the facilities to attend online classes.
4. **Problems with practical education:** Apart from these issues, online education **cannot replace practical field and laboratory-based learning** in higher education.

Suggestions to improve online higher education:

A sudden shift to online education will not only serve any needs in education but also become counterproductive. The government can improve this by few suggestions. Such as,

1. **Increased consultation:** According to the All India Survey on Higher Education (2018-19), India has 993 universities, 39,931 colleges, 3.73 crore students and 14.16 lakh, teachers. The government can include wider stakeholder consultation regarding online education.
2. **Tackling the issue of internet penetration:** Internet penetration still low in India. So the government **has to provide financial aids** to obtain appropriate IT tools, platforms, devices, provide training, etc.
 - a. Further, 25 lakh students belonging to the socially and economically weaker sections of society. The government can consider providing devices such as laptop/tablets to them to improve access to online education.
3. **Preparation of appropriate study material:** The government have to understand that only uploading scanned lecture notes or PowerPoint presentations does not fulfil education's full purpose. The government has to **explore application-based learning** for students.
4. **Introduction of online education in a phased manner:** A transition from conventional to online mode has to happen in a phased manner. State universities should first equip their infrastructure (both hard and soft) with complete government support.
5. **Development of other services:** The government has to invest more in developing massive open online courses (MOOCs), direct-to-home (DTH) content development, digital classrooms etc.

With more COVID-19 waves are expected, the government has to engage with academic stakeholders and invest adequately in online education as suggested by Fifteenth Finance Commission.

76. Controversies Surrounding Administrator of Lakshadweep

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: The role of the newly appointed administrator of Lakshadweep is under controversy. Some of the recent steps go against the interest of people.

Introduction

Lakshadweep is a group of 36 islands in the Arabian Sea totaling 32 square kilometers. It has had a calm existence as a Union Territory. But recent governance changes introduced by the government have become a cause of concern.

An administrator is a representative of the President in the Union Territory like a Lieutenant Governor.

What are the controversial steps taken by administrator?

The draft Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation 2021 empowers the Administrator to take over land and forcibly relocate people. It provides for strict punishments for those who resist. Following are some controversial steps taken by the administrator;

- **Firstly, the consumption or sale of beef will be an offence punishable** by seven years in prison.

- **Secondly**, Those who have more than two children cannot contest panchayat elections.
- **Third**, under the new Goonda Act, anyone could be held in prison without reason for up to a year. It is in a place that has a very low crime rate.
 - The traditional livelihood **of fishing communities has been obstructed by tedious regulations** that negate their access to coastlines.
- **Lastly, their sheds on the coastal areas have been demolished** on the ground of violating **the Coast Guard Act**. Dairy farms run by the administration have also been shut.
 - A development like this is a serious threat to the people of Lakshadweep and the delicate ecosystem.

What are the issues involved?

Lakshadweep administrator is the first politician to become an Administrator. In the past five months, he has showcased a sole disrespect for the people's concerns and priorities.

- There are **fears of other motivations in the absence of any administrative rationale** in these deliberately random methods.
- **Commercial interests could be one of the reasons**. The land vacated by people could be transferred to buyers from outside.
- **There could also be ill-advised political plans to change the demography** of the islands. People are protesting, but the Administrator seems firm on his plans.

The conclusion

- Rajya Sabha Members from Kerala have urged the President to recall the Administrator in separate letters. The basis for carving out Union Territories as an administrative unit is to protect the unique cultural and historical situations of their people.
- The Centre is reversing its duty to protect into a licence to interfere. It must recall the Administrator and reassure the locals.

77. Cooperative Federalism is Necessary for the Success of GST in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure,

Synopsis: Without a strong framework for 'Cooperative federalism' it is unlikely that the GST mechanism will survive in the future.

Background

- The GST Council is troubled with mistrust under the prevailing cloud of vendetta politics.
- Also, Cooperative federalism in India is witnessing a deep crisis due to the widening divide between the Centre and states.
- Further, the Covid induced Economic crisis is hampering state's revenues while uncertainty in GST revenue prevails.
- All the above issues are challenging the very existence of GST mechanism in India

What are the issues hampering Cooperative Federalism in India?

1. One, Centre backtracking on its promise to pay guaranteed GST compensation to the States during Covid 19 situation.
2. Two, stringent policy conditions by centre to grant approval to States for extra borrowing in the middle of the pandemic.

3. Three, Centre shifting its responsibility on states over the procurement of Covid vaccines. It has resulted in a high price burden on states.
 4. Four, unilateral decision to implement farm laws.
 5. Five, sudden lockdown imposed by the Centre with no consultations with the States that affected millions of migrant workers.
 6. Six, Centre is levying cess that gathers significant revenues for the Centre without sharing them with the States.
 7. Seven, Centre's recent Government of NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Act, 2021 that deprived the elected Delhi government of its governance powers.
- All these issues are hampering Cooperative Federalism in India.

What are the issues that are affecting the GST mechanism in India?

- GST was expected to deliver economic efficiency gains, improve tax buoyancy and collections, boost GDP growth, and achieve a greater formalisation of the economy.
- However, three years after its launch, GST had failed on all those promises. For instance, the **15th Finance Commission** report formally acknowledges that GST has been an economic failure that did not deliver on its early promises.

Problems in GST

- One, multiple rate structure.
- Two, high tax slabs.
- Three, the complexity of tax filings
- Four, the erosion of 'trust' and 'trustworthiness' between the States and the Centre.
- Five, the uncertainty in GST revenues compounded with the loss of fiscal autonomy of states possess a threat to States finances.
- Proponents of GST failed to factor in India's unique political economy and its ramifications. Striking a balance among the diverse interests of India's numerous parties in a larger political climate is significant along with the extension of revenue guarantee for the States for another five years to strengthen the GST mechanism in India.

78. Continuing Political Turmoil in Nepal and Opportunity for India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Synopsis: Present Constitutional crisis in Nepal is an opportunity for India to engage with Nepal's political leadership. It can help them to establish a stable democratic rule in Nepal.

Background

- Recently, Nepal's President had dissolved the House of Representatives (lower house) late at the suggestion of Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli.
- The decision to dissolve the house is viewed as a partisan move that disregards the Constitutional morality of Nepal.

Recent developments leading to Political turmoil in Nepal

- Oli (CPN(UML)), came to power with the support of Maoist Centre and enjoyed a near-absolute majority in the lower house.
- In May 2018, the two allies merged to cement their alliance and created the **Nepal Communist Party (NCP)**.
- However, very soon there were disputes related to the power-sharing arrangement, worked out with Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda'.

- Mr. Oli (CPN(UML)) was reluctant to run the NCP along with Prachanda as a co-chair and soon 'one person one post' policy demand surfaced openly.
- Amid rumours that Prachanda and Mr. Nepal (senior UML leader) were planning to move a no-confidence-motion against him, Oli got the President to approve dissolution of the House on December 20, paving the way for elections.
- On March 7, the Supreme Court also overturned the UML-Maoist merger of May 2018 and ruled it invalid. This verdict allowed Mr. Oli to be in power.
- Again, Mr. Oli was sworn in by President Bhandari on May 14 as Prime Minister. Article 76(3) permits the **leader of the largest party** to be sworn in and give 30 days to demonstrate majority.
- But the Nepal lower house again stands dissolved after Mr. Oli failed to seek another vote of confidence.
- Opposition leaders have challenged the House dissolution in the Supreme Court but its outcome is uncertain.

How Domestic politics of Nepal is affecting India- Nepal ties?

- To distract the happenings in Nepal's domestic politics, Oli raised the issue of Kalapani dispute with India.
- India issued new maps following the division of the State of Jammu and Kashmir into Union Territories, Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.
- Though the new Indian map did not affect the India-Nepal boundary in any material way, Mr. Oli used this opportunity to raise anti-India sentiment among Nepali citizens.
- He raised the demand for restoring an additional 335 sq. km around Kalapani area.
- Further, in May 2020 when Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated the 75 km road through Kalapani that linked to the Kailash-Mansarovar pilgrimage route.
- Oli to raise nationalist sentiment, got a new map of Nepal endorsed by the House and adopting a constitutional amendment to sanctify Nepal's new territory.
- This has strained India-Nepal relations in the last few months.
- India has traditionally supported constitutionalism and multi-party democracy in Nepal. India needs to remain actively engaged with all the political actors, and avoid being perceived as partisan to ensure democratic rule in Nepal.

79. New IT Rules 2021- No protection under the Section 79 of IT Act upon Non compliance

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Challenges to internal security through communication networks

Synopsis:

The Information Technology Rules, 2021 have now come into force. Social Media companies will lose their protection under Section 79 of the IT Act if they fail to comply with new rules.

Background:

- The Information Technology (Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 came into force on 26th May 2021.
- They aim to regulate the flow of information over social media, digital news media, and over-the-top (OTT) content providers.

About the new IT rules:

- It mandates all social media platforms to set up a grievances redressal and compliance mechanism. This includes appointing a resident grievance officer, chief compliance officer, and a nodal contact person.
 - Chief Compliance Officer shall be responsible for ensuring compliance with the Act and Rules.
 - Nodal Contact Person will do 24×7 coordination with law enforcement agencies.
 - Resident Grievance Officer shall receive and resolve complaints from users. The officer must acknowledge the complaint within 24 hours, and resolve it within 15 days of receipt.
- The platforms must submit monthly reports on complaints received from users and actions taken.
- Further, the platforms providing the feature of instant messaging need to track the first originator of a message.
- However, non-compliance with new rules would take away the protection granted to social media intermediaries under Section 79 of the IT Act.

What is Section 79 of the IT Act?

- It states that any intermediary shall not be held legally or otherwise liable for any third-party information, data, or communication link made available or hosted on its platform.
- The protection is available if the intermediary doesn't:
 - initiate the transmission of the message in question,
 - select the receiver of the transmitted message
 - modify any information contained in the transmission
 - tamper with any evidence of the concerned messages
- Further, the intermediary wouldn't be granted protection if it does not immediately disable access to the material under question as per the government order.

Genesis of Section 79:

- The need to provide protection to intermediaries from actions of third parties came into focus following a police case in 2004.
 - Under this, the chief executive officer of bazee.com and his associates were booked for allowing the auctioning of pornographic material on their website. They were held guilty under Section 85 of the IT Act.
 - The section says that when a company commits an offense under the IT Act, all its executives should be held liable and proceeded against.
- However, this decision was overturned by SC in 2012. The court held that the website and its executives could not be held accountable since they were not directly involved in the said transaction. After this, the IT Act was amended to introduce Section 79.

Global norms on safe harbour protection for social media intermediaries:

- **Section 230 of the 1996 U.S Communications Decency Act** provides internet companies a safe harbor from content posted by users over them.
 - The section states that “no provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider”
- This has enabled companies such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google to become global conglomerates without any fear of litigation.

What's Next?

- The prominent platforms including Facebook, Twitter, etc. have still not complied with the new rules. They have not appointed concerned officers nor have submitted the monthly reports to the government.
- This means the executives of these social media platforms no longer enjoy the protection of Section 79. They could be held liable for any social media post without any fault on their part.

80. Challenges involved in Shifting the National Museum of India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: Shifting the **National Museum of India** as per the **Central Vista Redevelopment Project** has many issues and challenges.

Background

According to the plans of the “**Central Vista Redevelopment Project**”, the **National Museum of India** will be shifted to the South Block offices as well as the North Block offices of the Indian government.

What are the issues and challenges involved in shifting the National Museum of India?

1. **First**, the major issue is that the vision of urban planning for a single, linked cultural district is disregarded in the **Central Vista Redevelopment Project**.
 - For instance, the existing architecture plan in which the four cultural buildings are arranged form a single, linked cultural district. (Archaeological Survey of India, the National Museum, the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, the National Archives).
 - However, according to the **Central Vista Redevelopment Project**, all four cultural buildings will be set up in different places.
2. **Second**, implementing the Central Vista Redevelopment Project results in Disaggregation, rather than the unification of India's cultures. For instance, The National Museum's collections have to be split up. Some in the Red Fort, some in storage, some in new buildings.
3. **Third**, the scale of arranging for the packing and moving of each of the Museum's artifacts poses a big logistical challenge.
4. **For instance, the Museum** houses a variety of artifacts, from small delicate objects to as heavy as a tonne. For example, paintings on birch-bark, palm leaf, and paper, Pallava and Chola sculptures weigh many tonnes.
5. **Fourth, absence of more qualified conservation personnel and trained staff** to file documentation about the condition of the artifacts at the time of packing. **For example**, recently, Vacancies for 92 posts at the National Museum were closed as finding qualified specialists in India could not be completed for years.
6. **Fifth, the lack of public information** about the collections in a museum will reduce accountability and transparency in the shifting process. For instance, in many world museums, each artifact is connected to an online location index by providing a way barcode number.
 - It allowed curators, the conservators, and researchers with access to the collections even while they were in storage.

- More importantly, they allowed the inventory to be safeguarded. However, the National Museum has more than 2,06,000 objects, but the official Museums of India website still only has a fraction of the collection on it.
- 7. **Sixth, issue of cost and time.** Refurbishing old buildings such as the North and South Blocks to provide the facilities for a museum will cost money and time. Also, it demands exceptional skill, and few architects have the necessary experience in adapting historic buildings.
- 8. **Seventh, lack of safety.** Many buildings in the North and South Blocks buildings are structurally unsafe and are ill-equipped to meet even the basic fire and earthquake safety norms.

81. Need to Reform the Information Technology Rules, 2021

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 **Information Technology Rules, 2021** has many positives there are some ambiguities that need to be addressed.

What are the positive provisions in the Information Technology Rules, 2021?

- **Positives in the Information Technology Rules, 2021:** It mandates duties on social media platforms such as
 - Removal of non-consensual intimate pictures within 24 hours,
 - Publication of compliance reports increasing transparency,
 - Setting up of a dispute resolution mechanism for content removal
 - Adding a label to information for users to know whether the content is advertised, owned, sponsored, or exclusively controlled.

What are the ambiguities in the Information Technology Rules, 2021?

- **First, the Information Technology Rules, 2021 goes against some landmark judicial precedents of the supreme court.**
 - For instance, in the case of **Life Insurance Corp. Of India vs Prof. Manubhai D. Shah (1992)**, the SC had stated that 'the freedom to circulate one's views as the lifeline of any democratic institution'.
 - The **Information Technology Rules, 2021** by making the Government the ultimate adjudicator of objectionable speech online restricts the citizen's **right to dissent** against the government.
- **Second, the act violates the legal principle of colourable legislation, and it is void.**
 - For instance, the act was framed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeiTY).
 - Although, the **Second Schedule of the Business Rules, 1961** does not empower MeiTY to frame regulations for 'digital media'.
 - The power to legislate on digital media belongs to the **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.**
- **Third, no alternative option for fair recourse by the social media intermediaries.**
 - **For instance**, an intermediary is now supposed to take down content within 36 hours upon receiving orders from the Government.
 - **However**, in the event of a disagreement with the Government's order, the Intermediary does not have an option for a fair recourse.
- **Fourth, undermine the right to privacy by imposing a traceability requirement.**
 - For instance, a User's privacy is protected by guaranteeing **end-to-end encryption.**

- It does not allow intermediaries to have access to the contents of user's messages. However, imposing this mandatory requirement of traceability will break this immunity.
- This will also render all the data from these conversations vulnerable to attack from third parties.
- **Fifth**, the rules empower a government authority to classify **Fake news**. In the event of the authority becoming arbitrary, ill-decided, and biased the purpose of eliminating fake news will fail.
- **Sixth**, the rules place a barrier on the "marketplace of ideas" and also on the economic market of intermediaries by adding redundant financial burdens.
 - **For instance**, the Rules requiring intermediaries to have Indian resident nodal officers, compliance officers, and grievance officers. Intermediaries are also required to have offices located in India.
- The above-mentioned issues in Information Technology Rules, 2021 need to be addressed. Further, provisions should be made to ensure citizen's right to have a private conversation, to engage in a transaction, to dissent, to have an opinion, and to articulate the same without any fear of being imprisoned.

82. India's Nepal policy needs to change for ensuring long-lasting friendship

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Gs2: India and its Neighbourhood Relations.

Synopsis: There is widespread disbelief against India in Nepal. But that needs to be addressed by winning back the people's trust. This will strengthen [India's Nepal policy](#)

Background

- As of now, Nepal's parliament has been dissolved once again and dates for fresh elections are announced. The current dissolution has been challenged in the court by five political parties.
- It has to be remembered that the earlier dissolution of parliament was overruled by the Supreme Court as Unconstitutional.
- In this context, we will discuss the prevailing [Nepali's scepticism about India](#) and India's Nepal policy measures to ensure long-lasting friendship between the two countries.

Prevailing Nepali's scepticism on India

- So far, India's credentials have always been under Nepali's suspect. Currently, political and public opinion in Nepal is convinced that Mr Oli is now India's favourite.
- Further, there are rumours spreading in Nepal that Mr Oli will promote the return of Nepal to its Hindu Rashtra status under the monarchy and keep the Chinese at distance.
- Some rumours even claim that India is working to bring back the monarchy to Nepal.
- Though the Indian government has maintained silence on the current political developments in Nepal, India needs to assess the political situation in Nepal to serve the interests of India best.

Suggestions to improve India's Nepal policy

- **First**, the monarchy in Nepal has always been against the interest of India. The monarchy has always tried to distance Nepal from India and promoted a nationalism that takes hostility to India as its main driver.

- So, to win the Nepali's people trust and also for its own interest, India should declare its **unconditional support to Nepal's republican democracy**.
- **Second**, India should remain fully engaged with Nepal at all levels and across the political spectrum. Through engagement, India **should advocate policies rather than persons**.
 - **The absence of India's** engagement will **provide space for China's** intervention. Further, India **should avoid advocating support for individuals** as it will create false apprehension over India's credential.
- **Third**, India's engagement with Nepal must find an important place for Nepali citizens, especially the **Madhesi population**.
 - Currently, through a **presidential ordinance**, the Nepal government had **reversed a constitutional provision** that denied citizenship to children born of Nepali mothers who had foreign husbands. This was directly targeted at the Madhesi population.
 - Though this provision stands removed, it **might be reintroduced after the political uncertainty** is over. **India should proactively support** the demands of **Madhesi population**.
- **Finally**, India needs to **facilitate the people-to-people links** including long-standing religious and cultural links, between our two countries.
 - The future of India's Nepal policy lies in leveraging people-to-people links. No other country other than India has such an advantage.

83. Need for real-time data on public health

Source: The Indian Express

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

Synopsis: Having access to epidemiological real-time data on public health will help us to fight against the pandemic better by making informed choices.

Background

- The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of data to governments in decision-making.
- However, India lacks real-time data on public health and the provision of health services.
- This necessitates the **need for data transparency and data sharing** in India to make informed decision-making.
- Hence, India **needs to create a charter for standardizing digital health data**.
- **How real-time data on public health can help fight against the Pandemic?**
- **First, it will help in data analysis and modelling.** For instance, the epidemiological concept of flattening the curve and its predictions are results of data analysis and modelling.
 - Epidemiology refers to the study of medicine which deals with the incidence, distribution, and control of diseases.
- **Second, it allows us to measure our preparedness, and shape our responses to identify, manage, and care for new cases.**
- **Third, it will help to understand disease pathogenesis and severity. For example,** Epidemic outbreak data like case data, medical and treatment data can be used to understand disease pathogenesis and severity.
- **Fourth, it helps us to understand the transmissibility or infectivity of the virus.** For example, comparing genome surveillance data with the magnitude of

fatalities or recovery will help us to understand the transmissibility or infectivity of the virus.

- **Fifth, it will help in predicting viral evolution and drug-treatment strategies.** Surveillance through studying genome sequencing of the virus, along with epidemiological data allows us to identify the evolution of the virus after the rollout of vaccinations.

Challenges in generating real-time data on public health

- **One, standardisation of data collection is the biggest challenge** due to many operational constraints.
 - Ensuring data availability and quality under operational constraints is critical. This can be addressed by **reducing errors and enabling transparency.**
- **Second, concerns of privacy and security while sharing personal health data.**
 - A systemic infrastructure with built-in safeguards has to be built. This will provide security and ensure privacy.

84. Resolving bottlenecks in procuring Pfizer's vaccine

Source-[The Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis – Pfizer has asked for certain conditions in order to supply 5 million doses to India between July and October this year.

Introduction

- According to reports, Pfizer is ready to supply five crore doses of the mRNA vaccines [developed with the German company BioNTech] between July and October.
- However, the company has requested certain protection from the Centre, as it has done with other 116 governments across the world, including the United States.
- Therefore, to seal the deal, the pharmaceutical giant and the Indian government must quickly resolve their long-standing dispute over the protection.

Pre-conditions to supply Vaccine to India:

- **Pfizer said that it will supply vaccine only to the central government, not to individual states.** The company also refused to send vaccines directly to local governments citing its **policy of dealing only with the Central government** of various countries.
- **The company has also asked for protection from the Government of India.** Such as, slots for testing of their vaccines in CDL (Central Drugs Laboratory).
- The company is also requesting that it **should not be liable for compensation** in case of an adverse event.

What needs to be done in order to increase procurement?

1. Timely vaccination is the need of the hour to protect people against the coronavirus, thus the [Centre needs to take charge of all procurement and negotiations](#) with all vaccine suppliers, including domestic and foreign.
2. The government has to **consider the global situation in decision-making.** Such as, around 14.7 crore doses of Pfizer vaccines have already been administered worldwide without any significant reports of adverse effects.

85. Effects of Pandemic on Young Healthcare Workers

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: Attention needs to be given to the requirements of the most vulnerable members of the caregiving team i.e. young healthcare workers.

Introduction

young medical interns, postgraduates, nurses, physiotherapists, pharmacists, etc are the lowest steps in the hierarchy of training. It seems fair from an academic view and is according to any professional training path. However, this structure is apathetic for young Health care workers.

- Even before the pandemic, duty hour restrictions were not followed for young healthcare workers. Sleep-deprived postgraduates used to work for 100-hours in a week.
- The stipends provided to them are inconsistent. For example, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh offer the lowest monthly stipends to first-year residents at Rs 35-37,000.

What are the adverse effects of the pandemic on young healthcare workers?

During the pandemic, most public hospitals had young interns, postgraduates, nurses, and technicians staff in fever clinics, wards, and ICUs. They were overworked by the huge volume of patients.

1. **Firstly, they are physically distressed by working for 8-12 hours** in a stuffy PPE suit and tightly-fitted face mask. One cannot even take a toilet break.
 - **It requires a tremendous cognitive effort to manage complex ventilator** settings and drug interactions. Especially when the patient is admitted to the Covid-19 ward with multiple co-morbidities.
2. **Secondly**, as the second wave hit, hospitals increased their beds and ICU capacity. **But the healthcare workers remained overstretched.** The burden further increased by poorly-informed public health measures and an increase in public frustration and indifference.
3. **Thirdly, the NEET postgraduate exams this year have been delayed.** The shortage of workers will continue to overburden them.
4. **Fourthly, the growing amount of disinformation on social media** which adds to distrust against doctors and nurses has left most trainees in an unfortunate position. They are defending their worth and the firmness of scientific evidence that updates medical practice.
 - **They also have to defend themselves against the several instances of violence** and abuse by patient attendees.
5. **Fifthly**, all of these factors have taken a toll on the well-being of young trainees. **They are away from their families** and the uncertainty about their safety amidst a global pandemic **affects their mental health.**
6. **Suicide has claimed the lives of students, interns, and postgraduates in the last year across the country.** Reasons were the stress of persistent duty hours, (some even suffering from severe conditions themselves).

The conclusion

- It is time we bring an end to our indifference towards young healthcare workers. There should be some amendments to the Epidemic Disease Act to protect frontline workers from exploitation. They should be provided with centrally-sponsored insurance schemes.

- Citizens must now speak out against the exploitation of young trainees. It should be a moral responsibility to end this toxic culture that feeds off public apathy.

86. Issues with Tarun Tejpal case judgment

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: Tarun Tejpal case judgment needs to be overturned. Else, it will remain as a bad precedent that impedes the workplace safety of women.

Background

- Tarun Tejpal, the former Tehelka editor-in-chief was accused of sexually assaulting his female colleague.
- Followingly he was arrested and released on bail by the Supreme Court.
- Recently, an Additional Sessions Judge had acquitted Tarun Tejpal from charges of rape.
- The judgment transforms the accused into the victim and the survivor into the accused. The judgment has been criticized on the following grounds.
 - The court had dismissed the rape charges based on unfounded rationality.
 - Further, this judgment will be in history as an example of the worst kind of victim-blaming and shaming to benefit the accused.

What are the reasons for criticising the Tarun Tejpal case judgment?

1. **First, the judgment is criticized for its unprecedented interpretation in support of the accused.**
 - **One**, the court denied accepting the victim as a sterling witness. It was stated that the survivor did not fit into the court's preconceived ideas of a rape survivor's behaviour.
 - This disregards the women's struggles that forced changes in law, in case law, and in approaches to victims of rape.
 - **Two**, even some evidence against the accused were ignored. Such as the accused's personal apology, the draft of an official apology, and the conversations recorded by the survivor with the senior woman officer negotiating on behalf of the accused.
 - The judgment holds that the apology and the statements made by the accused were not sent voluntarily. But that it was under pressure and intimidation by the survivor.
2. **Second, violation of privacy.** Section 53A in the **Indian Evidence Act** rules out reference to past sexual history. However, the survivor was subjected to answer even intimate details of her life and her friendships.
3. **Third, the judgment criminalizes the right of a survivor to approach activists and lawyers for their help.** Senior members of the Bar such as Indira Jaisingh were accused of doctoring and also of adding to incidents in support of the victim.

General Studies Paper - 3

General Studies - 3

1. Guidelines of National Building Code to Ensure Fire Safety in Public buildings

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Disaster and Disaster Management (Fire accidents)

Synopsis: Effective regulations to manage fire risks in public buildings like Guidelines of National Building Code are available. However, lack of enforcement by states has led to fire disasters in India.

Background:

- Fire accident in Public building has been a recurrent event in India. **For instance**,
 - Fire accidents in hospitals at Bharuch in Gujarat, Virar (Mumbai), and Mumbra near Thane, have killed at least 37 people.
- According to **National Crime Records Bureau** (NCRB), 330 people have died in commercial building fires in 2019.
- When fire accidents in residential or dwelling buildings are included, the fatality rate is very high at 6,329.
- Some common causes are:
 1. Electrical failures
 2. failure of the state to ensure adherence to safety laws
 3. Lack of modern tech to ensure safety in public buildings.

What are the legal provisions available to ensure fire safety compliance in public buildings?

- **First, the National Building Code of India** deals with Fire and life safety. It is published by the **Bureau of Indian Standards** as a recommendatory document. However, the Home Ministry asked States to incorporate it into their local building bylaws. It makes the recommendations a “mandatory requirement”.
- **Guidelines under NBC**
 1. One, it provides specifications and guidelines for **design and materials** that reduce the threat of destructive fires. **For example**,
 - It specifies fire resistance materials to be used in exterior walls, interior bearing walls, floor, roof, fire check doors, fire enclosure exits, etc.,
 2. Two, The Code, classifies all the existing and new buildings by nature of use. For example; residential, educational, institutional, assembly (like cinemas and auditoria), Industrial, etc.,
 3. It recommends the location of buildings by type of use in specific zones. This is to ensure that industrial and hazardous structures do not coexist with residential, institutional, office, and business buildings.
 4. Three, the code prescribes the Technologies to be incorporated into buildings to alert in case of a fire and also to fight. Examples are, automatic fire detection and alarm system, automatic sprinklers and water sprays, fireman’s lift, fire barriers, etc.,
 5. Four, It provides exemptions for various buildings in case of practical difficulty. A local head, fire services may consider exemptions from the Code.
 6. Despite, the existence of fire safety rules in every state, the provisions of the Code are ignored in practice.
- **Second, Fire Safety Committees** were constituted. They conduct periodical audits on fire installation, heating, ventilation and air-conditioning, and other electrical equipment in the Union government’s hospitals.

- **Third**, Health Ministry has also imposed a **third-party accreditation** for fire safety. It has also formed strict guidelines for a mandatory fire response plan in every hospital.
- **Fourth, The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** has also provided mandatory requirements for fire safety in public buildings, including hospitals.
 - Such as, maintaining minimum open safety space, protected exit mechanisms, dedicated staircases, and crucial drills to carry out evacuations.
- **Fifth**, the Supreme Court has directed all States to carry out fire safety audits of dedicated COVID-19 hospitals.
- **How far National Building Code is adequately implemented by the estates?**
- Evidence shows that States lack the manpower to inspect and ensure compliance with safety codes, including NBC. For instance,
 - According to **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report** (2010 to 2015), in Maharashtra, a joint physical inspection by an audit of 53 government buildings revealed that only fire extinguishers were installed in 11 of 53 buildings, and the remaining 42 buildings were not equipped with any of the fire-fighting installations.
- Further, Tamil Nadu and Kerala though have broader regulations, no reference is found for compliance with the National Building code.

Way forward

Making heavy fire liability insurance compulsory for all public buildings, will ensure protection to occupants and visitors and bring about external inspection of safety.

2. Natural Gas Can be India's Alternative Road to Clean Energy

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3

Synopsis: India should not solely focus on the end goal of decarbonisation. First it must try to 'green' its fossil fuel energy bag by increasing the share of natural gas.

Introduction

- Policymakers, climate diplomats, academicians, corporates, and NGOs are currently focussed on the concept of **net-zero carbon emissions**. Also, they are looking for the suitable target year for achieving it.
- However, the book **"The Next Stop: Natural Gas and India's journey towards a Clean Energy Future"** suggests that India must first green its fossil fuel energy bag. This can be done by increasing the share of natural gas.
- This is a practical view because increasing natural gas will avoid negative impacts that shutting down coal mines might produce.
- Also, It allows the government to meet its aim of giving affordable energy to everyone without harming the environment. It can be done through executive order.

What policy changes in the natural gas supply chain are required to green its fossil fuel energy bag?

To explain the scale of the answers, here are four key policy suggestions:

- **Firstly, the experts must highlight the significance of natural gas.** They must identify its usefulness. It is a competitive fuel and is amply available in and within the Asian/ME subcontinent. It has multiple uses, and it is the greenest of all fossil fuels.
- **Secondly, the authorities must correct the present deterrent policy biases.** The taxation system is regressive. The tax rates increase as the gas flows from one zone

to another. This means that consumers situated at a distance from the source of gas pay a higher price than those closer to the source. Gas is not under GST.

- The price of natural gas is complex as there are multiple price formulae.
 - One for gas produced from domestic fields by the public sector companies.
 - One for gas produced by private companies.
 - Furthermore, one for production from deep waters offshore under high temperature etc.
- **Thirdly, the authorities should refurbish the arrangement of the industry.** The Gas Authority of India Ltd (GAIL) is engaged in the production, transportation, and marketing of gas. This allows GAIL to influence its rights of the gas pipelines.
 - They deny their competitors access to the market. Assured and common access to all marketers is required.
 - Most countries have separated the production/import and marketing interests from transportation. GAIL's business activities should be limited to pipeline construction and transportation.
- **Lastly, an institutional apparatus should be created** to allow better coordination between the central and state governments. The Center and state have clashed over issues like land attainment, pipeline routing; and royalty payments. This is why India has not yet made a national pipeline grid.
 - Center-state alterations have also delayed the construction of import facilities and the creation of gas markets. The Centre and state should resolve these issues through an integrated decision-making process.

Conclusion

- Every participant will come to COP26 later this year with hard evidence to back their longer-term commitments. Participants must also focus on other important alternatives to net-zero.

3. Climate Change is Shifting Earth's Axis of Rotation

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

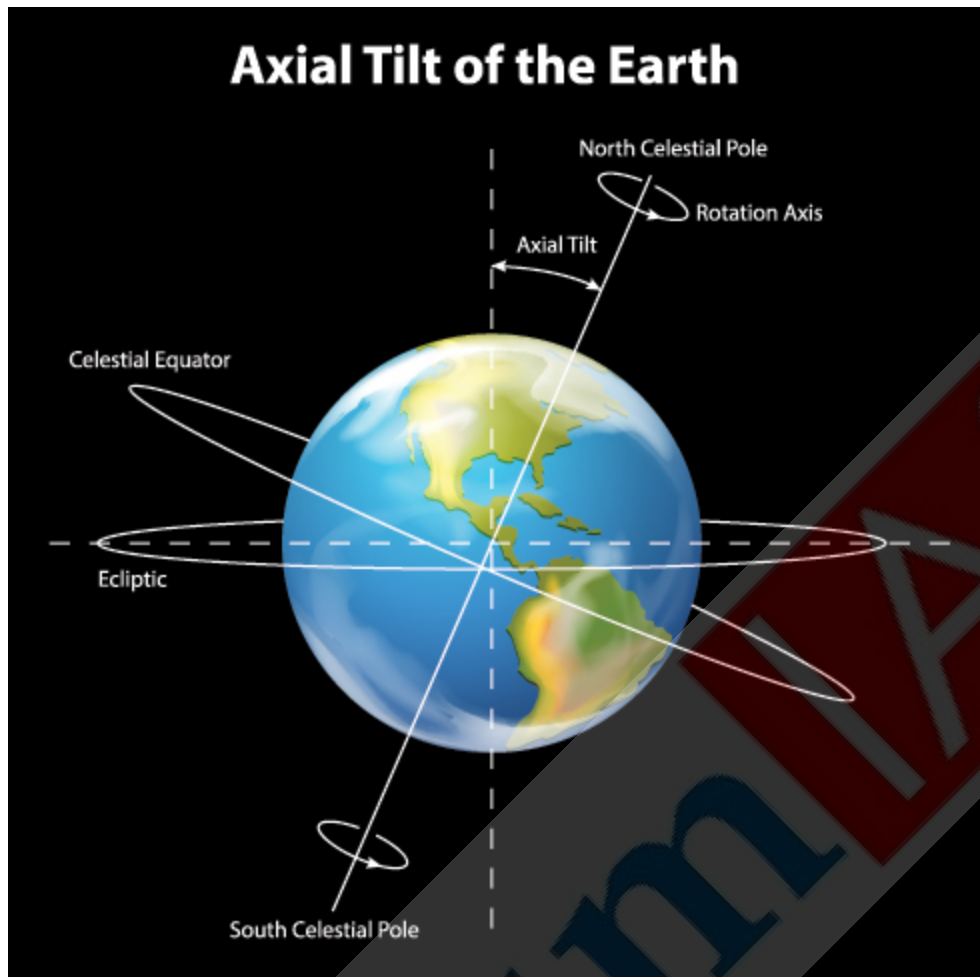
Syllabus- **GS 3 – Climate Change.**

Synopsis-According to a new study, loss of water on land is shifting the earth's axis of rotation. The reasons behind loss of water are ice melting and human-induced factors [such as excessive groundwater pumping].

Introduction-

- According to a study published in the Journal Geophysical Research letters, Earth's axis of rotation has been rotating faster than normal since the 1990s due to the significant melting of glaciers caused by global warming.
- According to NASA, the spin axis drifted around 10 cm every year in the 20th century. It means, in a year, polar motion exceeds 10 metres.

Concept of earth's axis of rotation and polar motion



Source: NASA website

- **Earth's axis of rotation** – It is the line along which Earth spins around itself as it revolves around the Sun.
 - The points on which the axis intersects the planet's surface are the geographical north and south poles
- **Polar motion**- Changes in the distribution of Earth's mass around the globe also change the earth's axis of rotation and as the axis moves, the poles move as well, which is known as polar motion.
- Earth's rotation will decrease if its mass is moved away from the rotation axis (From poles towards equators) and vice versa.

Key finding of the study-

- In the mid-1990s, melting glaciers redistributed a large amount of water. It changed the direction of the routine **polar wander** to turn eastward and also accelerate it.
- The average drift speed rose by around 17 times between 1995 and 2020.
- The primary cause of polar drift is water loss from the Polar Regions, with contributions from water loss in nonpolar regions, which describes the eastward shift of polar drift.

What are the major factors causing the shift in Earth's axis of rotation?

The rotation of the earth is affected by mass redistribution on and within the planet, such as shifts in soil, ice sheets, seas, and mantle movement. The following are the main forces that contribute to the mass redistribution-

- **Melting of glaciers** -Climate change has caused billions of tonnes of glacial ice to melt into oceans. This has caused the Earth's poles to move in new directions.
- **Groundwater pumping** – The excessive use of groundwater has caused changes in groundwater storage in non-glacial areas. Further, it led to polar wander as most of it eventually joins the sea, thus redistributing the planet's mass.
 - **For example-** The changes in groundwater mass in areas like California, northern Texas, Beijing and northern India, areas that have been pumping large amounts of groundwater for agricultural use.

Way forward-

The shifting of the Earth's axis as a result of climate change demonstrates how much active human action can affect changes in the mass of water on land.

4. New Malaria Vaccine Can be a Game Changer in Curtailing Malaria

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Science and Tech and its effect on everyday life

Synopsis:

Phase 2b clinical trials of R21/Matrix M (a new malaria vaccine) have shown the efficacy of 77%. It is a new version of RTS, S — another candidate against malaria. Experts believe that this new version could be a game-changer in curtailing the spread of malaria across the globe, especially during pandemic times.

Background:

- The results of phase 2b clinical trials of R21/Matrix M were published recently in the Lancet Journal.
- The new malaria vaccine showed an efficacy of 77%, much higher than its previous version named RTS,S.

About Malaria:

It is caused by the bite of the female Anopheles mosquito if the mosquito itself is infected with a malarial parasite.

There are **five kinds of malarial parasites** — Plasmodium falciparum, Plasmodium vivax (the commonest ones), Plasmodium malariae, Plasmodium ovale, and Plasmodium knowlesi. According to the World Malaria Report 2020, cases of Malaria in **India** dropped from about 20 million in 2000 to about **5.6 million in 2019**.

Globally 39 countries have declared themselves Malaria free.

As per WHO, a country can be declared malaria-free when it reports zero indigenous cases of malaria for 3 or more years.

About the Previous Version:

- RTS, S has been in development for more than 30 years. It is a joint work of Walter Reed Institute of Research, GlaxoSmithKline, and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation with the PATH Malaria Vaccine Initiative.
- It targets the liver stage protein of the Plasmodium falciparum life cycle.
- Thus, it stops the Plasmodium falciparum malaria parasite from entering the liver thereby preventing the subsequent deadly blood stages.

- To date, it is the only vaccine to reduce malaria in children. However, it doesn't have high efficacy.

About the new version:

- R21/Matrix M is a modified version of RTS, S.
- Scientists at the University of Oxford have been developing it for the last 6-7 years. Serum Institute of India is manufacturing it.
- The vaccine trial began in 2014-15 on 450 children in Burkina Faso.
- The result of the phase 2b trial showed a 77% efficacy, making it the first vaccine to reach WHO's goal of at least 75% efficacy.

Need of New Malaria Vaccine:

- **High Incidence of Malaria:** In 2019, there were an estimated 229 million cases of malaria and 409 000 malaria-related deaths in 87 countries. In the same year, India witnessed 5.6 million cases.
 - Under 5 children in sub-saharan Africa accounted for approximately two-thirds of global deaths.
- **Greater Hardships posed by Pandemic:** As per a WHO survey, approximately one-third of countries around the world reported disruptions in malaria prevention, diagnosis and treatment services during the first quarter of 2021.
 - Disruptions occurred as people were unable or unwilling to seek care in health facilities.
 - Further lockdowns and restrictions on the movement led to delays in the delivery of insecticide-treated mosquito nets.

What's next?

- Serum Institute of India and US vaccine maker Novavax have begun the process of phase 3 trials in 4 African countries.
 - This would assess large-scale safety and efficacy in 4,800 children aged five to 36 months.
- The success of the trial would enable bulk production of the vaccine that would help curtail malaria across the globe.

5. Frequent Hospital Fires during COVID Time in India- Cause and Way forward

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- GS 3 – Disaster and disaster management

Synopsis – The hospital system in India has been overwhelmed by the heavy patient load and arrangement for the pandemic. It has increased their vulnerability to fire.

Introduction–

- Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and mismanagement, the hospital system is becoming over stressed, resulting in frequent fire incidents.
- Since last August, more than 93 people have died in 24 hospital fire incidents in India, the majority of whom were Covid-19 patients.

Major reason behind frequent hospital fire in India despite fire checks and audits-

- **Electrical faults are cited as the leading cause of fires –**
 - **Overheated ICU's and ACs-** In most hospitals, to meet the current COVID-19 situation, medical equipment or wires are in use beyond their capacity. It is overheating the electrical wiring system, causing the fire.
 - **Short circuit or overloading** due to continuous running ACs in hospitals.

- **Mismanagement in hospital** – Placing more ICU beds in limited space also makes it more vulnerable to fire spread.
- **Lack of cross-ventilation** – Hospital ICUs (for COVID-19) are at significant fire risk because they are sealed for the purpose of keeping them sterile.
- **Highly inflammable material in Hospitals**- sanitizer spills and vapor, higher oxygen content in the air, and PPE kits made of synthetic materials all contribute to the rapid spread of fire.

What needs to be done to reduce fire accidents in hospitals?

- All states need to carry out proper **fire and electrical audits of dedicated COVID-19 hospitals** in order to reduce the frequent cases.
- As the health sector expands to accommodate pandemic arrangements, it is essential that all new facilities and plans meet safety standards such as-
 - **Cross-ventilation in ICUs** –Proper ventilation passage in ICUs is required to allow fumes, an outlet.
 - Keeping electrical equipment for ACs away from **oxygen-saturated areas** will reduce the risk.
 - **Fire safety drills**- Hospitals should mandatorily hold regular fire safety and evacuation drills.
 - **Hospitals must install sprinklers**, which start dispensing water [35 liters per minute] as the temperature increases above 78 °C.
 - **Fire extinguishers** should be installed in temporary hospitals, and a fire truck should be stationed outside hospitals in the event of a major disaster.

6. IPR Waiver For Covid 19 Vaccines

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Issues relating to Intellectual Property Rights.

Synopsis:

The US is now supporting the plea of developing countries for granting an IPR waiver to Covid-19 vaccines. The waiver would allow the countries to speed up the production process without the permission of manufacturing company. However, significant roadblocks exist that may prevent the grant of waiver.

Background:

- The US has shown its willingness to an IPR waiver for Covid-19 vaccines. It would be pursuing text-based negotiations on the waiver at the World Trade Organization (WTO).
 - Under text-based negotiations, negotiators exchange their preferred texts and then try to develop a consensus over them.
- Experts believe that US support is based on an October 2020 proposal given by India and South Africa in the WTO.
 - However, the October proposal called for a waiver on all Covid-19 interventions. This includes testing, diagnostics, and novel therapeutics.

About Patents and Intellectual Property:

A patent is a type of intellectual property right. It is an exclusive right granted by a government to an inventor for a limited, pre-specified time.

It provides an enforceable legal right to prevent others from copying the invention.

Types of Patents:

Product Patent: No person can manufacture the patented product without the consent of the patent holder even if he/she uses an alternative process.

Process Patent: Under this only the process is protected. A person can manufacture the patented product using an alternate process.

Type of regime in India:

India moved from product patenting to process patenting in the 1970s. This enabled it to become a significant producer of generic drugs on a global scale.

It allowed companies like Cipla to provide Africa with anti-HIV drugs in the 1990s.

However, due to obligations arising out of the TRIPS Agreement, it had to amend the Patents Act in 2005. This made a switch to a product patents regime across the pharma, chemicals, and biotech sectors.

The October 2020 proposal:

- India and South Africa had asked the WTO to waive certain conditions of the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement.
- The countries **wanted a waiver over sections 1, 4, 5, and 7** that could impede timely access to affordable medical products to combat Covid-19.
 - The sections relate to copyright and related rights, industrial designs, patents, and the protection of undisclosed information.

Need of IPR waiver:

- **Boost Production:** Currently, most production is concentrated in high-income countries. With a waiver, the middle-income countries would be able to manufacture covid vaccines with emergency use authorisations (EUA). This includes vaccines developed by Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Novavax, Bharat Biotech, etc.
- **Reducing Cost of Production:** The manufacturing in middle-income companies is currently happening through licensing or technology transfer agreements. The companies which grant the license, charge a hefty price for it. The companies would not need a license after an IPR waiver.
- **Avert legal Difficulties:** The developing countries may face institutional and legal difficulties when using flexibilities available in the TRIPS Agreement. The waiver would help in averting this problem.

Roadblocks in granting IPR waiver:

- **Procedure Complexities:** The nature of text-based negotiations can delay the process. Further, even one country can veto the waiver as granting requires consensus among all 164 members of WTO.
- **Disincentivization of Companies:** Waiver may reduce the earning potential of companies. They may be disincentivized to do more research on tackling new variants. This may undermine the global response to the pandemic.
- **Erosion of Public Trust:** People may not trust the quality and efficacy of vaccines manufactured in a middle-income country.
- **Production barriers:** Ramping up production capacities will be a lengthy process. The developing countries that are currently producing Covid 19 vaccines are able to do so with the extensive support and grant of developed countries.

Other Challenges concerning the production and distribution of Covid vaccines in developing countries:

- **Scarcity of Raw Material:** It has been a growing issue for ramping up production. Several manufacturers have been relying on specific suppliers, and alternatives are limited.
- **Trade Barriers:** US has blocked exports of critical raw materials used in the Covid-19 vaccines using regulations like the American Defence Production Act. This led to a delay in the production of Covid vaccines by some companies in India.
- **Acquisition Capability of Developed World:** They have a higher propensity to purchase the vaccine. This has enabled them to acquire most of the supplies.

Way Forward:

- The developed countries should understand the plight of developing countries under the current extraordinary circumstances. The recent intention of the EU to support the U.S proposal should be materialised in reality.
- Further, other covid related interventions including testing, diagnostics, and novel therapeutics should be made part of IPR waiver proposal.
- The developing world should be given an opportunity to develop cheap and efficacious vaccines. They have already shown their manufacturing capabilities by developing good quality generic medicines in the past.

7. Indian Offshore Model will Dominate Global IT Sector

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS:3 – Industries and employment

Synopsis:

The Indian IT industry will dominate the global landscape due to various advantages associated with the offshore model

Introduction:

According to analysts, India is increasingly becoming an attractive market for tech companies from all over the world.

What is the offshore model or the Work from home model?

In simple terms, it is the **relocation of a company's business process to a country that is not in the same geographical region**. For example, a company in the US might have the majority of its employees working in India or China due to various benefits.

Why is India becoming an attractive market for tech companies?

India is becoming an attractive IT market because:

- Increase in Critical shortage of skilled manpower in countries such as the US and Europe
- Pandemic-induced work-from-home has raised the openness of global tech buyers. They are allowing to work away from onshore (or the client's location).
- Markets are witnessing a 50% reduction in the onshore model and about 15% increase in the offshore model.

Advantages of Work from Home Model or Offshore Model:

- **Zero Commutation:** When working remotely, a person doesn't have to step out of their home. So it will reduce the time and fuel spent to and from the office commute.
- **Flexible Schedule:** A person can choose to schedule tasks that would otherwise be left out. For example, when in office and build their working hours around their priorities, either for home or for learning something new.

- **Larger Skill Pool:** Employers can extend their reach to **hire a better skill pool across the globe**, rather than just relying on persons available locally.
- **Saving on Office Space:** Having a majority of all the workforce working remotely will help to cut costs significantly on office space and maintenance.
- **Limitations of Work from Home Model or Offshore Model:**
- **Increased isolation:** A person can become quite isolated if he/she spend the majority of the time by him/herself working independently.
- **Loss of Focus:** Homes are comfortable, but they present their own challenges. Even with a strict schedule, it is difficult to not get involved with family work or responsibilities.
- **Lack of Accountability and Fall in Productivity:** Work from Home makes it difficult for an organisation to chart the strengths and weaknesses of every individual while working remotely.

8. EAC Recommends the Great Nicobar Development Plan for EIA Study

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 3:Environmental Impact Assessment

Synopsis: The Environment Appraisal Committee has recommended the **Great Nicobar Development plan** for grant of terms of reference for EIA studies. The committee also flagged a few critical concerns.

Introduction

The Environment Appraisal Committee (EAC) had raised serious concerns about NITI Aayog's ambitious project for the **Great Nicobar Development plan**. However, the EAC has also recommended the plan for a term of reference (TOR) for [Environmental Impact Assessment](#) (EIA) studies.

About the NITI Aayog's Great Nicobar Development plan:

NITI Aayog developed a ['Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island at Andaman and Nicobar Islands'](#) plan.

The plan proposal includes construction of the following,

- An international container trans-shipment terminal,
- A greenfield international airport,
- A power plant and a township complex spread over 166 sq. km
- **Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO)** will be the nodal agency for the implementation of the Great Nicobar Development plan.

The 'pre-feasibility report of the Great Nicobar Development plan was prepared by a Gurugram-based consulting agency Aecom India Private Limited for NITI Aayog. The report mentioned the implementation of the plan will require an estimated cost of ₹ 75,000 crores.

About the Environment Appraisal Committee:

- A 15 member EAC headed by a marine biologist and former director, Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), Deepak Apte was formed to study the pre-feasibility report.
- Recently, the EAC made their decision and uploaded the documents on the MoEFCC's Parivesh portal.
- In that, it recommended the plan for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) studies.
- Apart from that, the committee also raises few concerns with the plan.

What were the concerns of the committee?

The committee held two meetings one in March and the other in April. During that, it raises both technical and practical concerns. The discussion of the March meeting was delayed because of the incomplete submission of documents.

1. **The incomplete information includes** the details of the township, information on seismic and tsunami risks, freshwater requirement details for projects and settlements, etc. Apart from that, the impact on the [Giant Leatherback turtle](#) was also incomplete.
 - o After the completion of projects, it is expected that nearly 6.5 lakh people will live on the island. The current population is only 8,500 on Great Nicobar. The current total population of the entire island chain is less than 4.5 lakh.
2. **The committee also pointed that there were no details of the trees to be chopped.** 130 sq. km. of the project area has some of the finest tropical forests in India. Hence, the numbers of chopped trees could run into millions.
3. **The committee asked for details of the corporate environment policy of the implementing agency.** Similarly, the EAC also asks whether the company has an environmental policy, a prescribed standard operating procedure to deal with environmental and forest violations.
4. **AECOM's pre-feasibility report has proposed 2022-23 for the start of work on the site.** However, **one year is not enough if the government and project proponents follow the EAC's recommendations in letter and spirit.**
5. **Galathea Bay** of Great Nicobar forms the **centrepiece of the NITI Aayog proposal.** The Plan aims to construct a port in Galathea Bay. But, this has a number of issues in the plan.
 - o **Ecological surveys have reported a number of new species**, many restricted to just the Galathea region. These include the critically endangered Nicobar shrew, the Great Nicobar crane, the Nicobar frog etc. **These are not mentioned in AECOM's pre-feasibility report.**
 - o The beaches at the mouth of the river Galathea in South Bay are among the most prominent nesting sites of [Giant leatherback turtles](#).
 - o **The EAC highlighted that the site selection** for the port had been done on technical and financial criteria. **The environmental aspects were ignored.**
 - o So the EAC has asked for an **independent evaluation** for the aptness of the proposed port site **with a specific focus on Leatherback Turtle.**
6. At present, the ANIIDCO is involved in activities such as tourism, trading and infrastructure development for tourism and fisheries. Its annual turnover for 2018-19 was ₹ 379 crore. But to manage the infrastructure **project valued to cost ₹75,000 crore is way beyond its capacity.**

Action points suggested by the Environment Appraisal Committee:

More than 100 specific points of action are listed out by the committee. The important ones include,

1. The need for an independent assessment of terrestrial and marine biodiversity
2. A study on the impact of dredging, recovery and port operations, including oil spills.
3. Analysis of risk-handling capabilities and a disaster management plan.
4. Details of labour, labour camps and their requirements.
5. The need for studies of alternative sites for the port with a focus on environmental and ecological impact
6. Conducting a hydro-geological study to assess the impact on ground and surface water regimes.

9. Solving Present Health Care Crisis With Lessons from Green Revolution

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: India is facing a severe shortage of healthcare infrastructure. But, this is not the first time. India already tackled a food shortage worse than this during the 1960s by the green revolution.

Introduction:

India is witnessing shortages of almost everything needed to treat COVID-19 patients. Such as hospital beds, drugs, ventilators, [Vaccines](#), and, above all, [medical oxygen](#). Many countries such as the US, the U.K., the European Union, and even China offering [help to India to tackle the second Covid-19](#) wave. This situation resembles India from the Mid-1960s.

The Situation of India during the 1960s:

- India faced a **severe food shortage after facing two consecutive years of drought**. After that, India forced to accept US aid. It is a point to note that, India at that time neither supported USSR nor the USA.
- **President Lyndon, send food to India by the shipload**. So that India can keep the ship on a short lease”
- Though it was the worst situation, the response of Indian leadership was exemplary.
- Prime Ministers Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi, and others brought the scientific and bureaucratic communities to debates. Especially to bring a **quantum leap in food production**.
- The debate turned into action very soon. Within a few years, India **achieved Food security**.
- No one imagined that India from such a dreadful situation will achieve food security this fast.
- The **Green Revolution** stands out in Indian history even today. It is the display of extraordinary accountability of political leadership, combined ability to resolve an issue from bureaucrat and Scientific community.

Advantages for present India vis-à-vis 1960s:

- In March 2020, India faced a similar 1960s problem on health infrastructure. To improve the medical capability and delay the Covid-19 spread India imposed lockdown at very short notice.
- But India has certain advantages at present when compared to the situation in 1960. Such as,
 - At present, India has a better industrial base, compared to the 1960s. So, India needs some time to ramp up hospital beds, ventilators, and oxygen supply.
 - Similarly, certain parts of India actually have a surplus of oxygen. They can help to fulfill urgent demands.
 - India has an enormous foreign exchange reserve at present. This is not the case in the 1960s. So, India was in a better position to import some crucial medical inputs such as vaccines.

Suggestions:

- **Inter-State variation in death rate is directly related to the amount of health spending** with respect to the state domestic product. Similarly, the health

infrastructure of the country is also important. So, to avert any future crisis States have to increase the level of spending on health.

- India also witnesses a hike in Food prices during the pandemic. This denotes that there is a disruption of supply in between in the supply chain. This will be further impacted due to various State-level lockdowns. To avoid this, **PM has to interact with the farming community**. This is an important lesson for India from the mid-sixties.

10. Issues Associated with IPR Waiver to Covid Vaccine

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3

Synopsis: IPR waiver will not bring instant benefits. Thus, efforts must be made to share the excess stockpiles of vaccines lying with the developed countries.

Introduction

The Biden administration announced that it would support a waiver on intellectual property rights (IPR) for the production of COVID-19 vaccines.

- The original plan, for TRIPS waiver for Covid vaccines, was drafted at the WTO by India and South Africa last year.
- During the 2020 U.S. presidential election, Joe Biden made a promise to share vaccine technology with countries that needed it if he won. He was expecting the deep gap of inequality in vaccine access.

How has the world reacted to this stance?

This policy stance of US has been rejected by major EU nations and met with counter-suggestion.

- **The first refusal came from Germany.** They said that it would create major complications for the production of vaccines, the major pharma corporations resonated with this view.
- **French President Emmanuel Macron** was relatively less antagonistic to considering the proposal. However, he **lashed out at the Anglo-Saxons for hindering vaccine availability** globally by blocking the export of ingredients.
- **There is some substance to the argument that an IPR waiver may not fully resolve the vaccine shortage issue** in countries suffering the worst of the pandemic now, even if it were to become a reality.

What should be done?

- **Firstly, the grant of a waiver would have to be supplemented** by technology transfer. It will provide the pharmaceutical manufacturers with the required trained personnel, raw materials, and high-tech equipment and production know-how.
- **Secondly, after tech transfer, there must be a scientific** criterion to test the safety, immunogenicity, and protective efficacy of the vaccine developed by these generic manufacturers.
- **Thirdly, the effect on global supply chains for vaccine production** should be inspected so major troubles might be avoided.
- **Lastly, other options to instantly address vaccine shortages should be considered.** Developed nations should share a considerably greater part of their vaccine stockpiles, particularly in cases where the latter exceed projected domestic needs.

Conclusion

- There is a rumor that Mr. Biden's waiver announcement might be a tactic to persuade pharmaceutical companies to accept less painful measures. This includes

- sharing some of their technology willingly,
- agreeing to joint ventures to increase global production expeditiously, and
- simply producing more doses at affordable prices to donate directly to where the need is most severe, especially in India.

11. Consequences of Neglecting Science Education

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Science and Technology- Developments and their Applications and Effects in Everyday Life.

Synopsis: Neglect of Science education on disease control and health is one of the main reasons for the current Covid crisis in India.

How Science Education can help in controlling the spread of disease?

- Many waterborne diseases in India could be prevented if children are taught the science behind the origin and causes of the disease.
- For instance, in the case of Malaria, avoiding the proliferation of mosquitoes prevent the chances of being infected by the parasite. Malaria breeds in stagnant water. Spreading kerosene on stagnant water restricts the growth of Mosquito larvae.
- Similarly, it is possible to prevent other diseases, such as typhoid fever and jaundice, by avoiding contaminated water. Children should be taught, how boiling water can kill microbes and ensure disease prevention.
- The same is the case with Common diarrhea. It can be prevented by ensuring the supply of clean water in all geographical locations,
- Apart from teaching the Science behind the disease spread and control, it is important to instill a belief system regarding disease control and prevention. For instance,
 - Giving an opportunity for children to view microbes through use of Microscopes.
 - Conducting field study to educate them on how stagnant water helps in breeding mosquitos.

How the neglect of Science education in India, on disease control and health contributed to the current Covid crisis?

- Inefficiency of our education system has failed to instill belief system on controlling the diseases. For instance, to control the Pandemic, Health advisories such as Social distancing, wearing masks, ban on spitting are seen as a solution.
- Due to a lack of knowledge in the Science of Health and diseases, many violated these health advisories. It resulted in the rapid spread of Covid-19.
- Rather than cultivating belief in Science, our education system has cultivated belief in Fatalism.

Way forward

- Along with due importance for Science teaching, a rational social environment is needed.
- Children should be encouraged to participate in dissent and debate to instill rationality.

12. Kerala Model to tackle the Covid-19 Pandemic in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS:3 – Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors

Synopsis: The Kerala model provides a lot of lessons to Center and State governments to tackle the pandemic.

Introduction:

India at present not only battling with Covid-19 cases but also battling with many associated issues. Such as **floating dead bodies in the Ganges**, the [demand for medical oxygen](#) and the [challenges with the vaccination drive](#), etc. All these impacted the health infrastructure of India a lot.

Lockdown and prerequisites:

With these challenging issues, there is a debate going to **implement a national lockdown**. Even if national lockdown is not feasible, regional lockdowns/micro-containment zones are necessary. But before imposing them, there are a few things to consider.

- The lockdown has to [protect the interests of migrants](#) and other worst affected sectors.
- **Adequate preparation and planning** are required to ensure the proper continuation of lockdown.
- The government has to provide an **adequate time for the people** to get themselves to prepare for the lockdown.

Lessons from Kerala model to tackle the pandemic:

The Kerala model provides lessons to not only implement the lockdown but also to tackle the pandemic effectively. The important initiatives are,

- **Transparency in governance:** The government of Kerala provided daily press briefings. During that, the government reveals detailed information on the rate of infections and fatalities. Apart from that, the regular information includes the **availability of beds, ICUs, oxygen, vaccines, and measures taken to deal with the pandemic**.
 - All these increased public participation in controlling the pandemic. Further, the public also knows the gravity of the situation and built people's trust and confidence in government measures.
 - So, the Central government and other state governments have to see **transparency as an important part of the COVID-19 response toolkit**.
- **Tackling Hunger:** To tackle poverty and hunger, the Kerala government provided food kits to homes. Apart from that, **Community kitchens and Janakeeya hotels**(people's hotels) have also opened to control hunger.
- **Providing adequate medical attention:** The government of Delhi faced a lot of challenges in providing adequate medical facilities. As a result, people used personal networks to hunt for oxygen and beds in hospitals.
 - In contrast, the Kerala model created **First-level treatment centers and second-level treatment centres**. These models screened and treated people appropriate to their symptoms.
 - **Only** the most **serious cases reach the district and specialty COVID-19 hospitals**.
 - Further, **Domiciliary care centres** have also been created in Kerala to provide shelter, food, and treatment to those who do not have space at home to be quarantined. This prevented the migrant worker not to flee to their hometowns in panic.

- In private hospitals, 50% of the beds have been declared as COVID-19 beds. Also, the government fixed the cost of RT-PCR testing and treatment charges in private hospitals at a reasonable level.
 - The private hospitals filed a PIL against fixing of price. But the Kerala High Court dismissed the petition.
- Similar to the '**Mumbai model**', beds are allotted through centralised control rooms in each district. These rooms also monitor the **requirements of oxygen and ambulances**.
- **Empowering the Local bodies:** The Kerala model identified the Local Bodies as a **first line of defence** in the fight against COVID-19. They perform various functions in controlling the pandemic. Such as,
 - They look out for fresh infections amongst their constituencies and ensure the supply of medicines and provisions.
 - Panchayat members motivate people to get vaccinated
 - The Local body members also supervise the implementation of the lockdown in their locality.
 - Apart from that, they also set up help desks, providing ambulances facilities, and organising food packets.

Suggestions:

- The government has to understand that the battle against the Covid-19 is a long one. So, the Center and the States have to prepare for not only the second wave but for the third and fourth wave. To control them **lockdowns will be inevitable** until the **progress of vaccination drives**. The Kerala model has lessons for both lockdown and vaccination drives.
- Twelve Opposition parties issued a joint letter to the Center. In that they demanded,
 - The government should initiate a **free universal mass vaccination campaign**.
 - Ensuring an **uninterrupted supply of medical oxygen and vaccines**.
 - Invoking compulsory licensing to expand domestic vaccine production.

If the Centre provided these things and the other States adhere to the Kerala model then India can tackle the pandemic effectively.

13. Government Must Ensure 'Right to Life' for Economic Recovery

Source: [Click Here](#)

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

Synopsis: The pandemic time warrants the state to take some proactive measures that would enable the masses to properly exercise their 'Right to Life'. This would enhance their consumption capacity thereby fueling demand and eventually leading to revival.

Background:

- The Indian population is undergoing severe stress due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This includes:
 - Surviving a health emergency on a crippled health infrastructure
 - Battling Job losses and reduction of incomes
 - Countering mass hunger and worsening nutrition.
- A recent study called 'hunger watch' found that almost 25% of households witnessed a 50% decline in income levels. Similarly, 2/3rd of households were eating less than what they did before the lockdown.

- This all is happening because the government is unable to protect and augment the Right to Life of the masses.

About Right to life:

- Article 21 of the Indian Constitution states that 'No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to a procedure established by law'.
- The courts have widened the meaning of life in multiple judgments to allow the individuals to live a dignified life.
 - For instance, **In Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India**, the Supreme Court gave a new dimension to Art. 21.
 - It held that the right to live is not merely a physical right but includes within its ambit **the right to live with human dignity**. It includes bare necessities of life such as adequate nutrition, clothing, shelter over the head, etc.

Acts undermining Right to Life during the Pandemic:

- The current vaccine policy for the 18-45 age group that demands a fee for vaccinating in private hospitals is against the right to life. The policy discriminates against the poor people who can't afford to pay a hefty sum. This discriminatory policy was formulated as:
 - The government did not ensure adequate production through compulsory licensing of more producers;
 - It did not order enough vaccines;
 - It introduced differential pricing. This forced state governments to compete with each other and with private clinics to buy vaccines.
 - It allowed price overcharging by Bharat Biotech and Serum Institute of India.
- The Supreme Court ordered providing free rations and meals without insisting on ID proof to all migrant workers in Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh. However, it was criticized as:
 - It was restricted to a few states rather than the whole country
 - It did not extend the facility to cover cash payments by the state besides meals and ration
 - Lastly, It made the facility a state prerogative rather than a right.
- The policymakers abandoned the plight of the poor (especially informal workers). Because, they were denied adequate compensation over the past year of lockdowns, restrictions, and economic distress.
- The country remains fiscally conservative, resulting in less expenditure on welfare activities and discouraged economic revival.
 - The Central government spending over April 2020 to February 2021 shows a rise in non-interest expenditure only by 2.1% of GDP. The focus was on creating infrastructure for economic recovery.

Ineffectiveness of current measures:

- Focusing on infrastructure creation has a lesser 'multiplier' effect than cash transfers to people.
 - Countries that were hit more severely in the first wave than India, managed to show a good recovery. They announced larger fiscal packages directed towards providing income support to people.
 - Cash Transfers helped people spend more on domestically produced goods and revive the economy.

- Free rations and meals, as mandated by the Supreme Court, have a very little expansionary effect on the economy. As the bulk of the commodities required to come from the existing stocks of food grains.

Way Forward:

- The state needs to take multiple measures to augment the 'Right to Life' that would also ensure equitable economic recovery. This includes:
 - Centralised procurement of Covid-19 vaccines along with enhancement of production capacity. Both things must be done to ensure free immunization to all.
 - Universal access to free foodgrains of 5 kg per month to all the vulnerable people for the next six months.
 - Cash transfers of Rs. 7,000 per household to those without regular formal employment for at least three months.
 - MGNREGA expansion by removing the limit on the number of days or beneficiaries per household.
 - A parallel scheme like MGNREGA for the educated unemployed in urban areas.
- These measures would cost around 3.5% of GDP. This might enhance the fiscal deficit that would further widen wealth inequalities and frighten globally mobile finance capital.
 - However, 1% cost would be set off by the additional taxation generated by Centre and State Governments. For the remaining 2.5% GDP, the government can impose a 1.5% Wealth Tax on the top 1% of households.

14. Need of Global Rules to protect the Cyberspace

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Challenges to internal security through communication networks

Synopsis:

The 21st century is going to be an era of data revolution wherein almost all the activities would be carried on in cyberspace. This calls for creating some global rules to protect cyberspace as their absence has failed to prevent cyberattacks even on powerful countries like the U.S.

Background:

- The US created cyberspace as a free, open, decentralized, distributed, and self-governing platform.
- In the current scenario, the domain has gained utmost importance as our critical systems like power, financial or military etc. are connected to it through data.
 - Further, the introduction of 5G technology and the Internet of Things would turn everything into a networked object. It would lead to an exponential expansion of data.
- This high usage of data would ease the governance process but would also make the system more prone to cyber-attacks.

Reasons behind Cyberattacks:

- **Economic Benefits:** A cyberattack gives a hacker access to critical economic data that can be sold for millions in the grey market.
 - For instance, a Chinese attack on the weapon design system of the US allows it to develop a competitive advanced defence system. It enables the country to save millions of dollars and years of research and development.

- **Ideological Conflict:** The free and decentralised structure of cyberspace goes against the ideology of authoritarian countries like Russia and China. This induces them to launch attacks on democratic countries like U.S and India. They have also built firewalls to protect their societies from freedom.
- **Geopolitical Interest:** One country attacks another country's data to serve its geopolitical interest in the region. The attack is aimed to cripple the governance structure in another country and induce it to act in a favourable way.
 - For instance, IP theft costs the US economy hundreds of billions of dollars annually and reduces US companies' R&D investment and innovation. The reduced investment and rising losses diminish its geopolitical position.

Factors fueling Cyberattacks:

- **No Global Order:** Countries have domestic laws and agencies to punish cyber offenders. However, it is difficult to punish if the attacker is located in another country as there are no global rules on cyberspace.
- **Low Entrance Threshold:** It enables a curious person to learn and become a hacker. This allows him/her to get into infrastructure, financial or military systems without leaving a trace.
- **Synergy between State and Non-State Actors:** Rogue states and well-organised digital terrorist groups use footloose hackers to invade diplomatic and strategic plans.
 - For instance, the October 2020 cyberattack shut down the electrical grid of Mumbai. The New York Times claimed this to be an attack carried out by China with the support of non-state actors.
- **Traceability:** The advancement in technology has made the traceability of hackers very difficult.
 - For instance, the hacking group demanded ransom in bitcoins in the May 7 ransomware attack on Colonial Pipeline, one of America's largest fuel suppliers. However, the countries can't trace transactions in cryptocurrency.

Way Forward:

- The countries should realise the inefficiencies of domestic laws and institutions in combating cyber attacks.
 - For instance, the US has a National Security Agency that conducts surveillance under the authority of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.
 - Similarly, it has a dedicated Cyber Command but still, it was unable to prevent the May 7 ransomware attack on the colonial pipeline.

Thus, the countries must work together to develop global law and technology to implement more aggressive measures against cyberattacks. The focus should be on developing foolproof encryption to protect the nation's data.

15. Steps and Suggestions to Handle Cyclone related Disasters

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3

Synopsis: Precise forecasts and resilience-building are very important in handling severe cyclones.

Introduction

- Cyclone Tauktae has become a severe cyclonic storm. It is throwing huge volumes of water all along the west coast. It caused loss of life in Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra, and Gujarat, before fading overland.

- **Thousands of people had to be evacuated to safe locations.** This year's pre-monsoon season is posing a double risk. People are stuck between a fast-spreading virus variant and a pounding storm.
- Many coastal residents would have gone through a similar experience last year, when the severe cyclonic storm, **Nisarga**, moved landwards from the Arabian Sea.

Initiatives and suggestions

1. India has taken many steps in forecasting, disaster mitigation. However, it needs to develop greater expertise in crafting policies to increase resilience among communities. Only then it would be prepared to handle cyclones.
2. **Firstly**, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) introduced an **impact-based cyclone warning system** from the October-December season aimed to reduce economic losses last year. It focussed on districts and specific locations. It also incorporated factors such as population, infrastructure, land use, and settlements.
3. **Secondly**, the IMD claimed that its **accuracy of forecasts is now better**. For instance, in plotting landfall location. This is a promising approach (along with ground mapping of vulnerabilities) to avoid loss of life and destruction of property.
4. **Thirdly**, the **importance of accurate early warnings cannot be over stressed**. The Arabian Sea has become a major source of severe cyclones. Their intensity is heightened by a long-term rise in sea surface temperatures related to pollution over South Asia and its neighbourhood.
5. **Lastly**, **climate-proofing of lives and dwellings should be a high priority now**. Climate proofing requires a multi-sectoral approach:
 - To build durable homes of suitable design.
 - Create adequate storm shelters.
 - Provide accurate early warnings.
 - Ensure financial protection against calamities through insurance for property and assets. Governments must rise up to this challenge.

16. Significance of SC Ruling on Personal Guarantors for Corporate Loans

Source-[The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- GS 3 – Indian Economy

Synopsis – The Apex Court has dismissed all challenges to the [liability of personal guarantors](#) for corporate loans under the insolvency code.

Introduction

The Supreme Court upheld a government notification of 2019 issued under the Indian Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).

- This allows banks to initiate insolvency proceedings against personal guarantors who are usually promoters and top officials of debt-laden companies.
- Also, approval of a resolution plan for the corporate debtor does not end the personal guarantor's liability.

Central Government's 2019 notification – It made personal guarantors a separate category of individuals. They can be approached for recovery for defaults under the IBC as part of the insolvency proceedings against defaulting corporate entities.

This gives additional powers to lenders [financial institutions or banks] under IBC, to recover their money.

- **In response to the 2019 notification**– There were more than 40 petitions filled, where petitioners had challenged the validity and operationalization of the central notification.
- However, the SC dismissed all the petitions stating that the government right.

Significance of Ruling

- The SC judgment will boost recovery efforts of banks involving piles of bad loans.
 - This will enable banks to take simultaneous action against corporate debtors and personal guarantors.
 - As a result, the promoters [as the provider of personal guarantees] have to deal with their own insolvencies and not become an impediment/roadblock to the insolvency proceedings of the corporate debtor.
- By roping in guarantors, there is a greater chance that they would “arrange” for the payment of the debt to the creditor bank to save themselves.
- As guarantors can be approached even if an insolvency proceeding is ongoing, Banks can enhance recovery. Because most banks agree to ‘haircuts’ when negotiating a resolution plan with a new promoter for the defaulting company.

Way forward-

The judgment provided the much-needed teeth to banks and financial institution far as recovery action with respect to personal guarantees was concerned.

17. Need for Eco Tax in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment

Synopsis: Eco Tax in India can be useful for sustaining public Health financing as well as in mitigating effects of climate change.

Background

- India’s tax revenue decreased significantly during the Pandemic. It has resulted in widening the Fiscal deficit. **For instance**, the fiscal deficit for FY 2020-21 (revised estimates) is projected to be 9.5% of the GDP
- Also, according to **WHO**, 17.33% of the Indian household’s expenditure on health was greater than 10% of their total expenditure or income. The percentage was higher in rural areas compared to urban areas.
- According to the **Economic Survey** (2019-20), Government should increase public spending from 1% to 2.5-3% of GDP on health. It is envisaged in **the National Health Policy** of 2017. This much spending can decrease **out-of-pocket expenditure** from 65% to 30% of overall healthcare expenses.
- However, sustained health financing in India remains a challenge. Along with this, India is shouldered with the responsibility of mitigating climate change and preservation of the environment.
- In this context, an **eco-tax** (Environment tax) will help India to (i) Mobilise resources (ii) Reduce out of Pocket Expenditure on health by increasing public spending (iii) Mitigate climate change.

Benefits of implementing Eco Tax in India

The implementation of an environmental tax in India will have three broad benefits: fiscal, environmental and poverty reduction.

- **First**, revenues mobilised from Eco tax can be used for the provision of environmental public goods and addressing environmental health issues. Such as
 - To, finance basic public services.
 - To, reduce other distorting taxes such as fiscal dividend
 - Lastly, to finance research and the development of new technologies

- **Second**, it will help in eliminating existing subsidies and taxes that have a harmful impact on the environment.
- **Third**, it will help in restructuring existing taxes in an environmentally supportive manner.
- **Fourth**, may help in initiating new environmental taxes in the future.

How Eco tax can be implemented?

In India, eco taxes can target three main areas:

1. One, **differential taxation on vehicles** in the transport sector for fuel efficiency and GPS-based congestion charges.
2. Two, in the **energy sector** by taxing fuels which require for energy generation.
3. Three, **waste generation** and use of natural resources.

What are the Challenges in implementing Eco tax?

- Environmental regulations may have significant costs on the private sector. Such as slow productivity growth, high cost of compliance, resulting in the possible increase in the prices of goods and services.
- However, the European experience shows that most of the taxes also generate substantial revenue.
- Further, most countries' experiences suggest only a negligible impact on the GDP that can be neglected.

What is the way forward?

1. One, the success of an eco-tax in India would depend on its planning and design. It should be credible, transparent and predictable.
2. Two, the eco tax rate should be equal to the **marginal social cost**. This cost arises from the negative externalities associated with the production, consumption, or disposal of goods and services.
3. Three, **Green accounting**. Need to evaluate the damage to the environment based on scientific assessments. It includes, adverse impacts on the health of people, climate change, etc.

18. Issues with New IT rules for Social Media

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS:3 Challenges to internal security through communication networks.

Synopsis: Instead of [non-compliance with the new IT rules for](#) social media, social media companies should engage with the government to address their concerns.

Introduction:

[New IT rules of intermediaries](#) will come into effect from today. But, it is expected that most of the global social media giants will not comply with the rules.

About the new IT rules on social media:

The government introduced few stringent rules for social media intermediaries in February. Further, the government provided 3 months' time for Social media platforms to adhere to the rules. That 3-month time period ended on 25th May. The important provisions of rules are,

- Social media companies are **prohibited from hosting or publishing any unlawful information**. This information is "in relation to the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India, public order, friendly relations with foreign countries, etc.

- **If such information is hosted or published the government can take down such information within 24 hours.** The user will be **given a notice** before his/her content is taken down.
- New IT rules were introduced in February. Under the new rules, Social media platforms are classified into **two categories**.
 - **Social media intermediaries** – Platforms that have a limited user base.
 - **Significant social media intermediaries** – These are the platforms with a large user base.
- 1. The **significant social media intermediaries** have to follow few additional measures like:
 - These platforms should **have a physical contact address** in India.
 - **Appointing a Chief Compliance Officer, Nodal Contact Person, and a Resident Grievance Officer in India.** All of them should be Indian Residents.
- 2. **Problems with new IT rules on social media:**
- 3. **Lack of public consultation:** The rules were notified in a short time without much public consultation.
- 4. **Against some social media intermediary's policy:** The rules require tracing the information back to the source. This is against some social media's policy. For example, WhatsApp claiming their policy as end-to-end encrypted cannot accept new IT rules.
- 5. **Widen the gap:** This non-compliance will further widen the relationship gap between social media players and the Government. Further, it will also increase ongoing issues. For example,
 - [Twitter not complied to the Government](#) order to remove certain accounts
 - [WhatsApp's new privacy policy and the issues with government notice](#).
- 6. **Genuine concerns of social media companies are not considered:** Social media companies like Facebook mentions that they are ready to comply with the rules. But prior to that, they need to engage with the Government on a few issues. They mention that the genuine concerns on new IT rules are not considered by the government.

Suggestions:

- **Providing more time:** Five industry bodies, including the CII, FICCI and the U.S.-India Business Council have sought an extension of 6-12 months for compliance. The government can provide time relaxation for compliance. In the meantime, the government can **bring together both the private and industry experts to address genuine concerns**.
- **Taking the issue to court:** Instead of complete non-compliance, social media companies can **fight the new rules in a court of law** if they find them problematic.

19. [Prioritise food and work for all](#)

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Growth and Rural Employment

Synopsis:

The second wave of Pandemic has put immense stress on the Indian masses. They are facing job losses, food shortages, and hunger issues. In this scenario, the government should prioritise food and work for all.

Background:

- The second wave of Covid-19 -19 has made it imperative for many states to impose a lockdown.
- This is creating severe hardships for the marginalized and vulnerable masses. Migrant workers and the rural poor have been facing great distress over the past year and the crisis for food and work is only going to intensify further.

Dismal State of Affairs:

- The 'Hunger Watch' report of the Right to Food Campaign and the Centre for Equity Studies compares the pre-lockdown situation to the situation in October 2020. As per the report,
 - 27% of the respondents had no income;
 - 40% of the respondents witnessed worsening of their food's nutritional quality
 - 46% of the respondents had to skip one meal at least once a day in October 2020
- According to the estimates of the Stranded Workers Action Network, 81% of stranded workers are without any work since April 15, 2021.
 - Further, 76% of the workers are short of food and cash and require immediate support.

Inadequate Efforts:

- The government announced 5 kg free food grains for individuals enlisted under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), for May and June 2021.
 - However, about 100 million deserving people are excluded from the ration distribution system. This is due to an outdated database based on the 2011 Census.
- The Centre had allocated 73,000 crore rupees for 2021-22 for MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) and notified an annual increment of about 4% in wages.
 - This is 38,500 crore rupees less than last year's revised estimate. Even if 1 crore fewer people enroll in the scheme than the previous year, then also this year's amount can't meet their demands.

Way Forward:

- The government should expand PDS coverage immediately and include all eligible households under the schemes. It should extend the free food grains program to a year instead of limiting it to two months.
- The government should give a wage hike of at least 10%. This would further call for an allocation of at least 1.4 lakh crore towards the MGNREGS for ensuring an uninterrupted implementation during the year.

20. Improving Resilience to Cyclones Disasters in India

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- GS 3 – Disaster and disaster management

Synopsis – The Government needs to ensure fiscal rehabilitation for improving resilience to Cyclones disasters.

Introduction-

- The Indian subcontinent is among the worst affected regions of the world when it comes to tropical cyclones. It is due to its 4,670-mile coastline, where a large percentage of the country's population lives.

- Even after all the planning for reducing risk and forecasting cyclone paths still, cyclones have been incredibly destructive as seen in the case of Cyclone YAAS. Thousands have lost houses and property.
- There is still a lot of work to do in terms of preserving assets and developing fiscal tools to assist people to rebuild their lives.

What are the reasons behind frequent cyclones disasters in India?

Extreme tropical storm precipitation events and accompanying inland floods may become more common. Because the climate continues to warm due to increasing human activities.

- **Rising Ocean temperatures** – Warmer ocean temperature makes atmospheric and ocean conditions favorable for the intensification of cyclones.
 - It could intensify the speed of the winds by up to 10%. It will result in an increase of 10-15% in precipitation. Both of these factors could cause more flooding and widespread damage.
- **Rise in seas level** due to global warming.
- **Impact of recent cyclones**- According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) report on the **State of Global Climate 2020**-
- The economic losses caused by cyclone Amphan amounts to about \$14 billion.
- Around 2.4 million people were displaced in India, mainly in West Bengal and Odisha.

Ways to address the risk of cyclones and other extreme events

Following cyclone Amphan, the West Bengal government faces allegations of irregularities and corruption in the distribution of financial relief. Governments are in the best position to compensate people against the cost of disasters by spreading the cost across the population. Thus,

- **Government should ensure proper distribution of funds without corruption and mismanagement.**
- It should make citizens, members in a **social insurance model**.
- **Rebuilding should be green and follow a build-back better approach. It is necessary**, considering the negative impact of climate change on tropical cyclones.

21. Dairy Sector in India Needs Urgent Attention

Source: [India Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Agriculture and allied activities

Synopsis:

The second wave of pandemic has brutally impacted the dairy sector. There is a reduction in milk demand coupled with a shortage of livestock feed. The situation is very grim and requires the adoption of robust measures to support the dairy sector.

Background:

- In the first wave, agriculture and allied sectors put up a spectacular performance. It showed an annual growth of **3.4 %** while the economy contracted by **(-)7.2 %** in 2020-21.
- However, this good performance was not replicated by the dairy sector in the second wave.

About the dairy and livestock sector:

- In India, around 70 million farm-dependent people are engaged in the dairy and livestock sector.

- Further, 7.7 million people are exclusively engaged in the sector. Amongst them, 69% are female which means the sector is a crucial source of women empowerment.
- The labour force of the sector mainly comprises unpaid female members.
- In the Gross Value Added (GVA) from agriculture, the livestock sector contributed 28 percent in 2019-20. Further, India witnesses a 6% growth rate in milk production every year.
- Farmers keep 2-5 milk animals for livelihood which provides great support to them, especially during drought and flood.

Challenges faced by the dairy Sector:

- **Price Sensitivity:** Milk producers are highly susceptible to even minor shocks. For instance, small changes in the employment and income of consumers can leave a significant impact on milk demand.
- **Unorganised Nature:** The majority of cattle raisers are unorganised unlike sugarcane, wheat, and rice-producing farmers. This nature further inhibits the creation of political clout to advocate for their rights.
- **Data Deficiency:** There is no official and periodical estimate of the cost of milk production. Even though the value of milk produced outweighs the combined value of the output of wheat and rice in India.
- **Poor returns:** There is no MSP (Minimum Support Price) for milk unlike 24 major agricultural commodities in the country including wheat and rice. Further dairy cooperatives are not a preferred choice for landless or small farmers.
 - The cooperatives adopt a fat-based pricing policy which is 20 to 30 % less than the price in the open market.
 - Further, more than 75 % of the milk bought by dairy cooperatives is at its lower price band.

Adverse impact of Pandemic on the Dairy Sector:

1. **First**, the threat of disease has restrained the door-to-door sale of liquid milk to households. This has forced the farmers to sell the entire produce to dairy cooperatives at a much lower price.
2. **Second**, the lockdown had led to the closure of shops. This has reduced the demand for milk and milk products.
3. **Third**, the severe shortage of fodder and cattle feed has pushed up the input cost.
4. **Fourth**, private veterinary services have almost stopped due to Covid-19. This has led to the death of milch animals.

Steps taken by Government for the Dairy Sector:

- The government has launched a **Nationwide AI (artificial insemination) program**. It targets to augment annual milk productivity from 1,860 kg/per animal to 3,000 kg/per animal upon its completion.
- The **dairy farmers have been included in the Kisan Credit Card (KCC) program**. It provides adequate and timely credit support from the banking system to the farmers for their cultivation and other needs.
- Similarly, **dairying was brought under MGNREGA** to compensate farmers for the income loss due to Covid-19.

Concerns associated with the above steps:

1. **First**, there is a shortage of AI technicians in India. In August 2020, the department of animal husbandry reported a requirement of 2.02 lakh technicians while only 1.16 lakh were available.

2. **Second**, the dairy cooperatives have not applied for a sufficient number of loans under KCC. As of October 2020, not even one-fourth of the dairy farmers' loan applications had been forwarded to banks.
3. **Third**, the MGNREGA scheme may not be able to provide relief as its budgetary allocation has been curtailed. The budgetary allocation for 2021-22 was curtailed by **34.5 percent** in relation to the revised estimates for 2020-21.

Way Forward:

- The dairy farmers must be given a **stable market and remunerative price** for the milk. For the price, a greater weightage should be accorded to the quantity of milk than its fat content
- They must be ensured of an **uninterrupted supply of fodder and cattle feed** at a reasonable price.
- The government should also provide a **regular supply of veterinary services and medicines to them**.

22. Tussle between Government and Social Media companies

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Challenges to internal security through communication networks

Synopsis:

The new IT rules have initiated a tussle between Government and Social Media companies. The government wants compliance while the companies are hesitant to adopt them on the grounds of privacy and freedom.

Background:

- The fault lines are hardening between the government and social media companies over the adoption of the Information Technology (Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.
- WhatsApp has approached the Delhi High Court to challenge the traceability provisions under the new rules.
 - As per the platform, implementing such a provision would infringe on the users' "fundamental rights to privacy and freedom of speech".
- Experts believe that this petition was filed after witnessing inappropriate behavior on the part of the government.
 - The Delhi police had recently visited Twitter's offices in Delhi and Gurgaon to serve the platform a notice over its flawed way of identifying "manipulated media".

Issues in new IT rules:

- **First**, the government will be performing a dual role of an appellant and arbitrator. This is against the principle of natural justice as a person can't be made a judge in his own cause.
- **Second**, a blanket demand on traceability may allow the government to wield power in an arbitrary manner for purposes that remain opaque.
 - Further such a demand is unnecessary as the companies have on various occasions complied with the government's requests on issues pertaining to terror, child abuse, national security, etc.
 - The provisions of the Indian Penal code are sufficient to ensure companies' compliance with government requests.

Concerns associated with Social Media Companies:

- There is **not much clarity over the policy adopted by them** before taking down content. Despite their professions of faith in openness, the decision-making processes of these platforms are wrapped in secrecy.
- Further, they **evade their responsibility as per their convenience** by invoking the protection granted under Section 79 of the IT Act 2000.
 - It states that any intermediary shall not be held legally or otherwise liable for any third-party information, data, or communication link made available or hosted on its platform.

Thus, the judiciary should decide the case in such a way that targeted access is given to the government, subject to due process cleared by a neutral arbiter.

23. The increasing prices of edible oil needs government intervention

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS-3: marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints

Synopsis:

In the past year, the prices of edible oil increased significantly. There are many internal and external reasons behind the price rise. So, the government has to pay attention to the edible oil prices.

Introduction:

In India, Edible oil prices have risen sharply in recent months. According to the data from the **Department of Consumer Affairs**, the prices of six edible oils — groundnut oil, mustard oil, vanaspathi, soya oil, sunflower oil and palm oil — have risen between 20% and 56% at all-India levels in the last one year.

India's Demand of Edible Oil:

- **India's production of oilseeds** is too little to fulfil the domestic demand. Therefore, India is dependent on imports.
- **India is one of the largest importers** of oilseed and edible oils in the world. About 56% of the domestic edible oil demand is met from imports.
- **The major sources of these imports** are
 - Argentina and Brazil for soybean oil;
 - Indonesia and Malaysia palm oil; and
 - Ukraine and Argentina for sunflower oil.
- **Therefore, any increase in global prices** of oilseeds and edible oil is bound to be transmitted into domestic prices.

Why are International Prices of Edible Oil rising?

- **Demand on making biofuel from Soybean oil:** There has been a demand on making renewable fuel from soybean oil in the US, Brazil and other countries. This increased the demand for edible oil in these countries and increased prices globally.
- **Aggressive Buying by China:** China uses soybean for extracting oil as also to prepare the animal feed. Hence, aggressive Chinese buying of soybean depleted inventories in the market. This in turn put upward pressure on prices.
- **Labour issues in Malaysia:** Malaysia's palm oil sector is dependent on migrant foreign workers. However, pandemic induced border closure meant the palm oil sector faced a severe labour shortage causing the output to fall.
- **Impact of La Niña** on palm and soya producing areas
- **Imposition of Export duties** on crude palm oil in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Suggestions to reduce prices of edible oil

- **Short Term Measures:**
 - **Lower Import Duties:** India can lower the import duties on the edible oil prices. This can lower the prices immediately.
 - **Subsidise Edible Oil:** Government can subsidise edible oils and make them available to the poor under the Public Distribution System.
- **Long Term Measure:** India needs to reduce its dependence on imports of edible oils. This can be feasible by incentivising farmers to diversify wheat and paddy crops to oilseeds.

24. Highlights of 43rd GST Council Meeting

Source- [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis- Key recommendations made during 43rd GST Council meeting and why it is a missed opportunity.

Introduction

43rd GST Council Meeting took place recently. Several measures were announced however, they failed to inspire any hope of recovery from the disastrous impacts of 2nd wave of the pandemic.

Key recommendations during 43rd GST council meeting

- **GST Amnesty Scheme for small firms pending GST returns–**
 - The scheme has been recommended for reducing late fees. Now Taxpayers can file pending returns, avail benefits of the scheme, with reduced late fees.
- **Annual Return Filing** – The Council has recommended amending the CGST Act 2017. It allows for self-certification of reconciliation statements, instead of getting them certified by Chartered Accountants.
- **The Council exempts import duty on Covid-19 relief materials-** The GST Council extends the GST exemption granted on relief material received for free from abroad for donations to State-approved entities.
 - The period for availing of this exemption has also been extended to August 31.
 - The medicine for Black Fungus [Amphotericin-B] has also been included in the exemption list for tax-free imports.
- **GST Compensation Cess to remain the same** – Same formula as last year will be adopted in 2021 too. A rough estimate is that the Central Government will have to borrow Rs. 1.58 lakh crores and pass it on to the states.

Key points missed in 43rd GST council meeting

1. **There were no discussions on putting fuel- petrol, diesel under GST**, despite high petrol prices.
2. **The Council failed to provide an immediate tax break for critical pandemic relief supplies** despite States and industry pressing for waivers.
3. **Inadequate relaxation in GST amnesty scheme** – There is no waiver from interest payment available to businesses with a turnover of over ₹5 crores.

Way forward-

- It would be beneficial, if all businesses were given a complete waiver of late fees for pandemic hit months.

- Waiting until June 8 for a final decision on extra GST exemptions for COVID relief operations are waste of time, when each day's delay in providing relief hurts thousands.

25. Factors Affecting Growth of Block Chain technology in India

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs3: Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, Robotics, Nano-technology, Bio-technology

Synopsis: There are many positive benefits in utilising blockchain technology. However, regulatory uncertainties in Policymaking have impeded the growth of Blockchain technology in India.

Background

- **Satoshi Nakamoto** created the most popular cryptocurrency, **Bitcoin**, in 2008, as a fully **decentralised, peer-to-peer electronic cash system**.
- Since then, Bitcoins have seen phenomenal growth in market value. For instance, Bitcoin, which was traded at just \$0.0008 in 2010, commands a market price of \$65,000 this April.
- Many newer coins were introduced since Bitcoin's launch, and their **cumulative market value touched \$2.5 trillion**. Their value has surpassed the size of the economy of most modern nations.
- Despite its increasing acceptance globally, India has followed its usual approach of **'bar what you can't understand, ban what you can't control'**.
- In 2018, the Reserve Bank barred our financial institutions from supporting crypto transactions, but the Supreme Court overturned it in 2020.
- Further, the government has circulated a **draft bill** outlawing all cryptocurrency activities. It has been under discussion since 2019.
- More recently, the Reserve Bank has announced the launch of a private blockchain-supported **official digital currency**, similar to China's **digital Yuan**.
- However, **launching official digital currency** is impractical, and shows a lack of understanding of this disruptive innovation.

Why India is hesitant to accept cryptocurrencies?

Though Cryptocurrencies have many advantages there are few concerns associated with them,

- **One, extreme volatility.** For example, China's recent crackdown on cryptocurrency wiped out a trillion US dollars from the global crypto market within a span of 24 hours.
- **Two, it can be used as an instrument for illicit activities**, including money laundering and terror funding as there are no regulations.

What is the significance of Blockchain technology?

The underlying technology of Cryptocurrencies is Blockchain technology. Blockchain network performs functions such as verification of transactions and contracts and the updating and maintenance of these records in the form of tamper-proof ledgers. It serves many purposes.

- **One**, currently, intermediaries (including banks, credit card, and payment gateways) draw almost 3 percent from the total global economic output of over \$100 trillion, as fees for their services. Integrating blockchain into these sectors could result in hundreds of billions of dollars in savings.

- **Two**, Blockchain can make every aspect of e-governance, judicial and electoral processes more efficient and transparent.
- **Three, it can make our digital space more redistributive and fairer. For instance**, Tech firms, including titans like Google and Facebook, derive most of their value from their multitude of users. Blockchain could enable these internet customers to receive micro-payments for any original data they share in the digital space including ratings, reviews, and images.

Despite its significance, regulatory uncertainty is hampering the growth of blockchain start-ups in India. For instance, blockchain start-ups worldwide received venture funding of \$ 2.6 billion. Whereas, in India, less than 0.2 percent of the amount the sector raised globally have gone into the Indian blockchain start-ups

Way forward

- India has been a late adopter in all the previous phases of the digital revolution. Like semiconductors, the internet, and smartphone technology (4G and 5G).
- Currently, we are witnessing the next phase in a digital revolution led by technologies like blockchain.
- Channelizing India's human capital, expertise, and resources supported with the right policies will help India to make the most benefit of it.

26. Need to revive the Cultural Mapping project

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 1 – Art and Culture

Synopsis:

The situation of cultural ministry in the country is in bad shape. It is facing an acute shortage of funds and resources. A little relief can be given to the artists if the proposed Cultural Mapping project is completed in due time.

Background:

- The culture ministry has received a marginal budget in the last decade. Further, the budget has been declining for the last 5 years and currently stands at 0.07% of the total budget.
 - For 2021-22, it is just 2,688 crores that equal the amount of just 1.5 Rafael jets. The government slashed the budget by 21% since last year while other major countries like the UK, China, Singapore enhanced their cultural budgets.
- Further, the government's cultural institutions are plagued by vacancies (ranging from 30% to 70%) and a lack of trained manpower. This has enhanced the troubles for artists and cultural institutions.
- Experts believe that the timely completion of the 2017 cultural mapping project can provide significant relief to the artists.

About National Mission on Cultural Mapping:

- The mission was proposed in 2015 but was officially approved in 2017.
- It seeks to envision and address the necessity of **preserving the threads of rich Indian Art and Cultural Heritage**. It also aims to convert the vast and widespread cultural canvass of India into an objective cultural mapping.
- Under this Mission, there are three important objectives as follows:
 - To undertake the cultural mapping (i.e. database of cultural assets and resources) via running a nationwide cultural awareness programme called

Hamari Sanskriti Hamari Pahchan Abhiyan (National Cultural Awareness Abhiyan).

- To run a Nationwide Artist Talent Hunt/Scouting Programme called Sanskritik Pratibha Khoj Abhiyan
- Lastly, to establish a National Cultural Working Place (NCWP) portal. It would be a Centralised Transactional Web Portal with a database and demography of cultural assets and resources including all art forms and artists.

Benefits of Cultural Mapping:

- Firstly, it would create an open database that could be used as a resource by the media, researchers, and funders.
- Secondly, it would help locate a derelict cinema and renovate it as an auditorium in a town where there are none.
- Lastly, it would help create transport and tourism infrastructure around a declining crafts village.
 - For instance, the European Capitals of Culture program picked **Glasgow** for a cultural revival. Earlier, the city was surrounded by poverty and crime, but the program converted it into a cultural marvel.

Issues with Cultural Mapping Project:

- **First**, the mission hasn't received sufficient funds for implementation. Out of the promised 3,000 crore, it has received only 42.78 crores till 2019-20.
- **Second**, there exists a problem of under utilisation of funds. Out of 42.78 crores, only 1.17 crores have been utilised so far.
- **Third**, there is no IT infrastructure that can enable the proper identification of artists at the block level.
- **Fourth**, some of the mission's objectives deviate from the core theme of cultural mapping. For instance,
 - It calls for roping artists into the Swachh Bharat and Namami Gange schemes.
 - It creates a grading process for artists in which officials decide which artist is "good" or "not so good."
 - Also, It focuses on imparting digital literacy to artists and running talent hunt competitions.
- **Fifth**, the mission proposes a Unique Identification Code for every artist/institution, apparently to facilitate schemes. However, this may enhance surveillance and control over the artists.

Way Forward:

- There should be a deeper survey and understanding of the diversity of the cultural base, without caste, communal and regional hierarchies.
- The government should allocate sufficient resources to the Ministry of Culture in order to realise the true potential of the mission.