

9pm
Compilation

June, 2021 (Second Week)

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General Studies Paper - 1

General Studies - 1

1. India's response to shocks – 1962 war to COVID pandemic

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- GS 1- Post-independence consolidation and reorganization within the country.

Synopsis- The article distinguishes between the Center's reaction to the current pandemic and its responses to shocks in Indian History.

Three criteria to analyze Indian government's response

- The team
- The science
- The organizational innovations put together

List of previous shocks and the India's response

- **First, 1962's Sino-India War-**
 - **Response- Defence reform**
 - The new defence minister was appointed.
 - The financial allocation for the defence was increased
 - Alters India's understanding of the world and foreign policy in a fundamental way.
- **Second, 1966 Severe Drought** – In 1966, due to drought, food grain production fell by 20 per cent. Foreign food aid came to the rescue of the starving population.
 - **Team-** Indira Gandhi (PM), C Subramaniam (agriculture minister) and M S Swaminathan (scientist).
 - **Response-**
 - **Start of [Green Revolution](#).**
 - Science and technology were relied on and organizational innovations like the [Food Corporation of India](#) [FCI] were made.
- **Third, 1975 National Emergency, political shock**
 - **Team-** Indira Gandhi (PM) and Sanjay Gandhi.
 - **Response-**
 - **The harsh family planning** programme was launched by PM Indira Gandhi on her son's insistence. Despite the efforts to create awareness and support for sterilization [surgery to make a person or animal unable to produce offspring], the camps were receiving a lukewarm response.
- **Fourth, 1991, External sector shock**
 - **Team-** P V Narasimha Rao (PM), Manmohan Singh (FM), M S Ahluwalia (finance secretary) and S S Tarapore (from the RBI).
 - **Response-**
 - S S Tarapore played a key role by not acceding to the capital account convertibility requirement of the IMF.
 - Response to the shock, in this case, was that both **policy and organizational change** was brought about slowly, without disrupting the economy.
- **Lastly, India's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic**
 - **Team-** No clarity about who is in the team.
 - **Response-**
 - Not clear if the Covid-19 task force and control room in the Niti Aayog are the same.
 - Mismanagement in providing information regarding Covid-19 response.

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- There are some [vaccine-related issues](#) such as the [gap between the two shots](#) and taking two different vaccines. This contributes to vaccine hesitancy.
- Confusion related to vaccine procurement.
- Allowing huge gathering such as Kumbh Mela, election rallies were obvious cases of **not following science**.
- Few cases of which reveal the unimportance the government gives to science.

Conclusion

There is a drastic difference between the handling of COVID-19 pandemic shock from the previous shocks. The government needs to improve on all three criteria.

2. Why foster care in India needs to be expanded?

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 1

Synopsis: Foster care is a feasible, suitable substitute to adoption and institutional care in light of the trouble being faced by [Covid-19 orphans](#).

Introduction

Orphaned children in the second wave of Covid-19 are being sent to local shelter homes. But, is it the optimum solution?

The negative impact of institutional care

- Every child has a right to be raised in a family and that's why there is a push for non-institutionalized (foster) care solutions for [orphaned children](#).
 - A research highlighted that physical and mental development in overcrowded and under-resourced shelter homes is delayed. This also increases the likelihood of social and behavioural problems.

What is foster care?

Foster care is an arrangement whereby a child lives, usually on a temporary basis, with unrelated family members. While placing a child in foster care, preference shall be given to those families that share similar cultural, tribal and /or community connection.

What is the difference between foster care and institutionalized care?

The state of [orphaned children](#) in the country has brought the focus back to the issue of foster care versus institutional care.

- **Fostering has yet to gain credibility as a recognized method of child protection in India.** Under this system, foster parents have custody rights only. Foster parents are responsible for raising the child in a secure and personalized family setup.
 - **The family has no control over the child's assets**, nor is it compulsory to share inheritance rights over its own assets to the foster child.
- Whereas, **the adopted child becomes a legal member of the family in the adoption system and is entitled to property rights.**

What is the state of adoptions in India?

India has almost 30 million orphaned and abandoned children. The legal adoption of these children is a challenge. Adoption processes are very lengthy; this results in just a fraction of kids finding a home.

- **Firstly**, the yearly adoptions enabled by the [Central Adoption Resource Authority \(CARA\)](#) are just 3,000-4,000.

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- **Secondly, there is a reluctance to adopt** because in foster care there is a life-long commitment and adopted children have enforceable legal rights.
- **Thirdly, foster care comparatively offers a more flexible ecosystem.** Regular follow-ups can be done to check on the well-being of the child. In legal adoption, there is little or no follow-up.
- **Problems that need resolution**
- **No legal framework:** A legal framework to encourage foster care in India was presented by the central government through the enactment of the [Juvenile Justice \(Care and Protection of Children\) Act](#). But the Act left it to the states to make rules for purposes of carrying out the scheme. This resulted in uneven implementation.
- **Lack of awareness of legal provisions:** Many Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) are not aware of the applicable legal provisions. Many **avoid the duty of choosing foster families, approving childcare plans**, and conducting compulsory monthly reviews to help check misuse of the foster system for abuse and exploitation.

Measures to improve the foster care system

- State governments should **promote foster care where association care is unavailable.**
- States should go beyond the declaration of aid packages. They should ensure that the district child protection machinery is promoted to chart the **promising territory of foster care.**
- Foster parents should be **financially supported** by the state for child care. This model is followed in many countries. **Foster parents can provide a socio-cultural environment similar to when the child was born.**
- In India, district agencies get annual funds to support foster care, but they go unutilised. These funds should be utilized in an optimum manner.
- **Clear, crisp rules** and visibly managed budgets for fostering
- **Committed and sensitive citizens** can be expected to come forward to open their homes and hearts to children in need.

General Studies Paper - 2

General Studies - 2

1. Problems with “one state one vote” structure of GST Council

Source: [Indian Express](#)

GS2: Functions and Responsibilities of the Union and the States, Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure

Synopsis: The “one state one vote” structure under [GST Council](#) is a flawed one. It needs to be replaced with a **proportional representation of voting** in the GST Council. This system should be based on the size of states or their revenue contribution to the GST pool

Background

- In the [recent GST Council](#) meeting, there is a debate going on, whether to tax or not to tax on products essential to fighting Covid-19.
- **12 states**, representing nearly 70% of India’s population, **agree** to make such products tax-free.
- But, **19 states**, representing the remaining 30% of the population, want to **continue to levy GST** on these products.
- The **lack of consensus** can largely be explained by the distorted design and incentive structure of the GST itself.

What is the distribution methodology for taxes collected under GST?

The GST Council has representatives from all states. According to “one state one vote” all the representative have equal voting rights in GST Council.

- The taxes collected under GST (from states) are accumulated by the Union government and a portion is transferred back to each state under a formula.

Which states contribute maximum to the GST pool?

Four states — **Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Gujarat** contribute nearly as much (~45%) of the total GST pool

What is the source of revenue for the states in India?

Every state in India has two major components of revenues. These are,

1. State’s own revenues
2. Transfers from the Union government, consisting of both **share of taxes** collected by the Union and **grants**.

How the source of revenue differs for bigger and smaller states?

- Only about **30%** of the overall revenue of the 4 big states, namely, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, and Karnataka, comes from the Union government.
- But for the remaining 27 states, **roughly 60%** of their revenues are obtained through transfers from the Union government.
 - For the smaller **Northeastern states**, these transfers from the Union government constitute **80-90%** of their total revenues
- **Negative trends in the revenue collection & distribution in India**
- **Imbalance in collection & distribution of taxes between states:** As mentioned above,
 - While four big states contribute around 45% to the GST pool, they are the least **dependent on the Union government** for their revenue needs.
 - Whereas smaller states which contribute less to the GST pool are more dependent on the Centre’s transfers for their revenues.
 - So,

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- States that are more dependent on transfers from the Union **want to maximize GST collections**. This is why they are in **support of taxation on Covid-related products**.
- Whereas bigger states that are less dependent can afford to be **more sensitive to citizens' concerns** and are **against taxing Covid related products**.
 - With time, net transfers from center should decrease as states come at par in development relative to each other. But in India over the past few years, these net transfers have increased.
- **States are getting a lower share of revenues:** States' revenue has declined owing to unfair taxation practices by the Center. For instance,
 - **Increase in cesses:** The Union has shifted a large proportion of taxation (roughly 18% of its overall revenues) into cesses. This remains outside the GST pool and hence do not have to be shared with the states
- So, the GST model based on **"one state one vote"** causes grave injustice to the developed states.

Way forward

A system of proportional representation, instead of one state one vote model, would not have resulted in this lack of consensus.

- A **proportional representation** of voting in the GST Council either as a proportion of the size of a state or by its contribution to the GST revenue pool is the ideal way forward.

2. Amending Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act to provide labour rights for sex workers

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 **Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act** needs to be reformed to decriminalise sex work and to guarantee labour rights for sex workers.

Background

- Sex work in India is governed by the **Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act**.
- It penalises acts such as keeping a brothel, soliciting in a public place, living off the earnings of sex work and living with or habitually being in the company of a sex worker.
- The act is archaic and **deprives basic labour rights** for sex workers and it needs to be reformed.

Why the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act needs to be reformed?

- **One**, the Act represents the archaic and regressive view that sex work is **morally wrong** and that the people involved in it, especially women, never consent to it voluntarily. However, it fails to take account of the rights of **consenting adult sex workers**.
- **Two**, it has led to the **stigmatization of sex workers** making them more prone to violence, discrimination and harassment.
- **Third**, The Act denies an individual their **right over their bodies**. Further, it imposes the will of the state over adults in making their life choices.
- **Fourth**, the act has **subjected the sex workers to harassment** by the state officials due to a lack of independent agencies.

Way forward

- In the recent past, the **Justice Verma Commission** had also acknowledged the distinction between trafficked women for commercial sexual exploitation and consenting women sex worker.
- Further Judiciary is of the view of recognising sex workers' right to livelihood. For instance, The Supreme Court, **in Budhadev Karmaskar v. State of West Bengal** (2011), opined that sex workers have a right to dignity.
- Sex workers have the right to earn by providing sexual services, live with dignity, and remain free from violence, exploitation, stigma and discrimination.
- Parliament must reform existing legislation and do away with the '**victim-rescue-rehabilitation**' narrative. The government should decriminalise sex work at the earliest and provide labour rights for sex workers

3. How COVID -19 can be addressed via COVID-19 appropriate behaviour?

Source- [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis- Adoption of COVID-19 appropriate behaviour is the best way to reduce transmission of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Introduction-

- One of the key causes of COVID-19's second wave in India has been the carelessness and reckless behaviour of few people. They have consistently violated Covid-19 guidelines of wearing masks and social distancing.
- According to KAP [knowledge, attitudes and practices] survey, from July 2020 to March 2021, India **witnessed a 5% drop in mask-wearing**.
- Relying entirely on medical science, especially treatment, is not a viable strategy for dealing with the epidemic.
- Therefore, Covid-19 appropriate behaviour is a must to reduce transmission.

What is behavioural science?

Behavioural science is a field of study that blends findings from social and cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and behavioural economics to make sense of human behaviour.

- With an evidence-based approach, behavioural scientists unpack what makes individuals tick: from motivations and aspirations to cognitive biases and social influences.

How behavioural science methods can be used in COVID-19 prevention?

1. **Create awareness about masks**
 - Provide basic information regarding who should wear them, when and where.
 - Also, provide clarity on what types of masks are most effective, how to wear a mask correctly, and when to double mask.
2. **Information should be tailored accordingly to people**-The government has to communicate with each group of people and provide information accordingly. But it should not discount or put down people's beliefs or misconceptions. The government has to counter them with credible facts.
3. **Need to communicate the benefits of mask-wearing** – The state should share testimonials, infographics and statistics that explain how masks have prevented infection transmission.
 - The government can share testimonials from people who wear masks regularly and explaining how they have managed to avoid getting infected could help.

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4. **Role model leadership** – Leaders at every level should play their role in influencing people for mask-wearing and vaccinations.
5. **Need of responsible media**–
 - The media needs to maintain a high standard and report on much more than just struggling hospitals, the oxygen crisis and vaccine and drug shortages. Instead, they have to participate in fighting misinformation and disinformation.

Way forward

- People have to be aware and sensitive about COVID-19 appropriate behaviour. Till everyone will not get vaccinated, behaviour change is the most effective measure to deal with COVID-19.
- Stringent implementation of public health and social measures remain the key to stop virus transmission.

4. Mitigating the third wave requires a focus on DOTS

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis:

India is witnessing a softening of the second wave. Nonetheless, the anticipation of the 3rd wave is quite high. Therefore, it is imperative for India to focus on reducing the reproduction number (R). This in turn calls for focusing on its determinants i.e. DOTS for Mitigating the third wave

Background:

- India witnessed a brutal impact of the second wave of the pandemic in May 2021, with cases crossing the 4 lakh mark in one day.
- The situation has now eased and the number of cases has come down below the 1.5 lakh mark. The second wave appears to be abating due to a reduced reproduction number.

About Reproduction number (R):

- It refers to the **average number of new infections arising from one infected individual**.
- R greater than 1 implies that infected individuals infect more than one person on average, and we observe increasing cases. When it is less than 1, cases are declining.
- It is dependent on Four Factors, summarised by the acronym DOTS:
 - **Duration** a person is infectious
 - **Opportunities** for infected individuals to spread the infection to others;
 - the probability of **Transmission** of infection if given an opportunity
 - the average **Susceptibility** of a population or subpopulation

What led R to increase earlier this year resulting in a second wave?

- **Susceptibility:** It was quite high at the start of the year. This is evident from the results from a national seroprevalence survey done in December 2020 and January 2021. They indicate roughly **25% of the population had antibodies to the virus** that causes COVID-19.
 - Further, **less than 1% of the total population had received two doses** of the vaccine till March 2021.

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- **Opportunity for Transmission:** By January 2020, people perceived that they had won the battle over the pandemic. They were eager to get back to life and work. Eventually, this increased the social mixing and the occurrence of large gatherings that might have facilitated a second wave.
- **Probability of Transmission:** A fall in [Covid-19 appropriate behaviour](#) was witnessed in early 2021 like not wearing masks in public, not properly sanitizing oneself etc. Further new variants with higher transmissibility potential emerged.
 - For instance, B.1.617.2 ([the delta variant](#)) is known to possess higher transmissibility potential, twice than the [Covid-19 variants circulating in 2020](#). It has emerged as the dominant variant in India and UK during their second wave.
- **Duration of infectiousness:** It may have enhanced with the emergence of new variants however more research is needed on this front.
- Therefore, it is now imperative that **we need to focus on DOTS for Mitigating the third wave.**

Suggestions for Mitigating the third wave:

- The government must build **well-designed seroprevalence surveys** to understand how much of the population remains susceptible and where they reside. These should accommodate the complexities of new variants and the occurrence of reinfections.
- The focus should be on **increased use of face masks and improved ventilation** for reducing the transmission. The country can learn from **the Bangladesh model** in which the distribution of free masks coupled with community monitors delivered positive results.
- **Temporary** solutions like lockdowns and a ban on mass gatherings should be used to focus on slowing the transmission rate.
- The magnitude of the susceptible population can be brought down by substantially **increasing the immunisation coverage**. Currently, only 3% of the population has received both doses.
- The **isolation and quarantining guidelines should be revised periodically** as per the changing duration of infectiousness.

5. Prudent Approach towards the Downward Trajectory of Second Wave

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis:

India has witnessed a decline in Covid-19 cases since the last month, thereby indicating a downward trajectory of the second wave. It presents an opportunity to effectively prepare for the upcoming third wave through [universal vaccination](#) and accommodative reforms.

Background:

- The second wave of pandemic left a more brutal impact on India than the first wave, with cases touching the 4 lakh/day mark. Rural India was hurt significantly and many districts reported higher fatality rates than the national average.
- However, the cumulative Covid-19 cases have now declined by 72 % from the peak in May.

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Understanding the Downward Trajectory of Second Wave:

- The decline is **mainly caused by a decrease in urban cases** while the [rural cases are still on the rise](#) as shown by the 14-day moving average of the top 20 districts.
- The percentage of daily new cases from rural areas is still at 52.8 percent. A high prevalence of cases in the rural area indicates that:
 - The **GDP loss** due to the current wave will be much lower than that in the first wave. This is because these **rural districts account for a lower share of economic activity**.
- There is also a subtle change in India's vaccination policy. Now India is **prioritising people receiving the first dose**.
 - This would **bring down the magnitude of serious cases** in the country and ensure better preparation for the 3rd wave.

Suggestions to capitalise the downward Trajectory of Second Wave:

- The government should **step up the vaccination drive** as currently, around 16% of people have received the first dose and only 3% have been fully vaccinated. For the US, these numbers are 89.4 and 44.1 respectively.
 - India **must opt for an advanced procurement strategy** like that adopted by developed nations to inoculate its remaining population, especially the 12-17 age bracket.
 - There should be a [centralised vaccine procurement along with a centralised pricing strategy](#).
- The rollout of a **compassionate fiscal policy** at both the central and state levels is also desired for reducing the stress of the common man and businesses. This would include rationalisation of fuel prices, tax holidays, electricity rebates for MSMEs etc.
- There should be **prudent adoption of the best administrative practices** at state and local level. The Centre should now **collect and collate such systems** and make them available to state governments to strengthen the health infrastructure. This includes:
 - **"Mumbai model"** of oxygen distribution under the able administrator, Iqbal Chahal.
 - **"Ernakulam's war room model"** that oversees the entire city and allows for resources to be shifted swiftly between hotspots.
 - **Telephone-based triaging systems** of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.
 - Triage systems are methods for systematic prioritizing of patients' treatment according to how urgent they need care.
- The **operations of local bodies should be digitalised** to ensure better resource allocation and greater accountability.

6. How can India address its mental healthcare problem?

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: [GS2 - Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health](#)

Synopsis: Evaluation of India's state of [mental health care](#) and suggestions to improve them.

Background

- Recent reports published in **Lancet** revealed that **one in seven people in India** had a mental disorder ranging from mild to severe in 2017.
 - Mental illnesses include anxiety disorders, psychotic disorders, mood disorders, substance use disorders, personality disorders and eating disorders.

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- Despite having the necessary components to address the [mental healthcare](#) issues, more needs to be done in the context of COVID-19 that has exacerbated mental illnesses.

The mental healthcare situation in India

- The situation is **bad especially in the southern states** as compared to the northern states due to the nature of development, modernization, urbanization etc.,
- **Sharp gender divide:** Depressive disorders are more prevalent among females than males due to sexual abuse, gender discrimination, stress due to antenatal and postnatal issues etc
- **Why mental healthcare situation is bad in India?**
- **Inadequate public spending on Mental Health:** India spends around 1.3% of total health expenditure on mental health, whereas, in developed countries, it ranges from 3% to 15%.
- **Inadequate infrastructure for Mental Health:** For Instance, the share of mental hospitals per 1,00,000 population is as low as 0.01 according to the WHO.
- Similarly, India fares poorly in the distribution of mental health units, mental health outpatient facilities, community residential facilities etc.,
- **Inadequate Mental health resources:** Nurses, social workers and psychologists working in the mental health sector in India are way less compared to other countries. For instance, leading countries have 222.6 psychologists per 1,00,000 population whereas India has only 0.069, per 1,00,000 population.

Why Mental Health needs to be given priority?

- **One, Causative factor for suicides.** The majority of suicides in the world are related to psychiatric problems or mental illnesses. India's suicide rate was 16.3 per 1,00,000 in 2016 that is very high compared to the Global suicide rate of 10.6 per 1,00,000 population.
- **Two, a significant contributor to the total disease burden in India.** For instance, the proportional contribution of mental disorders to the total disease burden had doubled between 1990 and 2017.
- **Three reduces longevity.** According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there is a 10-25-year life expectancy reduction in patients with severe mental disorders.
- **Government measures on mental health care**
- India has rightly enacted the following policies to cater to the needs of the population suffering from Mental illness:
 - The National Mental Health Policy (NMHP) in 2014,
 - Rights-based Mental Healthcare Act in 2017,
 - National Adolescent Health Programme
 - Ayushman Bharat
- More needs to be done.

What more steps can be taken?

In order to further address mental health issues and promote mental healthcare, India needs to do the following,

- One, reduce the treatment gap for mental disorders. For instance, **Telemedicine** can be promoted to reduce the gap.
- Two, **increase the number of personnel** in the mental healthcare sector.
- Three, **remove stigmatization** by reducing discriminatory attitudes.
- Four, devise an **integrated approach** for detecting, treating, and managing patient needs.

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- Five, **increase counselling facilities**, especially in rural areas, with special support for women through the provision of women doctors.
- Six, leverage the benefits of **technology**. The application of big data and crowdsourcing ideas can help to make informed decision-making.
- Seven, focus on **community-based programmes**. For Instance, School-based programmes on mental health can improve the mental health of children.
- Eight, **create mental health awareness** through traditional media, government programmes, the education system, industry, and social media.

7. China warns Bangladesh on joining QUAD

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: **GS2 – Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests.**

Synopsis: In the wake of the growing momentum of [Quad](#), China’s aggression is expected to grow in the Indo-Pacific and States are likely to push back Chinese “**cheque-book diplomacy**”.

Background:

- Recently Chinese ambassador warned Bangladesh that there will be “**substantial damage**” to bilateral relation if it joins the USA backed anti-China coalition “**Quad**”
- However, Bangladesh categorically replied that Bangladesh is an independent sovereign nation and practices an independent foreign policy.
- In this context, the USA said, it respects Bangladesh sovereignty and the **right to make independent foreign policy**.

What is the significance of this episode?

- Firstly, it reveals the **fault lines in South Asia and in the Indo-Pacific**. It shows that major powers are changing their moves to change the power balance in the Indian Ocean.
- Secondly, it shows the growing [relevance of the Indo-Pacific](#). “**Quad**” with all its weaknesses is becoming **reality** in the Indo-Pacific despite China’s attempt to suppress it.
- Thirdly, it reveals that Quad’s success can be challenging for **China strong-arm tactics** (*use of threats and force*). Quad can become an **alternative for the regional states**.
- Fourthly, it is clear China wants to send a clear message to regional states that they should remain away from joining Quad.
- It further signifies that as the relevance of Quad will grow, Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific will grow.

What are the major limitations with Quad?

- Firstly, Quad members are not able to figure out **any cohesive agenda** or any plan of expansions in the region.
- Secondly, there **is no credible platform** to work with a like-minded nation such as China’s Belt and Road initiative.
- Thirdly, no countries have shown any interest to join the coalition as China has called it “**Asian NATO**”.

India and other regional states will have to come up with more clear-cut foreign policy choices to counter China’s aggressive diplomacy.

Also read: [Quadrilateral Security Dialogue](#)

8. Protecting human rights in the age of disinformation

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: Despite the threat of information disorder (*spread of disinformation*), human rights-friendly governance is both possible and achievable.

Introduction

The Supreme Court of India (SC) recently warned against any attempt to curb free speech. The [UN Human Rights Council \(UNHRC\)](#) Special Rapporteur gave a report on “Disinformation and Freedom of Opinion and Expression”, which is to be discussed between June 21 and July 9.

- Justices Dhananjay Chandrachud, L Nageswara Rao and S Ravindra Bhat stated that any attempt to curb information on social media or harassment caused to individuals seeking/delivering help on any platform will **attract a strong use of jurisdiction by the Court.**
- The SC instructed the registrar to place this **order before all district magistrates** in the country. It also asked the central and state governments to inform all chief secretaries/director generals of police etc.
- The SC supports the principle that **abuse of public power cannot irrationally or randomly curb the freedom of speech, press, and media platforms.**
- Human rights provide a powerful framework to contest lies and present alternative viewpoints. It justifies **utilitarianism of human rights as freedom of opinion** allows development. Journalists are able to contest lies and present alternative viewpoints.

Findings of the UNHRC report

The UNHRC report talks about “**information disorder.**” It rises from disinformation which is politically dividing, deters people from importantly exercising their human rights, and **destroys their trust in governments and institutions.**

- **Firstly, the UNHRC criticized inherently blanket internet shutdowns.** The report declares that content moderation efforts will not make any difference.
- **Secondly, the problem is in the varying application of companies’ terms of service.** The global platforms do not apply the same policies across all geographical areas or uphold human rights to the same extent.
- **Thirdly, Internet shutdowns don’t curb disinformation but obstruct fact-finding.** It is contrary to rights against discrimination when meant to silence minority voices and stopping them to get access to vital information.
- **Fourthly, the report clearly upholds that disinformation risks the right to freedom of opinion and expression.** It poses a threat to the safety of journalists and the media ecosystem.
- **Fifthly, the report stresses that the intention to harm is decisive in disinformation** as false information is spread intentionally to cause serious social harm.
- **Lastly, the report mentions factors contributing to the growth of disinformation.** These include,
 - Factors such as digital transformation and competition from online platforms.
 - State pressure and the **absence of robust public information** regimes.
 - Digital and media literacy among the public.
 - Frustrations and grievances of a growing number of people.
 - Decades of economic deprivation, market failures, political disenfranchisement, and social inequalities.

What did the Oxford study find out?

- A 2020 Oxford study of “Industrialized Disinformation” states that **81 governments use social media to spread propaganda and disinformation** about politics. Facebook and Twitter even removed more than 3,17,000 accounts and pages.
 - However, **the cyber troops act as agents of political parties and a tool of geopolitical influence.**
 - Some authoritarian countries like Russia, China and Iran benefitted from **coronavirus disinformation** to increase anti-democratic narratives designed to dent trust in health officials.
- **Cyber troops are available for pro-party propaganda**, or post insult campaigns, trolling and producing plots that drive division and polarize citizens.
- **Online disinformation also results in offline practices of violent social trips** on actually existing individuals and communities such as ethnic, gender, migrant, sexual minorities.

The conclusion

Reactive content moderation efforts are simply inadequate without a serious review of the business model. The report offers useful material for reflective thought and diligent action.

9. Issues with recent draft rules notified by the Lakshadweep administration

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis: The [recent changes brought in Lakshadweep](#) Administration in the name of public purpose is against the public interest and ethos of the island.

Background:

- Recently, **the administrator** of Lakshadweep brought changes to the following acts to promote infrastructural development to boost tourism.
 - Development Authority Regulation,
 - Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Regulation,
 - Lakshadweep Panchayat Regulation and
 - Lakshadweep Animal Preservation Regulation
- However, the proposed changes ignore the significance of cultural ecology, cultural geography and strategic location of Lakshadweep.
- These changes are also against the **2019 Kerala HC** judgement which had recognised the special status given to the inhabitants for protecting their ethnic culture and traditions.
- Now, the draft rules are challenged before the High Court of Kerala.

What is unique about Lakshadweep?

- It is an egalitarian coconut tree owning society.
- It has little economic inequality along with high literacy and high unemployment.
- The Muslim community is designated as Scheduled Tribes.
- Coconut trees are the main agricultural crop and fisheries is the main economic activity.
- Fisheries employ the majority of the working population.
- Since solar electricity requires a large land area, electricity is generated through diesel generators.

What are the two competing visions for the island's future?

- **NITI Aayog's vision 2019:** It identified water villas and land-based tourism projects as the development issue faced by the islands.
 - It also suggested zoning-based land acquisition and focused on sustainable development.
 - However, it ignores the fragile environment and culture.
- **Integrated Island Management Plan 2016:** It was prepared under the guidance of the Supreme Court and the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management.
 - It had **rejected 'home stays'** in view of the **strict social customs** and strong resistance of the vast majority.
 - It also suggested that **development programmes** should be implemented **in consultation with the elected local self-government bodies**
 - It also recommended adherence to scientifically determined plans.

Major concerns associated with the new changes in Lakshadweep administration

- Firstly, these changes are **arbitrary**, authoritarian and will destroy the way of life.
- Secondly, **vague criteria of 'public purpose'** for acquiring private land will increase conflict.
 - **Dev Sharan vs State of Uttar Pradesh, 2011:** SC observed that "Any attempt by the State to acquire land by promoting a public **purpose to benefit a particular group of people** or to serve any particular interest at the cost of the interest of a large section of people especially of the common people **defeats** the very concept of **public purpose**."
- Thirdly, Since, the existing water balance is under stress, it is difficult to adopt tourism.
 - All the inhabited islands already have a scarcity of drinking water supply. Hence, the conventional method of sewage treatment is not feasible because of the coral sandy strata and high-water table.
- Fourthly, arbitrary changes will affect the relationship between the state and society, resulting in **trust deficit and misgovernance**.
 - For instance, the powers of the panchayats have been withdrawn on grounds of corruption, two-child policy for election candidates, banning beef and allowing liquor only for tourists.
 - Also, the new draft legislation has brought preventive detention for 'anti-social activities' whereas the island has no case of murder or smuggling by local people.
- The Lakshadweep Administration has said the changes are in line with Maldives development road. However, it has adopted a very different strategy **without the active participation of the public**.

How the Maldives development strategy is different from the Lakshadweep administration?

- Firstly, tourism in the Maldives is centred on water villas in uninhabited islands, ensuring that very few coconut trees are cut.
- Secondly, only limited homestays are allowed.
- Thirdly, Maldives has a **'one island, one resort' policy** which has kept very little pressure on reefs low.
- Fourthly, since the rich and healthy reefs are essential for economic returns, its business model is about **giving coral reefs economic significance**.

10. The Pros and Cons of e-Courts project

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: E-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential

Synopsis: Pandemic has shown that the **e-Courts project** has the ability to revolutionize the Indian Judiciary, but its application needs to be in line with the Fundamental Right to Privacy.

Why Indian courts should use digital technologies?

- **Faster justice delivery.**
- **Clearing pendency** which is around 3.27 crore cases before Indian courts. Of which 85,000 have been pending for over 30 years as of June 2020 as per the [e-Committee](#).
- **Reduce long delays and difficulties** for ordinary litigants.
- **Building people's trust** in the judiciary.

To fulfil the above-given objectives, the Indian judiciary has launched project e-courts, which are monitored by the e-Committee.

Salient features of the e-Courts project:

- **Phases I and II had dealt with the digitisation of the judiciary:**
 - e-filing, tracking cases online
 - uploading judgments online.
- **Draft vision document for Phase III of the e-Courts project aims for:**
 - [Digitisation of court processes](#)
 - Upgrade the electronic infrastructure of the judiciary.
 - Enable access to lawyers and litigants.
 - **Seamless exchange of information** between various branches of the State. Such as between the judiciary, the police and the prison systems through the [Interoperable Criminal Justice System](#) (ICJS).

Read more: [CJI launches SUPACE Portal— AI-driven Research Portal](#)

What are the key benefits of the e-Courts project?

- Phase II of the project helped in the development of the **National Service and Tracking of Electronic Processes** which enabled the delivery of e-summons.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Supreme Court and High Courts have been able to function online.
- **What are the concerns associated with the e-court project?**
- Firstly, as per Criminal Justice and Police Accountability Project, the ICJS will **exacerbate existing class and caste inequalities**.
 - For instance, the exercise of data creation at local police stations have historically contributed to the **criminalisation of entire communities** through colonial-era laws such as the **Criminal Tribes Act of 1871**.
 - It helped in labelling such communities as “**habitual offenders**”.
 - ICJIS also has the potential to label citizen with such tags.
- Secondly, large-scale gathering and sharing of data with **no data protection regime** present in India may cause data theft, cybersecurity issues and online harassment.
- Thirdly, Localised data will be centralised by the Ministry of home affairs will lead to
 - **Creation of a 360-degree profile** of each person by integrating all of their interactions with government agencies into a unified database.
 - This approach is used by **social media platforms** and technology companies for **targeted advertisement**, but data collection by the **government** may end up as “**targeted surveillance**”.

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- Fourthly, it is not clear that **why Home Ministry needs access to court data** which has absolutely no relation to criminal law.

Way forward:

- Firstly, the e-Courts project must move towards localization of data. Also, e-Committee must prevent the seamless exchange of data between the branches of the state that should remain separate.
- Secondly, collected data need to be stored in an **anonymous** and aggregated manner.
- Thirdly, the Supreme Court need to ensure that the e-courts project **does not violate the privacy standards** that it set in **Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017)**.
- Fourthly, active participation of citizen should be there as when data of the courts and police stations are integrated, the link is individual citizen.
- [Digital Technology](#) can play a huge role in the faster delivery of justice. However, the **privacy and fundamental rights of citizens need to be protected** as the technology is only a means, not an end in itself.

11. [Need to ban the Conversion therapy of the LGBTQIA+ community](#)

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis:

The recent order of the Madras high court presents an opportunity to ban the inhuman conversion therapy of the LGBTQIA+ community. The therapy subjects them to immense physical and mental stress leading to occurrence of depression, anxiety and suicide cases amongst the community.

Background:

- The Madras High Court called for a ban on the conversion therapy of the LGBTQIA+ community in its recent **S Sushma V. Commissioner of Police case**. It also demanded legal action against those who practise it.
 - Conversion therapy is the pseudoscientific practise of trying to change an individual's sexual orientation. In this therapy, psychological, physical, or spiritual interventions will be carried out for the members of the LGBTQIA+ community to change them heterosexual.
 - LGBTQIA+ refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual.
- The order **coincided with the celebration of pride month in June**. Since 1969, pride month is celebrated across the globe to recognise the significance of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Why Conversion therapy of the LGBTQIA+ should be banned?

- **First**, it would be a **significant step in the fight against homophobia**. The continued persistence of the therapy entrenches the false belief that non-heterosexual orientations are somehow unnatural or immoral.
- **Second**, the move will **erode the misguided and unscientific notion** that sexuality can be altered through external intervention. The ban will concretise the notion that homosexuality is not a mental illness.
- **Third**, the practice is already **banned in many liberal countries** while many more are about to ban it.

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- For instance, the **UK took a pledge to outlaw conversion therapy** in May 2021. Further, the practice is **already banned in Germany, Canada, Malta, Australia, and the United States.**
- **Fourth**, the patients are also subjected to various forms of **physical and emotional abuse** in the therapy. This includes physical abuse, food deprivation, and homophobic insults.
 - A study by UN's independent expert on gender violence and discrimination found that 98% of people undergoing conversion therapy experience lasting damage. This includes depression, anxiety, permanent physical harm and loss of faith.
 - In extreme situations, patients are unable to handle the stress and anguish which eventually induces them to end their lives. In May 2020, a 21-year queer (Anjana Harish) committed suicide in Goa post-conversion therapy.

Way Forward:

- The Indian Government has taken some positive steps like decriminalising consensual homosexual sex under Sec-377 of the Indian Penal Code. However, there is no explicit law banning conversion therapy in India. The latest Mental Healthcare Act also implicitly allows the therapy with the patient's consent.
- The government must undertake the following steps to protect the LGBTQIA+ community:
 - **Ban conversion therapy of the LGBTQIA+ involving minors** as they cannot consent to any such procedure.
 - **Ban advertising conversion therapy** in order to reduce its prevalence and decreasing its social acceptability.
 - Impose **professional sanctions** against medical practitioners who engage in conversion therapy of the LGBTQIA+ community.

12. Dismal Healthcare systems in South Asia needs attention

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis:

The second wave of pandemic highlighted the lacunas in the healthcare systems in South Asia. The situation now demands the replacement of short term measures with a well-thought-out vision and political commitment for long-term healing.

Background:

The pandemic managed to penetrate across the countries due to the dismal state of health infrastructure and reluctance to enhance public health care spending. For example,

- India recorded 4,529 deaths from COVID-19 on 18th May 2021. It is the highest daily death toll recorded in the world, beating 4468 deaths recorded by the US in January 2021.
- The virus has consolidated itself in other South Asian countries as well.
 - Sri Lanka added 78,218 cases in May.
 - Pakistan crossed over 200 daily deaths in April, its highest since the pandemic started.
 - Bangladesh detected the highly contagious [Delta variant of Covid-19](#)
- The consolidation of the virus has been attributed to the dismal state of healthcare systems in South Asian countries.

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Dismal State of Healthcare systems in South Asia:

- **Funding:** The Indian government spends around 1.4 % of its GDP on public healthcare. There is a lack of prudent expenditure towards public health in other south Asian nations as well.
- **Doctor to Population Ratio:** In India, there are only 0.08 doctors per 1000 population in the public health sector. But the WHO standard is 1 per 1000 population. Pakistan and Bangladesh also have less than one doctor per 1000 population.
- **Bed Availability:** India has only half a bed available for every 1,000 people. Similarly, Bangladesh and Pakistan have a bed to patient ratio of 0.8 and 0.6 respectively.
- **Out of Pocket Expenditure:** The ideal out-of-pocket expenditure should not surpass 15% to 20% of the total health expenditure. However it is 62.67%, 73.87% and 56.24% for India, Bangladesh and Pakistan respectively.

Other factors behind the spread of the virus in South Asia:

- **First**, superspreader events in India gave a lucrative opportunity for the spreading of the virus
- **Second**, the citizens violated the [Covid protocols by disregarding social distancing](#), not wearing masks etc.
- **Third**, the logistical mismanagement in the countries delayed the accessibility of vaccines and other life-saving drugs.
- **Fourth**, the increase in health expenditure remained well below the desired levels. For instance, Pakistan's defence budget was increased by 12% in 2020-21 to reach \$7.85 billion. On the other hand, the spending on health remained around \$151 million.

Way forward:

- The South Asian countries can **learn from the Bhutan Model**. There has been only 1 death and 1724 cases of Covid-19 in the country.
 - Its success is owed to a well-funded and prepared public health system with stringent measures, responsible citizenship, and an accountable government.
- There is a need to **enhance public expenditure, especially towards rural healthcare**. In [Rural India, the poor health care system](#) enhanced the hardships of people –
 - Patients were treated on the hospital floor for lack of beds,
 - Some had to walk hundreds of miles just to reach a hospital and
 - Many were compelled to resort to homemade concoctions and local quacks
- The South Asian nations can also take **lessons from the Southeast Asian countries** including Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia etc.
 - They prioritised investments in healthcare systems while broadening equitable access through universal health coverage schemes.

13. Securing privacy and data rights in the age of social audio

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: Privacy and data rights remain out of focus on social audio.

Introduction

The clubhouse is a new social networking app based around audio rooms. It crossed over 2 million Android downloads last month. The main feature of the app is the unique audio medium through which its users interact.

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- This feature makes clubhouse different from other platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and YouTube. These apps use text, images, video, or a combination of three.
- The app does not have separate texting features or the option to create online profiles. Its focus is purely on audio-based interaction.

What are the issues with such apps?

The nature of the app raises questions on privacy and data rights. **Audio rooms bring new challenges for data regulators.** As they have not yet found ways to control traditional social media platforms.

- **Firstly, audio-based exchanges are faster and in real-time.** Thus, traditional methods of content moderation may not work here. **Cyber-bullying and trolling, driven by sexism, racism and communalism, can be more damaging on apps like a clubhouse.**
 - **Secondly, anyone can join any room that their friends are a part of, this makes stalking easier. The app even sends notifications to its followers.**
 - **Thirdly, the experience on Clubhouse includes a constant awareness about how every action is being shown to followers. This awareness and the fear of being judged will limit people from exploring the app's content.**
 - This is opposite to Instagram, Facebook, Twitter which allow browsing in invisibility.
 - **Fourthly, Clubhouse temporarily records the audio in a room** while the room is live, this is a major concern. It says that it deletes the recording when the room ends. **The app lacks end-to-end encryption, which makes the data still potentially accessible. This recording is done without the consent of the user.**
 - Privacy expert Alexander Hanff says the platform's practices are **violating** many provisions of Europe's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
 - A report by the Stanford Internet Observatory stated that the backend infrastructure of Clubhouse is given by a Chinese start-up called Agora. The report mentions a risk of the Chinese government accessing raw audio and other security flaws.
 - **Fifthly, India does not have a strict data protection law:** This makes its users more vulnerable to data breaches and privacy violations. The lack of end-to-end encryption in Clubhouse could also make it an easy tool for government surveillance.
 - **Lastly, Clubhouse takes permission to access users' contacts,** which is a significant privacy concern. **It gives the app information about people who are not even on the app.** The contact list can be shared with app developers and with people in a user's contact list. This affects privacy and contributes to the harassment culture.

How will the dominant companies in similar space react?

The clubhouse is one of the numerous apps that have grown popular during the COVID-19 as people are looking for new methods to communicate with each other.

As the popularity of Clubhouse grows, Twitter has launched 'Spaces', and Facebook is working on a similar feature. LinkedIn, Discord, Reddit and Spotify are doing the same.

The conclusion

Clubhouse might seem like a lightweight app, but it does not offer much in terms of securing privacy and data rights. It is not very different from traditional platforms. Social audio won't truly progress until innovation is balanced with respect for privacy, security and data rights.

14. Annual review of state laws 2020 report by PRS

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS2 – Parliament and State Legislatures—Structure, Functioning, Conduct of Business, Powers & Privileges and Issues Arising out of these

Synopsis: PRS Legislative Research's "Annual review of state laws 2020" shows that the productivity and efficacy of State legislatures is poor.

Background

- Public information on the working of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha is readily available to Indian citizens because of the efforts of PRS Legislative Research.
- In contrast, the public information available on the functioning of state legislatures and their productivity has been limited.
- The good news is that PRS has now ventured into monitoring state legislatures and has recently released a report on the legislative work performed by states for the year 2020.

About Annual review of state laws report

- The report is based on data compiled from state legislature websites and state gazettes.
- It covers 19 state legislatures, including the Union Territory of Delhi, which together accounts for 90% of the population of the country.
- Some of the state's data are not available because few states do not have a systematic way of reporting legislative proceedings and business.

Important Findings of Annual review of state laws 2020

- **One, less number of working days:** Pre-2020, these 19 states met for an average of 29 days a year as compared to the Parliament that met for 33 days in 2020.
- **Two, lack of detailed scrutiny over Bills:** For instance, in 2020, 59% of the Bills were passed on the same day that they were introduced in the legislature. A further 14% were passed within a day of being introduced.
 - Whereas, In Parliament, Bills are often referred to Parliamentary Standing Committees for detailed examination. In most states, such committees are non-existent.
- **Three, no uniformity in policies that are related to National interest.** For instance, while some states decided to reduce salaries of the members of state legislature, some states did not take any such action to maintain financial propriety.

Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India case:

In 2003, Section 3 of the Representation of People Act, 1951 (RP Act) was amended.

Section 3 of the RP Act, stipulated that for a person to be a member of the Rajya Sabha, he needs to be an "ordinary resident" in the State, from which he or she is contesting the election.

By amending the RP Act, the government did away with the '**domicile**' requirement to be a member of the Rajya Sabha.

This amendment was challenged before the Supreme Court in the case **Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India**.

The petitioner argued that to “represent” a state, the member needs to have some domiciliary nexus with the State he is representing

However, the Supreme Court held that domicile requirement of a representative is not an essential attribute of federalism. Therefore, it does not violate the [Basic Structure of the Constitution](#).

15. **Public’s right to information vs. national security interest**

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Important Aspects of Governance, Transparency and Accountability,

Synopsis: This article summarises the opinions and views of the former home secretary of India (G.K. Pillai) and retired Indian diplomat (Syed Akbaruddin). They provide their opinion regarding the **public’s [right to information](#) vs. national security interest**.

Background

- Recently, the Government of India prohibited retired officials of security and intelligence organisations from publishing anything about their work or organisation without prior clearance from the head of the organisation.
- Though some restrictions on sharing of sensitive information related to the government are necessary, there is a need to ensure the public’s right to information by declassifying files in a timely manner.

Does restrictions base on national security interest justifiable?

- One, officers of intelligence and security organisations and other departments are exposed to a lot of sensitive information. So, there needs to be **some government control over that information**.
- Two, there is a near-universal consensus among decision-makers, around the world, that **some measure of secrecy is necessary** to protect authorised national security activities.
- Three, **no rights to freedom of expression can be absolute**; they will always be restricted in certain contexts.
- However, there are **certain ambiguities that need to be addressed**. For instance, the notification calls for **lifelong restriction and the word Sensitive information is not clearly defined**.
- According to G.K. Pillai, there needs to be a **time limit of 5 years after retirement rather than imposing lifelong restrictions**. Because, in five years, operational information that is actually more sensitive will not be of concern in most cases.

How to balance the public’s right to information vs. national security interest?

- One way of addressing this dilemma is by providing the information to the public through the **declassification of files**. A declassification is an important tool in raising public awareness after a specified period.
- **For instance**, In the US, at the end of 30 years, after a rigorous examination, they declassify most files and make them available in the public domain. However, In India, the availability of declassified information is less.
- Also, a consequence of **extreme secrecy will produce undesirable effects** such as the explosion of deep throats (secret informant who provided information). That is not good for any society.

Way forward

- A free and democratic country should guarantee the free flow of information and the right of the public to be aware of situations.
- Information can be revealed without, revealing national secrets or difficult situations.
- The government needs to prioritise declassification of the top-secret files that are of less relevance today.

16. Political and administrative elements in maintaining Healthy Federalism

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Functions and Responsibilities of the Union and the States, Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure.

Synopsis: The recent Centre-West Bengal controversy over Political and administrative elements has brought attention towards the health of the [federal structure in India](#).

Background:

- The recent issue is that the former Chief Secretary of Bengal reached late in the meeting called by Prime Minister to review cyclone relief work.
- Though both political and administrative state functionaries were requested to attend the meeting, the chief secretary along with West Bengal Chief Minister left the meeting abruptly.
- Consequently, the centre has sent showcase notices and a charge sheet for the chief secretary's failure in fully and properly participating in the meeting.
- These events **raised concerns regarding the norms of civil service conduct**, political and administrative arrogance and revengeful behaviour.

Why the Centre's action on the Former chief secretary of Bengal is unwarranted?

To understand this issue, a few important political and administrative elements should be kept in mind.

- Firstly, India is a 'union of states'.
 - The State governments are **not subordinate agencies** of the central government.
 - As per the Constitution, the Centre's decisions have primacy over those of the State governments.
 - But the **primacy** does not extend to the holding of meetings.
- Secondly, **most relief and rehabilitation work** during natural calamity or disaster is done at the **local level** under the State governments.
 - Also, the Disaster Management Act, 2005 operates mainly at the State, district and local levels.
 - However, the States have given space to the Centre for disaster management for getting financial, technical and logistical support.
- Thirdly, civil servants are required to balance **between loyalty toward states and loyalty toward center**.
 - IAS officers are ultimately **subject to the control of the respective State governments** when they are in the employment of their States.
 - Otherwise, IAS officers will **face trust deficit**, if they show preference or loyalty to the central government just because they are appointed by the Center.
- Fourthly, the center has **violated the norms required for "deputation"**.
 - As a measure of punishment, the former chief secretary for his conduct was initially called to the Centre on 'deputation' on the day he was to retire.

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- This was done **without the concurrence of the state government**. But the concurrence of the state is required before an officer of its cadre is deputed to the Centre.
- Fifthly, absurd interpretation of the provision of **Disaster Management act, 2005**.
 - Actions against the former Chief secretary is taken under **Section 51(b) of the Disaster Management Act** for failing to comply with the Centre's direction.
 - However, this section is meant to deal with cases of defiance of the lawful orders or action of the competent authorities under the Act for handling disaster management.
- Lastly, the All-India service officer or any officer has to act under the direction of his official superior.
 - For an IAS officer, the State government is the official superior.
 - If this is not followed, there will be chaos and indiscipline in administration.
- The conduct of the former chief secretary and the reaction of the Central government must be seen in an overall context. Also, in these kinds of circumstances, one needs to use the wisdom of our tall political leaders to maintain proper Political and administrative elements for a healthy federal polity.

17. **Single dose of vaccine can't control Delta Variant: Global Study on vaccines**

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis:

The data from clinical trials and post-vaccination study on vaccines shows that the Dominant delta variant of Covid-19 can't be easily controlled by a single dose of vaccine. The countries must administer two doses of vaccine and should [reduce the time gap between them](#).

Background:

- The WHO has recently given a new classification to SARS-CoV-2 [variants of interest \(VOI\)](#) and [variants of concern \(VOC\)](#) on the basis of Greek letters. The objective was to create easy-to-pronounce and non-stigmatising labels for VOI and VOC.
- However, the established nomenclature systems for naming and tracking of SARS-CoV-2 genetic lineages by GISAID, Nextstrain and Pango will remain in use for scientific research.
- The new classification is as follows:
 - VOC B.1.1.7 will be called Alpha Variant. It was the earliest [documented in the United Kingdom](#) (September 2020).
 - VOC B.1.351 will be called Beta Variant. It was the earliest documented in South Africa (May 2020).
 - VOC P.1 will be called Gamma Variant. It was the earliest documented in Brazil (November 2020).
 - VOC B.1.617.2 will be called [Delta Variant](#). It was the earliest documented in India (October 2020).

About the Delta Variant:

- It was first identified in Maharashtra and is believed to be responsible for the severe second wave in India.
- It has now spread to most parts of India and also been identified in many other countries.

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- The rapid expansion has induced the WHO to graduate it from a “variant of interest” (VOI) to a “variant of concern” (VOC) category. Scientists have undertaken various studies to address 3 major questions surrounding the delta VOC –
 1. Is it more infectious than the prevalent virus?
 2. Is it more lethal than the previous virus?
 3. Does the delta variant is more resistant to the effect of vaccines?

Data shown by various studies on vaccines:

- **Results of Study conducted by [Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortia \(INSACOG\)](#) and the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC):**
 - The Delta variant is the “prime reason” behind the second wave, though the wave may have been initiated by the Alpha variant.
 - The Delta Variant has become dominant even in Britain, where scientists have recently noted that it is 50% more infectious than the Alpha variant.
- **Results of study on vaccines conducted by Public Health England:**
 - A single dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine provided 33% efficacy against the Delta variant, while it was 51% against the Alpha variant.
 - The second dose improved the efficacy to 60% against the Delta variant and to 66% against the Alpha variant.
 - Further, two doses of Pfizer-BioNtech vaccine provided much higher levels of protection than two doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine.
- **Results of a British study on vaccines published in Lancet Journal:**
 - Merely 32% of the vaccinated individuals had adequate antibody levels against the Delta variant after the first dose of the Pfizer vaccine. It was 25% against the beta variant.
 - The antibody levels rose after the second dose. However, they were far below the levels obtained against the initial variant of the Covid-19 virus.
- **Results of a study on vaccines conducted by the Pasteur Institute, France:**
 - The Delta variant showed reduced response to both the vaccines (Pfizer and Astrazeneca). It was resistant to neutralisation by some monoclonal antibodies targeting the Spike protein.
 - The study concluded that a single dose of the Astrazeneca vaccine will not display optimal protection against the delta variant.

Lessons learnt from the various study on vaccines:

- **First**, the Delta variant is the most infectious variant in circulation. However, there is not much convincing evidence to prove it is more deadlier than the previous variants.
- **Second**, vaccines have diminished efficacy against the delta variant. Further, a **single dose of either the AstraZeneca or the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine does not provide adequate protection** against the Delta variant.
- **Third**, a shortened dosing interval is recommended to deal with the Delta variant. Britain has already reduced the interval to 8 weeks from earlier 12 weeks.

18. [POSHAN 2.0 and tackling malnutrition in India](#)

Source-[The Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis- What is POSHAN 2.0 and how it is going to help [tackle malnutrition in India](#).

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Introduction

- The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the burden of malnutrition, especially among the most vulnerable and economically disadvantaged families.
- The pandemic and the ensuing lockdown have put nearly 115 million children in danger of malnutrition as incomes, food consumption and essential services all come under pressure.
- Thus, to solve India's [nutrition crisis](#), an evidence-based, integrated, and outcome-focused approach is urgently required.

What is malnutrition?

Malnutrition refers to deficiencies, excesses, or imbalances in a person's intake of energy and/or nutrients. The term malnutrition addresses three broad groups of conditions:

Under-nutrition: This includes wasting (low weight-for-height), stunting (low height-for-age) and underweight (low weight-for-age);

Micronutrient-related malnutrition: This includes micronutrient deficiencies (a lack of important vitamins and minerals) or micronutrient excess; and

Overweight, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases (such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers).

About POSHAN & POSHAN 2.0 scheme

POSHAN scheme – Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment

- The government of India had launched the [POSHAN Abhiyaan](#) in 2018 to ensure a Malnutrition Free India by 2022.
- The scheme, by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, aims to reduce stunting, undernutrition, anaemia and reduced low birth weight by 2%, 2%, 3% and 2% per annum respectively.
- **To improve nutritional outcome- POSHAN 2.0** announced in 2021 Budget.
- **New guidelines of POSHAN 2.0-**
 - POSHAN scheme focuses on the 1,000 days between a mother's pregnancy and her child's second birthday.
 - Prioritizing women and girls, and addressing their nutritional deficiencies through fortification and provision of take-home rations.
 - The introduction of community-based programmes for tackling severe acute malnutrition.
 - The guidelines now place accountability at the district level with nutrition indicators included in the KPIs (key performance indicators) of DN/DC.
- **POSHAN tracker-** The Ministry of Women and Child Development has developed a new software tool called the **Poshan Tracker**. The aim is to streamline the supply side of the scheme. This will replace the earlier ICDS CAS, because the data generated by it was not usable.

Advantages of POSHAN tracker-

- It will provide a holistic view of distribution and access of nutrition services by Anganwadi centres and AWWs (Anganwadi workers) to eligible groups.
- The software will ensure real-time updates, enhance transparency and enabling the system to identify last-mile beneficiaries.
- The tracker carries a module that enables AWWs to identify and provide support to orphaned children [due Covid-19].
- Over 2.94 million take-home rations and 1.35 crore hot cooked meals delivered and tracked using the tracker thus far.

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- What else needs to be done to address malnutrition?
- **Convergent actions**, especially agriculture-nutrition convergence and strengthening of demand-side behaviour, can play a pivotal role in helping India tackle malnutrition.
 - Agriculture-nutrition convergence means creating agricultural policies which are based on a nutrition-sensitive approach. For e.g.: incentivizing the production of millets in an area that is rain-deficient results not only in nutritional well-being but also promotes sustainable agriculture.
- **Empower women farmer** – The majority of India's smallholder plots are worked upon by women farmers. Government should invest in nutrition-sensitive agricultural programmes. This can help women and their communities live healthier and more prosperous lives.

Conclusion

The undernutrition problem in India can be addressed through scientific innovation, traditional knowledge systems, community participation, digital technologies, and data-driven management.

19. Steps to Prevent Frequent Building Collapse in Mumbai

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS

Synopsis: Every Year Mumbai witnesses incidents of building collapse during monsoon. However, the steps taken are not adequate.

Introduction

In Mumbai, recently an unsafe multi-storeyed building has collapsed in a core area of the city. It resulted in the loss of the lives of at least 11 people.

The disaster is a repetition of incidents like that every year. People are inhabiting unsafe and illegal buildings, and civic authorities are failing to act in time, as usual.

- Mumbai needs a time-bound and accountable system of ensuring the safety of its housing stock.
- **The Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority identified 21 structures in Mumbai** as being extremely dangerous in this year's monsoon. It **advised 700 occupants to move to temporary accommodation**, while reconstruction takes place.
- However, the people who live there are reluctant as the alternative housing is far away from their education and work locations. This is a challenge that Maharashtra will have to address.

What should be done?

Coastal Maharashtra is vulnerable to extreme monsoon weather events. Such events are increasing in frequency due to the ongoing warming of the Arabian Sea. It should be treated as a crisis that will only get worse by changes to monsoon rainfall intensity over time. Thus following steps are required: –

- **Firstly**, scientists of the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology have suggested that accurate monsoon forecasting **would help governments prepare better to save lives** and agriculture.
- **Secondly, Mumbai needs to accelerate its repair and restoration program** for weak buildings and replace those that cannot be recovered.
- **Thirdly, the city urgently needs canals for huge volumes, for water to flow out.** A plan to create new urban wetlands where it is possible to store the rainfall is required.

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- **Fourthly, a revival of Mithi river is needed as it could offer some relief.** Its planned clean-up was delayed by the COVID-19 crisis. More such water bodies are required, and it will take a mass housing program to make life safer for the thousands in shacks.
- **Fifthly, a far-sighted plan to shift people from filthy buildings to modern ones is important on health grounds as well.** This process should begin with the most dangerous structures first.

20. FSSAI bans blending of mustard oil with other cooking oil

Source- Down To Earth

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

Synopsis – FSSAI has banned the blending of Mustard oil with other edibles oils. This step offers a ray of hope to farmers as well as to the public.

Introduction-

- With effect from June 8, Food regulator FSSAI ended practice to add other edible oil (like from palms, rice bran, etc.) to mustard oil.
- This would end the practice to add other edible oil to mustard oil. It may also eliminate the adulteration in mustard oil, especially for domestic consumption.
- The decision will benefit mustard growers as well as consumers.

What is dropsy epidemic and how it impacted the sale of Mustard oil?

- The government allowed blending in edible vegetable oil by a notification in 1990.
- In 1998, Delhi and other north Indian states witnessed the dropsy epidemic. It killed at least 60 people and 3,000 were hospitalized.
 - **Dropsy epidemic** – It is an acute non-infectious disease that causes swelling in the body due to the build-up of fluid in tissues. As per experts, disease resulted from the use of mustard oil.
- It resulted in massive campaigns against the consumption of the oil.
- The epidemic eventually impacted the sales of mustard oil.

Impact of allowing blending of edibles oil with mustard oil

- The sales of mustard oil dropped drastically.
- **Increases India's dependency on oil import over the last two decades-** The processing sector profited from the practice of blending since low-cost palm oil was blended up to 80% in mustard oil. As a result, mustard producers' income dried up, discouraging them from growing the crop.
- **The agricultural land for mustard farming hasn't increased** in the last 25 years. It has consistently been at 5.5-6 million hectares.
- **Lack of support from the government-** The new policies have not been effective, and farmers producing it are not supported either.
- The blending of mustard oil is also dangerous to health.

Way forward-

- The decision would encourage mustard growers to increase the sowing area under the mustard crop.
- The higher domestic production of mustard oil will lead to a fall in edible oil imports.

21. Need for Equity-focused Vaccination Plan in Vaccine Drive

Source: [The Hindu](#)

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

Synopsis:

To control the Covid-19 pandemic, India needs an equity-focused vaccination plan and a road map to provide equity and justice in vaccination.

Introduction:

According to **WHO's strategic advisory group of experts on immunisation**, prioritizing socio-demographic groups is essential for universal vaccination. So, an equity-focused vaccination plan is essential for controlling the pandemic.

What is an equity-focused vaccination plan?

Instead of focussing on vaccinating the public, the plan facilitates vaccinating vulnerable sections of society. This plan should include the following sectors of people to prevent disease and death among them. Such as, prioritizing the poor, religious minorities, socially disadvantaged castes, Adivasi communities, those living in remote areas, urban slums, and women.

- For example, the **Chhattisgarh government prioritised ration cardholders** in vaccination.
 - Under this, the Chhattisgarh government vaccinated high-risk persons such as the poor, people who live in multi-generation for the same house, larger household.
 - Further, these are the people who lack access to mobile phones and the Internet (Crucial for registering vaccines).

Challenges in providing equity-focused vaccination plan

1. **Lack of data on various parameters:** India's Covid-19 impact data does not provide the impact of virus infection among gender, caste, religious, and indigenous identities. Though crowd-sourced data is available, they too **lack geographic and other meta-data for tests conducted** in India.
2. **Vaccination through digital registration:** Digital technologies can create a digital divide among age, gender, economic dimensions, rural-urban differences. The government's CoWIN data also shows inequitable vaccination between tribal and non-tribal areas.
3. **Role of developed countries:** The developed countries do not always help other countries in vaccination drives. For example, During the 2009 H1N1 flu pandemic, wealthy countries secured more doses than they need to vaccinate every member of their population. Similar such behavior is also observed in the Covid-19 pandemic also. Poor countries in the world depend on the mercy of the European Union and the United States for vaccinating their population.

How to improve the equity-focused vaccination plan?

1. **Trying out vaccination camps or door-to-door campaigns:** Vulnerable sections of people often have **poor access and low levels of trust in the healthcare system**. So, the camps and campaigns can provide the following advantages. Such as,
 - **Older adults** can **get the vaccine** from their homes.
 - Essential workers will **not face any interruption in their service delivery**.
 - Similarly, the poor and vulnerable people will **not face any loss in daily wages**

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2. The government can try **women-only vaccine days** to ensure that women are getting equal importance in vaccination. Women are often neglected in vaccine drive for reasons such as, they are not the breadwinner of the family, historically marginalized stature of women, etc. But this might lead to gender inequities in vaccine uptake. This will only lead to more Covid-19 infection among women
 - For example, During the 1918 influenza pandemic in India, the mortality rate of women is higher than men.
3. The government has to **ensure vaccinating older people completely before opening vaccination to younger adults**.
4. In Indian villages, **Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) and Auxiliary Nurse-Midwives (ANMs)** have enough **experience and expertise** with pulse polio vaccination and newborn vaccination. So, the government has to utilize its expertise to vaccinate Indian villages.
5. **Local governments and municipalities should prioritise vaccines for historically marginalised persons** in the locality. Such as,
 - Adivasi's communities often live in remote and forested areas. The government should prioritize these regions.
 - Religious minority areas such as Muslim-dominated tier-3 cities and villages should also get priority on vaccination drive.
6. **At the global level:** WHO is consistently highlighted vaccine equity at global level. The [COVAX facility](#) can play a greater role in the equity distribution of vaccines around the world. The world leaders also need to follow the lead of WHO in vaccination and ensure global solidarity in this pandemic.

Conclusion:

The [central procurement](#) of vaccines and providing free vaccines are not alone enough to vaccinate the entire population. So, refocused rejuvenated local, national, and global vaccination campaigns alone can provide equity-focused vaccination in the world.

General Studies Paper - 3

General Studies - 3

1. Lab leak theory of Coronavirus needs credible investigation

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS3: Disaster and Disaster Management

Synopsis: The theory that Coronavirus could have been man-made from Wuhan Institute of Virology is increasing. So, adequate studies are necessary regarding the Lab leak theory of Coronavirus.

Background

- When the Covid-19 became a pandemic, China promoted the narrative that the virus had a natural origin, and it got spread from a wet market in Wuhan. This was done to avoid any scrutiny on researches being carried out in the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV).
- Soon, the idea of a **Lab leak theory of Coronavirus was discredited as a conspiracy theory** and most experts embraced the natural spread narrative.
- Even the findings of the [WHO on the origins of the SARS-CoV-2 virus](#) (coronavirus) dismissed the lab leak as “extremely unlikely”.
- However, recent developments point out the **possibility that coronavirus could have originated from a lab leak**, either intentionally or unintentionally.
- Recently, the U.S. President made an appeal to the U.S. intelligence community “to collect and analyse information so that, a definitive conclusion regarding the origin of the virus could be made.
- Further, the publication by Nicholas Wade, titled *the origin of COVID: Did people or nature open Pandora’s box at Wuhan?*” has laid out a strong case for a fuller investigation into this event.

Arguments in support of lab leak theory of Coronavirus

- First, advancement in biotechnology had made it possible to **genetically engineer existing pathogens** to make them more lethal and difficult to treat.
- Second, in 2019, the head of corona virus-related research at WIV lab, in an interview, talked about the **research** carried out involving the creation of novel, life-threatening and pandemic-creating viruses.
- Third, though The WIV operates a Biosafety level-4 (BSL-4) facility, many times the **deficient safety standards** had been reported by U.S. inspectors but no remedial measures were taken.
- Fourth, China’s **reluctance to share data**, covering up facts and impeding investigation raises suspicion.
- Fifth, the findings of WHO is also being discarded on the account that the **inquiry team had persons with vested interests** in the WIV experimentation.
- Sixth, there are instances when **Smallpox and other viruses have escaped** from secured laboratories before.

Suggestions

To prevent future pandemics or an event of Biowarfare, the 1972 **Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC)** needs to be strengthened by resolving the following drawbacks. Such as,

1. The convention has no systems to verify compliance with its prohibitions. So, the global countries have to come together to build such a system
2. The convention lacks enforcement mechanisms to penalize infringement of its provisions. So, the enforcement system has to be strengthened.

2. How can India tackle the third wave of COVID?

Source: [click here](#)

GS 3 – Health

Synopsis: To control the third wave, the decision-making on vaccines should be filled by a spirit of cooperative federalism and guided by scientists.

Introduction

Vaccines have become the focus of pandemic policy. [Effective vaccine policy](#) over the next few months will require huge efforts to boost vaccine supply. Distribution of existing supplies, helped by science, data and cooperation, can also play an important role.

What are the challenges India is likely to face?

India is going to face **major vaccine shortages** over the next 6-12 months. However, distributing the limited vaccine supply in a balanced, targeted way could help India save many lives and help **prevent a deadly third wave**.

- Vaccine supply and allocation are disordered currently. There are multiple decision-makers, rules are uncertain, messages are contradicting. Such conditions worsen the problem of a vaccine shortage.
- **Challenges in continuing the current policy:**
 - Serious shortage in vaccine availability.
 - Higher infections rates in India.
 - At the end-December 2020, the third national seroprevalence survey suggested that the actual infection rate was 21.5 per cent, that is over 1 in 5 people in India had been exposed to the virus by the end-2020. Thus, a **possible infection rate of over 50%** or above 700 million people in June.
- Advanced countries with successful vaccine programmes like Israel, the US and UK had adopted a similar strategy. They first vaccinated essential workers and then used age as parameters to decide vaccination in the initial stages.

What should India do to prevent the third wave?

[Centralization of the vaccine policy is a must](#). Vaccines should be **free for all** and the **costs must be borne by the Centre**. However, these measures may not be sufficient in the short run.

- **Focus on uninfected and vulnerable:** Latest research suggests that prior infection offers protection for some time. This immunity increases strongly with at least one dose of the vaccine. This gives the government **some time to focus on the uninfected and vulnerable as the immediate priority**.
- **Widespread testing:** Vaccinating the uninfected will require detailed data on infection rates, demography and vaccination status. **Widespread testing needs to be done**.
- A larger share of the limited **vaccines could be devoted to geographies that currently have less infection rates**.
- **Partial dosing or vaccine mixing** could also be explored.
- **Expert guidance:** A technical team of scientists, epidemiologists, statisticians etc should design a plan to decide on the most effective allocation of existing vaccines.
 - **The team should report to a group involving the prime minister and all the chief ministers.**

Decision-making on vaccines should be filled with a spirit of cooperative federalism and be guided by scientists. **Trust, transparency and technical reason** must guide this process.

Conclusion

The government should make efforts to increase the supply of vaccines. Once the supply of vaccines becomes sufficient, the need for allocation and prioritization will decline. Until then, it is vital to use data and science to reduce the magnitude and costs of vaccine shortages

3. Role of National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-Being on India's Biodiversity

Source: The Hindu

Gs3: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.

Synopsis: The pandemic has exposed the dysfunctional relationship between humanity and nature. The National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-Being will help India to restore that dysfunctional relationship.

Background

- Globally, there is a decline in biodiversity. Since 2000, 7% of intact forests have been lost.
- Further, Climate change and the ongoing pandemic will add additional stresses to our natural ecosystems.
- Protecting Biodiversity loss is critical for India's development. Effective implementation of The **National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-Being** can safeguard and reclaim India's Biodiversity

Significance of Biodiversity

India is home to nearly 8% of global biodiversity on just 2.3% of the global land area. India contains four of the 36 global biodiversity hotspots. The varied ecosystems across land, rivers, and oceans provide us with the following benefits

- Food security
- Enhanced public health security
- Protection from environmental disasters.
- Source of spiritual enrichment, catering to our physical and mental well-being.
- The economic value provided by ecosystem services.
- Thus, preserving biodiversity is directly relevant to the social, economic, and environmental well-being of our people

Significance of National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-Being (NMBHWB)

- The mission was approved in 2018 by the Prime Minister's Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) in consultation with MoEF&CC and other Ministries.
- The Mission will strengthen the science of restoring, conserving, and sustainably utilising India's natural heritage.
- It will enable **biodiversity as a key consideration** in all developmental programmes, particularly in agriculture, ecosystem services, health, bio-economy, and climate change mitigation.
- It will establish a citizen and policy-oriented biodiversity information system.
- The Mission will enhance capacity across all sectors for the realisation of India's national biodiversity targets and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).
- Furthermore, it will allow India to emerge as a leader in demonstrating the linkage between the conservation of natural assets and societal well-being.

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- Above all, the Mission offers a holistic framework, integrated approaches, and widespread societal participation.

Effective implementation of the mission will benefit India in many ways

- The Mission's comprehensive efforts will **empower India to restore, and even increase, our natural assets** by millions of crores of rupees.
- It will help in **rejuvenating agricultural production systems** and **increase rural incomes** from biodiversity-based agriculture.
- It will also result in **creating millions of green jobs** in restoration and nature tourism.
 - For instance, Restoration activities across India's degraded lands (1/3rd of our land area), alone could generate several million jobs.
- The Mission will **help India to meet its international commitments** under the new framework for the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**, and **UN SDGs** by facilitating poverty alleviation, justice and equity.
- It will facilitate the **creation of climate-resilient communities** by offering nature-based solutions to numerous environmental challenges.
- Further, it will aid in **conservation and ecosystem management** by gaining from the Scientific inputs related to geospatial informatics and policy.
- More importantly, it has the potential to **curtail future pandemics**. Since, the mission encompasses the "[One Health Programme](#)", integrating human health with animal, plant, soil and environmental health.

Way forward

To improve the results of the National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-Being further, India can implement the following suggestions. Such as,

- India needs to build an **extensive cadre of human resources** required to meet the enormous and complex environmental challenges of the 21st century.
- **Capacity building of professionals** in sustainability and biodiversity science.
- Investment in civil society outreach.
- Public engagement, in the exploration, restoration and conservation of biodiversity, is critical.

4. [Genomic sequencing in India needs to be scaled up](#)

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: [GS3 – Science and Technology- Developments and their Applications and Effects in Everyday Life.](#)

Synopsis: There is a need for rapidly expanding genomic sequencing and sharing related data in a timely & transparent manner. This will help in understanding the impact of new variants on transmissibility, severity and vaccine effectiveness.

Background

- An effective COVID-19 pandemic response requires tracking of emerging variants, conducting studies about their transmissibility, immune escape and its potential to cause severe disease.
- In this context, genomic sequencing becomes important. [Genomic sequencing](#) helps to track the emerging variants and use the evidence for timely actions.
- Unfortunately, Genomic sequencing in India is not being paid much attention.
- Despite, the establishment of [SARS-CoV2 Genomic Consortia, or INSACOG](#) the sequencing has remained very low.

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- **INSACOG:** It is a grouping of 10 National Laboratories involved in carrying out **genomic sequencing and analysis of circulating COVID-19 viruses**. It was established by the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**.

What is Genome Sequencing?

[Genome sequencing](#) is a process of determining the complete DNA/RNA sequence of an organism's genome. It has the potential to benefit mankind especially in healthcare, disease prevention etc.

Significance of Genome Sequencing

The data from genomic sequencing has **both policy and operational implications**.

- **First**, the genome sequencing of SARS CoV-2 conducted by premier research institutes provides very **useful insight into the behaviour and impact of [Delta variant](#)**. For instance, consider the recent findings in India based on genome sequencing.
 - Recently, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research – Institute of Genomics along with two other institutes, analysed nearly 3,600 genomic sequence samples from Delhi.
 - The genome sequencing of SARS CoV-2 led to the following findings,
 - The Delta variant had become the most circulating variant in Delhi and was found in nearly 60% of the samples analysed.
 - The Delta variant was found to be 50% more transmissible than the Alpha variant.
 - Also, the Delta variant was found to be associated with a high viral load and resulted in a higher proportion of breakthrough infection.
 - Based on their analysis, they were able to conclude that the Delta variant was responsible for the pandemic wave in Delhi.
- **Second, Genome sequencing was also helpful to find out the efficacy of the vaccine against different strains. For instance,**
 - Based on the findings from genome sequencing in U.K, The Public Health England reported that the effectiveness of a single dose of vaccine was lower against the Delta strain.

What needs to be done for an effective COVID-19 pandemic response?

- **First**, to scale up genomic sequencing in India, across all States, **adequate samples should be collected for national-level analysis** of collated genomic sequencing data on a regular basis and findings should be shared publicly.
- **Second**, the Indian government needs to **invest and support more scientific and operational [research on vaccine effectiveness](#)**. The data should be analysed on various stratifies such as age, gender and comorbid conditions, etc.
- **Third**, experts need to deliberate and find solutions to the issues posed by Covid-19 variants, such as immune escape and reduced vaccine effectiveness against the Delta variant.
- The only assured way to fight the pandemic is to use scientific evidence to decide policies, modify strategies and take corrective actions. In this regard, increasing genomic sequencing is not a choice but an absolute essential.

4. India's efforts to achieve SDGs

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

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

Synopsis- The idea for Sustainable development aims to maintain progressive development and at the same time retaining sustainability, catastrophe risk resilience, and community building at its heart. But, India's efforts to achieve SDGs is commendable.

Introduction

- [World Environment Day \(WED\)](#) is celebrated on **June 5**, every year, to encourage awareness and environmental protection.
- Also, one of the goals of the UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development is to create a **balance between sustainable development and environmental conservation**.
- **The theme for WED 2021-** Ecosystem Restoration
 - **Focus on resetting nature** –A global mission to revive billions of hectares, from forests to farmlands, from the top of mountains to the depth of the sea.
 - The theme for this year in India – **Promotion of biofuels for a better environment**'.
- The **UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021 – 2030** was also launched

Also read: [SDG India Index by NITI Aayog](#)

India's efforts to achieve SDGs throughout the last seven years

- [Swachh Bharat Mission \(Urban\)](#)
 - The movement focuses on achieving an open-defecation-free India, building solid waste management capacity and bringing about behavioural change.
 - By 2022, the mission is expected to have reduced GHG emissions 17.42 million tonnes of carbon
- [Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana](#)
 - The mission is to ensure the objective basic infrastructure services relating to water supply and management, energy efficiency and increased green spaces have been part of the goal in 500 target cities.
 - By 2022, the mission is expected to have reduced GHG emissions by 48.52 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent.
- [Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation \(AMRUT\)](#)
 - The mission focused on new construction technologies that are innovative, environmentally friendly and disaster-resilient.
 - By 2022, the mission is expected to have reduced GHG emissions by 12 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent.
- [Smart Cities Mission](#)
 - The mission is about the technological advancements of cities to improve governance, sustainability and disaster risk resilience.
 - The objective is to improve city administration, sustainability, and catastrophe risk resistance through technological improvements.
 - In urban areas, smart solutions are being adopted to increase energy efficiency and non-motorized transportation capacity.
 - By 2022, the mission is expected to have reduced GHG emissions by 4.93 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent.
- **Metro Neo, the mass rapid transit system** for providing low-cost, energy-efficient and eco-friendly urban transport solutions for tier 2 and tier 3 cities.
 - The system is expected to mitigate around 21.58 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent. GHG from 2015-2022.

Technological democratization, sustainable infrastructure development, and behavioural change will help us preserve our environment, restore ecosystems and mitigate the risks posed by climate change in the coming decade. India's efforts to achieve SDGs will aid India in mitigating Climate change.

5. Special treatment under GST for few states is a bad idea

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: **GS3 – Indian Economy**

Synopsis: The issue of special allowances under [GST on Covid-19 relief products](#) is being projected as a Centre versus states issue.

Introduction

This is an attempt to gain political benefit on an issue of human and national importance. The structure and design of GST are being questioned. Already settled debates on the decision-making process in the GST Council are sought to be re-opened.

- The structure and design of GST and its basic features were unanimously adopted and endorsed by Parliament and each of the state legislature. All sections and clauses were discussed and recommended by the GST Council after complete consent.
- No state was given special privilege during consensus building. This shows maturity in the debates of the Council. Having come so far, any attempt to reopen some of the fundamental issues should be criticized.

What is GST?

The Goods and Services Tax in India is a comprehensive, multi-stage, destination-based value-added indirect tax. It has replaced many central and state indirect taxes in India such as excise duty, VAT, services tax, etc.

GST is a single tax on the supply of goods and services

It is considered to be a destination-based tax as it is applied to goods and services at the place where final/actual consumption happens

GST is applied to all goods other than crude petroleum, motor spirit, diesel, aviation turbine fuel and natural gas and alcohol for human consumption

There are four slabs for taxes for both goods and services- 5%, 12%, 18% and 28%. Although GST aimed at levying a uniform tax rate on all products and services, four different tax slabs were introduced because daily necessities could not be subject to the same rate as luxury items.

'Dual' GST Model:

Central GST (CGST) levied by the Centre

State GST (SGST) levied by State

Integrated GST (IGST) –levied by Central Government on inter-State supply of goods and services.

UTGST – Union territory GST, collected by union territory government

Also read: [GST Compensation issue](#)

Special treatment under GST is a bad idea

Arguing for any special treatment to states under GST whose contribution to the GST pool is higher is a dangerous idea. This could lead to arguments such as special rights for bigger taxpayers, unequal voting rights in elections etc.

- **Firstly, it is not right to say that the GST collected in a state represents the revenue of that particular state.** The tax deposited by a taxpayer in a state under the GST mechanism is a function of the value of supplies made by such taxpayer. Most of such **values are of an inter-state nature.**

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- Most supplies made from any producing state are consumed elsewhere and the revenue in such a situation **naturally and rightfully adds to the destination state.**
- **Secondly, it is false to say that under GST; most of the profits is collected by the Union and is given to the states on the basis of some formula.** The major chunk of IGST revenue that is given to any state is directly related to the returns filed in that state.
 - This payment also **comprises tax on supplies “destined” to that state,** as shown in the returns of such suppliers.
- **Thirdly, the reason why some states have a higher revenue collection is because such states enjoy locational or geographical advantages.** They are coastal areas and hugely suited to the needs of trade and distribution as also manufacturing.
 - However, such states have a **disadvantage in the account of the lower availability of certain vital minerals like coal and iron ore.** This was undone by the principle of cargo equalization implemented in the years following Independence.
- **Fourthly, the argument of unequal transfers of central receipts is also untrue.** Such transfers are made for improving horizontal fiscal imbalances in a federation.

Also read: [Analysis of GST regime in India](#)

The conclusion

The [principle of “one state one vote”](#) is intact and is also the norm in every civilized discourse. Even in the UN, every country has one vote. If this principle is questioned, it would lead to the undoing of the force that binds this great country. Special treatment under GST would only hamper the true spirit of cooperative federalism.