

# UPSC EPFO Monthly Current Affairs June 2020

## Polity and Governance

### **"PM CARES" is not a public authority under RTI Act: PMO**

#### **Why in the news?**

- The **Prime Minister's Office (PMO)** has recently refused to disclose details on the creation and operation of the **PM CARES Fund**, telling a **Right to Information** applicant that the fund is "**not a public authority**" under the **ambit of the RTI Act, 2005**.
- **PM CARES Fund** is not a **Public Authority** under the purview of **Section 2(h) of the RTI Act, 2005**.
- However, **relevant information** in respect of **PM CARES Fund** may be seen on the **Website "pmcares.gov.in"**.



#### **What constitutes Public Authority under the RTI act, 2005?**

- The relevant section of the Act defines a "**public authority**" as "any authority or body or institution of self-government established or constituted –  
(a) by or **under the Constitution**  
(b) by any other **law made by Parliament**  
(c) by any other **law made by State Legislature**  
(d) by a notification issued or order **made by the appropriate Government** – and includes any
  - body owned, controlled or substantially financed.
  - Non-Government Organisation mainly financed, directly or indirectly by funds provided by the appropriate Government.

#### **Is PMNRF subject to the RTI act?**

- There is also **ambiguity regarding whether the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF)** is subject to the **RTI Act of 2005**.
- The **Central Information Commission** directed **PMNRF** to disclose information in 2008.
- However, a **division bench of the Delhi High Court** gave a split opinion on the question of whether **PMNRF is a public authority under the Act**.

### **AP High Court orders reinstatement of "Andhra Pradesh State Election Commissioner"**

#### **Why in the news?**

- Recently the **Andhra Pradesh government**, the **High Court struck down AP Panchayat Raj (Second Amendment) Ordinance (No.5 of 2020)** through which it cut short the term of the **State Election Commissioner (SEC) from five to three years**.

- It will result in the expulsion of **Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar** from that post as a **State Election Commissioner**.



### About State Election Commissioner

#### a. Constitutional provision

- The **Article 243K** provides for constituting a **State Election Commission** that will consist of a **State Election Commissioner**.
- It was formed under the **Articles 243-K and 243-ZA** of **Constitution of India**.
- It conducts the **Rural and Urban Local Body Elections** in the **Indian state of Andhra Pradesh**.
- Under the Constitution, the **establishment of local self-government institutions is the responsibility of the states** (entry 5, List II, Seventh Schedule).

#### b. Appointment

- As per **article 243(C3)** the **Governor**, when so requested by the **State Election Commission**, makes available to the **State Election Commission** such staff as may be **necessary for the discharge of the functions** conferred.

#### c. Tenure

- **Conditions of service and tenure** of office of the State Election Commissioner shall be such as the **Governor may by rule determine**.

#### d. Safeguards

- State Election Commissioner **shall not be removed from his office except in the like manner and on the like ground as a Judge of a High Court**.

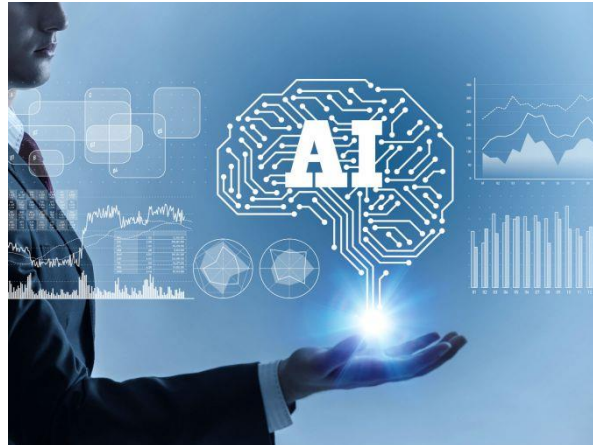
### Note:

- A **judge may be removed from office by the President** through a **motion adopted by Parliament** on the grounds of **'proven misbehaviour or incapacity'**.

### National AI Portal of India

#### Why in the news?

- Recently the **Union Minister for Electronics and IT** has launched **India's national Artificial Intelligence Portal** called **www.ai.gov.in**.



### About the Portal

- It has been jointly developed by the **Ministry of Electronics and IT and IT Industry**.
- **National e-Governance Division of Ministry of Electronics and IT and NASSCOM** from the **IT industry** will jointly run this portal.

### Functions

- This portal shall work as a **one-stop digital platform for AI-related developments in India**, sharing of resources such as **articles, startups, investment funds in AI, resources, companies and educational institutions** related to AI in India.
- The portal will also share **documents, case studies, research reports** etc. It has a section about **learning and new job roles** related to AI.

### Responsible AI for Youth program

- The **Minister for Electronics & Information Technology, Communications and Law & Justice, Ravi Shankar Prasad** has launched a **National Program for the youth, “Responsible AI for Youth”**.

### About the Responsible AI for Youth

- The Program has been created and launched by the **National e-Governance Division, Ministry of Electronics & IT** in collaboration with **Intel India**, with support from **Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSE&L)**, and **Ministry of Human Resource Development**.
- The **National Programme** is open to students of **classes 8 - 12** from **Central and State government-run schools** (including KVS, NVS, JNV) from **across the country - all 28 States and 8 Union Territories**.

### Aim of the Program

- This program aims to **give the young students of our country a platform and empower** them with appropriate **new age tech mindset**, relevant **AI skill-sets and access** to required **AI tool-sets** to make them **digitally ready for the future**.
- It will empower the youth to **become AI-ready and help reduce the skill gap** while **enabling youth to create meaningful social impact** solutions.
- The **Program is designed to reach out to students from Government schools pan India** and provide them with an **opportunity to become part of the skilled workforce** inclusively.

### Implemented in Phase wise

- The **Program** will be implemented in a **phase-wise manner**, and in its first phase, each of the **State Education Department** will **nominate ten teachers** as per the eligibility criteria. Teachers may also **self-nominate themselves** by fulfilling the eligibility criteria.



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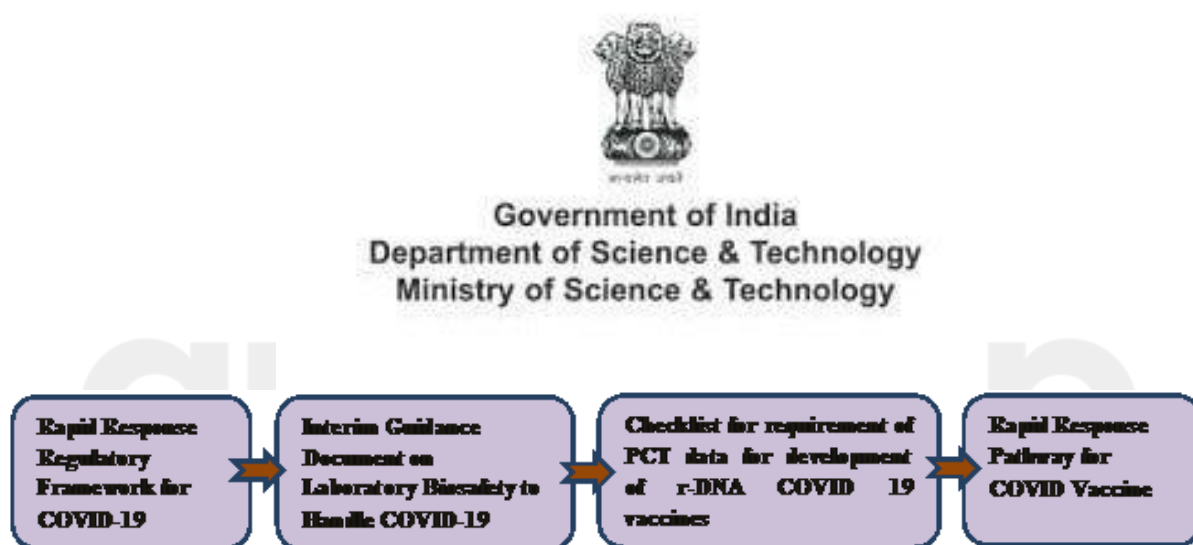


- These teachers will be **provided orientation sessions** aimed to help them understand the premise and identify 25-50 potential students for the Program.
- The **identified students** will attend **online training sessions on AI and understand how to identify social impact ideas/projects** that may be **created using AI and submit their ideas through a 60 seconds video explaining** a proposed AI-enabled solution.

### **A Rapid Response Regulatory enabling mechanism for COVID 19**

#### **Why is in the news?**

- The **Department of Biotechnology** has taken **several proactive measures to streamline the biosafety regulation** and to **facilitate researchers and industries** which are undertaking **research and development in Recombinant DNA Technology and Hazardous Microorganisms**.



#### **Initiatives taken by DBT:**

##### **a. Operationalization of Indian Biosafety Knowledge Portal.**

- The **Indian Knowledge Biosafety Portal** launched in **May 2019** was made **fully operationalized**, and now the **Department is receiving all new applications** through online portal only.
- This has made the **whole process transparent and time-bound**.

##### **b. Revised Simplified Guidelines on Import, Export and Exchange of GE Organisms and Product**

- The **Department issued the Revised Guidelines** in **January 2020** in which **Institutional Biosafety Committee** has been delegated authority to take decisions on applications of import-export and exchange of GE organisms and product thereof for R&D purpose for RG1 and RG2 items.

##### **c. Facilitation of Research and Development on COVID-19**

DBT has issued following guidelines, orders and checklist on COVID

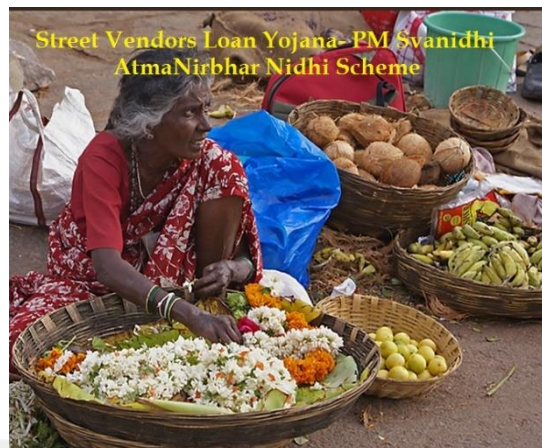
- **Rapid Response Regulatory Framework for COVID-19** to deal with an application for development of vaccines, diagnostics, prophylactics and therapeutics has been notified on 20.03.2020
- **DBT notified “Interim Guidance Document on Laboratory Biosafety to Handle COVID-19 Specimens”** on 08.04.2020.

- IBSCs are allowed to **conduct their meeting** through video conferencing up to 30th June 2020.
- Rapid response regulatory framework for the **development of recombinant DNA COVID 19 vaccine** was issued on 26.05.2020.

### **PM SVANidhi**

#### **Why in the news?**

- The **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA)** has recently launched a **Special Micro-Credit Facility Scheme - PM SVANidhi - PM Street Vendor's Atma Nirbhar Nidhi**, for providing **affordable loans to street vendors**.



#### **About PM SVANidhi**

- In this scheme, a **vendor can avail a working capital loan of up to Rs. 10,000**, which is **repayable in monthly instalments** in the **tenure of one year**.
- The **scheme provides for escalation of the credit limit** on **timely/ early repayment of the loan** to **help the vendor achieve his ambition of going up** on the economic ladder.

#### **This scheme is unique due to several reasons:**

##### **a. A historic first:**

- This is for the **first time in India's history** that **street vendor's from peri-urban/ rural areas** have become **beneficiaries of an urban livelihood programme**.
- The vendors can avail a **working capital loan of up to Rs. 10,000**, which is **repayable in monthly instalments** in the **tenure of one year**.
- **On timely/ early repayment of the loan**, an **interest subsidy @ 7% per annum** will be **credited to the bank accounts of beneficiaries** through **Direct Benefit Transfer** on a **six-monthly basis**. There will be **no penalty on early repayment of the loan**.
- It is for the first time that **MFIs/ NBFCs/ SHG Banks** have been allowed in a **scheme for the urban poor** due to their **ground-level presence and proximity to the urban poor, including the street vendors**.

##### **b. Encouraging digital transactions:**

- The scheme **incentivizes digital transactions** by the **street vendors through monthly cashback**.

##### **c. Focus on capacity building:**

- **MoHUA in collaboration with State Governments, State Missions of DAY-NULM, ULBs, SIDBI, CGTMSE, NPCI and Digital Payment Aggregators** will

- also launch a **capacity building and financial literacy programme** of all the **stakeholders and IEC activities** throughout the country.
- It will be **started during June** and loaning will **commence in July**.

### **Finance Commission holds a meeting on issues Related to Air Quality in Urban Areas**

#### **Why in the news?**

- The **15th Finance Commission** has recently **held a meeting with the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** on the **issues relating to Air Quality (AQ)** especially that in **Urban Areas**.



#### **What is unique in this meeting?**

- It may be recalled that the **XVFC Report 2020-2021** was the first time that **any Commission has given attention to air quality (AQ)** as a **major focus**.
- The **Finance Commission** had not only **recommended grants for 2020-21** and **provided a road map** for its **award period**.
- The **Commission is currently deliberating** the recommendations to be made for the **next five years from 2021-22 to 2025-26**.
- It needs to formulate suitable provisions for continuing the grants** for these **cities/UAs** for **sustainably improving ambient air quality**.

#### **The objective of the meeting**

- The **objective of the meeting focused** was to discuss the status of the **implementation of the FC's recommendations for 2020-21** for **administering the grants to improve AQ in million-plus cities**.
- It also to **seek inputs from the Ministry** on what should be considered for the **next five years from 2021 to 2026**.

#### **Highlights**

##### **a. Regarding reliable data on AQ measurement**

It was explained that there is a **network of stations** covering a **wide range of cities and towns** which were set up under the **National Control of Air**.

##### **b. Pollution (NACP) to meet its objectives.**

- Through a **network of AQI, monitoring stations** are in place; there is a **need for strengthening and expanding** these along with the geographical area to cover the air-shed areas to **make it more robust and accurate**.
- The **Ministry has begun** this work earlier as **part of the roll-out of NACP** and various **think-tanks like IITs, IIMs and NITs** have been made local partners for **different cities/towns**.
- As the **problem of AQ is mostly not a localized phenomenon** and is **influenced by many factors** beyond the **control of a particular region**,

the **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** is now focusing on **air-shed management approach**.

- **Construction & Demolition Waste Management** was a **priority of the Government** and that the Government would seek the **support of the Commission for the same**.

**c. About the 15th Finance Commission**

- It was constituted by the **President of India** in **November 2017**, under the **chairmanship of NK Singh**.
- Its **recommendations will cover a period of five years** from **April 2020 to March 2025**.

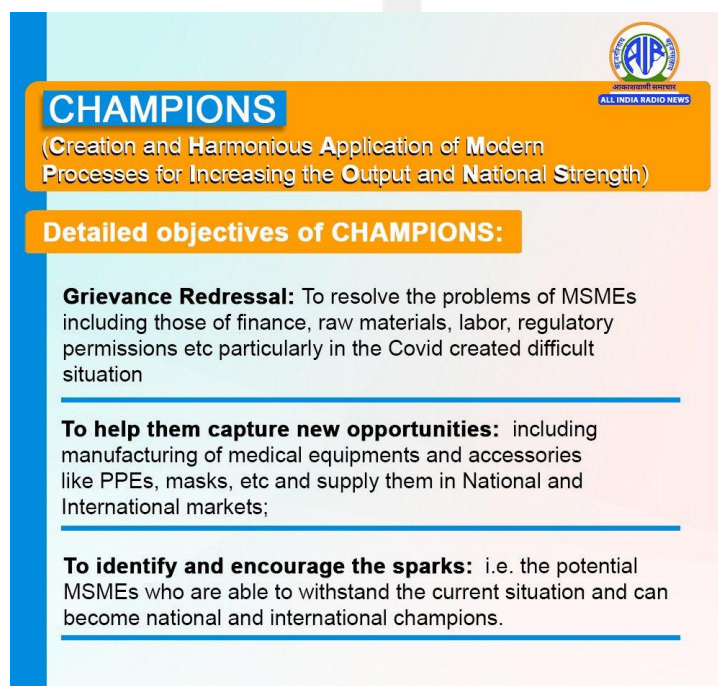
**CHAMPIONS: Technology Platform to empower MSMEs**

Why is in the news?

- **Prime Minister** has recently **launched the technology platform CHAMPIONS** which stands for **Creation and Harmonious Application of Modern Processes for Increasing the Output and National Strength**.

About CHAMPIONS

- The **portal is basically for making the smaller units big** by solving their **grievances, encouraging, supporting, helping and handholding**.
- It is a **real one-stop-shop solution** of **MSME Ministry**.
- This **ICT based system** is set up to **help the MSMEs in present difficult situations** and also to **handhold them to become national and international champions**.



The infographic features a blue and orange color scheme. At the top right is the All India Radio News logo. The main title 'CHAMPIONS' is in a blue box, followed by its full name in parentheses. Below this, a section titled 'Detailed objectives of CHAMPIONS:' lists three points: 'Grievance Redressal' (resolving MSME problems like finance and labor), 'To help them capture new opportunities' (manufacturing medical equipment like PPEs and masks), and 'To identify and encourage the sparks' (identifying resilient MSMEs).

**Objectives of CHAMPIONS:**

- **Grievance Redressal:** It helps to resolve the problems of MSMEs including those of **finance, raw materials, labour, regulatory permissions** etc. particularly in the Covid created a difficult situation.
- It is a **real one-stop-shop solution** of **MSME Ministry** to help them capture new opportunities.
- a) Including **manufacturing of medical equipments and accessories** like PPEs, masks, etc. and supply them in National and International markets.



- b) **To identify and encourage the sparks:** That is the **potential MSMEs** who can **withstand the current situation** and can **become national and international champions**.
- As the name suggests, the **portal is basically for making the smaller units big** by **solving their grievances, encouraging, supporting, helping and handholding**.

### **Eggshell rule**

#### **Why is in the news?**

- Recently the **former chairman of the Railway Claims Tribunal (RCT)** has said that **families of several migrants who died on board the Shramik Specials** can be given **compensation under the “eggshell principle”**.
- Under the **Railway Act**, any **passenger dying or getting injured** in what is called an **“untoward incident”** may seek compensation.
- There is a **principle called the eggshell rule**, in which a person who is **already fragile comes by and an untoward incident** (happens).



#### **Background of Eggshell Principle**

- In **2018 judgment of the RCT** that **awarded Rs 8 lakh** to the **kin of a passenger who died after falling off the upper berth of a train**, Justice Kannan (Former RCT chairman) said –  
While the death of a passenger due to illness alone is not a ground for compensation, the “eggshell” principle in the law allows for such compensation.
- In the 2018 case, the Railways had contended that the victim had died because he had a pre-existing illness – similar to the position it has taken in the case of the deaths on board the Shramik Special trains, however, later compensation was paid.

#### **About Railway Claims Tribunal**

- The **Railway Claims Tribunal Act, 1987** was enacted to **provide speedy disposal of claims** against the **Railway Administration**.
- The **Railway Claims Tribunal principal bench** situated at Delhi.
- It also includes the **establishment of a Railway Claims Tribunal** for inquiring into and determining -
- **claims against a Railway Administration** for loss, destruction, damage, deterioration or non-delivery of animals or goods entrusted to it, to be carried by railway or
- the **refund of fares or freight** or for **compensation for death or injury** to passengers occurring as a result of railway accidents or untoward incidents and
- **matters connected in addition to that** or incidental to that.

### **Electronics incentive schemes**

#### **Why is in the news?**



- **Telecom and IT Minister** has recently launched **three incentive schemes** with a **total outlay of about ₹48,000 crores** to boost **large-scale manufacturing** of electronics in the country.
- These three schemes are -
  - a. **Production Linked Incentive Component Manufacturing Scheme**
  - b. **Modified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters**



#### **About Production Linked Incentive**

- Under the **Production Linked Incentive (PLI)**, which is **targeted at mobile phone manufacturing and specified electronic components**, the government initially plans to **incentivize 10 firms - five global and five locals**.

#### **About Scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electronic Components and Semiconductors (SPECS)**

- It shall **provide a financial incentive of 25% on capital expenditure for the identified list of electronic goods**.
- These **electronic goods** are **electronic components, semiconductor/display fabrication units, Assembly, Test, Marking and Packaging (ATMP) units, specialized sub-assemblies and capital goods for manufacture of aforesaid goods**.

#### **About Modified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC 2.0) Scheme**

- This scheme will **provide support for the creation of world-class infrastructure** along with **common facilities and amenities**, including **Ready Built Factory (RBF) sheds / Plug and Play facilities** for attracting **major global electronics manufacturers**, along with their supply chains.

#### **Cabinet Initiatives to transform the agriculture sector**

##### **Why in the news?**

- The **Union Cabinet** has recently taken **several landmarks and historic decisions** which will go a long way in **helping India's farmers** while also **transforming the agriculture sector**.



### Historic Amendment to Essential Commodities Act

- The **Cabinet approved a historic amendment** to the **Essential Commodities Act**, which is a visionary step towards **the transformation of agriculture and raising farmers' income**.

### Problems faced by the Farmers

- While **India has become surplus in most agri-commodities**, farmers have been unable to get better prices **due to lack of investment in cold storage, warehouses, processing and export as the entrepreneurial spirit** get dampened due to **hanging sword of Essential Commodities Act**.
- **Farmers suffer huge losses** when there are **bumper harvests, especially of perishable commodities**.
- With **adequate processing facilities**, much of this wastage can be reduced.

### Benefits

- With the **Amendment to Essential Commodities Act**, **commodities like cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes** will be removed from the list of essential commodities.
- This will **eliminate fears of private investors of excessive regulatory interference** in their **business operations**.
- The **freedom to produce, hold, move, distribute and supply** will lead to **harnessing of economies of scale and attract private sector/foreign direct investment** into the agriculture sector.
- It will help **drive up investment** in cold storages and **modernization of the food supply chain**.

### Safeguarding interest of consumers

- The Government, **while liberalizing the regulatory environment**, has also ensured that **the interests of consumers are safeguarded**.
- It has been provided in the **Amendment**, that in situations such as war, **famine, extraordinary price rise and natural calamity**, such **agricultural foodstuff can be regulated**.
- However, the **installed capacity of a value chain participant and the export demand of an exporter** will remain **exempted from such stock limit imposition** to ensure that **investments in agriculture** are not discouraged.
- The **Amendment announced** will help both **farmers and consumers** while bringing in **price stability**.
- It will **create a competitive market environment** and also prevent **wastage of agri-produce** that **happens due to lack of storage facilities**.

### Farming Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020'

#### Why is in the news?

- Recently **cabinet approved 'The Farming Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020'** for **Barrier-free trade in agriculture produce**.



### Background

- **Farmers in India** presently **suffer from various restrictions** in marketing their produce.
- There are **restrictions** for farmers in **selling agri-produce** outside the **notified APMC market yards**.
- The farmers are also **restricted to sell the produce** only to **registered licensees of the State Governments**.

### Benefits

- The **Ordinance** will create an ecosystem where the farmers and traders will **enjoy the freedom of choice** of sale and purchase of agri-produce.
- It will also **promote barrier-free inter-state and intra-state trade and commerce** outside the **physical premises of markets** notified under **State Agricultural Produce Marketing legislations**.
- This is a **historic step in unlocking the vastly regulated agriculture markets** in the country.
- It will **open more choices** for the farmer, **reduce marketing costs** for the farmers and **help them in getting better prices**.
- It will also help **farmers of regions with surplus produce** to get **better prices and consumers of regions with shortages, lower costs**.
- The **Ordinance also proposes electronic trading** in transaction platform for **ensuring a seamless trade electronically**.
- The **farmers will not be charged any cess or levy** for sale of their products under this Act.
- Further, there will be a **separate dispute resolution mechanism** for the farmers.

### One India, One Agriculture Market

- The **Ordinance aims at creating additional trading opportunities** outside the APMC market yards to help **farmers get remunerative prices due to additional competition**.
- This will supplement the **existing MSP procurement system**, which is **providing stable income to farmers**.
- It will undoubtedly pave the way for creating '**One India, One Agriculture Market**' and will lay the **foundation for ensuring golden harvests** for our **hard-working farmers**.

Topic- GS Paper 2–Governance

Source- PIB



## **SWADES- Skilled Workers Arrival Database for Employment Support**

### **Why is in the news?**

- **Union Government** has recently launched a **new initiative SWADES- Skilled Workers Arrival Database for Employment Support** to conduct a **skill mapping exercise** of the returning citizens under the **Vande Bharat Mission**.

### **About SWADES**

- This is a **joint initiative of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Civil Aviation Ministry and External Affairs Ministry**.



### **Aims**

- It aims to **create a database of qualified citizens** based on their **skillsets and experience** to **tap into and fulfil the demand of Indian and foreign companies**.
- The **collected information** will be **shared with the companies** for **suitable placement opportunities** in the country.
- The **returning citizens** are required to fill up an **online SWADES Skills Card**.
- The data collected through **SWADES Skill Card** will help the citizens with **job prospects and bridge the demand-supply gap**.

**Topic- GS Paper 2–Governance**

**Source- PIB**

## **Essential Commodities Act**

### **Why is in the news?**

- The **Union Cabinet** has recently **approved an ordinance** to **amend the Essential Commodities Act, 1955**, to **deregulate food items** such as **cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes**.



### **New amendments in the Essential Commodities Act 1955**

- The ordinance has introduced a new **subsection (1A) in Section 3 of The Essential Commodities Act, 1955.**
- This **amended law provides a mechanism** for the “**regulation**” of **agricultural foodstuffs**, namely cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, potato and supplies under extraordinary circumstances, which include extraordinary price rise, war, famine, and natural calamity of a severe nature.

### **Definition of an ‘essential commodity’**

- There is **no specific definition of essential commodities** in the **Essential Commodity Act.**
- **Section 2(A)** of the Act states that an “**essential commodity**” means a commodity specified in the “**Schedule**” of this Act.
- The Act gives powers to the central government to add or remove a **commodity in the “Schedule.”**
- The Centre, if it is satisfied that it is **necessary to do so in the public interest**, can notify an item as **essential, in consultation with state governments.**
- At present, the “**Schedule**” contains **nine commodities** – drugs; fertilisers, whether inorganic, organic or mixed; foodstuffs, including edible oils; hank yarn made wholly from cotton; petroleum and petroleum products; raw jute and jute textiles; seeds of food-crops and seeds of fruits and vegetables, seeds of cattle fodder, jute seed, cottonseed; face masks; and hand sanitisers.

### **Recently added items in the schedule**

- The latest items added to this **schedule are face masks and hand sanitisers**, which were declared **essential commodities with effect from March 13, 2020**, in the wake of Covid-19 outbreak.

### **Impact**

- By **declaring a commodity as essential**, the government can **control the production**, supply, and **distribution of that commodity**, and impose a stock limit.

### **The Urban Learning Internship Program (TULIP)**

#### **Why is in the news?**

- **Ministry of Human Resource Development** and **All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)** has jointly launched an **online portal for ‘The Urban Learning Internship Program (TULIP)’.**



### About the TULIP

- TULIP has been conceived under the **Budget 2020-21** announcements by the **Finance Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman** under the theme '**Aspirational India**'.
- It is a **program for providing internship opportunities** to fresh graduates in all **Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and Smart Cities across the country**.
- The **digital platform powering TULIP enables discovery**, engagement, aggregation, amplification, and transparency.
- The **platform is customizable** and provides **immense flexibility to ULBs/ Smart Cities** and interns to **allow convenient access**.
- **Security features** have been thoroughly **tested**, and the **platform** has been made scalable, federated, and transparent by design.

### Eligibility

- Any graduate who have completed **B. Tech, B. Arch, B. Plan, BSc** etc. can apply within **18 months from date of its graduation**.

### Benefits

- This will not **only help the interns** get hands-on experience in the **vast activities of urban local bodies** but will also help to **create a resource upon which the industry can draw quickly for hiring**.

### Bodies involved

- AICTE shall anchor technical support for the platform and the programmatic **non-technical support** shall be anchored by **Minister of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA) over five years**.

### Note:

- A **Steering Committee** under the **Chairmanship of Secretary, MoHUA** will review the progress of the **program on a periodical basis**.

**Topic- GS Paper 2–Governance**

**Source- PIB**

### PM-KUSUM Scheme

#### Why is in the news?

- Recently, the **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy** has issued an alert warning for **people against fraudulent websites** claiming to be registration portals for **Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan (PM-KUSUM) Scheme**.



### About PM-KUSUM Scheme

- It is for **farmers for installation of solar pumps and grid-connected solar** and other **renewable power plants** in the country.
- The **aim of the scheme** to add solar and other renewable capacities of **25,750 MW by 2022**.

### The scheme has three components:

- Component-A:** Installation of 10 GW of renewable energy power plants of individual plant capacity up to 2 MW on barren and fallow land.
- Component-B:** Installation of 17.5 lakh standalone solar pumps of capacity up to 7.5 HP.
- Component-C:** Solarization of 10 lakh existing grid-connected agricultural pumps of pump capacity up to 7.5 HP.

### Benefit

- It will **open a stable and continuous source of income** to the **rural landowners** for 25 years by utilization of their dry/uncultivable land.

### Taskforce constituted to lowering Maternal Mortality Rate

#### Why in the news?

- **Ministry of Women and Child Development** has recently constituted a task force which is headed by **Jaya Jaitly**.



**Ministry of Women and  
Child Development**

#### More about the Taskforce

- **Union Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman** in her **Budget Speech for 2020-21** has announced to set up a **task force for women**.
- The **task force** will examine the **issues related to Infant**
  - a. Mortality Rate
  - b. Maternal Mortality Rate

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- c. Total Fertility Rate
- d. Sex Ratio at Birth
- e. Child Sex Ratio (CSR)
- f. any other matters pertaining to health and nutrition.
- It will also **suggest measures** for **promoting higher education** among women.

### Related terms

#### Maternal Mortality Rate

- It is the **annual number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births**.
- **Maternal mortality** is the **death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy**.
- It is a **key performance indicator for efforts to improve the health and safety of mothers** before, during, and after childbirth.
- **MMR of India is 122 according to the data of 2015-2017.**

#### Infant Mortality Rate

- It is defined as the **‘number of deaths of children under the age of 1 year per 1000 live births for a given year.’**
- **India’s IMR is 33 deaths per 1,000 live births**, according to the data of 2017.

#### Total Fertility Rate

- The **number of children** who would be **born per woman (or per 1,000 women)** if she/they were to pass through the **childbearing years taking children** according to a **current schedule of age-specific fertility rates**.
- **India’s TFR is 2.24 births per woman.**

#### Sex Ratio at Birth

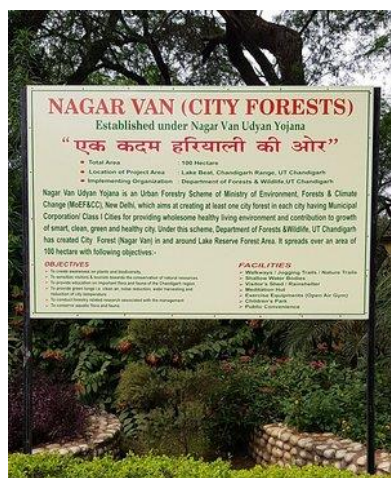
- It is defined as the **number of male births per female births**.
- **India’s Sex Ratio at birth is 919.**

#### Child Sex Ratio

- In India, the **child sex ratio** is defined as the **number of females per thousand males in the age group 0–6 years in a human population**.

### Nagar Van scheme

- On **World Environment Day**, the government has **announced the implementation of the Nagar van scheme**.
- The **aim of the scheme to increase forest cover** in urban areas by **developing 200 Urban Forests** across the **country in the next five years**.
- It will be **implemented with people’s participation and collaboration** between the **Forest Department, Municipal bodies, NGOs and corporates**.



### Funding

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- It will be funded in part by the **Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act (CAMPA), 2016 funds.**

#### **About Warje Urban Forest or Smriti Van**

- It is a **Public-Private Partnership project of Pune** that has been successful in **converting 16.8 hectares of barren Warje hill** into green forests.
- **Warje Hill** was a **barren land** under the **Maharashtra Forest Department.**

#### **Airborne Rescue Pod for Isolated Transportation (ARPIT)**

##### **Why in the news?**

- Recently the **Indian Air Force** has **designed, developed and manufactured** an **Airborne Rescue Pod for Isolated Transportation (ARPIT).**



#### **About the Airborne Rescue Pod for Isolated Transportation**

- This pod will be utilized for the **evacuation of critical patients with infectious diseases, including COVID-19** from **high altitude area, isolated and remote places.**
- The **system** has been **developed as a lightweight isolation system** made from **aviation certified material.**
- The **ARPIT Design requirements** have been **evolved and are based on the guidelines issued by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers (NABH) and Centre for Disease Control (CDC), USA.**

#### **Annual Refresher Programme In Teaching (ARPIT).**

- **Annual Refresher Programme In Teaching (ARPIT)** is launched by **Human Resource Development (HRD)** in 2018.
- It is an **initiative for online professional development of 15 lakh higher education faculty** using the **Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) platform SWAYAM.**

#### **About Massive Open Online Course**

- **MOOC** is a **free Web-based distance learning program** that is **designed for the participation of large numbers of geographically dispersed students.**

#### **About SWAYAM Portal**

- **SWAYAM platform** is **indigenously developed** by the **Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)** and **All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)** with the help of **Microsoft for open online courses.**

#### **Central Administrative Tribunal**

##### **Why in the news?**

- **Union Minister of State** has recently **inaugurated the 18th Bench of Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT)** for the **Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.**
- **Central Government** has **specified Jammu and Srinagar** as the places at which the benches of the **Central Administrative Tribunal** shall ordinarily sit for the **Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and Union Territory of Ladakh.**



#### About Central Administrative Tribunal

- The **Central Administrative Tribunal** had been established under **Article 323 - A of the Constitution.**
- It provides **adjudication of disputes and complaints** concerning **recruitment and conditions of service of persons appointed to public services** and posts in connection with the affairs of the **Union or other authorities under the control of the Government.**
- In **pursuance of Article 323-A**, the **Parliament** passed the **Administrative Tribunals Act in 1985.**
- The act authorises the **Central Government** to establish one **Central Administrative Tribunal** and the **state administrative tribunals.**

#### ONLINE NAIMISHA 2020 Programme

##### Why in the news?

- Recently, the **Ministry of Culture** announced a **programme called 'ONLINE NAIMISHA 2020'**.



#### About ONLINE NAIMISHA 2020

- It is a **summer art programme** to be organized by **National Modern Art Gallery.**

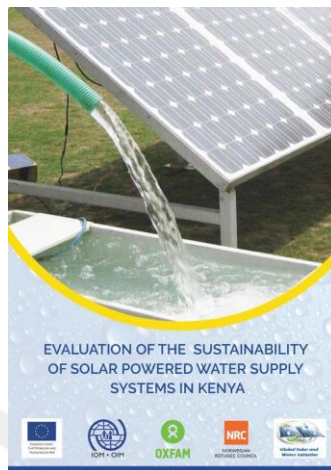


- In the **online NAIMISH 2020 program**, four workshops will be organized entitled **Painting workshop, Sculpture workshop, Printmaking and Indrajaal**, i.e. **The Magic of Art (Interdisciplinary creative workshop to understand Freedom)**.
- The **title of the program NAIMISHA**-represents a **sacred place** where people **offer their shraddha or devotion**.

### **Solar Risk Mitigation Initiative**

#### **Why in the news?**

- The **World Bank** has recently **operationalized a Solar Risk Mitigation Initiative (SRMI)** with **\$333 million for 22 African countries**.



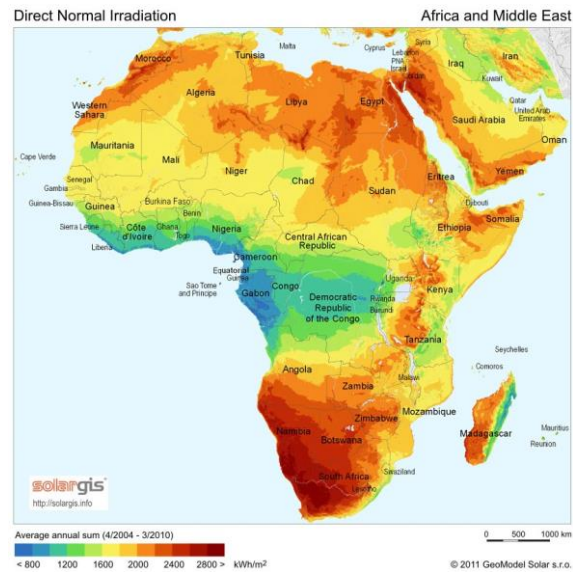
#### **About Solar Risk Mitigation Initiative**

- It has been **developed by the World Bank** in partnership with **Agence Française de Développement (AFD), International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and International Solar Alliance (ISA)**. The **aim of the initiative** is to **support countries in developing sustainable solar programs** that will **attract private investments** and so **reduce reliance on public finances**.

#### **About International Solar Alliance**

- It is an **alliance of more than 120 countries**, most of them **being sunshine countries**, which **come either completely or partly** between the **Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn**.
- The **primary objective** is to **collectively work for the efficient exploitation of solar energy to reduce dependence on fossil-based fuels**.
- The **Headquarters is in India** with its **Interim Secretariat being set up in Gurgaon**.





### Background

- This initiative was proposed by Prime Minister of India first during his speech at Wembley Stadium, London.
- This initiative was launched at the India Africa Summit, and a meeting was held among them before the conclave of the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris on November 2015.

### Arogyapath: A web-based solution for the healthcare supply chain

#### Why in the news?

- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has recently launched Arogyapath portal, which is a web-based solution for the healthcare supply chain that provides real-time availability of critical supplies.



#### About ArogyaPath

- ArogyaPath would serve manufacturers, suppliers and customers during the present national health emergency arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### Vision

- It helps in providing a path which leads one on a journey towards Aarogya (healthy life).

#### Significance

- It will help manufacturers and suppliers to reach a wide network of customers efficiently, overcoming gaps in connectivity between them and

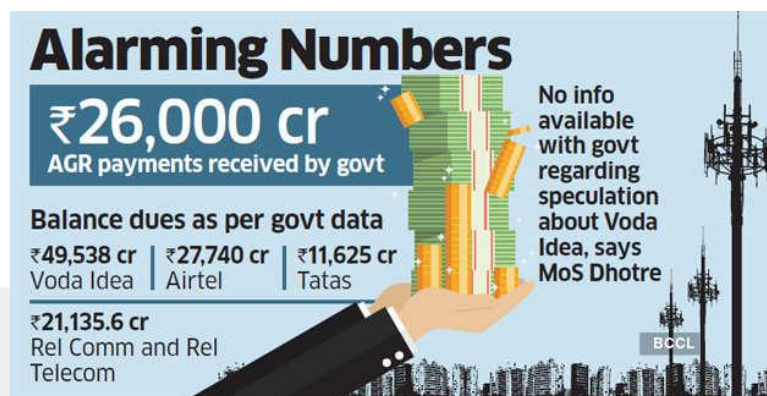
potential demand centres like nearby **pathological laboratories, medical stores, hospitals**, etc.

- It will also **create opportunities for business expansion** due to an **expanded slate of buyers and visibility** of new requirements for products.
- Over time, **analytics from this platform** is expected to **generate early signals to manufacturers** on **overcapacity as well as on looming shortages**.
- This would help to **reduce wastage of resources** due to **inefficient forecasting and excess manufacturing**, **generate awareness** about the **demand for new technologies**.

### Adjusted Gross Revenue issue

#### Why in the news?

- The **Supreme Court's order** has recently **asked telecom operators** to provide details on **staggered payment of Adjusted Gross Revenue dues**, as proposed by the **Department of Telecommunication**.



#### What are AGR and the issue?

- The **AGR is divided into spectrum usage charges and licensing fees**, pegged **between 3-5 percent and 8 percent**, respectively.
- As per **DoT**, the **charges are calculated based on all revenues** earned by a **telco – including non-telecom** related sources such as **deposit interests and asset sales**.
- **Telcos**, on their part, **insist that AGR should comprise only the revenues generated from telecom services**.
- The **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)** has in its **recommendation paper agreed** on many of the **sector's demands such as the exclusion of income from dividend and capital gains on account of profit on the sale of assets and securities**.

#### About Telecom Regulatory Authority of India

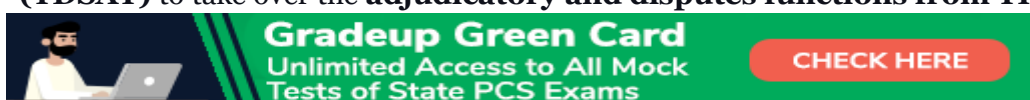
- It is a **statutory body** set up by the **Government of India** under **section 3 of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India Act, 1997**.
- It is the **regulator of the telecommunications** sector in India.

#### Composition

- It consists of a **Chairperson** and not more than **two full-time members** and not more than **two part-time members**.

#### About Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal

- The **TRAI Act** was **amended by an ordinance**, effective from **24 January 2000**, establishing a **Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT)** to take over the **adjudicatory and disputes functions** from **TRAI**.



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## Sahakar Mitra Scheme

### Why in news?

- **Union Minister for Agriculture & Farmers Welfare** has recently launched **Sahakar Mitra** scheme on **Internship Programme for young professionals**.



### About the Sahakar Mitra Scheme

- It is an initiative of **National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC)**.
- The **aim** of the scheme to **help cooperative institutions access new and innovative ideas of young professionals**. At the same time, the interns will **gain experience of working in the field to be self-reliant**.

### Eligibility

- The **professional graduates in disciplines such as Agriculture and allied areas, IT etc.** and also who are **pursuing or have completed their MBA degrees in Agri-business, Cooperation, Finance, International Trade etc.** will also be eligible.

### About National Cooperative Development Corporation

- It is an **apex statutory institution** which has been **established by an Act of Parliament in 1963** under the **Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare**.

### Note:

#### Yuva Sahakar scheme

- It is also implemented by the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) to **encourage young entrepreneurs into start-ups in the cooperative sector** by providing them with **cheaper loans**.

## Assistance to Disabled Persons (ADIP) Scheme

### Why in the news?

- Recently a **Virtual ADIP Camp for free distribution of assistive aids and devices at Block level for Divyangjans** under the **ADIP scheme of Government of India** was organized at **Ferozpur District in Punjab**. This is the **first camp being organized by the ALIMCO under DEPwD, M/o Social Justice and Empowerment** under the **ADIP Scheme of the Government of India**.

Government of India  
Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment  
Department of Disability Affairs



**ADIP SCHEME**  
for purchase of Aids and Appliances

### About Assistance to Disabled Persons Scheme

- The **Scheme** aims at helping the **disabled persons** by bringing suitable, durable, **scientifically manufactured**, modern, **standard aids and appliances** within their reach.

### Objectives

- The main **objective of the Scheme** is to assist the **needy disabled persons** in procuring **durable, sophisticated, and scientifically manufactured**, modern, standard aids and appliances.
- These **appliances** can **promote their physical, social, and psychological rehabilitation** by **reducing the effects of disabilities** and enhance their economic potential.

### Eligibility of Implementing Agency under the Scheme

The following agencies would be **eligible to implement the Scheme** on behalf of **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment**, subject to **fulfilment of laid down terms and conditions**:

- I. **Societies registered** under the **Societies Registration Act, 1860** and their branches, if any, separately.
- II. **Registered charitable trusts**
- III. **District Rural Development Agencies, Indian Red Cross Societies** and other **Autonomous Bodies** headed by **District Collector/Chief Executive Officer/District Development Officer of Zilla Parishad**.
- IV. **National/Apex Institutes** including **ALIMCO** functioning under the administrative control of the **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment/Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**.
- V. **State Handicapped Development Corporations**.
- VI. **Local Bodies**- Zilla Parishad, Municipalities, District Autonomous Development Councils and Panchayats.
- VII. **Nehru Yuvak Kendras**.

### **Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan**

#### Why in the news?

- **Government of India** has recently **decided to launch a massive rural public works** scheme '**Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan**'.





### About Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan

- It will be launched from Village – Telihar, Block- Beldaur of Khagaria District of Bihar.

### Objective

- The main objective of the scheme is to empower and provide livelihood opportunities to the returnee migrant workers and rural citizens.
- It is a campaign of 125 days, which will work in mission mode, will involve intensified and focused implementation of 25 different types of works on employing the migrant workers. Coordinate agency
- The Abhiyaan will be a coordinated effort between 12 different Ministries/Departments, namely, Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, Road Transport & Highways, Mines, Drinking Water & Sanitation, Environment, Railways, Petroleum & Natural Gas, New & Renewable Energy, Border Roads, Telecom and Agriculture.
- A total of 116 Districts across six States, namely Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Odisha, have been chosen for the campaign.
- It will also include 27 Aspirational Districts.

### Jan Aushadhi Suvridha Oxo-Biodegradable Sanitary Napkin

#### Why in the news?

- On the eve of World Environment Day, 4th June 2018, Government of India has announced the launch of “Jan Aushadhi Suvridha Oxo-Biodegradable Sanitary Napkin” for women of India. About Jan Aushadhi Suvridha Oxo-Biodegradable Sanitary Napkin
- This Sanitary Napkin is being made available in more than 6300 Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushdhi Pariyojna -PMBJP Kendras across the country at a minimum price of Rs.1/-per pad.



### Advantages of the Sanitary Napkin

- These **sanitary napkins** are **environmentally friendly**, as these pads are made with **Oxo-biodegradable material** complying with **ASTM D-6954** (biodegradability test) standards.
- This step ensured **‘Swachhta, Swasthya and Suvidha’** for the **underprivileged Women of India**.

### About Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana

- It is a **campaign launched by the Department of Pharmaceuticals** to provide quality medicines at affordable prices to the masses.
- **PMBJP stores** have been set up to **provide generic drugs**, which are **available at lesser prices** but are **equivalent in quality and efficacy** as **expensive branded drugs**.
- The Department of Pharmaceuticals launched it in **November 2008** under the name **Jan Aushadi Campaign**.
- **Bureau of Pharma PSUs of India (BPPI)** is the implementation agency for PMBJP.

### SATYABHAMA Portal

#### Why in the news?

- **Union Minister for Coal, Mines and Parliamentary Affairs** has recently launched **SATYABHAMA (Science and Technology Yojana for Aatmanirbhar Bharat in Mining Advancement) Portal** for **Science and Technology Programme Scheme** of Ministry of Mines.



### About the SATYABHAMA Portal

- The Portal has been **designed, developed and implemented** by **National Informatics Centre (NIC)**, Mines Informatics Division.
- **SATYABHAMA Portal** allows online submission of project proposals along with monitoring of the projects and utilization of funds/grants.
- The researchers can also **submit progress reports** and **Final Technical Reports** of the projects in the **electronic format in the Portal**.
- The **Portal is integrated with NGO Darpan Portal** of NITI Aayog.

### About NGO Darpan

- It is a **platform that provides space for the interface between VOs/NGOs and key Government Ministries / Departments / Government Bodies** which is managed at present by NITI Aayog.

### Rajya Sabha Poll

#### Why in the news?

- Recently another **round of Rajya Sabha elections** has been completed.





### **Peculiar to the Rajya Sabha polls**

- In **Rajya Sabha polls** only elected members of the **State Legislative Assemblies** can vote in a **Rajya Sabha election**.
- The **legislators** send a **batch of new members to the Upper House** every two years for a **six-year term**. A **third of Members of Parliament** in the **Rajya Sabha** (which is a permanent House and is not subject to dissolution), from each **State**, **retire once in two years**, and polls are held to fill up the vacancies.
- Also, **vacancies that arise due to resignation, death or disqualification** are filled up through **by-polls** after which those elected serve out the **remainder of their predecessors' term**.

### **How does Voting Take Place?**

- **Voting** is by **single transferable vote**, as the **election is held on the principle of proportional representation**.
- The **Rajya Sabha polls** have a **system of the open ballot** and a **secret ballot**.

### **Why does not none of the above, or NOTA, apply to the Rajya Sabha polls?**

- The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** issued two circulars, on **January 24, 2014**, and **November 12, 2015**, giving **Rajya Sabha members** the option to **press the NOTA button in the Upper House polls**.
- However, in **2018**, the **Supreme Court of India** struck down the **provision**, holding that the '**none of the above**' option is only for general elections held based on **universal adult suffrage**, and **cannot be applied to indirect elections** based on **proportional representation**.

### **Does crossvoting attract disqualification?**

- The **Supreme Court**, while **declining to interfere** with the open ballot system, ruled that not voting for the party candidate will not attract disqualification under the anti-defection law.
- As voters, **MLAs retain their freedom to vote** for a candidate of their choice.
- However, the **Court observed** that since the party would know who **voted against its candidate**, it is **free to take disciplinary action** against the **legislator concerned**.

### **Can a legislator vote without taking oath as a member of the Assembly?**

- While taking oath as a **member is for anyone to function as a legislator**, the **Supreme Court** has ruled that a **member can vote in a Rajya Sabha election** even before taking oath as a legislator.
- It ruled that **voting at the Rajya Sabha polls**, being a **non-legislative activity**, can be **performed without taking the oath**.
- A person becomes a member as soon as the **list of elected members** is notified by the ECI.

- Further, a **member can also propose** a candidate **before taking the oath.**

### **Rule of Law Index**

#### **Why in the news?**

- The Supreme Court has recently asked the government to treat a writ petition filed by apex court lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay, for setting up expert panels to boost India's prospects in the Rule of Law Index.

#### **What are the issues?**

- As on March 11 every year, the World Justice Project announced the Rule of Law Index 2020 in which India is ranked 69th position.
- The petition sought a direction to the government to constitute expert committees to examine the best practices of the countries ranked among top 20 in Rule of Law Index-2020 and accordingly take steps to improve the "pathetic ranking" of India.
- India has never been ranked even among the top 50 in the Index, but successive governments did nothing to improve the international ranking of India.

#### **About Rule of Index**

- It is a quantitative assessment tool designed to offer a detailed and comprehensive picture of the extent to which countries adhere to the rule of law in practice.
- It is published by the World Justice Project which is an independent organisation.
- The index covers **128 countries.**
- In the Rule of Index 2020, **Denmark is on the top followed by Norway and Finland.**
- **India has been ranked at 69 out of 128 countries.**

### **Model village scheme/ Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana**

#### **Why in the news?**

- Recently a study **commissioned by the Ministry of Rural Development** has observed that the **Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana** has not made "**any significant impact**" and based on **current speed**, will **fail to achieve the desired purpose.**
- The study was part of the **Fifth Common Review Mission (CRM)** for "**independent assessment**" of the **progress of various programs and schemes of the Ministry of Rural Development.**



#### **About Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana**

- It is a **village development project** launched by the **Government of India** in **October 2014.**
- Under the **Yojana**, **Members of Parliament (MPs)** will be responsible for **developing the socio-economic and physical infrastructure of three villages** each by **2019**, and a **total of eight villages** each by **2024.**

#### **Objectives**

- a. The **development of model villages**, called **Adarsh Grams**, through the **implementation of existing schemes**, and **certain new initiatives** to be designed for the **local context**, which **may vary from village to village.**



- b. **Creating models of local development** which can be **replicated in other villages.**

#### Identification of villages

- **MPs can select any gram panchayat**, other than their **village** or that of their **spouse**, to be **developed as an Adarsh Gram.**
- The **village** must have a **population of 3000-5000 people** if it is in the **plains**, or **1000-3000 people** if located in **hilly areas.**

#### Selection of Village

- **Lok Sabha MPs** can choose a **village from their constituency.**
- **Rajya Sabha MPs** from the state from which they are elected.
- **Nominated members** can choose a **village from any district of the country.**
- **MPs which represent urban constituencies** can identify a **village from a neighbouring rural constituency.**

#### Funding:

**No new funds** have been allocated for the **Yojana**, but the **fund should be raised** through:

- a. **Funds from existing schemes**, such as the **Indira Awas Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme**, and **Backward Regions Grant Fund**, etc.,
- b. The **Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS)**,
- c. The **gram panchayat's revenue**,
- d. **Central and State Finance Commission Grants**, and
- e. **Corporate Social Responsibility funds.**

#### Strategy to create Adarsh Gram from Identified Village:

- **Energize and mobilize** the community towards common positive action.
- **Participatory planning exercise** for identifying **peoples' needs and priorities in an integrated manner.**
- **Converging resources** from **Central Sector and Centrally Sponsored Schemes** and also other **State schemes to the maximum extent.**
- **Repairing and renovating existing infrastructure to the extent possible.**
- **Strengthening the Gram Panchayats and peoples' institutions** within them.
- **Promoting transparency and accountability.**

#### Note:

- Recently, the **Government of India** in the event of **struggle against Covid-19** has suspended **Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme or MPLADS funds** for **two years (2020 and 2021)** and directed these funds to be **transferred to the Consolidated Fund of India.**

### **YUKTI 2.0 platform launched for Higher Education Institutes**

#### Why in the news?

- Recently, the **Union Minister of Human Resource Development** launched an initiative '**YUKTI 2.0**' web portal.



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### Background

- Earlier, the **Ministry of HRD** had launched the **YUKTI (Young India combating COVID with Knowledge, Technology, and Innovation)** web portal on **11 April 2020** due to Coronavirus.

### About the YUKTI portal

- The **portal intends** to cover the **different dimensions** of **COVID-19 challenges** in a **very holistic** and **comprehensive way**.
- Through this portal, the **Ministry** will endeavour to ensure that **students, teachers, and researchers** in **higher educational institutions** are getting **appropriate support** to meet the requirements needed to advance their **technologies and innovations**.

### About YUKTI 2.0

- It is the **logical extension** of an earlier **version of ‘YUKTI’**.
- **YUKTI 2.0 initiative** is a very important step in the **direction of making Bharat Atmanirbhar**. **Youngsters** are very **capable of thinking innovatively**, and there is a need to make **every possible effort** to help them **convert their ideas into enterprises**.
- It will also **help systematically assimilate technologies** having **commercial potential and information** related to **incubated startups** in our **higher education institutions**.

### Global Education Monitoring Report 2020

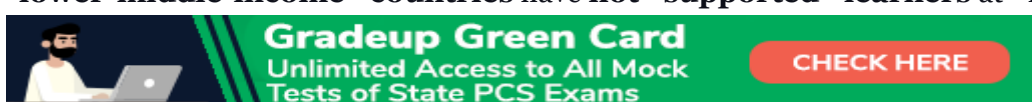
#### Why in the news?

- The **2020 Global Education Monitoring Report** was released by **UNESCO** recently.



#### Key highlights of the report

- The **coronavirus pandemic** has **exacerbated inequalities** in **education systems across the world**. According to the report, **about 40% of low- and lower-middle-income countries** have **not supported learners** at risk of



exclusion during this crisis, such as the poor, linguistic minorities, and learners with disabilities.

- The report also noted that **efforts to maintain learning continuity** during the **pandemic** might have **worsened exclusion trends**.
- During the **height of school closures** in **April 2020**, almost **91% of students around the world** were out of school.

#### **Imperfect substitutes**

- **According to report the education systems** during the **pandemic** responded with **distance learning solutions**, all of which offered **less or more imperfect substitutes** for classroom instruction.
- While many poorer countries opted for **radio and television lessons**, **55% of low-income**, **73% of lower-middle-income** and **93% of upper-middle-income countries** adopted for **online learning platforms** for **primary and secondary education**.
- **India** has used a **mix of all three systems** for **educational continuity**.
- However, **even as governments increasingly** rely on **technology**, the **digital divide** lays bare the **limitations of this approach**.
- **Not all students and teachers** have **access to an adequate internet connection**, equipment, skills and **working conditions** to take advantage of available platforms.

#### **Unavailability of the resources outside**

- **School closures** due to **lockdowns** have also **interrupted support mechanisms** from which many **disadvantaged learners' benefit**.
- **Resources for blind and deaf students** may not be available outside schools.
- Also, children with **learning disabilities** or those who are on the **autism spectrum** may **struggle with independent work** in front of a **computer or the disruption of daily school routines**.
- For **poor students** who **depend on school for free meals or even free sanitary napkins**, these closures have been a significant blow.

#### **Other problems**

- The **cancellation of examinations in many countries**, including India, may result in **scoring dependent on teachers' judgments** which could be **affected by stereotypes of certain types of students**.

#### **Higher drop-out rates are also a cause for concern.**

- For example, during an **earlier Ebola epidemic in Africa**, many **older girls** **never returned to school** once the crisis was over.

### **Landmark decisions to boost infrastructure across sectors**

#### **Why in the news?**

- The **Union Cabinet** has taken **several landmark decisions**, which will go a long way providing a much-needed **boost to infrastructure across sectors**, which are **crucial in the time of the pandemic**.



This landmark decision includes:

**A. Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund set-up**

- Cabinet has approved setting up of **Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF)** amounting to **Rs. 15000 core** in pursuance of recently announced **Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan stimulus package**.

**Benefits**

- There is **huge potential** waiting to be unlocked through **private sector investment** in the animal husbandry sector.
- The **AHIDF** with the **interest subvention scheme** for **private investors** will ensure **the availability of capital to meet upfront investment** required for these projects and also help **enhance overall returns/ payback** for investors.
- Such **investments in processing and value addition infrastructure** by eligible beneficiaries would also promote exports.

**B. Declaration of Kushinagar Airport in UP as International Airport**

- Union Cabinet has **approved the proposal to declare Kushinagar Airport in Uttar Pradesh** as an **International Airport**.

**Background**

- **Kushinagar** is an **important Buddhist pilgrimage site**, where **Gautama Buddha attained Mahaparinirvana**.
- It is regarded as a **very sacred Buddhist pilgrimage centre** where **Buddhists pilgrims from all over -the world come for a pilgrimage**.
- **Kushinagar** already **serves as the presenting site for Buddhist circuit pilgrimage** spanning across **India and Nepal**.

**Benefits:**

- The **Buddhist Circuit** is an essential **pilgrimage destination** for **530 million practising Buddhists across the globe**.
- Hence the declaration of **Kushinagar Airport as an 'International Airport'** will offer improved connectivity, a more extensive choice of **services at competitive costs** to the **air-travellers** resulting in **boosting of domestic/international tourism and economic development of the region**.

**C. Additional investment by OVL towards further development of Shwe oil & gas project in Myanmar approved**

- **ONGC Videsh (OVL)** has been associated with **exploration and development of Shwe gas project in Myanmar since 2002**, as part of a consortium of companies from **South Korea, India and Myanmar**.

**Benefits:**

- The participation of **Indian PSUs in oil & gas exploration and development projects in neighbouring countries** is aligned with **India's Act East Policy**.

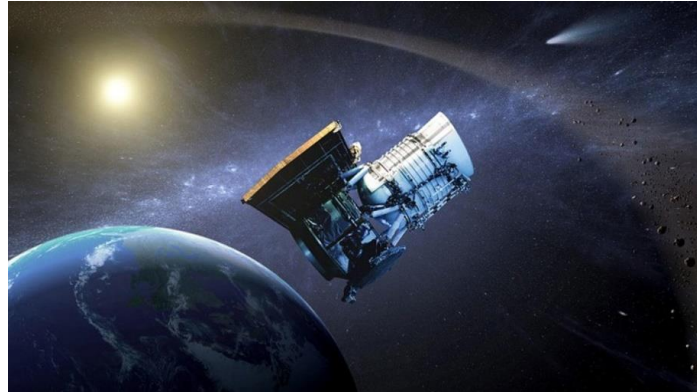


- It is also a part of India's strategy to develop Energy Bridges with its neighbours in addition to further strengthening India's energy security needs.

### **Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACE)**

#### **Why in the news?**

- The Union Cabinet has recently approved the creation of the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACE).



#### **Benefits**

- It will help to provide a level playing field for private companies to use Indian space infrastructure. These reforms would allow the ISRO to focus more on research and development activities (R&D), new technologies, exploration missions and human spaceflight programme.
- Some of the planetary exploration missions will also be opened to the private sector through an 'announcement of opportunity' mechanism.

#### **Current status of participation of private industries in the Space Programme**

- NewSpace India Limited (NSIL) was incorporated to carry forward the industry production of space systems and the ISRO's efforts in realising Polar Satellite Launch Vehicles (PSLV) from the industry.
- Currently, more than 500 Indian industries are contributing to ISRO programmes, and more than half of the project budget outlay flowed to these industries.

### **G. Rohini Commission on Sub-Categorization of OBCs**

#### **Why in the news?**

- The Union Cabinet has approved the extension of the term of the Commission constituted under Article 340 of the Constitution to examine the issue of Sub-categorization within Other Backward Classes in the Central List, by six months, i.e. upto 31.1.2021.



#### **Background**



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- The **Commission** was constituted under article 340 of the Constitution with the **approval of President in 2017** under Justice (Retd.) Smt. G. Rohini.

**Benefits:**

- The **Communities in the existing list of OBCs** which have **not been able to get any major advantage of the scheme of reservation for OBCs for appointment in Central Government posts and admission in Central Government Educational Institutions** are **expected to be benefitted upon implementation of the recommendations** of the Commission.
- The **Commission** is likely to **make recommendations for the benefit of such marginalized communities** in the **Central List of OBCs**.

**Expenditure:**

- The **expenditure** involved are related to the **establishment and administration costs of the Commission**, which would continue to be borne by the **Department of Social Justice and Empowerment**.

**Topic- GS Paper 2–Governance**

**Source- AIR**

**Distressed Assets Fund–Sub-ordinate Debt for MSMEs**

**Why in the news?**

- **Union Minister of Minister of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME)** has launched the **Credit Guarantee Scheme for Sub-ordinate Debt (CGSSD)** which is also called “**Distressed Assets Fund–Sub-ordinate Debt for MSMEs**”.



**About Distressed Assets Fund–Sub-ordinate Debt for MSMEs”.**

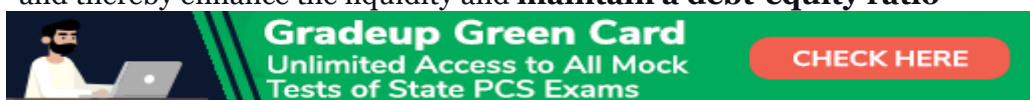
- The **aim of the Scheme** seeks to **extend support to the promoter(s) of the operational MSMEs** which are **stressed and have become NPA as on 30th April 2020**.
- It provides a **guarantee cover worth Rs. 20,000 crores** to the **promoters who can take debt from the banks to further invest in their stressed MSMEs as equity**.

**Implementation agency**

- The Scheme will be **operationalised through Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for MSEs (CGTMSE)**.

**Key features of the Scheme**

- The **promoter(s) of the MSMEs** will be given **credit equal to 15% of their stake (equity plus debt) or Rs. 75 lakh whichever is lower**.
- The **Promoter(s) in turn** will **infuse this amount in the MSME unit as equity** and thereby enhance the liquidity and **maintain a debt-equity ratio**



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- **90% guarantee coverage** for this sub-debt will be given under the Scheme, and **10%** would come from the **concerned promoters**

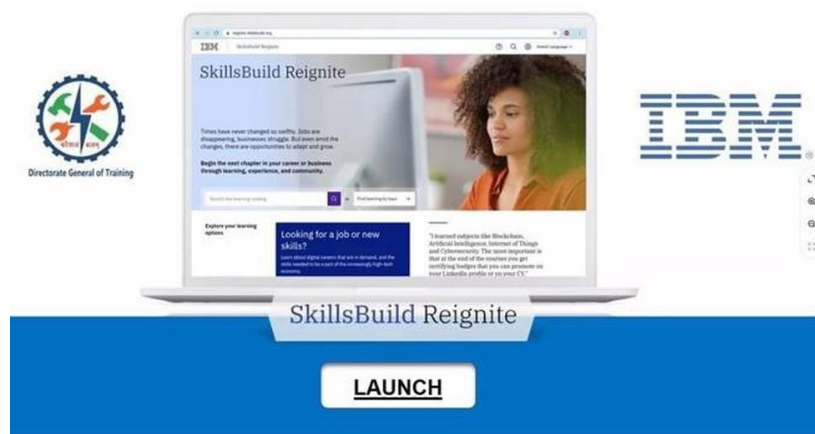
#### Duration

- There will be a **moratorium of 7 years on payment of principal** whereas maximum tenor for **repayment will be 10 years.**

### **Skills Build Reignite**

#### Why in the news?

- **Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE)** in partnership with **IBM** has unveiled Free Digital Learning Platform '**Skills Build Reignite**' to reach more **job seekers and provide new resources** to business owners in India.



#### About Skills Build Reignite

- The **Skills Build Reignite** tends to provide **job seekers and entrepreneurs**, with access to **free online coursework** and **mentoring support** designed to help them **reinvent their careers and businesses**. Its **special feature** is the **personalized coaching for entrepreneurs**, seeking advice to help **establish or restart their small businesses** as they begin to focus on recovery to emerge out of the COVID 19 pandemic.

#### Role of IBM Skills Build Reignite

- **IBM's expertise** in providing multifaceted **digital skill training** in the area of **Cloud Computing and Artificial Intelligence** will strengthen the **efforts in the recovery of local workforces**, communities and economies by supporting job seekers, entrepreneurs and small businesses.
- **IBM** has also **committed to providing multifaceted digital skill training** in the area of **Cloud Computing and Artificial Intelligence** to students and trainers in **National Skill Training Institutes (NSTIs) and ITIs.**

#### Background

- In November 2019, **IBM India**, in **partnership with Directorate General of Training (DGT), Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship** and its implementation partners, made the **Skills Build online learning platform** available to Indian students through **Bharatskills of DGT.**
- **Digital classrooms** on this platform are available to students and instructors from the **Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and technical education ecosystem** in India.

### **NITI Aayog launches behaviour change campaign 'navigating the new normal'**

#### Why in the news?





- **NITI Aayog** has recently **launched behaviour change** campaign '**Navigating the New Normal**' and its **website to help people follow norms** to contain the spread of Covid-19.



### About the Campaign

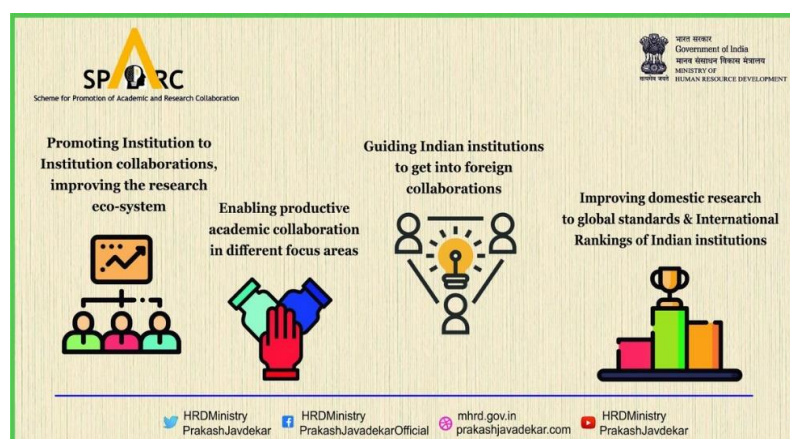
- The **campaign focusses on COVID-safe behaviours**, especially **wearing masks**, during the '**Unlock**' phase of the ongoing pandemic.
- It is developed **under the guidance of Empowered Group 6**, constituted by the **Government of India**, and chaired by CEO, NITI Aayog.
- The **campaign has two parts**.
- The first is a **web portal containing resources** informed by **behavioural science and the use of nudge and social norms theory**, related to **Covid-safe behavioural norms** during the ongoing **Unlock phase**.

The second is a **media campaign focused on the wearing of masks**.

### Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC)

#### Why in the news?

- **Researchers** from the **Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IITM)** are collaborating with **their counterparts in Germany** to **develop new materials** for **green energy solutions** under the scheme **SPARC**.



- The **project aims to develop alternative technologies** to **produce green hydrogen** in anticipation of the transition to a **hydrogen-based economy**.
- The **conventional methods of generating hydrogen** result in a **large quantity of carbon dioxide**. Whereas **electrochemical splitting of water**,



called ‘**Water Electrolysis**’ (WE), is a clean, facile, and highly efficient technology for large-scale production of high-purity H<sub>2</sub>.

#### About SPARC

- It is an **initiative of the Ministry of Human Resource Development**.
- It aims at **improving the research ecosystem** of India’s Higher Educational Institutions by **facilitating academic and research collaborations** between Indian Institutions and the best institutions in the world.
- There are **28 selected nations** to jointly solve problems of national and international relevance in this initiative.

#### **World Bank approves \$500 mn education project for six states**

##### Why in the news?

- The **World Bank** has recently approved a project worth \$500 million to improve the **learning outcome and governance** of government schools in six **Indian states** through the project STARS.



#### About STARS Project

- The project, **Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States Program (STARS)**, will be implemented through the **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan** (a flagship central scheme).

#### Coverage

- The **six states** included in the project are **Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Rajasthan**.
- More than **52%** of children in government-run schools in the **six project states** belong to **vulnerable sections**, such as **Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and minority communities**.

#### Benefits:

- It will help improve the **learning assessment systems, strengthen classroom instruction and remediation, facilitate school-to-work transition, and strengthen governance and decentralized management**.
- **STARS** will aid **India’s response by strengthening implementation** at the local level, investing in **teacher capacity and ensuring that no child of any background is left behind from the right to education**

#### Background

- **STARS** build on the **partnership between India and the World Bank since 1994** for **strengthening the school education system** and to support the **goal of providing education to all**.
- **Before STARS**, the **World Bank** had aided of **over \$3 billion** towards this.



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## Related Information

### About Samagra Shiksha

- **Samagra Shiksha** is an **integrated scheme for school education**, extending from **pre-school to class XII** to ensure **inclusive and equitable quality education** at all levels of school education.

It subsumes the three Schemes:

- i. **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)**
  - ii. **Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)**
  - iii. **Teacher Education (TE)**
- The Scheme **treats school education holistically** as a **continuum from Pre-school to Class 12**.
  - The main emphasis of **the Scheme is on improving the quality of school education** by focussing on the two T's – **Teacher and Technology**.

Topic- GS Paper 2–Governance

Source- The Hindu

### **Banking Regulation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020**

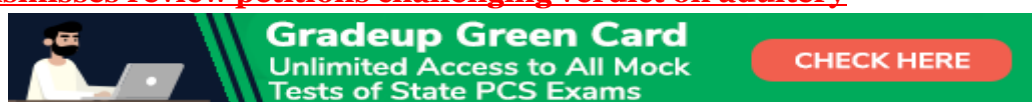
#### Why in the news?

- In pursuance of the **commitment to ensure the safety of depositors across banks**, the **President has promulgated the Banking Regulation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020**. About the **Banking Regulation Ordinance 2020**
- The **Ordinance amends the Banking Regulation Act, 1949** as applicable to **Cooperative Banks**.



- The **Ordinance seeks to protect the interests of depositors and strengthen cooperative banks** by **improving governance and oversight** by extending powers already available with RBI in respect of **other banks to Cooperative Banks**.
- The **amendments do not affect existing powers** of the **State Registrars of Cooperative Societies** under state cooperative laws.
- The **amendments do not apply to Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS)** or **cooperative societies** whose **primary object and principal business is long-term finance for agricultural development**.
- The **Ordinance also amends Section 45 of the Banking Regulation Act**, to **enable the making of a scheme of reconstruction or amalgamation** of a **banking company** for **protecting the interest of the public, depositors and the banking system** and for **securing its proper management**, even without making an **order of moratorium**, so as to **avoid disruption of the financial system**.

### **SC dismisses review petitions challenging verdict on adultery**

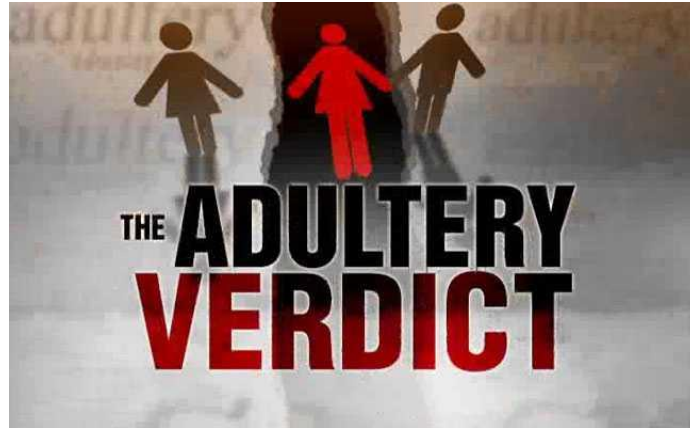


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### Why in the news?

- The **Supreme Court** has recently refused to review its **2018 judgment** which **decriminalised adultery**. A **five-judge Review Bench**, led by **Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde**, upheld a **September 2018 Constitution Bench** which had struck adultery out of the penal statute book.



### Background

- The **original judgment** was by a **Constitution Bench**, led by then **chief justice Dipak Misra**, which found that **Section 497 (adultery)** of the **Indian Penal Code** cannot “**command**” **married couples** to remain **loyal to each other** for fear of **penal punishment**.
- The **original judgment in 2018** was based on a **writ petition** filed by a **Kerala resident, Joseph Shine**.

### About IPC section 497

- **Adultery law in India** is defined by the **Indian Penal Code Section 497**.
- **Section 497 defines adultery** as ‘Whoever has sexual intercourse with a person who is and whom he knows or has reason to believe to be the wife of another man, without the consent or connivance of that man, such sexual intercourse not amounting to the offence of rape, is guilty of the offence of adultery, and shall be punished’.
- In such cases, the wife shall not be punishable as an abettor.
- It treats a married woman as the commodity of her husband.
- Adultery is **not a crime if the cuckolded husband connives or consents to his wife’s extra-marital affair**.
- The **provision is a reflection** of the **social dominance of men prevalent 150 years ago**.

### Tribes India Products on GeM

#### Why in the news?

- Recently, the **Union Minister of Tribal Affairs** has launched **Tribes India** products on the **Government e-Marketplace (GeM)**.



### About the Tribal Products

- The **Government Departments, Ministries and PSUs** can access **TRIBES India** products via **Government e-Marketplace (GeM)** and shop as per **GFR regulations**.
- The products range from **Artefacts like Dhokra Metal Crafts, beautiful Pottery, Paintings of all kinds** (Gond, Bhil, Warli, Pithora, among others) to **uniquely fabricated Apparel wear, and distinctive Jewellery designs**. The **Van Dhan Naturals** range offers **Honey, Spices, Rice, Tea, Coffee**, among other organic essential food items.
- To support the **Tribals, PSUs and Ministries** may give **First Preference** to various **Tribal products on GeM**, and **70% of the amount** will go directly to the hands of Tribals.

### **DCGI nod for human trials of ‘Covaxin’**

#### Why in the news?

- The **Drug Controller General of India (DCGI)** has permitted **human clinical trials of ‘Covaxin’**, the country’s **first vaccine candidate** for COVID-19.



### About Drugs Controller General of India

- It is a department of the **Central Drugs Standard Control Organization** of the **Government of India** which comes under the **Ministry of Health & Family Welfare**.





- It is **responsible for approval of licences** of specified categories of drugs such as **blood and blood products, IV fluids, vaccines, and sera in India**. It also sets standards for manufacturing, sales, import, and distribution of drugs in India.

### **Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative**

#### **Why in the news?**

- Recently the **alleged torture and killing of a father and son in custody in Tamil Nadu** last week points to a **broken criminal justice system**, and **highlights the need for police reforms** and the **ratification of the United Nations Convention Against Torture (UNCAT), the Executive Committee (India) of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)**.



#### **About the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative**

- It is an **independent, non-partisan, international non-governmental organization**.
- The headquarter is in **New Delhi**.
- The **organization works for the practical realization of human rights** across the Commonwealth.
- In **1987, several Commonwealth associations founded CHRI** as a response to South Africa's policy of racism.
- Its objectives are to **promote awareness of and adherence to the Harare Commonwealth Declaration**, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other internationally recognized human rights instruments, as well as domestic instruments supporting human rights in member states.

#### **Harare Commonwealth Declaration**

- The **Harare Commonwealth Declaration** was a declaration of the **Commonwealth of Nations, issued in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1991**.
- It sets out the Commonwealth's core principles and values, detailing the Commonwealth's membership criteria, and redefining and reinforcing its purpose.

#### **About United Nations Convention against Torture**

- It is an **international human rights treaty**, under the **review of the United Nations** that aims to **prevent torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment** around the world.
- It came into force in **June 1987**.
- It requires states to **take effective measures to prevent torture in any territory** under their jurisdiction. It forbids **states to transport people** to any country where there is reason to believe they will be tortured.

- **India is a signatory to the convention (since 1997)** and is bound by the principle of jus cogens that ensures human rights to those who are tortured and persecuted.
- In the past, **India** has pledged several times to **ratify the UNCAT**, but it could not be done so.
- As per recent reports by **National Campaign against Torture, custodial deaths in the country are increasing.**

### Portal for street vendors' loan scheme

#### Why in the news?

- The **Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry** have recently launched the portal, **pmsvanidhi.mohua.gov.in**, for a loan scheme for street vendors.



#### About the portal

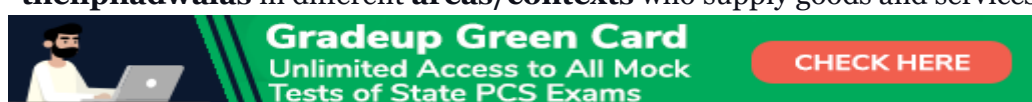
- It provides an **“integrated end-to-end IT interface** to users for **availing benefits** under the scheme **Pradhan Mantri Street Vendors' AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi)**. The portal will help in **managing loan applications**, collection of documents, and **integration with Aadhaar** etc.

#### About PM SVANidhi

- The **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs** has launched **PM Svanidhi, or Pradhan Mantri Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi scheme** in June this year.
- The scheme was **announced by the finance minister** on **14 May** to enable street vendors to resume their **livelihoods**, which have been hit hard **due to the national lockdown**.
- It is a **special micro-credit facility plan** to provide an **affordable loan of up to ₹10,000 to more than 50 lakh street vendors**, who had their **businesses operational** on or **before 24 March**.
- The scheme is valid **until March 2022**.
- **Small Industries Development Bank of India** is the technical partner for the implementation of this scheme.
- It will **manage the credit guarantee** to the lending institutions through **Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises**.

#### Eligibility:

- The scheme applies to **vendors, hawkers, thelewalas, rehriwalas, theliphadwalas** in different **areas/contexts** who supply goods and services.



- The **Street vendors** belonging to the surrounding **peri-urban/rural areas** are also included in this scheme.

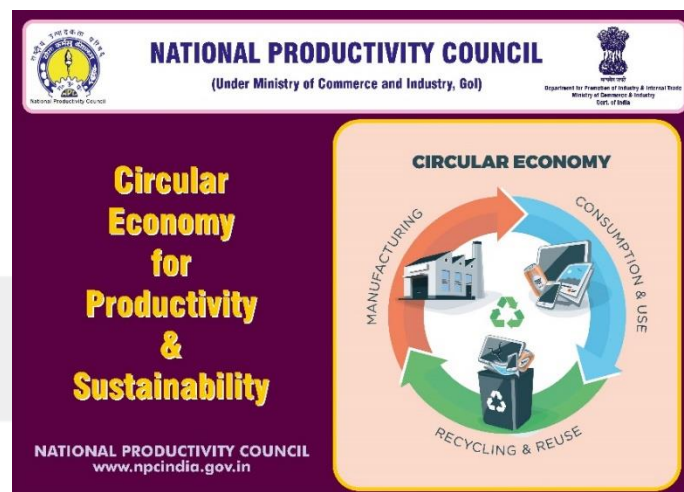
#### Loans under the scheme:

- Under the scheme, **vendors can avail working capital loan** of up to **₹10,000**, which is **repayable in monthly instalments** within one year.
- On **timely/early repayment of the loan**, an **interest subsidy of 7% per annum** will be credited to the bank accounts of beneficiaries through **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)** on a **six-month basis**.
- There will be **no penalty on early repayment of the loan**.

### National Productivity Council

#### Why in the news?

- The **49th Governing Council Meeting of National Productivity Council (NPC)** was held recently under the **Chairmanship of Commerce and Industry Minister**.



#### About the National Productivity Council (NPC)

- It is a **national level organization to promote productivity culture in India**.
- It is an **autonomous body under Department for Promotion of Industry & Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India**.
- It has been **registered as a Society under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860**.
- NPC is a **constituent of the Tokyo-based Asian Productivity Organisation (APO), an Intergovernmental Body of which the Government of India is a founder member**.

### COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support Programme

#### Why in the news?

- The **Government of India and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)** has recently **signed a \$750 million “COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support Programme.”**

#### About the COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support Programme

- This is the **first-ever budgetary support programme** from the **AIIB to India**. It helps to **assist India to strengthen its response to the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on poor and vulnerable households**.

- **Earlier, AIIB also approved \$500 million in loans for the COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness Project.**

#### **Beneficiaries**

- The **primary programme beneficiaries** would be **families below the poverty line**, farmers, healthcare workers, women, women's self-help groups, widows, people with disabilities, senior citizens, low wage earners, construction workers and other vulnerable groups.

#### **About the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank**

- It is a **multilateral development bank** with a **mission to improve social and economic outcomes in Asia**, began **operations in January 2016**.
- It has now **grown to 102 approved members worldwide**.
- Its **headquarters in Beijing, China**.
- **China, India and Russia** are the **three largest shareholders of AIIB** with voting shares are **26.06%, 7.5% and 5.92%** respectively.
- It offers **sovereign and non-sovereign finance** for projects in **various sectors with an interest rate of London Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR) plus 1.15% and a repayment period of 25 years with five years in the grace period**.

#### **Various other Projects sponsored by AIIB**

- a. **Major irrigation and flood management project in West Bengal**
- b. **250MW solar project in Rajasthan**
- c. **Mumbai urban transport project**
- d. **Power transmission and distribution projects in Assam**
- e. **Rural water supply system in Karnataka etc.**

#### **Topic- GS Paper 2–International Organisation**

**Source- The Hindu**



## Economy and Social development

### **Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine & Homoeopathy (PCIM&H)**

#### **Why is in the news?**

- The **Union Cabinet** has recently given its **approval to re-establish Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine & Homoeopathy (PCIM&H)** as **Subordinate Office under Ministry of AYUSH**. Presently, the **Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine & Homoeopathy (PCIM&H)** is an **autonomous body** under the **aegis of Ministry of AYUSH** established since 2010.



#### **Benefits of the Merger**

- It **helps in optimizing the use of infrastructural facilities, technical manpower and financial resources** of the three organizations for **enhancing the standardization outcomes of Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and Homoeopathy drugs** towards their **effective regulation and quality control**.
- It will also **facilitate focused and cohesive development of standards of AYUSH drugs and publication of pharmacopoeias and formularies**.
- It is also **intended to accord legal status to the merged structure of PCIM&H and its laboratory by virtue of making the necessary amendment and enabling provisions in the Drugs & Cosmetics Rules, 1945**.

### **Cabinet approves EGoS, Project Development Cells for attracting investments in India**

#### **Why is in the news?**

- The **Cabinet** has recently given its **approval for setting up of an Empowered Group of Secretaries (EGoS) and Project Development Cells (PDCs) in Ministries/Departments of the Central Government for attracting investments in India**.

#### **About Empowered Group of Secretaries (EGoS)**

- It will **reinforce India's vision of becoming a \$5 trillion economy by 2024-2025**.
- It aims to take advantage of **these opportunities** from the **global economic situation, considering the Covid-19 crisis, to make India among the most significant players in the global value chain**, an official statement said.



### Composition

- The **Empowered Group of Secretaries (EGoS)** has the **Cabinet Secretary as the Chairperson**
- **Secretary, Department for Promotion of Industry, and Internal Trade as the Member Convenor.**
- **Secretaries of the Department of Commerce, Department of Revenue, and Department of Economic Affairs, and the CEO, Niti Aayog, are the Members of this committee.**
- The **Secretary of Department** concerned where investment is coming in to be **co-opted in the committee.**

### Project Development Cell

- A **Project Development Cell (PDC)** is also approved for the development of investible projects in coordination between the **Central Government and State Governments.**
- It helps to **grow the pipeline of investible projects in India** and turn increase **Foreign Direct Investment inflows.**

### In-charge of Project Development Cell

- Under the **guidance of the Secretary**, an officer not below the rank of **Joint Secretary of each relevant central line Ministry**, who will be **in charge of the PDC.**
- He will be tasked to **conceptualise, strategise, implement, and disseminate** details concerning **investable projects.**

### Topic- GS Paper 3–Economics

Source- PIB

### Payments Infrastructure Development Fund

#### Why in the news?

- In an effort, to give a **push to digital payments across the country**, the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has set up a **Payment Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF) of Rs 500 crore.**
- The **fund will be governed through an advisory council**, but it will be **managed and administered by the RBI.**



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### Funding pattern

- The RBI has made an **initial contribution of Rs 250 crore** covering half the fund.
- The remaining will come from the **card-issuing banks and card networks** operating in the country.
- This fund has been **created to encourage acquirers to deploy point of sale (PoS) infrastructure**, both **physical and digital**, in **tier-3 to tier-6 centres** and **northeastern states**.
- This is in line with the **measures proposed** by the **vision document on payment and settlement systems in India 2019-2021**. The **dedicated fund for deepening digital payments infrastructure** will receive **recurring contributions** to cover **operational expenses** from the **card-issuing banks and card networks**, and the **central bank will also contribute to yearly shortfalls**, if necessary.

### Note:

- The **vision document had envisaged** that the **usage of debit cards at PoS transactions** would be **around 44 per cent** of **total debit card transactions by 2021**.
- Last year, the RBI had also proposed to set up an **Acceptance Development Fund** which will be used to **develop card acceptance infrastructure** across **small towns and cities**

Topic- GS Paper 3–Infrastructure

Source- The Hindu

### Govt promulgates ordinance to amend Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code

#### Why in the news?

- **Union Government** has recently promulgated an **ordinance to amend Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code**. Under it, **fresh insolvency proceedings** will not be initiated for defaults due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Default on repayments from **March 25**, the day when the nationwide lockdown began to curb Coronavirus infections, will not be considered for **initiating insolvency proceedings** for a certain period of time.



### Amendments

- It **suspends sections 7, 9 and 10 of the IBC for six months** with an enabling provision **allowing for it to be extended upto one year.**
- **Section 7 of the IBC** pertains to the **initiation of the insolvency process** by a **financial creditor**, while Section 9 covers insolvency plea by an **operational creditor – supplier, employee and workman.**
- **Section 10 of the IBC** comes into play when the **corporate debtor files for insolvency.**
- A **new section 10 A** has been **inserted in the Code** which states that **no insolvency application** will be filed for defaults arising on or after **March 25 for six months (can be further extended upto one year).**

### About Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016

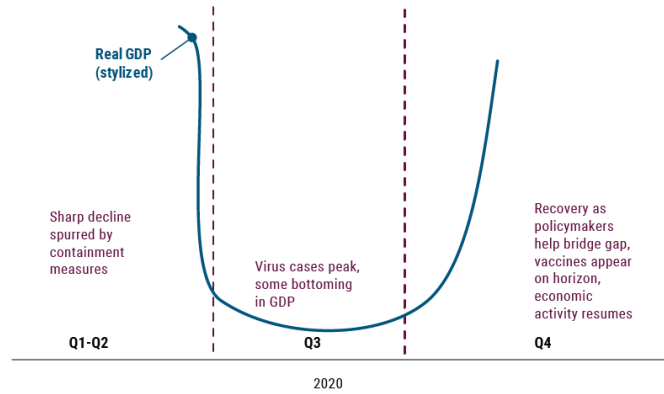
- It is considered as **one of the most significant insolvency reforms** in the **economic history of India.**
- It **provides a mechanism** for the **insolvency resolution of debtors** in a **time-bound manner** to **enable maximisation of the value of their assets**, to promote **entrepreneurship, availability of credit** and **balance the interests of all the stakeholders.**
- Under the IBC, **an entity can seek insolvency proceedings** against a **company even if the default is only one day.**
- This is **subject to the minimum threshold of Rs 1 crore**, which was earlier; the **threshold was Rs 1 lakh.**

### Shapes of economic recovery

#### Why in the news?

- Given the **weakness of India's economy** going into the **Covid crisis** as well as the **less than adequate fiscal stimulus**, India is likely to end up with an **elongated U-shape recovery.**



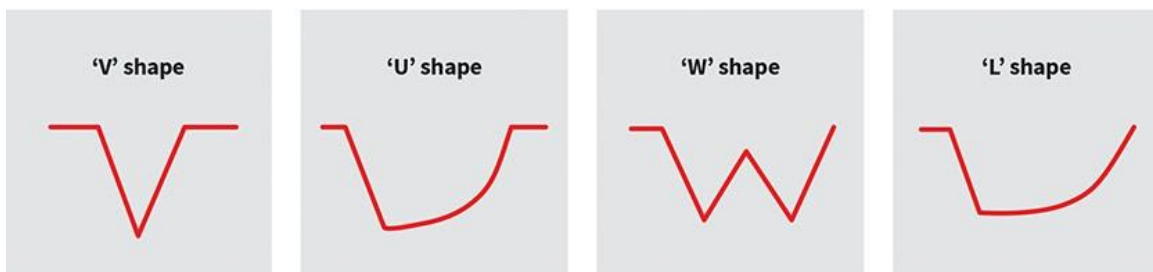


YEAR	Likely growth rate of GDP (in %)	Likely absolute GDP in Rs Trillion*	Absolute GDP at 6% growth (Rs Trillion)	Absolute GDP at 8% growth (Rs Trillion)
2019-20 (pre-Covid)	5	207		
2019-20 (post-Covid)	3	203		
2020-21	-12	178	219	224
2021-22	-9	163	233	242
2022-23	6	172	247	261
2023-24	6	183	261	282

Source: Pronab Sen and Ideas for India; Express Research Group  
 \*2019-20 prices

**Why is it important for India?**

- The **Indian economy was slowing down** even before Covid hit, and the **trouble has now been amplified** manifold because of the lockdowns.
- Experts predict a **fall of up to 5 per cent in the GDP in FY-21**.
- This is **clearly a crisis situation**, and our getting out of the hole will **depend a great deal** on the **shape of the economic recovery** that will hopefully follow.
- A **'Z'- or at least 'V'-shaped recovery** would be the most preferable.
- If not, we should at least have a **U-shaped recovery** or a **Swoosh** to get back on our feet in a couple of years.



The different type of shape of the economic recovery is U, V, W, Z, L, J, Swoosh and Inverted square.

**Z-shaped recovery**

- It is the **most optimistic scenario** in which the **economy quickly rises** like a phoenix after a crash.

- It more than makes up for **lost ground (think revenge-buying after the lockdowns are lifted)** before settling back to the **normal trend-line**, thus forming a **Z-shaped chart**.

### V-shaped recovery

In V-Shaped recovery, the **economy quickly recoups lost ground** and gets back to the **normal growth trend-line**.

- It **resembles a bathtub**, in which the **economy, after falling, struggles and muddles around a low growth rate** for some time, **before rising gradually** to usual levels.

### W-shaped recovery

- It is a **dangerous creature – growth falls and rises, but falls again before recovering yet again**, thus forming a **W-like chart**.
- The **double-dip depicted by a W-shaped recovery** is what some **economists are predicting** if the **second wave of Covid comes along** and the initial rebound flatters to deceive.

### L-shaped recovery

- It is the **worst-case scenario**, in which growth **after falling, stagnates at low levels and does not recover for a long, long time**.

### Swoosh shaped recovery

- It is similar to the **Nike logo – in between the V-shape and the U-shape**. Here, **after falling, growth starts recovering quickly** but then, **slowed down by obstacles**, moves gradually back to the trend-line.

### J-shaped recovery

- In this, the **growth rises sharply from the lows much higher than the trend-line and stays there**.

### Inverted square root shaped recovery.

- In this scenario, **while there could be a rebound from the bottom, the growth slows and settles a step-down**.



## **Food Safety Index of India**

### **Why in the news?**

- **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** has recently released the results of the **second 'State Food Safety Index'** to mark the **occasion of the World Food Safety Day**. **About India's food safety index**
- This is the **second index on food safety**, which **FSSAI released on the occasion of World Food Safety Day** with the theme **"Food Safety is everyone's business"**.



FSSAI has developed this State Food Safety Index (SFSI) to measure the performance of States on five parameters of food safety.

The categories include:

- a. Human Resources and Institutional Arrangements
- b. Compliance
- c. Food Testing- Infrastructure and Surveillance
- d. Training and Capacity Building
- e. Consumer Empowerment.

#### Highlights

- In the large state category - Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra have topped in the list of larger states on the index.
- In the smaller state category: Goa came first followed by Manipur and Meghalaya.
- In the Union territories category: Chandigarh was ranked first followed by Delhi and Andaman Islands.

#### Other Related Information

- FSSAI also released an e-handbook on 'Eat Right during COVID-19' for the citizens.
- It highlights safe food practices to be followed diligently and tips on health and nutrition.

#### Raman 1.0

- It is a hand-held battery-operated device, which performs rapid detection (in less than 1 minute) of economically driven adulteration in edible oils, fats and ghee.
- The equipment tests more than 250 samples per battery charge, collects and stores data on the cloud using a smart device.

#### Food Safety Magic Box

- It is an innovative solution to take food safety to schools.
- This do-it-yourself food testing kit comprises a manual and equipment to check for food adulterants, which schoolchildren can use in their classroom laboratories.

#### Eat Right Awards

- FSSAI has instituted the 'Eat Right Awards' to recognize the contribution of food companies and individuals to empower citizens to choose safe and healthy food options, which would help improve their health and well-being.

#### About the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India

- It is an autonomous statutory body established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 (FSS Act).
- Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India, is the administrative Ministry of FSSAI.
- Its headquarters is in Delhi.

## **Turant Customs**

### **Why in the news?**

- **Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs** has recently launched its **flagship programme “Turant Customs”**, at **Bengaluru and Chennai**.



### **Objective**

- It is a **giant leap forward to leverage technology for faster Customs clearance of imported goods**.
- The importers will now get their **goods cleared from Customs** after a **faceless assessment** is done remotely by the **Customs officers located outside the port of import**.
- It is also a **mega reform for the ease of doing business**.
- The start of **Turant Customs at Bengaluru and Chennai** will be the first phase of the All India roll out which **would get completed by 31st December** this year.

### **Benefits**

- **Turant Customs** will benefit the **importers by eliminating routine interface** with the **Customs officers and providing uniformity** in assessment across the country.

### **About Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs**

- The **Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs** is the **national nodal agency responsible** for administering **Customs, GST, Central Excise, Service Tax & Narcotics in India**.
- The **Customs & Central Excise department** was established in the year **1855** by the then **British Governor-General of India (Earl of Dalhousie)** to **administer customs laws in India** and collection of import duties/land revenue.
- It is **one of the oldest government departments** of India.
- Currently, the **Customs and Central Excise / GST department** comes under the **Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, and Government of India**.

## **Forex reserves**

### **Why in the news?**

- Recently the **level of foreign exchange reserves of India** has **steadily increased by 8,400 per cent** from **\$5.8 billion** as of **March 1991** to the **current level**.
- **India's foreign exchange reserves** are rising and are slated to hit the **\$500 billion** mark soon.



## Forex reserves of INDIA



### What are forex reserves?

- **Foreign exchange reserves** (also called forex reserves or FX reserves) are **cash and other reserve assets** held by a **central bank or other monetary authority** that are **primarily available to balance payments of the country**.
- It **influences the foreign exchange rate** of its currency, and to **maintain confidence** in **financial markets**.
- **Reserves are held in one or more reserve currencies**, nowadays mostly the **United States dollar** and to a **lesser extent the euro**.

### India's foreign exchange reserves comprise

#### a. Foreign currency assets (FCAs).

- These are **maintained in currencies like the US dollar, euro, pound sterling, Australian dollar and Japanese yen**.

#### b. Gold

#### c. SDR (special drawing rights) in the International Monetary Fund.

#### d. RTP (reserve tranche position) in IMF



### Reasons for forex reserves rising despite the slowdown in the economy:

- The **major reason for the rise in forex reserves** is the **rise in investment in foreign portfolio investors in Indian stocks and foreign direct investments (FDIs)**.
- **Foreign investors had acquired stakes in several Indian companies in the last two months**.
- The **fall in crude oil prices** has brought down the **oil import bill, saving the precious foreign exchange**.

### What is the significance of rising forex reserves?

- The **rising forex reserves** give a lot of comfort to the government and the **Reserve Bank of India** in managing India's external and internal financial issues at a time when the **economic growth** is set to contract by **1.5 per cent in 2020-21**.
- It's a **big cushion** in the event of any crisis on the economic front and **enough to cover the import bill** of the country for a year.
- The **rising reserves** have also helped the rupee to strengthen against the dollar.
- The **foreign exchange reserves to GDP ratio** is around **15 per cent**. Reserves will provide a **level of confidence to markets** that a country can meet its -
  - a. **external obligations**
  - b. demonstrates the **backing of domestic currency** by external assets
  - c. **assist the government** in meeting its foreign exchange needs
  - d. **external debt obligations** and maintain a reserve for national disasters or emergencies.

### Where are India's forex reserves kept?

- The **RBI Act, 1934** provides the **overarching legal framework** for the **deployment of reserves** in different **foreign currency assets** and **gold within the broad parameters** of currencies, instruments, issuers and counterparties.

### Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS)

#### Why in the news?

- **Union Finance Minister** has recently said that the **COVID Emergency Credit Facility** covers all companies and not just **Micro, Small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)**.



#### About Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS)

- It is the **biggest fiscal component** of the **Rs 20-lakh crore Self-Reliant India Mission package** announced by **Finance Minister last month**.
- Under the scheme, **100 per cent guarantee coverage** will be provided by **National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company (NCGTC)** for additional funding of up to **Rs 3 lakh crore** to **eligible companies and borrowers**, in the form of a **guaranteed emergency credit line (GECL) facility**.
- For this purpose, a **corpus of Rs 41,600 crore** was provided by the **government**, **spread over the current and next three financial years**.

#### Objective of the scheme

- The **main objective of the scheme** is to provide an incentive to member lending institutions to increase access and enable the availability of

**additional funding facility** to borrowers, in view of the **economic distress** caused by the **COVID-19 crisis**.

### **Nature Index 2020**

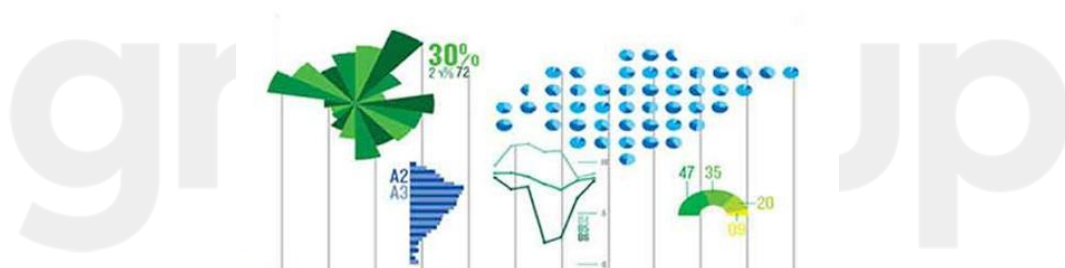
#### **Why in the news?**

- In the **recently released Nature Index table 2020**, **India** is placed **twelfth globally in science** research output by **Nature Index in 2019**, ranked by **country or territory**.
- The **top five positions** have gone to the **United States of America, China, Germany, United Kingdom** and **Japan**.

#### **What is the Nature Index?**

- The **Nature Index Annual Tables 2020** is based on the research published in the **82 scientific journals covered by the Nature Index** and selected by a **panel of 58 researchers in the natural sciences**.
- **Nature Research's flagship publication in Nature**, a weekly multidisciplinary journal first published in **1869**.
- The **Nature Index provides a close to real-time proxy of high-quality research output and collaboration at the institutional, national, and regional level**.

## Nature INDEX



#### **Nature Index, 2020 and India**

- **India is twelfth** in the **country-wise ranking in Nature Index** publications and, from **2018 to 2019**; it has **improved its share score by 4.7%**.
- However, **only three Indian institutions feature in the list of top 100 rising academic institutions globally**.

#### **These include**

- a. IISER Kolkata at 57
  - b. IIT Madras at 77
  - c. IIT Guwahati at 100
- In the top position is **the University of Chinese Academy of Sciences**.

### **Border Adjustment Tax**

#### **Why in the news?**

- Recently, a **NITI Aayog member has favoured imposing a Border Adjustment Tax on imports to provide a level-playing field** to domestic industries.
- This **suggestion comes in the backdrop of the USA-China trade tensions** (trade war) which are expected to raise even further post-Covid-19.

#### **About Border Adjustment Tax**

- It is a duty that is **proposed to be imposed on imported goods** in addition to the **customs levy** that gets charged at the **port of entry**. It is a **fiscal**

**measure that imposes a charge on goods or services** in accordance with the **destination principle of taxation**.

- Under this principle, **government taxes products** based on the location of their sale to the **final consumer** rather than on the **location of their production or origin**.
- Generally, **BAT seeks to promote “equal conditions of the competition”** for foreign and **domestic companies** supplying products or services within a **taxing jurisdiction**.

The **World Trade Organization (WTO) rules** allow for the adjustment of certain types of internal taxes at the **border under certain conditions**.

**The main conditions are as follows.**

- The **tax must be applied equally to imports** and **"like" domestic products**.
- A **permitted border tax adjustment** must not subsidize exports.
- The tax must be **"borne" by a product and not be "direct"**.

### **P K Mohanty Committee**

- The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has recently constituted a **five-member Internal Working Group** under **RBI executive director P.K. Mohanty** to review **extant ownership guidelines** and **corporate structure** for **‘Indian Private Sector Banks’**.



### **About the Committee**

- The committee will submit its report by **30th September 2020**.

### **Terms of Reference of the Committee are:**

- The **group will examine the existing licensing guidelines and regulations** on **ownership and control of private sector banks**.
- It will also **suggest appropriate norms**, keeping in mind the **issue of excessive concentration of ownership and control**.
- It will also **examine and review the eligibility criteria** for individuals or entities to **apply for a banking license and review** the promoter shareholding norms at the **initial licensing stage**.
- It will also **study the current regulations** on holding of **financial subsidiaries through a non-operative financial holding company (NOFHC)** and suggest steps to **migrate all banks to a uniform regulation**.

### **Need for examination**

- The **need to examine the current guidelines** on ownership comes after **large shareholders of private sector banks** sought **RBI's permission to raise their stakes** beyond the **permitted 15%**.
- Top on the list was the **Hindujas, promoters of IndusInd Bank**, who wanted to **increase their stakes in the bank**.

**Note:**



- The **bank licensing rules** mandated that a **private bank's promoter** will need to pare **holding to 40% within three years, 20% in 10 years and to 15% in 15 years.**
- The **rules on promoter holding** have changed over the years.

### **India's first gas exchange launched**

#### **Why in the news?**

- **India's first gas exchange the Indian Gas Exchange (IGX) was launched recently.**
- The **exchange is expected to facilitate transparent price discovery in natural gas and facilitate the growth of the share of natural gas in India's energy basket.**

#### **How will this exchange work?**

- It is a **digital trading platform** that will allow **buyers and sellers of natural gas to trade both in the spot market and in the forward market for imported natural gas.**
- This will be **applicable for trade across three hubs Dahej and Hazira in Gujarat, and Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh.**
- **Imported Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG)** will be **regasified and sold** to buyers through the exchange, thus **removing the requirement for buyers and sellers to find each other.**



#### **Significance of the Indian Gas Exchange (IGX)**

- Buyers do not have to contact multiple dealers to ensure they find a fair price.
- The Indian Gas Exchange (IGX) also allows much shorter contracts –
- For delivery on the next day, and up to a month.
- On the other hand, ordinarily contracts for natural gas supply are as long as six months to a year.
- This, experts say, will allow buyers and sellers greater flexibility.
- The exchange is expected to facilitate overall transparent price discovery in natural gas, and facilitate the growth of the share of natural gas in India's energy basket.

#### **Current situation**

- Currently, the **pipeline infrastructure necessary for the transportation of natural gas is controlled by the companies** that own the network.
- **State-owned GAIL** owns and operates **India's largest gas pipeline network, spanning over 12,000 km.**
- It is necessary to have an **independent system operator for natural gas pipelines**

- It would **help ensure the transparent allocation of pipeline usage** and **build confidence in the minds of buyers and sellers about neutrality** in the **allocation of pipeline capacity**.

### **International Day of Family Remittances 2020**

#### **Why in the news?**

- The **International Day of Family Remittances (IDFR)** is a **universally recognized observance adopted by the United Nations General Assembly** and **celebrated every year on June 16**.



International Day  
of Family Remittances  
16 JUNE

#### **Meaning and significance of International Day of Family Remittances 2020**

- A **remittance is a money sent back home** by a worker who works in a foreign land.
- This money (that is sent back home by migrant workers) is **considered** to be one of the **largest financial inflows in developing countries**.
- **International Day of Family Remittances 2020** aims to recognize the efforts of such workers who help for the **betterment of the lives** of their loved ones back home.
- The International Day of Family Remittances 2020 also **aims to focus on strengthening current partnerships** among all sectors to **promote the development impact of remittances** across the world.
- International Day of Family Remittances 2020 also **works to maximize the impact of remittances** in the world.
- The Day also furthers **the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.
- The **first International Day of Family Remittances** was **celebrated** way back on **June 16, 2015**.

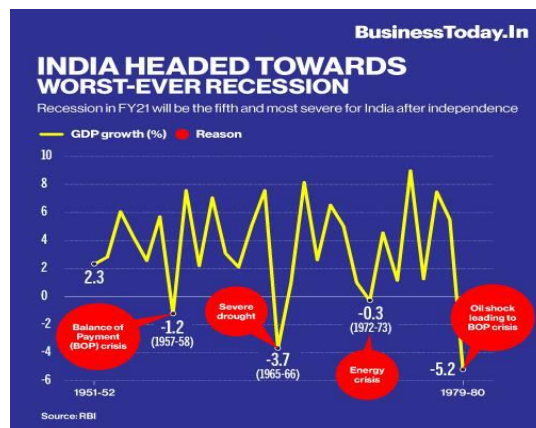
#### **Note:**

- India is the **world's biggest recipient of remittances in 2018** followed by **China (USD 67 billion)**, **Mexico (USD 36 billion)**, the **Philippines (USD 34 billion)**, and **Egypt (USD 29 billion)**.

### **India stares at 5th recession**

#### **Why in the news?**

- Recently **Indian** will be facing the **5th recession** which is different from **previous recessions** as it comes with a **fresh set of challenges**.



### What is a recession?

- **Recession** is generally defined as a fall in the overall economic activity for two consecutive quarters (six months) accompanied by a decline in income, sales and employment independent India's history, four such years of negative GDP growth were registered.
- They saw contraction of **-1.2% (FY58)**, **-3.66% (FY66)**, **-0.32% (FY73)** and **-5.2% (FY80)**.

### India's past recessions

- Since independence, India has witnessed four recessions which were occurred in 1958, 1966, 1973 and 1980 as per Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

### How 5th recession different from other recession?

- Previous contractions in India's GDP had common culprits - weak monsoon and energy crisis, but if India's FY21 GDP contracts, as projected by analysts, its cause would be entirely different.

### Other four recessions are

- Recession of Financial year 1958 - Balance of Payment (BoP) crisis
- Recession of Financial year 1966 - Severe Drought
- Recession of Financial year 1979 - Energy Crisis
- Recession of Financial year 1980 - Oil Shock leading to BoP crisis
- Recession of Financial year 1921 - Lockdown killing economic activity

## World Investment Report

### Why in the news?

- According to the latest 'World Investment Report' by UNCTAD, the Foreign direct investment (FDI) into India may shrink sharply in 2020 because of coronavirus and the consequent lockdown, supply chain disruptions and economic slowdown after jumping over 20% to \$51 billion in 2019.

### Highlights of the report

#### a. Worldwide scenario

- According to the report, global FDI flows are forecast to decrease by up to 40% in 2020 from their 2019 value of \$1.54 trillion.
- This would bring FDI below \$1 trillion for the first time since 2005.
- In addition, FDI is projected to decrease by a further 5% to 10% in 2021 before initiating a recovery in 2022.
- Global FDI flows rose modestly in 2019, following sizable declines in 2017 and 2018.

#### b. India and report

- India has jumped from 12th position in 2018 to 9th in 2019 on the list of the world's top FDI recipients.

- According to the report, foreign direct investment (FDI) into India may shrink sharply in 2020 because of COVID-19 and the consequent lockdown, supply chain disruptions, and economic slowdown after jumping over 20% to \$51 billion in 2019.
- The number of Greenfield investment announcements in India declined by 4% in the first quarter, and M&As (mergers and acquisitions) contracted by 58%.
- The report noted that India's most sought-after industries, including professional services and the digital sector, could see a faster rebound as global venture capital firms and technology companies continue to show interest in India's market through acquisitions.

**c. Other Reports published by UNCTAD are:**

- Trade and Development Report
- World Investment Report
- Technology and Innovation Report
- Digital Economy Report

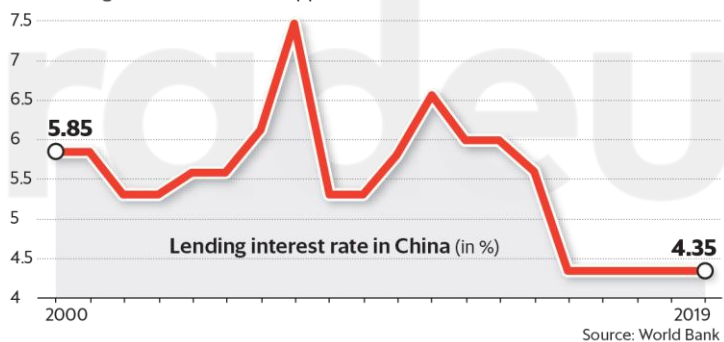
**China's growing threat via debt-trap diplomacy**

**Why in the news?**

- **China** has been using the **financial tool of debt** to gain influence across the world and grab considerable power in India's neighbouring countries.

**Generous loans**

To lure low- and middle-income countries into its debt trap, China offers loans at interest rates that are usually below market rates and have long grace periods. The lending interest rate has dropped from 5.85% in 2000 to 4.35% in 2019.



**How does China's debt-trap diplomacy work?**

- In a push to **gain rapid political and economic ascendancy** across the globe, **China is dispensing billions of dollars** in the form of **concessional loans** to **developing countries**, mostly for its **large-scale infrastructure projects**.
- Often, **developing nations** are lured by **China's offer of cheap loans** for **transformative infra projects**, which involve a **substantial investment**.
- These **developing nations**, which are **primarily low- or middle-income countries**, are **unable to keep up with the repayments**, and **Beijing** then gets a **chance to demand concessions** or advantages in **exchange for debt relief**.

**What are these concessional loans granted by China?**

- These are **loans extended to low- and middle-income countries** on terms that are **significantly more generous** than market loans.
- The '**concessional**' factor is achieved either by offering interest rates that are below the **market rates** or **leniency** in the **grace period**, and often with a **combination of both**. These loans generally have **long grace periods**.

**Advantages of concessional loan for China**



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- There are **several advantages or concessions that China** asks for in **exchange for debt relief**.

**For example-**

- **Sri Lanka**, for instance, was **forced to hand over control** of the **Hambantota port project to China for 99 years**, after it found itself **under massive debt** owed to Beijing.
- This **allowed China to control** over a **key port positioned** at the doorstep of its **regional rival India** and a **strategic foothold** along a **key commercial and military waterway**.
- Similarly, in **exchange for relief**, **China** constructed its **first military base in Djibouti**. In contrast, **Angola is replaying multibillion-dollar debt** to China with **crude oil**, creating major problems for its economy.

**How is the debt trap affecting India?**

- Most of **India's neighbours** have fallen prey to **China's debt trap** and ceded to China's \$8 trillion project – **One Belt One Road Initiative (OBOR)** which seeks to improve connectivity among countries in **Asia, Africa and Europe**.
- The **initiative requires India** to accept that the **Kashmir-controlled Pakistan** region is Pakistan because that's where some of the projects are.
- **China**, through **OBOR**, can hence increase **India's political** cost of dealing with its neighbours.

**LIC IPO 2020: The biggest IPO that Govt is set to launch**

**Why in the news?**

- The government has recently started the process to launch the initial public offer (IPO) of Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) within this year which is expected to be the biggest in the Indian capital markets given the size and scale of LIC.



**Rules in Place**

- Proposed IPO touted as India's largest ever
- Govt invites bids for pre-IPO process advisors
- Up to two advisors to be appointed

**THE CRITERIA**

- ₹15,000 cr capital market transaction in past 3 FYs
- Or IPO of more than ₹5,000 cr in past 3 FYs
- ₹2.1 lakh cr Divestment target for FY21
- Govt eyeing January or March quarter FY21 for the listing

**Background of disinvestment roadmap**

- In the Budget 2020-21, the government had announced plans for IPO of LIC and a proposal to sell the government's equity in the stressed IDBI Bank to private, retail and institutional investors through the stock exchange.
- The government expects to raise Rs 90,000 crore through stake sale in LIC and IDBI Bank, and another Rs 1.2 lakh crore through other disinvestments.
- The government had also earlier listed the shares of General Insurance Corporation and New India Assurance through IPOs three years ago.

**What benefits can be expected through the IPO?**

- An IPO will certainly bring in transparency into affairs of LIC since it will be required to inform financial numbers and other market-related developments on time to the stock exchanges.
- Investors can benefit from picking up equity in the insurer, which has been making underwriting profit as well as profits on its investments.
- LIC's investment in various equity and bond instruments will come under greater scrutiny after its lists on the exchanges.

#### **About Initial Public Offering (IPO)**

- An initial public offering (IPO) refers to the process of offering shares of a private corporation to the public in a new stock issuance.
- Public share issuance allows a company to raise capital from public investors.
- The transition from a private to a public company can be an important time for private investors to fully realize gains from their investment as it typically includes share premiums for current private investors.
- Meanwhile, it also allows public investors to participate in the offering.

#### **Note:**

- Last year, the government has taken decisions on many big-ticket disinvestments.
- These include disinvestment of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), Shipping Corporation of India Container Corporation of India, Tehri Hydro Power Development Corporation (THDCIL), and North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Ltd (NEEPCO).

#### **Government eMarketplace (GeM)**

##### **Why in the news?**

- Recently, the **Government e-Marketplace (GeM)** under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry** has made it **mandatory for sellers to enter the 'Country of Origin'** while registering **all new products on GeM**.



##### **Benefits**

- The changes to the GeM, a **Special Purpose Vehicle** under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**, are in line with the **Centre's Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India** policies.
- **Buyers** on the platform can now see the **percentage of local content** in various **products**.
- They can also **switch on a new Make in India** filter to **see products** that match their preferences on **local content**.

##### **About Government eMarketplace**

- It a **particular Purpose Vehicle** under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.
- It is registered under the **Companies Act, 2013**.

- It provides an **end-to-end online Marketplace** for **Central and State Government Ministries / Departments, Central & State Public Undertakings (CPSUs & SPSUs), Autonomous institutions and Local bodies**, for **procurement of common use goods and services** in transparent and efficient man.

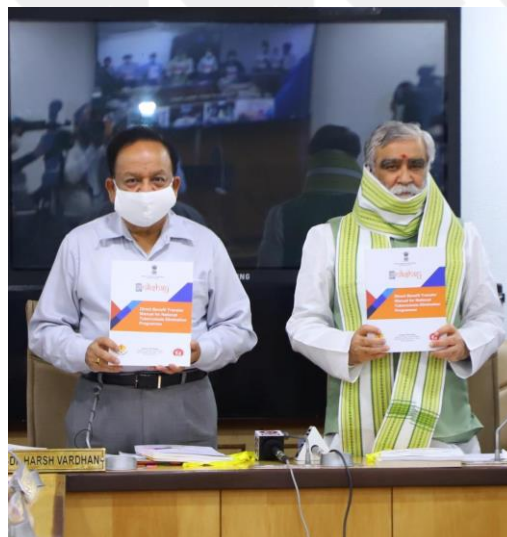
### **Annual TB Report 2020**

#### **Why in the news?**

- **Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare** has **recently released the annual TB Report 2020**. They also released a **Joint Monitoring Mission (JMM) report**, a manual on **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to TB patients under NIKSHAY system**, a Training Module, and the quarterly newsletter, **NIKSHAY Patrika**.

The key achievements listed in the Report include:

- Around **24.04 Lakh TB patients** have been **notified in 2019**, which shows a **14% increase in TB notification** as compared to the year 2018.
- **Achieving near-complete on-line information of TB patients** through the NIKSHAY system.
- **Reduction in the number of missing cases to 2.9 lakh cases** as against **more than 10 lakhs in 2017**.
- **Private sector notifications** increased by **35%**, with **6.78 lakh TB patients notified**.
- **Due to easy availability of molecular diagnostics**, the **proportion of children diagnosed with TB increased to 8% in 2019** compared to **6% in 2018**.
- **Provision of HIV testing for all notified TB patients** increased from **67% in 2018 to 81% in 2019**.



- Expansion of **treatment services** has **resulted in a 12% improvement** in the treatment success rate of notified patients.
- For **2019 it is 81% compared to 69% in 2018**.

**NIKSHAY also expanded the provision of four Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT) schemes of the programme –**

- a. **Nikshay Poshan Yojana (NPY)** to TB patients
- b. **The incentive to Treatment Supporters**
- c. **The incentive to Private Providers** and

- d. **Transport incentive to TB patients** in the notified tribal areas

**Note:**

- The **Government of India** has committed to achieving the **SDG goal of eliminating TB** in the country by **2025**, five years ahead of the **Global Target** which is **2030** under the **National Tuberculosis Elimination Program (NTEP)**.

**Urban, multi-State cooperative banks to come under RBI supervision**

**Why in the news?**

- The **Centre** has recently decided to **bring all urban and multi-State cooperative banks** under the **direct supervision** of the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** to ensure that **depositors are protected**.



**Present Status**

- Currently, these **banks come under dual regulation** of the **RBI** and the **Registrar of Cooperative Societies**.

**Benefit**

- It will **help to ensure that depositors are protected**.
- Currently, the **urban cooperatives and multi-State cooperative banks**, which are **1,540** in number and have a **depositor base of 8.6 crores**, who have **saved nearly ₹4.84 lakh crore**.
- As these **banks have been brought under RBI supervision process**, the depositors would get more security.

**Background**

- The move to **bring these urban and multi-State coop banks** under the supervision of the **RBI comes after several instances of fraud and severe financial irregularities**, including the **major scam at the Punjab and Maharashtra Co-operative (PMC) Bank** last year.
- In **September**, the **RBI was forced to supersede the PMC Bank's board** and **impose strict restrictions**.

**Interest Subvention approved on repayment of Shishu Loans under MUDRA Yojana**

**Why in the news?**

- **Union Cabinet** recently approved a **scheme for interest subvention of 2% for 12 months**, to all **Shishu loan accounts** under **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana** to eligible borrowers.
- The **Scheme will be extended to loans** which meet the following criteria outstanding as on **31st March 2020** not in **Non-Performing Asset (NPA)** category, as per **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** guidelines, on **31st March 2020** and during the **period of operation of the Scheme**.





### Background

- This Scheme is for implementation of one of the measures relating to MSMEs, announced under the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.
- Under PMMY, loans for income-generating activities up to Rs. 50,000 are termed as Shishu loans.
- PMMY loans are extended by Member Lending Institutions viz. Scheduled Commercial Banks, Non-Banking Finance Companies and Micro Financial Institutions, registered with Mudra Ltd.

### Implementation strategy

- The Scheme will be implemented through the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) and will be in operation for 12 months.

### About Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana

- It is a flagship scheme of Government of India, launched in 2015.
- It enables a small borrower to borrow from all Public Sector Banks such as PSU Banks, Regional Rural Banks and Cooperative Banks, Private Sector Banks, Foreign Banks, Micro Finance Institutions (MFI) and Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFC) for loans upto Rs 10 lakhs for non-farm income-generating activities.
- The mission of the MUDRA Yojana is to create an inclusive, sustainable and value-based entrepreneurial culture, in collaboration with our partner institutions in achieving economic success and financial security.

### Eligibility

- Any Indian Citizen who has a business plan for a non-farm sector income generating activity such as manufacturing, processing, trading or service sector and whose credit need is less than Rs 10 lakh can approach either a Bank, MFI, or NBFC for availing of Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency Ltd. (MUDRA) loans under Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY).

### Types of loans provided

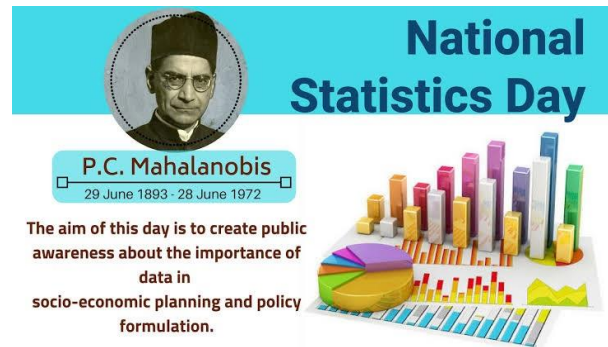
- Under the aegis of Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana, MUDRA has already created the following products/schemes.
  - **Shishu:** covering loans upto 50,000/-
  - **Kishor:** covering loans above 50,000/- and upto 5 lakh
  - **Tarun:** covering loans above 5 lakh and upto 10 lakh

### Statistics Day

#### Why in the news?

- The Union Government has been celebrating the Statistics Day on 29th June every year to popularise the use of Statistics in everyday life and sensitize the public as to how Statistics helps in shaping and framing policies.

- This year the **theme of Statistics Day** is **SDG- 3** (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) & **SDG- 5** (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls).



### About the Statistics Day

- This day is celebrated on the birth anniversary of Prof. P C Mahalanobis, on **29th June**, in recognition of his invaluable contribution in establishing the **National Statistical System**.

### About Prof. P C Mahalanobis

- Prof. Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis is also known as the **father of Indian Statistics**.
- He was a **physicist by training**, a statistician by **instinct** and a **planner by conviction**.
- The **second five-year plan (1956 to 1961)** was based on the **P.C. Mahalanobis Model**.

### Note:

- In **2019**, the **Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI)** instituted a **new award**, namely, **Prof. P.C. Mahalanobis National Award in Official statistics**.
- This award used for recognizing outstanding achievement of **official statisticians** in **Central Government, State Governments, and Institutions**.

## Science and Technology

### **India pledges \$15 million to international vaccine alliance**

#### **Why is in the news?**

- Recently **India pledged \$15 million to GAVI**, the international **vaccine alliance while addressing** the virtual **Global Vaccine Summit** hosted by **British Prime Minister Boris Johnson**.



#### **About the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations (GAVI)**

- The **GAVI Alliance (formerly the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization)** is a **global health partnership of public and private sector** organizations dedicated to **“immunization for all”**.
- It provides a **unique opportunity for a wide range of partners** to build consensus around policies, strategies, and priorities and to recommend **responsibility of the implementation to the partner** with the most **experience and insight in the area**.

#### **Objective**

- **GAVI’s strategy supports** its mission to save children’s lives and **protect people’s health by increasing access to immunization in developing countries**.
- It contributes to achieving the **United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals** by focusing on **performance, outcomes and results**.

#### **Funding**

- Their partners **provide funding for vaccines and intellectual resources** for care advancement.
- They **contribute**, also, to **strengthening the capacity of the health system** to deliver **immunization and other health services** sustainably.

#### **Note:**

- **Immunization** is one of the best buys in **global health** and has a **crucial role in achieving 14 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals**.
- As one of the **most far-reaching health interventions**, it closely reflects the ethos of the **SDGs: “leaving no one behind”**.

**Topic- GS Paper 3–Health Issue**

**Source- The Hindu**

### **Proxima Centauri b**

#### **Why in the news?**

- Recently **Scientists have confirmed the existence of Proxima Centauri b** as an **Earth-sized planet**.



### About Proxima Centauri b

- It is an **exoplanet** (means a planet outside the Solar System) **orbiting in the habitable zone of the star Proxima Centauri.**
- It is **located approximately 4.2 light-years** from Earth making it the **closest known exoplanet** to the **Solar System.**

### About Proxima Centauri

- It is the **red dwarf star closest to the Sun** lying **just four light-years** away in the **southern constellation of Centaurus.**

### Ultra-Swachh

#### Why is in the news?

- **Defence Research and Development Organisation** has recently developed a **disinfection unit named Ultra Swachh** to disinfect a **wide range of materials**, including **Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs)**, **electronics items**, **fabrics**, etc.



### About Ultra Swachh

- It is **developed by Institute of Nuclear Medicine & Allied Sciences (INMAS)**; the **Delhi based laboratory of DRDO** has developed this product with **industry partner M/s Gel Craft Healthcare Private Ltd, Ghaziabad.**

### Features

- The **system uses an advanced oxidative process** comprising of **multiple barrier disruption** approaches using **Ozonated Space Technology** for disinfection.

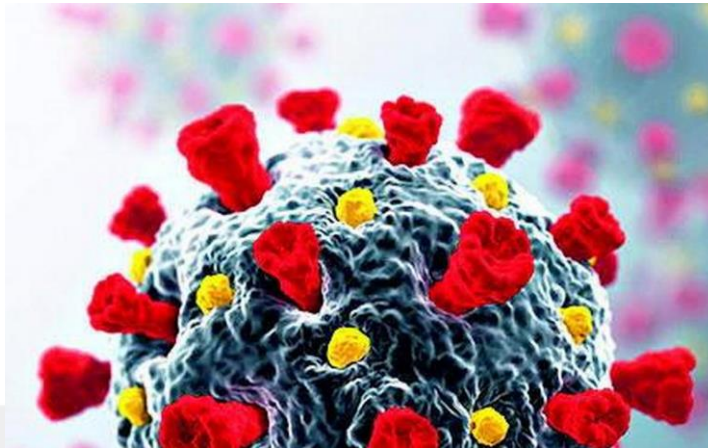


- The system is double layered with specialised Ozone sealant technology assuring trapping of ozone for the necessary disinfection cycle. It also has a catalytic converter to ensure environment-friendly exhaust, i.e. only oxygen and water.

### **A3i: The second most common coronavirus type in India**

Why is in the news?

- Recently Scientists at multiple CSIR laboratories have identified A3i coronavirus type that may be the second most prevalent in India and may comprise 3.5% of the genomes globally.
- The most dominant coronavirus clade in India is the A2a, and of 213 genomes analysed by the group, 62% of them were A2a.



- The newly identified, that the scientists have christened A3i, comprised 41% of those analysed.
- With the new clade, there are 11 SARS-CoV-2 types recognised globally with at least six of them identified in India.

### **A2a ENTERS LUNGS EFFICIENTLY**

➤ 10 mutations from 'ancestral' O type that originated in Wuhan, China, identified  
➤ Of them, type A2a dominates geographical regions, find researchers from the National Institute of Biomedical Genomics

**GLOBAL SPREAD** 3,636 coronavirus RNA sequences studied from 55 countries:  
**A2a:** 1,848 (50.8%),  
**O:** 582, **B1:** 505

**INDIAN SCENE** 35 Indian RNA sequences checked: **A2a:** 16 (47.5%), **A3:** 13, **O:** 5, **B:** 1

**NEW SYMPTOMS:** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cites new Covid-19 symptoms: **Chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat and loss of taste or smell.** Earlier, it had listed just 3 symptoms: fever, cough & shortness of breath

### **Evolutionary similarities**

- The coronavirus type, or clade, is a cluster of SARS-CoV-2 viruses that share evolutionary similarities and are grouped based on characteristic mutations or similarities in parts of their genomes.
- Such classifications are useful in establishing whether certain strains are particularly virulent; spread more easily, how they are likely to evolve over time and whether some could be less vulnerable to certain kinds of vaccines.

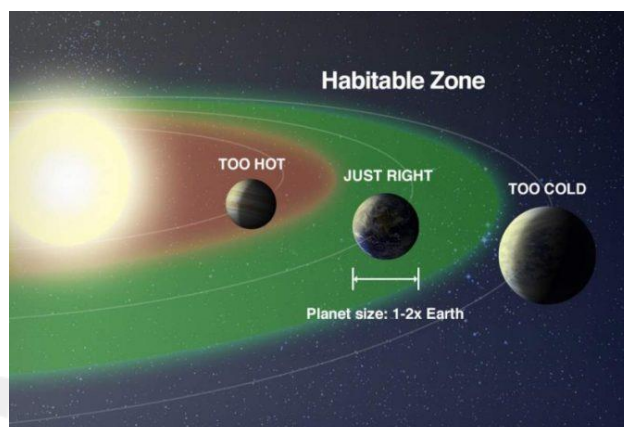
Topic- GS Paper 3–Science and Technology

Source- The Hindu, TOI

### **KOI-456.04**

#### **Why in the news?**

- Recently the **scientists find new exoplanet-star pair** called **KOI-456.04** which having a **resemblance to the Sun-Earth system**.
- The **star Kepler-160** and its **companion KOI-456.04** are more **reminiscent of the Sun-Earth system** than any **previously known exoplanet-star pair**. According to a **team of scientists led by the Max Planck Institute for Solar System Research (MPS) in Gottingen, Germany**, the star Kepler-160 and its companion KOI-456.04 are more reminiscent of the Sun-Earth system than any previously known **exoplanet-star pair**.



- The star Kepler-160 is probably **orbited by a planet less than twice the size of the Earth** with a **star-planet distance** that could **permit planetary surface temperatures** conducive to life.
- The **newly discovered exoplanet** is more than just **another potentially habitable world**.

#### **Similarity with Sun-Earth System**

- The **KOI-456.04** has **resembled the Sun-Earth system** more than any other previously known world is its **Sun-like host star**.
- The **light shed on KOI-456.04** by its **Sun-like host star**, however, is very **much like the daylight** seen on our **home planet**.
- Moreover, the **orbital period of KOI-456.04** around its **Sun-like star** is **almost identical to an Earth year**.
- KOI-456.01 is **relatively large** compared to many other planets that are **considered potentially habitable**.

#### **About the star Kepler-160**

- It was **located in the field of view of the Kepler primary mission** and was continuously **observed from 2009 to 2013**.
- Its **radius of 1.1 solar radii**, the **surface temperature of 5,200 degrees Celsius** (300 degrees less than the Sun).
- It has **Sun-like stellar luminosity** makes it an **astrophysical portrayal of our own parent star**.

### **163348 (2002 NN4) Asteroid**

#### **Why in the news?**



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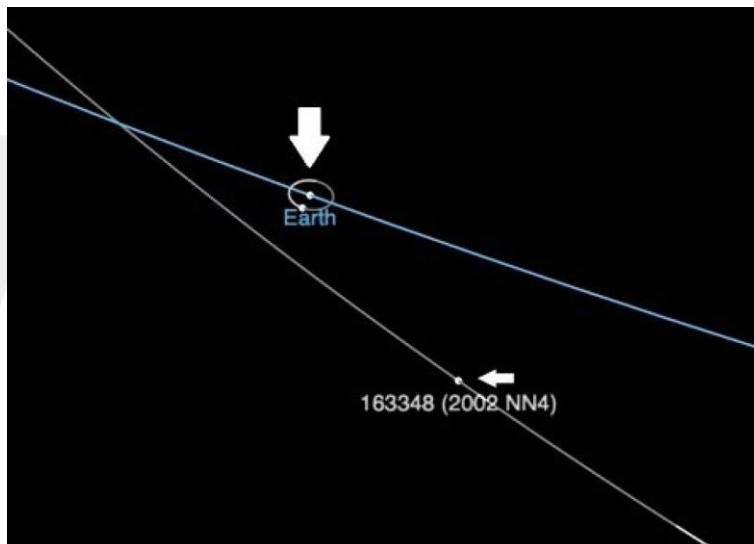
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- **NASA** has recently **announced** that a **giant asteroid** called **163348 (2002 NN4)** is expected to **pass Earth**. The Asteroid is a **Near-Earth Object (NEO)** and is classified as **Potentially Hazardous Asteroid (PHA)**.



#### **About 163348 (2002 NN4)**

- This Asteroid is classified as a **Potentially Hazardous Asteroid**, which means the **Asteroid has the potential** to make **threatening close approaches to the Earth**.



#### **Which Asteroid is called Potentially Hazardous Asteroid?**

- Asteroids with a **minimum orbit intersection distance (MOID)** of about **0.05 astronomical unit** which is approximately **7,480,000 km or less** and an **absolute magnitude (H)** of **22** (smaller than about 150 m or 500 feet in diameter) or less are considered PHAs.
- The **astronomical unit** is the **distance between the Earth and the Sun** and is roughly **150 million km**.

#### **What are the Near-Earth Objects (NEOs)?**

- NEOs occasionally approach **close to the Earth** as they **orbit the Sun**, **NASA's Center for Near-Earth Object Study (CNEOS)** determines the **times and distances of these objects** as and when their approach to the Earth is close.
- **NASA defines NEOs as comets and asteroids nudged by the gravitational attraction of nearby planets** into orbits which allows them to enter the Earth's neighbourhood.
- These objects are **composed mostly of water ice with embedded dust particles**.



**Note:**

- **NASA's Near-Earth Object Observations Program finds, tracks and characterises over 90 per cent of the predicted number of NEOs that are 140 metres or larger in size (larger than a small football stadium).**

**India joins Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI)**

**Why in the news?**

- **India has recently joined the league of leading economies to launch the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI or Gee-Pay).**



**About Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence**

- It is an **international and multi-stakeholder initiative** including USA, UK, EU, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Singapore. It guides the **responsible development and use of AI**, grounded in human rights, inclusion, diversity, innovation, and economic growth.
- This is also the **first initiative of its type** for evolving **better understanding of the challenges and opportunities** around AI using the **experience and diversity of participating countries.**

**Significance for Indian**

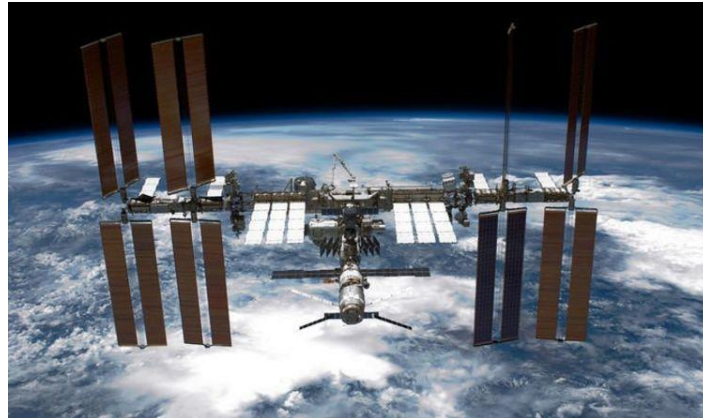
- By joining GPAI as a **founding member**, India will **actively participate** in the **global development of Artificial Intelligence**, leveraging its **experience around the use of digital technologies for inclusive growth.**
- GPAI will be **supported by a Secretariat**, to be **hosted by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)** in Paris, as well as by **two Centers of Expertise- one each in Montreal and Paris.**

**Bose-Einstein condensates (BECs)**

**Why in the news?**

- Recently **NASA scientists** unveiled the **first results from BEC experiments** aboard the **International Space Station**, where **particles can be manipulated free from Earthly constraints.**





### About Bose-Einstein condensates (BECs)

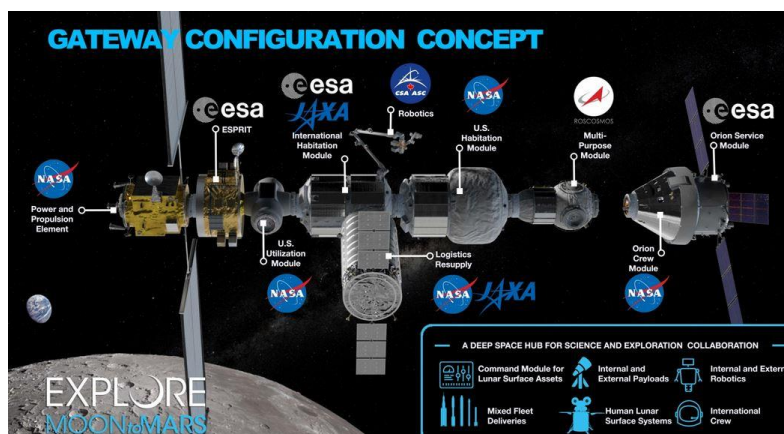
- **Bose-Einstein condensates** -- the existence of which was predicted by **Albert Einstein** and **Indian mathematician Satyendra Nath Bose** almost a century ago -- are formed when atoms of **certain elements** are cooled to **near absolute zero (0 Kelvin, minus 273.15 Celsius)**.
- At this point, the **atoms become a single entity** with **quantum properties**, wherein **each particle** also functions as a **wave of matter**.
- **BECs straddle the line between the macroscopic world governed by forces** such as **gravity** and the **microscopic plane**, ruled by quantum mechanics.

**Scientists believe BECs** contain vital clues to mysterious phenomena such as **dark energy** -- the **unknown energy** thought to be **behind the Universe's accelerating expansion**.

### NASA's Gateway lunar orbiting outpost

Why in the news?

- NASA has recently finalised the contract for the **initial crew module** called **habitation and logistics (HALO)** support for **Gateway lunar orbiting outpost**.



### About Gateway Lunar Orbit outpost

- It is a **small spaceship** that will **orbit around the Moon** meant for **astronaut missions to the Moon** and later for **expeditions to Mars**. NASA developed it in collaboration with **commercial and international partners** like **Canada (CSA), Europe (ESA), and Japan (JAXA)**.

- It is a part of **NASA's Artemis program** that aims to send **the first woman** and the **next man** to the **Moon by 2024**.
- One of the unique **features** of the **Gateway** is that it can be **moved to other orbits** around the **Moon** to conduct more research.
- It will act as a **temporary office and living quarters** for astronauts distanced at about **250,000 miles from Earth**.

#### **Purpose**

- It will act as a **temporary office for astronauts** by **providing living quarters for astronauts**, a lab for **science and research**, ports for visiting **spacecraft among others**.

#### **Related term**

##### **Habitation and logistics (HALO)**

- The **HALO** refers to the **pressurised living quarters** where **astronauts will spend their time** while visiting the Gateway.

##### **Dexamethasone emerges as first Covid-19 life-saving drug**

#### **Why in the news?**

- In a **major breakthrough** in Covid-19 treatment, **scientists in the UK** have claimed that the **generic steroid drug dexamethasone** reduced deaths by up to **one third in severely ill hospitalised patients**.
- The results are a **part of the UK-based RECOVERY trial**, one of the **world's most extensive randomised trials** of drugs to treat COVID-19 patients.



#### **What is dexamethasone?**

- **Dexamethasone** is a **generic steroid widely used in other diseases to reduce inflammation**.
- The **drug helps stop some of the damage** that can happen when the **body's immune system** goes into **overdrive** as it tries to **fight off coronavirus**.
- It is **used to treat a range of diseases**, including **rheumatism, asthma, allergies**, and even to **help cancer patients** better handle **nausea triggered by chemotherapy**.

##### **DBT – AMTZ Mobile Diagnostic Unit for Covid Testing- I-Lab**

#### **Why in the news?**

- Recently **India's first I-Lab (Infectious disease diagnostic lab)** for Covid testing was inaugurated by Union Minister in rural and inaccessible areas of India.



### About the DBT-AMTZ COMManD

- The **Department of Biotechnology (DBT)** under the **Ministry of Science and Technology** along with the **Andhra Pradesh Med-tech Zone (AMTZ)** has initiated **DBT-AMTZ COMManD** (COVID-19 Medtech Manufacturing Development).

### Objective

- It helps to **address the shortage of critical healthcare technologies** in India and move progressively towards a **stage of self-sufficiency**.
- **AMTZ is Asia's first medical equipment manufacturing ecosystem uniquely dedicated to medical technology and supported by various ministries.**

### About Infectious Disease Diagnostic laboratory (I-lab)

- It has been **launched by Minister for Science & Technology, Earth Sciences and Health & Family Welfare.**
- The labs will be provided to the **regional/City hubs**, and they will deploy it further in the **interior, inaccessible parts of the region.**
- It helps to **promote last mile access of testing** to rural India, **DBT under the Covid-Command strategy** has supported the building of **mobile testing labs through AMTZ.**

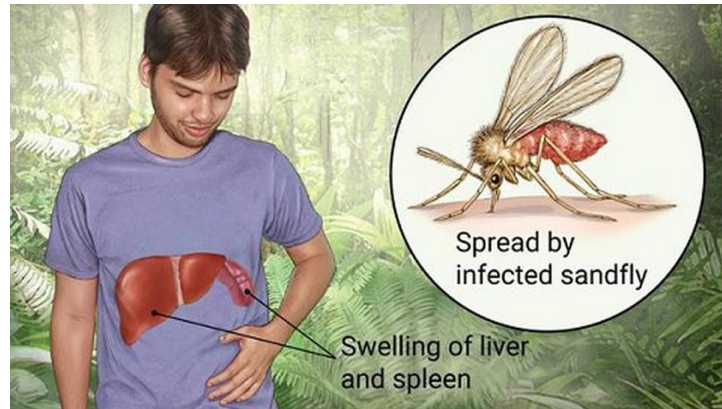
### Unique Feature

- The **unique feature of these mobile testing labs** is their utility in **diagnosing other infectious diseases** beyond the Covid period.
- A close up of a truck Description automatically generated.

### Leishmaniasis (Kala-azar)

#### Why in the news?

- Recently a **team of researchers at the Department of Biotechnology's National Centre for Cell Science (DBT-NCCS)** in **Pune** has been exploring ways to **tackle miltefosine** (a drug used to treat **Leishmaniasis/Kala-azar**) resistance.



### Mechanism of Resistance for Kala-azar

- **Specific types of protein molecules**, called **transporter proteins**, play a **major role in carrying miltefosine** into and out of the **parasite's body**, which **comprises a single cell**.
- A protein called '**P4ATPase-CDC50**' is responsible for **the intake of the drug by the parasite**, and another **protein, called 'P-glycoprotein'**, is responsible for throwing this drug out from within the **parasite's body**.
- A decrease in the activity of the **former protein**, and an increase in the **activity of the latter results in fewer amounts of miltefosine** being accumulated inside the parasite's body, **thus causing it to become resistant to the drug**. The researchers worked with one of the **species of Leishmania** that causes infection, called **Leishmania major**.
- They tried to **manipulate these transporter proteins** in the species in a manner that would result in increased uptake of the drug and decrease in its being thrown out of the **parasite's body**.
- The only **drug available against leishmaniasis, miltefosine**, is rapidly losing its effectiveness because of emerging resistance to this drug due to a decrease in its **accumulation inside the parasite**, which is necessary for the **drug to kill the parasite**.

### About Leishmaniasis

- It is a **neglected tropical disease affecting almost 100 countries**, including India.
- It is caused by a parasite called **Leishmania**, which is transmitted through **the bite of sandflies**.
- There are **three primary forms of leishmaniasis**
  - a. **Visceral which affects multiple organs** and is the **most severe form of the disease**
  - b. **Cutaneous**, which **causes skin sores** and is the most common form.
  - c. **Mucocutaneous**, which **causes skin and mucosal lesion**.

Note:

- **Visceral leishmaniasis**, which is commonly known as **Kala-azar in India**, is **fatal in over 95% of the cases** if left untreated.

### Govt. approves use of dexamethasone

#### Why in the news?

- The **Union Health Ministry** recently released an updated **clinical management protocol for COVID-19 cases**. This includes the **advice to use dexamethasone** as an **alternative to methylprednisolone** for **managing moderate to severe cases**.





### About Dexamethasone

- It is a **corticosteroid drug** used in a **wide range of conditions** for its **anti-inflammatory and immunosuppressant effects**. The drug was **tested in hospitalised patients** with COVID-19 in the **'RECOVERY' clinical trial in the United Kingdom** and was found to have **benefits for critically ill patients** and **reduce mortality by one-third for patients** on ventilators and **one-fifth for patients on oxygen therapy**.
- The drug is also a part of the **National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM)** and is widely available.

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## Security Matters

### Section 69A of the Information Technology Act

#### Why in the news?

- Government has recently banned **59 mobile apps** under **Section 69A of the Information Technology Act** read with the relevant provisions of the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking of Access of Information by Public) Rules 2009.



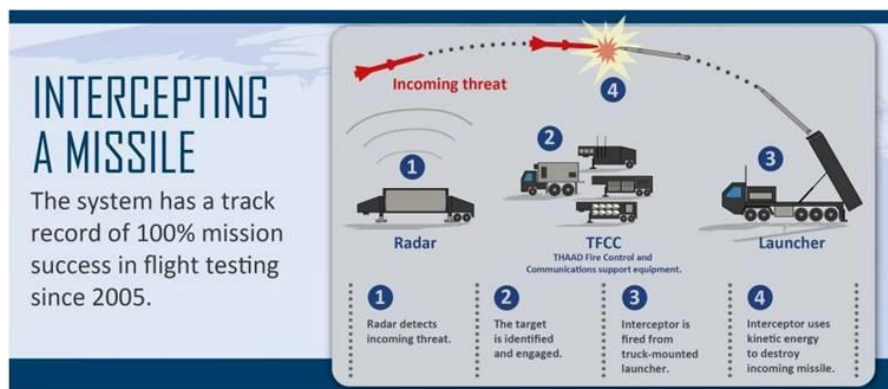
#### Related Information

- According to ministry, these **Apps are engaged in activities** which are **prejudicial to sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, the security of the state and public order.**
- Title of **Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000** is “Power to issue directions for blocking for public access of any information through any computer resource”.
- The **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre, Ministry of Home Affairs** has also sent an **exhaustive recommendation for blocking these malicious apps.**

### THAAD defence systems

#### Why in the news?

- Recently **China** has **issued a statement reiterating its long-standing objections** to the presence of the **US THAAD missile defence system** in **South Korea.**



### What is THAAD?

- THAAD is an acronym for **Terminal High Altitude Area Defense**, a **transportable, ground-based missile defence system**.
- This **anti-ballistic missile defence system** has been designed and manufactured by the **US Company Lockheed Martin**.
- It is coupled with **space-based and ground-based surveillance stations**, which transfer data about the **incoming missile and informs the THAAD interceptor missile** of the threat type classification.
- **THAAD** is alarmed about **incoming missiles by space-based satellites with infrared sensors**.

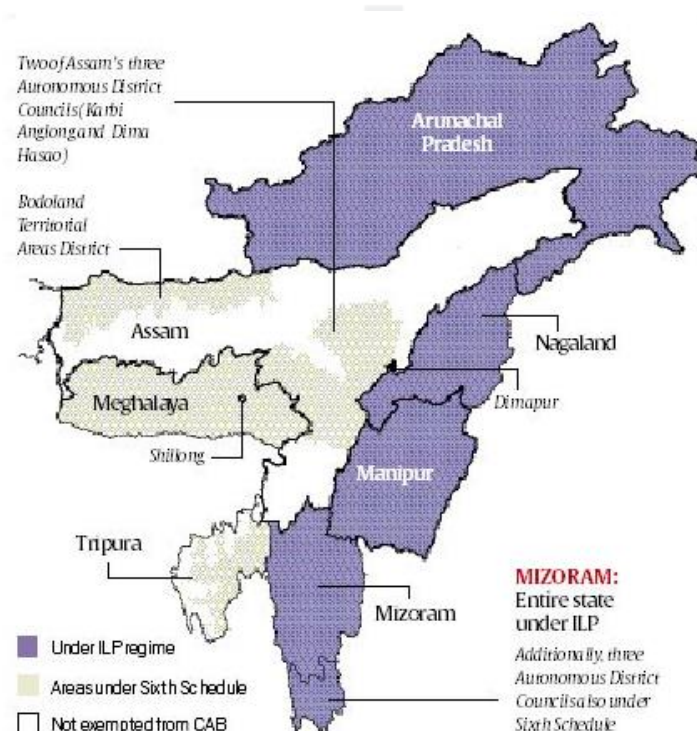
### Note:

- **South Korea** is not the **only country with the THAAD missile defence system**.
- It has been **previously deployed** in the **UAE, Guam, Israel and Romania**.

### Inner Line Permit

#### Why in the news?

- The **Supreme Court** has recently **declined to stay the operation of a Presidential order which petitioners claimed deprived Assam of the powers to implement the Inner Line system in its districts and limit the applicability of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. Historical**



### Background

- The **Inner Line Permit** is an extension of the **Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act 1873**.
- The **Britishers** framed **regulations restricting entry** in certain designated areas.
- This was done to protect the **Crown's interest in certain states** by preventing **"British subjects" (Indians)** from trading within these regions.

### About Inner Line Permit



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- It is an **official travel document** issued by the **Government of India** to allow travel of an Indian citizen into a **protected area for a limited period**.
- It is **obligatory for Indian citizens** from outside certain states, to obtain such a permit.
- At present, **four Northeastern states are covered**, namely, **Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram are protected by the Inner Line**, and lately, **Manipur** was added.

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A promotional banner for Gradeup's Green Card. On the left, there is a small illustration of a person sitting at a desk with a laptop. The background is green with white text. A red button with white text is on the right.

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## Miscellaneous

### **Global Economic Prospects Report: World Bank**

#### **Why is in the news?**

- The **World Bank** has recently released the **Global Economic Prospects report 2020**, which **highlighted the adverse impact of COVID 19** upon the countries.



#### **Key highlights of the report:**

- The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to have **“severe” short and long-term effects on economic growth**. The **Emerging Market and Developing Economies (EMDEs)** are especially **vulnerable, which faces health crises, restrictions and external shocks** like falling trade, tourism and commodity prices, as well as capital outflows.
- These countries are **expected to have a 3-8% output loss** in the short term, based on **studies of previous pandemics**
- **Sixty million people** could be **pushed into extreme poverty this year**.

#### **About the World Bank**

- The **World Bank Group** is one of the **world’s largest sources of funding and knowledge for developing countries**.
- Its **five institutions share a commitment to reducing poverty, increasing shared prosperity, and promoting sustainable development**.

#### **The organizations in the group are:**

- a. International Development Association (IDA).
- b. International Finance Corporation (IFC).
- c. Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA).
- d. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD).
- e. International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID)

#### **Note:**

- **IBRD, IFC and IDA are Specialized Agencies of the United Nations** whereas **the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) and Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) are not Specialized Agencies**.

#### **Other Reports and Indices of World Bank**

- a. Ease of Doing Business
- b. World Development Report
- c. Global Economic Prospect (GEP) report
- d. Remittance Report
- e. Ease of Living Index
- f. India Development Update
- g. Universal Health Coverage Index
- h. The Service Trade Restriction Index

## QS World University rankings

### Why in the news?

- **Quacquarelli Symonds (QS)** has recently published its **annual QS World University Rankings**.



### About QS World University rankings

- It is previously known as **Times Higher Education–QS World University Rankings**.
- The **publisher had collaborated with Times Higher Education (THE) magazine** to publish its **international league tables from 2004 to 2009** before both started to announce their versions.
- **QS** then chose to continue **using the pre-existing methodology**, while **Times Higher Education** adopted a **new methodology to create their rankings**.

### Methodology of QS World University rankings:

#### Six indicators of QS World University Rankings

Indicator	Weighting	Elaboration
Academic peer review	40%	Based on an internal global academic survey
Faculty/Student ratio	20%	A measurement of teaching commitment
Citations per faculty	20%	A measurement of research impact
Employer reputation	10%	Based on a survey on graduate employers
International student ratio	5%	A measurement of the diversity of the student community
International staff ratio	5%	A measurement of the diversity of the academic staff

### Ranking and India

- The **top five Indian Institutes of Technology** and the **Indian Institute of Science** have all **dropped in this year's QS World University rankings**.



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- The **total number of Indian institutions** in the **top 1,000 global list** has also **fallen from 24 to 21**, despite the Centre's **flagship Institutes of Eminence scheme**.

#### **Rankings:**

- **IIT-Bombay** still **maintains its position** as the **top institution in India** in the **QS rankings** but has **slipped 20 places** from **152 to 172** in the **global list**.
- **IISc** **overtook IIT Delhi** to make it to the **second place** but still **dropped a rank to 185**.
- **IIT Delhi** fell **more than 10 places** in the **rankings to 193 ranks**, while **IIT Madras** is at **275**. Both **IIT Kharagpur** and **IIT Kanpur** **crashed out of the top 300**.
- **IIT Hyderabad** entered the **top 1,000 for the first time**.

#### **Reasons for a poor score in Internationalization:**

- **Out of the six parameters**, Indian institutions get **zero scores on the ratio of international faculty and students**.
- **Poor score on the faculty-student ratio**
- It is because **IITs only count full-time faculty**, whereas **American universities include PhD students** who are teaching or research assistants. **IITs** do quite well on the **research impact parameter**.

#### **Government initiatives**

- The **Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan** or the **National Higher Education Mission** to strategically fund **higher education institutes** in the country.
- The **National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF)** was launched to rank universities and institutes in various parameters, including research.
- The **'Institutes of Eminence (IoE)'** scheme, where **GoI** initially **pledged to support 20 institutes** to become **world-class universities** – of which **six have already been announced**, and **more than a dozen** are awaiting the status upgrade.
- **IITs receive funds** under the **Institutes of Eminence scheme**.

#### **Prime Ministers Research Fellowship**

- In this **undergraduate and postgraduate student** with a **Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA)** of **at least 8.0** from elite Indian institutes will be eligible for **direct admission in PhD programmes of IITs and IISc**.
- They will also be **fairly compensated under the scheme**.

#### **Tenure track system**

- The **IIT Council** recently introduced the **tenure track system** for **hiring and confirming assistant professors**.
- The **MHRD** is **planning to extend this system** to **Central universities** and the draft **National Education Policy** has recommended its **introduction in all institutions by 2030**.

#### **About tenure track system**

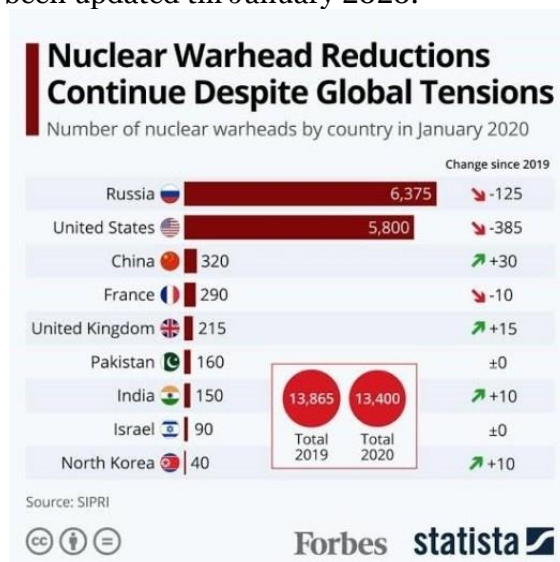
- Under this system, an **assistant professor** may be hired without the **mandatory post-PhD experience** requirement, and her **performance reviewed internally after three years**.
- Based on an **evaluation by an external committee** at the **end of 5.5 years**, he or she may either be **granted tenure (made permanent)** and **promoted to the next higher level of associate professor** or **asked to leave**.

#### **Note:**

- **Anil Kakodkar Committee** appointed by **MHRD** to **Recommend Autonomy Measures to Facilitate IITs Scaling Greater Heights**.

## SIPRI Yearbook 2020

- The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has launched the findings of SIPRI Yearbook 2020, which assesses the current state of armaments, disarmament, and international security.
- The figures have been updated till January 2020.



### Key finding of the Report

- ✓ **Nuclear warhead reductions continue despite growing tension**
  - The nine nuclear-armed states—the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea—together possessed 13,400 nuclear weapons at the start of 2020, a decrease from the 13,865 nuclear weapons at the beginning of 2019.
  - The decrease in the overall number of nuclear weapons in the world in 2019 was largely due to the dismantlement of retired nuclear weapons by Russia and the USA—which together still possess over 90 per cent of global nuclear weapons.
  - The reductions in US and Russian strategic nuclear forces required by the 2010 **Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START)** were completed in 2018, and in 2019 the forces of both countries remained below the limits specified by the treaty.
  - **New START will lapse in February 2021 unless both parties agree to prolong it.**
  - Despite an overall decrease in the number of nuclear warheads in 2019, all nuclear weapon-possessing states continue to modernize their nuclear arsenals.
- ✓ **India and its neighbouring state**
  - China and Pakistan possess more nuclear weapons than India.
  - In 2019, India had 130-140 warheads which make **India at a place of 6<sup>th</sup> rank in the world.**
  - China is developing a nuclear triad for the first time, made up of new land- and sea-based missiles and nuclear-capable aircraft.

### About Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

- It is an international institute based in Sweden, dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament which has been established in 1966.
- It provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public. SIPRI is based in Stockholm.



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