

UPSC EPFO Monthly Current Affairs March 2020

Polity and Governance

Capacity Building Programme for Scheduled Tribe PRI Representatives' and '1000 Springs Initiatives

- Union Tribal Affairs Minister has recently launched the “Programme for Capacity Building of Scheduled Tribe Representatives in Local Self Governments and 1000 Spring Initiatives.

About the Capacity Building Programme for Scheduled Tribe PRI Representatives

- Capacity Building initiative is aimed at empowering tribal PRI representatives by enhancing their decision-making capabilities at local government level.
- It also focuses on constitutional and legal provisions that protect and promote the rights and welfare of the tribal population.
- The programme will be implemented in a cascading mode for better coverage and faster implementation.
- The programme will ensure greater participation of ST PRIs representatives in planning, execution and monitoring of government policies and programmes.

About 1000 Springs Initiative

- It aims at improving access to safe and adequate water for the tribal communities living in a difficult and inaccessible part of rural areas in the country.
- It is an integrated solution around natural springs.
- The initiative will help in harnessing the potential of perennial springs' water to address the natural scarcity of water in tribal areas.
- It includes a different provision like
 - provision of infrastructure for piped water supply for drinking
 - provision of water for irrigation
 - community-led total sanitation initiatives
 - provision for water for backyard nutrition gardens
 - generating sustainable livelihood opportunities for the tribal people.

About Spring Atlas

- Springs are natural sources of groundwater discharge and have been used extensively in the mountainous regions across the world, including India.
- An online portal on GIS-based Spring Atlas has been developed to make these data easily accessible from an online platform.
- Presently, data of more than 170 springs have been uploaded on the Spring Atlas.

Govt approves 32 projects under Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana

- Government has recently launched a total of 32 projects have been sanctioned under the 'unit' scheme of Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana.
- It said the projects envisage the creation of direct and indirect employment for about 15,000 persons and focus will be employment opportunities in rural areas.

About Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana

- Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMPADA Yojana is a scheme for Agro-Marine Processing and Development of Agro-Processing Clusters which has been launched in 2017.
- **Ministry of Food Processing Industries is the nodal agency of the scheme.**

- The PMKSY has seven component schemes
 - Mega food parks
 - integrated cold chain and value addition infrastructure
 - creation of backward and forward linkages
 - creation/expansion of food processing and preservation capacities
 - infrastructure for agro-processing clusters
 - food safety
 - quality assurance infrastructure and human resources and institutions.

Objectives:

- Creation of modern infrastructure for food processing mega food parks/ clusters and individual units.
- To create a robust supply chain infrastructure for perishables.
- To create effective backward and forward linkages – linking farmers, processors and markets.

Period poverty

- The Scottish Parliament has passed the Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill that aims to make sanitary products free for women of all age groups.
- After passing the bill Scotland may become the first country in the world to end ‘period poverty’.

About Period poverty

- Period poverty Scotland’ website mentions some circumstances that make menstruation a “difficult experience” for women.
- These include homelessness, coercive, controlling and violent relationships and health conditions such as endometriosis.
- It is also referring to as “period dignity”, the legislation aims to develop a universal system in Scotland, which will provide free sanitary products for “anyone who needs them”.

Government Schemes To Promote Menstrual Hygiene Management in India

- **The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE) (2009)** includes standards for drinking water and gender-separated sanitation facilities in schools.
- **Menstrual hygiene scheme** launched by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in 2011 in the rural selected district for promotion of menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls (10-19 years).
- From 2014 onwards scheme extended to all districts under **Rashtriya Kishore Swasthya Karyakram** to enhance MH knowledge, improve hygiene practices, provide subsidised sanitary absorbents, and raise awareness of MHM at school.
- **SABLA programme of Ministry of Women and Child Development** focuses on nutrition, health, hygiene and reproductive and sexual health (linked to a rural mother and childcare centres).
- **National Rural Livelihood Mission** of the Ministry of Rural Development supports self-help groups and small manufacturers to produce sanitary pads.
- Menstrual hygiene management is also an integral part of the Swachh Bharat Mission

- Menstrual Hygiene Day is an annual awareness day on May 28 to highlight the importance of good menstrual hygiene management.

Schemes to preserve and promote languages, folk dance, Art and culture of tribals

- Zonal Cultural Centres under the Ministry of Culture is implementing a number of schemes for promoting the folk/tribal art and culture

These are :

Guru Shishya Parampara

- This scheme envisages transmitting our valued traditions to the coming generations.
- Disciples are trained under veterans in art forms which are rare and vanishing.
- Rare and vanishing art forms of the region are identified and eminent exponents are selected to carry out the training programmes in 'Gurukula' tradition.

Research & Documentation:

- It helps to preserve promote and propagate vanishing visual and performing art forms including folk, tribal and classical in the field of music, dance, theatre, literature, fine arts etc. in print/ audio-visual media.
- The art form is finalized in consultation with the state Cultural Department.

Shilpgram

- It helps to promote folk and tribal art and crafts of the zone by organizing seminar, workshops, exhibitions, craft fairs, design development and marketing support to the artisans living in the rural areas.

Octave

- It helps to promote and propagate the rich cultural heritage of North East region comprising of eight states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim, Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura to the rest of India.

Zonal Cultural Centres

- It has been set up to preserve & promote various forms of folk art and culture of the tribals throughout the country including West Bengal, the Government of India.
- It has set up seven Zonal Cultural Centres (ZCCs) with headquarters at Patiala, Nagpur, Udaipur, Prayagraj, Kolkata, Dimapur and Thanjavur.
- These ZCCs organize various cultural activities and programmes all over the country on a regular basis.

Note:

- Sahitya Akademi, an autonomous organization under Ministry of Culture, encourages the preservation and promotion of languages, especially the unrecognized and tribal languages.
- The Akademi periodically organizes language conventions throughout the country in this regard.

EKAM Fest

- Entrepreneurship, Knowledge, Awareness, and Marketing (EKAM) Fest is an exhibition-cum-Fair organized by National Handicapped Finance Development Corporation (NHFD) under M/o Social Justice & Empowerment.

About National Handicapped Finance Development Corporation



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- It is an apex corporation under the aegis of Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment and is working since 1997.
- It is registered as a company, not for profit and provides financial assistance to the Divyangjan/Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan/PwDs) for their economic rehabilitation and provides a number of skill development programmes.

Recent Initiatives of NHFDC are as follows

- **NHFDC Swavalamban Kendra (NSK)** - Initiative to establish PWD owned micro skill training Centers throughout the country for skill training of PwDs.
- **Safe Cabs in Delhi and Indore** – Arrangements with Sakha Cabs (Vehicles financed by NHFDC) where the PwD owned commercial vehicles will be driven by the Women drivers to provide safe taxi option for the women, children and senior citizen commuters.
- **Safe Drinking Water E Carts** - E-carts fitted with RO water dispensing vending machines, these carts will sell water in paper glasses maintaining the hygiene, the carts will be supported in operation by Bharat Jal and funded by NHFDC.

Renewable Energy Management Centers

- Union Power Minister has recently launched 11 Renewable Energy Management Centers.

About Renewable Energy Management Centers

- It is a hub for all information regarding renewable energy power generation”, which would have a “dedicated team for managing forecast RE generation, dispatch and real-time monitoring to ensure safe, secure and optimal operation of the grid.
- These are load forecasting Centres equipped with Artificial Intelligence based Renewable Energy (RE) forecasting tools.
- They will mainly perform three functions
 - forecasting of renewable energy from each plant
 - scheduling of renewable energy to customers
 - tracking of generation from the RE plants.
- The Government of India had approved the implementation of the REMCs as a Central Scheme and had mandated POWERGRID which is a Maharatna CPSE under the Ministry of Power as an Implementing Agency.
- The Centres are being managed by the Power System Operation Corporation of India Ltd. at Regional and National level and at State level by State Load Despatch Centres.

Centre working on the exclusive body for river-linking projects

- The Central government is working on the establishment of an exclusive body called the National Interlinking of Rivers Authority to implement projects for linking rivers.

Function of the National Interlinking of Rivers Authority

- It will be the apex body on river linking in the pipeline.
- It is expected to take up both inter-State and intra-State projects.
- It will also make arrangements for generating funds, internally and externally.

About River Inter-interlinking



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- It is formally known as the National Perspective Plan.
- It helps in envisages the transfer of water from water 'surplus' basins where there is flooding, to water 'deficit' basins where there is drought/scarcity, through inter-basin water transfer projects.
- The National River Interlinking Project will comprise of 30 links to connect 37 rivers across the nation through a network of nearly 3000 storage dams to form a gigantic South Asian Water Grid.
- It includes two components:
 - Himalayan Rivers Development Component
 - Southern Water Grid

Himalayan Rivers Development Component

- This component aims to construct storage reservoirs on the Ganga and Brahmaputra rivers, as well as their tributaries in India and Nepal.
- The aim is to conserve monsoon flows for irrigation and hydropower generation, along with flood control.
- The linkage will transfer surplus flows of the Kosi, Gandak and Ghagra to the west.
- A link between the Ganga and Yamuna is also proposed to transfer the surplus water to drought-prone areas of Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat.

Southern Water Grid

- It includes 16 links that propose to connect the rivers of South India.
- It envisages linking the Mahanadi and Godavari to feed the Krishna, Pennar, Cauvery, and Vaigai rivers.
- This linkage will require several large dams and major canals to be constructed.
- Besides this, the Ken River will also be linked to the Betwa, Parbati, Kalisindh, and Chambal rivers.

About National Water Development Agency

- It is the agency of the Ministry of Jal Shakti.
- It was set up in July 1982 as an autonomous society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- It was established to carry out the water balance and other studies on a scientific and realistic basis for optimum utilisation of Water Resources of the peninsular rivers system.
- Besides it was tasked to prepare feasibility reports and give concrete shape to Peninsular Rivers Development Component of National Perspective.
- It has been also entrusted to prepare feasibility reports of intra-State links as proposed by the States.

Note:

- Ken-Betwa river link entails a 231-kilometre canal between the two rivers in the states of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.
- The project is running through the Panna Tiger Reserve.

Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme

- Recently after COVID-19 outbreak, there are six cases confirmed by the government.
- The Health Ministry's Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) network is in hot pursuit to trace people who have come in contact with the six people whose samples have been sent for confirmation.

Integrated Disease Surveillance Program (IDSP)

- The Integrated Disease Surveillance Program (IDSP) was initiated in assistance with the World Bank, in the year 2004.
- The scheme aimed to strengthen disease surveillance for infectious diseases to detect and respond to outbreaks immediately.
- The surveillance data is collected on three specified reporting formats, namely **“S” (suspected cases), and “P” (presumptive cases) and “L” (laboratory-confirmed cases) filled by Health Workers, Clinicians and Laboratory staff respectively.**

Objective:

- To strengthen/maintain decentralized laboratory-based IT enabled disease surveillance system for epidemic-prone diseases to monitor disease trends and to detect and respond to outbreaks in the early rising phase through trained Rapid Response Team.

Programme Components:

- Integration and decentralization of surveillance activities through the establishment of surveillance units at Centre, State and District level.
- Use of Information Communication Technology for collection, collation, compilation, analysis and dissemination of data.
- Strengthening of public health laboratories.
- Intersectoral Coordination for zoonotic disease.

Sukhna Lake is a living entity with rights: HC

- The Punjab and Haryana high court has recently declared Sukhna Lake a “living entity” or “legal person” with rights, duties and liabilities of a living person.
- It also declared all citizens of Chandigarh as loco parentis (in the place of a parent) to save the lake from extinction.
- The court observed that Sukhna Lake is required to be declared as a legal entity for its survival, preservation and conservation.
- The Chandigarh administration has been directed to declare it a wetland within a period of three months.

Earlier Decision

- Earlier in 2018, a bench presided over by justice Sharma had accorded the status of “legal person or entity” to animals in Haryana.
- In Uttarakhand high court, justice Sharma was part of a bench in 2017, which declared the Ganga and Yamuna as living entities, a verdict that was later stayed by the Supreme Court.

National Programme for Dairy Development Scheme

- The Minister of State for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying have given written reply about the implementing National Programme for Dairy Development (NPDD) scheme.

National Programme for Dairy Development Scheme

- The National Programme for Dairy Development (NPDD) scheme was launched by the Government of India.
- The NPDD scheme is designed to provide technical and financial assistance for dairy development.

Objectives of the Scheme



- To strengthen and create the necessary infrastructure for the production of quality milk including the creation and development of cold chain infrastructure that will enhance the linkage between the farmers and their consumers.
- To strengthen and create the infrastructure required for the production, procurement, marketing and processing of milk.
- To create appropriate training infrastructure and facilities for the training of dairy farmers.
- To strengthen the dairy Producer Companies/cooperative societies at the village level
- To increase the production of milk by providing the most needed technical input services like mineral mixture and cattle feed, etc
- It also assists the rehabilitation potential and viable milk unions/federations.

Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalaya Yojana

- The Government has informed that around 4.39 lakh candidates have been trained during 2018-19 and 2019-20 under Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalaya Yojana.

About Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalaya Yojana

- It has been launched in 2014 by the Ministry of Rural Development as a part of the National Rural Livelihood Mission.
- It aims to transform rural poor youth into an economically independent and globally relevant workforce.

Eligibility

- Rural youth in the age group of 15–35 years.
- SC/ ST/ Women/ PVTG/PWD upto 45 Yrs.

Salient Features of the scheme:

- Provides funding support for placement linked skilling projects.
- Demand led skill training at no cost to the rural poor.
- Mandatory coverage of socially disadvantaged groups (SC/ST 50%; Minority 15%; Women 33%).
- Greater emphasis on projects for poor rural youth in Jammu and Kashmir and North-East region and 27 Left-Wing Extremist districts.

QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) World University Ranking 2020

- Quacquarelli Symonds has released the World University Rankings by Subject 2020.

Key Findings

- The Indian Institutes of Technology, Bombay (44th) and Delhi (47th) have both broken into the world's top 50 engineering and technology institutions.

Twelve institutes in list

- Overall, 12 institutions from the country were ranked in the top 500 in this category alone.
- In the Natural Sciences category, three Indian institutions made it to the top 200
 - IIT-Bombay at 108th rank
 - Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore at the 111th position
 - IIT-Madras scraped in at the 195th rank.

- Jawaharlal Nehru University remained the country's top institution in the Arts and Humanities category, with a global ranking of 162
- Delhi University topped the Social Sciences and Management category, with a global ranking of 160, followed by IIT-Delhi at 183.
- There are no Indian institutions in the world's top 200 when it comes to Life Sciences and Medicine.
- The top institution in the country is the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, which had a global ranking of 231.

Land Ports Authority of India

- Union Minister of State for Home Affairs has addressed the 4th Foundation Day of the Land Ports Authority of India.

About the Land Ports Authority of India

- It came into being on March 1, 2012.
- LPAI was established under the Land Ports Authority of India Act, 2010 as a statutory body to function as a body corporate under the administrative control of the Department of Border Management, Ministry of Home Affairs.
- It has vested with the powers on the lines of similar bodies like the Airports Authority of India.
- The LPAI is mandated to provide better administration and cohesive management at border crossings on India's land borders.

Solar Charkha Mission

- Union Minister for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises has given in written reply to a question in Lok Sabha about the subsidies in Solar Charkha Mission.

About Mission Solar Charkha

- The Solar Charkha Mission is a Ministry of Micro Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) initiative launched during June 2018.
- The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) would implement the programme.

Scheme Objectives

The objectives of the Scheme are as follows:

- To ensure inclusive growth by the generation of employment, especially for women and youth, and sustainable development through solar charkha clusters in rural areas.
- To boost the rural economy and help in arresting migration from rural to urban areas.
- To leverage low-cost, innovative technologies and processes for sustenance

Project Coverage

- The scheme shall be implemented in all states of India.
- The geographical distribution of the clusters throughout the country, with at least 10% located in the North Eastern Region (NER), J&K and hilly states, will also be kept in view.
- Special focus will be given to 117 aspirational districts for soliciting project proposals under the scheme.

About the Khadi and Village Industries Commission

- It is a statutory body formed by the Government of India, under the Act of Parliament, 'Khadi and Village Industries Commission Act of 1956'.

- It is an apex organisation under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, with regard to khadi and village industries within India.
- It seeks to - "plan, promote, facilitate, organise and assist in the establishment and development of khadi and village industries in the rural areas in coordination with other agencies engaged in rural development wherever necessary.
- The KVIC is authorized to establish and maintain separate organisations for the purpose of carrying out any or all of the above matters besides carrying out any other matters' incidental to its activities.

Central Adoption Resource Authority

- Recently the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) has invited suggestions and feedback for simplification of the adoption process from all stakeholders.

About Central Adoption Resource Authority

- It is a statutory body of Government of India and also an autonomous body of the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- It will promote and facilitates in-country adoption and regulates Inter-country adoption as Central Authority under the Hague Convention for Inter-country adoptions.
- It is also mandated to frame regulations on adoption-related matters from time to time as per Section 68 of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.

About the Hague Adoption Convention

- It is also known as the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption.

Objectives:

- To protect children and their families against illegal or ill-prepared Inter-Country adoptions.
- To prevent the abduction, the sale of, or trafficking of children.
- The Convention establishes minimum standards but does not intend to serve as a uniform law of adoption.

Background:

- The Convention was developed by the Hague Conference on Private International Law.
- This Convention gives effect to Article 21 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Limited Liability Partnership settlement scheme

- The Centre has introduced a new scheme called Limited Liability Partnership settlement scheme 2020.
- The scheme will come into force on March 16, 2020 and remain in force up to June 13, 2020.

About the Limited Liability Partnership scheme

- It helps non-compliant Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) firms turn compliant and enable 'ease of doing businesses for such entities.
- This scheme would provide a one-time relaxation in an additional fee to the defaulting LLPs to make good their default by allowing filing of pending documents and help them serve as a compliant LLP in future.

- It would be applicable to a “defaulting LLP” for filing documents, which were due for filing till October 31, 2019, on payment of a nominal additional fee of ₹10 per day for the period of delay.

Centre launches the second phase of Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen)

- Union Minister of Jal Shakti has launched the second phase of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) - SBM (G) Phase-II.
- It will be implemented from 2020-2021 to 2024-2025 in a mission mode.

About the second phase of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen)

- The second phase will focus on sustaining the gains made under the programme in the last five years in terms of toilet access and usage, ensuring that no one is left behind.
- It will also ensure that effective solid and liquid waste management (SLWM) is instituted in every Gram Panchayat of the country.
- It will continue to generate employment and provide impetus to the rural economy through the construction of household toilets and community toilets.

About the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin)

- The aim of Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) is to achieve a clean and Open Defecation Free (ODF) India by 2nd October 2019.

Objectives:

- To bring about an improvement in the general quality of life in the rural areas, by promoting cleanliness, hygiene and eliminating open defecation.
- To motivate communities to adopt sustainable sanitation practices and facilities through awareness creation and health education.
- To encourage cost-effective and appropriate technologies for ecologically safe and sustainable sanitation.
- To develop community managed sanitation systems focusing on scientific Solid & Liquid Waste Management systems for overall cleanliness in the rural areas.
- To create a significant positive impact on gender and promote social inclusion by improving sanitation especially in marginalized communities.

Panel for delimitation in J&K, 4 N-E states

- The Law Ministry has notified the delimitation commission for Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland.

About the Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai Commission

- The delimitation panel has three-member commission will be headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai.
- Chief Election Commissioner has nominated Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra as his representative on the commission.
- The third member will be the election commissioner of the state or Union Territory concerned.
- The delimitation commission is expected to wind up the exercise in a year's time.
- The delimitation of Assembly constituencies of the erstwhile state would be carried out on the basis of the 2011 Census.

About the Delimitation Act

- Delimitation is the act of redrawing boundaries of Lok Sabha and Assembly seats to represent changes in population and is done on the basis of the last Census.
- Under Article 82 of the Constitution, Parliament enacts a Delimitation Act after every Census which establishes a delimitation commission.
- The main task of the commission is redrawing the boundaries of the various assembly and Lok Sabha constituencies to ensure an equitable population distribution.
- Delimitation commissions have been set up four times in the past under 'Delimitation Commission Acts' of 1952, 1962, 1972 and 2002.

Note:

- The delimitation in 2002, in which only boundaries of constituencies were readjusted, was completed in all states, except Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and Nagaland.
- When the exercise began in these states in 2002, the use of the 2001 Census was challenged by several organisations before the Gauhati High Court on the ground that it was riddled with defects.

Right of an accused to be defended

- The Karnataka High Court observed that it is unethical and illegal for lawyers to pass resolutions against representing accused in court.

Constitutional Provision

- Article 22(1) gives the fundamental right to every person not to be denied the right to be defended by a legal practitioner of his or her choice.
- Article 14 provides for equality before the law and equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.
- Article 39A, part of the Directive Principles of state policy, states that equal opportunity to secure justice must not be denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities and provides for free legal aid.

Some Prominent Case related to resolutions not to defend an accused?

- After the 2008 terror attack in Mumbai, a resolution was passed against representing Ajmal Kasab.
- A Legal Aid lawyer was assigned the brief but he refused, while another who agreed to defend Kasab faced threats.
- Subsequently, a lawyer was appointed and given police security.
- After the 2012 gangrape in Delhi, lawyers in Saket court passed a resolution not to defend the accused.

Chief Information Commissioner

- Bimal Julka has recently appointed as Chief Information Commissioner (CIC).
- With her induction, the total number of information commissioners in the Central Information Commission, including the chief information commissioner, has gone up to seven.

Selection process

- According to rules, the CIC and ICs are appointed by the president on the recommendation of a committee consisting of the
 - Prime minister as its head,
 - the leader of opposition in Lok Sabha
 - A Union cabinet minister to be nominated by the PM.

Note:



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- President has administered the oath of office to Julka as CIC in the Central Information Commission.

India accepted as an observer in the Indian Ocean Commission

- Recently India was accepted as an observer in the Indian Ocean Commission.
- Till now, IOC had four observers – China, Malta, European Union and International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF)

About the Indian Ocean Commission

- The Indian Ocean Commission is an intergovernmental organization that was created in 1982 at Port Louis, Mauritius and institutionalized in 1984 by the Victoria Agreement in Seychelles.
- The COI is composed of five African Indian Ocean nations: Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Réunion (an overseas region of France), and Seychelles.
- Its principal mission is to strengthen the ties of friendship between the countries and to be a platform of solidarity for the entire population of the African Indian Ocean region.
- The mission also includes development, through projects related to sustainability for the region.

Objectives

- The COI works on four pillars which have been adopted in 2005 by the Summit of Heads of States:
 - Political and diplomatic cooperation,
 - Economic and commercial cooperation
 - Sustainable development in a globalisation context, cooperation in the field of agriculture, maritime fishing, and the conservation of resources and ecosystems
 - Strengthening of the regional cultural identity, cooperation in cultural, scientific, technical, educational and judicial fields.

Significance for India

- It will help in getting a seat at the table of the organization that handles maritime governance in the western Indian Ocean.
- It also lends depth to India's SAGAR (security and growth for all in the region) policy unveiled by PM Modi in 2015.
- The move would lead to greater security cooperation with countries in East Africa.

Jan Auashadhi Diwas

- Recently the Jan Aushadhi Diwas will be celebrated on 7th March 2020.
- The Jan Aushadhi Divas aims to provide further impetus and create awareness about the use of generic medicines.

Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Pariyojna

- It was launched by Prime Minister with an objective of making high-quality medicines available to all at affordable prices through exclusive outlets of Jan Aushadhi Medical Stores.
- “Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana” is a noble initiative by Department of Pharmaceuticals, Government of India.
- It will be run through the Jan Aushadhi Kendra.

- All Kendras can be located and the prices of medicines compared with the help of the mobile app ‘Janaushadhi Sugam.’

Centre can not brand an organisation as ‘political’ for aiding a public cause: Supreme Court

- A petition was filed by Indian Social Action Forum challenging certain provisions of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010 and the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Rules of 2011.
- Both of which confer the Centre with “unguided and uncanalised power” to brand organisations ‘political’ and shut down their access to foreign funds.
- The FCRA 2010 prohibited acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality for any activities detrimental to the national interest.
- The provisions under challenge before the court included:
 - Section 5 (1) of the FCRA: This provision allowed the Centre a free hand to decide whether a seemingly non-political organisation was actually political in nature.
 - Section 5(4) of the FCRA: INSAF said the provision did not exactly identify the authority before which an organisation could represent its grievance. But the apex court dismissed this contention.
 - INSAF had also challenged the various clauses of Rule 3 of the 2011 Rules. This provision identified the various types of ‘political’ activities for which/organisations whose foreign funding could be stopped by the government.

Key Points:

- SC observed that Any organisation which supports the cause of a group of citizens agitating for their rights without a political goal or objective cannot be penalised by being declared as an organisation of a political nature.
- But the **foreign funding pipeline could be cut** if an organisation took recourse to these forms of protest to score a political goal, the court said.
- It struck a similar balance in the cases of organisations of farmers, workers, students, youth based on caste, community, religion, language, etc. It said their foreign funding could continue as long as these organisations worked for the “social and political welfare of society” and not to further “political interests”.

Justification Behind the SC Order:

- Ensure that the administration is not influenced by foreign funds.
- A prohibition from receiving foreign aid, either directly or indirectly, by those who are involved in active politics is to ensure that the values of a sovereign democratic republic are protected.
- Also, ensure the protection of those voluntary organisations which have absolutely no connection with either party politics or active politics cannot be denied access to foreign contributions.

Schemes for Women Empowerment: Minority Affairs Ministry

- The Ministry of Minority Affairs has been implementing various schemes for socio-economic and educational empowerment of women from minority communities

Who are the minorities?



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- The Minister of Minority Affairs has stated in the Lok Sabha that Minority has been defined under Section 2 (c) of the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) Act, 1992.
- As per Section 2 (c) of the NCM Act, “minority”, for the purposes of this Act, means a community notified as such by the Central Government.
- So far, six communities’ viz. Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Zoroastrians (Parsis) and Jains have been notified as minority communities by the Central Govt.

Various schemes for Minorities are:

Employment-oriented Skill Development Initiatives

- a. **Seekho Aur Kamao** - It is a placement linked skill development programme.
- b. **Nai Manzil** – A scheme for formal school education & skilling of school dropouts
- c. Gharib Nawaz Employment Training for providing short-term job oriented skill development courses to youths belonging to minority communities (MAEF)
- d. National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (NMDFC)
 - It provides concessional loans to minorities for self-employment and income-generating ventures.

Improving the living conditions of Minorities initiatives

Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram

- It is an area development scheme.
- It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme for creating socioeconomic infrastructure as well as basic amenities for uplifting the quality of life of minorities in the Minority Concentration Areas.
- The thrust of the Scheme is to allocate at least 80% of the resources for education, health and skill development, out of which 33-40% are to be specifically allocated for women-centric projects.

Haj without Mehram:

- Restrictions lifted on Muslim women going for Haj without “Mehram” (male companion).

WISTEMM Program

- Recently WISTEMM program of the Department of Science and Technology (DST) in association with Indo-U.S. Science & Technology Forum (IUSSTF) have provided international exposure to several women scientists.
- The acronym of WISTEMM program is Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine.

Other related schemes

KIRAN Scheme

- The Knowledge Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing Scheme is one of the several pioneering initiatives started by the Department of Science and Technology for promoting women in science.
- The scheme provides various career opportunities to women scientists and technologists.
- It is primarily aimed to bring gender parity in the Science & Technology sector by inducting more women talent in the research & development domain through various programmes.

Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship programme

- The Union Minister for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has launched the Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship programme in the Indian Institute of Management in Bengaluru.
- The Fellowship is launched as part of the SANKALP programme of the ministry to provide skilled manpower for District Skill Committees to prepare the District Skill Development plan.

About SANKALP Programme

- Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion (SANKALP) project aims to implement the mandate of the National Skill Development Mission (NSDM).
- It was launched on 15th July by Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, through its core sub-missions.
- The project will be implemented in mission mode through World Bank support and is aligned with the overall objectives of the NSDM.
- The main objectives of the project include strengthening institutional mechanisms at both national and state levels.
- The SANKALP program consists of four objectives:
 - Strengthened institutional mechanisms at National and State levels to guide planning, delivery and monitoring of market-relevant training;
 - Improved Quality and Market Relevance of SD programs
 - Improved access to and completion of skills training for female trainees and other disadvantaged groups
 - Expanding skills training through private-public partnerships (PPPs).

Mahua Nutribeverage

- The Government of India is set to launch a mahua-based alcoholic beverage in the market for the first time.

About the Mahua Nutribeverage

- The beverage has a high nutritional value and relatively low alcohol content, at 5 per cent.
- It has been developed by IIT-Delhi after two years of research in collaboration with TRIFED (Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India).
- The marketing is being undertaken under the Tribal Affairs Ministry's Van Dhan Vikas Karyakram.

About the TRIFED

- TRIFED (Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India) was established in 1987.
- The basic objective of the TRIFED is to provide good price to the products made or collected from the forest by the tribal peoples.
- It is functioning under the administrative control of Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

Objectives

- To provide a fair price to the 'Minor Forest Produce (MFP) collected by the tribes and enhance their level of income.
- To ensure sustainable harvesting of 'Minor Forest Produce (MFP).
- To save the tribes from the exploitation of the business mediators who purchase the products of the tribes at a cheap rate and sell at the higher prices.

About Mahua

- Mahua (*Madhuca Indica*) is an Indian tropical tree found largely in the central and north Indian plains and forests.
- It is adaptable to arid environments, being a prominent tree in tropical mixed deciduous forests in India in the states of Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Gujarat, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.
- The mahua flowers are a rich source of sugars and are said to contain vitamins, minerals and calcium.

United Nations adopts political declaration on women's rights

- United Nations has adopted a stripped-down political declaration on women's rights the **64th session** of the **Commission on the Status of Women**. The declaration seeks to preserve gains under threat but does not advocate new ways to ensure progress toward gender equality.
- The declaration follows the main lines of the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995**, which sought to promote women's emancipation and advancement around the world.
- It underlines the importance of gender equality to progress on all **17 Sustainable Development Goals**.

About the Beijing Declaration

- The Beijing Declaration was a resolution adopted by the United Nations at the **Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995**.
- It sets strategic objectives for the advancement of women and gender equality in 12 critical areas of concern like women and health, women in power and decision-making, the girl-child, women and the environment.

About the Commission on the Status of Women

- The Commission on the Status of Women was **established in 1946** as a functional commission of the **United Nations Economic and Social Council**.
- It is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The year **2020** is regarded as '**A milestone year for gender equality**'

In addition to the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Conference, the year will feature:

- 64th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.
- Generation Equality Forum in Mexico in May, and France, in July.
- High-level meeting of the 75th General Assembly on gender equality in September.
- 20th anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security in October.
- The Sustainable Development Goals five-year milestone.
- 10th anniversary of UN Women.

Note: A UN declaration on women is approved every five years.

Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme

Raksha Rajya Mantri has given in a written reply about the Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme in Lok Sabha.

About the Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme

- It is a flagship scheme of Ministry of Defence launched in 2003.



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- It aims to provide allopathic and AYUSH Medicare to Ex-servicemen pensioner and their dependents through a network of ECHS Polyclinics, Service medical facilities and civil empanelled/Govt. hospitals/AYUSH hospitals.
- It is structured on the lines of Central Government Health Scheme to ensure cashless transactions for the patients and is financed by the Government of India.
- It is managed through the existing infrastructure of the Armed Forces so as to minimize the administrative expenditure.
- The Central Organization of ECHS is located in Delhi and functions under the Chiefs of Staff Committee.
- The Scheme caters for medical care to all ESM pensioners including those earning Disability and Family Pension and their dependents, which includes wife/husband, dependent legitimate children and wholly dependent parents.

Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897

- Recently in a high-level meeting conducted by Cabinet Secretary has decided that all States/UTs should be advised by Health Ministry to invoke provisions of Section 2 of Epidemic Disease Act, 1897 so that Health Ministry advisories are enforceable.

About the Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897

- The **Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897** was the British government's reaction to the bubonic plague that hit Mumbai.

Provisions of the 1897 Epidemic Diseases Act:

- The Act, which consists of four sections, aims to provide “for the better prevention of the spread of Dangerous Epidemic Diseases.”

Sections of the Act

- Section 2: It empowers state governments/UTs to take special measures and formulate regulations for containing the outbreak.
- Section 2A of the Act empowers the central government to take steps to prevent the spread of an epidemic
- Section 3: It provides penalties for disobeying any regulation or order made under the Act.
- These are according to section 188 of the Indian Penal Code (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant).
- Section 4: It gives legal protection to the implementing officers acting under the Act.

Examples of implementation:

- In 2018, the district collector of Gujarat's Vadodara issued a notification under the Act declaring the Khedkarmsiya village in Waghodia taluka as cholera-affected after 31 persons complained of symptoms of the disease.
- In 2015, to deal with malaria and dengue in Chandigarh, the Act was implemented and controlling officers were instructed to ensure the issuance of notices and challans of Rs 500 to offenders.
- In 2009, to tackle the swine flu outbreak in Pune, Section 2 powers were used to open screening centres in civic hospitals across the city, and swine flu was declared a notifiable disease.

Laws prevailing in other countries:

England

- In England, the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 was promulgated with the aim of creating specific delineated roles of different authorities to combat infectious diseases.
- The act provides for notification of infectious disease, the role and responsibilities of healthcare workers in identifying contagious individuals and a clear hierarchical chain in which the said identification is to be reported.

America

- The Public Health Services Act from the United States which also like its English counterpart creates an administrative superstructure through which any public health emergency must be routed.
- The Act prepares for a nationwide epidemic by anticipating the need for additional manpower by creating a reserve corps to supplement commissioned corps on short notice.

National Cybercrime Training Centre

- Union Home Minister launched a National Cybercrime Training Centre at the **35th Inception Day** of the National Crime Records Bureau.

About National Cybercrime Training Centre

- The National Cybercrime Training Centre is meant for professional-quality eLearning services on cybercrime investigation on large scale to police officers, judges, prosecutors and other stakeholders.
- The system will also generate alerts on the matching of recovered and stolen vehicles based on the national database of CCTNS.

About the National Crime Records Bureau

- It is an Indian government agency responsible for collecting and analyzing crime data as defined by the Indian Penal Code and Special and Local Laws.
- NCRB is headquartered in New Delhi.
- It is a part of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

COVID Emergency Fund

- Recently the Prime Minister has proposed the creation of a COVID 19 emergency fund based on a voluntary contribution from SAARC nations.

India Response for COVID 19

- India is assembling a Rapid Response Team of doctors and specialists, along with testing kits and other equipment.
- India has set up an Integrated Disease Surveillance Portal to better trace possible virus carriers and the people they contacted.
- This Disease Surveillance software could be shared with SAARC partners.

About South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

- The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established with the signing of the SAARC Charter in Dhaka on 8 December 1985.
- Afghanistan became the newest member of SAARC at the 13th annual summit in 2005.
- **The Headquarters and Secretariat of the Association are at Kathmandu, Nepal.**

Members of SAARC

- It comprises of eight-member States: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka

- There are currently nine Observers to SAARC, namely: Australia, China, the European Union, Iran, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mauritius, Myanmar and the United States of America.

State Disaster Response Fund

- The Centre has recently said that it will treat the Novel Coronavirus outbreak as a notified disaster for the purpose of providing assistance under the State Disaster Response Fund.
- The Home Ministry has said in case of procurement of essential equipment, the expenditure will be incurred only from the SDRF and not the National Disaster Response Fund, NDRF.
- The total expenditure on equipment should not exceed 10 per cent of the annual allocation of the SDRF.

About the State Disaster Response Fund

- It is constituted under Section 48 (1) (a) of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, is the primary fund available with State Governments for responses to notified disasters.
- The Central Government contributes 75% of SDRF allocation for general category States/UTs and 90% for special category States/UTs (NE States, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir).
- The annual Central contribution is released in two equal instalments as per the recommendation of the Finance Commission.
- SDRF shall be used only for meeting the expenditure for providing immediate relief to the victims.

Disaster (s) covered under SDRF

- Cyclone, drought, earthquake, fire, flood, tsunami, hailstorm, landslide, avalanche, cloudburst, pest attack, frost and cold waves.

During Local Disaster

- A State Government may use up to 10 percent of the funds available under the SDRF for providing immediate relief to the victims of natural disasters that they consider to be 'disasters' within the local context in the State.
- These are not included in the notified list of disasters of the Ministry of Home Affairs subject to the condition that the State Government has listed the State-specific natural disasters and notified clear.
- The transparent norms and guidelines for such disasters with the approval of the State Authority, i.e., the State Executive Authority (SEC).

About the National Disaster Response Fund

- The National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF), constituted under Section 46 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, supplements SDRF of a State, in case of a disaster of severe nature, provided adequate funds are not available in SDRF.

Uttar Pradesh Recovery of Damage to Public and Private Property Ordinance, 2020

- The Uttar Pradesh government has recently notified the Uttar Pradesh Recovery of Damage to Public and Private Property Ordinance, 2020, promulgated by Governor Anandiben Patil.

About the Ordinance

- It is a stringent new law to recover compensation from those who damage public and private property during protests and riots.
- The owner of any private property or the head of the office concerned in respect of public property may file claims for compensation within three months of any incident that causes any damage during public protests, bandhs or riots.
- Claims for compensation will be decided by designated '**Claims Tribunals**' that will be authorized to investigate complaints and assess the damage.
- Every order or award passed by the Claims Tribunal would be "final" and no appeal would be "maintainable" before any court.
- Also, no civil court will have the jurisdiction to entertain any question regarding the claims.

Composition of Claims Tribunal

- The chairperson of the Claims Tribunal would be a retired district judge.
- Its members would be of the rank of additional commissioner.
- It would have the power to attach the property of the respondents and publicize their names, addresses and photographs to warn the public against purchasing the property.
- The tribunal will have to adhere to the principles of natural justice.

Jurisdiction of Claims Tribunal

- The Claims Tribunal shall have all the powers of a civil court for the purpose of taking evidence on oath and enforcing the attendance of witnesses and compelling the discovery and production of documents and material objects.
- The tribunal also has the power to appoint a claims commissioner to estimate the damage caused and investigate liability to assist it in holding the inquiry.

The state of Rampur

- The Supreme Court ended India's longest-running civil dispute last year, and the process of evaluating the inheritance is currently ongoing fighting over the assets and legacy of Nawab Raza Ali Khan.

About the State of Rampur

- The state of Rampur was founded by Nawab Ali Muhammad Khan, the adopted son of Sardar Daud Khan, the chief of the Rohillas in Northern India.
- The Rohillas were Afghans who entered India in the 18th century as the Mughal Empire was in decline, and took control of Rohilkhand, at the time known as Katehr.

After Independence

- Rampur, under Nawab Raza Ali, was the first kingdom to accede to India in 1949, becoming the only Muslim-majority district in Uttar Pradesh.

Patrons of the arts, culture

- The Rampur royals have played an important role in the socio-cultural history of the Ganga-Yamuna belt.
- They run the Amir Raza Library in Rampur, once known as the official darbar of the Nawab, which is home to some 15,000 manuscripts in Arabic, Urdu, Persian and Turkish, as well as a seventh-century Quran.
- The library has also the extremely rare Persian translation of Valmiki's Ramayana, which is believed to have been Emperor Aurangzeb's personal copy.

Note: Rampur District is the only Muslim majority district in the state of Uttar Pradesh, according to the 2011 Census of India which is the 50.57% of Rampur population.

National Creche Scheme

- Recently Minister of Women and Child Development has given in a written reply in the Lok Sabha about the National Creche Scheme

About National Creche Scheme

- The scheme was earlier named as Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme is being implemented as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme through States/UTs. with effect from 1.1.2017.
- It provides daycare facilities to children (age group of 6 months to 6 years) of working mothers.

The salient features of the National Creche Scheme are as follows:

- Daycare Facilities including Sleeping Facilities.
- Early Stimulation for children below 3 years and pre-school education for 3 to 6 years old children.
- Supplementary Nutrition (to be locally sourced)
- Growth Monitoring
- Health Check-up and Immunization

Crime Multi-Agency Centre and National Cybercrime Training Centre

- Union Minister for Home Affairs has launched the Crime Multi-Agency Centre (Cri-MAC) and National Cybercrime Training Centre (NCTC).

About Crime Multi-Agency Centre

- Crime Multi-Agency Centre (Cri-MAC) aims to share information on heinous crime and other issues related to inter-state coordination.

About National Cybercrime Training Centre

- The National Cybercrime Training Centre (NCTC) is meant for professional-quality eLearning services on cybercrime investigation on large scale to police officers, judges, prosecutors and other stakeholders.

Essential Commodities Act, 1955

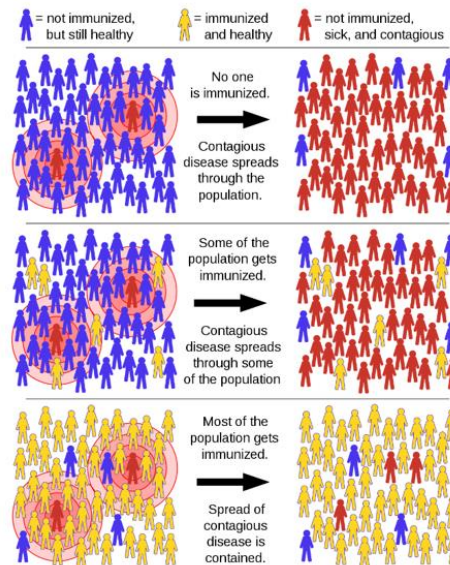
- The Centre has brought masks and hand sanitisers under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 (EC Act).
- It will help to make sure that these products, key for preventing the spread of Covid-19 infection, are available to people at the right price and in the right quality.

About the Essential Commodities Act, 1955

- Under this Act, the States and Union Territories can ask manufacturers to enhance their production capacity so that these products are widely available to consumers.
- Under the Act, an offender may be punished with imprisonment up to seven years.

Herd Immunity

- As Europe was declared the epicentre of the novel coronavirus outbreak last week, Britain announced Herd immunity, a different strategy to tackle the situation.



About Herd immunity

- It is also referred to as community immunity or herd protection.
- Herd immunity is when a large number of people are vaccinated against a disease, lowering the chances of others being infected by it.
- This is the government's strategy to minimize the impact of COVID-19 i.e. to allow the virus to pass through the entire population so that we acquire herd immunity
- When a sufficient percentage of a population is vaccinated, it slows the spread of disease.
 - World Health Organization (WHO) explains it as herd protection of the unvaccinated occurs when a sufficient proportion of the group is immune.

Effects

- The decline of disease incidence is greater than the proportion of individuals immunized because vaccination reduces the spread of an infectious agent by reducing the amount and/or duration of pathogen shedding by vaccines, retarding transmission."

Madhya Pradesh Governor orders floor test

- Madhya Pradesh's Governor has recently ordered a floor test in the state Assembly to allow the State Government to prove its majority.

About floor test

- A floor test is primarily taken to know whether the executive enjoys the confidence of the legislature.
- It is a constitutional mechanism under which a Chief Minister appointed by the Governor can be asked to prove majority on the floor of the Legislative Assembly of the state.
- As per the Constitution, the Chief Minister is appointed by the Governor of the state.

- When a single party secures the majority of the seats in the house, the Governor appoints the leader of the party as the Chief Minister.
- In case the majority is questioned, the leader of the party which claims the majority has to move a vote of confidence and prove the majority among those present and voting.
- The Chief Minister has to resign if they fail to prove their majority in the house.
- This happens both in the parliament and the state legislative assemblies.
- In situations, when there are differences within a coalition government, the Governor can ask the Chief Minister to prove majority in the house.

Composite floor test

- It is the test which is conducted only when more than one person stakes claim to form the government.
- When the majority is not clear, the governor might call for a special session to see who has the majority.
- The majority is counted based on those present and voting. This can also be done through a voice vote where the member can respond orally or through division voting.
- Some legislators may be absent or choose not to vote.
- In division vote, voting can be done through electronic gadgets, ballots or slips.
- The person who has the majority will form the government.
- In case of a tie, the speaker can also cast his vote.

Note: When no party gets a clear majority, the governor can use his discretion in the selection of the chief ministerial candidate to prove the majority as soon as possible.

Mission Solar Charkha

- The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) has launched the Mission Solar Charkha in 2018-19 for implementation of 50 Solar Charkha Clusters across the country.

Objective:

- To ensure inclusive growth by the generation of employment, especially for women and youth and sustainable development through solar charkha cluster in rural areas.
- To boost the rural economy and help in arresting migration from rural to urban areas.
- To leverage low-cost, innovative technologies and processes for substance.

Project Coverage

- The target is to cover 50 solar clusters across the country, whereby approx. 1,00,000 artisans/beneficiaries are to be covered under the various scheme components.
- The scheme shall be implemented in all states of India.
- The geographical distribution of the clusters throughout the country, with at least 10% located in the North Eastern Region (NER), J&K and hilly states, will also be kept in view.
- Special focus will be given to 117 aspirational districts for soliciting project proposals under the scheme.

Current Status

- Till date, 10 projects have been approved under Mission Solar Charkha.

- One Solar Charkha cluster has been identified in Andhra Pradesh.
- The scheme envisages generating direct employment to nearly one lakh persons.

Project Intervention

One cluster of Solar Charkha would involve a maximum subsidy of Rs. 9.599 crore. The scheme would cover three types of project interventions.

- **Capital Subsidy for individual and for Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)**
- **Interest subvention for Working Capital:** It is proposed to have a ceiling of 8% of interest subvention on working capital irrespective of the interest rates being charged by the Banks/Financial Institutions for a period of six months.
- **Capacity building**

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for females

- Union Minister for Human Resource Development informed Lok Sabha about Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for females.

Related Information

- The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for females in higher education is higher than the National Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER).
- As per All India Survey of Higher Education 2018-19, females constitute 48.6% of the total enrolment in higher education and the Gross Enrolment Ratio for females in higher education at 26.4% is higher than the national GER of boys at 26.3%.
- The Gender Parity Index (GPI) has increased during the last 5 years, from 0.92 in 2014-15 to 1 in 2018-19.
- As per All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2018-19, there are 39931 colleges in India, out of which 60.53% are located in rural areas.
- Further, the majority of the colleges provide higher education to both males and females and 11.04% of colleges are exclusively for females.

Unnat Bharat Abhiyan

Why in news?

- Recently, Union Minister for Human Resource Development has informed about the 'Unnat Bharat Abhiyan' in a written reply in the Lok Sabha.

Objective of the Abhiyan

- To involve professional and other higher educational institutions of the country in the process of indigenous development of self-sufficient and sustainable village clusters in tune with the notion of '**GramSwaraj**' propounded by Mahatma Gandhi. It aims to create a vibrant relationship between society and the higher educational institutes.



About the Unnat Bharat Abhiyan

- It is a flagship programme of the **Ministry of Human Resources Development**, with the intention to enrich Rural India.
- It was launched in 2014 by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) and its upgraded version **Unnat Bharat Abhiyan 2.0** was launched in 2018.
- **IIT Delhi** has been designated to function as the **National Coordinating Institute** for this programme.
- The Ministry intends to extend the coverage to all the reputed Higher Educational Institutes, in a phased manner.
- Each selected institute would adopt a **cluster of villages/panchayats** and gradually expand the outreach over a period of time.

What impact it is expected to create in society?

- To engage the faculty and students of **Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs)** in identifying development issues in rural areas and finding sustainable solutions for the same.
- Identify & select existing innovative technologies, enable customization of technologies, or devise implementation method for innovative solutions, as required by the people.
- To allow HEIs to contribute to devising systems for smooth implementation of various Government programmes.

About Unnat Bharat Abhiyan 2.0

- It is the upgraded version of Unnat Bharat Abhiyan 1.0.
- The scheme is extended to all educational institutes; however, under Unnat Bharat Abhiyan 2.0 Participating institutes are selected based on the fulfilment of certain criteria.

Usage of Modern Contraceptives

Why in news?

- The Minister of State (Health and Family Welfare) stated about the usage of Modern Contraceptives in the Rajya Sabha.

GoI Measures

In this regard, measures taken by the Government to increase the availability, awareness and usage of modern contraceptives:

(i) Mission Parivar Vikas



The Government has launched Mission Parivar Vikas on 10th November 2016 for substantially increasing access to contraceptives and family planning services in 146 high fertility districts with Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of 3.

(ii) New Contraceptive Choices

- New contraceptives viz. Injectable contraceptive (Antara program) and Centchroman (Chhaya) have been added to the existing basket of choices in 2015-16.
- A new method of IUCD insertion immediately after delivery i.e. post-partum IUCD (PPIUCD) has been introduced in 2010.
- Emphasis on Post pregnancy Family Planning services which includes promotion of Post-Partum and Post-Abortion contraception.

Redesigned Contraceptive Packaging: The packaging for Condoms, OCPs and ECPs has been improved and redesigned since 2015 in order to increase the demand for these commodities.

Family Planning Logistic Management and Information System (FP-LMIS): It is a dedicated software launched in 2017, to ensure smooth forecasting, procurement and distribution of family planning commodities across all the levels of health facilities.

About the National Family Planning Indemnity Scheme

- In this scheme, the clients are insured in the eventualities of death, complication and failure following sterilization.
- The scheme was introduced in 2005 and implemented through an insurance company.
- It was revised in 2013 and is now being operated by the state governments directly with NHM funding.

About the Clinical Outreach Teams (COT) Scheme

- The scheme has been launched in 146 Mission ParivarVikas districts from December 2017 for providing family planning services through mobile teams from accredited organizations in far-flung, underserved and geographically difficult areas.

Former CJI Ranjan Gogoi nominated to Rajya Sabha

- Recently the former **Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi** has been nominated as a member of Rajya Sabha.
- Gogoi headed a five-judge bench that gave the verdict on the sensitive Ayodhya land dispute on 9 November last year
- **Justice Gogoi** was the **46th Chief Justice of India**.



Constitutional Provision

- Under **Article 80 of the Constitution**, Rajya Sabha is composed of **not more than 250 members**, of whom **12 are nominated** by the **President of India**.
- The nominated members are usually amongst persons having special knowledge or practical experience in literature, science, art and social service.

Who are the nominated members?

- The nominated members are usually amongst persons having special knowledge or practical experience in literature, science, art and social service.
- Nearly a fifth of all Rajya Sabha seats are falling vacant and elections for them will take place on 26 March 2020.

Premium subsidy Sharing Pattern

Why in news?

- Agriculture Minister has informed the Lok Sabha that the premium subsidy sharing pattern between Centre and North Eastern States has been changed from 50: 50 to 90:10.

How it will impact?

- It will allow more States to notify the scheme and existing States to notify more crops and areas to facilitate greater coverage of farmers under the scheme.
- For remaining States, subsidy sharing pattern will continue as 50: 50.
- Also, the insurance companies will now be selected by the States for 3 years in a go instead of one year thereby increasing their commitment and accountability to the farmers.

Appropriation Bill

Why in news?

- The Lok Sabha has recently passed the **Appropriation Bill 2020-21**. It will empower the government to draw over **₹110 lakh crore** from the Consolidated Fund of India for its working, as well as for the implementation of its programmes and schemes.

About Appropriation Bill

- It is a money bill that **allows the government to withdraw funds from the Consolidated Fund of India** to meet its expenses during the course of a financial year.
- As per **Article 114 of the Constitution**, the government can withdraw money from the Consolidated Fund **only after receiving approval from Parliament**.

Passing of Appropriation Bill

- The government introduces the Appropriation Bill in the lower house of Parliament after **discussions on Budget proposals** and **Voting on Demand for Grants**.
- The Appropriation Bill is first **passed by the Lok Sabha** and then sent to the Rajya Sabha.
- The Rajya Sabha has the power to recommend any amendments in this Bill.
- However, it is the prerogative of the Lok Sabha to either accept or reject the recommendations made by the upper house of Parliament.

- The **unique feature of the Appropriation Bill** is its automatic repeal clause, whereby the Act gets repealed by itself after it meets its statutory purpose.
- It is to be noted that state assemblies also have to pass appropriation bills as a part of their respective budget exercises, so as to be enabled to withdraw money from the Consolidated Fund of India.
- Since India subscribes to the **Westminster system of parliamentary democracy**, the defeat of an Appropriation Bill (and also the Finance Bill) in a parliamentary vote would necessitate resignation of a government or a general election.

Note: The Finance Bill contains provisions on financing the expenditure of the government, and Appropriation Bill specifies the quantum and purpose for withdrawing money.

Scheme for Comprehensive Rehabilitation of Beggars

Why in news?

- The **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** has proposed to restructure and formulate a scheme namely **Scheme for Comprehensive Rehabilitation of Beggars**. It will be a comprehensive scheme for persons engaged in the act of begging.

About the Scheme

- The scheme will cover **identification, rehabilitation, provision of medical facilities, counselling, education, skill development** with the support of State Governments, Local Urban Bodies and Voluntary Organizations.
- The scheme will be **implemented in the selected cities having large concentration of Beggar community** during the **financial year 2020-2021**.

Fake Currency

Why in news?

- Recently, the Minister of State for Finance & Corporate Affairs has informed the Lok Sabha about the initiative taken by the government to curb fake currency notes.



- As per data of the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)**, there is a declining trend in **Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN)** seized during the years **2017, 2018** and **2019**.

These initiatives are:

- **FICN Coordination Group**
- It has been formed by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

- Its objective is to share **intelligence/information among the security agencies** of the state/centre to counter the problem of circulation of fake currency cases.
- **Terror Funding and Fake Currency Cell**
- A Terror Funding and Fake Currency Cell (TFFC) have been constituted in the **National Investigation Agency (NIA)** to investigate terror funding and fake currency cases.
- A **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** has also been signed between India and Bangladesh to prevent and counter-smuggling and circulation of fake currency notes.

Commission for Sub-Categorisation of OBCs

Why in the news?

- Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment has informed about the **Commission for Sub-Categorization of OBCs** in Rajya Sabha. The Government has notified the latest extension of the Commission to examine the issues of sub-categorization of Other Backward Classes, by six months, till **31st July 2020**.

Objective

- This order aims to further **study the various Entries in the Central List of OBCs** and **recommend correction** of any repetitions, ambiguities, inconsistencies and errors of spelling or transcription.

About Commission for Sub-Categorization of OBCs

- The committee has been set up to examine sub-categorization of Other Backward Classes on **2nd October 2017** under **Article 340 of the Constitution** to examine the issues of the sub-categorization of **Other Backward Classes**.
- The committee has been set up under **Justice G Rohini**.

Tasks of the Committee:

- To examine the extent of inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation among the castes or communities included in the broad category of Other Backward Classes with reference to such classes included in the Central List.
- To work out the mechanism, criteria, norms and parameters in a scientific approach for sub-categorization within such Other Backward Classes; and
- To take up the exercise of identifying the respective castes or communities or sub-castes or synonyms in the Central List of Other Backward Classes and classifying them into their respective sub-categories.
- The sub-categorization of OBCs can ensure increased access to benefits such as reservations in educational institutions and government jobs for less dominant OBCs

Health Scheme for Jammu and Kashmir

Why in news?

Recently, the Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, Girish Chander Murmu has announced the rolling out the '**J&K Health Scheme**' for **universal health coverage**.



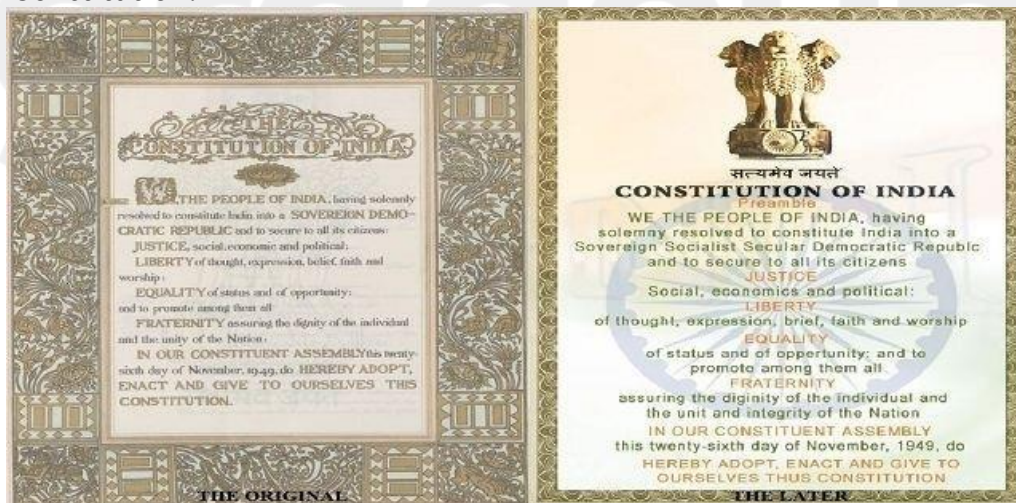
About Health Scheme for Jammu and Kashmir

- The scheme will provide **universal health coverage at free of cost**.
- It will **cover all the residents** of the union territory of J&K.
- The beneficiaries shall be **entitled to free health insurance cover of 5 lakh rupees per family per year on floater basis**.
- The scheme does not have any restriction based on family size, age or gender.
- All **pre-existing illnesses** shall also be covered.

Resolution for removal of 'socialism' from Constitution

Why in the news?

- Recently a member of the Rajya Sabha, Rakesh Sinha has issued a notice to the Chairman to move a resolution to move in the House. The resolution is sought the removal of the phrase "socialism" from the preamble of the Constitution.



What the resolution about?

- The resolution aims to remove the word 'socialism' as the member finds it redundant in the current scenario.
- He wants to create a space for 'economic thinking' by dropping the word 'socialism'.

Preamble as of now

- The preamble of Constitution declares India to be a sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic republic.
- The terms 'socialist' and 'secular' had been inserted in the preamble by the 42nd Amendment Act, 1976 which was passed during the Emergency.

What does socialist emphasize?

'Socialist' means the achievement of socialist ends through democratic means.

- It is basically a ‘Democratic Socialism’ that holds faith in a mixed economy where both private and public sectors co-exist side by side.
- The Indian brand of socialism is a ‘democratic socialism’ and not a ‘communistic socialism’ (also known as ‘state socialism’) which involves the nationalization of all means of production and distribution and the abolition of private property.
- **Democratic socialism**, on the other hand, holds faith in a ‘mixed economy’ where both public and private sectors co-exist side by side.
- Democratic socialism aims to end poverty, ignorance, disease and inequality of opportunity.
- Indian socialism is a blend of Marxism and Gandhism, leaning heavily towards Gandhian socialism.

Can preamble be amended?

- Supreme Court in Kesavnanda Bharti case, 1973 pronounced that the preamble is a part of the Constitution and the Parliament has full rights to amend the Preamble.
- The Preamble has been amended only once so far, in 1976, by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, which has added three new words— Socialist, Secular and Integrity—to the Preamble.

V K Paul Committee

Why in news?

- The **government of India** has recently constituted a high-level technical committee of **Public Health Experts** for **COVID-19** to guide the **prevention and control activities** in the country.



About the V K Paul Committee

- It is a **twenty-one-member committee** headed by NITI Aayog member b.
- **Union Health Secretary** and **Director General Indian Council of Medical Research** is the Co-Chair.

Some additional information

- V.K. Paul is an incumbent member of the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog).
- In NITI Aayog, he leads the Health and Nutrition verticals.
- Paul has recently been appointed as the **Chairman of The Board of Governors of Medical Council of India**.
- He has played a pivotal role in formulating the **POSHAN Abhiyaan** and the **Ayushman Bharat initiative**.

- Prior to the NITI Aayog, he has been a member of the faculty at the **All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi**.
- Paul is an **internationally renowned** paediatrician, academic, medical research and public health exponent.
- He was conferred the prestigious **Ihsan Dogramaci Family Health Foundation Prize** by WHO at the **2018 World Health Assembly**.

Modified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC 2.0) Scheme

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet has approved financial assistance to the Modified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC2.0) Scheme.



Objective:

- To develop the world class infrastructure along with common facilities and amenities through Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMCs).
- The Modified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC 2.0) Scheme would support setting up of both Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMCs) and Common Facility Centers (CFCs).
- The Scheme will create a robust infrastructure base for electronic industry to attract flow of investment in ESDM sector and lead to greater employment opportunities.

How will the move be helpful?

The scheme will ensure availability of ready infrastructure and Plug & Play facility for attracting investment in electronics sector:

- EMCs are expected to aid the growth of the Electronics and Design Management (ESDM) sector.
- Jobs creation by the manufacturing units.
- Revenue in the form of taxes paid by the manufacturing units
- EMCs also expected to help development of entrepreneurial ecosystem, drive innovation.
- New investment in electronics sector is expected.
- EMCs will help catalyze the economic growth of the region by attracting investments in the sector, increasing employment opportunities and tax revenues.

Where will the scheme be implemented?

- An Electronics Manufacturing Cluster (EMC) would set up in geographical areas of certain minimum extent, preferably contiguous, where the focus is on development of basic infrastructure, amenities and other common facilities for the ESDM units.
- The Common Facility Centre (CFC), there should be a significant number of existing ESDM units located in the area and the focus is on upgrading common technical infrastructure and providing common facilities for the ESDM units in such EMCs, Industrial Areas/Parks/industrial corridors.

About the Modified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC 2.0) Scheme

- It is the scheme of Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) would support setting up of both Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMCs) and Common Facility Centers.
- The scheme would support setting up of both Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMCs) and Common Facility Centers (CFCs).
- These CFC focused on upgrading common technical infrastructure and providing common facilities for the ESDM units in such EMCs, Industrial Areas/Parks/industrial corridors.

Eighth Schedule of constitution

Why in news?

- Recently the Union Government is taking positive steps for the listing of three languages **Bhojpuri, Rajasthani and Bhoti** into the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

About 8th Schedule of constitution

- It is a list of **official languages** recognized by the Constitution.
- The Eighth Schedule to the Indian Constitution contains a list of **22 scheduled languages**.
- These languages were added in the Eighth Schedule by the following amendments:
- **By 21st Amendment Act, 1967:** Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Odia, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Sindhi
- **By 71st Amendment Act, 1992:** Konkani, Manipuri, Nepali
- **By 92nd Amendment Act, 2003:** Bodo, Dogri, Maithili, Santal
- The list had originally **14 languages** only but subsequently through amendments **8 new languages** were added.

National Supercomputing Mission

Why in news?

- Recently, the **Department of Science and Technology (DST), Ministry of Science and Technology, New Delhi** officially declared that **14 new supercomputers** will be deployed this year. This initiative will undertake **4500 Crore-National Computing Mission (NSM)**.
- The National Supercomputing Mission (NSM) has gathered momentum and is moving fast to create a computer infrastructure and capacity building for India.



Objective:

- With a transformative approach in supercomputing, it is aimed to develop the next generation of supercomputer expertise. It is a first of its kind of mission which attempts to boost the country's computing power.

About the National Supercomputing Mission

It is the joint initiative of the institutions:

- Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), New Delhi
- Department of Science and Technology (DST), New
- Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Pune
- Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru.
- CDAC and IISc are the mission implementing agencies

How will it impact?

- The mission was set up to provide the country with supercomputing infrastructure to meet the increased computational demands of academia, researchers, MSMEs, and startups by creating the capability design, manufacturing, of supercomputers indigenously in India.
- The target of the mission was set to establish a network of supercomputers ranging from a few Tera Flops (TF) to Hundreds of Tera Flops (TF).
- The three systems with greater than or equal to 3 Peta Flops (PF) in academic and research institutions of National importance across the country by 2022.

Places where these supercomputers assembled indigenously:

- a. Param Shivay, IIT (BHU)
 - b. Param Shakti , IIT-Kharagpur and
 - c. Param Brahma, IISER, Pune.
- These are equipped with applications from domains like Weather and Climate, Computational Fluid Dynamics, Bioinformatics, and Material science.
 - Three more supercomputers are planned to be installed by April 2020, one each at IIT Kanpur, JN Centre for Advanced Scientific Research, Bengaluru and IIT Hyderabad. Doing so will enhance the supercomputing facility to 6 Peta Flops (PF).

Section 188 IPC

Why in news?

- Nation-wide, the Janata Curfew was observed on 22nd March 2020 on Central govt's advice to enforce a full lockdown in districts to contain the spread of COVID-19. The orders issued have been framed under the Epidemic Disease Act, 1897.

- The Act lays down punishment as per **Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860**, for flouting such orders –leading to **imprisonment of up to 6 months or fine up to Rs 1000 or both**.
- In this regard, Maharashtra and many other state governments have announced Section 188 IPC curfew-like measures across the state for people to keep indoors.

Purpose

The orders are issued to curb the spread of the coronavirus and to enforce a full lockdown to avert the spread of COVID-19.

What is Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code?

- Section 3 of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, provides penalties for disobeying any regulation or order made under the Act.
- These are according to Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant).

Under Section 188, there two offences:

(i) Disobedience to an order lawfully promulgated by a public servant, If such disobedience causes obstruction, annoyance or injury to persons lawfully employed

(ii) Punishment: Simple Imprisonment for 1 month or fine of Rs 200 or both

- If such disobedience causes danger to human life, health or safety, etc the punishment would be simple Imprisonment for 6 months or fine of Rs 1000 or both
- According to the **First Schedule of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), 1973**, both **offences are cognizable, bailable, and can be tried by any magistrate**.

Why have governments in the country imposed these curbs?

- The novel coronavirus, which is known to spread mainly person-to-person (first emerged in China's Wuhan late last year) and has since spread to at least 177 countries and territories, infecting thousands.
- The virus has shown community transmission in many areas of the world.
- To counter its outbreak, several states in India enforced measures aimed at reducing public gatherings– called “social distancing”
- Offices, schools, concerts, conferences, sports events, weddings, and the like were ordered shut or cancelled around the world, including in many Indian states.

Finance Bill

Why in the news?

- The Lok Sabha passed the **Finance Bill** by **voice vote without discussion** due to the Coronavirus outbreak.

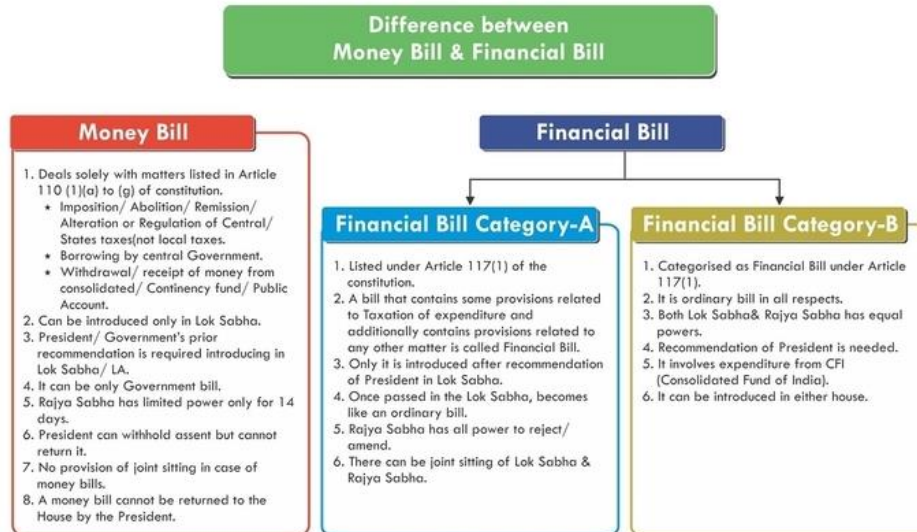
What is a Finance Bill?

- Finance Bill is part of the budget every year. It is introduced to pave the way for financial proposals of the country for the financial year.

Key highlights

- The **Finance Minister** tables the **bill** in the **Parliament** immediately **after the Union Budget**.
- The government uses the **bill to amend the Finance Act** and **notify changes** in direct and indirect taxes, including proposals for (a) levy of new taxes (b) of existing tax structures to the Parliament.
- The govt in power seeks parliamentary approval for a set of proposals.

- **Rajya Sabha cannot amend the Money Bill directly;** it **can only recommend amendments to the bill**
- **Rajya Sabha must return the Money Bill to Lok Sabha within fourteen days** from its receipt. Lok Sabha may either accept or reject all or any of the **recommendations** made by **the Rajya Sabha**.
- The bill must be passed by Parliament **within 75 days** after its introduction.



- Finance Bill is accompanied by a Memorandum that contains the explanations of the provisions that are included in the bill.
- The bill is classified into three categories:
 - (a) The Money Bill – **Article 110**
 - (b) Finance Bill (I) – **Article 117 (1)**
 - (c) Finance Bill (II)- **Article 117 (3)**
- The Finance Bill I and II contain provisions relating to taxation and expenditure.
- Money Bill contains provisions related to borrowings, withdrawal of money from Contingency Fund and amendments to tax laws at the centre or state level. Also, appropriation of money out of the Consolidated Fund of India.

CRITERIA FOR BEING A MONEY BILL		
Article 110 of the Constitution defines the Money Bill		
Money Bills are those Bills which contain "only" provisions dealing with all or any of the matters specified in Article 110 sub-clauses :		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Imposition, abolition, remission, alteration, regulation of any tax 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Appropriation of moneys out of Consolidated Fund of India 	<p>A Bill which has any provision other than money provision (as mentioned in sub-clauses) is not a Money Bill</p> <p>Constitution gives power to the Lok Sabha Speaker to take a final call if any question arises whether a Bill is a Money Bill or not</p> <p>Speaker's decision is final and cannot be challenged in any court of law</p> <p>RS has limited powers with respect to Money Bills</p> <p>Lok Sabha has supreme power in terms of Money Bills</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Regulation of borrowing of money or the giving of any guarantee by govt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Declaring of any expense to be expenditure charged on the Consolidated Fund of India or the increasing of the amount of any such expenditure 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Custody of the Consolidated Fund or the Contingency Fund of India, the payment of moneys into or the withdrawal of moneys from any such fund 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Receipt of money on account of Consolidated Fund of India or Public Account of India or the custody or issue of such money or the audit of the accounts of the Union or of a State 	

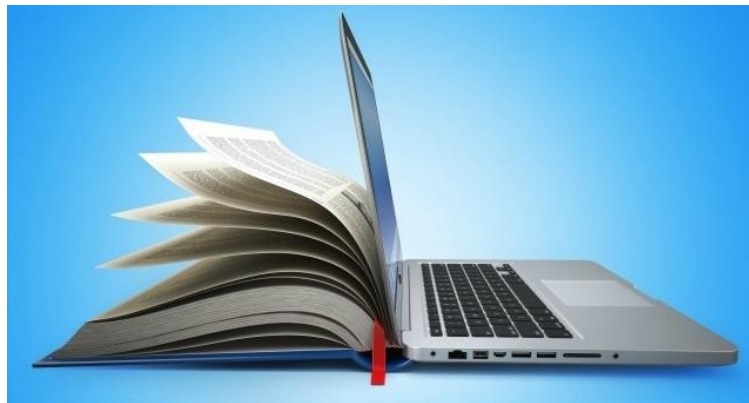
Therefore, it is clear from the classification that money bills are simply a part of the financial bill. Hence, all money bills are financial bills, but all financial bills are not money bills.

Note: Only those financial bills are money bills which contain exclusively those matters which are mentioned in Article 110.

Digital e-Learning platforms

Why in news?

- Union Human Resource Development Minister has asked students to continue their learning through 'Digital e-Learning platforms' amid the COVID-19 outbreak.



Some of the digital initiatives/platforms of Ministry of HRD

(i) DIKSHA

- It offers teachers, students and parents engaging learning material relevant to the prescribed school curriculum.
- Diksha has more than 80000 e-Books for class 12th created by CBSE, NCERT and States/UTs which are available in multiple languages.

(ii) e-PATHSHALA

- It is a joint initiative of Ministry of HRD and NCERT to showcase and disseminate all educational e-resources including textbooks, audio, video, periodicals and a variety of other digital resources.
- In this web portal, NCERT has deployed 1886 audios, 2000 videos, 696 e- e-books (e-Pubs) and 504 Flip Books for classes 1st to 12th in different languages.

(iii) SWAYAM

- Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM) is an integrated platform for offering online courses, covering school (9th to 12th) to Postgraduate Level.

(iv) SWAYAM Prabha

- It is an initiative to provide 32 High-Quality Educational Channels through DTH (Direct to Home) across the length and breadth of the country on a 24X7 basis.

(v) National Digital Library of India

- It is a project to develop a framework of virtual repository of learning resources with a single-window search facility.

Advocate Welfare Scheme

Why in news?

- Several lawyers have moved the Delhi High Court seeking direction to the city government to extend the benefit of '**Chief Minister's Advocates' Welfare Scheme**' to all lawyers enrolled with the **Bar Council of Delhi (BCD)**, irrespective of whether their names appear in the voter's list of the Capital or not.

About Advocate Welfare Scheme

- The Delhi government has made a **provision of Rs 50 crore budget for lawyers' welfare** under the '**Chief Minister's Advocate Welfare Scheme**' in 2019.
- An **e-library with 10 computers** will be set up **in all the District Courts** - Tis Hazari Court, Patiala House Court, Karkardooma Court, Saket Court, Dwarka Court and Rohini Court along with **e-journal, web editions and other facilities**.
- It also includes **SCC Online, Delhi Law Times** as well as **heavy-duty printers**.
- All courts will have the **facility of the creche**.
- Lawyers will get **group life insurance, family medical claim policy**, along with other facilities.

Key Highlights of the scheme

- Group (Term) insurance providing **life cover of Rs. 10,00,000/- per advocate**.
- Group **medi-claim coverage** for advocates, their spouses, two dependable children upto the age of 25 years, for a family floater sum insured of Rs 5,00,000/-

Eligibility:

- All those advocates who are practising in **Delhi** registered with **Delhi Bar Council** and **advocate-voters of Delhi** will be able to apply for this scheme.

Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLAD)

Why in the news?

- The **Union government** has **relaxed norms for use of discretionary funds available with Indian lawmakers** for buying medical equipment that will be needed to fight COVID-19 outbreak.
- The **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)** has issued a circular granting **one-time dispensation for utilizing funds** under the **Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme**.

How will it impact?

- This will **facilitate Members of Parliament to recommend funds** for the purchase of equipment for Government Hospitals / Dispensaries for medical testing and screening of patients and also **facilitate in setting up other related facilities in their respective constituencies**.

The fund can be utilized for:

- **Infra-Red thermometers (Non-contact)** to enable doctors and medical personnel to record and track a person's temperature.

- **Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) Kits** to keep the medical personnel well-protected and enable them to function efficiently by minimizing the risk of transmission.
- **Thermal imaging scanners** or cameras for railway stations, airports and other points of entry which allow detecting of temperature from a safe distance.
- **CORONA testing kits** approved by M/o Health and Family Welfare
- **ICU Ventilator and Isolation/ Quarantine Wards** within their approved facilities.
- **Face masks, gloves and Sanitizers** for medical personnel.
- Any other **medical equipment** recommended by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for prevention, control and treatment of COVID-19.

About the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme

- It is an **ongoing Central Sector Scheme** which was launched in 1993-94.
- The Scheme **enables the Members of Parliament to recommend works** for the creation of **durable community assets** based on locally felt needs to be taken up in their constituencies in the area of national priorities namely drinking water, education, public health, sanitation, roads etc.

Implementing agency

- The **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation** has been responsible for the policy formulation, release of funds and prescribing monitoring mechanism for implementation of the Scheme.

Features

- The MPLADS is a **Plan Scheme fully funded by Government of India**.
- The annual MPLADS **fund entitlement per MP constituency is Rs. 5 crores**.
- MPs are to recommend every year, works costing at least **15 per cent** of the MPLADS entitlement for the year for areas inhabited by **Scheduled Caste population** and **5 per cent** for areas inhabited by **S.T. population**.

Kurzarbeit scheme

Why in the news?

- Amid the all-round disruption caused to the economy by the novel coronavirus outbreak, a concern across the world is the **possibility of a loss of jobs**.
- Various governments have unveiled various measures to address such concerns, and one of the most talked-about is **Kurzarbeit, Germany's existing scheme**.

Objectives of the Scheme

- The Kurzarbeit scheme **aims to address workers** who are impacted by the **loss of income due to shortened work hours** during such times.
- They can apply for **short-term work benefits under the scheme**, with the government stepping in to pay employees a part of their lost income.
- This helps the companies retain their employees instead of laying them off and allows the latter to sustain themselves for a **period of up to 12 months**.

How does the scheme work?

Kurzarbeit is the German word for “short-work”.

- The policy provides for a **short-time work allowance**, called **kurzarbeitgeld**, which partially **compensates for lost earnings during uncertain economic situations**.
- The policy was **rolled out during the 2008 economic crisis** while its origins date back as far as the **early 20th century, before and after World War I**.
- When companies face a loss of earnings due to unforeseen economic situations, they often need to cut back on their working hours or send some of their employee's home.

Adjourned sine die

Why in the News?

- The Lok Sabha was **adjourned sine die** recently after the **passage of the Finance Bill, 2020** without any debate due to the **situation arising out of the Coronavirus pandemic**.

About the Adjournment sine die

- It means **terminating a sitting of Parliament for an indefinite period**.
- In other words, when the **House is adjourned without naming a day for reassembly, it is called adjournment sine die**.
- The power of adjournment, as well as adjournment sine die lies with the **presiding officer of the House**. He can also call a sitting of the House before the date or time to which it has been adjourned or at any time after the House has been adjourned sine die.

Who is a Presiding Officer?

- The **Speaker of the Lok Sabha** is the presiding officer of the Lok Sabha.
- The speaker is **elected generally in the first meeting of the Lok Sabha** following general elections.
- Serving for a **term of five years**, the speaker chosen from sitting members of the Lok Sabha and is by convention a member of the ruling party or alliance.

Cobuddy Platform

Why in the news?

- The **Tiruvallur police have launched Cobuddy Platform** that includes an **application with facial recognition features**, to communicate and track those **under home quarantine**.

How it helps the government?

- It helps the **government track, communicate effectively and eventually coordinate delivery of essentials** to the doorsteps of the quarantined person.
- It **can also be used by the health workers** to monitor the **condition of the quarantined person and communicate** with them.

Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana

Why in News?

- Recently, the **Minister of Textiles** has provided information regarding **Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana (MGBBY)** in the **Lok Sabha**.



About Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana

- It was **introduced in December 2003**, which was a combination of **Janshree Bima Yojana** and **Add-on Group Insurance Scheme** being implemented **in collaboration with the Life Insurance Corporation of India**.
- Since **2005-06** this scheme was revised and has been implemented revised with the title **“Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Yojana”**.
- During the **XII Plan**, the **Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Yojana** will continue to be implemented with the same benefits as were given in **the 11th plan period**.

Objective

- The primary aim of the scheme is to **provide enhanced insurance cover to the handloom weavers** in the case of **natural as well as accidental death** and in **cases of total or partial disability**.

Eligibility

- The weaver should be earning at least **50% of his income** from handloom weaving.
- All weavers, whether male or female, between the age group of **18 and 59 years**, are **eligible to be covered** under the scheme.
- Weavers being regular members of a **Co-operative Society** will be **eligible to benefit** from the scheme.
- Weavers affiliated to **State Handloom Development Corporations** will also be eligible.

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the **Delhi government has allocated over rs. 15000 crore budgets for the education sector** which stressed upon **the participation of students of Delhi in 'Programme for International Student Assessment Test in 2024**.

About the Programme for International Student Assessment

- It is a comprehensive **study programme of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)**. It measures **15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges**.
- It was **started in the year 2000** and then it is conducted every three years.

- **PISA 2018** was the **7th study of PISA** in which **China topped** the ranking **followed by Singapore**.
- **India** is participating in **PISA 2021** with students from **Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS), Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS)** and other schools in the **Union Territory of Chandigarh** as the participants.

About the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

- The OECD is an **intergovernmental economic organisation** with **36 member countries**, founded in 1961.
- Its objective is to **stimulate economic progress and world trade**.
- The OECD is an **official United Nations observer**.
- Its **headquarters is in Paris, France**.
- The official founding members are: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, West Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom and the United States

Other agencies of OCED

- a. The **OECD Development Centre** (1961)
- b. **International Energy Agency** (IEA, 1974)
- c. **Financial Action Task Force** on Money Laundering.

PM's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM-CARES) fund

Why in the news?

- Prime Minister has announced the constitution of the PM's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM-CARES) fund.
- It is a dedicated national fund with the **primary objective of dealing with any kind of emergency or distress situation** like posed by the **COVID-19 pandemic**.

About the PM-NRF Fund

- This fund has been **established in 1948** which is headed by Prime Minister.
- Its **other members** include **Defence Minister, Home Minister and Finance Minister**.
- Donations to this fund will be **exempted from income tax under section 80(G)**.

Hydroxychloroquine now a schedule H1 drug

Why in the news?

- The Union Health Ministry has notified **anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine** under **Schedule-H1**.
- This was done in exercise of its powers conferred by **Section 26B of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 (23 of 1940)**.
- The move is aimed at **stopping misuse of the drug** which has now been allowed by the government for **prophylactic use in high-risk contacts of Covid-19 patients and healthcare workers treating** such patients.

About the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945

- It contains provisions for classification of drugs under given schedules and there are guidelines for the storage, sale, display and prescription of each schedule.

These Schedules are:



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Schedule H1

- It aims to check the indiscriminate use of antibiotics, anti-TB and some other drugs.
- It **cannot be sold without a valid prescription.**
- The Package of the drugs has a mandatory warning printed in a box with a red colour border.

Schedule H

- It cannot be sold without a valid prescription.
- The labels of any Schedule H drug must display the text **“Rx” on the top left corner** of the label

Schedule X

- The Labels of any **Schedule X drug** must display the text **“XRx”** on the top left corner of the label.
- It also includes **narcotic and psychotropic substances-based drugs.**
- It also cannot be sold without a valid prescription.
- Drug retailer has to preserve the copy of the prescription for two years

Sections 269 & 270 IPC

Why in news?

- Recently during the coronavirus outbreak, penal provisions, such as Sections 188, 269 and 270 of the IPC, are being invoked to enforce the lockdown orders in various states.



What are Sections 269 and 270 of the IPC?

- **Sections 269 and 270** of the IPC come under Chapter XIV of the Indian Penal Code– **‘Of Offences Affecting the Public Health, Safety, Convenience, Decency and Morals’.**
- **Section 269** (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) provides for a **jail term of six months and/or fine.**
- **Section 270** (malignant act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) provides for a **jail term of two years and/or fine.**
- The word **‘malignantly’** indicates a **deliberate intention** on the part of the accused.
- Both Sections have been used for over a century to punish those disobeying orders issued for containing epidemics.

Economy and Social Development

Enhanced Access and Service Excellence (EASE 3.0)

- Finance Minister has launched the Enhanced Access and Service Excellence (EASE 3.0).



EASE 3.0: Digital & data-driven PSBs	
Smart Lending for Aspiring India <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dial-a-loan for doorstep facilitation Credit@click: End-to-end digital retail and MSME lending Alternate-data-based lending using cash-flow analysis Analytics-based credit offers Tech-enabled agricultural lending and export credit 	Hard-wiring sound banking through IT systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collections and Recovery Management Systems Risk Scoring & Scrutiny Platform Early Warning Signals System for SOP-driven remedial actions Cloud-based banking solutions AML Compliance Monitoring System Alternate-data- and technology-based monitoring
Tech-enabled Ease of Banking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Palm Banking: End-to-end digital delivery of financial services "Banking on the go" through EASE Banking Outlets: Paperless, digitally enabled banking at frequently visited spots like malls, stations, complexes and campuses Digitalising the branch experience for customers 	Governance and outcome-centric HR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board oversight for alignment of structures and processes with strategic goals Succession Planning Productivity assessment and IT-system based HR deployment Scientific and business-focussed Performance Mgmt System Specialised job families and cadres

About the Enhanced Access and Service Excellence

- EASE (Enhanced Access and Service Excellence) 3.0 agenda aims to provide advanced solutions that will make the public sector banking smart and technology enabled.
- It also aims to digitize the customer's experience at public sector bank branches.

Project Monitoring Group (PMG) Portal

- Union Minister of Commerce & Industry reviewed 17 large-size infrastructure projects through the Project Monitoring Group portal.

About the Project Monitoring Group

- Project Monitoring Group (PMG) is an institutional mechanism of DPIIT to expedite resolution of issues and removal of regulatory bottlenecks in projects.
- It helps to expedite resolution of issues and removal of regulatory bottlenecks in projects, with investments upward of ₹ 500 crores in India.
- PMG enlists unresolved project issues of all Public, Private and 'Public-Private Partnership' (PPP) projects and undertakes fast-tracking of approvals, sectoral policy issues and removal of bottlenecks for expeditious commissioning.
- Invest India provides implementational support to PMG in identifying and following up on issues with the States.

SC frees trade in cryptocurrencies

- The Supreme Court has set aside April 6, 2018, circular of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) that prohibited banks and entities regulated by it from providing services in relation to virtual currencies.

About Cryptocurrencies

- Cryptocurrency is an encrypted decentralized digital currency transferred between peers and confirmed in a public ledger via a process known as mining.

Some important cryptocurrencies are

- Bitcoins
- Swiftcoin
- Bytecoin
- Litecoin
- Namecoin
- Gridcoin

Risks associated with the use of cryptocurrencies

- Digital currencies, being in electronic format, are prone to losses arising out of hacking, loss of password etc.
- The lack of any authorized central agency to regulate the payments or to turn to for redressal of grievances.
- There is no underlying of the asset for Cryptocurrencies, making the value a matter of speculation.
- The exchanges are located in various parts of the world, making the law enforcement a tricky thing for the multiple jurisdictions available.
- Trading may subject the user to illicit and illegal activities since the cryptocurrencies can easily be used for illegal activities anonymously.

Urja Dakshata Information Tool

- Bureau of Energy Efficiency along with World Resources Institute has launched Urja Dakshata Information Tools a first-ever initiative to facilitate a database on energy efficiency.

About Urja Dakshata Information Tool

- It is a user-friendly platform that explains the energy efficiency landscape of India across industry, appliances, building, transport, municipal and agriculture sectors.
- UDIT will also showcase the capacity building and new initiatives taken up by the Government across the sectors in the increasing energy efficiency domain.

Bureau of Energy Efficiency

- It was established in March 2002, as a statutory body by the Government of India under the Energy Conservation Act 2001.
- Its mission is to assist in developing policies with the primary objective of reducing the energy intensity of the Indian Economy.

About World Resources Institute

- It is a global research non-profit organization that was established in 1982.
- It aims to promote environmental sustainability, economic opportunity, and human health and well-being.
- It's headquartered is in Washington, USA.

India's Energy Sector

- India's energy sector is set for a transition with recent developmental ambitions of the Government e.g.
 - 175 GW of installed capacity of renewable energy by 2022
 - 24X7 Power for all
 - 100% electrification of households

Mega Consolidation in Public Sector Banks

- The Union Cabinet has approved the mega consolidation of ten PSBs into four which would be effective from 1 April 2020.
- It includes the following
 - Amalgamation of Oriental Bank of Commerce and United Bank of India into Punjab National Bank
 - Amalgamation of Syndicate Bank into Canara Bank
 - Amalgamation of Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank into Union Bank of India
 - Amalgamation of Allahabad Bank into Indian Bank

Benefits

- This would help create banks with a scale comparable to global banks and capable of competing effectively in India and globally.
- Greater scale and synergy through consolidation would lead to cost benefits enabling the PSBs to enhance their competitiveness and positively impact the Indian banking system.
- It will also result in the adoption of technologies across the amalgamating banks, access to a wider talent pool, and a larger database.

AT-1 Bond

- As per the report by rating agency ICRA, investors have total bets of over Rs. 93000 crores on AT-1 bonds in the Indian Banks and a complete write-down proposed in the Yes Bank Ltd
- The SBI-led restructuring plan by Reserve Bank of India, there is a proposal to write-down the entire outstanding on AT-1 bonds.

About AT-1 Bonds

- Additional tier-1 bonds, also called AT1 in market parlance, are a kind of perpetual bonds without any expiry date that banks are allowed to issue to meet their long-term capital requirement.
- AT-1 bonds are a type of unsecured bonds that banks issue to shore up their core capital base to meet the Basel-III norms.
- They are treated as quasi-equity instruments under the law.
- The Reserve Bank of India is the regulator of AT-1 bonds.
- These bonds are issued by banks and companies, which pay a fixed rate of interest at regular intervals.
- The issuing bank of these bonds has no obligation to pay back the principal to investors.

Commercial cord blood banking

- Poona Citizen Doctor Forum (PCDF), a body that aims to rebuild trust among citizens and doctors, and promote an ethical rational medical practice, has come forward to bust the aggressively promoted concept of cord blood banking.

About Cord blood banking

- Cord blood banking is the process of collecting the cord blood and extracting and cryogenically freezing its stem cells and other cells of the immune system for potential future medical use.
- Cord blood (short for umbilical cord blood) is the blood that remains in the umbilical cord and placenta post-delivery.

- In Europe and other parts of the world, cord blood banking is more often referred to as stem cell banking.
- Cord blood has an abundance of stem cells and immune system cells, and the medical uses of these cells have been expanding at a rapid pace.
- As these cells help the body re-generate tissues and systems, cord blood is often referred to as regenerative medicine.

Help in treating diseases

- Cord blood is currently approved by the FDA for the treatment for nearly 80 diseases.
- The cord blood treatments have been performed more than 35,000 times around the globe to treat cancers (including lymphoma and leukaemia), anaemias, inherited metabolic disorders and some solid tumours and orthopaedic repair.

Shared economy at \$2 bn by end-2020

- According to a recent report by Maple Capital Advisors, the sharing economy in India is estimated to be about \$2 billion industry by the end of the current year.

About Sharing Economy

- The **sharing economy** is an economic model defined as a **peer-to-peer (P2P)** based activity of acquiring, providing or sharing access to goods and services that are often facilitated by a community-based online platform.
- It includes segments such as co-working (Awfis, WeWork India), co-living (Stanza Living, OYO Life, Oxford Caps), shared mobility (Uber, Ola, Shuttll) and furniture rental (Furlenco, Rentomojo.)

Long-term repo operation

- The Reserve Bank of India has recently received ₹1.71 trillion in the third long-term repo operation (LTRO) conducted for an amount of ₹25,000 crores.

What is LTRO?

- It is a tool under which the central bank provides a one-year to three-year money to banks at the prevailing repo rate.
- It is accepting government securities with matching or higher tenure as the collateral.
- While the RBI's current windows of liquidity adjustment facility (LAF) and marginal standing facility offer banks money for their immediate needs ranging from 1-28 days, the LTRO supplies them with liquidity for their 1- to 3-year needs.
- LTRO operations are intended to prevent short-term interest rates in the market from drifting a long way away from the policy rate, which is the repo rate.

Why did RBI introduce LTRO?

- RBI introduced LTRO with a view to assuring banks about the availability of durable liquidity at a reasonable cost relative to prevailing market conditions.
- It also further encourages banks to undertake maturity transformation smoothly and seamlessly so as to augment credit flows to productive sectors.

When will LTRO start?

- RBI will conduct LTRO from the fortnight beginning on February 15, at the policy rate.

How will it work?

- It is a measure that market participants expect will bring down short-term rates and also boosts investment in corporate bonds.
- These new measures coupled with RBI's earlier introduced 'Operation Twist' are an attempt by the central bank to manage bond yields and push transmission of earlier rate cuts.

Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products Scheme

- Union Cabinet has recently given its approval for introducing the Scheme for Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP).

About the Scheme

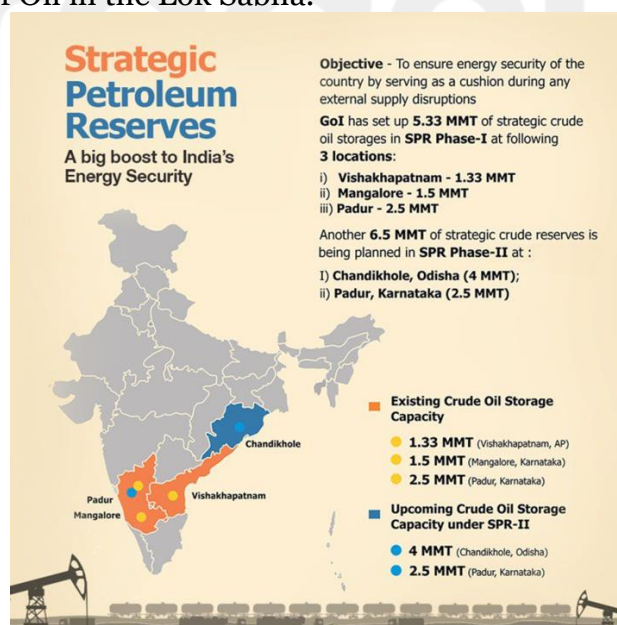
- The scheme aims to reimburse taxes and duties paid by exporters such as value-added tax, coal cess, transportation cost among others which are not getting exempted or refunded under any other existing mechanism.
- It will replace the Merchandise Export from India Scheme (MEIS) that was found to violate the World Trade Organization rules as it was export-focused.

About Merchandise Exports from India Scheme

- It was introduced in the Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) 2015-20.
- Its objective is to offset infrastructural inefficiencies and associated costs involved in exporting goods which are manufactured in India including products manufactured by the MSME Sector.

Demand and Import of Oil

- Union Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas has informed about the Demand and Import of Oil in the Lok Sabha.



Some Statistics

- The consumption of petroleum products in the year 2018-19 was 213.2 MMT.
- The percentage of Import Dependency on Oil based on the consumption of petroleum products during 2018-19 was about 83.8%.

Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserve Limited

It is a Government of India Special Purpose Vehicle, has established Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) facilities with a total capacity of 5.33 Million Metric Tonnes (MMT) at 3 locations, namely

- a. Vishakhapatnam
- b. Mangaluru
- c. Padur (Karnataka)
 - As per the consumption pattern of 2017-18, the total capacity is estimated to provide for about 9.5 days of crude oil requirement.
 - Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) currently have stock for 64.5 days. Hence, total capacity storage of petroleum products is 74 days.
 - Government has given 'in principle' approval for establishing two additional SPR facilities with a total storage capacity of 6.5 MMT at two locations namely
 - a. Chandikhol in Odisha (4 MMT)
 - b. Padur in Karnataka (2.5 MMT).

MACS 4028: a semi-dwarf variety of wheat

Why in News?

- Scientists from **Agharkar Research Institute (ARI), Pune** have developed a **biofortified durum wheat variety MACS 4028**, which shows high protein content.



About the MACS 4028

- It is a **semi-dwarf variety**, which **matures in 102 days** and has shown the **superior and stable yielding ability** of 19.3 quintals per hectare.
- It is **resistant to stem rust, leaf rust, foliar aphids, root aphids, and brown wheat mite**.
- The wheat showed **high protein content** of about 14.7%, better nutritional quality having zinc 40.3 ppm, and iron content of 40.3ppm and 46.1ppm respectively, good milling quality and overall acceptability.
- The MACS 4028 variety is also included by the **Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) programme for United Nations Children's Children's Fund (UNICEF)** to alleviate malnutrition sustainably.
- It also helps in boosting the **Vision 2022 "Kuposhan Mukh Bharat", the National Nutrition Strategy**.

About the National Nutrition Strategy

- NITI Aayog published · National Nutrition Strategy (NNS) in 2017. MoHFW, under the umbrella of the National Health Mission (NHM), has implemented many schemes and programmes to address malnutrition.

Objectives and targets:

- 3-point percentage/year **reduction in underweight prevalence** in children (**0-3 years**) by **2022** from NFHS-4 levels. These include addressal

at (i) Key strategic areas of action, (ii) Nutrition specific interventions and (ii) Funding (leveraging).

- 1/3rd reduction in anaemia in children, **adolescent & Women of Reproductive Age (WRA)**

Under the 3-point percentage, the 'Funding' is leveraged through:

- National Health Mission
- National Nutrition Mission
- Integrated Child Development Scheme
- Swachh Bharat Mission
- Increased provision of 25% Flexi funds for States in Centrally sponsored schemes

Other ongoing schemes and programs to prevent malnutrition in India:

- **"MAA- Mothers' Absolute Affection"** Government has implemented "MAA- Mothers' Absolute Affection" program to improve breastfeeding coverage and appropriate breastfeeding practices in the country.

National Iron Plus Initiative

- It has been launched as an effective strategy for supplementation and treatment of anaemia in children, adolescents, pregnant and lactating women, in programme mode through a life cycle approach.
- Vitamin A supplementation (VAS) for children until the age of 5 years.
- Specific program to prevent and treat micronutrient deficiencies through Iron & Folic Acid (IFA) supplementation across life stages are:
 - a. Bi-weekly IFA syrup supplementation to children 6 – 59 months.
 - b. Weekly IFA tablet supplementation to children 5 – 10 years and adolescents 10 – 19 years.
 - c. IFA tablets to pregnant and lactating women.
- **National Deworming Day** is a fixed day strategy to administer Albendazole tablets to all the children in the age group of 1-19 years through the platform of AWCs and Schools.
- **Intensified Diarrhoea Control Fortnight (IDCF)** is being observed during July-August, increasing awareness about the use of ORS and Zinc in diarrhoea, aiming **'zero child deaths due to childhood diarrhoea'**.
 - a. **Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK)**, aimed to detect nutrition deficiency among children and adolescents respectively with systematic efforts.
 - b. **Mission Indradhanush**
 - Launched on 25th December 2014 to ensure high coverage of children with all vaccines in identified districts.
 - It is aimed at achieving 90% full immunization coverage in India.
 - a. **Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK)** provides child health screening for 30 common health conditions by expanding the reach of mobile health teams at the block level and establishment of District Early Intervention Centres (DEICs) at the districts for early interventions services.
 - b. **Village Health and Nutrition Days** and **Mother and Child Protection Card** are the joint initiatives of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and the Ministry of Woman and Child Development.

- It is aimed to address the nutrition concerns in children, pregnant women and lactating mothers.
- Village Health and Nutrition Days (VHNDs) are monthly days held at village level in Anganwadi centre to bring awareness and desired changes in the dietary practices.
- It also emphasizes on the promotion of breastfeeding.

Note: Recently National Nutrition Mission has been approved under the Ministry of Women and Child Development for addressing malnutrition status of the country comprehensively.

Keqiang Index

Why is the news?

- Recently the Keqiang Index' amid the questions surrounding **China's most recent COVID-19 numbers**, with authorities saying for several days now the **country had zero local infections**.

What is Li Keqiang index?

- Li Keqiang index or Keqiang index is an **economic measurement index** created by **The Economist** to measure China's economy using three indicators.
- These indicators are
 - a. Electricity consumption
 - b. Railway cargo volume
 - c. Bank lending
- The "Keqiang index" is also **used by Haitong Securities released in 2013**, suggesting **decelerating China's economic growth** since the beginning of 2013.

Recapitalisation of RRBs

Why in the news?

- The **Union Cabinet** has approved a **₹1,340-crore recapitalisation plan** for **regional rural banks (RRBs)**. This will **improve their capital-to-risk weighted assets ratio (CRAR)**, strengthening these institutions that are critical to the **provision of credit in rural areas**.

About the Regional Rural Banks

- These are the **Indian Scheduled Commercial Banks (Government Banks)** operating at the **regional level in the different states of India**.
- These banks were set up based on the **recommendations** of the **Narasimham Working Group (1975)**, and after the legislation of the **Regional Rural Banks Act, 1976**.
- The first **Regional Rural Bank "Prathama Grameen Bank"** was set up on **2nd October 1975**.
- The equity of a regional rural bank is held by the **Central Government, concerned State Government and the Sponsor Bank** in the proportion of **50:15:35**.
- They have been created with a view of serving the rural areas of India with basic banking and financial services primarily.
- However, **RRBs** may have branches set up for **urban operations**, and their area of operation may include urban areas too.

Functions of RRBs:



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- Providing **banking facilities** to **rural and semi-urban areas**.
- Carry out government operations like **disbursement of wages of MGNREGA workers, distribution of pensions** etc.
- Providing **Para-Banking facilities** like **locker facilities, debit and credit cards, mobile banking, internet banking, UPI** etc.
- **Small financial banks**.

Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (Amendment) Scheme 1952

Why in the news?

- Ministry of Labour and Employment has recently amended the EPF Scheme 1952.

Highlights of the amendment

- It allows **withdrawal of non-refundable advance** by EPF members in the wake of **COVID-19 pandemic** in the country.
- The notification permits **withdrawal not exceeding the basic wages and dearness allowance for three months or upto 75 per cent of the amount standing to member's credit** in the EPF account in the event of an outbreak of epidemic or pandemic.
- A sub-para (3) under para 68L has been in the **EPF scheme, 1952**.
- The amended scheme **Employees Provident Fund (Amendment) scheme, 2020** has come into force from **28th March 2020**.

About the Employees' Provident Fund Organization

- It is an organization tasked to assist the **Central Board of Trustees, Employees' Provident Fund** a statutory body formed by the **Employees' Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952**.
- It is under the administrative control of the **Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India**.

About Universal Account Number (UAN)

- It is a **12-digit number** allotted to an employee working in an organisation.
- If a person has multiple member ID's issued by multiple organisations, all the ID's will come under one single **UAN number** which will be the same for a lifetime.
- This **number will not change** even when an employee changes his organisation.

Companies Fresh Start Scheme, 2020 and revised the "LLP Settlement Scheme, 2020"

Why in the news?

- **Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA)**, has introduced the "**Companies Fresh Start Scheme, 2020**" and revised the "**LLP Settlement Scheme, 2020**" to **provide relief to law-abiding companies and Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs)** in the wake of COVID 19

About the Schemes

- The Schemes gives **longer timelines** for **corporates to comply with various filing requirements** under the Companies Act 2013 and LLP Act, 2008.
- The objective of the **scheme to reduce the related financial burden on them**, especially for those with long-standing defaults, thereby giving them an **opportunity to make a "fresh start"**.

- Both the schemes are a **one-time waiver of additional filing fees** for **delayed filings by the companies or LLPs** with the **Registrar of Companies** during the currency of the Schemes.
- Both the Schemes also **contain a provision for giving immunity from penal proceedings**, including against imposition of penalties for late submissions.
- It also provides **additional time for filing appeals** before the concerned **Regional Directors against the imposition of penalties**, if already imposed.

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Science and Technology

Gisat-1

- **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** is set to launch a new-age geo-imaging satellite **Gisat-1** from **Sriharikota** with the capability to **perform real-time and constant watch** of the **Indian subcontinent**.

About the Gisat-1

- GSLV-F10 rocket will **launch Gisat-1**.
- **Gisat-1** is a **state-of-the-art agile earth observation satellite** that will be placed in a **geosynchronous transfer orbit at 36,000km altitude**.
- It is weighing **2,275 kg**.
- It is operating from the **geostationary orbit** which will facilitate near real-time observation of the **Indian subcontinent**, under **cloud-free condition, at frequent intervals**.
- **Gisat-1** will do a full rotation of the **Earth and come to the same point after every 2 hours**.

Mini moon

- Astronomers have observed recently a small object orbiting Earth, which they have dubbed 2020 CD3, a “mini-moon” or the planet’s “second moon”.

About the Mini Moon

- The mini-moon was discovered by Kacper Wierzchos and Teddy Pruyne of the NASA-funded Catalina Sky Survey (CSS) in Arizona
- It is a Temporarily Captured Object (TCO) which is actually an asteroid with a diameter of about 1.9-3.5 m.

About the Temporarily Captured Object

- When an asteroid’s orbit crosses Earth’s orbit, it can sometimes be captured into the latter orbit which is happened with 2020 CD3.
- Such an asteroid is called a Temporarily Captured Object (TCO).
- The orbit of such objects is unstable.
- They have to contend with the gravitational influence of our permanent Moon as well as that of the Sun.
- Once caught in Earth’s orbit, such objects usually remain for a few years before they break free and go into an independent orbit around the Sun.

Red snow in Antarctica

- Recently, the snow around Ukraine’s Vernadsky Research Base, located off the coast of Antarctica’s northernmost peninsula, has started to take on a red tinge.
- It is also known as watermelon phenomenon that has been known since ancient times.

Reason behind these red tinges:

- such algae as found around the Ukrainian research base grow well in freezing temperatures and liquid water. During the summer, when these typically green algae get a lot of sun, they start producing a natural sunscreen that paints the snow in shades of pink and red. In the winter months, they lie dormant.
- The algae produce the tinted sunscreen to keep themselves warm and because the snow becomes darker from the tinge, it absorbs more heat, as a result of which it melts faster.



Change in Albedo

- These algae change the snow's albedo — which refers to the amount of light or radiation the snow surface is able to reflect back.
- It causes the surrounding ice to melt faster according to the study done by Alaska Pacific University in 2017.

Svalbard Global Seed Vault

- Recently a fresh stock of 60,000 new seed samples from 36 different institutions worldwide was deposited to the reserve vault of seeds in February 2020.

About the Svalbard Global Seed Vault

- It is referred to as the earth's 'doomsday vault' which is now containing about 1.05 million seeds.
- The aim of the vault is to preserve a vast variety of crop seeds in the case of a doomsday event, calamity, climate change or national emergency.
- The vault is situated in the island of Spitsbergen, midway between Norway and the North Pole.
- The vault is artificially cooled at temperatures of below 18 degrees Celsius.

About India's Seed Bank

- India has also established its own seed storage facility at Chang La in Ladakh,
- It was built jointly by the Defence Institute of High-Altitude Research and the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources in 2010 under the aegis of Defence Research and Development Organisation.

Raider-X

- Recently a new explosives detection device called Raider-X was unveiled at the National Workshop on Explosive Detection 2020 in Pune.
- Raider-X was developed by the High Energy Material Research Laboratory (HEMRL) — an arm of the DRDO — in Pune and the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore.

Features and capabilities

- It can detect up to 20 homemade explosives from up to two meters away.
- Raider-X's data library can be updated to accommodate the detection of different explosives in their pure and contaminated forms.
- These types of devices were incremental to thwarting the threat from homemade explosives.
- The device has various applications including narcotics, for local police, for customs and other detection agencies that need to detect various elements which may be explosive or non-explosive in nature.

Mac-binding condition

- Recently the Internet speed in Jammu and Kashmir is still restricted to 2G which will be made available "with mac-binding".

What is mac-binding?

- Mac-binding essentially means binding together the MAC and IP addresses, so that all requests from that IP address are served only by the computer having that particular MAC address.
- Every device has a Media Access Control (MAC) address, a hardware identification number that is unique to it.
- While accessing the Internet, every device is assigned an IP address.

- In effect, it means that if the IP address or the MAC address changes, the device can no longer access the Internet.
- Also, monitoring authorities can trace the specific system from which a particular online activity was carried out.

Unguarded X hypothesis

- According to new research, sex chromosomes are the key reason for men living shorter lives than women worldwide.

About the Human Chromosome

- The human cell has 23 pairs of chromosomes out of these twenty-two of these pairs, called autosomes.
- One pair is of the sex chromosomes, named X and Y, which determine whether an individual is male or female.
- A female has two X chromosomes (XX) while a male has one X and one Y (XY).

About the Unguarded X hypothesis

- This hypothesis suggests that the Y chromosome in XY is less able to protect an individual from harmful genes expressed on the X chromosome.
- In a male, as the Y chromosome is smaller than the X chromosome, it is unable to “hide” an X chromosome that carries harmful mutations, which may later expose the individual to health threats.
- On the other hand, the hypothesis goes, there is no such problem in a pair of X chromosomes (XX) in a female.
- If one of the X chromosomes has genes that have suffered mutations, then the other X chromosome, which is healthy, can stand-in for the first, so that the harmful genes are not expressed.
- This maximises the length of life, according to the hypothesis.

Polymer Electrolyte Membrane fuel cells

- Scientists at International Advanced Research for Powder Metallurgy & New Materials (ARCI), Hyderabad have developed Polymer Electrolyte Membrane fuel cells (PEMFC).

About Polymer Electrolyte Membrane fuel cells

- It is also known as Proton-exchange membrane fuel cells.
- This type of fuel cell being developed mainly for transport applications, as well as for stationary fuel-cell applications and portable fuel-cell applications.
- Their distinguishing features include lower temperature/pressure ranges (50 to 100 °C) and a special proton-conducting polymer electrolyte membrane.
- PEMFCs generate electricity and operate on the opposite principle to PEM electrolysis, which consumes electricity.
- Fuel cell systems offer a potential benefit in terms of providing sustainable electricity using hydrogen gas without the need of grid power as required by conventional battery backup systems.

Endophytic Actinobacteria

- Researchers at the Institute of Advanced Study in Science and Technology (IASST) Guwahati have found significant plant-growth-promoting and antifungal activities of endophytic actinobacteria associated with Tea plant.

About the Endophytic Actinobacteria

- It is related to genera, Eurya which find potent plant growth-promoting strains.

- Researchers isolated 46 endophyticactino bacteria found in diverse environments
- Most of the endophyticactino bacteria isolate having antifungal activity showed the presence of chitinase, NRPS (Nonribosomal peptides synthetase) or PKS-1 (Polyketide Synthase) gene.
- These are suggesting the presence of mechanisms to inhibit the growth of pathogenic plant fungi.
- The application of this bacteria strain will able to reduce chemical fertilizers & fungicides in Tea plantation.

Note:

- Institute of Advanced Study in Science and Technology (IASST) is an autonomous institute under the Department of Science & Technology.
- The Scientific name of the tea is **Camellia sinensis** which plays an important role in the Indian economy as a major portion of the tea produced is exported.

WHO declares coronavirus a pandemic

- The World Health Organization on March 11 finally declared the novel coronavirus a 'pandemic'.

What is a pandemic?

- According to the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, a pandemic is the worldwide spread of a new disease.
- The US Centers for **Disease Control and Prevention** defines a pandemic as "an epidemic that has spread over several countries or continents, usually affecting a large number of people."
- The same body defines an epidemic as "an increase, often sudden, in the number of cases of a disease above what is normally expected in that population in that area."

Changes after declaring Coronavirus as a pandemic

- Declaring the disease, a pandemic won't mean the WHO gets more funds or more powers to fight it. However, the declaration is a formal announcement that the WHO assesses **the impact of COVID 19** to have reached a new level.

What is an Endemic?

- When a disease that exists permanently in a particular region or population then it is regarded as endemic e.g. 'Malaria' is a constant worry in parts of Africa.

What is an Epidemic?

- When an outbreak of disease that attacks many peoples at about the same time and may spread through one or several communities.

Bi-luminescent security ink

- CSIR-National Physical Laboratory has developed a **bi-luminescent security ink** to **Curb Fake Printing of Passports and Counterfeiting of Currency Notes.**

About the Bi-luminescent security ink

- It glows in red and green colours when illuminated by two different excitation sources at 254 nanometers (nm) and 365 nm, respectively.

- The formulation can be used to check the authenticity of passports, Government documents, tamper-evident labels, identity cards, etc.
- The ink was prepared in a batch of 1kg and given to Bank Note Press (BNP), Dewas, a unit of Security Printing Minting Corporation of India Ltd. (SPMCIL), New Delhi.

National Supercomputer Mission

- India has produced just three supercomputers since 2015 under the National Supercomputer Mission.

About National Supercomputer Mission

- It is a dedicated programme aimed at boosting the country's overall computing facilities.
- The Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) and Department of Science and Technology handle the National Supercomputer Mission.
- The mission's nodal agencies are the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Pune, and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru.
- The National Supercomputer Mission envisaged setting up a network of 70 high-performance computing facilities.
- Supercomputers Built under National Supercomputer Mission
 - a. PARAM Shivay installed in IIT-BHU, Varanasi
 - b. Second Supercomputer installed in IIT-Kharagpur
 - c. PARAM Brahma, installed in IISER-Pune
- Globally, China continues to lead the supercomputer race by adding eight more supercomputers in the last six months taking its existing numbers to 227 followed by the US (119 supercomputers).

Sepsis

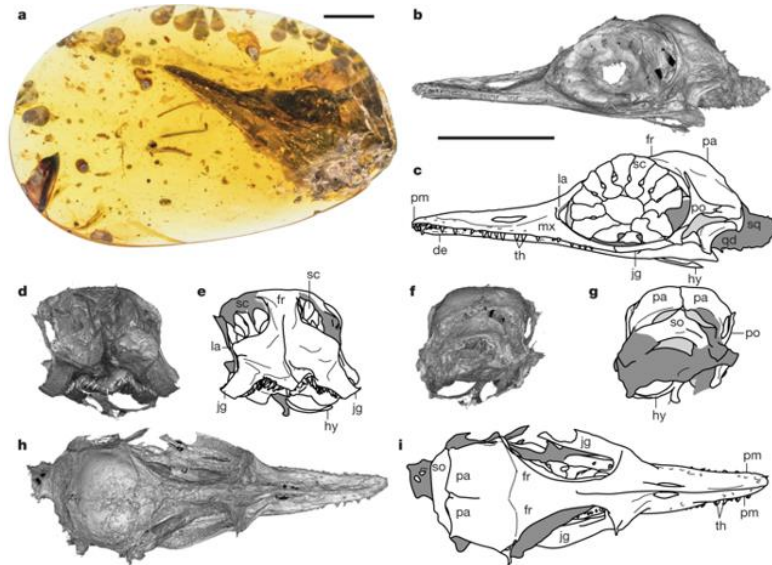
- Sepsis is a life-threatening organ dysfunction caused by the body's immune system overreacting in response to an infection. This overactive, toxic response can lead to tissue damage, multiple organ failure and death.

The organism responsible for Sepsis

- Viruses, bacteria, fungi or parasites — sepsis can be triggered by a variety of pathogens.
- The causes of sepsis are usually pneumonia, wound infections, urinary tract infections or infections in the abdominal cavity.
- In addition to the known seasonal influenza viruses, other viruses that are highly infectious, such as coronaviruses, Ebola and yellow fever viruses, dengue, swine flu or bird flu viruses can also cause sepsis.

Oculudentavis khaungrae: tiny Dinosaurs

- Scientists have identified a 100-million-year-old flying dinosaur called Oculudentavis **khaungrae** encased in amber in Myanmar that may be the smallest yet discovered.



- The preserved skull is just 7.1mm (less than one-third of an inch) long.
- It would have been smaller than the smallest bird alive today, the bee hummingbird.
- Despite its minuscule size, researchers believe it hunted insects, using its sharp teeth and large eyes to home in on prey

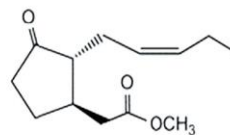
Jasmonic acid

Why in news?

- Researchers in the United States have discovered a communication network in plants that helps them respond to a hormone involved in pest resistance. They observed that the hormone called jasmonic acid is particularly important for a plant's defence response against fungi and insects.



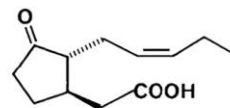
Jasminum grandiflorum



Methyl jasmonate



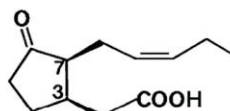
Broad beans (*Vicia faba*)



(-)-Jasmonic acid



Broad beans fruits



(+)-7-iso jasmonic acid

Other findings by the Scientists

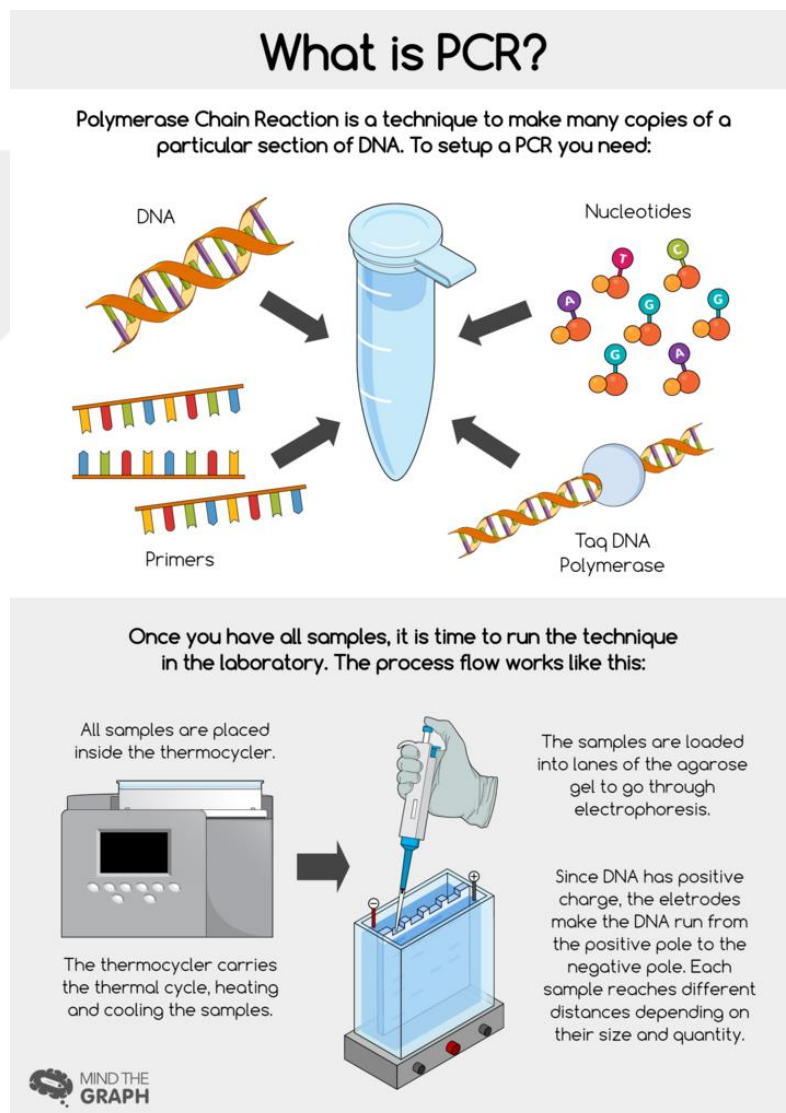
- The study team could identify genes important for the plant's response to jasmonic acid, and for the cellular cross-communication with other plant hormone pathways.
- According to the scientists, the genes MYC2 and MYC3 rose to the top in their degree of importance across the system.
- They said the two genes are involved in producing proteins that regulate the activity of thousands of other genes.
- It also helped them to understand which genes are turned on and off during a plant's defence response.

Ultimately, the process helps in identifying breeding crops that are able to better withstand attacks from pests.

Polymerase chain reaction

Why in news?

- Recently the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** has said designated labs will use the **conventional real-time polymerase chain reaction (PCR)** test for **SARS-COV-2**.



About Polymerase chain reaction

- It uses a technique that creates **copies of a segment of DNA**. ‘Polymerase’ refers to the enzymes that make the copies of DNA.
- The ‘**chain reaction**’ is how the DNA fragments are copied, exponentially – one is copied into two, the two are copied into four, and so on.
- **Kary Mullis**, the American biochemist who **invented the PCR technique**, was awarded the **Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1993**.

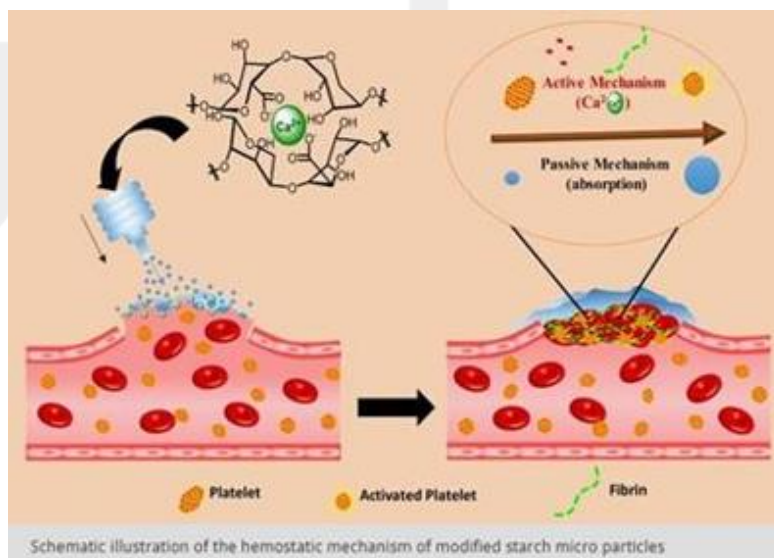
About Indian Council of Medical Research

- It is the apex body in India for the formulation, coordination and promotion of biomedical research is one of the oldest and largest medical research bodies in the world.
- The ICMR is funded by the Government of India through the Department of Health Research, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Starch-based materials developed to stop rapid blood loss during accidents

Why in the news?

- Scientists from the **Institute of Nano Science and Technology (INST)**, an autonomous institute under the **Department of Science & Technology, Ministry of Science and Technology in India**, have developed a starch-based ‘hemostat’ material.



Objective:

- This will help to concentrate the natural clotting factors in blood by physically absorbing excess fluid.

How does it work?

- These are the **biodegradable microparticles** that combine to form a gel on a wound **offer significant improvement** over existing alternatives.
- The product has **increased absorption capacity**, improved absorption, inexpensive, **biocompatible** as well as **biodegradable**.
- **Hemostat materials** absorb excess fluid by concentrating the natural clotting factors in the blood that are critical for stopping the blood flow; however, the bleeding can restart when non-biodegradable materials are removed.

Coronavirus and Contact Tracing

Why in news?

- Recently the Indian Council of Medical Research has said that the contact tracing is an integral part of fighting the coronavirus epidemic on the ground.


About contact tracing

- Contract tracing is the process of identifying, assessing, and managing people who have been exposed to a disease to prevent transmission.
- Any person who has had contact with the index patient under investigation/treatment for suspected, probable or confirmed case of SARS-COV-2, should be monitored for the appearance of symptoms.

Hunting down the virus Health workers identify, assess and manage people who have been exposed to a disease to prevent onward transmission. This part of their job is called "contact tracing"

WHO ARE "CONTACTS"?	WHAT IS THE DATA THE HEALTH WORKERS ARE SUPPOSED TO COLLECT IN THE FIRST 48 HOURS	IF THE CONTACTS ARE...
<p>Index patient who tests positive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Health workers Room-mates Visitors Close physical contacts Partners Schoolmates Colleagues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health worker should visit the contact Identify the contact, monitor for 2-8 days Collect demographic details, date of exposure with the patient Date of onset of symptoms, if any 	<p>...symptomatic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refer for isolation Perform tests Initiate medical management If tested positive, move contact to a health facility <p>...asymptomatic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place under home quarantine for 28 days Watch for symptoms Maintain a daily list of contacts

A traveller being scanned at the Ernakulam railway station on Wednesday. THULASI KAKKAT



Symptomatic contacts

- Persons who have fever and cough and a history of contact with a confirmed case within the last 28 days should be referred for isolation for strict infection control.

Asymptomatic contacts

- They must remain at home (home quarantine) for at least 28 days after the last exposure with the patient.
- The contacts should start monitoring their health and watch for symptoms of fever and cough, within 28 days of the last exposure to the patient, and maintain a list of people they are in contact with, on a daily basis.

Giant exoplanet: WASP-76b

Why in the news?

- Recently, astronomers have observed an exoplanet named Wasp-76b where they suspect it rains iron instead of water.

About Wasp-76b

- It is an exoplanet that is twice the width of our Jupiter whose name comes from the UK-led Wasp telescope system that detected it four years ago.
- It is 640 light-years from the Earth and is so close to its star that it takes just 43 hours to complete one revolution.



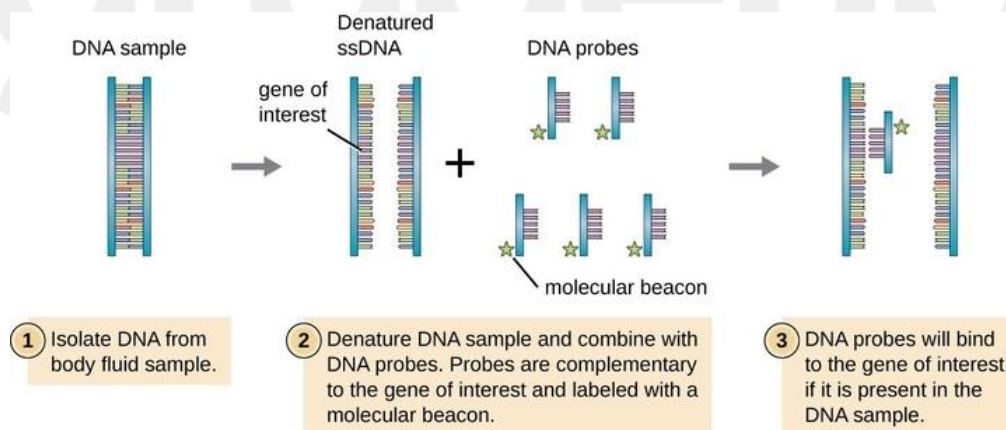
According to researchers, the iron rain happens because the exoplanet always presents the same face to the star which is called as tidally locked, meaning it takes as long to rotate around its axis as it does to go around the star.

Note: Exoplanet means planet which orbits a star outside the solar system

Probe-free detection assay

Why in news?

- Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology here have developed a method called **Probe-free detection assay** to detect COVID-19.
- The **National Institute of Virology, Pune**, is in the process of validating this test on clinical samples.



What is a probe?

- **Probes** are **complementary to the gene of interest** and labelled with a molecular beacon.
- A probe is a **single-stranded sequence of DNA or RNA** used to search for its complementary sequence in a sample genome.
- A probe is generally labelled with a **radioactive or chemical tag** that allows its binding to be visualized.

Therefore, in the case of COVID-19 detection, 'Probe-free detection assay' has been developed.

How will it benefit?

- Probe-free detection assay method will significantly reduce the test cost.

- This initiative will make the test toolkit for detection of COVID-19 affordable for large sections.
- Large clusters of society where the outbreak has taken place can be detected.

What tests are performed presently?

- Currently, the government of India has allowed private laboratories with NABL accreditation to carry out the tests for real-time PCR SA for RNA virus to conduct COVID-19 tests.
- These tests are in line with the *Indian Council of Medical Research(ICMR)*

About ICMR

- The Indian Council of Medical Research is the apex body in India for the formulation, coordination and promotion of biomedical research.
- The institute is one of the oldest and largest medical research bodies in the world.

About the National Institute of Virology

- The National Institute of Virology, Pune is an Indian Virology Research Institute.
- It is one of the translational science cell's part of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).
- Previously it was known as 'Virus Research Center' and was founded in collaboration with the Rockefeller Foundation.
- It has been designated as a WHO H5 reference laboratory for the South-East Asia region.

Note: The WHO H5 Reference Laboratory Network was established, as an ad hoc component of the WHO. Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System (GISRS), in response to the public health needs arising from avian influenza A(H5N1) infection in humans and influenza pandemic preparedness.

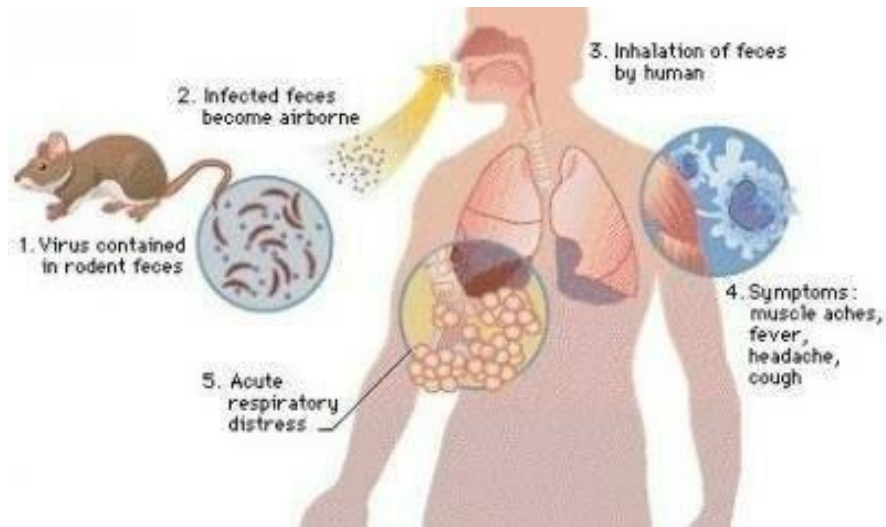
Hantaviruses

Why in the News?

- According to the **Global Times**, a man from **China's Yunnan province** died from Hantavirus while on a bus to the **Shandong province**.

What is Hantavirus?

- Hantaviruses are **RNA viruses** transmitted to humans by **rodents (rodent-borne)**.
- Hantaviruses in the Americas are known as “**New World**” Hantaviruses and may cause **hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS)**.
- Other hantaviruses, known as “**Old World**,” **hantaviruses**, are found mostly in Europe and Asia and may cause **hemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome (HFRS)**.
- There is **no vaccine available** to prevent **Hantavirus infection or pulmonary syndrome**.
- **So far**, the transmission of hantavirus in the US has **not transferred from human-to-human contact**.



Note: The most important hantavirus in the United States that can cause HPS is the Sin Nombre virus, spread by the deer mouse.

Host-specific

- Each hantavirus serotype has a specific rodent host species

Hantavirus is spread to humans by particles of:

- rodent urine
- faeces
- saliva

Therefore, caution is needed from airborne particles containing these excretions.

Indelible ink

Why in the news?

- Election Commission has recently decided to allow usage of indelible ink on persons for stamping for home quarantine by health authorities because of COVID-19.



About the Indelible ink

- It is a **purple-coloured ink** which is applied on the **left-hand index finger of the voter** in a polling booth.
- Once applied, the ink cannot be **removed by any chemical, detergent, soap or oil** for several months.
- It is popularly known as **voter's ink**, used in the general elections.
- The **Mysore Paints and Varnish Limited** is the sole supplier of this ink.

Chemical constituents

- Its main constituent is **silver nitrate** (vary between 7% to 25 %,) which reacts with the skin protein and makes a strong bond.
- It leaves a **dark stain**, which remains for several days to even weeks but will not harm your skin.
- The mark will wear off only **when the old skin cells begin to die** and are replaced by new ones.

WHO launches global mega trial ‘Solidarity’ of the four most promising coronavirus treatments

Why in the news?

- The **World Health Organization (WHO)** has recently announced a sizeable global trial, called **SOLIDARITY**.

Objectives

- The trial consists of the study, testing, and development of antidote against coronavirus through four most promising therapies, which are as follows:
- **Remdesivir** **Compound** This experimental **antiviral compound** was **widely used to combat Ebola** and **other dangerous viruses** in the past.

1. Chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine:

This is used to treat patients suffering from malaria. Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) has also recommended this for healthcare workers and caregivers looking after positive COVID-19 patients.

2. Combination of lopinavir and ritonavir

- This drug combination is used for treating human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).
- This combination slows down the process of deterioration of organs.
- In India, it was used to treat the first case of coronavirus, who were a couple from Italy.

3. Ritonavir/lopinavir plus interferon-beta

- It combines the two antivirals with interferon-beta, a molecule involved in regulating inflammation in the body.

Agencies for approving diagnostic kits in India

Why in the news?

- The **Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR)** has recently approved three other centres, alongside the **National Institute of Virology (NIV)**, as agencies for approving diagnostic kits.

These are:

- a. National AIDS Research Institute, Pune
 - b. National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases, Kolkata
 - c. National Institute of Pathology, New Delhi
- Before that, the rules require that only kits approved by the **U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** and **European CE** be allowed, but now this was no longer mandatory.
 - **Mylab**, a diagnostic kit maker in Pune, was the first such **indigenous maker of kits** to be validated.

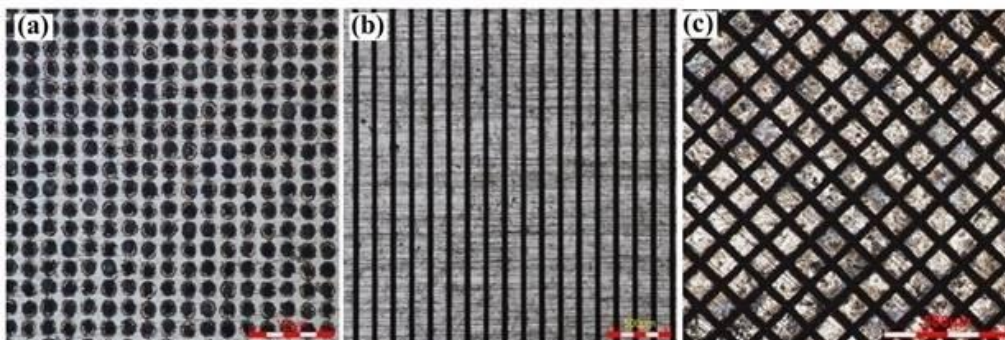
About Indian Council for Medical Research

- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the apex body in India for the formulation, coordination and promotion of biomedical research.
- The council promotes biomedical research in the country through intramural as well as extramural research.
- The Government of India funds the ICMR through the Department of Health Research, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Laser surface micro-texturing

Why in the news?

- **International Advanced Centre for Powder Metallurgy & New Materials (ARCI)** has developed **ultrafast laser surface texturing technology**, which can improve the fuel efficiency of internal combustion engines.



About the Laser surface micro-texturing

- This technology **provides precise control of the size**, shape and density of micro-surface texture features has gained momentum as a way to control friction and wear.

How do these technologies work?

- In this technology, a **pulsating laser beam** creates **micro-dimples or grooves** on the surface of materials in a very controlled manner.
- Such textures can trap wear debris when operating under dry sliding conditions and sometimes provide effects like enhancing oil supply (lubricant reservoir) which can lower friction coefficients and may enable reduced wear rate.

Quantum chemistry

Why in the news?

- **IIT Bombay** has developed **new methods for quantum chemistry** and implements them in the efficient and free software to **study electron attachment to aqueous DNA**.
- This **study** has many **implications in radiation therapy-based treatment of cancer**.

About Quantum Chemistry:

- **Quantum chemistry** is one of the **new branches of chemistry** which **tries to understand the chemical properties of atoms and molecules without performing a lab experiment**.
- Instead, in quantum chemistry, the Scientists try to solve the **Schrödinger equation for the molecules**, and it gives every measurable

quantity about that **particular molecule**, without actually doing the measurement.

- However, the mathematical equations resulting from the application of the **Schrodinger equation** are **very complicated** and **can only be solved using computers**.
- Therefore, one needs to **develop new theories** and write **efficient computer programs** to solve these equations.

Convalescent plasma therapy

Why in news?

- The **US Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** last week approved the **use of blood plasma from recovered patients to treat severely critical COVID-19 patients**.
- **New York** will be the first state to test the treatment of coronavirus with blood from recovered patients.
- The **method dates back more than a century**, but it has not been used widely in the United States in decades.

How does Convalescent plasma therapy work?

- The method involves **harvesting virus-fighting antibodies** from the **blood of previously infected patients**.
- It seeks to make use of the **antibodies developed in the recovered patient against the coronavirus**.
- The whole blood or plasma from such people is taken, and the **plasma is then injected in critically ill patients** so that the **antibodies are transferred and boost their fight against the virus**.
- According to the study in 'The Lancet Infectious Diseases, last month **said a COVID-19**' patient usually develops **primary immunity against the virus in 10-14 days**.
- Therefore, if the **plasma is injected at an early stage**, it can **possibly help fight the virus and prevent severe illness**.

Note: In 2014, the **World Health Organization** released guidelines to **treat Ebola patients with convalescent whole blood and plasma**.

Sodium hypochlorite

Why in the news?

- Recently **Uttar Pradesh government** has sprayed **Sodium hypochlorite solution (1 % concentration)** to the migrant workers **apparently to sanitize them**.

What is Sodium hypochlorite?

- Sodium hypochlorite, **commonly known as bleach**, is most frequently used as a **disinfecting agent**.
- It is used for a variety of **cleaning and disinfecting purpose** which releases chlorine which is a disinfectant.
- It is a **broad-spectrum disinfectant** that is effective for the **disinfection of viruses, bacteria, fungi, and mycobacterium**. However, sodium hypochlorite is **not effective in the disinfection of bacterial spores and prions**.

Health impact



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- Sodium hypochlorite is **corrosive and is not recommended to be used on human beings**, certainly **not as a spray or shower**.
- **A 1% solution**, if it comes in contact with human being, can cause -
 - a. **damage to the skin**
 - b. **serious harm to the lungs** (if inhaled)
 - c. **Serious eye damage/eye irritation**
 - d. **Chronic aquatic toxicity**

The concentration of the chemical in the solution varies according to the purpose it is meant for.

- Normal **household bleach** usually is a 2-10% sodium hypochlorite solution.
- At a much lower 0.25-0.5%, this chemical is **used to treat skin wounds like cuts or scrapes**.
- An even weaker solution (0.05%) is sometimes used as a hand wash.
- It is commonly used as a **bleaching agent, and to sanitize swimming pools**.

Does the chemical get rid of the novel coronavirus?

- The **World Health Organization, and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**, recommends **homemade bleach solutions of about 2-10% concentration to clean hard surfaces** to clear them of any **presence of the novel coronavirus** and not on human beings.
- If sodium hypochlorite comes in contact with other cleaners **containing ammonia or chlorine compounds, fatal levels for ammonia gas or chlorine gas can be produced**. Therefore, it is advisable to never mix bleach with other chemicals. Also, hand gloves are advisable for the usage of high concentration.

Security Matters

Milan Exercise 2020

- Due to the spread of COVID-19, the Navy has decided to postpone the multilateral exercise, Milan 2020, scheduled for later this month off the Visakhapatnam coast.

About the Milan (naval exercise)

- It is a multilateral naval exercise hosted by the Indian Navy under the aegis of the Andaman and Nicobar Command.
- It is a biennial event which is held in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- Milan was first held in 1995.

Efforts to Boost Defence Sector

- The efforts made by the Government to boost the country's defence sector during the last two years are as follows:

(i) Foreign direct investment

- Recently the FDI Policy has been revised and under the revised policy.
- Foreign Investment is allowed under automatic route upto 49% and above 49% through government route, wherever it is likely to result in access to modern technology or for other reasons to be recorded.

(ii) Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP)

- Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) was revised in 2016.
- A new category of procurement 'Buy {Indian-IDDMM (Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured)}' has been introduced in DPP-2016 to promote indigenous design and development of defence equipments.
- This category has been accorded topmost priority for procurement of Capital equipment.
- Besides this, preference is being given to 'Buy (Indian)' and 'Buy & Make (Indian)' categories of capital acquisition over 'Buy (Global)' & 'Buy & Make (Global)' categories.

(iii) "Make" Procedure

- In February 2018 a separate procedure for 'Make-II' sub-category has been notified wherein a number of industry-friendly provisions have been introduced.
- This effort of the Government to promote industry participation in indigenous development of defence items has yielded an extremely encouraging response.
- Make-II Procedure for implementation at OFB/DPSUs has also been notified in February 2019.

(iv) Innovations for Defence Excellence Framework

- This framework was launched with the aim to achieve self-reliance and to foster innovation and technology development in Defence and Aerospace Sector by engaging Industries including MSMEs, startups, individual innovators, R&D institutes and academia.

(v) Indigenisation policy

- Government has notified a Policy for indigenisation of components and spares used in Defence Platforms in March 2019.
- The objective is to create an industry ecosystem which is able to indigenize the imported components (including alloys & special materials) and sub-assemblies for defence equipment and platforms manufactured in India.

(vi) Defence Corridors

- Government has decided to establish two defence industrial corridors to serve as engines of economic development and growth of defence industrial base in the country.
- They span across Chennai, Hosur, Coimbatore, Salem and Tiruchirappalli in Tamil Nadu and Aligarh, Agra, Jhansi, Kanpur, Chitrakoot and Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh.

(vii) Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti

- This framework aims to provide a boost to the IPR culture in the indigenous defence industry.

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief exercise

Why in the news?

- Raksha Rajya Mantri has informed in a written reply to the in Lok Sabha about the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief exercise.

About the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief exercise

- It is an exercise between the Indian and Myanmar Air Force (MAF) was conducted at Prayagraj on the theme of HADR.
- The objectives of the exercise include planning of HADR operation in a given scenario, learn best practices, executing mission during HADR disasters, understand Search and Rescue Mission procedures etc.
- The exercise was conducted under the aegis of Headquarters Central Air Command, IAF. 20-member team of IAF participated in the exercise.

Operation Namaste

Why in the news?

- The **Indian Army** has recently launched '**Operation Namaste**' to **Combat Coronavirus**.



About the Operation Namaste

- Under 'Operation Namaste', the Army has **issued the directives to all its bases to insulate the force** from the coronavirus.
- **All border posts** have been **prepared to deal with cross-border infections**.

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