

UPSC Daily Current Affairs 07 Jun 2021

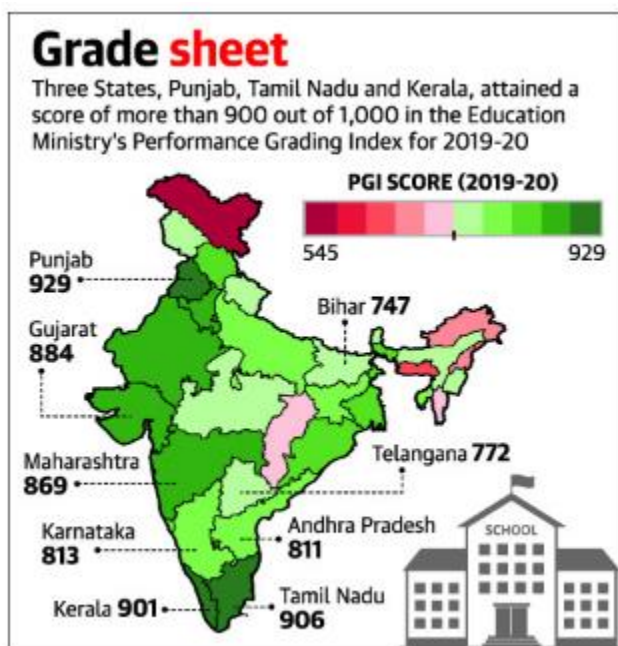
1. Performance Grading Index on School Education

(Topic- GS Paper III –Education, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Ministry of Education has recently released Performance Grading Index for 2019-20.

About the Performance Grading Index for 2019-20



- The index monitors the progress that the States and Union Territories have made in school education with regard to learning outcomes, access and equity, infrastructure and facilities, and governance and management processes.
- This is the third edition of the index and uses 70 indicators to measure progress.
- Of these, the 16 indicators related to learning outcomes remain unchanged through all three editions, as they are based on data from the 2017 National Achievement Survey(NAS), which tested students in Classes 3, 5, 8 and 10.
- The next NAS was scheduled to be held in 2020, but was postponed because of the pandemic.
- The remaining 54 parameters use Central databases, collating information from the school and district level, and have been updated for 2019-20

Methodology

- The PGI is structured in two categories, namely,

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- a. Outcomes
- b. Governance & Management
- The information on the indicators are drawn from data available with the DoSEL from the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE), National Achievement Survey (NAS) of NCERT, Mid Day Meal website, Public Financial Management System (PFMS) and the information uploaded by the States and UTs on the Shagun portal of DoSEL.
- **It comprises 70 indicators in aggregate with a total weightage of 1000.**
- The total weightage under the PGI is 100 points with each of the 70 indicators assigned a weightage of either 10 or 20 points.
- The States and UTs have been assessed on the basis of their performance against the benchmark for each indicator.
- Weightages against each indicator have been divided into 10 groups- 0, 1-10, 11-20 and so on upto 91-100.
- Thus, a State which has achieved 91% of the benchmark of an Indicator will get maximum points (10 or 20 whichever is applicable for the particular indicator).
- However, in case of a few Indicators, a lower value would score a higher weightage e.g. equity indicators, time taken for release of funds and single teacher schools.

Key Finding of the Report

- The Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Kerala have all scored higher than 90%.

Huge jump

- **Punjab recorded** the highest score of almost 929 out of a possible 1,000, showing a huge jump from 769 last year.
- The State topped the charts in terms of equity, infrastructure and governance, and shared the top spot in the domain of access with Kerala.
- Punjab overtook the Union Territory of Chandigarh, which topped both previous editions of the index, but has now slid to second place with a score of 912.
- **Tamil Nadu** also overtook Kerala, with a score of 906, largely driven by improvements in the State's educational governance and management, as well as in terms of infrastructure and facilities.

Gujarat Performance

- **Gujarat**, which had the second highest score in the previous edition, dropped to eighth place.
- It regressed in the key domain of access, which measures enrolment of students in school and the ability to keep them from dropping out as well as mainstreaming out-of-school students.
- Its progress in other areas also did not keep pace with other States.

Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh Performance

- Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh saw a glaring drop in their scores, pushing both States to an overall performance that was worse than in the previous edition.

Note:

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- The new Union Territory of Ladakh was included separately for the first time in this edition, and had the lowest score of just 545.

2. Equal Access to Green cards for Legal Employment (EAGLE) Act

(Topic- GS Paper II –Governance, Source- AIR)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, the Democrat Representative Zoe Lofgren and Republican John Curtis have introduced the Equal Access to Green cards for Legal Employment (EAGLE) Act of 2021.

About EAGLE Act

- It is a bipartisan act seeks to phase out the seven per cent per-country limit on employment-based immigrant visas.
- It raises the per-country limit on family-sponsored visas from seven per cent to 15 per cent. It provides for a nine-year period for the elimination of this limit.
- It provides for a nine-year period for the elimination of this limit.
- With the EAGLE Act, the per-country cap would be removed, which may expedite the petitions for those applying for employment-based green cards.

Significance of EAGLE Act

- It will benefit the US economy by allowing American employers to focus on hiring immigrants based on their merit, not their birthplace.
- It ensures that no country may receive more than 25 per cent of reserved visas and no country may receive more than 85 per cent of unreserved visas.

Importance of EAGLE Act for Indians

- Green Card, officially known as a Permanent Resident Card, allows a person to live and work permanently in the United States.
- With the current 7% per-country cap on the allotment of the immigration visa, a large number of Indian professionals working in the U.S. primarily on H-1B visas have to wait for a long period to obtain the “Green Card”.
- **EAGLE Act** will be advantageous for Indian job-seekers who currently rely on temporary visas or await green cards to work in the US.
- The think-tank Cato Institute had reported in March 2020 that 75 per cent of the backlog for employment-based visas was made up of Indians.

3. NPR slips valid for long-term visas: MHA

(Topic- GS Paper II –Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

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- Recently, according to a Union Home Ministry manual, migrants belonging to six non-Muslim minority communities from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, while applying for long-term visas (LTVs), can also produce National Population Register (NPR) enrolment slips as proof of the duration of their stay in India.

More on the news

- The NPR number is part of an illustrative list of more than 10 documents that could be provided to apply for an LTV, which is a precursor to acquiring Indian citizenship either by naturalisation or registration under Section 5 and 6 of the Citizenship Act, 1955, for the six communities — Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Parsis, Christians and Buddhists — from the three countries.
- The special provision of LTVs for Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan and Afghanistan was first made in 2011.
- Other documents to prove the date of entry of the applicant in to India/ date from which residing in India
 - (a) Slip issued by the Census Enumerators in India to such persons while conducting survey for preparation of National Population Register prior to 31.12.2014.
 - (b) Insurance policies issued by the Insurance companies in India
 - (c) Bank/ Post Office Account in India
 - (d) Court/ Tribunal Records/ Processes in India
 - (e) Government issued licence/ certificate in India
 - (f) Land and tenancy records in India
 - (g) Permanent Residential Certificate, if any, issued in India
 - (h) Refugee Registration Certificate issued in India
 - (i) Document showing service/ employment under any employer in India
 - (j) Any other document issued by the Government authority in India - Gram Panchayat Secretary Certificate countersigned by the Circle Officer, Driving licence, Aadhaar Card , etc. to prove the date of entry into India or the date from which residing in India.

Guidelines issued by the Home Ministry

- According to detailed guidelines issued by the Home Ministry on documents that can be produced to prove the date of entry of the minority community migrants currently in India, the “slip issued by the Census enumerators” during the survey for the preparation of the NPR prior to December 31, 2014, can be provided.
- Migrants who can apply for LTVs will have to produce any document issued by the governments of Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan “clearly showing the religion of the applicant like school certificate etc. to establish that the applicant is from a minority community”.

About National Population Register

- The NPR was first compiled in 2010 simultaneously with the decadal Census exercise and later updated in 2015.
- It already has a database of 119 crore residents.
- The NPR is a register of usual residents linked with location particulars down to the village level and is updated periodically “to incorporate the changes due to birth, death and migration”.

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- Even though 18-44-year-olds were more likely to own smartphones (nearly half), the proportion is still dismal, with the majority of the chunk likely to get the job later than their privileged counterparts.
- In 2017, 24% Indians (and 35% among 18-44s) owned smartphones.

Recent Data

- The most recent data of late 2020 and early 2021, in the five states that went to polls most recently — Bihar, Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala — smartphone users have grown by 12%, from 33% in 2019 to 45% in 2020-21.
- Among 18-44s, this proportion improved from 47% to 56%.
- Since we also find that these five states taken together mirrored the national average for smartphone ownership both in 2017 and 2019, we assume a similar growth nationally as well.
- This would mean that a majority of the population in India still finds itself at the wrong side of the digital divide.

Who all stand at the risk of exclusion?

- The urban, the rich, the upper castes, the rich, the educated and men are more likely to own Internet-enabled smartphones, while the rest stand at a risk of exclusion from accessing vaccines.

Gender Gap and Digital Gap

- Women, for instance, are far less likely to own smartphones, with a gap of 22 percentage points among 18-44s.
- Further, the digital divide accentuates through caste and class — the rich (18-44 years) are three times more likely than the poor, while the upper castes are more than 1.5 times likely than SCs/STs to have a smartphone.
- Backing up the Supreme Court's observation, the data highlights the "farfetchedness of an illiterate villager from rural India crossing the 'digital divide' to register for Covid-19 vaccine on the **CoWin portal**".
- Among 18-44, merely 8% of non-literates, 17% of those who studied up to the primary, and 40% of those educated up to matric own smartphones, as against three in four (74%) of college-educated.

Recent Development

YounTab scheme

- Ladakh Lt Governor has recently launches **YounTab scheme** for students to encourage digital learning

Aim

- YounTab scheme formulated to encourage digital learning, bridge the digital divide between connected and unconnected and mitigate the Covid pandemic disruptions.
- As a part of the first phase of the YounTab scheme the students of 9 to 12 class has get the tablets.

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- A total of 12 thousand 300 students of 6th to 12th class from government schools will benefit from the scheme.

5. More anti-bodies produced by Covishield than Covaxin: study

(Topic- GS Paper III –Science and Technology, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, in a reports of healthcare workers (HCW) in India has revealed that two doses of Covishield vaccine produced more antibodies than Covaxin doses, but there were relatively fewer instances of „breakthrough infections“ after the latter.

Key findings of the study

Tale of two vaccines | A study of the real-world effectiveness of vaccination in India shows the differences in the protection accorded by Covishield and Covaxin:



- It was a pan-India exercise studying vaccine responses in doctors across 13 States and 22 cities
- Among the 515 healthcare workers (305 male and 210 female), 95% showed seropositivity after two doses of both vaccines
- Overall, anti-bodies towards the spike protein were higher in Covishield than Covaxin
- There were relatively fewer instances of 'breakthrough infections' after taking Covaxin
- Mild to moderate adverse events associated with both vaccines were similar, and none had severe or unsolicited side-effects

- The study shows that none of the participants, who were all doctors and got both doses of vaccines, were ill and only about 6% tested positive at different points of the vaccination schedule.
- While both vaccines were protective, there were differences in the protection accorded by a single dose of the vaccines.
- A single dose of Covishield elicited about 10 times the antibodies than Covaxin whereas a second dose narrowed the gap somewhat, with Covishield-triggered antibodies about six times that of Covaxinsimulated ones.
- Due to the shortage, it's easier for people to get a single dose - given that the recommended gap has been extended to as many as 12 weeks for Covishield.

6. State of India's Environment Report 2021

(Topic- GS Paper III –Environment, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- **According to the State of India's Environment Report 2021**, India's rank has slipped by two places from last year to 117 on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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Key finding of the report

- India ranks below four South Asian countries -- Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.
- **In 2020, Indian has ranked 115 on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).**
- The overall SDG score of India is 61.9 out of 100.

Reasons of ranking dropped

- The State of India's Environment Report 2021 revealed that India's rank was 115 last year and dropped by two places primarily because major challenges like ending hunger and achieving food security (SDG 2), achieving gender equality (SDG 5) and building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and fostering innovation (SDG 9) remain in the country.

Other findings

- India ranked 168 out of 180 countries in terms of Environmental Performance Index (EPI) which is calculated on various indicators, including environmental health, climate, air pollution, sanitation and drinking water, ecosystem services, biodiversity, etc.
- **India's rank was 172** in the environmental health category, which is an indicator of how well countries are protecting their populations from environmental health risks.
- **According to the EPI 2020 report by Yale University**, India ranked 148, 21 positions behind Pakistan which was at 127th position in the category of biodiversity and habitat which assesses countries' actions toward retaining natural ecosystems and protecting the full range of biodiversity within their borders.

State-wise preparedness

- Jharkhand and Bihar are the least prepared to meet the SDGs by 2030, which is the target year.
- While Jharkhand lags in five of the SDGs, Bihar lags in seven.

Best overall Score

- Kerala, Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh are the States/UTs with the best overall score on the path to achieving the SDGs.
- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, was adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, which provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future.

About the Sustainable Development Goals

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- The UN General Assembly in its 70th Session considered and adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the next 15 years.
- **The 17 SDGs came into force with effect from 1st January 2016.**
- Though not legally binding, the SDGs have become de facto international obligations and have potential to reorient domestic spending priorities of the countries during the next fifteen years.
- Countries are expected to take ownership and establish a national framework for achieving these Goals.
- Implementation and success will rely on countries' own sustainable development policies, plans and programmes.

7. New variant T478K

(Topic- GS Paper III –Science and Technology, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

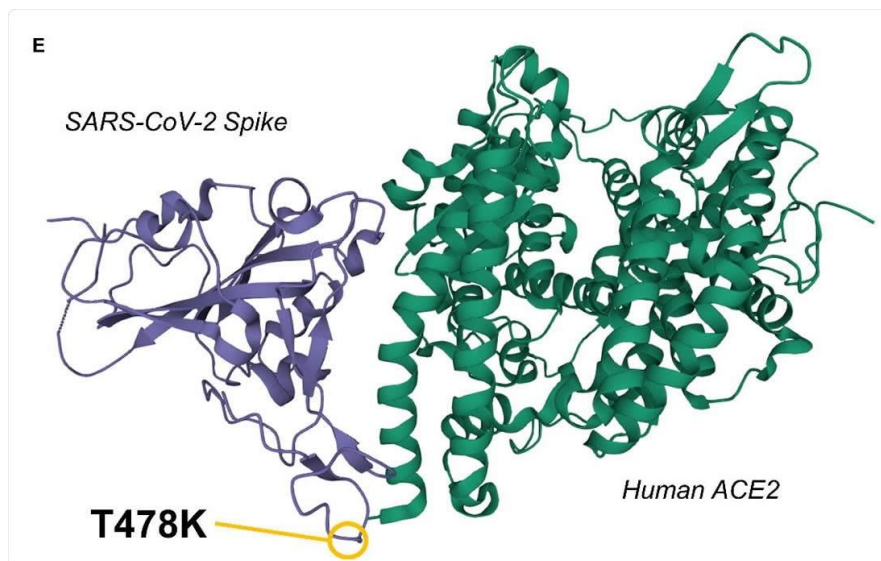
- COVID-19 cases New Covid-19 variant T478K: This variant has been increasingly spreading among people in North America, particularly in Mexico.
- An analysis of more than one million SARS-CoV-2 genome sequences has led to the identification of a **new variant called T478K.**

About New variant T478K

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- It has been spreading mostly in Mexico but has also been found in Europe.
- Like other strains, this presents a mutation in the spike protein.
- The variant spreads evenly across males and females and age ranges, the University of Bologna says on its website.
- This variant represents 52.8% of all sequenced coronaviruses in Mexico, whereas in the US it shows up only in 2.7% of the sequenced samples.

8. Raimona reserve forest becomes Assam's sixth national park

(Topic- GS Paper III –Environment, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, **Raimona reserve forest in lower Assam became the state's sixth national park.**

About Raimona reserve forest

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- It is in the Kokrajhar district of Assam.
- Raimona National Park straddles the northern part of the notified Ripu reserve forest, which forms the westernmost buffer to the Manas Tiger Reserve.
- Raimona also shares contiguous forest patches with Phipsoo Wildlife Sanctuary and Jigme Singye Wangchuk National Park in Bhutan (1,999sqkm) creating a transboundary conservation landscape of more than 2,400sqkm.

Other five National Park in Assam

- Kaziranga National Park, Manas National Park, Nameri National Park, Dibru-Saikhowa National Park and Orang National Park are the five other existing national parks in the state.

Related Information

Golden Langur protection status

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- IUCN List of Threatened Species: Endangered
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) : Appendix I
- Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 : Schedule I

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