

CURRENT EVENTS  
AND  
ANALYSIS  
**(March 2020)**

**Editor**

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# NATIONAL POLITY

## EXECUTIVE

### Relief Package for the Package:

## Rs 1.70 Lakh Crore Relief Package for the Poor

The poor and vulnerable people who depend on daily wages for survival were severely impacted by the countrywide lockdown announced by the Union Government.

To provide a safety net to the people hit hard by the lockdown who have been deprived of source of income, the Union Government announced a package of measures under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana. An amount of Rs 1.70 Lakh crore would be spent under the package.

The package includes assistance in cash and kind to ensure that the poor do not face difficulties in buying essential items, and meeting essential services like health services.

### **1. Free Food grains:**

80 crore individuals, i.e., roughly two-thirds of India's population, would be provided double of their current entitlement over next three months through Public Distribution System (PDS)

This additional food grains would be free of cost.

(Under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), food grains are made available to 80 crore individuals at subsidised prices of Rs. 3/2/1 per kg for rice, wheat and coarse grains.

NFSA covers upto 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population.

Beneficiaries are divided into Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households and priority households. While AAY households, which constitute poorest of the poor, are entitled to 35 kg of food grains per family per month, priority households are entitled to 5 kg per person per month).

### **2. Pulses:**

Pulses, at 1 kg per family, would also be provided free of cost for next three months to ensure adequate availability of protein.

### **3. Farmers:**

The first instalment of Rs 2,000 due in 2020-21 will be front-loaded and paid in April 2020 itself under the PM KISAN Yojana.

This would benefit 8.7 crore farmers

### **4. Poor Women:**

20.40 crores Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) women account-holders would be given an ex-gratia of Rs 500 per month for the next three months.

### **5. Gas cylinders:**

Under PM Garib Kalyan Yojana, gas cylinders would be provided free of cost to 8 crore poor families for the next three months.

### **6. Senior citizens (above 60 years), Widows, and Divyang (Differently Abled):**

Government will give Rs 1,000 during next three months to 3 crore aged widows and people in Divyang category.

**7. Rural Employment:**

Wages under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) would be increased by Rs 20 (to Rs 202 a day from Rs 182) with effect from 1 April, 2020.

Wage increase will provide an additional Rs 2,000 benefit annually to a worker.

This will benefit approximately 13.62 crore families.

**8. Self-Help Groups:**

For self-help groups, the limit of collateral free lending would be increased from Rs 10 to Rs 20 lakhs.

This will benefit Women organised through 63 lakhs Self Help Groups (SHGs) and support 6.85 crore households.

**9. Low Wage Earners in Organised Sectors:**

For low-wage workers in Micro, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises, the government will contribute the employees' as well as employers' PF contribution, which works out to 24 per cent of the provident fund for the next three months. This is for units with up to 100 employees and 90 per cent earning less than ₹15,000 a month.

**10. Organised sector:**

Employees' Provident Fund Regulations will be amended to include Pandemic as the reason to allow non-refundable advance of 75 percent of the amount or three months of the wages, whichever is lower, from their accounts.

Families of four crore workers registered under EPF can take benefit of this window.

**11. Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Fund:**

Welfare Fund for Building and Other Construction Workers has been created under a Central Government Act. State Governments implement the Act.

State Governments will be given directions to utilise this fund to provide assistance to these workers to protect them against economic disruptions.

At present, the size of the Fund is Rs 31,000 crore and there are around 3.5 Crore registered workers in the Fund.

**12. District Mineral Fund**

The State Governments will be asked to utilise the funds available under District Mineral Fund (DMF) for supplementing and augmenting facilities of medical testing, screening and other requirements in connection with preventing the spread of COVID-19 pandemic as well as treating the patients affected with this pandemic.

District Mineral Fund (DMF) consists of proceeds of royalty collected from mining companies in the mining affected districts. Around Rs. 24,000 crores has been collected under Fund set up in 2015.

**13. Insurance Cover for Medical Workers Treating and Working on Covid Patients:**

Safai karamcharis, ward-boys, nurses, ASHA workers, paramedics, technicians, doctors and specialists and other health workers would be covered by a Special Insurance Scheme.

Any health professional, who while treating Covid-19 patients, meets with some accident, then he/she would be **compensated with an amount of Rs 50 lakh under the scheme.**

All government health centres, wellness centres and hospitals of Centre as well as States would be covered **under this scheme.**

**Approximately 22 lakh health workers would be covered under the insurance.**

District Mineral Foundation (DMF) is set up in any district affected by mining related operations.

### **PM CARES Fund:**

## **Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM CARES Fund)**

On March 27, 2020, the Union Government launched 'Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund '(PM CARES Fund)'.

### **What is 'PM CARES Fund'?**

- It is a public charitable trust.
- **Chairman** of the Trust: Prime Minister
- **Ex officio Members** of the Trust: Defence Minister, Home Minister and Finance Minister.
- **Members:** The Chairperson of the Board of Trustees (Prime Minister) shall have the power to nominate three trustees to the Board of Trustees who shall be eminent persons in the field of research, health, science, social work, law, public administration and philanthropy.
- Any person appointed a Trustee shall act in a pro bono (free of charge) capacity.

### **Objectives of the Fund are to**

- provide relief or assistance during a public health emergency or any other kind of emergency (calamity, distress, etc. either man-made or natural),
- create or upgrade of healthcare or pharmaceutical facilities, and other necessary infrastructure for emergencies,
- fund relevant research, and any other type of support.
- render financial assistance, provide grants of payments of money or take such other steps as may be deemed necessary by the Board of Trustees to the affected population, and
- undertake any other activity which is not inconsistent with the above objects.

### **Who will contribute to the Fund?**

- The Fund will consist of entirely of voluntary donations from public and organisations.
- It will not get any budgetary support.

### **Exemption from income Tax:**

- Donations to this fund will be eligible for 100% exemption under the Income Tax Act, 1961.
- Donations will also qualify to be counted as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) expenditure under the Companies Act, 2013.
- PM CARES Fund has also got exemption under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) and a separate account for receiving foreign donations has been opened to accept donations, and contributions from individuals and organizations based in foreign countries. This is in consistent with modalities under Prime Minister's National Relief

Fund (PMNRF). PMNRF has also received foreign contributions as a public trust since 2011.)

### **Payment Options:**

Citizens and organisations in India can go to the website [pmindia.gov.in](http://pmindia.gov.in) and donate to PM CARES Fund using following details:

Name of the Account : **PM CARES**

Account Number : **2121PM20202**

IFSC Code : **SBIN0000691**

SWIFT Code : **SBININBB104**

Name of Bank & Branch : **State Bank of India, New Delhi Main Branch**

UPI ID : **pmcares@sbi**

**Following modes of payments are available on the website [pmindia.gov.in](http://pmindia.gov.in) -**

1. Debit Cards and Credit Cards
2. Internet Banking
3. UPI (BHIM, PhonePe, Amazon Pay, Google Pay, PayTM, Mobikwik, etc.)
4. RTGS/NEFT

This fund also accepts micro-donations to enable a large number of people contribute even smallest of denominations.

### **Criticism on PMCARES Fund:**

The launch of PMCARES Fund has come under criticism from political parties as a similar fund called Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF) already exists.

PMNRF was set up in 1948 by the then Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. It was established with public contributions to assist displaced persons from Pakistan. The resources of the PMNRF are now utilised primarily to render immediate relief to families of those killed in natural calamities like floods, cyclones, earthquakes, etc. and to the victims of the major accidents and riots.

Assistance from PMNRF is also rendered to partially defray the expenses for medical treatment like heart surgeries, kidney transplantation, cancer treatment, acid attack, etc. The fund consists entirely of public contributions and does not get any budgetary support. The corpus of the fund is invested in various forms with scheduled commercial banks and other agencies. Disbursements are made with the approval of the Prime Minister. As on December 16, 2019, PMNRF has a balance of Rs. 3,800 crore.

### **LEGISLATURE:**

#### **Anti-Defection:**

### **Supreme Court Strips Manipur MLA of Ministerial Post**

On March 14, 2020, the Supreme Court stripped Manipur Cabinet Minister T. Shyam Kumar, who is facing disqualification proceedings for defection, of his office, using its power under Article 142 of the Constitution of India.

It also stated that T. Shyam Kumar should not enter the legislative assembly.

**What is Article 142 of the Indian Constitution?**

Under Article 142 of the Constitution, Supreme Court may pass such decree or order necessary for doing complete justice in any case or matter pending before it.

### **Background:**

- On January 21, 2020, the Bench had given the Speaker a month's time to decide on the disqualification of Mr. Shyam Kumar under the anti-defection law.
- He contested and won on the Congress party ticket in the Manipur assembly elections.
- No party got majority in the 60 member house. The Congress got 28 seats and the BJP got 21 seats.
- The BJP formed the Government with the support of the National People's Party.
- Mr. Shyam Kumar of Congress joined the BJP and he was made Minister for Forest and Environment in the government led by N. Biren Singh on March 16, 2017.
- However, despite the judgment, the Speaker had returned to the apex court seeking eight weeks to take a decision.
- 15 Congress MLAs filed petitions for Mr. Shyam Kumar's disqualification, arguing that he had violated the 10th Schedule of the Constitution.
- The speaker did not take any decision on the petition. There is no time limit for disposal of petitions under the 10th Schedule of the Constitution
- Hence, they moved the Manipur High Court and the Supreme Court over inordinate delay in the disposal of the disqualification petition.
- On January 21, 2020, the Bench had given the Speaker a month's time to decide on the disqualification of Mr. Shyam Kumar under the anti-defection law.
- On March 18, 2020 the Speaker asked for 10 days' time and said the decision on the disqualification would come on March 28. However, the Supreme Court refused the plea and issued the order.
- Finally, on March 28, 2020, Manipur Speaker Yumnam Khemchand disqualified T. Shyam Kumar as a member of the Assembly for defection.

### **Suggestion for Separate Tribunal and Time Period for Decisions:**

- In the January 2020 order, the Supreme Court made two suggestions to check defections.

#### **Separate Quasi-judicial Tribunal :**

Parliament should amend the anti-defection law to set up a separate quasi-judicial tribunal to decide disqualification petitions. Speakers should not be entrusted with the power to decide on disqualification as he is appointed by the political party and cannot stay aloof from the pressures and wishes of his political party

#### **Decision in Three Months:**

Till the anti-defection law is amended, Speakers should decide Tenth Schedule disqualifications within a "reasonable period" of three months. This is reasonable period as the ordinary life of the Lok Sabha or the Legislative Assemblies is merely five years, the SC stated.

Unless there are "exceptional circumstances", disqualification petitions under the Tenth Schedule should be decided by Speakers within this reasonable period of three months.

### **SOCIAL SECTOR:**

### Happiness Report:

## **India Ranked 140<sup>th</sup> in World Happiness Report; Finland is World's Happiest Country**

India secured 140<sup>th</sup> rank out of 156 countries in the World' Happiness Index released on March 18, 2020. India's ranking slipped 7 positions from 2019 when it was ranked 133.

Finland stood in the first position while South Sudan stood last in the index with a rank of 156.

### **Top 5 Countries in the Index:**

<u>Country</u>	<u>Rank</u>
Finland	1
Denmark	2
Norway	3
Iceland	4
Netherlands	5

### **Bottom 5 countries in the Index:**

<u>Country</u>	<u>Rank</u>
South Sudan	156
Central African Republic	155
Afghanistan	154
Tanzania	153
Rwanda	152

### **About the report:**

- The World Happiness Report is a publication of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN).
- SSDN was set up in 2012 under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General.
- The first World Happiness Report was released in 2012.

### **Criteria for Ranking:**

The report ranks countries based on **six key variables** that support the well-being:

- Per capita income,
- Social Support,
- Healthy Life Expectancy at birth,
- Freedom to make life choices
- Generosity, and
- Perceptions about corruption

### **Factors that Helped Finland to Get First Rank:**

- High quality of life,
- Trust among people and trust in public institutions
- Low income inequality, and
- Less poverty.

## STATES:

### Madhya Pradesh:

## **Kamal Nath Resigns as Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister**

On March 20, 2020, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath resigned just a couple of hours ahead of floor test in the Legislative Assembly.

In the Assembly elections held in December 2018, the Congress party won 114 seats in the 230 member assembly. It fell short of majority by 2 seats. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) stood second with 107 seats.

The Congress Party formed the Government with the support of 2 Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) members, one Samajwadi Party member and four independent members. Senior Congress Party leader Kamal Nath was sworn in as Chief Minister.

### **Reason for Resignation of Kamal Nath:**

22 MLAs loyal to Mr. Jyotiraditya Scindia, former Union Minister, quit the Congress and also resigned from the Assembly.

After the resignations of 22 MLAs, strength of the Congress in the Assembly fell to 92.

The strength of the 230-member Assembly also came down to 206 (two seats are vacant) after the resignation of the 22 MLAs.

The majority mark at present is 104. The Congress has 92 MLAs and the BJP 107.

Jyotiraditya Scindia and the 22 rebel MLAs joined the BJP. Jyotiraditya Scindia secured a Rajya Sabha ticket from the BJP.

Senior BJP leader **Shivraj Singh Chouhan** took oath as the new chief minister of Madhya Pradesh for the fourth time on March 23, 2020.

### **Limitations of Anti-defection Law:**

The resignation of 22 MLAs and the fall of Kamal Nath Government once again exposed the ineffectiveness of the Anti-defection law (10<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the Constitution) which was brought in to check political defections.

These 22 congress MLAs resigned as they have assured of seats to contest in the by-elections (caused due to their resignation) on the BJP tickets.

Similar exercise was done in Karnataka where congress MLAs resigned to bring down the coalition government of Congress and Janata Dal (Secular) led by H.D. Kumaraswamy. 13 MLAs who defected from Congress and Janata Dal were given tickets in the by-elections. 11 of the 13 defected MLAs got re-elected on BJP ticket and 10 of them were made ministers in the BJP Government headed by BS Yediyurappa.

In Madhya Pradesh, the 22 congress MLAs resigned just one year after getting elected as MLAs as they have been assured of tickets to contest on behalf of BJP.

Under Anti-defection law, an elected member loses membership of the house for voluntarily giving up the membership of his/her party or disobeying the directives of the party leadership on a vote, and abstaining from voting.

The Law does not bar a member who is disqualified for defection from contesting in the immediate by-elections.

**Suggestion:**

Members who are disqualified from the house should not be allowed to immediately contest in the by-poll and return to the House.

Anti-defection Law should be amended to bar such disqualified members for the remainder of the term of the house.

Disqualification for the remaining tenure of the House will serve as a stronger deterrent against horse trading.

In the absence of above safeguards, the anti-defection provisions will become toothless because disqualified/ resigning MLAs can contest a subsequent by poll and return to the House.

**Uttar Pradesh:**

**UP Government Issues Ordinance to Recover Damages to Public and Private Property**

On March 14, 2020, the Uttar Pradesh Government promulgated an ordinance to recover damage to public and private properties during any violent protest or riot.

**Major provisions of the Uttar Pradesh Recovery of Damage to Public and Private Property Ordinance, 2020.**

**Claims Tribunals:**

- ‘**Claims Tribunals**’ will be set up to investigate complaints and assess the damage.

**Composition of Claims Tribunals:**

- The chairperson of the Claims Tribunal would be a retired district judge while its members would be of the rank of additional commissioner.

**Procedure for Claims:**

- 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.
- The claim can cite as respondents those who “exhorted” or “instigated” or “committed” acts that caused the damage, as well as those named by the police.
- The Claims Tribunal has the power to appoint a Claims Commissioner to estimate the damage caused and investigate liability to assist it in holding the inquiry.
- The claims would cover not only damage to public and private property but also the costs borne by the police and administration in taking preventive measures.

- The liability would be fixed on the alleged perpetrators as well as those accused of instigating or exhorting them.

#### **Powers of Claims Tribunals:**

- Claims for compensation will be decided by these Tribunals.
- **Every order or award passed** by the Claims Tribunal would be “final” and **no appeal** against such orders would be "maintainable" before any court.
- Also, no civil court will have the jurisdiction to entertain any questions regarding the claims.

#### **Attachment of Properties:**

- The Claims Tribunal would have the power to attach the property of the respondents and publicise their names, addresses and photographs to warn public against purchasing the property.
- As soon as the order for recovery of damages is passed, the property of the respondent would be attached. Government authorities shall be directed to publish the name and address of property along with a photograph of a warning for public at large not to purchase the attached property.

#### **Other Details:**

- The Tribunal will have to adhere to the principles of natural justice, issue notices and receive replies from the respondents, but it also has the power to decide a matter ex parte, if those given notices do not respond.
- The pendency of any criminal proceeding relating to the incidents would not be a bar on the Tribunals proceeding with their work.
- The compensation, if unpaid, can be recovered through the District Collectors as arrears of land revenue.

#### **Why Did the UP Government Promulgate?**

- Uttar Pradesh government sent notices to at least 500 alleged protestors to recover the losses caused by damage to public properties during the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) in the state in December 2019. Twenty-eight persons in Lucknow have been asked to pay around ₹64 lakh as recovery for damage to private and public property.
- The Government also put up several hoardings in Lucknow identifying those accused of violence during the protests against the CAA and pending recoveries from them.
- These notices were challenged on the ground that as per Supreme Court guidelines issued in the past, such notices for recovery of damages can be issued only by a serving/retired high court judge, or, a retired district judge as “claims commissioner”.
- But the notices in the present case were issued by the additional district magistrate. They also contended that there is no provision to appeal once the order is passed by the ADM.
- The hoardings were challenged on the grounds that these violate Article (19) i.e Right to Privacy, and Article 21 i.e. Right to life and liberty which are fundamental rights under the Constitution. Under, Article 21, no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according **to a procedure established by law.**

- The Allahabad High Court stayed the notices of the UP Government and also stated that the hoardings were an “unwarranted interference in privacy” of people and a violation of Article 21 of the Constitution.
- This was appealed in the Supreme Court by the UP Government. The Supreme Court also refused to lift the stay of the Allahabad High Court and referred the appeal of UP to a larger Bench.
- Hence, the UP Government promulgated the ‘Uttar Pradesh Recovery of Damage to Public and Private Property Ordinance, 2020.

#### NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS:

### **Non Governmental Organisations (NGO’s) Which Have No Connection with Party Politics or Active Politics Cannot Be Denied Access to Foreign Contributions: Supreme Court**

Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 and the rules made under the Act empower the Central Government to designate voluntary organisations as ‘*organisations of political nature*’ under certain criteria. Such designation denies them access to foreign contributions. These provisions of the Act and rules which empower the Central Government were challenged by the Indian Social Action Forum (INSAF), a national forum of over 700 movements and NGOs in India committed to resist globalisation, combat communalism & defend democracy, on the ground that these provisions and rules are

- vague and arbitrary, and
- give unfettered authority to the Government to regulate the Non Governmental Organisations.
- The Government is using the provisions of the Act and rules to deny source of funding from foreign contributions.

The following provisions of Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010, and the rules made under it were challenged

**Section 5 (1) of the Act:** This section empowers Central Government to declare an organisation to be an ‘organisation of a political nature’ after considering the activities of the organisation or the ideology propagated by the organisation or association of the organisation with the activities of any political party.

If an organisation is declared as an organisation of political nature, accepting foreign contributions would be denied to such organisation.

**Section 5 (4) of the Act:** This section deals with the procedure before declaring an organisation as of political nature. The Government would serve a notice and organisation could submit a representation giving reasons for not declaring as organisation of political nature. Such representation would be forwarded by the Government to ‘any authority’ to go through the representation and report to it.

INSAF contested that the term any authority is vague as it is not specifically mentioned.

#### **Rule 3 of Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Rules, 2011:**

INSAF also asked for declaring Rules 3 (i), 3 (v), and 3 (vi) as violative of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution.

Rule 3 of Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Rules, 2011 contains a list of activities to consider an organisation to be of political nature, not being a political party, and bar them

from accepting foreign contributions. Rules 3 (i), 3 (v) and 3 (vi) deal with the following activities.

**Rule 3 (i):** organisation having avowed political objectives in its Memorandum of Association or bylaws.

**Rule 3 (v):** organisation of farmers, workers, students, youth based on caste, community, religion, language or otherwise, which is not directly aligned to any political party, but whose objectives, as stated in the Memorandum of Association, or activities gathered through other material evidence, include steps towards advancement of **Political interests** of such groups.

**Rule 3 (vi):** any organisation, by **whatever name called**, which habitually engages itself in or employs common methods of **political action** like 'bandh' or 'hartal', 'rasta roko', 'rail roko' or 'jail bharo' in support of public causes.”

INSAF contested that the terms 'political objectives', 'political activities', 'political interests' and 'political action' have no clarity and any activity though not connected with party politics can be brought into the fold of Rule 3.

### **Supreme Court Verdict:**

**Indian Social Action Forum (INSAF)** filed a writ petition in Delhi High Court challenging the above provisions.

The Delhi High Court dismissed the petition of the INSAF stating that the Act and rules provide for sufficient safeguards. INSAF went for appeal to the Supreme Court.

### **Highlights of the Supreme Court Verdict:**

The Supreme Court, in its verdict delivered on the appeal on March 6, 2020, stated that

- Voluntary Organisations which have absolutely no connection with either party politics or active politics cannot be denied access to foreign contributions, and
- support to public causes by resorting to legitimate means of dissent like bandh, hartal, etc. cannot deprive an organisation of its legitimate right of receiving foreign contribution.
- 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.

### **Details of the Judgement:**

**Section 5 (1)** cannot be declared as unconstitutional as the larger objective of the Act is to regulate foreign contributions and there are enough safeguards like giving notice to the organisation and considering its views before declaring an organisation as one with 'political nature'

**Section 5 (4)** cannot be declared as unconstitutional only on the ground that the authority to whom representation should be made is not specified.

**Rule 3 (i): According to Rule 3 (i)** an organisation having avowed political objectives in its memorandum of association or bye laws is an organisation of a political nature.

As the intention of the legislature is to prohibit foreign funds in active politics, an Association with avowed political objectives (i.e. to play a role in active politics or party politics) cannot be permitted access to foreign funds. There is no ambiguity in the provision, and hence, cannot be termed as vague.

**Rule 3 (v)** deals with **organisations of farmers, workers, students, etc.** which are not directly aligned to any political party but objectives of which include steps towards advancement of 'political interests' of such groups.

The Supreme Court stated that the words 'political interests' are **vague and are susceptible to misuse.**

Hence, a balance has to be drawn between the object that is sought to be achieved by the legislation and the rights of the voluntary organisations to have access to foreign funds. The purpose for which the statute prevents organisations of a political nature from receiving foreign funds is to ensure that the administration is not influenced by foreign funds.

Voluntary organisations which **have absolutely no connection with either party politics or active politics cannot be denied access to foreign contributions.**

Such organisations which are working for the social and economic welfare of the society **cannot be brought within the purview of the Act or the Rules by enlarging the scope of the term 'political interests'.** The expression 'political interests' in Rule 3 (v) has to be construed to be in connection with active politics or party politics.

**Rule 3 (vi):**

**Any organisation** which habitually engages itself in or employs **common methods of political action** like 'bandh' or 'hartal', 'rasta roko', 'rail roko' or 'jail bhara' in support of public causes can also be declared as an organisation of political nature, according to the guideline prescribed in Rule 3 (vi).

It is clear from the rule itself that **bandh, hartal, rasta roko, etc., are treated as common methods of political action.**

The Supreme Court ruled that **support to public causes by resorting to legitimate means of dissent like bandh, hartal, etc. cannot deprive** an organisation of its legitimate right of receiving foreign contribution.

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.

Only those organisations which have connection with active politics or take part in party politics are covered by Rule 3 (vi). Organisations which are not involved in active politics or party politics do not fall within the purview of Rule 3 (vi).

**Additional Background Information about Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010:**

**Why was the Act Brought in?**

Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 has been enacted (by repealing the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 1976) to

- regulate the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality by certain persons or associations.

**Regulation is**

- to ensure **that parliamentary institutions, political associations, academic and other voluntary organisations** as well as **other individuals working in important areas of national life function** in a manner consistent with the values of a **sovereign democratic republic.**
- In simple words, the act is meant to **insulate the sensitive areas of national life** like - journalism, judiciary and politics and **other voluntary organisations** as well as other

**individuals working in important areas of national life** from extraneous influences stemming from beyond our borders as these can destabilise the nation.

### **Who are prohibited from Accepting Foreign Contribution?**

The Act prohibits acceptance of foreign contribution by the following:

- (a) candidate for election;
- (b) correspondent, columnist, cartoonist, editor, owner, printer or publisher of a registered newspaper;
- (c) Judge, Government servant or employee of any corporation or any other body controlled or owned by the Government;
- (d) member of any Legislature;
- (e) political party or office-bearer thereof;
- (f) organisation of a political nature as may be specified by the Central Government;
- (g) association or company engaged in the production or broadcast of audio news or audio visual news or current affairs programmes through any electronic mode, or any other electronic form as defined in the Information Technology Act, 2000 (21 of 2000) or any other mode of mass communication; and
- (h) correspondent or columnist, cartoonist, editor, owner of the association or company referred to in clause

### **Rules:**

The Act further provided that the Central Government may frame guidelines specifying the ground(s) on which **an organisation** shall be specified as *an 'organisation of a political nature'*.

Under the rules framed by the Central Government, the following organisations can be designated as an 'organisation of a political nature'. Such designation would deny them access to foreign contributions.

- (i) organisation having avowed political objectives in its Memorandum of Association or bylaws;
- (ii) **any Trade Union** whose objectives include activities **for promoting political goals**;
- (iii) **any voluntary action group with objectives of a political nature** or which **participates in political activities**;
- (iv) front or mass organisations like **Students Unions, Workers' Unions, Youth Forums and Women's wing of a political party**;
- (v) **organisation of farmers, workers, students, youth based on caste, community, religion, language** or otherwise, which is not directly aligned to any political party, but whose objectives, as stated in the Memorandum of Association, or activities gathered through other material evidence, include steps towards advancement of Political interests of such groups; and
- (vi) **any organisation**, by whatever name called, which **habitually engages** itself in or employs common methods of political action like 'bandh' or 'hartal', 'rasta roko', 'rail roko' or 'jail barov' in support of public causes."

## **FOREIGN RELATIONS**

### Indian Ocean Commission:

## India Admitted as Observer State of Indian Ocean Commission

On March 6, 2020, India was admitted as 'Observer State' of the Indian Ocean Commission.

Observer State participates in the meetings to know the working and priorities of the organisation but it does not have any voting rights.

### **About Indian Ocean Commission (IOC):**

1. Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) was set up in 1982.
  2. It is an intergovernmental organisation consisting of **five member States**: Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles and Reunion Islands (a French Overseas Territory).
  3. It is the only regional organisation in Africa comprised solely of islands.
  4. The member states are erstwhile French colonies or partly British, and partly French colonies.
  5. The five-member Indian Ocean Commission grouping is important in India's plans to expand its outreach in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region which strategically connects the Indian Ocean to the Southeastern coast of Africa and beyond.
- France which is a member of IOC because of Reunion Islands played a key role in ensuring India's admission.

The 2018 joint strategic vision for India-France cooperation in the Indian Ocean region - released during the visit of French President Emmanuel Macron - specifically mentions that France would support India's entry in the IOC as an observer.

### **Mission of IOC:**

The IOC's **mission** is to

- strengthen the links between the islands of Indian Ocean, and
- support its member states in the path towards sustainable development.

The IOC gives shape to this regional solidarity with the active support of its international partners which finance and support its cooperation projects.

The projects implemented by the IOC cover a **wide spectrum of sectors**: climate change, fisheries, maritime security, connectivity, food security, education, culture, public health, etc.

### **Observer Countries/Organisations:**

1. India is the fifth observer of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC).
2. There are **four other observers**:
3. **China, Malta, European Union and International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF).**
4. International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF) is an organisation of 54-nation French-speaking nations.

## SUMMITS

### G-20 Summit:

## Extraordinary Virtual G-20 Leaders Meeting to Tackle COVID-19 Pandemic

An extraordinary virtual G-20 Leaders Summit meeting was held on March 26, 2020 to advance a coordinated global response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its human and economic implications.

### **Outcome of the Meeting:**

G-20 members committed to individually and collectively

- protect lives,
- safeguard people's jobs and incomes,
- restore confidence, preserve financial stability, revive growth and recover stronger,
- minimise disruptions to trade and global supply chains,
- provide help to all countries in need of assistance, and
- coordinate on public health and financial measures.

### **\$5 Trillion Support:**

The G-20 Leaders committed to inject over \$5 trillion into the global economy, as part of targeted fiscal policy, economic measures, and guarantee schemes to counteract the social, economic, and financial impacts of the pandemic.

### **Global Cooperation:**

The G20 committed to work along with the World Health Organisation (WHO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank Group (WBG), United Nations (UN), and other international organisations to overcome the pandemic.

### **Fighting the COVID Pandemic:**

The Leaders committed to **take all necessary health measures** and **ensure adequate financing** to contain the pandemic and protect people, especially the most vulnerable.

They also **committed to expand manufacturing capacity** to meet the increasing needs for medical supplies and ensure these are made widely available, at an affordable price, on an equitable basis, where they are most needed and as quickly as possible.

### **About G-20:**

- The Group of Twenty (G20) is the premier forum for international economic cooperation.
- The G20 brings together the leaders of both developed and developing countries from every continent.
- Collectively, G20 members represent around **80% of the world's economic output, two-thirds of global population, and three-quarters of international trade.**

### **Genesis of G-20:**

- It originated in 1999 at the level of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors for high-level discussions on macro-financial issues after the Asian financial crisis.

- In the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, the G20 was elevated to include the leaders of member countries.
- The first G20 Leaders' Summit took place in Washington D.C. in November 2008.
- Consequently, the G20 agenda expanded **beyond macro-financial issues**, to include **socio-economic** and **development issues**.

#### **Members of G-20:**

- The G20 brings together finance ministers and central bank governors from 19 countries plus the European Union
- **19 Countries:** Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

#### **Presidency:**

- The G20 is not an international organisation, but an informal forum. That means it does not adopt decisions that have a direct legal impact. Decisions are only commitments without any legal binding.
- The G20 has neither an administrative board with a permanent secretariat nor a permanent representation of its members. That is why the Presidency, which rotates on an annual basis, plays such an important role in organising the annual summits.
- For the year 2020, Saudi Arabia holds the Presidency.

## INTERNATIONAL POLITY

### USA:

### US President Approves \$ 2 Trillion Stimulus Package

On March 27, 2020, President of the United States of America (USA) signed a US \$ 2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), the largest economic relief in U.S. history. The package equals nearly half the size of the entire \$4.5 trillion annual federal budget.

#### **Highlights of the Package:**

##### **Direct payments for most Americans taxpayers**

Individuals who earn \$75,000 or less in adjusted gross annual income would get onetime direct payment of \$1,200 each. Married couples earning up to \$150,000 would receive \$2,400.

An additional \$500 per child will be added to that.

The payment would scale down as income rises, phasing out entirely at \$99,000 for singles, and \$198,000 for couples without children.

##### **Unemployment Benefits:**

Unemployed workers would be are eligible to receive up to 39 weeks of unemployment benefits.

The program was expanded to include freelancers, furloughed employees, and gig workers, such as Uber drivers.

### **\$350 billion for Small Businesses:**

\$350 billion has been earmarked for small businesses to pay salaries, rent and utilities.

These benefits will extend to businesses having 500 or fewer employees, as well as nonprofits, self-employed persons and hotel and restaurant chains having not more than 500 workers per location.

Eight weeks of cash assistance will be provided through loans to cover salaries, rent and other miscellaneous expenses. These would be forgiven if the company retains workers i.e. they need not pay back the loans if the company retains workers. The intention here is to make sure that the companies which take loans do not close down the businesses after taking loans and instead retain staff and continue businesses which would safeguard jobs and help in reviving the economy.

### **\$500 Billion Fund for Hard-hit Sectors :**

A \$500 billion fund to help companies which includes loans to hard-hit sectors such as the airline industry and hotel industry.

### **Russia:**

## **Constitutional Changes Approved to Allow President Putin to Contest After 2024**

In March 2020, Russia's Parliament (which consists of Duma, the Lower House, and Senate, the Upper House) approved constitutional changes that would allow President Vladimir Putin to seek re-election and stay in power for another 12 years after his current term ends in 2024.

The Parliament approved either lifting presidential term limits all together, or Mr. Putin could seek two new terms after the amendment came into force.

### **Public Referendum:**

This constitutional change would be put to public referendum. This choice of people has to be approved by the Constitutional Court of Russia.

### **Vladimir Putin in Power in Russia for the past 20 Years:**

Vladimir Putin has been in power in Russia for the past 20 years either as President or Prime Minister.

He was first elected as President in 2000. He was re-elected again in 2004 and served till 2008.

The Constitution of Russia does not provide for limits on total number of terms for President. It only states that a President can be in power **consecutively** only for two terms. This means a President who has completed two terms can sit aside for one term after completing two terms and contest again.

Thus, Vladimir Putin stepped down in 2008 and served as Prime Minister till 2012. He contested again in 2012 and won as President.

The Constitution was also amended in 2008 to give President a six year term from 2012 election. Thus Putin got a six year term in 2012. He was in power till 2018. He contested and won again in 2018. His current term of six years is to end in 2024.

By 2024, he would be completing two consecutive terms again i.e. 2012-18 and 2018-24. He would have to sit aside in 2024 elections and can contest only in 2030 Presidential election.

As he could not contest in 2024 elections, the Parliament has approved changes to enable him to contest another two six year terms or remove term limits.

These changes to the constitution have come under criticism. Putin's most prominent critic, Alexei Navalny, denounced the proposals as an effort to make him "president for life" and this is like return to a Soviet-era politics of leaders-for-life.

## **SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY**

### **Health:**

### **WHO Declares COVID-19 a Pandemic**

On March 11,2020 WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic as WHO noted that 1,18,000 positive cases have been reported globally in 114 countries as of March 11,2020.

H1N1 Swine Flu pandemic: 2009-2010 was the last pandemic declared by WHO before COVID-19.

#### **What is a Pandemic?**

A pandemic is the worldwide spread of a new disease for which humans have not developed immunity.

#### **What are the main recommendations of WHO to prevent the spread of the Pandemic?**

WHO recommended countries to follow

- **testing** every suspected case,
- **isolating and taking care of every confirmed case** and
- **tracing and quarantining every close contact** of COVID-19 affected person.

#### **What is the difference between Isolation and Quarantine?**

**Isolation:** Separating persons tested positive or showing symptoms of COVID-19 from healthy people to prevent the spread of the disease.

**Quarantine:** Restricting movement of healthy people who may have been exposed to infection to assess if they show symptoms of COVID-19. The current recommended period of quarantine for COVID-19 is 14 days which is the incubation period of the Sars-CoV2 virus that causes COVID-19.

**Incubation Period:** Time between infection and the first sign of symptoms.

### **India's Response to Contain COVID-19**

- On March 11,2020, Union government issued a new travel advisory stating that all existing visas, except diplomatic, official, U.N/ International Organizations, employment and project visas will be suspended at the port of departure from March 13,2020 to April 15,2020.
- Visa free travel facility granted to OCI (Overseas Citizenship of India) card holders was also put in abeyance till April 15,2020.
- Central Government also announced that no commercial passenger aircrafts will be allowed to land in India from March 22, 2020. Only International Cargo flights will be allowed.

#### **Prime Minister Announces Countrywide Lockdown to Contain the Spread of Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID19) :**

- The Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) has affected many countries in the world.

- Hence, the World Health Organisation has declared it as a 'Pandemic' (Pandemic means worldwide spread of a new disease).
- As a preventive measure to contain the spread of novel Coronavirus Disease in India, the Union Government announced countrywide lockdown for 21 days. Symptoms of coronavirus appear in an infected person between 2 to 14 days. As a measure of precaution, the Government announced 21 day lockdown.
- The Prime Minister announced the lockdown exercising his powers under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 as he is the Chairman of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), the apex organisation, set up under the provisions of Disaster Management Act, 2005, for spearheading and implementing a holistic and integrated approach to Disaster Management in India.

### **Rs. 15,000 crore Fund Set Up:**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi also announced Rs 15,000 crore fund for setting up testing facilities, isolation beds, procuring personal protection equipment, and ventilators to combat the coronavirus outbreak.

### **What is Lockdown?**

- Lockdown means confinement of people as an emergency measure.
- It restricts the free movement of people by preventing them from entering or leaving a restricted area or building (such as a school) during a threat of danger.
- As the coronavirus spreads easily from the affected person, the Government announced countrywide lockdown.

### **Impact of Lockdown:**

The following have been ordered to close during the Lockdown.

- Offices of Government of India, subordinate offices, and public sector units,
- Offices of State Governments and Union Territories, subordinate offices, and public sector units,
- All religious places,
- All educational institutions,
- Agriculture and Allied Activities
- Industrial establishments,
- Commercial and private establishments, and
- Transport services (Airways, Railways, and Roadways).

### **Exemptions:**

The following **emergency and essential services** have been exempted from lockdown.

- Defence, Central Armed Forces, Treasury,
- Police, Fire, Prisons, Disaster Management
- District Administration,
- Hospitals,
- Public Utility Services like Electricity, Gas, Petrol Pumps, Water, Sanitation,
- Banks, Insurance offices, and ATMs,
- Telecommunication, and Internet Services,
- Delivery of essential services through E-commerce (food, and medicines), and
- Cold Storage and Warehousing Facilities.

### **Agriculture and Allied Activities Exempted:**

The lockdown hampered the agriculture sector as it is harvesting period for Rabi crops such as wheat, pulses, mustard, and paddy.

Agriculture sector was deprived of labour for agricultural production operations, and for procurement of the produce.

Hence, on March 28, 2020, the Government exempted the following agriculture and allied activities from lockdown.

- Farming operations by farmers and farm workers in the field;
- Agencies engaged in procurement of agriculture products, including Minimum Support Price (MSP) operations;
- 'Mandis operated by the Agriculture Produce Market Committee or those notified by the State Government;
- 'Custom Hiring Centres (CHC)' related to farm machinery;
- Manufacturing and packaging units of fertilisers, pesticides and seeds, and
- Intra and Inter-State movement of harvesting and sowing related machines like harvesters, and other agriculture/horticulture implements.

### **Lockdown Extended:**

- The 21 day lockdown was to end on April 14, 2020. But, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on April 14, 2020, announced extension of countrywide lockdown till May 3, 2020.

### **Reasons for Extension:**

- Many State Governments requested extension of lockdown as new cases are being registered every day.
- There were also suggestions from health experts in the country to extend the lockdown.
- The WHO also warned against lifting of lockdown restrictions too quickly.
- Union Government's assessment also found that without taking lockdown and containment measures since March 25, 2020, the number of cases would have risen to 8.2 lakh by April 15 and to 1.2 lakh if only containment measures (tracing and treating of coronavirus positive patients and quarantine of suspected people who are in contact with the coronavirus patients) were undertaken without lockdown. Due to lockdown and containment measures, India was able to restrict the total number of affected people to around 10,000.

### **Why India opted for Lockdown?**

- India opted for lockdown when the spread of virus was in second stage i.e. local transmission due to the following reasons.
- Health infrastructure in the country is relatively weak in terms of number of beds in hospital, ICU beds, ventilators and personal protective equipment needed for doctors who treat patients with severe respiratory problems.

### **Lockdown serves two purposes:**

1. slowdown the spread by ensuring social distancing, and
2. scale up of the medical infrastructure in case the virus spread continues.

### **Positive Aspects of Lockdown:**

1. It enabled social distancing as meeting people in groups in public places like malls, theatres as well as in educational institutions and offices was banned.
2. Social distancing slowed down the spread of coronavirus,

### **Negative Aspects of Lockdown:**

1. **Economic activities** were **disrupted** as a result of lockdown. All industries in the manufacturing and service sector were closed.
2. The lockdown severely affected the poor like daily wage earners, particularly migrant labourers, who lost livelihood opportunities.

But the Government defended the lockdown stating that if lives are saved livelihoods can be regained.

### **Background:**

On **December 31,2019** China alerted WHO (World Health Organization) that several cases of **pneumonia** were reported in the **port city of Wuhan** of 11 million people in the central Hubei province in China.

**Timeline of Novel Coronavirus(COVID-19) Pandemic worldwide spread:** (A Pandemic is a disease that spread over several countries or continents, affecting a large number of people).

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
January 1,2020	<b>The Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in Wuhan, China</b> was <b>shut down</b> as <b>all the cases originated</b> in people who <b>visited the market.</b>
January 1 to January 6,2020	The <b>virus did not match any known viruses in the Coronavirus family</b> like common cold, <b>SARS</b> (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome)and <b>MERS</b> (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome).
January 5,2020	Officials in China <b>ruled out the possibility of recurrence of SARS</b> which originated in China and killed <b>813 people worldwide in 2003</b>
January 7,2020	<b>China announced</b> that they identified a <b>new virus</b> and named it <b>COVID-19.</b>
January 11,2020	China announced its <b>first death</b> of a 61 year old man who visited the Huanan Seafood market
January 13, 2020	WHO reported <b>first case in Thailand</b>
January 16, 2020	Japan's Health Ministry reported first case in Japan.
January 16-January 20,2020	More confirmed cases reported in <b>France, Hong Kong, Thailand Singapore, US, Taiwan, Macao, Malaysia, Nepal ,Japan, Vietnam, South Korea.</b>
January 20, 2020	Officials <b>confirm virus can be passed directly between humans</b>
January 23, 2020	The epicentre of the disease outbreak the city of <b>Wuhan on quarantine</b> , followed by

	13 other Chinese cities affecting 36 million people.
January 23,2020	<b>WHO convened a Emergency Committee meeting and announced that 2019-nCoV is not yet a PHEIC (Public Health Emergency of International Concern) because of limited number of cases reported outside of China.</b>
January 30,2020	<b>-Death toll in Mainland China rose to 180 with more than 7700 confirmed cases of 2019-nCoV. -A sudden increase of more than 2000 cases from the day before. -WHO reconvenes Emergency Committee meeting and declared 2019-nCoV as a PHEIC(Public Health Emergency of International Concern).</b>
February 2,2020	<b>A man in Philippines dies due to 2019-nCoV-first outside Mainland China.</b>
Feb 7,2020 and Feb 10 2020	<b>-A Chinese doctor Dr. Lee Wenliang who was the first to warn against the virus died. -The death toll in China(more than 1000) surpassed the number SARS killed worldwide(800) on Feb 10 2020.</b>

### What is Coronavirus?

- Coronavirus is a family of viruses like the common cold and viruses such as SARS(Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) and MERS(Middle East Respiratory Syndrome).
- Coronaviruses transmit between animals and some of them are able to transmit between animals and humans.

### What are the symptoms of person affected by COVID-19?

- Symptoms of COVID-19 include headache, runny nose, fever, difficulty in breathing, impaired liver and kidney function, kidney failure, severe cough or sore throat, muscle pain, Pneumonia.

### What are the preventive measures to contain the disease?

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

### What constitutes a disease to be declared as PHEIC by WHO?

- **PHEIC (Public Health Emergency of International Concern) is defined in the IHR (International Health Regulations) (2005) as an extraordinary event which is determined as a public health risk to all countries through the international spread of disease apart from the primary country affected by the disease; and that which requires a coordinated international response.**

- An **Emergency Committee** appointed by the **Director General of WHO** determines the **temporary recommendations which include health measures to be implemented by the State Party experiencing the PHEIC, or by other States Parties**, to prevent or reduce the international spread of disease and avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic.

#### **Major steps taken by China in January and February 2020 to contain the virus:**

- China **locked down the city of Wuhan on January 23,2020** to stop the virus from spreading.
- It also **imposed a ban on trade in wild animals temporarily** to contain the spread of the virus.
- On **January 28,2020 officials in China announced the suspension of long-distance buses** in the eastern province of Shandong of 100 million people, Beijing and Shanghai.
- The Chinese government has also **closed a number of places of worship, the Forbidden City and part of the Great Wall.**
- An expert from the Chinese National Health Commission (NHC) has said it could take 10 more days from 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020 for the outbreak to peak but the peak is yet to be seen with the continued rise in the number of positive COVID-19 cases so far.
- China has **built 2 brand new hospitals in less than a week in Wuhan** to treat the COVID-19 suspected and infected patients.
- China has also sequenced the genome of the virus quickly and is working to develop vaccines and medications to prevent the virus from getting stronger but getting a vaccine ready is a time taking process which could take 2-3 years.
- WHO has asked China and the international scientist community to track down the source of the disease to prevent unknown contamination. Bats are believed to be the source of COVID-19 according to some scientists.

#### **Measures taken by World nations in January and February 2020 to contain the virus:**

- Hong Kong and Eastern Russia have closed most of their borders with mainland China.
- United states and other nations has started screening travellers and have airlifted their citizens from Wuhan followed by health check-ups and quarantines.
- Australia, Japan, the US and EU nations are bringing back their citizens from Wuhan, and quarantine measures will be imposed for those who return.
- Some major European, American and Asian airlines have suspended their flight operations to some or all Chinese cities fully or partially to contain the virus.

#### **Measures taken by India in January and February 2020 to be prepared to handle the virus:**

- India has advised its citizens against travel to China on January 17 2020.

#### **Kerala's response to contain COVID-19:**

- India has seen its **first COVID-19 case in Kerala on January 30, 2020** and Kerala has declared COVID-19 as '**State Calamity**' on **February 3, 2020** after **3<sup>rd</sup> COVID-19 positive case** was detected in the state.
- Kerala used **unique community based isolation methods to contain COVID-19** developed during Nipah virus outbreak in the state in 2019. It has **also traced hundreds of contacts to the three persons who tested positive** to the virus and **notified them to Integrated Disease Surveillance Program for monitoring.**
- **Kerala's model of monitoring with District Collector as the administrative unit** has been **shared as best practice to the rest of the states.**

#### **Monitoring at the borders, airports and ports:**

- India has put the **Indo-Nepal border on high alert** to contain the virus after Nepal reported first case of COVID-19.
- Indigo and Air India have suspended most of their flights to China.
- Union Health Ministry Special Secretary Sanjeeva Kumar has met Health Secretaries of the states with **21 identified airports with inbound flights from China** and the secretaries of states that border Nepal (namely Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Sikkim) to monitor the measures taken to handle screening for the virus. **Thermal entry screening of passengers from China is being used in these 21 airports.**
- **Universal checking at major aerobridges with flights from China, Hongkong, Singapore and Thailand is being carried out.**
- **Isolation wards** have been identified to handle potential cases of COVID-19.
- **The Union Ministry of Shipping** has asked the state governments **to put 204 minor and major ports in the country on quarantine mode.**

#### Sample collection and diagnostics:

- Timely collection and testing of samples from suspected patients **to NIV (National Institute of Virology), Pune** is being monitored. **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) made NIV (National Institute of Virology), Pune as the designated place to test samples**, and 14 Viral Research and Diagnostic Labs have been upgraded to test for 2019-nCoV.
- **National Centre for Disease Control opened a 24x7 helpline.**

#### Wuhan airlift by India:

- The **External Affairs Ministry of India airlifted 645 Indians**, mostly students from Wuhan, working in co-ordination with Chinese diplomats and they were quarantined and checked for symptoms by the medical team provided by the **Health and Family Welfare Ministry.**
- **Special camps for health check-ups and quarantines** were set up by the **Armed Forces Medical Services in Manesar, Haryana** and the **Indo-Tibetan Border Police facility in Delhi.** All 645 airlifted people tested negative

#### India's help to Neighbouring Countries:

- India helped in airlifting 7 Maldivian nationals from Wuhan according to its Neighbours First Policy.
- It also extended technical assistance to several countries to setup COVID-19 diagnostic facilities.

### How Does Soap Use Help in Tackling COVID -19

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, **WHO (World Health Organization) has advised frequent and thorough handwashing with soap and water**, and the **use of alcohol based hand sanitizers as important preventive measures.**

#### How does washing hands with soap and water help?

- Viruses stick to hands easily **when hands touch surfaces that have the virus.**
- Genetic material of some viruses is **surrounded by a coating of protein and fats called lipid envelop** like Sars-Cov2 (COVID-19 causing virus).
- When we wash our hands with water alone the virus acts like a drop of oil because of its lipid envelope and the water just goes past it and only small amount of microbes get washed.
- **Soap has two sided molecules** on one end, **the head is attracted to water (hydrophilic)** and the other end, **the tail is attracted to oils (Oleophilic).**

- When we wash our hands with soap and water, **the soap molecule pulls the oil coating of the virus and kills the virus and the water washes the left over virus particles.**

**Do all Viruses have the lipid layer?**

- No **not all viruses have the lipid envelop and hence are called non-enveloped viruses** like **Rotavirus, Poliovirus, Adenovirus that cause pneumonia and Human papillomavirus(HPV).**
- The dirt on hands and non-enveloped viruses are surrounded by several tails of the soap molecule making them remain as suspended particles and rinsing with water washes away the suspended particles.

**How do alcohol based hand sanitizers help get rid of coronavirus(Sars-Cov2)?**

- **Alcohol present in the hand sanitizer dissolves the lipid envelop** thus inactivating the virus but doesn't wash them off the hands.
- While sanitizer can reduce the number of microbes on the hand it does not work as effectively as washing with soap and water especially when the hands are visibly dirty or greasy.

## **Centre Directs the States of India to Invoke the Epidemic Diseases Act 1897**

On March 11, 2020 the Centre directed the States and UTs to invoke provisions of Section 2 of the Epidemic Diseases Act 1987 so that all the advisories being issued to contain the spread of COVID-19 can be enforceable.

- The announcement was made by Health Secretary Preethi Sudan after a meeting chaired by Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare Dr. Harshvardhan with a high level Group of Ministers(GoM) tasked with the responsibility to review, monitor, and evaluate the preparedness and measures taken to contain the spread of COVID-19.
- The Group of Ministers (GoM) are Mr. Hardeep S. Puri, Minister of Civil Aviation, Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs, Mr. Nityananda Rai, Minister of State for Home, Mr. Mansukh Mandaviya, Minister of State (Independent Charge), Ministry of Shipping, Chemicals and Fertilisers and Mr. Ashwini Kumar Choubey, Minister of State, Health & Family Welfare.
- Minister of State (Independent charge) is a Minister of State without an overseeing cabinet minister unlike a Minister of State who assists a cabinet minister.

**What are the provisions of section 2 of Epidemic Diseases Act 1897?**

- Section 2 of the Epidemic Diseases Act enables State governments and UTs with the power to take special measures and prescribe regulations by public notice which the State deems necessary to contain the spread of a dangerous epidemic disease.
- The State may do so if it thinks that the ordinary provisions of the law for the time being in force are insufficient to contain the spread of the disease.

**Environment:**

## **Assessment Report on Illegal Trade Related Threats to Red Panda-an Endangered Species**

On March 9, 2020 a report called “**Assessment of illegal trade-related threats to Red Panda in India and selected neighbouring range countries**” was released by TRAFFIC-

a leading **non-governmental organization working globally on trade in wild animals and plants** in the context of bio-diversity conservation and sustainable development.

- The study was carried out for the period **July 2010 to June 2019 in India, Bhutan and Nepal.**
- Red Panda is listed as **'endangered' on the IUCN( International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red List of threatened species.**
- The main reasons for its decline in population are **hunting for it's meat, illegal collection for trade in pet animals and destruction of its habitat( North Eastern Himalayan subalpine conifer forest and Eastern Himalayan Broadleaf forests).**
- An estimated **14,500 animals are left in the wild across Nepal(no estimate), Bhutan(580), India(5000-6000), China(6000-7000) and Myanmar(no estimate).**
- To regulate its international trade, it has also been listed in **Appendix I of CITES(Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) and is given schedule 1 protection in India, Bhutan and Nepal.**
- **Schedule 1 protection is the highest level of protection provided for plant and animal species with maximum penalty for violation.**
- CITES is an agreement between governments to ensure that international trade in wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. It came into force in 1975 and was a result of a resolution adopted in 1963 at a meeting of members of IUCN(International Union of Conservation of Nature)
- Red Pandas are **found in Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur and West Bengal** with Arunachal Pradesh holding the highest population in India.

**What were the findings and recommendations of the report?**

**Findings:**

- **no incidences of poaching or illegal trade of Red Pandas in India or Bhutan were found** during the study period (2010 to 2018) which indicates that **demand for Red Panda has decreased due to the Schedule 1 legal protection and awareness campaigns about Red Panda conservation undertaken in the areas.**
- however, **Nepal reported around 25 incidences of Red Panda poaching** involving 55 animals.
- It was found that Red Pandas were getting caught in the snares set for other animals like musk deer and wild pig.

**Recommendations:**

- **Trans-boundary law enforcement co-operation** through the use of **multi-government platforms like SAWEN (South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network).**
- **Community based conservation** and protection for the species **as its habitat stretches across remote areas.**

**What were the sources of research for the report?**

- Open source media reports on trade of Red Pandas (newspapers/web portals/reports) etc.
- Government records and the CITES trade database.
- Individual contact with the experts working in this field via email
- Face to face questionnaire survey and physical market surveys in the Red Panda's distribution range.

**What are the protected areas of Red Panda in India?**

- Kanchendzonga National Park (NP) — Sikkim
- Neora Valley NP – West Bengal
- Namdapha National Park – Arunachal Pradesh
- Singalila National Park – West Bengal

### **What is IUCN Red list?**

- IUCN(International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red list released in 1964 is the **world's most comprehensive list of conservation status of all biological species. It is based in the United Kingdom.**
- It was set up
  - a) to draw attention to the magnitude and importance of threatened biodiversity of biological species in the world.
  - b) to influence national and international policy and decision-making,
  - c) and to provide information to guide actions to conserve biological diversity.

### **Space:**

## **NASA develops New Satellite Based Global Groundwater Maps**

On March 31,2020 NASA researchers and University of Nebraska have released global weekly maps of Surface soil moisture, root zone soil moisture (top three feet of soil), and shallow groundwater.

- These maps were generated using data from NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) and German Research Center for Geosciences's Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment Follow On (GRACE-FO) satellites, a pair of satellites that detect the movement of water on earth based on variations of earth's gravity field.
- This satellite data was combined with computer models that simulate water and energy cycles to produce the global groundwater maps.

### **What is unique about these maps?**

- This is the first time that such maps are available for all regions of the world.
- Dry/wet conditions maps for the United States are available since 2012.
- Now these global maps have been made available online for free on the National Drought Mitigation Center website at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) to support U.S. and global drought monitoring.

### **How does this data help?**

These are a few ways the data would help:

- in managing the selection of appropriate agricultural crops, and predicting crop yields,
- predicting drought conditions, which will help in mitigating the impact of drought especially in countries that do not have groundwater monitoring infrastructure.
- and in the study of drought in the context of climate change.

## **MISCELLANEOUS (Persons, Awards, Sports)**

### **INTERNATIONAL PERSONS**

**Bill Gates**, Microsoft Corp. co-founder, stepped down from the board on March 14, 2020 to focus on philanthropic work related to global health, education and climate change. Gates also

stepped down from the board of Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway Inc., which he has served since 2004.

Bill Gates and his wife Melinda run one of the world's largest charities, the Gates Foundation, which has billions in assets and funds global health programmes to combat disease and poverty.

Bill Gates co-founded Microsoft Corp., in 1975 along with Paul G. Allen, and built it into the world's largest software company. He served as CEO of Microsoft until 2000, the same year his Gates Foundation was started. He was chairman of the Microsoft company till February 2014. Since then, he has been a board member. Microsoft company has a market capitalisation of more than \$1.2 trillion.

**Adnan al-Zurfi** was appointed as the Iraq's new prime minister-designate on March 17, 2020 by President Barham Salih in the latest bid to resolve a months-long political crisis.

Al-Zurfi has 30 days to form his cabinet and then seek a vote of confidence in Iraq's fractious Parliament. The 54-year-old former governor of the holy Shia city of Najaf heads the Nasr parliamentary grouping of former Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi.

Al-Zurfi would replace caretaker Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, who quit in December 2019 following widespread mass demonstrations against a government that protesters see as corrupt, failing to provide them with basic services, and beholden to powerful neighbouring Iran.

Al-Zurfi's appointment came two weeks after former Prime Minister-designate Mohammed Allawi withdrew his candidacy for the post, accusing political parties of obstructing him.

Al-Kadhimi was appointed as third Prime Minister designate as Al-Zurfi could not form the Government due to lack of support of sufficient number of Members of Parliament.

**Kenny Rogers** (81), American country music legend whose career spanned more than six decades, passed away on March 20, 2020 in Sandy Springs, Georgia, USA.

**Reverend Joseph Lowery** (98), U.S. civil rights leader who campaigned with Martin Luther King, passed away on March 27, 2020. Rev. Lowery worked closely alongside leading figures in the civil rights movement and with King co-founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) civil rights group in 1957.

He was chosen to speak at the inauguration of the U.S.'s first black President Barack Obama in 2009, and later that year was awarded the Medal of Freedom, the country's highest civilian award.

**Manolis Glezos** (97), a major figure of the national resistance against Nazi occupation of Greece during the second World War, died on March 30, 2020 in Athens. Mr. **Manolis** Glazes was an 18-year-old student in 1941 when he joined a resistance group during the German occupation. Manolis Glezos and his friend tore down the Nazi flag that waved over the Acropolis when the Germans occupied Athens in 1941.

### NATIONAL PERSONS

Former Chief Justice of India **Ranjan Gogoi**, who headed benches that pronounced several key judgements including in the sensitive Ayodhya land dispute case, was nominated to Rajya Sabha by the President of India on March 16, 2020, on the recommendation of Government of India led by Mr. Narendra Modi.

Justice **Ranjan Gogoi** the first former Chief Justice of India to be nominated to Rajya Sabha. Former Chief Justice Ranganath Misra was also a Rajya Sabha member but he was elected on a Congress party ticket. His tenure as judge and as CJI was also marked by some controversies as he had faced allegations of sexual harassment. He was later cleared of the charges. He was

also among the four senior-most judges who held an unprecedented press conference in January 2018 questioning the then CJI's way of functioning. He also led a bench which monitored the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam to identify and deport illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

**Bimal Julka**, Information Commissioner, was appointed as the Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) of the Central Information Commission under Right to Information (RTI) Act on March 6, 2020.

Central Information Commission has been functioning without a chief after Sudhir Bhargava retired on January 11, 2020 and is at a reduced strength of six information commissioners, against the sanctioned strength of 11 (including the CIC). There is a vacancy of five more information commissioners at the commission after Mr. Julka's appointment as the CIC.

**Satish Gujral** (94), acclaimed artist, architect, designer and sculptor, died on March 27, 2020 in New Delhi. Born in Jhelum in modern-day Pakistan, Gujral was the brother of the late Prime Minister I.K. Gujral. He was awarded Padma Vibhushan, India's second-highest civilian honour, in 1999 for his contribution to art.

**Professor Arjun Dev**, the legendary educationist and historian, passed away on March 29, 2020 in Noida.

Born on November 12, 1938 in Leiah, West Punjab (now in Pakistan), he did his schooling in Ambala and then studied at Kirori Mal College, Delhi University. Prof. Arjun spent the better part of his academic life working as a historian at the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). In partnership with his wife Indira Arjun Dev, he wrote a number of extremely popular textbooks for the NCERT on Modern and Contemporary India and the World. One of their books, which was discontinued by the NCERT under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) regime in 2002 was republished by Orient Black Swan as History of the World: From the Late 19th to the Early 20th Century and has remained a very widely read text.

### **SPORTS PERSONS**

**Abdul Latif (73)**, former Indian football player, passed away in Guwahati on March 24, 2020. Latif, who played as a midfielder, represented India in the 1970 Asian Games where the team won a bronze. Latif was also the coach of the Assam team which won the junior and the sub-junior national titles under his guidance.

### **INTERNATIONAL AWARDS**

#### **Abel Prize in Mathematics:**

Israeli-American **Hillel Furstenberg** and Russian-born **Gregory Margulis**, both probability experts, were awarded the Abel Prize for Mathematics in March 2020.

Both are retired professors. Hillel Furstenberg (84) worked in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Gregory Margulis (74) worked at the Yale University, Connecticut, USA.

#### **About the Abel Prize:**

- The Abel Prize recognises contributions to the field of mathematics that are of extraordinary depth and influence.
- The Prize was established by the Norwegian government in 2002 on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of Niels Henrik Abel's birth, a renowned Norwegian mathematician.
- The Prize was awarded for the first time in June 2003.

- The prize carries a cash award of 7.5 million NOK (Norwegian krone).
- The prize is awarded by the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters based on a recommendation from the Abel committee. The Abel Committee consists of five mathematicians. It reviews the nominated candidates and submits a recommendation for a worthy Abel laureate.
- In addition to honouring outstanding mathematicians, the Abel Prize contributes to raising the status of mathematics in society and stimulating the interest of children and young people in mathematics.

## **SPORTS AWARDS**

### **3rd Annual Hockey India Awards:**

3rd annual Hockey India Awards were presented in New Delhi on March 8, 2020.

Former India Hockey player Mr. Harminder Singh won the prestigious Hockey India Major Dhyan Chand Lifetime Achievement Award 2019 which carries cash award of 30 lakhs, while current Indian team Captains Manpreet Singh and Rani won the Hockey India Dhruv Batra Player of the Year Award 2019 for Men and Women respectively. Manpreet and Rani received a cash award of Rs 25 lakh each, besides trophies.

#### **List of Awards:**

Dhruv Batra Award for Player of the Year (Women) 2019: Rani Rampal

Dhruv Batra Award for Player of the Year (Men) 2019: Manpreet Singh

Major Dhyan Chand Lifetime Achievement Award 2019: Harminder Singh

Baljit Singh Award for Goalkeeper of the Year 2019: Krishan B Pathak

Pargath Singh Award for Defender of the Year 2019: Harmanpreet Singh

Ajit Pal Singh Award for Midfielder of the Year 2019: Mandeep Singh

Asunta Lakra Award for Upcoming Player of the Year (Women - Under 21) 2019: Lalremsiami

Jugraj Singh Award for Upcoming Player of the Year (Men - Under 21) 2019: Vivek Sagar Prasad.

## **SPORTS**

### **Cricket**

#### **ICC Women T20 World Cup (Melbourne, March 2020 )**

Australia - Winner

India - Runner

This is the fifth ICC T20 World Cup title to Australia

Player-of-the-Final: Alyssa Healy

Player-of-the-Tournament: Beth Mooney

#### **Ranji Trophy (Raikot, March 2020)**

Saurashtra - Winner

Bengal - Runner

Man of the Match: Arpit Vasavada.

### **Football**

#### **Indian Super League ( Goa, March 2020)**

ATK 3 - Winner

Chennaiyin FC - Runner

### **Badminton**

#### **All England Championship (Birmingham, March 2020)**

##### **Men's Singles:**

Viktor Axelsen (Denmark) - Winner

Chou Tien-Chen (Chinese Taipei) - Runner

##### **Women's Singles:**

Tai Tzu Ying (Chinese Taipei) - Winner

Chen Yu Fei (China) - Runner

##### **Women's Doubles:**

Yuki Fukushima & Sayaka Hirota (Japan) - Winner

Du Yue & Li Yin Hui (China) - Runner

##### **Men's Doubles:**

Hiroyuki Endo & Yuta Watanabe (Japan) - Winner

Marcus Fernaldi Gideon & Kevin Sanjaya Sukamuljo (Indonesia) - Runner

##### **Mixed Doubles:**

Praveen Jordan & Melati Daeva Oktavianti (Indonesia) - winner

Dechapol Puavaranukroh & Sapsiree Taerattanachai (Thailand) - Runner

### **Table Tennis**

#### **ITTF Challenger Plus Oman Open (Muscat, March 2020)**

A. Sharath Kamal (India) - Winner

Marcos Freitas (Portugal) - Runner

#### **The 2020 Tokyo Olympics Postponed**

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) postponed the Olympics that were to be held in Tokyo, Japan in 2020.

On March 30, 2020, the Olympic Committee confirmed the new dates for the 32nd edition of the Games from July 23 to August 8, 2021, almost exactly a year after the Games were to commence this year (2020).

The 2020 Tokyo Olympics, originally scheduled to be held from July 24 to August 9, 2021. This is the first such delay in the Games' 124-year modern history, due to the COVID-19 crisis.