

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

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CURRENT EVENTS AND ANALYSIS

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ECONOMY

MACROVIEW OF INDIAN ECONOMY:

GDP Growth:

GDP Growth Slows Down to 4.7 Per cent in Q3 of 2019-20

- Indian economy registered an estimated growth rate of **4.7 per cent** in Q3 (October - December) of 2019-20 as per the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on February 28, 2020.

GDP Growth Rates of 2019-20 at a Glance:

Q1 (April-June) : 5.6 Per cent

Q2 (July-September) : 5.1 Per cent

Q3 (October-December) : 4.7 Per cent

- Despite Q3 being one of the strongest quarters due to the festival season and higher rural spending driven by kharif harvest, growth slowdown continued.
- But, 4.7 per cent growth is slowest growth in the last 27 quarters (nearly seven years).
- Coronavirus outbreak is likely to lead to further disruption in the economy and delay recovery.
- Growth rate in terms of Gross Value Added (GVA), which is GDP minus taxes and reflects supply-side growth, is estimated at 4.5 per cent in Q3 (October - December) of 2019-20.

Causes for Slowdown:

- Contraction (negative growth) in
Manufacturing (- 0.2 %),
Electricity, Gas, Water Supply & other Utility Services (- 0.7 %), and
- weak growth in construction (0.3 %) dragged down the overall growth.

The NSO estimated 5.0 per cent GDP growth for 2019-20.

Growth Rate at a Glance:

	2018-19			2019-20		
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q1	Q2	Q3
1. Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	3.8	2.5	2.0	2.8	3.1	3.5
2. Mining & Quarrying	-7.3	-7.0	-4.4	4.7	0.2	3.2
3. Manufacturing	10.7	5.6	5.2	2.2	-0.4	-0.2
4. Electricity, Gas, Water Supply & other Utility Services	7.9	9.9	9.5	8.8	3.9	-0.7
5. Construction	6.4	5.2	6.6	5.5	2.9	0.3
6. Trade, Hotels, Transport, Communication & Services related to Broadcasting	8.5	7.8	7.8	5.7	5.8	5.9
7. Financial, Real Estate & Professional Services	6.0	6.5	6.5	6.9	7.1	7.3
8. Public Administration, Defence and other Services	8.8	8.9	8.1	8.7	10.1	9.7
GVA at Basic Prices	6.9	6.1	5.6	5.4	4.8	4.5

Q1 : April-June; Q2 : July-September; Q3 : October-December

Impact of Coronavirus:

India Among 15 Most Affected Economies by Coronavirus

- **India is among the 15 most affected economies due to the coronavirus epidemic** in China , according to the estimates published by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).
- In addition to grave threats to human life, the coronavirus (COVID-19) has the **potential to significantly slowdown not only the Chinese economy but also the global economy** as

China has become the central manufacturing hub of many global business operations.

Any disruption of China's output will have repercussions elsewhere through regional and global value chains.

(During the last two decades China has become crucial to the global economy. China's rising importance in the global economy is not only related to its status as a manufacturer and exporter of consumer products. China has become the **main supplier of intermediate inputs for manufacturing companies abroad**. As of today, about 20 percent of global trade in manufacturing intermediate products originates in China).

- China is the largest export economy in the world.
- According to WTO data, China's merchandise exports stood at US\$ 2.49 trillion, and imports at US\$ 2.14 trillion in 2018

Highlights of the Report:

- The slowdown of manufacturing in China due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak is disrupting world trade.
- **Global Impact:** Coronavirus could result in a **50 billion dollar decrease in exports across global value chains in February 2020** alone.
- **Most affected sectors** : precision instruments, machinery, automotive and communication equipment.
- **Most affected economies (through loss of trade) :**

European Union : USD 15.6 billion

United States : USD 5.8 billion

Japan : USD 5.2 billion

South Korea : USD 3.8 billion

Taiwan : USD 2.6 billion

Vietnam : USD 2.3 billion

- **Impact on India :**

- The trade impact of the coronavirus epidemic on India is estimated to be about **348 million dollars in February 2020 alone**.

The trade impact is estimated to be the highest in the following sectors:

Chemicals sector at 129 million dollars,

Textiles and apparel at 64 million dollars,

Automotive sector at 34 million dollars,

Electrical machinery at 12 million dollars,

Leather products at 13 million dollars,

Metals and metal products at 27 million dollars and

Wood products and furniture at 15 million dollars.

Coronavirus Classified as COVID-19 a 'Force Majeure' Situation

- On February 19, 2020, the Union Finance Ministry classified the coronavirus outbreak as a natural calamity under Force Majeure Clause (FMC).

What is Force Majeure clause (FMC) ?

- Force Majeure is **a clause included in contracts to remove or reduce liability** on a party (to the contract) for **natural and unavoidable catastrophes** that interrupt the expected course of events and restrict it from fulfilling obligations.
- Extraordinary events beyond human control, such as wars, riots, crimes and natural calamities, can be classified as Force Majeure.
- This classification would avoid imposition of penalties and other negative consequences on the companies executing government contracts who may be dependent on supplies from affected areas of coronavirus.
- The declaration of a 'force majeure' situation was one of the major demands of industry representatives who met Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to discuss the fallout of the coronavirus epidemic.
- India is among the 15 most affected economies due to the coronavirus epidemic in China , according to the estimate published by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

FISCAL POLICY:

Finance Commission:

15th Finance Commission Report for 2020-21

- On February 1, 2020, the Report of the 15th Finance Commission for 2020-21 was tabled in Parliament.

Why Interim Report ?

- The 15th Finance Commission was constituted by the President of India under Article 280 of the Constitution on November 27, 2017.
- It was mandated to make recommendations for a period of five years from **1st April 2020 to 31 March 2025**.
- The Commission was expected to make its recommendations by 30 November 2019.
- But, later through a Gazette Notification on November 27, 2019, the XV Finance Commission was mandated to submit the two reports:

Report for the financial year 2020-21, and

Final report for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2026 (by 30 October 2020).

Reasons:

- Bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir State into two Union Territories which requires close examination of the revenues needed,
- slowdown in the economy which impacted revenue collections,
- need to study the impact of structural reforms like Goods and Services Tax (GST), and
- impact of measures initiated by the Union Government like reduction of corporate tax.

Recommendations for 2020-21:

Vertical Distribution (Between Centre and States):

- The 15th Finance Commission recommended for 2020-21, had **reduced the share of states in the divisible pool of central taxes by one percentage point to 41% from 42 %** (in the 14th Finance Commission), since the State of Jammu & Kashmir was reorganised into the Union Territories (UT) of Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir. Since UTs are the responsibilities of the Union, they are within the purview of the Union budget.

The Commission notionally estimated that the share of the erstwhile State of Jammu & Kashmir would have come to around 0.85 per cent of the divisible pool. But it felt that there is a strong case for enhancing this to 1 per cent of the divisible pool in order to meet the security and other special needs of the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

Horizontal Devolution (Between States):

For horizontal devolution of divisible pool of taxes, the Commission assigned the following criteria and weights.

Criteria	Weights (%)
Population	15.0
Area	15.0
Forest and Ecology	10.0
Income Distance	45.0
Demographic Performance	12.5
Tax Effort	2.5
Total	100.0

- The use of 2011 population figures by the 15th Finance Commission has resulted in states with larger populations like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar getting larger shares, while the shares of smaller states with lower fertility rates (the number of children born to a woman in her life) got reduced.

State	Share in Taxes (14 FC)	Share in Taxes (15 FC)	Increase (+)/Decrease (-)
Karnataka	4.7%	3.64%	(-) 1.07
Kerala	2.5%	1.94%	(-) 0.56
Maharashtra	5.53%	6.13%	(+) 0.61
Rajasthan	5.49%	5.98%	(+) 0.49
Bihar	9.66%	10.06%	(+) 0.40

- The population parameter used by the 15th Finance Commission has been criticised by the governments of the southern states stating that it penalises better performing states on population control and rewards non performers.

The 14th FC used both the 1971 and the 2011 populations to calculate the states' shares, giving greater weight to the 1971 population (17.5%) as compared to the 2011 population (10%).

But, the Fifteenth FC used only 2011 population as it was specifically mentioned in its Terms of Reference.

Other Recommendations:

Centrally Sponsored Schemes and Central Sector Schemes:

- The 15th Finance Commission noted that there is **proliferation of centrally sponsored schemes and central sector schemes** and also **tendency to continue with them without an evaluation of their outcomes**.
- It advised the Union Government to utilise the year 2020-21 to complete the review of such schemes and thereafter prune and rationalise the list to focus on certain key sectors and interventions with nation-wide effects. The objective should be to ensure that there is **a minimum level of expenditure on certain desired sectors to improve human development and infrastructure**. This will also **reduce pressure on the revenue account of the Union to enable higher capital expenditure within the available fiscal space**. Such rationalisation will allow the Union Government to rein in its expenditure.

Revenue Mobilisation:

- The tax revenue of the Union and States in India stood at around 17.5 per cent of GDP in 2018-19 and has remained broadly unchanged since the early 1990s. In contrast to India, tax revenue has been rising in other emerging markets.
- Hence, there is a compelling case for raising India's tax ratio from both **macroeconomic** and **redistributive perspectives**. Additional tax revenue is essential for building fiscal space to meet **infrastructure** needs and **drive inclusive growth**. Most importantly, the **driver of tax reforms must be broadening of the base** and **streamlining the rates**, with parallel steps to increase the capacity and expertise of the tax administration at all tiers of government.

FRBM:

Centre Invokes 'Escape Clause' to Relax FRBM Targets

- The Union Government invoked the 'Escape Clause' to relax targets for Fiscal Deficit and Revenue Deficit under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act (FRBM) Act, 2003.

What is Fiscal Deficit?

- It is excess of expenditure above the receipts of the Government which is financed through debt.
- **Objective of FRBM Act is to ensure fiscal discipline in the spending of government**

Targets under FRBM Act, 2003:

- It aims at limiting the fiscal deficit to 3 per cent of GDP, and eliminating revenue deficit i.e. zero.

What is Escape Clause?

- In 2018-19 Budget, the Government amended Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act (FRBM) Act, 2003.
- It provided for an 'Escape Clause' which ensures relaxation from achieving FRBM Targets.
- Under, 'Escape Clause', the Fiscal deficit target can be relaxed by 0.5 per cent under the following circumstances.
 - a) over-riding considerations of national security, acts of war, and calamities of national proportion and collapse of agriculture severely affecting farm output and incomes.
 - b) far-reaching **structural reforms** in the economy with unanticipated fiscal implications, and
 - c) a **sharp decline in real output growth of at least 3 percentage points** below the average for the previous four quarters.

Deviation from the stipulated fiscal deficit target must not exceed 0.5 percentage points in a year.

Government Reason for Relaxation:

- Implementation of Structural Reforms.

The implementation of Goods and Services Tax (GST) and reduction of corporate tax to make India an attractive investment destination are the major structural reforms which have impacted government revenues.
- Hence, the Government took a deviation of 0.5 per cent from FRBM Act for 2019-20 and 2020-21 as given below.

Fiscal Deficit	Original Estimates	Revised Estimates
2019-20	3.3	3.8
2020-21	3.0	3.5

- States have been demanding a similar option for relaxation of FRBM targets with the 15th Finance Commission.

Why Fiscal Deficit should be under control?

1. Interest Payments:

Since Fiscal Deficit is financed through debt, it carries the burden of interest payments. Hence, borrowings should be sustainable. For example, the estimated interest payments on the borrowings of central government are as follows:

Year	Interest Payments (Rs. Crores)
2019-20	6,25,105
2020-21	7,08,203

2. Cost to Future Generations:

Excessive and unsustainable borrowing by the government is perverse as it entails a cost on future generations.

3. Ensuring Adequate Capital for Private Sector:

Excessive borrowing by Government crowds out private investment as when both Government and private sector compete for the savings with in the country, Government would garner more borrowing due to sovereign nature of the borrowings which carry least risk when compared with private borrowings.

More borrowings by the Government are also likely to raise the interest rates for private borrowings in the open market.

4. Unproductive expenditure:

Borrowings by the Government would be more productive only when channelised for productive sectors like infrastructure which have multiplier effect on economy. On the other hand, if the borrowings are channelised for revenue expenditure it leads to unproductive deployment of capital.

MONETARY POLICY:

RBI Keeps Repo Rate Unchanged; Adopts New Measures to Increase Money Supply

In its sixth bi-monthly monetary policy statement for 2019-20, released on February 6, 2020, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) led by Governor Shaktikanta Das

- decided to keep the **repo rate unchanged at 5.15%**.
- Repo rate is the rate at which commercial banks borrow money from Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to meet their short term fund requirements by placing government securities as collaterals.
- Repo rate also serves as a benchmark for banks to decide their lending rates.

1. Long Term Repo Operations (LTROs) :

- Till now RBI conducted repo auctions for maximum duration of 14 fays.
- Now, Reserve Bank has decided to conduct term repos of one-year and three-year tenors.
- Rs 1,00,000 crore would be made available to the commercial banks at repo rate i.e. 5.15%.

Purpose:

- To provide more funds to the commercial banks at lower interest rates.
- As the cost of funds to commercial banks is less, they pass on the benefit to customers.
- This leads to more supply of credit at lower interest and boost demand for goods and services in the economy.

2. Exemption from Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) Requirements:

- Banks have been exempted from maintaining the cash reserve ratio - which is 4% of the net demand and time liabilities now - for home, auto and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) loans that are extended from January 31 to July 31, 2020.

Benefit:

- Banks would have additional funds for lending due to exemption from maintaining the cash reserve ratio.
- Thus, this measure **would lead to increase in the flow of bank credit to productive sectors** (home, auto and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) having multiplier effects to support growth.

3. Extension of Time for MSME Debt Restructuring:

- The RBI has also allowed extension of time up to end-December 2020 for a one-time restructuring of bank loans to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) that were in default but 'standard' as on January 1, 2019.

The RBI had launched debt restructuring for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector as it plays an important role in the growth of the Indian economy.

- MSME sector contributes over 28 per cent of the GDP, and more than 40 per cent of exports, while creating employment for about 11 crore people.

4. External Benchmarking of New Floating Rate Loans by Banks to Medium Enterprises:

- The RBI had already linked **all new floating rate personal loans, retail loans** (housing loans, consumption loans for purchase of durables (Televisions, washing machines, etc.), automobile loans, educational loans, etc. and **floating rate loans to micro and small enterprises (MSEs)** extended by banks to external benchmarks, viz., (i) the policy repo rate; or (ii) any benchmark market interest rate produced by the Financial Benchmarks India Private Ltd. (FBIL), including Treasury bill rates effective October 1, 2019.
- Subsequent to the introduction of an external benchmark system, the monetary transmission (reduction of interest rates by banks when RBI reduces repo rate) has improved to the sectors where new floating rate loans have been linked to the external benchmark.
- With a view to further strengthening monetary transmission, the RBI decided to link pricing of loans by scheduled commercial banks for the **medium enterprises** also to an external benchmark effective April 1, 2020.

What is a Medium Enterprise?**In Manufacturing:**

An enterprise where the investment in

plant and machinery is more than Rs.5 crore but does not exceed Rs.10 crore if it is in manufacturing sector

in equipment is more than Rs. 2 crore but does not exceed Rs. 5 crore if it is in **service sector**

5. Relief to Commercial Real Estate sector:

- The RBI decided to permit extension of date of commencement of commercial operations (DCCO) of project loans for commercial real estate, delayed for reasons beyond the control of promoters, by another one year without downgrading the asset classification.

The RBI's decision will for now help developers focus on completing projects and will ease banks' concerns about projects turning into non-performing assets.

6. Regional Rural Banks - Permission for Merchant Acquiring Business

- To give a fillip to digital banking and enabling regional rural banks (RRBs) to provide cost effective and user-friendly solutions to their customers, RBI has decided to allow RRBs, like other commercial banks, to act as merchant acquiring banks i.e. allowing RRBs to provide money accepting services to its merchants, using Aadhaar Pay, BHIM app and Point of Sale (POS) terminals.

Growth Rate:

- Decline in GDP growth in **2019-20 to an estimated 5 per cent** is due to
 - a) deceleration in private consumption,
 - b) stagnation in investment, and
 - c) contraction in both exports and imports under the impact of the slowdown in global growth and trade.
- The RBI projected GDP growth for 2020-21 at 6.0 per cent with the range of 5.5-6.0 per cent in H1 (April-September 2020) and 6.2 per cent in Q3 (October-December 2020).
- Growth is estimated at 6 per cent in 2020-21 due to the following measures taken by the Government in 2019.
 - a) reductions in corporate tax rate cuts of September 2019 which is expected to increase investments by corporates leading to employment generation and domestic demand,
 - b) reduction in GST tax rates,
 - c) rise in rural incomes due to higher rabi season production, and
 - d) measures announced by the Union Budget 2020-21 to boost rural economy and infrastructure leading to higher demand for power, cement, aviation and roads.

Inflation:

- Retail inflation, measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), surged to 7.4 per cent in December 2019, which is the highest reading since July 2014. This is also higher than the target rate set by RBI which is 6 per cent.
- Food inflation rose to double digits, primarily caused by a spike in onion prices due to unseasonal rains in October-November 2019. Excluding onions, headline inflation (CPI) would have been 5.2 per cent. Prices of several other food sub-groups such as milk, pulses, cereals, edible oils, eggs, meat and fish also increased.
- Taking into consideration these factors, the RBI revised the CPI inflation projection upwards to 6.5 per cent for Q4:2019-20 (January-March 2020); 5.4-5.0 per cent for H1:2020-21 (April-September 2020); and 3.2 per cent for Q3:2020-21 (October-December 2020).

BANKING:

Banking Regulation Act to Be Amended to Give Greater Powers to RBI over Cooperative Banks

- On February 5, 2020, the Union Government approved **amendments to the Banking Regulation Act, 1949** to bring **1,540 cooperative banks** under the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) regulation.

Reason for Amendments:

- The recent crisis in the Punjab & Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank.
- Cooperative banks in India have **86 million account holders**, with a total deposit of about **Rs. 5 lakh crore**.

Current Position:

- Cooperative banks are currently under the dual control of the Registrar of Cooperative Societies and RBI.
- While the role of registrar of cooperative societies includes incorporation, registration, management, audit, supersession of board and liquidation,
- RBI is responsible for regulatory functions such maintaining **cash reserve ratio, capital adequacy ratio, provisioning, etc.**

Amendments:

- Cooperative banks will be audited according to RBI's norms.
- RBI can supersede the board, in consultation with the state government, if any cooperative bank is under financial distress.
- Qualifications would be laid down for appointments, including that of Chief Executive Officers.
- Prior permission from the RBI would be required for the appointment of key positions.
- Administrative matters would continue to be under the Registrar, Cooperatives. However, cooperative banks would be regulated under the RBI's banking guidelines. Their auditing would also be done as per RBI's norms.
- The amendments will apply to all urban co-operative banks and multi-state cooperative banks.

Punjab & Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank Crisis:

- PMC Bank is a cooperative bank regulated by the RBI and registered under the Cooperative Societies Act.
- It is a 36-year old institution which has around 16 lakh depositors.
- The bank has 137 branches spread over half a dozen states of which almost 100 branches are in Maharashtra. The other states where it has branches include Karnataka (15), Goa (6), Delhi (6), and Gujarat (5).
- The crisis in **Punjab & Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank, a multi-state cooperative bank**, was detected in In September 2019.
- The RBI detected **gross under-reporting of bad loans**.
- Those in the management of the bank (Waryam Singh, Joy Thomas, etc.) had allegedly took bribes and gave loans of about Rs. 6,500 crore (out of its total Rs 9,000 crore) to the Housing Development & Infrastructure Limited (HDIL) or dummy companies affiliated to it. These loans were not repaid.
- Promoters of HDIL Rakesh Wadhawan and Sarang Wadhawan took these loans.

-
- 21,000 fake accounts were created by bank officials to hoodwink Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on the NPAs and bad loans for the loans given to HDIL and group companies.
 - To check panic withdrawal after the detection of fraud, the RBI had to impose restrictions on withdrawals from the Bank. The initial amount allowed by RBI was just Rs 1,000. This was increased to Rs 10,000 per depositor and later to Rs 25,000. The RBI again revised it to Rs 40,000 and later to Rs 50,000 per depositor.
 - **Enforcement Directorate (ED) filed chargesheet** against HDIL promoters Rakesh Wadhawan and Sarang Wadhawan for money laundering under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).
 - The Reserve Bank of India has ordered major urban cooperative banks (UCBs) to report credit information on all borrowers that have aggregate exposures of Rs **5 crore or above** on its **Central Repository of Information on Large Credits (CRILC)** for better supervision.

AGRICULTURE:

Agri-Insurance:

Revamp of Agricultural Insurance Schemes Approved

On February 19, 2020, the Union Government approved major modifications to the two crop insurance schemes namely

- Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), and
- Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme (RWBCIS) from Kharif' 2020 season throughout the country.
- **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)** provides insurance on the basis of **guaranteed crop yield**,
- **Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme provides** insurance coverage on the basis of **weather parameters** i.e. adverse weather conditions relating to rainfall, temperature, wind, humidity, etc., irrespective of the yield of crop.

Both the Schemes have following features regarding Premium Payments by Farmers:

Uniform premium of only

- 2% to be paid by farmers for all Kharif crops,
- 1.5% for all Rabi crops, and
- 5% for commercial and horticultural crops.
- Balance premium will be paid by the Union Government and State Governments in the ratio of **50:50**.

Objectives of Low Premium are

- to reduce the burden of premium on farmers, and
- increase the coverage of farmers under the insurance scheme while
- assuring full insured amount to the farmers in case of crop loss.

Other Features:

- In areas where **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) is implemented**, it was made **mandatory for all farmers who have taken loans from Banks**.

Modifications to the Schemes:

On February 19, 2020, the Union Government approved major modifications to the above two crop insurance schemes.

1. **Central Subsidy under the two schemes has been limited for premium rates upto**

30% for unirrigated areas/crops, and

25% for irrigated areas/crops.

Districts having 50% or more irrigated area will be considered as irrigated area/district.

2. Enrolment under the Scheme to be made **voluntary for all farmers.**

3. Central Share in premium subsidy would be increased to 90% for North Eastern States from the existing sharing pattern of 50:50

Why the Premium Rates Have been Capped?

- Insurance companies are quoting very high premiums in some areas for crops.
- The **average premium rate** under PMFBY and RWBCIS at the national level was 12.32% for 2018-19.
- But for some crops in certain districts, the rate of premium has been higher than 30% in recent years.
- For instance, the rate of premium for Kharif groundnut has reached 49% in Rajkot of Gujarat, and the rate for Rabi paddy crop Ramnathapuram (Tamil Nadu) has reached 42%.
- This means, if groundnut crop is insured for Rs.1,00,000 in Rajkot, the premium in above cases 49 per cent (Rs.49,000) and the premium for paddy crop in Ramnathapuram would be 42 % (Rs. 42, 000).
- The Centre wants to disincentivise certain crops in such areas where growing these crops involve high risks and consequently high insurance premiums.

How the New Scheme Works?

- In the old regime, for example, if a farmer's Kharif crop was insured for Rs 1,00,000 and the rate of premium is 40% (Rs.40,000), then the premium paid by the farmer was 2% (Rs 2,000), and remaining premium was shared by the Centre and the state equally (19% or Rs 19,000).
- **In the new regime**, for the same sum insured (Rs 1,00,000) and the same rate of premium (40%), the Centre will give subsidy for premium rates up to 30%.
This means the Centre will have to pay premium at the rate of 14% (as out of 30%, the farmer's share is 2%, and the Centre's and state's 14% each) instead of the 19% it paid (out of 40%).
- The state has to bear the entire burden of the premium subsidy in cases where the rate of premium goes beyond the threshold of 30%.

Problems in the Implementation of Scheme:

- PMFBY has come under criticism of stakeholders.
- Farmers groups and political parties claim that private insurance companies have made windfall gains out of the scheme.
- On the other hand, several major insurers, including ICICI Lombard and Tata AIG, have opted out of the scheme in 2019-20 due to losses because of high claims.
- Several States, including Punjab and West Bengal, have refused to participate in the scheme due to high premiums.
- The Government has selected both public sector insurance companies and private sector insurance companies for the implementation of the insurance scheme for farmers.
- While the private sector insurance companies are making profits, public sector insurance companies are incurring losses in the implementation of the scheme.

Impact of Government Decision:

1. On States:

The revamp **reduces the burden on the Centre and** increases in the premium amount to be paid by the States where the premium rates are beyond 30 % (for crops in unirrigated areas) and 25 % (for crops in irrigated areas).

2. Higher Premiums:

Insurance companies might quote a much higher premium due to chances of heavy reduction in the number of farmers as the scheme has been made voluntary and consequently lower collection of total premium.

3. If insurance companies quote exorbitant rates in tenders, the states may decide not to go for crop insurance at all.

4. Impact on Farmers:

If the State Governments pass on the burden of higher premium (due to restriction of Union Government's share to 30 % for crops in unirrigated areas and 25 % for crops in irrigated areas), it would increase the amount of premium to be paid by the farmers where premiums are higher than prescribed limits of Union Government.

Since the scheme has also been made voluntary for all farmers, farmers may opt out of the scheme. In such a scenario, such farmers would become vulnerable to crop failures and their income security will be affected.

Other Changes made to streamline the working of the Insurance Scheme:

- Once selected, insurance companies will implement the insurance scheme for three years instead of one year at present.
- States are delaying release of their share of subsidy. This is affecting the timely disposal of claims. Hence, states will not be allowed to implement the insurance scheme in subsequent seasons in case of considerable delay by States in release of requisite premium subsidy to concerned Insurance Companies beyond a prescribed time limit.

Cut-off dates for invoking this provision for Kharif and Rabi seasons will be 31st March and 30th September of successive years respectively.

Allocation:

For 2020-21, the Union Government has allocated Rs 15,695 crore for Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY).

FPOs:

Scheme for "Formation and Promotion of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) Launched

On February 29, 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched "Formation and Promotion of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) " scheme at Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh.

Aim is

- to form and promote **10,000 new Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)**.
- **Time Period:** Five years from 2019-20 to 2023-24.
- Each FPO would be supported for 5 years from its year of inception.

What are Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)?

- A Farmer Producer Organizations (FPO), formed by a group of farm producers, is a registered body with producers as shareholders in the organisation.

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- It deals with business activities related to the farm produce, and
 - works for the benefit of the member producers.

What is the need for Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)?

- India has about 12.5 crore farmer households of which over **85% are small and marginal farmers with land holdings of less than 2 hectares.**
- The average size of land holding is 1.33 hectare/ farmer household.
- Due to this fragmentation, these small, marginal and landless farmers face challenges such as access to technology, quality seed, fertilizers, pesticides and requisite finances.
- They also face challenges in **marketing their produce** due to a long chain of intermediaries which leads producer (farmer) receiving only a small part of the value that the ultimate consumer pays.
- FPOs help in collectivization of such small, marginal and landless farmers in order to give them the **collective strength to deal with such issues.**
- By organising themselves collectively through formation of FPOs, **farmers will have better access** to quality input, technology, credit and better marketing access.
- **FPOs will take up viable business activities like aggregation of produce, collective marketing, bulk procurement of inputs, primary processing, etc.**
- **The ultimate aim of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) is to empower farmers and increase their incomes.** With Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), farmers will be able to negotiate the price of their produce with traders and do business.

Implementation of the Scheme:

- **Total budgetary provision** : Rs. 4496.00 crore for five years (2019-20 to 2023-24) with a further committed liability of Rs. 2369.00 crore for period from 2024-25 to 2027-28.

Implementing Agencies:

- Initially there will be three implementing Agencies to form and promote FPOs, namely Small Farmers Agri-business Consortium (SFAC), National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC), and National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).
- States may also, if so desire, nominate their Implementing Agency in consultation with **Department of Agriculture, and Cooperation & Farmers Welfare (DAC&FW).**

Formation of Farmer Producer Organization (FPO):

- Initially, the **minimum number of members** in **Farmer Producer Organization (FPO)** will be 300 in plain area and 100 in North East & hilly areas.
However, DAC&FW may revise the minimum number of membership based on experience/need with approval of Union Agriculture Minister.
- Priority will be given for formation of FPOs in **aspirational districts in the country** with at least one FPO in each block of aspirational districts.
- **Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)** will be promoted under "**One District One Product**" cluster to **promote specialization** and **better processing, marketing, branding & export by FPOs.**
- These FPO clusters would be **promoted** by '**Cluster Based Business Organizations (CBBOs)**' set up by implementing agencies.
- The CBBOs will have **five categories of specialists** from the domain of Crop husbandry, Agri marketing / Value addition and processing, Social mobilisation, Law & Accounts and Information Technology/ Management Information System (MIS).

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- These CBBOs will be platform for an end to end knowledge for all issues in FPO promotion.
 - There will be a **National Project Management Agency (NPMA)** at Small Farmers Agri-business Consortium (SFAC) for **providing overall project guidance, data compilation and maintenance through integrated portal and Information management and monitoring.**

How the Government Funding Helps?

- To carry out their functions, members (farmers) of **Farmer Producer Organization** will raise funds through equity contributions among themselves.
- The Government will provide Equity Grant for increasing the equity base of FPOs.
- The Government will also set up the following funds to assure flow of institutional credit to the FPOs.

Credit Guarantee Fund of up to Rs. **1,000.00 crore** in **National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)** with equal contribution by Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare (DAC&FW), and

Credit Guarantee Fund of Rs.500.00 crore in **National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC)** with equal contribution by DAC&FW and NCDC

Credit guarantee minimizes the risk of financial institutions for granting loan to FPOs.

- **States/UTs will be allowed to avail loan at prescribed concessional rate of interest** under Agri-Market Infrastructure Fund (AMIF) for developing agriculture marketing and allied infrastructure in Gramin Agriculture Markets (GrAMs).

INDUSTRY:

Textiles:

National Technical Textiles Mission

National Technical Textiles Mission was approved by the Union Government on February 26, 2020.

Objective is

- to **position the country as a global leader** in Technical Textiles.
- **Total Budget** for the Mission: **Rs 1480 Crore.**
- **Implementation Period:** Four years i.e from Financial Years 2020-21 to 2023-24.

What are Technical Textiles?

- Technical Textiles are materials and products manufactured primarily for their **technical and performance properties** rather than their aesthetic characteristics.
- Technical Textiles products are divided into **12 broad categories** depending upon their application areas.

These are Agrotech (textiles used in agriculture for weed and insect control, Buildtech (construction textiles like shading nets), Clothtech (clothing textiles with functional uses like sewing threads), Geotech (Geo textiles having geotechnical applications pertaining to soil, rock, earth etc., Hometech, Indutech (industrial textiles), Mobiltech (mobility textiles i.e. automobiles), Meditech, Protech (protective textiles), Sportstech, Oekotech (Environmental Engineering), Packtech (packaging textiles).

- Some of the examples of technical textiles: Airbags, seat belts, bullet proof jackets, conveyor belts, surgical masks, sanitary napkins, diapers,

Need for National Technical Textiles Mission ?

- India imports huge quantity of technical textiles every year.
- Hence, the Government wants to reverse this trend, and
- position India as a global leader in technical textiles

Details of the Mission:

The Mission will have **four components**:

1. Research, Innovation and Development. Outlay Rs. 1000 Crore.

This component will promote both

- (i) fundamental research at fibre level aiming at path breaking technological products in Carbon Fibre, Aramid Fibre, Nylon Fibre, and Composites, and
 - (ii) application based research in geo-textiles, agro-textiles, medical textiles, mobile textiles and sports textiles and development of biodegradable technical textiles.
- The fundamental research activities will be conducted in various Centre for Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) laboratories, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), and other scientific/industrial/academic laboratories of repute.

Bio degradable technical textiles:

A **sub-component of the research** will focus on development of **bio degradable technical textile materials**, particularly for agro-textiles, geo-textiles and medical textiles. It will also develop suitable equipment for environmentally sustainable disposal of used technical textiles, with emphasis on **safe disposal of medical and hygiene wastes**.

- Application based research will be conducted in CSIR, IIT, Research Design & Standards Organisation (RDSO) of Indian Railways, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO), National Aeronautical Laboratory (NAL), Indian Road Research Institute (IRRI), and other such reputed laboratories.

2. Promotion and Market Development:

The penetration level of technical textiles is low in India varying between 5-10% against the level of 30-70% in developed countries. The Mission will aim at average growth rate of 15-20% per annum taking the level of domestic market size to 40-50 Billion USD by the year 2024; through market development, market promotion, international technical collaborations, investment promotions, and 'Make in India' initiatives.

3. Export Promotion:

The component aims at export promotion of technical textiles enhancing from the current annual value of approximately Rs.14000 Crore to Rs.20000 crore by 2021-22 and ensuring 10% average growth in exports per year upto 2023-24.

An **Export Promotion Council for Technical Textiles** will be set up for effective coordination and promotion activities in the segment.

4. Education, Training, Skill Development:

Education, skill development and level of human resources in the country is not adequate to meet the technologically challenging and fast growing technical textiles segment.

The Mission will promote technical education at higher engineering and technology levels related to technical textiles and its application areas covering engineering, medical, agriculture, aquaculture, and dairy segments.

Skill development will be promoted and adequate pool of highly skilled manpower resources will be created for meeting the need of technical textiles manufacturing units.

- The Mission will focus on **usage of technical textiles in various flagship missions, programmes** of the country including strategic sectors. The use of technical textiles in agriculture, aquaculture, dairy, poultry, etc. JaiJivan Mission; Swachh Bharat Mission; Ayushman Bharat will bring an overall improvement in the cost of economy, water and soil conservation, better agricultural productivity and higher income to farmers per acre of land holding in addition to promotion of manufacturing and exports activities in India.

The use of geo-textiles in highways, railways and ports will result in robust infrastructure, reduced maintenance cost and higher life cycle of the infrastructure assets.

Encouraging Innovation:

- Promotion of innovation amongst young engineering /technology/ science graduates will be taken up by the Mission.
- **Innovation and Incubation centres** would be set up.
- The research output will be repositied with a 'Trust' with the Government for easy and assessable proliferation of the knowledge thus gained through research, innovation and development activities.
- **'Start-up' and Ventures' would be promoted.**

INFRASTRUCTURE:

Ports:

New Major Port at Vadhavan in Maharashtra

On February 5, 2020, the Union Government gave 'in-principle' approval for setting up a major port at **Vadhavan** near Dahanu in **Maharashtra**.

- Total cost of the project is likely to be **Rs.65,544.54 crore**.
- Vadhavan port will be developed on "land lord model".

What is Landlord Model?

- Currently, 11 of the 12 ports owned by the Indian government function as trusts under a law framed more than five decades ago called the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963. (Kamarajar Port Ltd is the only exception).
- Trust model has limitations as it acts a regulator and provider of commercial services (cargo terminal operator) in many instances along with private cargo terminal operators. This leads to conflict of interest.
- To overcome this, Tariff Authority for Major Ports or TAMP was set up in 1997 through an amendment to the Major Port Trust Act. But, TAMP's regulations were seen as rigid, not investor-friendly and discouraging efficiency. Over the years, the environment has also changed, particularly with the emergence of private ports which are offering more efficient services. So, the Government decided to adopt "land lord model" for Vadhavan port.
- In the **landlord port model**, the publicly governed port authority acts as a regulatory body and as landlord while private companies carry out port operations i.e cargo-handling activities.
- Here, the port authority maintains ownership of the port while the infrastructure is leased to private firms that provide and maintain their own superstructure and install own equipment to handle cargo.
- In return, the landlord port gets a share of the revenue from the private entity.

Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV):

- A **Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)** will be formed with Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) as the lead partner with equity participation equal to or more than 50% to implement the project.
- The SPV will develop the port infrastructure including reclamation, construction of breakwater, besides establishing connectivity to the hinterland.
- All the business activities (cargo handling) would be undertaken under Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode by private developers.

Need for Vadhavan port ?

- Maharashtra has India's largest container port at JNPT which caters to the hinterland of Maharashtra, North Karnataka, Telangana and secondary hinterland of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, NCR, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh.
- There is a need for a deep draft port that will accommodate the largest Container Ships in the world and also cater to the spill over traffic from JNPT port once its planned capacity of 10 million TEUs is fully utilized.

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- JNPT and Mundra, the two largest container handling ports of the country (for mid size container ships only), have drafts of 15 M and 16 M respectively, while the world's largest container handling modern deep draft ports require a draft of 18M-20M.
 - The VadHAVAN port has a **natural draft of about 20 meters close to the shore**, making it possible for it to handle bigger vessels at the port.
 - Development of VadHAVAN port will enable call of container vessels of 16,000-25,000 twenty-foot equivalent unit (TEUs) capacity, giving advantages of economies of scale & reducing logistics cost.
 - The ever **increasing size of container ships** makes it imperative that a deep draft container port in West Coast of India is developed.
 - **Increasing containerization of cargo** in the wake of value-added manufacturing sector makes it important to prepare our port infrastructure for handling value-added import and export to facilitate manufacturing activity.
 - Container traffic in the JNPT hinterland is expected to grow from 4.5 MTEUs currently to 10.1 MTEUs by 2022-25 when JNPT's potential will be fully exhausted.
 - The demand for container traffic will further accelerate after the plans for improving logistic infrastructure fructify and the 'Make in India' push drives greater exports and manufacture sourcing to India.

SOCIAL SECTOR:

Employment:

India Can Create 70-100 Million Formal Jobs through Policy Changes and Adoption of Technology : Chandrasekaran

- On February 3, 2020, speaking at the release of the book, '**Bridgital Nation**', jointly authored by him and Roopa Purushothaman, Tata Sons chairman, N. Chandrasekaran stated that
- **India is a job- strapped nation** and a **majority of our jobs** are in the **informal sector**.
- He stated that India will be able to create 100 million formal jobs if informal sector is properly tapped with the support of **policy changes** and **suitable technologies**. This would add at least 10% extra income in the hands of people, he stated.
- Mr. Chandrasekaran stated that **the country currently had this strange scenario of high skill and high productivity and low skill and low productivity layers in terms of jobs**.
- He stated that the **middle layer is totally missing** and there is need to build this middle layer by augmenting technology. For instance, specialists or doctors could do only 50% of their jobs as they had to take care of tasks which were not part of the job profile due to paucity of qualified people in the middle layer.
- He said the **fundamental difference between India and the Western countries** was that **the latter used technology to drive efficiency**. In India, the **country did not have a market itself**, so it was **important to use technology to provide access and develop markets**, which can lead to distribution, consumption, jobs and income growth.

Ground Water Management:

\$450 Million World Bank Loan for Atal Bhujal Yojana

- On February 17, 2020, Government of India signed an agreement with the World Bank for a \$450 million loan to support the Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABHY) also called National Groundwater Management Improvement Programme.

What is Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABHY)?

Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABHY) - National Groundwater Management Improvement Programme - is aimed at

- improving ground water management through community participation in select over-exploited and ground water stressed areas in seven States

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- 8350 Gram Panchayats of 78 districts in seven states - Gujarat, Maharashtra, Haryana, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh have been selected for the implementation of the scheme.
 - Total Allocation : Rs. 6000 crore
 - Implementation Period: 5 years (2020-21 to 2024-25)
 - World Bank Loan: 50 per cent.

Need for the Scheme?

- India is the world's largest user of groundwater.
- 85% of drinking water requirements in the country is met through ground water.
- Groundwater also provides approximately 60 percent of irrigation water.
- But, there is increasing depletion of ground water. This is due to an exponential growth in the exploitation of groundwater through millions of private tube wells.

Between 1950 and 2010, the number of drilled tube wells increased from 1 million to nearly 30 million.

If the current trends persist, 60 percent of districts are likely to reach critical level of groundwater depletion within two decades. This in turn will render at least 25 percent of the agriculture production risky.

Climate change will exacerbate current pressures on groundwater resources.

- Hence, there is need to take steps to increase the ground water level.

The **scheme would focus** on

- enhancing the recharge of aquifers;
- introducing water conservation practices;
- promoting activities related to water harvesting, water management, and crop alignment;
- creating an institutional structure for sustainable groundwater management; and
- equipping communities and stakeholders to sustainably manage groundwater.

Implementation:

- The programme will introduce a bottom-up planning process for community-driven development of
- **water budgets** and **Water Security Plans (WSPs)** would be developed through bottom-up planning process by involving people.
- **Water budgets will assess** surface and groundwater conditions (both quantity and quality) and identify current and future needs.
- **Water Security Plans (WSPs)**, on the other hand, will focus on improving groundwater quantity and incentivize the selected states to implement the actions proposed.
- Such community-led management measures will make users aware of consumption patterns, and pave the way for economic measures that reduce groundwater consumption.

Focus on Crop Management:

- Crop management and diversification will be the other focus area.

Studies indicate that a one percent increase in the area irrigated with groundwater leads to a 2.2 percent increase in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Also, a one percent increase in irrigation efficiency will reduce GHG emissions by 20 percent.

The programme will support adoption of micro-irrigation systems, including sprinkler and drip irrigation to increase productivity and support farmers to shift to low water-intensive crops.

NATIONAL POLITY

Role of Dissent in Democracy:

Dissent Against Government Not Anti-national: SC Judge Justice Deepak Gupta

Delivering a lecture organised by the Supreme Court Bar Association on 'Democracy and Dissent' on February 24, 2020, Supreme Court judge Justice Deepak Gupta stated that

- **a dissenter is not an anti-national and holding a contrary view to that of the government does not make one an anti-national.**
- Justice Gupta stated that criticism of the executive, the judiciary, the bureaucracy or the armed forces cannot be termed 'anti-national' and in case we **attempt to stifle criticism of the institutions**, we shall **become a police state instead of a democracy**. He stated that to question, to challenge, to verify, to ask for accountability from the government is the **right of every citizen**.

Dissent, a human right, can be stifled only when it turns Violent:

- He also said that **dissent is a human right**. **A society will not evolve unless its rules are questioned. Dissent must be encouraged**. It is **only through discussion that we can strive to run the country better**. The government has **no right to stifle a protest unless it turns violent**. Dissent, after all, was the essence of Civil Disobedience movement of Mahatma Gandhi. We are only a free country where there is freedom of speech, Justice Gupta said.
- He said that **superior courts were protectors of the rights of the people and have a duty to ensure that the powers that be do not suppress dissent**.
- Justice Gupta's words are significant in the background of the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in various parts of the country, most prominently in Shaheen Bagh in Delhi. The Shaheen Bagh case is before the Supreme Court.

On Sedition Cases:

- Justice Gupta also red-flagged the **hike in sedition cases** against **activists, lawyers and students** and branding voices of dissent as "anti-nationals".

Majoritarianism Anti-thesis to democracy :

- Justice Gupta stated that Majoritarianism is an anti-thesis to democracy, and **a political party getting 51% mandate in the polls did not mean** the other 49% of the country ought to remain silent for the next five years.

He stated that those in power may claim that they represent the will of all the people but they may be the elected government voted on the first-past-the-post system by a large number of voters, and it cannot be said that they represent the entire will of the people

- Justice Gupta said **governance did not mean carrying out the whims of a few, but following the rule of law**. The government was not always right. Citizens have the right to come together, protest and dissent peacefully.

Criminalisation of Politics:

Supreme Court Directives to Check Criminalisation of Politics

On February 13, 2020, the Supreme Court of India issued the following directives to check increasing criminalisation of politics in our country. At present, 46% of Members of Parliament have criminal records.

1. Reasons Shall be Given for Selection of Candidates who contest in elections:

Political Parties shall give reasons for selection candidates.

The reasons for selection shall be with reference to the

**qualifications,
achievements, and
merit of the candidate concerned.**

Mere “winnability” at the polls shall not be the sole reason for giving party ticket.

If candidate with criminal cases are selected for contesting in elections, parties should also **explain why other individuals without criminal antecedents could not be selected as candidates.**

2. Uploading Candidates Details in Websites:

Political parties shall mandatorily upload on their **website** detailed information regarding individuals with pending criminal cases who have been selected as candidates for contesting in elections.

The information shall include the nature of the offences, and relevant particulars such as whether charges have been framed, the concerned Court, the case number, etc.

3) Publishing in Newspapers and Social Media Platforms:

This information regarding criminal cases of selected candidates shall also be published in:

- (a) One local vernacular newspaper and one national newspaper;
- (b) On the official social media platforms of the political party, including Facebook, and Twitter.

4) Timelimit for Publishing Details:

These details shall be published within 48 hours of the selection of the candidate or not less than two weeks before the first date for filing of nominations, whichever is earlier.

5) Submission of Compliance Report to the Election Commission:

The political party concerned shall then submit a report of compliance with these directions with the Election Commission within 72 hours of the selection of the said candidate.

6) Contempt of Court:

If a political party fails to submit such compliance report with the Election Commission, the Election Commission shall bring such non-compliance by the political party concerned to the notice of the Supreme Court for contempt of Court's directions.

Background:

- At present, law in India (Representation of the People Act 1951), does not debar a person with criminal cases from contesting elections.
- Even convicted politicians can contest in elections six years after serving their jail term.
- The Election Commission has been advocating life time ban on convicted persons from contesting in elections.
- Acting on public interest litigations (PILs), the Supreme Court has delivered a series of landmark judgments to address criminalisation of politics.

2013: It removed the statutory protection of convicted legislators from immediate disqualification in 2013. Until then, elected members when convicted by a lower court used to appeal the verdict in High Courts and later in Supreme Courts which delayed their disqualification.

2014: The Supreme Court directed the completion of trials involving elected representatives within a year.

2017: The Supreme Court asked the Centre to frame a scheme to appoint special courts to exclusively try cases against politicians

2018: The Supreme Court asked the political parties to publicise pending criminal cases faced by their candidates.

The Supreme Court also stated that rapid criminalisation of politics cannot be arrested by merely disqualifying tainted legislators but should begin by “cleansing” the political parties, and

suggested the Parliament to make a strong law to make it obligatory for political parties to not give tickets (to contest) to leaders charged with “heinous and grievous” crimes like rape, murder and kidnapping, etc.

Increasing Criminalisation of Politics:

- In spite of the Supreme Court’s interventions, the representation of candidates with criminal background in the elected houses is increasing.

In 2004, 24% of the Members of Lok Sabha had criminal cases pending against them;

in 2009, that went up to 30%; in 2014 to 34%; and

in 2019 as many as 43% of MPs had criminal cases pending against them.

Why do Political Parties field Candidates with Criminal cases?

- These candidates have the **ability to win elections** (winnability) due to **muscle power, money power or caste support**.
- They not only finance their own election expenditure but also contribute substantially to the party giving them tickets.

Why do candidates with criminal cases win elections?

- Sometimes voters view such candidates through a narrow prism i.e. they see the candidate as someone who represents their interests (E.g.: caste).
- Money power, and muscle power also enable these candidates to influence voters either through fear factor or inducements like giving money for voting for them.
- Another reason for criminals getting elected to Legislative Assemblies and the Lok Sabha is voters mainly keep in mind the Chief Ministerial candidate in the elections to the Legislative Assembly like M.G. Ramachandran, Jayalalitha, NTR, KCR, Mamata Benerjee, etc. and the Prime Ministerial candidate like Indra Gandhi, and Narendra Modi at the Lok Sabha elections.

Impact of criminalisation:

- Criminalisation erodes the credibility of democracy as people facing criminal charges law breakers become law makers.

Why the Supreme Court Issues Directives at present regarding publishing of information on criminal cases?

- A contempt of court petition was filed on non implementation of the 2018 Supreme Court judgement which called for publicising pending criminal cases faced by their candidates by the political parties.
 - The contempt petition was on two grounds.
1. The Election Commission had failed to take any step to ensure the implementation of a 2018 judgment which had made it mandatory for political parties to declare and publish all criminal cases pending against their candidates.
 2. Political parties are circumventing the 2018 judgment by publishing the details of their candidates' criminal background in 'obscure and limited circulation newspapers' and 'making the webpages on their websites difficult to access'.

Why Supreme Court Ruled for Publicising of details of their candidates' criminal background ?

- To inform the voters about the background of the contesting candidates.
- Informed citizens may take better decision while casting their votes.

Significance of the present SC Judgement:

1. Political parties should not only declare the criminal cases of the selected candidates but also give wide publicity on such selected candidates i.e. through party website, party social media (twitter, facebook, etc.) advertisement in national newspaper and one local newspaper.
2. They should also justify the selection of candidates with criminal cases over other individuals without criminal cases.
3. Not publicising of criminal cases of selected candidates and non justifying the selection of candidates with criminal cases over other individuals without criminal cases would come under 'contempt of court' directions.

Police Reforms:

Contempt Petition on Non Implementation of Police Reforms

The lack of professionalism in the working of police was once again in the news due to Delhi riots in February 2020.

Lack of professionalism:

- The Police did not file FIR's (First Information Reports) on the hate speeches of politicians.
- Delhi Police received thousands of calls during the riots but failed to deploy adequate forces in the riot hit areas.
- There are allegations of blatant collusion of police with rioters.
- Due to lack of professionalism, **police failed to prevent violence and save lives during the riots.**

Even the Supreme Court judge K.M. Joseph, while hearing the Shaheen Bagh protest case, commented on the "lack of professionalism" shown by the Delhi Police in not stopping people from making hate speeches, which led to the Delhi riots. He said that if police has not allowed people to get away after inflammatory remarks, all this would not have happened.

- Hence, advocate Prashant Bhushan sought an urgent hearing of contempt petitions pending on the non-implementation of the Prakash Singh judgment of September 22, 2006 on Police Reforms.
- In the 2006 judgement delivered 13 years ago, the Supreme Court had issued **specific directives** to unshackle the police from political influences and clearly stated that **police should not become a tool in the hands of authoritarian regimes and political bosses.**

Problems in the Working of the Police:

1. There is **lack of independence and professionalism of police to act as per law** as their **postings and transfers** are **decided by politicians.**
2. As a result, police **either choose inaction or disproportionate action through use of police force** depending on the directions of political masters. This is **hampering both independence and its professionalism** of police.

2006 Judgement of the Supreme Court:

Delivering its verdict on Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by two former DGPs Prakash Singh and N K Singh in 2006, the Supreme Court had held that

- **commitment, devotion and accountability of the police has to be only to the rule of law,**
- excessive control of the political executive over the police has the inherent danger of making the police a tool for **subverting the process of law,** **promoting the growth of authoritarianism,** and **shaking the very foundations of democracy.**

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- supervision and control has to be such that it ensures that the police serves the people without any regard, whatsoever, to the status and position of any person while investigating a crime or taking preventive measures.

Directions issued by the Supreme Courts:

The Supreme Court also issued the seven directions in the same case.

1. State Security Commission:

There is no established meaning in law or conventions in practice that indicate the limits of political 'supervision' and 'control' over the police. This has led to **unfettered and undue interference by politicians in the everyday functioning of the police**, disrupted the authority of supervisory cadres within the force and obscured command responsibility.

There is also **no rationale system for evaluating police performance against a set of pre-determined criteria**.

Hence, the State Governments have been directed to constitute a **State Security Commission** in every State to

- (i) ensure that the state government does not exercise unwarranted influence or pressure on the police
- (ii) lay down broad policy guidelines so that the State police always acts according to the laws of the land and the Constitution of the country, and
- (iii) evaluate the performance of the state police and preparing a report thereon for being placed before the State legislature.

This watchdog body (**State Security Commission**) shall be headed by the Chief Minister or Home Minister as Chairman and have the DGP of the State as its ex-officio Secretary. The other members of the Commission shall be chosen in such a manner that it is able to function independent of Government control (by inclusion of the leader of the opposition and independent members).

2. Selection and Minimum Tenure of DGP:

Arbitrariness in the appointment of the highest ranking police officer, **appointments made on considerations of personal preference and posts held at the discretion of the political executive** leading to uncertainty of office and tenure are the problems affecting the independent working of police.

Hence, the Supreme Court directed that the

Director General of Police of the State shall be selected by the State Government from amongst the three senior-most officers of the Department who have been empanelled for promotion to that rank by the **Union Public Service Commission** on the basis of

their length of service,

very good record, and

range of experience.

Once, he has been selected for the job, he should have a minimum tenure of at least two years irrespective of his date of superannuation.

(The DGP may, however, be relieved of his responsibilities by the State Government acting in consultation with the State Security Commission consequent upon any action taken against him under the All India Services (Discipline and Appeal) Rules or following his conviction in a court of law in a criminal offence or in a case of corruption, or if he is otherwise incapacitated from discharging his duties.)

3. Minimum Tenure of I.G. of Police & other officers:

Arbitrary and frequent transfers are taking place at the behest of influential third parties. These are done as a means to punish and reward and are outside rational administrative necessities related to policing.

Hence, the Supreme Court directed that the

Police Officers on operational duties in the field like the Inspector General of Police in-charge Zone, Deputy Inspector General of Police in-charge Range, Superintendent of Police in-charge district and Station House Officer in-charge of a Police Station shall also have a prescribed minimum tenure of two years.

This ensures security of tenure for police officers on operational duties in the field, allows them **withstand undue political interference**. Further, it gives them time to properly understand the needs of their jurisdictions and do justice to their jobs.

Exceptions to remove them prematurely could be disciplinary proceedings against them or their conviction in a criminal offence or in a case of corruption or if the incumbent is otherwise incapacitated from discharging his responsibilities.

4. Separation of Investigation:

Investigations are poor, slow, done by inadequately trained and unspecialized staff and frequently subject to manpower diversion into other pressing law and order duties.

Hence, the Supreme Court directed that

investigating police shall be separated from the law and order police to ensure speedier and expert investigation.

The separation may be effected in towns/urban areas which have a population of ten lakhs or more, and gradually extended to smaller towns/urban areas also.

(5) Police Establishment Board :

Subjective appointments, transfers and promotions within the police force lead to **political influence** and **patronage** on one hand, and uncertainty **fear and demotivation** on the other hand.

Hence, the Supreme Court directed that

- a) there shall be a **Police Establishment Board** in each State which shall decide **all transfers, postings, promotions and other service related matters of officers** of and below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police.

The Establishment Board shall be a departmental body comprising the Director General of Police and four other senior officers of the Department. The State Government may interfere with decision of the Board in exceptional cases only after recording its reasons for doing so.

- b) The Board shall be authorized to make appropriate recommendations to the State Government regarding the posting and transfers of officers of and above the rank of Superintendent of Police. Government is expected to give due weight to these recommendations and shall normally accept it.
- c) The Board shall also function as a **forum of appeal** for disposing of representations from officers of the rank of Superintendent of Police and above regarding their promotion/transfer/disciplinary proceedings or their being subjected to illegal or irregular orders and generally reviewing the functioning of the police in the State.

In effect, the Board is intended to bring all these crucial service related matters of police largely under police control, **remove political interference**, and **undue patronage**.

(6) Police Complaints Authority:

Public perception of the police is that there is **too much wrong doing by the police (abuse of power)** and **too little accountability**.

Internal inquiries are **lengthy, opaque and do not in general command public confidence**.

Hence, the Supreme Court directed that the

- a) there shall be a **Police Complaints Authority at the district level** headed by a **retired District Judge** to look into complaints against police officers of and up to the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police.

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- b) Similarly, there should be another **Police Complaints Authority at the State level** headed a retired Judge of the High Court/Supreme Court to look into complaints against officers of the rank of Superintendent of Police and above.

These Authorities may be assisted by three to five members depending upon the volume of complaints in different States/districts. Members shall be selected by the State Government from a panel prepared by the State Human Rights Commission/Lok Ayukta/State Public Service Commission. They would work whole time for the Authority.

Functions:

The **State level Complaints Authority** would take **cognizance of only allegations of serious misconduct** by the police personnel, which would include incidents involving **death, grievous hurt or rape in police custody**.

The district level Complaints Authority would, apart from above cases, may also inquire into allegations of **extortion, land/house grabbing or any incident involving serious abuse of authority**.

The recommendations of the Complaints Authority, both at the district and State levels, for any action, departmental or criminal, against a delinquent police officer **shall be binding** on the concerned authority.

(7) National Security Commission:

The Central Government shall also set up a National Security Commission at the Union level to prepare a panel for being placed before the appropriate Appointing Authority, for selection and placement of Chiefs of the Central Police Organisations (CPO), who should also be given a minimum tenure of two years.

The National Security Commission could be headed by the Union Home Minister and comprise heads of the CPOs and a couple of security experts as members with the Union Home Secretary as its Secretary.

The aforesaid directions shall be complied with by the Central Government, State Governments or Union Territories, on or before 31st December, 2006.

The Cabinet Secretary, Government of India and the Chief Secretaries of State Governments/Union Territories were directed to file affidavits of compliance by 3rd January, 2007.

Progress on the implementation:

- No state has completely implemented all the directives of the Supreme Court given in 2006.
- **State Security Commissions:** 27 states have set up State Security Commissions but they have either not included the leader of the opposition or independent members in it.
- Only eight states are fulfilling the requirement to prepare an annual report of the State Security Commission and table it before the state legislature
- **Appointment of DGP's:** In 23 states, the power to appoint the DGP vested solely with state governments with out any involvement of UPSC as directed by the Supreme Court.
- **Police Complaint Authority (PCA):** No state formed Police Complaint Authority (PCA) in accordance with directives of SC. Only 12 states had constituted a PCA both at state and district level.
- Hence, there are contempt petitions pending in the Supreme Court for non implementation of its 2006 directives.

Security Issues:

Former Chief Ministers of Jammu & Kashmir Booked under Public Safety Act

- Former Jammu & Kashmir Chief Ministers Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti, and Shah Faesal, former IAS officer, were booked under the stringent the Public Safety Act (PSA), 1978, of Jammu & Kashmir on February 6, 2020. These leaders were till now under preventive detention under Section 107 along with Section 151 (for apprehension of breaching peace) of the Code of Criminal Procedure which provides for detention upto six months. They can be detained beyond this period but become eligible to

secure bail. Hence, these leaders were booked under Public Safety Act (PSA). The **PSA allows for detention of a person without a formal charge and without trial upto two years.**

- Farooq Abdullah, former Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir and father of Omar Abdullah was booked under Public Safety Act, 1978 in September 2019.
- Many key leaders of political parties in Jammu & Kashmir have been booked under Public Safety Act following the abolition of the provisions of Article 370 which provided for special status to Jammu & Kashmir. The state was also bifurcated into two Union Territories - Union Territory of Ladakh (consisting of two districts of Kargil and Leh) and the new Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir (consisting of the rest of the former State of Jammu and Kashmir).

Major Provisions of Public Safety Act (PSA), 1978 of Jammu & Kashmir:

- The Public Safety Act (PSA), 1978 permits detention in jails for upto **two years** “in the case of a person acting in any manner prejudicial to the security of the state”, and for up to a year where “any person is acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order”.
- A detention order under the PSA is issued either by the Divisional Commissioner or District Magistrate.
- Within four weeks of passing the detention order, the government has to refer the case to an Advisory Board.
- The Advisory Board is a non-judicial body established under Section 14 of the PSA to review detention orders and determine whether there is sufficient cause for detention
- This Advisory Board will have to give its recommendations within eight weeks of the order. If the Board thinks that there is cause for preventive detention, the government can hold the person up to two years.
- The only way this administrative preventive detention order can be challenged is through a habeas corpus petition filed by relatives of the detained person.
- **The High Court and the Supreme Court have the jurisdiction to hear such petitions and pass a final order seeking quashing of the PSA.**
- However, if the order is quashed, there is no bar on the government passing another detention order under the PSA and detaining the person again.
- The District Magistrate who has passed the detention order has protection under the Act, which states that the order is considered “done in good faith”. Therefore, **there can no be prosecution or any legal proceeding against the official who has passed the order.**
- However, over the years, the Supreme Court has held in various cases that while detaining a person under the PSA, the District Magistrate (DM) is under a legal obligation to analyse all the circumstances and material before depriving that person of his or her personal liberty.

It has also held that when a person already under police custody is slapped with the PSA, the DM has to record “**compelling reasons**” for detaining that person. While the DM can detain a person multiple times under the PSA, he or she has to produce fresh facts while passing the subsequent detention order.

Criticism on Detention:

The criticism of these leaders of political parties has come under criticism on the following grounds.

- These leaders upheld were part of the democratic process in Jammu & Kashmir. They stood upto separatists, and never ascribed to violence and divisiveness.
- Detention without charges takes away their personal liberty and is the worst abomination in a democracy.
- They were also denied the option to protest peacefully against the constitutional changes in Jammu & Kashmir.

Government's Justification:

- But Government justifies preventive detentions on the ground that these are **preventive actions** and **not punitive actions** and **such detentions** are **done** in the **interests of security of the state** and **maintenance of public order**.

ELECTIONS

Aam Aadmi Party Sweeps Delhi Elections

In February 2020, the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), led by Arvind Kejriwal, swept the Delhi elections with resounding victory by winning 62 out of 70 assembly seats and getting more than 50 per cent of the votes. The Bharatiya Janata Party remained a distant second with 8 seats while the Indian National Congress party could not win even a single seat for the second consecutive time.

Results at a Glance:

<u>Party</u>	<u>Seats</u>	<u>Vote Share</u>
Aam Aadmi Party	62	53.5 %
Bharatiya Janata Party	08	38.5 %
Indian National Congress	00	4.2 %
Total Seats	70	

Reasons for the victory of Aam Aadmi Party:

Reforms in health and education, welfare policies (like subsidised electricity, water supply, free public transport for women) of the government, adoption of soft hindutva by the Aam Aadmi Party to counter Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), lack of popular Chief Ministerial candidate in the opposition parties, campaign strategy of Aam Aadmi Party, etc. are the reasons for the huge victory of the Aam Aadmi Party.

1. Education:

The Government transformed the school education system in Delhi by focussing on both on infrastructure and the curriculum of schools. The Budget for education was significantly enhanced from around Rs. 6, 000 crore in 2015-16 to Rs. 15, 000 crore in 2019-20.

- a) **Physical infrastructure** in Government schools was expanded and improved by constructing more than 8,000 additional classrooms, setting up laboratories, staff rooms, toilets, etc.

Now, all government schools have functional drinking water facility, separate toilets for girls and boys, electricity connection and computer facilities in 88.82% schools.

To check the **dropout rate**, the government introduced the 'Chunauti' scheme under which students are divided into groups on the basis of their learning abilities and offered 'special classes' in the government schools for students with poor learning outcomes.

- b) **Fee Regulation: Fee collected by private schools** was also regulated by a government panel in order to see that there is no excessive profiteering by the private schools.

- c) **Happiness curriculum:** The Delhi government also launched a "**happiness curriculum**" in state-run schools. The curriculum, taught to around eight lakh students from nursery up to Class 8 of all Delhi government schools, involves a "happiness period" of 45 minutes. The **philosophy** behind happiness curriculum is that **self-aware, sensitive and emotionally mature children are far more successful in life owing to their ability to manage** stress, anxiety, trust and relationships with their family and friends.

The Happiness curriculum focusses on

developing self-awareness and mindfulness by being aware of ones own emotions,

learning and understanding expectations in relationships, developing empathy,

ensuring healthy relationships with family, peers & teachers,

making children to communicate effectively and express themselves freely and creatively, and inculcating skill of critical thinking & inquiry through mindfulness activities, thought provoking stories, reflective activities self-expression, etc.

2. Health:

To ensure that primary healthcare facility is available in the neighborhood, the Government opened more than 300 Mohalla clinics (primary health centres) which provide **free doctor consultation** and **free medicines**.

The clinics, functional on all days except Sunday, provide services like basic medical care for common illnesses like fever, diarrhoea, skin problems, respiratory problems, first aid for injuries and burns, dressing and management of minor wounds and referral services. It also allows 212 types of lab tests by the empaneled laboratories.

The Government has set a target of opening 1000 mohalla clinics in Delhi.

3. Welfare Policies:

Electricity:

The AAP Government is providing free electricity of up to 200 units for domestic consumers. Earlier, people used to pay Rs 622 for 200 units of electricity. Now, 14 lakh consumers who are consuming less than 200 units of electricity are receiving zero bills (There are around 48 lakh domestic consumers in the national capital). In addition, people consuming electricity between 201 units and 400 units are eligible to avail 50 per cent subsidy from the government.

Water:

The AAP Government is also providing 20,000 litres of free water per month for every household.

Public Transport:

Public transport in buses has been made free for women. The Government announced free transport for women both in buses and Delhi metro but it did not get approval for the metro from the Union Government which is also a stakeholder. Hence, the Government launched the free transport facility in buses for the present.

In addition, marshals have been deployed in buses to ensure safety of women in government buses.

Free Wifi Internet Facilities:

The Government also launched Wifi hotspots to provide free internet in Delhi.

4. Adoption of Soft Hindutva:

Though there are different definitions on what exactly is Hindutva, it is generally seen as a hardline political ideology of establishing Hindu political supremacy.

To tackle the campaign of the main opposition party, the BJP, which focussed mobilising votes on the basis of religion (Hindutva), the Aam Aadmi Party leadership also adopted soft hindutva by visiting hindu places of worship, reciting Hanuman Chalisa, etc.

Though this approach of AAP has come under criticism for deviating from secular values, this is also seen as a pragmatic step by the AAP to counter the BJP from mobilising votes on the basis of religion.

The party also promised to include deshbhakti (patriotism) in school curriculum.

5. Lack of strong local leadership in the opposition:

There was no popular Chief Ministerial candidate in Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), the main opposition party, which could match the stature of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. Arvind Kejriwal exploited this by challenging the opposition parties to name a chief ministerial candidate who can engage with him in public debates on the development and governance of Delhi. But, the opposition parties went to the elections without a face as a Chief Minister candidate. This also worked in favour of Arvind Kejriwal

6. Campaign strategy of Aam Aadmi Party:

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) also adopted a clever strategy of being silent and not getting drawn into debates on controversial issues like Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) (on which there are continuing sit in protests at Shaheen Bagh) and focussed its campaign on development and welfare policies (schools, mohalla clinics, free electricity, subsidised water supply, etc.) being implemented by the Government.

On the other hand, BJP largely focussed its campaign on polarising voters by picking up controversial issues like Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, and implementation of National Population Register (NPR).

But, voters also made a clear distinction between parliamentary elections and assembly elections. In the 2019 General elections to the Lok Sabha, the BJP won all the 7 MP seats. The AAP stood in third place in 5 out of 7 MP Seats. But, in the assembly elections, the endorsed the leadership of Arvind Kejriwal.

Election Manifesto Promises:

In the 2020 Election Manifesto, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) party promised

- 24-hour electricity,
- continuous piped drinking water supply,
- building of houses for slum dwellers,
- extending free travel, which is now only for women, to students.
- doorstep delivery of ration,
- spoken English classes and patriotism curriculum in Delhi schools.
- a pilot project to allow markets to open 24 hours in commercial areas.
- free pilgrimage to 10 lakh senior citizens,
- reducing pollution by one-third,
- widen Delhi's Metro network to 500 km,
- develop the Yamuna riverside.
- an amnesty scheme for pending value-added tax (VAT) cases, and
- recognition of Bhojpuri and making efforts for its inclusion in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, and
- passage of Delhi Jan Lokpal Bill.

JUDICIARY

Independence of Judiciary:

SC Bar Association Condemns Justice Mishra's Praise of Prime Minister

- Delivering an address at the 'International Judicial Conference 2020' on February 22, 2020, sitting Supreme Court Judge Arun Mishra, who is also **one of the five senior-most judges of the Supreme Court, praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi** as 'internationally acclaimed visionary and a versatile genius who thinks globally and acts locally'.
- The Judge's open praise for the Prime Minister came under criticism as it raises **serious questions** about the **independence** of the **judiciary**. In many cases, the Government itself is a litigant. Hence, a Judge is expected to be independent of the Executive in his/her conduct.

SC Bar Association Condemns Justice Mishra's Remarks:

- The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA), an association of practising lawyers of the Supreme Court of India, passed a resolution strongly condemning Justice Arun Mishra's praise of Prime Minister Narendra Modi stating that such statements "**reflect poorly on the independence of the judiciary**".

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- It stated that **independence of judiciary is the basic structure of the Constitution of India** and that such independence be **preserved in letter and spirit**.
 - The resolution also called upon the Honourable Judges not to make such statements in future, nor show any proximity or closeness to the Executive.

Public Confidence Diminishes : Bar Association of India:

- Bar Association of India also, in a statement signed by its president Lalit Bhasin, stated that Justice Mishra's remarks diminished the confidence of the public as the top court's **judges are expected to decide cases against the government** while **upholding constitutional principles**. The praise for Prime Minister Modi sent a **wrong message to the public**, it stated.
- Bar Association of India is a Federation of the Supreme Court, High Court, District Court and other local Bar Associations, Law Societies in India, and the Society of Indian Law Firms (SILF). It is a voluntary body cumulatively representing the entire legal profession in India.

Supreme Court Judgements on Independence of Judges:

- Many judgements of the Supreme Court also emphasised the importance of independence of judges.
- **1993:** A Constitution Bench, in the Second Judges Appointment Case, declared: "Only those persons should be considered fit for appointment as Judges of the superior judiciary who combine the attributes essential for making an able, independent, and fearless judge".
- **1995:** In a case in 1995, C. Ravichandran Iyer v. Justice A.M. Bhattacharjee & Ors., the Supreme Court stated that for a judge "the standard of conduct is higher than that expected of layman". "The **Judges of higher echelons**, therefore, should not be mere men of clay with all the frailties and foibles, **human failings** and **weak character** which may be found in those in other walks of life'. 'They should not be susceptible to any pressure, economic, political or any sort'.
- **1997: "The Restatement of Values of Judicial Life" adopted by Supreme Court:**

In 1997, the full court of Supreme Court adopted a charter "The Restatement of Values of Judicial Life"

The Charter which is a "**complete code of judicial ethics**" categorically declares 'A **Judge should practise a degree of aloofness consistent with the dignity of his office**".

It also states "**Every Judge must at all times be conscious** that he is under the public gaze and there should be no act or omission by him which is unbecoming of the high office he occupies and the public esteem in which the office is held."

Law Commission:

22nd Law Commission to be Constituted

On February 19, 2020, the Union Government approved setting up of 22nd Law Commission of India for a period of three years.

What is Law Commission?

- The Law Commission of India is a **non-statutory body** constituted by the Government of India from time to time.
- The Commission was originally constituted in 1955. And, it is re-constituted every three years.

What are the Functions of Law Commission:

The Law Commission of India will

- identify laws which are no longer needed or relevant and can be immediately repealed;
- examine the existing laws in the light of Directive Principles of State Policy and suggest ways of improvement and reform and also suggest such legislations as might be necessary to implement the Directive Principles and to attain the objectives set out in the Preamble of the Constitution;

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- consider and convey to the Government its views on any subject relating to law and judicial administration that may be specifically referred to it by the Government through Ministry of Law and Justice;
 - take all such measures as may be necessary to harness law and the legal process in the service of the poor; and
 - revise the Central Acts of general importance so as to simplify them and remove anomalies, ambiguities and inequities;

Before finalizing its recommendations, the Commission will consult the nodal Ministry/ Department (s) and such other stakeholders as the Commission may deem necessary for the purpose.

Composition of Law Commission:

Law Commission will consist of

- a full-time Chairperson;
- four full-time Members (including Member-Secretary);
- Secretary, Department of Legal Affairs as ex-officio Member;
- Secretary, Legislative Department as ex officio Member; and
- not more than five part-time Members.

SOCIAL SECTOR

HEALTH:

Universal Health Coverage:

Public Financing Must for Universal Health Coverage: Dr. Srinath Reddy

- Delivering a memorial lecture on Dr.V.Chandramouli, on the theme 'Universal health Coverage: India's Journey Must Benefit from Global Learnings', in Hyderabad on February 17, 2020, Dr.K.Srinath Reddy, President, Public Health Foundation of India, stated that **primary health care is the corner stone of Universal Health Care (UHC) and it can be ignored at our own peril.**
- He stated that governments should give priority for primary health care. More so when **non-communicable diseases were on the rise imposing a huge pressure on secondary and tertiary hospitals and financial burden for the patients.**
- He stated that in India about **63% of deaths were due to Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and more importantly people in their productive mid-life were succumbing to NCDs was a major concern.**
- He stated that **seven per cent of India's population was pushed into poverty by unaffordable health care expenditure.**
- **Early detection of life style diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure at Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and their management could prevent people from developing complications requiring treatment at tertiary hospitals.**

Mismatch Between Advocacy and spending:

- Dr. Reddy also stated that there is a **mismatch between public advocacy on health and budgetary allocations. Public health management aims at efficiency and equity not profit**, he said.
- Dr. Reddy said that **public financing was critical if country wanted to provide universal health coverage and sufficient public spending on health would ensure financial protection.**
- He said India could learn more from Asean countries like **Japan and Thailand** which achieved good life expectancy after introducing **Universal Health Care (UHC)** in 1961 and 2002 respectively.

Need for Balance:

- Dr. Reddy also stated that there is a need to strike a balance among the view points of **political leaders, health professionals and administrators** on 'providing **cost-effective universal health care for all**' to provide people **better access** to **quality medical care** at **reasonable cost**.
- He stated that while political leaders are keen on **population coverage at the cost of quality, health professionals** seek **best service packages** and **administrators** focus on **cost coverage and fiscal prudence**.

Public Spending on Health care:

- Public spending on health care is very low in India. It stands at 1.5 per cent of GDP (2019-20). The Government has set a target of spending at least 2.5 per cent of GDP on public health by 2025.
- Low public spending on health leads high out of pocket expenditure on health by people which is one of the biggest reasons for people falling into poverty in India.
- As per the latest National Health Accounts (NHA) 2016-17, the out of pocket expenditure (OoPE) as a percentage of total health expenditure was 58.7 per cent in 2016-17.

Measures Taken:

- NITI Aayog has proposed **higher taxes on tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy food** in order to revamp the public and preventive health system.

- **Health and Wellness Centres:**

In 2018, the Government announced that nearly 1.5 lakh health and wellness centres would be set up under Ayushman Bharat.

- The mandate of these centres is preventive health, screening, and community-based management of basic health problems.

- **Health Insurance to the Poor:**

The Government also launched **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya (PM-JAY)** which provides **free health insurance cover to the 10.74 crore poor families ((approximately 50 crore beneficiaries) with up to Rs. 5 lakhs per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization.**

What is Universal Health Coverage?

- According to World Health Organisation (WHO), Universal health coverage is defined as ensuring that all people have access to needed health services (including prevention, promotion, treatment, rehabilitation and palliation) of sufficient quality, and ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user the financial hardship.

Regulation of Medical Devices:

Medical Devices to be Treated as Drugs

- On February 11, 2020, the Union Government issued a notification stating that from April 1, 2020 all medical devices sold in the country would be **treated as drugs** and **would be regulated under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act of 1940.**

The Health Ministry took this decision after consultation with the Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB), the apex decision making body on technical matters related to drugs.

Objective is

- to ensure that **all imported as well locally made medical devices meet certain quality standards.**

The government decided in this regard in the wake of recent case of Johnson & Johnson (J&J) hip implants which left many people permanently disabled due to the faulty device.

Present status:

- At present, **only 23 medical devices have been classified as drugs and are the only ones that are regulated.**
- The **rest are sold in the market without any particular standards governing these.**
- Imported medical devices are given approval in India if they have US FDA (Food and Drug Administration) approval or approval from the European Medicines Agency of European Union.
- Of these 23 medical devices, only a few like cardiac stents, orthopaedic knee implants, and intrauterine devices have been **brought under price control.**

Medical Devices (Amendment) Rules, 2020:

- In a separate notification, the Health Ministry also issued Medical Devices (Amendment) Rules, 2020 which would also come in force from April 1, 2020.
- It says that the **medical devices shall be registered** with the Central Licensing Authority through an identified online portal. The portal will be established by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO). Such registration is voluntary for a period of 18 months, after which it will be mandatory.
- The manufacturer of a medical device shall upload the information relating to that medical device for registration on the "Online System for Medical Devices" established by the CDSCO.
- Importers too will be required to do the same.
- Central Licensing Authority may verify the documents at any point of time and investigate quality or safety related failure or complaints.
- It can also cancel the license of a manufacturer if it finds lapses.

Medical Devices Import Dependence:

- While India boasts of robust drugs and vaccine manufacturing sectors, **medical devices are primarily import-dependent.**
- **80-90 per cent of the medical devices are imported.**
- The top five countries from where medical devices were imported included the **US, Germany, China, Netherlands and Singapore.**
- In 2017-18, the export of drugs and vaccines touched \$17.27 billion, while 80 per cent of medical devices were imported.
- Imports of medical devices in 2018-19 were Rs 38,837.28 crore. Exports were worth Rs 12,748.8 crore.
- Though India has an estimated 900-1000 domestic medical devices manufacturers, only 15 companies have a turnover of above Rs 200 crore.
- More than 80 per cent of domestic manufacturers are in the small scale sector with a turnover of less than Rs 10 crore.

Measures Taken to encourage domestic manufacturing of Medical Devices:

- In 2015, the government recognised medical devices as **a key sector of the Make in India initiative.**
- It allowed **100 per cent foreign direct investment (FDI)** under the automatic route.
- The **inverted customs duty structure** whereby imports of raw material incurred higher import duty than finished products was corrected.
- The government has also funded the establishment of clusters such as the Andhra Pradesh MedTech to help create the much-needed infrastructure.

The Kalam Institute of Health Technology, entirely funded by Department of Biotechnology, became India's first institute dedicated to medical technology.

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- The National Health Policy 2017 envisages that domestically sourced components must account for 25-50 per cent of the cost of medical devices in order to qualify for public procurement tenders.
 - Currently, most medical device imports attract a basic customs duty of 7.5 percent. In 2020-21 Budget, the Union Government imposed health cess of 5 per cent.

With an additional 5 percent cess, the revised customs duty becomes **12.5 percent**, in addition to the education cess levied on importers.

Sanitation:

Cabinet Approves Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) Phase-II

On February 19, 2020, the Union Government approved the Phase II of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) [SBM (G)].

Focus Areas of Phase II of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) **will be on Open Defecation Free Plus (ODF Plus)**. ODF Plus includes

- a) Sustainability in the abolition of Open Defecation and ensuring that everyone uses a toilet, and
- b) Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM).

Implementation Period:

- From 2020-21 to 2024-25.

Fund Allocation:

- Rs. 1,40,881 crores.

Convergence of Funds:

- This will be a novel model of convergence between different verticals of financing.
- Rs.52,497 crore will be allocated from the budget of Drinking Water and Sanitation
- Remaining amount will be dovetailed from the funds being released under **15th Finance Commission, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)**, and **revenue generation models particularly for solid and liquid waste management.**

Incentives:

- Rs.12,000/- would be provided for construction of Individual Household Toilet (IHHL) to the newly emerging eligible households.
- **Financial assistance to the Gram Panchayats (GPs)** for construction of Community Managed Sanitary Complex (CMSC) at village level has been increased from Rs.2 lakh to **Rs.3 lakh per CMSC.**
- Funding norms for Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM) have been changed to per capita basis in place of no. of households

Funding Pattern:

- The fund sharing pattern between **Centre and States** will be
90:10 for North-Eastern States and Himalayan States and UT of J&K;
60:40 for other States; and
100:0 for other Union Territories.

Monitoring of Progress:

- The Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM) will be monitored on the basis of output-outcome indicators for four key areas:
 - a) plastic waste management,
 - b) bio-degradable solid waste management (including animal waste management),

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- c) greywater management (household waste water generated through bathroom sinks, showers, tubs, and washing machines) and
 - d) fecal sludge management.

Progress under Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) Phase 1:

- The rural sanitation coverage in the country at the time of launch of SBM (G) on **October 2, 2014** was **38.7%**.
- More than 10 crore individual toilets have been constructed since the launch of the mission.
- As a result, rural areas in all the States have declared themselves **Open Defecation Free (ODF)** as on 2nd October, 2019.
- The Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS) has, however, advised all the States to reconfirm that there are no rural households that still do not have access to a toilet, and provide the necessary support to any such identified households to build individual household toilets in order to ensure that no one is left behind under the programme.

Impact of Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) Phase II:

Implementation of **Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) Phase II** will lead to

- effective handling of solid and liquid waste management problem in rural India, and
- substantial improvement in the health of the villagers in the country.
- Construction of household toilets and community toilets, as well as infrastructure for Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM) such as compost pits, soak pits, waste stabilisation ponds, material recovery facilities, etc. will also **generate employment opportunities in rural areas.**

SOCIAL ISSUES

Communal Violence in Delhi

- 46 people were killed and more than 250 injured in the communal violence in north east Delhi which began on February 23, 2020 due to clashes between anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and pro-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protestors.
- The riots are the worst since the 1984 anti-sikh riots in Delhi.

Extent of Damage:

- Extensive damage was done to the private and public property.
- Houses, schools, mosques, private shops, vehicles were set on fire by the mobs. A Petrol bunk was also set on fire. Local criminals and anti-social elements took advantage of the situation and looted shops.
- Those killed in the violence include both Muslims and Hindus. Many families abandoned their homes and fled for safety.
- **Areas affected by Violence:** Seelampur, Jaffrabad, Brahmpuri, Maujpur, Kardampuri, Karawal Nagar, Chand Bagh, Babarpur, Gokulpuri and Shivpuri in north east Delhi. Northeast Delhi has almost 30 per cent Muslim population while the overall Muslim population is 13 per cent in Delhi.

Reasons for the Clashes:

1. Immediate Trigger:

Around 500 women started a sit-in protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) on the road below the Jaffrabad metro station. BJP leader Kapil Sharma led pro-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protests and issued an ultimatum to the Delhi Police to clear the Jaffrabad and Chand Bagh streets of the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act protestors. Police tried to get the roads opened but protestors refused. This led to stone pelting between anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and pro-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protestors.

2. Hate Speeches:

Communal tension has been building up since the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in December 2019. The Act proposed citizenship to members of six religious communities - Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian - from three countries - Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Muslims have been excluded. There have been violent and peaceful protests since the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

Peaceful sit-in protests led by Muslim women are going on since the passage of the CAA in Shaheen Bagh in Delhi. These protests got wide support from Muslims and some non-Muslims.

However, these protests are being seen as anti-national by some of the members of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) like Anurag Thakur (Minister of State for Finance), Parvesh Sharma (BJP MP), Kapil Mishra (BJP leader) and Abhay Verma (BJP leader) delivered provocative speeches during the recent Delhi Assembly election campaigning like protestors are traitors who should be shot, and Shaheen Bagh would be cleaned with an hour if BJP is voted to power. The BJP party distanced from the provocative speeches of its leaders but it did not take any disciplinary action.

2. Lack of Professionalism of Police:

- The professionalism of police was under question as they failed to act quickly after the initial flare up of tensions, and bring the situation under control.
- Police failed to act on intelligence inputs. Police received more than 13,000 calls to the helpline but did not act quickly and deploy adequate in the riot hit areas.
- In spite of provocative speeches delivered by BJP leaders, police failed to take any action on them.

Even the Delhi High Court, while dealing with a petition moved by human rights activist Harsh Mander who sought an independent enquiry into the incidents of violence, questioned the police for not filing cases against the BJP leaders despite availability of video evidence on their provocative speeches.

Measures Taken by the Government:

- Delhi government will provide an ex gratia of Rs. 10 lakh to families of those who lost their lives in the violence.
- Rs. 5 lakh each was announced for those sustaining permanent damage, and Rs. 2 lakh and Rs. 20,000 respectively for those with serious and minor injuries.
- Delhi Government will also pay for the treatment of those injured in case they are admitted at private hospitals
- Delhi government also set up nine shelters for the riot-affected people.
- It also began distributing Rs 25,000 in cash as immediate relief to those whose houses have been burnt in the violence.
- Two Special Investigation Teams have been set up to investigate the incidence of violence. 167 FIRs have been filed and over 885 suspects have been detained. Thirty-six cases have been registered under the Arms Act. 13 cases for provocative social media posts on various sites such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

What are the reasons for protests against Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)??

- There is opposition from intellectuals as well as Muslims to the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

Intellectuals:

Some intellectuals cutting across religion are against Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) for the following reasons.

- a) **Religion should not be the basis for granting citizenship.** Such an approach is **against constitutional values of equality and secularism.**
- b) Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) also **polarises the society on religious grounds** and hence is a **threat to plural culture of India.**

Opposition from Muslims:

Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) does not deal with Muslims in India. Yet, they are opposing the CAA for the following reasons.

- Muslims see CAA as discriminatory law meant to segregate and target Muslims.
- The Government also has a proposal to conduct National Register of Citizens (NRC) of India to identify and deport illegal migrants in the country. Under NRC, individuals would have to prove that they are the genuine citizens of India by producing documentary proof through a family tree and supporting documents like ownership of land by their ancestors, names of their ancestors in the voter list, etc. One such exercise conducted in Assam to identify illegal migrants in Assam led to the exclusion of 19 lakh people. These excluded people have been given an opportunity to appeal against the exclusion in Foreigners' Tribunal
- Muslims in India have apprehension that if such an exercise is conducted under NRC poor members of the Muslim Community would be subject to hardships. Poor people cannot provide documentary evidence to prove that they are genuine citizens. They fear that they may be put in detention centres if they do not prove that they are genuine citizens of India. Hence, they are protesting against both the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC) of India. The Government did not state that it would not conduct NRC exercise, it only stated that a decision has not been taken yet.

Women (Gender Equality):

Supreme Court Verdict on Permanent Commission for Women in the Indian Army

- On February 17, 2020, the Supreme Court ordered the government to grant permanent commission to women officers in the **Army's noncombat support units on par with their male counterparts** including consideration for command appointments as any discrimination in this regard violates Right to Equality which is a Fundamental Right under Article 14 of the Indian Constitution.
- The Delhi High Court had in 2010 ordered the government to grant permanent commission to all short-service commission officers while upholding a policy decision to keep out women from the combat units.

The government challenged this ruling in the Supreme Court and did not implement the decision in the interim despite there being no stay on it. It now has to implement the policy within three months.

Brief History of Women in Indian Army: From Special Entry to Permanent Commission:

- 1992** : Women were allowed into Army through **Women Special Entry Scheme (WSES)** for a period of five years fixed tenure in 10 support branches of the Indian Army.
- 1996** : Government extended the five year period to ten years by a notification.
- 2005** : This ten year period was further extended up to fourteen years. Serving WSES officers were given an option to move to the **Short Service Commission (SSC)** scheme or to continue under the erstwhile WSES. But, **women officers were not considered for permanent commission in the above posts.**
- 2006** : **Non consideration** of women for **permanent commission** was challenged in Delhi High Court.
- 2010** : Delhi High Court ordered the government to grant the opportunity of permanent commission to all short-service commission women officers. This was challenged by the Union Government in Supreme Court.
- 2019** : While the case is pending in the Supreme Court, the Union Government issued a notification granting of Permanent Commission to SSC Women Officers in eight support branches in addition to the two granted earlier.

However, the Government states that on the grant of PC, women officers will be employed “**in various staf appointments only**” in accordance with their qualifications, professional experience, specialisation and not **command appointments. Women officers objected to non being considered for command appointments.**

2020 : Supreme Court ruled that an **absolute prohibition of women SSC officers to obtain** anything but staff appointments **does not fulfill the purpose of granting PCs** as a means of **career advancement in the Army** and **such prohibition** is also **against Article 14 (Equality)** of the **Indian Constitution.**

But it may be noted that even now, women are allowed only in support branches of the Indian Army and not combat braches.

Background:

How Recruitment Takes Place for Indian Army?

- Army Act of 1950 generally bars employment of women in regular army but
- gives **discretion** to the **Union Government** to recruit women by issuing an official notification specifying the corps, departments, and branches to which women officers may be recruited.
- Accordingly, in 1992 through **Women Special Entry Scheme (WSES)**, the Union Government issued two notifications to allow women officers in the following corps, departments, and branches of the Indian Army.

1. Corps of Signals (responsible for military communication),
2. Intelligence Corps (responsible for gathering, analysing and disseminating military intelligence),
3. Corps of Engineers (provide mobility to own forces by constructing bridges, tracks and helipads while denying the same to the enemy by creating obstacles such as laying mine-fields and demolition of bridges.,
4. Corps of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering,
5. Regiment of Artillery,
6. Judge Advocate General's Department (administration of military justice),
7. Army Education Corps,
8. Army Ordnance Corps (Central Ammunition Depots and Material Management);
9. Army Service Corps (Food Scientists and Catering Officers); and
10. Army Postal Service.

- Women recruited to the above posts in 1992 were commissioned initially for 5 years (i.e. 1997). But, in 1996, the Government extended the period to ten years by a notification.
- After 10 years, they would be released from the service and not granted permanent commission.
- In 2005, the Union Government issued an another notification under which

The tenure of **Short Service Commission (SSC)** male officers and Women Special Entry Scheme (WSES) officers was extended upto fourteen years.

The WSES would cease to apply and in future women officers would be inducted through SSC in the corps/services notified by the notifications of 1992.

Serving WSES officers were given an option to move to the new **Short Service Commission (SSC)** scheme or to continue under the erstwhile WSES.

- But, **women officers** were **not considered** for **permanent commission** in the **above posts.**

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- This was challenged in the Delhi High Court in 2006.
 - In 2010, the Delhi High Court ordered the government to grant the opportunity of permanent commission to all short-service commission women officers.
 - The Union Government appealed against the orders of the Delhi High Court in the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court gave the present verdict after a decade i.e. February 2020.

What is Short Service Commission and Permanent Commission?

- Candidates who are selected as officers in the Indian Army under Short Service Commission are granted a service of 14 years i.e. for an initial period of 10 years extendable by a further period of 4 years.
- Officers who are willing to continue to serve in the Army after the expiry of period of ten years in Short Service Commission may, if eligible and suitable in all respects, be considered for the grant of permanent commission in the 10th year of their Short Service Commission in accordance with the relevant rules. Permanent Commission means a career in the Army till retirement age.
- Those SSC officers, who are not selected for grant of PC but are otherwise considered fit and suitable, will be given options to continue for a total period of 14 years (including the initial tenure of 10 years) after which they will be released from the Army.

Why the Government Did Not Give Permanent Commission to Women Officers?

The following arguments were put forward by the Government to deny permanent commission to women officers.

Exigencies of Service:

1. The profession of arms is not only a profession but a "way of life", which often requires **sacrifices and commitment beyond the call of duty** by the entire family of service personnel involving **separation, frequent transfers** affecting **education of children** and **career prospects of the spouse**. As a consequence, it is a **greater challenge for Women Officers** to meet these hazards of service, owing to their **prolonged absence during pregnancy, motherhood and domestic obligations towards their children and families**, especially when both husband and wife happen to be service officers.

2. Physical Capabilities:

Inherent physiological differences between men and women preclude equal physical performances resulting in lower physical standards and hence the physical capacity of Women officers remain a challenge for command of units.

3. Composition of Rank and File:

Most of the countries whose armies have women as officers also have women in their rank and file with the **exception of India, Pakistan and Turkey**.

An **all-male environment in a unit would require 'moderated behavior' in the presence of women officers**.

4. Infrastructure:

Infrastructure in forward/border areas is very basic with minimal facilities for habitat and hygiene. Officers and men have to put up with primitive/make shift arrangements. Manning forward posts and small detachments with restricted communication facilities leads to a feeling of isolation. Deployment of Women Officers in such situations or places in the current circumstances is not advisable.

5. Prisoner of War:

- There also dangers of a woman officer being captured by the enemy and becoming a prisoner of war.

What are the Objections of Women Officers?

The women officers in their submission stated that they are facing following problems due to non granting of Permanent Commission

-
- Lack of opportunity for professional growth, and
 - lack of pensionary benefits as they have to leave the service at the end of 14 years (20 years of service is needed for officers in the army to receive pension benefits).

On the arguments of the Government for not granting Permanent Commission, they submitted the following arguments.

1. It is time that the **organisation starts accepting women as equal colleagues** along with men for unit cohesion.
2. **Battlefield Scenario:** The Army **considers women officers as an effective workforce until they complete fourteen years of service.** The nature of duties is similar to male officers. Hence, the contention advanced by the Union of India with respect to battlefield scenarios lacks substance.
3. **Physical Capabilities:** The nature of duty which a commissioned officer is required to perform while serving in the Corps is defined in the Army Manuals of these services. Both women and male officers who were commissioned in these services perform similar duties, undergo similar professional courses and training and are posted to all field/peace postings according to their profiles. There is no separate charter of duties for women officers or SSC commissioned male officers and PC male officers.

Revised Stand of Union Government:

While the case was pending in Supreme Court, the Government, on February 25, 2019, issued a notification under which

- it granted of Permanent Commission to SSC Women Officers in the eight arms/services in Indian Army viz. Signals, Engineers, Army Aviation, Army Air Defence, Electronics and Mechanical Engineers (EME), Army Service Corps, Army Ordinance Corps and Intelligence. Two streams of Judge Advocate General (JAG) and Army Education Corps (AEC) were granted Permanent Commission earlier in 2011. Thus women will be considered for grant of Permanent Commission in all the ten streams in which they are currently being commissioned as SSC Officers.
- On the completion of three years and before completing four years of commissioned service, they will be required to exercise an option for the grant of PC and the choice of specialisation.
- SSC women officers will be considered for the grant of PC based on the availability of vacancies and subject to willingness, suitability, performance, medical fitness and competitive merit.
- On the grant of PC, women officers will be employed “**in various staff appointments only**” in accordance with their qualifications, professional experience, specialisation, if any, and organisational requirements and not **command appointments**.

What are Command Appointments?

- These are positions which are higher in the chain of command in the military hierarchy i.e beginning from the rank of **Colonel to higher level.**
- They involve commanding large number of people or assets under them. A command position is given only to those officers who clear their promotion Board based on an efficiency metric.

Hierarchy of positions in the Indian Army (From top to Bottom)

Field Marshal

General

Lieutenant General

Major General

Brigadier

Colonel

Lieutenant Colonel

Major

Captain

Lieutenant

Objections to Revised Stand of the Government?

- Women officers objected to the restricting appointments to only 'staff positions' as it **affects their career progression** and limits the opportunities for promotion.
- They treated this condition as **discrimination** as this is not applicable to their male counterparts.

They stated that a command position is given only to those officers who clear their promotion Board based on an efficiency metric. Male officers (SSC or PC) who are not found fit for promotion to the rank of Colonel are accommodated in the staff appointments. **Similarly, if women officers are found fit and deserving for the rank of Colonel, they may be promoted to the next rank** or be allowed to continue in the manner other non-empaneled PC male officers are presently allowed.

Final Verdict of the Supreme Court:

- Seventy years after the birth of a post-colonial independent state, there is still a need for change in attitudes and mindsets to recognize the commitment to the values of the Constitution (Right to Equality).
- The reasons given by the Government are **based on sex stereotypes** premised on assumptions about socially ascribed roles of gender which discriminate against women. **It assumes that domestic obligations rest solely on women.**

- Gender Bias:

To deny the grant of Permanent Commission (PC) to women officers on the ground that this would upset the "peculiar dynamics" in a unit casts an undue burden on women officers and shows the need for change in mindsets to bring about true equality in the Army.

- Entrenching Gender Beliefs:

If society holds **strong beliefs about gender roles** - that **men** are **socially dominant, physically powerful** and the **breadwinners** of the **family** and that **women** are **weak and physically submissive**, and **primarily caretakers** confined to a domestic atmosphere - it is **unlikely that there would be a change in the mindsets about constitutional values** - which every institution in the nation is bound to uphold and facilitate.

- Physical Limitations:

Women officers of the Indian Army have brought laurels to the force. To cast aspersion on their abilities on the ground of gender is an affront not only to their dignity as women but to the dignity of the members of the Indian Army - men and women - who serve as equal citizens in a common mission.

Command Appointments:

- **An absolute ban on women seeking command appointments** would not conform with the **guarantee of equality under Article 14**. Implicit in the guarantee of equality is that where the action of the State does differentiate between two classes of persons, it does not differentiate them in an **unreasonable or irrational manner**.
- An **absolute prohibition of women SSC officers to obtain** anything but staff appointments evidently **does not fulfill the purpose of granting PCs** as a means of **career advancement in the Army**.
- Whether a particular candidate should or should not be granted a command assignment is a matter for the competent authority to consider having regard to all the exigencies of service, performance and organisational requirements.

-
- Command assignments are not automatic for men SSC officers who are granted PC and would not be automatic for women either. The absolute exclusion of women from all others except staff assignments is **undefensible**. If the army has cogent reasons for excluding women from a particular criteria or command appointment, it may provide them to the relevant authorities and if necessary, to future courts.
 - However, such a justification must take place on a case-to-case basis, in light of the requirements and exigencies of a particular appointment. The **blanket non consideration of women for command appointments** absent an individuated justification by the Army cannot be sustained in law.

Reservations:

Job Reservations and Quotas in Promotion Cannot be Claimed As a Fundamental Right; States Have an Option Whether to Provide Reservations or Not: Supreme Court

A two-judge Supreme Court bench consisting of Justices L. Nageswara Rao and Hemant Gupta ruled on February 7, 2020 that

1. **no individual could claim reservation in promotions as a fundamental right, and**
2. **the court could not issue a mandamus directing State governments to provide reservation.**

Background:

- The State of Uttarakhand is not implementing reservation in promotions in the Public Works Department of Uttarakhand.
- The employees of the Public Works Department of Uttarakhand filed petitions in the High Court demanding reservation in promotions.
- Uttarakhand High Court order directed the State Government to collect data on the adequacy or inadequacy of representation of SC/ST candidates in the State's services.
- The State Government challenged the judgement of the Uttarakhand High Court in Supreme Court.

Judgement of Supreme Court:

Constitutional Provisions regarding Reservations only Enabling Provisions:

- Citing Constitution Bench precedents that had settled the law, the Supreme Court stated that **Articles 16 (4) and 16 (4-A) of the Constitution did not confer individuals with a fundamental right to claim reservations in promotion.**
- The provisions of Article 16 **empower the State to make reservation in matters of appointment and promotion** in favour of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes only **"if in the opinion of the State they are not adequately represented in the services of the State"**.

"The inadequacy of representation is a matter within the subjective satisfaction of the State. Thus, the **State government has discretion** "to consider providing reservations, if the circumstances so warrant".

However, **if a State wishes to exercise its discretion and make reservation in promotions**, it has **to first collect quantifiable data showing inadequacy of representation** of a class or community in public services.

If the decision of the State government to provide SC/ST reservation in promotion to a particular public post is challenged, it would have to place the data and prove before the court that reservation was necessary and does not affect the efficiency of administration.

- The Supreme Court stated that in the present case since it is the decision of Uttarakhand Government to not extend reservation, the question whether its representation in the services is inadequate is irrelevant.

Present Reservations in Employment:

To ensure social justice to those sections of society that are oppressed by caste discrimination, the Central Government provides

- 15 per cent for the members of the Scheduled Castes,
- 7.5 per cent for the members of the Scheduled Tribes, and
- 27 per cent for the members of the Other Backward Classes
- Recently, the Union Government provided 10 per cent for economically backward classes to ensure that they are not left behind in the society due to poverty.

Reservation in States:

- State Governments also provide reservations keeping in view the proportion of their population in the respective States/UTs subject to a limit of 27%, and total reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs should not exceed 50%.
- A few states like Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra provide reservation in excess of 50 per cent.

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FOREIGN RELATIONS

Indo-USA:

US President Donald Trump Visits India

Highlights of the visit of President of United States (US) Mr. Donald Trump to India from February 24 to 25, 2020 are the following.

1. Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership

Both the countries decided to take the bilateral relationship to the level of '**Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership**'.

2. Defence Deal:

India and US signed a defence deal worth over US \$ 3 billion. Under the deal, India would purchase **24 Seahawk Multi-Role Helicopters for the Navy** (at a cost of US \$ 2.6 billion), and **6 attack helicopters** for the Army (at a cost of US \$ 800 million).

3. Joint fight Against International Crimes:

Both the countries decided to jointly fight international crimes like human trafficking, terrorism and violent extremism, drug-trafficking and crimes in cyberspace.

4. Trade Deal:

Both the countries agreed to conclude the ongoing negotiations and finalise phase one of a comprehensive bilateral trade agreement.

5. Energy Cooperation:

President Donald Trump stated that India could increase its imports of natural gas and coking coal (used in steel industry) from US.

6. Nuclear Energy:

Prime Minister Modi and President Trump encouraged the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited and Westinghouse Electric Company to finalize the techno-commercial offer for the construction of six nuclear reactors in India at the earliest date.

7. Strategic Convergence in the Indo-Pacific

Both the countries stated that a close partnership between India and the United States is central to a free, open, inclusive, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. This cooperation is underpinned by recognition of ASEAN centrality;

support for safety and freedom of navigation,

unimpeded lawful commerce; and

advocacy for peaceful resolution of maritime disputes in accordance with international law.

The United States **appreciated India for providing security**, as well as **developmental and humanitarian assistance** in the Indian Ocean Region.

India and the United States remain committed to sustainable, transparent, quality infrastructure development in the Indo Pacific region. U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) has announced a \$600 million financing facility for renewable energy projects in India, and has also decided to establish a permanent presence in India this year (2020).

8. Partnership for Global Leadership

UN Reforms:

- Prime Minister Modi and President Trump committed to working together to strengthen and reform the United Nations and other international organizations.
- President Trump reaffirmed the support of the United States for India's permanent membership on a reformed U.N. Security Council. He also reaffirmed U.S. support for India's entry to the Nuclear Suppliers Group without any delay.

Blue Dot Network:

- India and the United States stated that to **contain the build-up of sovereign debt in developing and low-income countries**, it is important to ensure **responsible, transparent, and sustainable financing practices** for borrowers and creditors. Prime Minister Modi and President Trump expressed interest in the concept of the **Blue Dot Network**, a **multi-stakeholder initiative** that will bring **governments, the private sector, and civil society** together to **promote high-quality trusted standards for global infrastructure development**.

Advancing Education, Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship of Women:

- Prime Minister Modi and President Trump noted the **importance of advancing education, economic empowerment and entrepreneurship of women** and girls through finance, training, and mentorship initiatives, as well as measures to promote their full and free participation in the economy, in line with the United States' Women's Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) Initiative and the Government of India's 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' programme.

Terrorism:

- Prime Minister Modi and President Trump denounced any use of terrorist proxies and strongly condemned cross-border terrorism in all its forms.
- They called on Pakistan to ensure that no territory under its control is used to launch terrorist attacks, and to expeditiously bring to justice the perpetrators of such attacks, including 26/11 Mumbai and Pathankot. They called for concerted action against all terrorist groups including Al-Qa'ida, ISIS, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Hizb-ul Mujahideen, the Haqqani Network, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Dawood-Company, and all their affiliates.

Additional Information:

Visits of US Presidents to India:

- India US bilateral relations were not strong until 2000.
- Only three US Presidents visited India in the first 50 years after India's independence i.e.

Dwight D. Eisenhower (1959);

Richard Nixon (1969); and

Jimmy Carter (1978).

Reasons:

- The reasons are the **India's non alignment foreign policy** i.e **not to be part of any military blocks** the then superpowers United States or Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and **India's adoption of Socialist model for economy and closer relationship with USSR** which adopted communism.
- The **collapse of USSR** and **launch of economic reforms** (Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation - LPG) in the 1990's changed the context of India - US relations.

Relations since 2000:

- Since the beginning of 2000, 4 US Presidents visited India i.e.
Bill Clinton (2000);

George W Bush (2006);

Barack Obama (2015); and

Donald Trump (2020)

- At present both the countries have strong partnership, in sectors like **bilateral trade, investments, defence, energy, etc.**
- **Bilateral Trade:** The U.S. is **India's largest trading partner, goods and services** combined. It stood at **US\$ 142 billion in 2018**. In 1995, total two-way trade, goods and services combined, was just **\$11 billion**.
- **Indian Students in US:** U.S. is one of the most favoured destinations by Indian students for higher education. More than 200,000 Indian students are currently pursuing various courses in the U.S.A.
- **Indian Diaspora:** The number of Indians and Indian Americans in the U.S. is estimated at around 4 million (40 lakhs). It includes a large number of **professionals, entrepreneurs and educationists** with considerable and increasing influence in U.S. polity, economy and the society.

India - USA Trade Relations

- The U.S.A is India's largest trading partner.
- **Goods and Services trade** combined stood at **US\$ 142 billion in 2018**.

Merchandise Trade:

- Two-way merchandise trade stood at around US\$ 87 billion in 2018.

Of this, India's goods exports to the U.S. were valued at US\$ 54 billion and India's goods imports from the U.S. were valued at US\$ 33 billion.

Services Trade:

- The India- U.S. trade in services stood at US\$ 54.5 billion.
- Of this, India's services exports to the U.S. were valued at US\$ 28.7 billion and India's imports of services from U.S. were valued at US \$ 25.8 billion.

Investments:

- Direct investments of U.S.A in India are estimated at about US\$ 44.5 billion whereas Indian FDI in U.S. is estimated at US\$ 18 billion.

Trade Issues Between India and US:

- US has **trade deficit with India** in both **goods and services**.
- U.S. goods and services trade with India totaled an estimated \$142.6 billion in 2018.

Exports (Goods and Services) : \$ 58.7 billion

Imports (Goods and Services) : \$ 83.9 billion

Deficit : \$ 25.2 billion

Goods and Services Trade Break up (2018):

	Goods Trade	Services Trade
Exports	\$ 33.5 billion	\$ 25.2 billion
Imports	\$ 54.3 billion	\$ 29.6 billion
Deficit	\$20.8 billion	\$ 4.4 billion

Trade Friction:

- As part of 'America First Policy', US President Donald Trump is working to reduce US trade deficit with major trading partners like China, Canada, Japan, South Korea, India, etc.
- Over all, US has **\$800 billion trade deficits with other countries.**

US Concerns regarding India:

- America's average tariff on imports from India is a little over 3%, while India average duties on imports from US are over 13%.
- President Trump also criticised India as tariff king stating that India levies 100 per cent tariff on products from US like Harley Davidson motorcycles. After Trumps criticism India reduced import duty to 50 per cent on Harley Davidson motorcycles but he still called this unacceptable.

Measures Taken by US:

- Duties on Steel and Aluminium:

In March 2018, the Trump administration slapped "national security" tariffs of 25% on \$761-million worth of steel and of 10% on \$382-million of aluminium imported from India.

- Removal of U.S. Generalised System of Preferences (GSP):

- In June 2019, **US removed India from Generalised System of Preferences (GSP)** which is given to **developing countries** and **allows certain exports to US at zero tariffs.**

India exported goods worth \$6.2 billion in 2018 under the GSP. Chemicals, gems and jewellery, engineering and textiles are among the Indian industrial sectors that benefited from the GSP.

Retaliation by India:

- **India retaliated by imposing higher tariffs on 28 U.S.** products including **almonds, walnuts, cashews, apples, pulses, wheat, and peas.**

Levy on walnuts in shell was increased to 120 per cent, against 30 per cent earlier; levy on apples was increased to 75 per cent import duty, up from 50 per cent.

Shelled almonds imported from the US was levied an import duty of Rs. 120/kg against Rs. 100/kg earlier.

Among pulses, the duty on chickpeas, bengal gram (chana) and masur dal has been raised to 70 per cent from 30 per cent, while that on lentils has been hiked to 40 per cent from 30 per cent.

- However, since then both the countries are also working to resolve the trade deficit between both the countries.

US Demands:

- US President Donald Trump wants India to address trade deficit by increasing market access to India.
- Both the countries are working on a trade deal to address the problem but it is yet to be concluded.
- US is asking for opening up Indian market for US Dairy and agricultural products, removal of price controls on medical devices such as coronary stents and knee implants, increasing FDI limit on sectors like insurance (currently 49 per cent), banking (currently 74 per cent), multi brand retail (currently 51 per cent), addressing intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) concerns like piracy of software, film, and music.
- India has concerns regarding allowing dairy products because of the religious sentiments in India. US uses animal protein (internal organs, blood meal) as feedstock for dairy animals which is not the case in India. India stated that it would open its market for US dairy products, provided veterinary officials certify that the source animal of dairy products was not raised on feed made of bovine extracts.

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- Similarly, India has imposed price controls on medical devices to make them affordable and prevent excessive profiting.

Measures by taken by India:

India has been trying to address the trade deficit by significantly increasing

1. energy imports, and
2. defence equipment purchases from US.

Energy Imports:

- India has started importing crude and LNG from the U.S. from 2017 and 2018 respectively. The total value of crude and LNG imports from the U.S. was US\$ 6.7 billion (2018). India's energy imports from the U.S. are likely reach \$10 billion in 2019.

In 2019, India increased its intake of oil from the U.S. to about 1,84,000 barrels per day (bpd) which was four times more than in 2018, and up from zero imports just four years ago.

Defence Purchases:

During the visit of Donald Trump, both the countries signed a defence deal worth over US \$ 3 billion.

'Blue Dot Network' Initiative

During the visit of US President Donald Trump's visit to India, Prime Minister Modi and President Trump expressed interest in the concept of the Blue Dot Network.

What is Blue Dot Network?

- It is a multi-stakeholder initiative that will bring governments, the private sector, and civil society.
- It will certify infrastructure and development projects.
- It was jointly launched by the **US, Japan and Australia.**

US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), Japan (Japanese Bank for International Cooperation) and **Australia** (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) launched the initiative in November 2019 on the sidelines of the 35th ASEAN Summit in Thailand.

Why Blue Dot Network?

- This proposal is being seen as a measure to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which was launched over six years ago.
- Under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China is building a network of infrastructure projects in around 70 countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa.
- But the China's BRI has come under criticism for **lack of transparency in selection of projects and opaqueness in financing.** It has been accused of picking up **unviable and unsustainable projects** and **pushing the countries in to debt trap.** Countries like **Sri Lanka, and Maldives** are examples in this regard.

China's government and state-owned enterprises finance the projects completely from concrete and steel to workers and cash. This approach has been labelled as "debt-trap diplomacy".

- Hence, US, Japan and Australia launched this initiative to **contain the build-up of sovereign debt in developing and low-income countries** by ensuring responsible, transparent, and sustainable financing practices for borrowers and creditors.
- Under this initiative, **infrastructure projects will be vetted and approved by the network** to meet certain global universal standards of excellence.
- The projects that are approved will get a "Blue Dot" that will be able to attract private capital easily and thus help developing and emerging economies to take up only sound infrastructure projects.

Difference Between Belt and Road Initiative and Blue Dot Network Initiative?

- **Belt and Road Initiative** involves direct financing by China.
- **Blue Dot Network Initiative** is not a direct financing initiative. It only **vetts infrastructure projects** and **certifies its viability and sustainability**. Such projects certified by Blue Dot Network are expected attract private capital easily.
- The US wants India to play an “active role” in the Blue Dot Network Initiative.

United States of America Drops India from Developing Countries List

- On February 10, 2020, the United States released the amended **list of developing and least-developed countries that are eligible for preferential treatment with respect to Countervailing duty (CVD) investigations**.
- **India** has been **dropped** from the list of developing countries in the amended list.
- Along with India, countries like Brazil, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, etc. have also been dropped from the list of developing countries.
- The new lists consist of 36 developing countries and 44 least developed countries.

What is Preferential Treatment with Respect to Countervailing Duty (CVD) Investigations?

- Under the WTO Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM Agreement), developing and least developed countries are entitled to special treatment for purposes of countervailing measures.

Countervailing measures refer to actions importing countries can take to counter the effects of subsidies by exporting countries.

Specifically, imports from such Members are subject to **different thresholds for purposes of determining whether countervailable subsidies** are **de minimis (too minor to merit consideration)** and **whether import volumes are negligible**.

- **De Minimis Thresholds:**

Developed importing country must terminate a Countervailing Duty (CVD) investigation if the amount of the subsidy is de minimis, which normally is defined as less than 1 percent ad valorem (value of the goods).

However, for a **developing Member country** the **de minimis standard is 2 percent or less**.

- **Negligible Import Volumes:**

Similarly, developed importing country must terminate a Countervailing Duty (CVD) investigation if the volume of subsidized imports from a country is negligible.

Imports from an individual country normally are considered negligible **if they are less than 3 percent of total imports of a product into the United States**.

Imports are not considered negligible if the aggregate volume of imports from all countries whose individual volumes are less than 3 percent but **collectively exceeds 7 percent of all such merchandise**.

However, imports from a **developing or least-developed Member** are considered negligible if the import volume is **less than 4 percent of total imports**.

They are not considered negligible only if the aggregate volume of imports from countries whose individual volumes are less than 4 percent but **collectively exceeds 9 percent of all such merchandise**.

How Countries have been dropped from Developing countries List by US?

- The United States followed the following criteria for dropping countries from developing countries list.
- A country fulfilling any of the following criteria would not be considered as a developing country and instead will be considered as a developed country.

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1. Per capita Gross National Income (GNI) threshold of more than \$12,375. The World Bank classifies any country with more than \$12,375 Per capita Gross National Income (GNI) as developed country.
 2. 0.5 per cent share of world trade. The US considers this as significant share in trade. (Earlier it was 2 per cent).
 3. Membership in
 - a) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
 - b) European Union (EU), and
 - c) Group of Twenty (G20).

Membership in above organisations indicates that the country is developed.

4. Any country which had not declared itself as a developing country during its accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

India Case:

- India has been dropped from the developing countries list as its share is more than 0.5 per cent in World Trade (India's share is around 1.7 per cent), and it is also a member of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Why the U.S Developed Criteria for Classification of Developing Countries?

- The World Trade Organisation (WTO) Agreements which deal with trade among countries do not define what is a developed country, developing country, and least developed country.
- But this classification plays an important role in international trade and availing concessions in tariffs.
- Under WTO, least developed countries are considered as those expressly classified by the UN. There is no such classification of developing countries.
- Any country can "self-designate" itself as a developing country under the WTO rules.
- The US believes that using this flexibility, countries like India, China, and Brazil are unfairly benefiting in the global trade through special treatment even though they have witnessed significant growth in the last few decades and became significant economic players in the global trade.
- Hence, the U.S. developed its own criteria for designation of developing countries.

How Countries Lost Developing Countries Status in the US List:

1. Due to Share of More than 0.5 per cent in World Trade:

- Brazil, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Viet Nam.

2. Due to Membership of EU:

- Bulgaria and Romania

3. Due to Membership in OECD:

- Colombia and Costa Rica
- Argentina, Brazil, India, Indonesia, and South Africa

4. Countries which have not declared themselves as developing countries under World Trade Organisation:

- Albania, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Ukraine.

India Dropped as Beneficiary of Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) program:

- This is the second instance in less than a year, when the U.S. has refused to extend to India the benefits enjoyed by developing countries under the multilateral trade rules.

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- In June 2019, **US dropped India from designation as a beneficiary developing country** under the **Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) program**.
 - Under the program, the US allows duty free import of around 3500 products from developing countries.
 - India was the largest beneficiary of the GSP programme in 2017-18 with USD 5.7 billion exports to the US under duty-free status. Goods worth \$6.35 billion were exported under GSP in 2018-19

Additional Information:

The new lists of 36 developing countries and 44 least developed countries released by the U.S on February 10, 2020 which are eligible for preferential treatment with respect to Countervailing duty (CVD) investigations.

Least Developed Countries in US List:

- Afghanistan; Angola; Bangladesh; Benin; Burkina Faso; Burundi; Cambodia; Central African Republic; Chad; Coˆte d'Ivoire; Democratic Republic of the Congo; Djibouti; Gambia; Ghana; Guinea; Guinea-Bissau; Haiti; Honduras; Kenya; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Lesotho; Liberia; Madagascar; Malawi; Mali; Mauritania; Mozambique; Myanmar; Nepal; Nicaragua; Niger; Nigeria; Pakistan; Rwanda; Senegal; Sierra Leone; Solomon Islands; Tanzania; Togo; Uganda; Vanuatu; Yemen; Zambia; Zimbabwe.

Developing Countries in US List:

- Bolivia; Botswana; Cabo Verde; Cameroon; Cuba; Dominica; Dominican Republic; Ecuador; Egypt; El Salvador; Eswatini; Fiji; Gabon; Grenada; Guatemala; Guyana; Jamaica; Jordan; Maldives; Mauritius; Mongolia; Morocco; Namibia; Papua New Guinea; Paraguay; Peru; Philippines; St. Lucia; St. Vincent & Grenadines; Samoa; Sri Lanka; Suriname; Tajikistan; Tonga; Tunisia; Venezuela.

Indo-Myanmar:

President of Myanmar Visits India

Highlights:

- President of Myanmar, Mr. U Win Myint, paid a State Visit to India from February 26 to 29, 2020 during which agreements were signed on cooperation in prevention of trafficking in persons, implementation of 'Quick Impact Projects' with India's grants, combating timber trafficking, conservation of tigers and other wildlife, health care, communication, etc.

Details:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President U Win Myint discussed a wide range of bilateral, regional and international issues of common interest.
- They welcomed the synergies between Myanmar's independent, active and non-aligned foreign policy and India's '**Act East**' and '**Neighbourhood First**' policies, and **reaffirmed their commitments to further strengthening partnership, explore new avenues of cooperation** in order to expand bilateral relations for the mutual benefit of the two countries and peoples.

Boundary Issues:

- Both sides **reiterated their mutual respect for the already demarcated portion** of the boundary between the two countries and affirmed their commitments to **settle pending issues through the existing bilateral mechanisms**, such as the Joint Boundary Working Group Meeting.

Energy Sector:

- Both sides recognized the mutual benefit of greater integration in the energy sector between the two countries and agreed to cooperate in petroleum products namely refining, stockpiling, blending and retail through a Government-to-Government Memorandum of Understanding.
- Both sides welcomed **investments by Indian oil and gas Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) in Myanmar's upstream sector (exploration and production)** and agreed that efforts would be made to **explore opportunities to export to India a portion of the output from such projects where investments** have been made by Indian oil and gas PSUs.

Economic Cooperation:

- Both sides agreed to work together to enable the launch of India's RuPay Card in Myanmar at the earliest which facilitates **tourism** and **business** from **India**.

Border Haats :

Border Haats are trade markets in border areas where goods are traded without any duties. These are held once or twice in a week. Trade is carried in local currencies (of two countries) or on barter basis. Such markets help people living in border areas to gain livelihood opportunities.

Emphasizing the importance of promoting the well-being of the people in the remote areas across the borders of the two countries, both sides agreed to commence the establishment of the border haats.

Connectivity Projects:

- The two sides emphasized the **centrality of connectivity in their relationship** and reaffirmed their commitments to expedite the completion of the various India-funded projects presently underway in Myanmar, with Myanmar's continued support and facilitation towards their execution.
- Welcoming the opening of the **two land border crossing points** at Tamu-Moreh and Rihkhawdar-Zowkhawthar as international border gates, they noted the need to further facilitate the easy movement of passenger and cargo traffic by streamlining procedures and expeditiously developing infrastructure.

India reiterated its commitment towards the construction of the modern **Integrated Check Post** as Phase-I at Tamu, Myanmar.

Both sides committed to the early conclusion of discussions on the pending bilateral Motor Vehicles Agreement to facilitate cross border movement of vehicles. In this context, both sides welcomed the MoU between their respective private operators to launch a Coordinated Bus Service between Imphal and Mandalay by April 7, 2020.

India's Development Assistance:

- Both sides also expressed satisfaction at the success of the Myanmar-India Border Area Development Programmes in providing infrastructure and socio-economic development in Chin State and Naga Self-Administered Region through the Indian grant-in-aid projects. Under this, 43 schools, 18 health centres and 51 bridges and roads have been constructed in the above areas over the last three years.
- Both sides acknowledged with satisfaction that 29 additional projects under the 4th year's tranche of assistance of US\$ 5 million, will be implemented in 2020-21.
- Both leaders took note of the developments related to the Sittwe Port and the Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project. They welcomed the appointment of a Port Operator to operate and maintain the Sittwe Port and Paletwa Inland Water Transport Terminal and associated facilities. Once operational, this port will contribute to the economic development of the region and benefit the local people.
- Both sides also reaffirmed their commitment to the early completion of the Paletwa-Zorinpui road – the final leg of the Kaladan project. Once completed, the road will connect Sittwe Port to North-East India, generating more traffic for the Port.

Capacity Building and Training:

- Myanmar appreciated India's assistance in the area of capacity building and training.
- Both sides agreed to jointly make flagship projects, such as Myanmar Institute of Information and Technology (MIIT) and Advanced Centre for Agricultural Research and Education (ACARE), sustainable on a long-term basis.

Rohingyas:

- India reiterated its commitment to support Myanmar's efforts for promoting peace, stability and the socioeconomic development in Rakhine State through the Rakhine State Development Programme. Ethnic clashes between Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine state has led to displacement of Rohingya Muslims who fled to Bangladesh and India.

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- Myanmar appreciated India's provision of 250 pre-fabricated houses and relief materials for displaced persons in northern Rakhine in 2019.
 - Both sides agreed to expedite the implementation of a set of 12 projects under the second phase of the Rakhine State Development Programme.

Terrorism:

- Recognizing the threat posed by terrorism, both sides agreed to cooperate in countering terrorist groups and their actions.

Both sides condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and **emphasized the need for stronger international partnership in countering terrorism and violent extremism**, including through increased sharing of information and intelligence. They agreed to enhance bilateral cooperation in this regard.

India-Africa

1st India Africa Defence Ministers Conclave Held in Lucknow

- The first ever '**India - Africa Defence Ministers' Conclave - 2020**' was held at Lucknow, India on February 6, 2020. The conclave, inaugurated by Defence Minister Mr. Rajnath Singh, was attended by Defence Ministers and representatives from 38 African countries.
- Defence Minister, Mr. Rajnath Singh, stated that India is willing to provide Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs), Fast Interceptor Boats, Night Vision Goggles (NVGs), Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), Dornier aircraft, and arms and ammunition to African countries.
- He stated that India's security relations with Africa have centered on providing training to African Service personnel, participation in United Nations peacekeeping efforts on the continent, and maritime cooperation.
- He stressed the importance of safe secure seas which were a pre-requisite for development of Blue (ocean) economy in the region.
- He said that India recognized the common security challenges in the form of transnational crimes of piracy, trafficking of drugs, arms and humans and illegal fishing. In the light of these challenges, there is a need for stronger partnerships for capacity building, information sharing and surveillance, the Defence Minister stated.
- He said India's increased engagement in the region has enabled it to be the first responders in providing humanitarian assistance in times of crisis like cyclone Idai in Mozambique and more recently, and cyclone Diane in Madagascar.
- A Joint Declaration - "**Lucknow Declaration**", was adopted at the end of the conclave of 38 African countries

Details:

- African countries recalled India's contribution to defence and security in the African continent through setting up of Defence Academies and Colleges in Nigeria, Ethiopia and Tanzania; deployment of training teams in several African countries including Botswana, Namibia, Uganda, Lesotho, Zambia, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Tanzania; provision of defence equipment and ammunition and Defence Training Programmes; and contribution of **Indian defence forces** in **humanitarian assistance** and **disaster relief operations** such as during cyclone IDAI in Mozambique in 2019, and evacuation of stranded persons of 41 countries through Djibouti on 2018.

Peace and Security:

- The Leaders recognised that **peace and security** are a **key priority for both India and African countries**.

Silence The Guns: Creating conducive conditions for African Development” is the **African Union’s theme** of the year (2020). This **vision** is to achieve ‘**a conflict-free Africa, prevent genocide, make peace a reality for all and rid the continent of wars, violent conflicts, human rights violations, and humanitarian disasters**’.

Both sides agreed to explore possibilities of further cooperation in peace and security including support for initiatives such as **Silence the guns by 2020, the African Standby Force, and Maritime Security**.

India has participated in almost all the peacekeeping operations in Africa, along with many other African countries.

The Leaders recalled **joint efforts of India and Africa** in **peacekeeping and anti-piracy operations**. They agreed to further strengthen our cooperation in enhancing peacekeeping capacity and peace-building efforts including support to the African Standby Force (ASF) and through courses, such as those at the centre for UN Peacekeeping (CUNPK) in New Delhi, and by other Peacekeeping Training Centres in Africa.

Common Security Challenges:

- The Leaders **recognised the common security challenges** such as **terrorism and extremism, piracy, organised crime** including **human trafficking, drug trafficking, weapon smuggling** and others and agreed to collaborate to tackle them together.

Terrorism:

The Leaders condemned the growing threat of **terrorism** and acknowledged that it constitutes **a major threat to peace and security in the region**. They urged all countries to take resolute action in rooting out terrorism, terrorist safe havens and infrastructure, disrupting terrorist networks and eliminating financing channels and halting cross-border movement of terrorists.

- They agreed to further enhance cooperation and coordination between Africa and India to combat terrorism and combat transnational crime.

Blue Economy:

- The Leaders recognized the importance of the oceans and seas to the livelihoods of people and stated that maritime security is a pre-requisite for the development of Blue (ocean) economy.
- They agreed to **increase cooperation in** securing sea lanes of communication, preventing maritime crimes, disasters, piracy, illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing through **sharing of information and surveillance**.

RC REDDY IAS STUDY CIRCLE

INTERNATIONAL POLITY

Afghanistan:

U.S. and Taliban Sign Peace Deal

- On February 29, 2020, the United States of America (USA) signed a peace deal with the Taliban insurgents in Doha, Qatar.

Who are Taliban?

- Taliban is a **radical political and religious sunni Islamic group** of predominantly **Pashtun tribesmen** in Afghanistan. (The word **Taliban** means "**students**" in the **Pashto language**).
- It **ruled Afghanistan** from **1996 to 2001**.
- The **Taliban group** was **overthrown** in November 2001 by US and British forces, alongside Afghan fighters from a group called the Northern Alliance.

Why Did the USA Invade Afghanistan?

- Coordinated terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 killed nearly 3,000 people in the USA.
- Militants associated with the Islamic extremist group al Qaeda hijacked four airplanes and carried out suicide attacks against targets in the United States. Two of the planes were flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, a third plane hit the Pentagon just outside Washington, D.C., and the fourth plane crashed in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.
- Osama Bin Laden, the head of Islamist terror group al-Qaeda, was quickly identified as the man responsible.

(The hijackers were Islamic terrorists from Saudi Arabia and several other Arab nations. They were reportedly financed by Osama bin Laden of the al Qaeda terrorist organization of Saudi Arabia and they were allegedly acting in retaliation for America's support of Israel, its involvement in the 1991 Persian Gulf War (international conflict that was triggered by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait), and its continued military presence in the Middle East.)

- Hence, US military forces invaded Afghanistan in 2001 by launching military operation "**Operation Enduring Freedom**" to dismantle al-Qaeda terrorist organisation and capture its head Osama Bin Laden as he was responsible for the terrorist attacks.

Prior to launching the military operation, the USA and the UN Security Council asked Afghanistan to hand over Osama bin Laden for prosecution. But, the Taliban refused to do so and instead offered to try bin Laden in an Islamic court in Afghanistan. USA did not accept to this proposition.

- Hence, the US began military operation in October 2001 with an aerial bombing of Taliban and al-Qaida installations in Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Konduz and Mazar-e-Sharif.

After the air campaign dismantled the Taliban defenses, the coalition began a ground invasion, with Northern Alliance forces providing most of the troops and the U.S. and other nations giving air and ground support.

- Within a month after the military action began, Taliban officials and their forces retreated from the capital of Kabul. By early December 2001, Kandahar, the last Taliban stronghold, had fallen and Taliban leader **Mullah Mohammed Omar** went into hiding rather than surrender.

What is Northern Alliance?

It is a loose coalition of mujahideen militias of Tajiks and Uzbeks that controlled a section of northern Afghanistan.

There are many ethnic groups in Afghanistan but three are major groups.

Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group with an estimated 42% of the population and reside in the south of Afghanistan bordering Pakistan and Iran, while Tajiks and Uzbeks are concentrated along the northern borders of Afghanistan bordering Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and the Hazaras in the central highlands.)

Developments After the Fall of Taliban:

- A transitional government was set up under Hamid Karzai, leader of the powerful Popalzai tribe of Durrani Pashtuns, in December 2001.
- In 2004, a **Constitution for Afghanistan was adopted** creating a **strong presidential system** intended to unite the country's various ethnic groups
- In the 2004 elections, Karzai became the first democratically elected head of Afghanistan
- However, in 2005, the Taliban gradually regrouped and regained its strength as it had a lot of support in areas around the Pakistani border.
- Taliban began suicide attacks in Kabul on security forces, military bases and schools. In 2015, it seized control over the strategically important city of Kunduz.
- In early 2019, the US and the Taliban began peace talks aimed at finding a solution to the 18-year conflict in Afghanistan.

Why Taliban was able to Regroup and Regain Its Strength?

Taliban was able to regroup and strengthen itself due to following reasons:

1. Taliban generates millions of dollars every a year through the drug trade (opium) which facilitates recruitment of armed cadres.
2. **Support from Pakistan.** Taliban has good ties with the Pakistani military establishment though Pakistan officially denies it. Afghanistan Government publicly blames Pakistan for harbouring Taliban leaders after they were ousted from power Afghanistan in 2001, and allowing safe havens for attacks against international and Afghan forces.

Pakistan was also one of only three countries, along with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which recognised the Taliban when they were in power in Afghanistan.

3. **Withdrawal of US Forces:** The gradual withdrawal of US Forces also led to regrouping of Taliban. The US Force at one time (2011) was around 1,00,000 in Afghanistan. But since then, it was gradually reduced.

What are the Highlights of Peace Deal?

1. Assurance on Not Supporting Terrorism:

Taliban guaranteed that Afghanistan will not be used for terrorist activities.

2. Withdrawal of Foreign Forces:

The US and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Forces have agreed to withdraw all troops within 14 months if the militants uphold the deal.

U.S. troop numbers will be reduced to 8,600 from about 13,000 within 135 days after the signing of the deal.

Further reductions of Western forces will depend on the Taliban adhering to a "reduction in violence".

3. Intra-Afghan negotiations:

The Taliban agreed to start talks with the Afghan government in March 2020.

Throughout the negotiating process, the Taliban had resisted direct talks with the government stating that talks are only possible when foreign forces left the Afghanistan soil.

4. Release of Prisoners:

As a confidence building measure before the start of Intra-Afghan negotiations, United States would work with both the Taliban and Afghanistan Government for the release of around 5000 Taliban prisoners by Afghanistan Government and 1000 Afghan security forces held by Taliban.

5. Review of Sanctions:

The United States would also review sanctions imposed on the key members of the Taliban and consider removing these sanctions by August 27, 2020.

What are the Challenges Ahead?

1. Many issues remain to be worked out during intra-Afghan negotiations, including sharing power between the Government and Taliban, disarming and reintegrating Taliban fighters into society, and determining the future of the country's democratic institutions and constitution.
2. The peace process could be **complicated** by a **weak central government**, afflicted by ethnic, sectarian, and tribal differences.

The country's 2019 election was marred by many problems: only 1.8 million out of 9 million registered voters cast ballots. Incumbent President Ashraf Ghani was announced the winner and assumed office. On the other hand, his challenger, Abdullah Abdullah, contested the results and formed his own government on March 9, 2020

3. The peace deal also offers no protections for the country's women, who fear that their hard-won rights could be lost.

During the rule of Taliban, women were barred from attending school, holding jobs, taking part in politics and leaving their homes without male escorts. Violators were flogged in public, beaten or stoned to death.

After the fall of Taliban, women have entered universities and the workplace. Women are holding seats in Parliament and thousands are serving as teachers, doctors and even police officers.

It remains to be seen whether if these rights and freedoms of women are protected.

Why did USA Sign Peace Deal with Talibans?

1. Huge economic and human costs,
2. stalemate in the war, and
3. increased strength of the Taliban

are reasons for the signing of the peace deal by USA with the Taliban insurgents.

- The Afghan war imposed **huge economic** and **human costs** (loss of lives) for the USA.
- It is estimated to have cost USA around \$2-trillion.
- Besides more than 3,500 American and coalition soldiers killed.

More than 100,000 Afghan civilians have been killed or injured over the past decade, according to the United Nations.

- After all these years of involvement, the Taliban has only gained strength and is at its strongest moment since the U.S. launched the war in 2001. The insurgents control or contest the government control in half of the country.
- Hence, the war had entered into a **stalemate** long ago and the U.S.A failed to turn it around despite both American Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump having sent additional troops. Faced with no other way, the U.S. wants to leave Afghanistan.

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- So, the US initiated dialogue with the Taliban in early 2019 though the United Nations designated it as a terrorist organisation and the US itself has imposed sanctions on members of the Taliban.
 - But, in its desperate bid to exit the Afghan war, the U.S has practically abandoned the Kabul government and millions of Afghans, who do not support the Taliban's strict religious laws.

During their rule, the Taliban introduced brutal punishments like public executions for convicted murderers and adulterers, and amputations for those found guilty of theft. Men were made to grow beards and women had to wear the all-covering burka. Television, music and cinema were also banned.

Pakistan:

Pakistan Retained in Grey List of FATF

- On February 21, 2020, Pakistan was retained on the "grey list" of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) for another four months for failure to check terror funding.

What Does Grey List Mean?

- If a country is in the Grey list, it means

It is a **safe haven for terror funding and money laundering**, and

it is a warning to the country to tackle these issues.

Black listing:

If a country is not actively tackling money laundering or terror funding even after repeated calls for action from FATF, it is blacklisted.

Thus, countries which are non cooperative in tackling money laundering or terror funding are put in Black list.

It is also a call to global financial institutions IMF, World Bank, ADB, etc. to give special attention to business relations and transactions with the country (in black list).

- FATF was given a stern warning to Pakistan to complete the 27-point action plan it has been given by June 2020 or face being put on the "black list".

So far only two countries have been blacklisted: **Iran** and **North Korea**.

- Some of the actions that Pakistan should take are the following to avoid being put under black list are:

Demonstrating effective implementation of targeted financial sanctions (supported by a comprehensive legal obligation) against all designated terrorists and those acting for or on their behalf, including

preventing the raising and moving of funds,

identifying and freezing assets (movable and immovable), and

prohibiting access to funds and financial services.

- Just a week before FATF meeting, an anti-terrorism court in Pakistan sentenced Hafiz Saeed, the mastermind of the 2008 Mumbai attack and founder of LeT, to 11 years jail term in two terror financing cases.

- India has been maintaining that Pakistan extends regular support to terror groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), and Hizbul Mujahideen, whose prime target is India, and has urged FATF to take action against Pakistan.

- Pakistan stated that there are 16 UN-designated terrorists in Pakistan, of which seven are dead. Out of the nine who are alive, seven had applied to the UN for exemption from financial and travel restrictions. It also informed FATF that JeM founder Masood Azhar and his family are "missing".

What is FATF?

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) was established in July 1989 by the Group of Seven (G-7) Summit in Paris.

- **Functions:**

To examine and develop measures to combat

1. money laundering,
 2. terrorist financing, and
 3. financing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
- It sets standards and promotes effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing, and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
 - **Members : 37 countries and two organisations** namely European Commission and Gulf Cooperation Council.

- **Countries:**

Argentina; Australia; Austria; Belgium; Brazil; Canada; China; Denmark; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Hong Kong; Iceland; India; Ireland; Israel; Italy; Japan; South Korea; Luxembourg; Malaysia; Mexico; Netherlands, New Zealand; Norway; Portugal; Russian Federation; Saudi Arabia; Singapore; South Africa; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; Turkey; United Kingdom; and the United States of America.

RC REDDY IAS STUDY CIRCLE

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

ENVIRONMENT:

Introduction of African Cheetah:

Supreme Court Allows Center to Introduce African Cheetah from Namibia in a Suitable Indian Habitat

Supreme Court of India agreed on January 25, 2020 to allow the introduction of the African Cheetah from Namibia into a suitable Indian habitat after considering the application of the National Tiger Conservation Authority to introduce Cheetahs in India as they have become extinct in the country.

The Supreme Court denied approval earlier in May 2012 to introduce African Cheetah into the Kuno-palpur sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh because

- this would be in **conflict with a project to introduce Asiatic lion from Gir forests of Gujarat** into the same sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh.
- The court also **worried whether the African cheetahs would have favorable climate in the sanctuary.**
- The **African Cheetah was considered a foreign species** and the court believed the limited conservation resources should be used to protect the native lions first.

Under what guidelines did the Supreme Court allow the introduction of African Cheetah to India now?

- **A Supreme Court bench headed by Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde appointed a three-member committee with former Director of Wildlife of India Ranjit Singh, DG of Wildlife of India Dhananjay Mohan, and DIG, Wildlife, Ministry of Environment and Forests to guide the National Tiger Conservation Authority** in the experimental introduction of the African Cheetah into India.
- Chief Justice Bobde also directed the committee to **file a progress report on the status of the project every 4 months.**
- The Supreme court also ordered that **a thorough survey needs to be done to identify the best possible habitat for the Cheetahs.**
- It also directed the NTCA (National Tiger Conservation Authority) to make every effort to help the Namibian Cheetahs to adapt to the Indian conditions.
- NTCA was asked to use its discretion for the actual action of introduction of the animal into a suitable habitat.

What attempts were made earlier to introduce the Asiatic Cheetah in India?

- There are **only 40 Asiatic Cheetahs in Iran currently** and India tried to trade a few to introduce them in India, but first their natural habitat and prey base needed to be restored.
- Conservationists worked to improve Cheetah's prey base like the Indian antelope and Indian gazelle.
- Later **talks with Iran fell apart after the Islamic Revolution of 1979.**
- In **2001 an attempt was made by Lalji Singh the 'father of DNA finger printing'** in India of the CCMB (Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology) to **collect sperm and tissue samples from Asiatic cheetahs in Iran and use an Indian leopard as surrogate mother for the newly cloned cheetah cub but Iran rejected the approach.**

What are the causes for Cheetah's extinction in India?

- Cheetah's **docile nature made it a tamable animal** which was **hunted in large numbers** in the 1800s and 1900s by emperors and rulers of princely states. They were **used to hunt other animals like black bucks as a sport called coursing.**

- **Cheetah's could not be bred in captivity** so the **removal of cheetah cubs from their natural habitat in large numbers led to their extinction too.**
- By the time the British came into India **Cheetah numbers were already dwindling which were recorded to have decreased to around 414 individual animals between 1772 and 1997.**
- **Only one human attack by a Cheetah was recorded** during the **British rule** during a coursing hunt in 1880, the man killed was an agent to the Governor in Vishakhapatnam.
- Though only one such incident took place, the **British still classified cheetahs as 'vermin' (wild animals that are believed to be harmful to crops, farm animals, or game, or which carry disease).**
- The British offered rewards for killing adult Cheetahs and their cubs and this final act led to their extinction in India.
- Though a researcher from the Indian delegation suggested at the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP 14) that desertification as the primary cause for the extinction of Cheetah in India, research and history proves otherwise.

What do wildlife experts think about the experimental introduction of African Cheetah into India?

- **Wild life expert Ranjitsinh who framed India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** is confident that Cheetah can be reintroduced in India and maintains that the Kuno region in Madhya Pradesh appeared to be the most suitable habitat but he believes 10 years have passed since the last survey for the best habitat and there is a **need for reassessment to find the most suitable habitat now.**
- **Conservationist Anish Andheria, president of the Wildlife Conservation Trust** believes that **India is just "not prepared" for the introduction of the African Cheetah.**
- African Cheetahs have a wide range of habitats ranging from dry forest,thick scrub to grasslands and hyper-arid deserts.
- He believes the **habitat at Kuno is a not savannah but is a mix of scrub and woodland which is right for the Asiatic lion but not a cheetah.**
- Another important thing to consider would be **to ensure enough prey base is available for the Cheetahs** and also to consider how it will cope with other predators such as wolves, jackals, leopards or dholes (the Indian wild dog).
- Anish Andheria believes a smaller number of Cheetahs should be introduced as trial runs in private game reserves first.

What are the differences between Cheetah and Leopard?

- Cheetahs and Leopards are often confused with each other. Here are a few differences between them.

Cheetah	Leopard
Their Coat or fur has spots	Leopards have rosettes like patches
Have a distinguishable tearline on their face	Do not have tearline on their face
Adult male cheetah weighs around 54-56 kgs	Adult male leopard weighs around 60-70 kgs
It is the fastest mammal because of slender and more streamlined body.	Leopard is more muscular which makes it stronger.
Is diurnal- more active during the day	Is nocturnal-active at night
Have non-retractable paws which gives more traction	Have retractable claws used to attack prey and climb trees.
Cheetah prefers open lands where other predators like lions and leopards can be seen.	Leopards prefer treetops

Ban on RO Water Systems:

Union Environment Ministry Issues Draft Notification Banning Reverse Osmosis(RO) Water filtration Systems

Union Environment Ministry issued a draft notification on February 4, 2020 which proposes to regulate membrane-based-water-filtration systems like Reverse Osmosis filtration systems in areas where the source of water supply meets Bureau of Indian Standards.

What is Bureau of Indian Standards?

The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) is the national Standards Body of India working under Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, Government of India. It is established by the Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 1986 that came into effect on 23 December 1986.

Why a notification to regulate RO water filtration systems?

- Environmental groups in Delhi filed a petition with the National Green Tribunal in March 2019 to ban RO water purification systems in Delhi because of the excessive wastage of potable water.
- The notification to regulate RO(Reverse Osmosis) water systems was released after the National Green Tribunal's directive on November 6,2019 to the Environment Ministry to release a draft notification to ban RO water purification systems in areas where the TDS(Total Dissolved Solids) of the water is less than 500 mg/L as the amount of potable(drinking) water that is disposed as waste during the purification process as 'Reverse Osmosis reject' water is high which is around 3 litres for every 1 litre of water purified.
- RO(Reverse Osmosis) water filters out essential minerals like calcium, zinc and magnesium. RO water purification manufacturers claim to overcome this with 'Post Treatment'.

What are Total Dissolved Solids(TDS)?

- TDS-Total Dissolved Solids represent the total concentration of inorganic salts like calcium, magnesium, potassium and sodium called cations and carbonates, chlorides, sulfates, and nitrates called anions plus the amount of organic matter that is dissolved in the water.

Total dissolved solids are measured in milligrams per litre:

- Freshwater < 1500 mg/L TDS
- Brackish water 1500 to 5000 mg/L TDS
- Saline water > 5000 mg/L TDS

The EPA(Environmental Protection Agency) of USA considers TDS levels of 500 mg/L safe. TDS levels higher than 1000 mg/L are not fit for human consumption.

Elevated levels of TDS, while not necessarily bad, can give water a bitter, salty, or brackish taste. Calcium and magnesium, two minerals commonly found in TDS, can cause water hardness (More calcium and magnesium causes hardness) , scale formation, and staining.

What is National Green Tribunal?

- The National Green Tribunal has been established under The National Green Tribunal Act 2010 for effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources.
- The National Green Tribunal deals with environmental protection cases which hold public agencies responsible to maintain air quality, reduce forest land encroachment, mitigate pollution of rivers, reduce contamination of groundwater and such issues relating to the environment.

What is the current quality of piped water in India?

- In line with the Jal Jeevan Mission, the Prime Minister has committed to providing tap water to the entire country by 2020.
- Department of Consumer Affairs made a recent study through Bureau of Indian Standards on the quality of piped drinking water in India.

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- **The report released in Nov,2019 showed that all samples from Delhi did not comply with BIS's requirements.**
 - All the 10 samples drawn from Mumbai were found to comply with the requirements.
 - In the cities of Hyderabad, Bhubaneswar, Ranchi, Raipur, Amravati and Shimla, one or more samples did not comply with the requirements.
 - None of the samples drawn from 13 of the State Capitals i.e. Chandigarh, Thiruvananthapuram, Patna, Bhopal, Guwahati, Bengaluru, Gandhinagar, Lucknow, Jammu, Jaipur, Dehradun, Chennai, Kolkata complied with the requirements of the Indian Standard.
 - In the third phase, samples from Capital cities of North Eastern States and SmartCities identified by Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs have been drawn and are being tested but the results are yet to be released.
 - In the fourth phase, it is proposed to test samples drawn from all the district headquarters of the country and their testing is planned to be completed by 15th August 2020.
 - **Currently only bottled water companies are required to adhere to BIS standards while piped water supply is not required to adhere to BIS standards.**

State of India's Birds Report:

The State of India's Birds(SoIB) 2020 Assessment

The State of India's Birds Assessment report 2020 was released on **February 18, 2020** at the global conference of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of wild animals at Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

The report assesses the status of 867 Indian birds **using a massive database of information contributed by 15,500 bird watchers over a period of 25 years to the online platform called eBird.com.** Collectively they made 10 million observations.

- **Citizen Science** was used to gather information for this report which is a **form of research where scientists and members of the public work together towards addressing scientific questions.**
- The report is a culmination of a **collaboration between ten research and conservation organizations within the country, spanning both governmental and non-governmental institutions:** Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), Foundation for Ecological Security (FES), National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS-TIFR), Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF), Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON), Wetlands International South Asia (WI-SA), Wildlife Institute of India (WII), and World Wide Fund for Nature India (WWF-India).

Birds of High Conservation Concern:

- Among the 867 Indian bird species researched, **only data for 261 species of birds was adequate to draw conclusions.**
- In all, **101 species are categorised as of High Conservation Concern**, 59 based on their range size and abundance trends, and an additional 42 based on their IUCN Red List status.

What is IUCN Red list?

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

What are the causes for sharp decline in abundance of bird population in India?

- Habitat loss, pesticides, hunting and trapping for pet trade are the main causes for decline in numbers.
- **The Western Ghats- High Shola forest grasslands** showed a **decline in abundance index for 12 endemic species** (birds whose native range is limited to the Indian subcontinent) by 75% since 2000 showing a need to restore the habitat loss of the Shola forest grasslands.
- **Survival of the Nilgiri pipit, Nilgiri Thrush and several Sholakilis** is tied to restoring the **Western ghats-Shola grasslands** where **tea plantations have replaced the grasslands**.
- The once abundant population of endemic and migratory birds in India have shown sharp decline in the last couple of decades mainly due to habitat loss.
- The protection of the **Terai grasslands in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and northeastern states is critical to protect the Hodgson's bushchat a migratory bird from Mongolia**. Terai grasslands harbor the entire population of this bird and therefore call for immediate attention.
- **Terai grasslands** have also been found to be **one of the few habitats** where **Finn's Weaver** is found **an endemic and neglected bird species** whose numbers have **declined drastically in the past 20 years and only 500** are believed to be in India currently with their total global population being just 1000.
- **The Green Munia** which is categorized as **neglected species** was threatened due to trapping for pet trade in the past and is now seen only in parts of Aravallis and North Eastern Ghats which needs to be urgently identified and protected.

House Sparrow and Indian Peafowl:

- The good news is that the **house sparrow** numbers have shown to be stable although the bird has disappeared from major cities.
- **Indian Peafowl or Peacock**, the National bird of India, **has seen an increase in number** as a result of **range expansion into Kerala** and due to the **highest level of protection against poaching** in the country, being placed in the **Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972**.

Abundance trends and Distribution ranges of the birds:

The following are the results of the report categorized into **long term trend, current annual trend (indices that show change in abundance of the birds) and distribution range** as the key indices on which the assessment was done.

- **Long term trend** : The proportional change in frequency of reporting (number of birds reported over a period of time) of a particular bird in 2018 compared to frequency of reporting before the year 2000.
- **Current annual trend** : The average annual change in frequency of reporting of a particular bird during the last 5 years (2014-2018).
- **Distribution range** shows the range of area in which the bird was spotted in the last 5 years.

Long term trend of 261 species of birds:

- Adequate data about the birds was available only for 261 species. Of the 261 species for which long-term trends (over a period of 20 years) could be determined
 - i. of these 52% have declined since the year 2000
 - ii. with 22% declining strongly.
 - iii. In all, 43% of species showed a long-term trend that was stable and 5% showed an increasing trend.

Current Annual trend for 146 species of birds:

- Current annual trends could be estimated for 146 species over a period of 5 years.
 - i. Of these nearly 80% are declining,

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- ii. With almost 50% declining strongly.
 - iii. Just over 6% are stable and 14% increasing.

Distribution range:

- The distribution range size of all but 6 species was estimated.
 - i. Most species (46%) have Moderate range sizes.
 - ii. A further 33% have Large or Very Large range sizes,
 - iii. and 21% have Restricted or Very Restricted range sizes.

Research from the report on 6 different taxonomical categories of birds:

Studying long term and current abundance trends based on the below categories will help to better identify the causes for decline in bird populations.

• **Raptors:**

- Raptors are categorized into generalist, woodland, open and scavenger. **Vulture species** which fall under **scavengers** have shown sharp decline in the past couple of decades mainly due to **poisoning caused by livestock anti-inflammatory drug called diclofenac which was banned in 2008.**
- Vultures are high up in the food chain and are usually the first to get affected due to poisoning from pesticides or drugs used on livestock.

• **Waterbirds:**

- **Migratory shorebirds, gulls and terns** have shown a **sharp decline** calling for **wetlands protection** while ducks and geese and other residents like storks are stable in numbers.

• **Diet Guild:**

- Based on the diet of the birds they are classified into seed eaters, omnivorous, fruit-nectar, invertebrate and carnivorous.
- Among these carnivores like **Eagles, Hawks and Falcons showed the greatest decline in numbers.**

• **Habitat:**

- Based on their habitat, birds are classified into generalist, grasslands/scrub, wetlands and forest. Of these, forest species followed by grasslands have declined the most.
- **The Great Indian Bustard** a grassland species has been marked as **Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List 2019.** Recent studies in Rajasthan revealed that collision with power lines as the greatest threat to these birds.

• **Migratory Status:**

- Birds are classified into **resident, within subcontinent and long-distance migrant birds under migratory status.**
- Among these, **within subcontinent and long-distance migrant birds have shown greater declines.**
- **Indian subcontinent is a major wintering area for long distance migratory birds** as they travel south during winter and live in India during major part of their life cycle so the onus is on India to conserve these species.

• **Endemicity:**

- Endemic birds' native region is limited to a particular geographical location.
- The 12 Western Ghats endemic birds have seen a sharp decline by 75% since 2000 due to loss of habitat-Shola grasslands.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT:

Union Cabinet to Amend Disaster Management Act of 2005

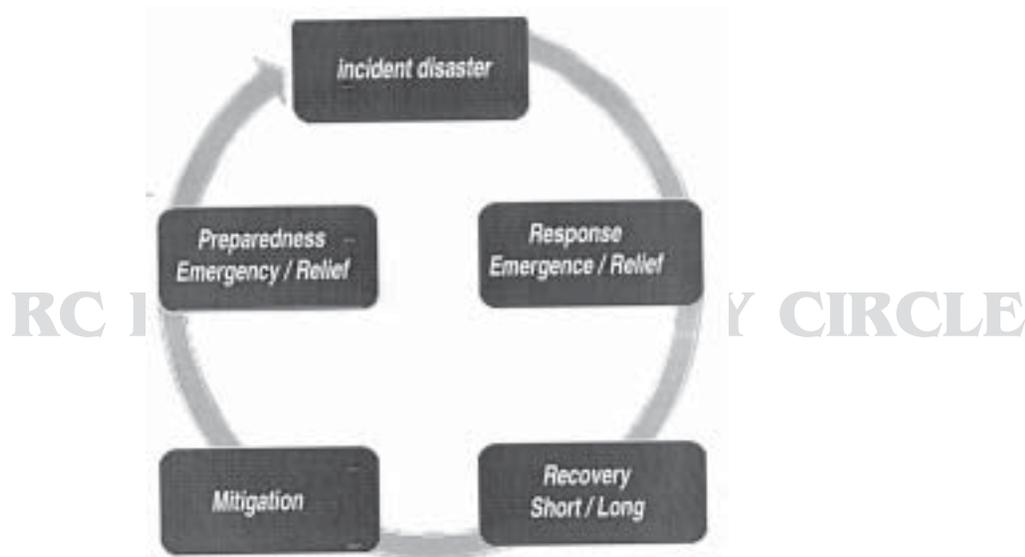
Union Cabinet of India proposed on **February 5, 2020** to amend the Disaster Management Act of 2005 in order to add provisions that address long term recovery after a disaster strikes.

- **Currently the Disaster Management Act** mainly focuses on improving alert systems and preparedness, mitigation, providing immediate relief and protecting infrastructure.

What is the Disaster Management Act 2005?

- Disaster Management Act of 2005 was enacted as a response to the massive calamities that India faced- the **1999 Super Cyclone in Odisha, 2001 Bhuj Earthquake, and 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami.**
- **The National Disaster Management Authority, the State Disaster Management authorities and the District Disaster Management Authorities were mandated under the Act** to implement disaster management plans.
- **National Institute of Disaster Management** was formed to facilitate training on disaster management.
- **Due to the emphasis on early alert systems and preparedness** in the Disaster Management Act 2005, evacuations were carried out after timely warnings which reduced **the number of casualties during disasters.**
- National and State Disaster Management funds created have helped delivery of funds immediately after a disaster.
- **National Disaster Management Plan was chalked out 10 years after the Disaster Management Act was enacted.** The plan did not lay out clear rules about how the rehabilitation and recovery aspects should be dealt with by each department or ministry.
- Only a few states like **Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Odisha** have laid out department wise disaster management plans.

What are the phases of a disaster? What is Long term recovery and why is it important?



Preparedness :

- Includes activities that aim at **preventing casualties, provide immediate response and minimize property damage in the event of a disaster.**

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- It is a **continuous process** for communities as they constantly strive to improve their readiness.
 - Some examples of preparedness activities are: community education and awareness. assessment of community hazards and risks. Identification, recruitment, and training of volunteers and government personnel in disaster response and recovery.
 - Development and possible implementation of evacuation plans.

Response:

- Response covers activities before impact and also covers the period during and immediately following the event.

- There are two phases of response:

1. Emergency
2. Relief

1. Emergency:

- **First responders** in the emergency phase will be local **fire and police departments**, and **search and rescue teams**.
- Evacuation plans may be implemented depending upon the type of disaster. Others who may initially respond include family, neighbours and community-based organizations.
- The emergency response is characterized by activities focusing on the preservation of life.

2. Relief :

- **Basic human needs** are addressed, such as medical services and the provision of food, clothing and temporary shelter.
- Initiation of emotional and spiritual care should begin in this phase and continue throughout the entire recovery process.
- **Basic cleanup of homes, businesses, and streets begins. Electricity and Communications services begin to be restored.**
- People begin moving into temporary housing.
- Human, material and financial resources begin to flow into the community.

Recovery:

- Recovery aims at bringing back a community to a new normal life after a disaster strikes. **It is not just about the restoration of structures, systems and services but about helping individuals and families rebound from their losses and sustain physical, social, economic, psychological well being.**
- It is both short term and long term.
- **Short term recovery** includes completion of emergency and relief programs, restoration of vital life services.
- **Long term recovery includes repairing, rebuilding and relocation of homes, providing financial assistance needed for families to rebound from losses.**
- **Long term recovery also ensures available resources are utilized properly once the initial relief fund starts to decrease.**

Mitigation:

- Mitigation **aims at reducing the severity of a future disaster's effect on a community.**
- Like preparedness, **mitigation is also a continuous process.**

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- After every disaster, the community gets an opportunity to reassess its vulnerabilities and risks and prepare for future disasters.
 - Examples of mitigation activities include relocation of homes and businesses away from high risk areas, building design and construction practices that prepare the community for future disasters.

How can long term recovery be accomplished after a disaster strikes?

- Long term recovery is important to help the communities affected by a disaster to recoup from the physical, economic, social and psychological losses.
- It can be achieved by **integrating long term recovery of a disaster affected community alongside development activities in areas like health care, skill building and livelihood diversification schemes.**
- It is important for all the **state and central ministries involved in development activities to have a comprehensive approach towards long term recovery as part of disaster management plan.**

BIOTECHNOLOGY:

Bio Asia 2020 Held in Hyderabad

Bio Asia 2020 Asia's largest Biotechnology and Life Sciences summit was held in Hyderabad, Telangana from February 17 to February 19 2020 with the theme 'Today for Tomorrow'.

- It was inaugurated by KT Rama Rao, Minister for Industries and Commerce & IT, Government of Telangana.
- Over 2,000 Delegates representing 50 countries, 100 eminent speakers, 800 Corporates, and 75 startups participated in it.

Mr. K.T. Rama Rao speech:

- Addressing the BioAsia Summit on February 17, 2020 Mr. KTR announced that **Telangana government's vision is to double the growth in life sciences sector to \$100 billion and create 4 lakh jobs in the next decade.**
- He mentioned that Telangana currently has a combined enterprise value of \$50 billion with 800 pharma, biotech and medical technology firms.
- He stated that **statutory clearances and environmental clearance were in place** for the proposed **12,000 acres Pharma city park in Mucherla, Rangareddy district** supported by the Life Sciences grid under Telangana State government.
- **Telangana State Industrial Infrastructure Corporation(TSIIC) has acquired about 10,000 acres of land and allotment of lands will be given soon to 150 firms in Phase 1.**
- He also mentioned that Pharma City has been given **National Investment Manufacturing Zone(NIMZ) status by the Centre.**
- NIMZs are large areas of developed land with the infrastructure needed to promote world-class manufacturing activity and employment generation.
- He also mentioned that **Syngene- a contract research organization** has committed to **invest 167 crores in the first phase to open its R&D facility in Pharma city, Hyderabad.**
- **Piramal Group Chairman Ajay Piramal** announced that they are planning to **invest 500 crores in Pharma City after his meeting with Mr. KTR at World Economic Forum, Davos 2020.**

What is the difference between NIMZ(National Investment Manufacturing Zone) and SEZ(Special Economic Zone)?

- The **main objective of Special Economic Zones is promotion of exports**, while **NIMZs** are based on the principle of **industrial growth in partnership with States** and **focuses on manufacturing growth and employment generation.**

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- NIMZs are different from SEZs in terms of size, level of infrastructure planning, governance structures related to regulatory procedures, and exit policies.

NIMZ:

- It is an important part of the **National Manufacturing Policy (NMP) 2011** setup with the **objective to increase the share of manufacturing in GDP(Gross Domestic Product)**.
- They are **large areas (minimum 5000 hectares or 12,000 acres)integrated industrial townships with state-of-art-infrastructure,land use on the basis of zoning, clean and energy efficient technology, necessary social infrastructure, skill development facilities,** etc to provide a conducive environment for manufacturing industries.
- The **Central Government will create the enabling policy frame work, provide incentives for infrastructure development like developing external infrastructure-road and railway linkages** on a Public Private Partnership (PPP) basis through appropriate financing instruments.
- **State government will work with the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) under Ministry of Commerce and Industry of India.**
- The State Government will appoint a **SPV(Special Purpose Vehicle)headed by a senior government official** with experience in pollution control and environmental protection to **discharge the functions specified in the NMP(National Manufacturing Policy) for each NIMZ.**
- As of February 2020 , 4 NIMZs have been granted final approval by the Union government: Kalinganagar in Jajpur district of Odisha, Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh, Sangareddy district (erstwhile Medak district) of Telangana and the recent Pharma city park in Mucherla, Rangareddy district and around 12 NIMZs have been granted in-principle approval in the country so far by the Union government.

Central government fund release for master planning of the Pharma city NIMZ:

- The **Chief Minister of Telangana Mr. K. Chandra Sekhar Rao** has **requested DPIIT(Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade) to release Rs.500 crores** for the **development of external and internal infrastructure for the NIMZ at Pharma City, Mucherla, Rangareddy district.**
- However, the (DPIIT) has conveyed to the State Government of Telangana **that DPIIT's financial commitment is limited to extending assistance of Rs. 3 crores for funding the cost of master planning** of the Pharma City and these funds have already been released to the SPV(Special Purpose Vehicle) of the Pharma City NIMZ.
- **For the development of infrastructure in the NIMZ, DPITT mentioned that their role is limited to coordination** and no finances from DPIIT are committed for this purpose.
- **DPIIT has forwarded the proposals, submitted by TSIIC(Telangana State Industrial Infrastructure Co-corporation) for External infrastructure linkages, i.e. Road linkages and Rail linkages, for phase-1 of the said NIMZ to the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways and Ministry of Railways respectively.**

Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Mr.Piyush Goyal, at BioAsia 2020:

- **Mr. Piyush Goyal** suggested a meeting of Pharma companies, medical schools, universities and government bodies such as **CSIR(Council of Scientific and Industrial Research)** to **discuss the solutions to some of the issues that the Pharma and Medtech industry is facing** such as **clinical trials, environmental concerns due to pharma industry effluent, economies of scale, developing better clusters, intellectual property infringement and price control.**
- **Mr. K. T. Rama Rao, Minister for Industries, Commerce and IT, highlighted** the above issues that the industry is currently facing.
- **The need for continuingtax breaks on R&D expenditure** was highlighted by **Dr.Reddy's laboratories Chairman** and Head of Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance **Satish Reddy** to which the minister responded that the **incentive was given at a particular time when the country was trying to attract investment and cannot continue the same.**

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- **Regarding Price control** (A government regulation set to establish a maximum price to be charged for specific goods and services), the Minister said that **price control regulation cannot be changed as it makes healthcare accessible.**

Telangana state to setup B-hub, Biotechnology Hub:

Mr.K.T.Rama Rao announced that **B-hub (Biotechnology Hub), and a curative therapy institute for cell gene research with the support from CCMB (Center for Cellular and Molecular Biology) will be setup in Telangana in the next 2 months.**

Genome Valley Excellence Award 2020:

BioAsia organizers have awarded the prestigious Genome Valley Excellence Award 2020 to

- **Dr.Carl H June, American Immunologist and Oncologist**, a pioneer of CAR-T Cell therapy for Cancer treatment and for commercialization of world's first FDA-approved gene therapy.
- and to **Novartis CEO Dr. Vasant Narasimhan** for his inspiring bold new vision to re-imagine the pharmaceutical business by embracing digital technology and transforming healthcare. He has done extensive work in public health issues in developing countries and work in development of 20 novel medicines.

Startup showcase :

- **75 promising startups** from all over the world with cutting edge solutions to transform healthcare were **given networking opportunity, and visibility to global industry leaders in the conference.** They were shortlisted from 350 applications.
- The **top 5 startups** from the 75 shortlisted startups were **given opportunity to present their solutions to industry leaders from over 50 countries.**
- **A start-up incubated at IIT-H (Indian Institute of Technology- Hyderabad) made it to the top-5 list for its evolutionary phototherapy device called 'nLite360' used to treat Jaundice.** The device was created by recognizing the need of doctors struggling to treat every new-born with minimal resources available and provided a solution to the problem by reducing the burden of the doctor in treating new-borns affected by jaundice by 70%, and also by reducing treatment time by 35%.
- Telangana government has partnered with **Tech-Mahindra as lead sponsor for the startup stage.**
- **Telangana government's Industries and IT secretary Jayesh Ranjan said that startup showcase was setup to promote innovation.**

Telangana Govt's RICH (Research and Innovation Circle of Hyderabad), and MedTech connect to launch Project Tej:

- Telangana government's Research and Innovation Circle of Hyderabad (RICH) and MedTech Connect (platform founded by Cyient and Xynteo's technology companies) **signed an MoU and launched Project Tej through which medical technology innovators and device manufacturers can validate the usability of their devices in public health settings and gain access to public health channels.**
- It would also provide structured mentoring from the industry on design, manufacturing, commercial access and provide market access to validated technologies.

PERSONS, AWARDS & SPORTS

International Persons

Rishi Sunak, Indian-origin politician, was appointed as U.K. Chancellor of the Exchequer (Finance Minister) by Prime Minister Boris Johnson on February 13, 2020. He succeeded Pakistani-origin Sajid Javid who resigned as Chancellor.

39-year-old Sunak, MP for Richmond in Yorkshire, is married to Akshata, daughter of Narayana Murthy, co-founder of IT services company Infosys. He first entered the U.K. Parliament in 2015 and fastly rose up the Conservative Party ranks as a staunch Brexiteer backing Johnson's strategy to leave the European Union (EU).

He co-founded a 1-billion pound global investment firm and specialised in investing in small British businesses before his entry into politics. He strongly believes that small businesses in the U.K. would flourish as a result of Brexit as the vast majority of British businesses (94%) do not have anything to do with the EU; but they are still subject to all EU law.

Hosni Mubarak (91), former President of Egypt, who ruled with an iron fist for 30 years before being deposed amid street protests in 2011, died in Cairo on February 25, 2020. Throughout his rule, he was a stalwart US ally, a bullwark against Islamic militancy and guardian of Egypt's peace with Israel.

His rule of nearly 30 years ended after hundreds of thousands of young Egyptians rallied for 18 days of unprecedented street protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square and elsewhere in 2011, forcing him to step down.

Kirk Douglas (103), famous US actor whose career spanned seven decades, passed away on February 5, 2020. Douglas made more than 90 movies in a career that stretched across seven decades and films such as "Spartacus" and "The Vikings" made him one of the biggest box-office stars of the 1950s and '60s. He is also the father of Oscar-winning actor Michael Douglas.

National Persons

Wendell Rodricks (59), Padma Shri award winning fashion designer, passed away in Goa on February 12, 2020. He was known for infusing modern aesthetics with traditional Goan influences. Wendell Rodricks was also instrumental in planning the first ever Lakme India Fashion Week (LFW) in 2000 and guiding it in its formative years. Rodricks was also an author, environmentalist and gay rights activist.

Rajinder K Pachauri (79), former Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, died on February 13, 2020. Dr. Pachauri was the founder and chief executive of The Energy Resources Institute (TERI). In April 2002, he was elected Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, established by the World Meteorological Organisation and the United Nations Environment Programme in 1988.

He received the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the IPCC, along with former U.S. Vice-President Al Gore, for the year 2007. The Nobel Prize recognised IPCC for its "efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change, and to lay the foundations for the measures that are needed to counteract such change."

Sports Persons

Maria Sharapova (32), Five-time Grand Slam winner (tennis) and one of the world's most recognisable sportswomen, announced her retirement on February 25, 2020. In tennis, the term Grand Slam refers to the accomplishment of winning all four major championships-the championships of Australia, France, Britain (Wimbledon), and the United States-in the same calendar season.

Sharapova shot to fame at the age of 17 when she won Wimbledon in 2004. She became world number one in 2005, at the age of 18, and won the U.S. Open the next year (2006).

International Awards

2020 Academy (Oscars) Awards:

- 92nd Academy Awards, popularly called Oscar Awards, were announced on February 10, 2020.
- For the first time in the history of Oscar Awards, 'Best Picture' was given to a non-English film.
- **Parasite**, a south korean film which is a **social satire on class-based inequalities** present in South Korea, won the best picture award.

Details of Awards:

Best Picture: Parasite

Best Director: Bong Joon-ho, Parasite

Best Actor: Joaquin Phoenix, (Film: Joker)

Best Actress: Renée Zellweger, (Film: Judy)

Best Supporting Actor : Brad Pitt, 'Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood'

Best Supporting Actress: Laura Dern, Marriage Story

International Feature Film: South Korea, Parasite

Best Film Editing: Ford v Ferrari

Best Cinematography: Roger Deakins, 1917

Best Adapted Screenplay: Taika Waititi, Jojo Rabbit

Best Original Screenplay: Bong Joon-ho, Parasite

Music (original song): "(I'm Gonna) Love Me Again" from Rocketman

Music (original score): Joker

Visual Effects: 1917

Documentary Short Feature: Learning to Skateboard in a Warzone (If You're a Girl)

Documentary Feature: American Factory

Best Costume Design: Jacqueline Durran, Little Women

Animated Short Film: Hair Love

Animated Feature Film: Toy Story 4

EY World Entrepreneur of the Year Award 2019:

- Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, CMD, Biocon, an Indian biopharmaceutical company based in Bangalore, has been named the EY Entrepreneur of Year 2019 in February 2020. She will now represent India at the EY World Entrepreneur of the Year Award (WEYO) in Monte Carlo, Monaco scheduled between June 4 and 6, 2020.

EY stands for Ernst & Young Global Limited. It is a leading global professional services organization based in UK.

Ms. Mazumdar-Shaw was recognised for being at the forefront of innovation in bio-technology and contributing towards research and development of affordable life-saving medicines.

About the Award:

- EY Entrepreneur of the Year is the world's most prestigious business award for entrepreneurs. It is given to encourage entrepreneurial activity and recognizes the contribution of people who inspire others with their vision, leadership and achievement.

Dr. Kiran Mazumdar Shaw Achievement:

- Synonymous with the Indian biotech industry, Dr. Kiran Mazumdar Shaw has been at the forefront of innovation and has enabled affordable, life-saving medicines through her strong investments in research. She is also among the earliest Indian signatories to the Giving Pledge, a global commitment to dedicate majority of her wealth to philanthropy.

EY Lifetime Achievement Award:

- Adi Godrej, Chairman of Godrej group, was felicitated with the EY Lifetime Achievement Award, for having transformed the 120-year old Godrej brand of consumer products and home utilities into a conglomerate that employs 28,000 people today.

National Awards

Genome Valley Excellence Award :

Dr. Carl H June, American immunologist and oncologist, and Dr. Vasant Narasimhan, CEO of Novartis pharmaceutical company, were presented the **Genome Valley Excellence Award** at BioAsia 2020 Conference in February 2020. The award is given to recognise and honour eminent individuals and organisations for their **exceptional contribution to the life sciences research and public health**. The Award was instituted in 2004 by the Government of the undivided Andhra Pradesh. At present, the Government of Telangana gives the award.

The award for Dr. June is for his pioneering work in the field of immunotherapy. His work led to a breakthrough research in developing **CAR-T therapy for treatment of cancer and development and commercialisation of world's first US Food and Drugs Administration (FDA)-approved gene therapy**.

Dr. Narasimhan has been selected for "inspiring the world with the bold new vision to re-imagine the pharmaceutical business including embracing digital technology and transforming healthcare." He has also done extensive work on a range of public health issues particularly in developing countries and exemplary work in the development of over 20 novel medicines, including advances in cell and gene therapies as well as vaccines.

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Laureus World Sports Awards :

20th Laureus World Sports Awards were presented on February 18, 2020 in Berlin, Germany.

Winners:

Laureus Sporting Moment of the last 20 years: Sachin Tendulkar

World Sportsman of the Year: Lewis Hamilton, Formula One driver, and Lionel Messi, world's greatest footballer.

World Sportswoman of the Year: Simone Biles (Gymnastics, USA). She is the most decorated gymnast in World Championship history with 25 medals – 19 gold, 3 silver, 3 bronze.

World Team of the Year: South Africa Men's Rugby Team

World Breakthrough of the Year: Egan Bernal from Columbia (Cyclist). **Bernal is the youngest Tour de France winner.** He is the first cyclist since Lance Armstrong to win a Laureus award.

World Comeback of the Year: Sophia Florsch from Germany (Motor Racing)

World Action Sports person of the Year: Chloe Kim of USA (Snowboarding)

World Sports person of the Year with a Disability: Oksana Masters of USA (Skiing)

Lifetime Achievement Award: Dirk Nowitzki of Germany (Basketball)

Exceptional Achievement Award: Spanish Basketball Federation.

Sport for Good Award: South Bronx United of USA (Football)

About the Awards:

Laureus World Sports Awards are given annually to honour the greatest and most inspirational sporting triumphs of the year by Laureus World Sports Awards Limited, a company registered in England and Wales. The company is supported by **Mercedes-Benz**, a global automobile company (established in 1886), **IWC Schaffhausen**, Swiss watch manufacturer (established in 1868), and **Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group, Inc. (MUFJ)**, one of the world's leading financial groups headquartered in Tokyo, Japan, as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

Shortlists for six categories (Sportswoman, Sportsman, Team, Breakthrough, Comeback and Action) are created by votes from more than 1,000 sports media from over 70 countries. The shortlist for World Athlete of the Year with a Disability is provided by the International Paralympic Committee.

The Laureus World Sports Academy (a unique group of sporting legends) votes for the winners in each shortlisted category and The Academy also has the ability to grant discretionary awards, such as the Laureus Lifetime Achievement Award.

A global public vote determines the winner of the Laureus Sporting Moment of the Year award, which honours one inspiring story that encapsulates the power of sport inspire and bring people together.

SPORTS

Australian Open (Melbourne, 2020 February)

Women's Singles:

Sofia Kenin (USA) - Winner

Garbine Muguruza (Spain) - Runner

It was the first Grand Slam title to Sofia Kenin

Men's Singles:

Novak Djokovic (Serbia) - Winner

Dominic Thiem (Austria) - Runner

It was the 17th Grand Slam title to Djokovic.

Women's Doubles:

Timea Babos & Krisina Mladenovic -Winner

Hsieh Su-wei & Barbora Strycova - Runner

Men's Doubles:

Rajeev Ram & Joe Salisbury - Winner

Max Purcell & Luke Saville - Runner

Mixed Doubles:

Nikola Pietrangeli, & Barbora Krejčíková - Winner

Jamie Murray, & Bethanie Mattek-Sands - Runner

Table Tennis**National Championship (New Delhi, 2020 February)****Team championship:****Men:**

Indian Oil - Winner

ONGC - Runner

Women:

ONGC - Winner

Indian Oil - Runner

CRICKET**ICC U-19 World Cup (Portchefstroom, 2020 February)**

Bangladesh - Winner

India - Runner

India-New Zealand T20 International (New Zealand, 2020 February)

India - Winner

New Zealand - Runner

India finished T20 series with 5-0

BADMINTON**Premier Badminton League Championship (Hyderabad, 2020 February)**

Bengaluru Raptors - Winner

North-Eastern Warriors -Runner

TENNIS**Tata Open Maharashtra (Pune, 2020 February)****Singles:**

Jiri Vesely (Czech) - Winner

Egor Gerasimov (Blr) - Runner

Doubles:

Andre Goransson (Sweden) & Christopher Rungkat (Indonesia) - Winner

Jonathan Erlich (Isr) & Andrei Vasilevski (Blr) - Runner

Bengaluru Open (Bengaluru, 2020 February)

Singles:

James Duckworth (Australia) - Runner

Benjamin Bonzi (France) - Runner

CHESS:

Cairns Cup (St. Louis, 2020 February)

K. Humpy - Winner

D. Harika - Runner

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