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Price Monitoring & Resource Unit (PMRU)

Context:

J&K sets up PMRU of NPPA.

Details:

- Jammu & Kashmir Union Territory has become 12th State/UT where the Price Monitoring & Resource Unit (PMRU) has been set up by the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA).

- PMRUs have already been set up by the NPPA in 11 States, including Kerala, Odisha, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Nagaland, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Mizoram.

About PMRU:

- The PMRU, a registered society, shall function under the direct control and supervision of the State Drug Controller of Jammu & Kashmir.

- The unit shall be funded by the NPPA for its recurring and non-recurring expenses.

- The PMRU shall help the NPPA and the State Drug Controller in ensuring the availability and accessibility of medicines at affordable prices.

- It is also expected to organise seminars, training programs and other information, education and communication (IEC) activities in the areas of availability and affordability of medicines for all.

- The PMRU will also collect samples of medicines, collect and analyse data and make reports with respect to availability and over-pricing of medicines for taking action under the provisions of the Drug Price Control Order (DPCO).

- **PMRU Mandate:** To track violation of prices of essential drugs and medical devices under the Drugs Price Control Order (DPCO).

- **PMRU Functions:** Offering technical help to the State Drug Controllers and the NPPA to –

- Monitor notified prices of medicines,

- Detect violation of the provisions of the DPCO,

- Look at price compliance, collect test samples of medicines, and

- Collect and compile market-based data of scheduled as well as non-scheduled formulations.

  The PMRU is chaired by the State Health Secretary. The Member-Secretary would be Drugs Controller.

India Post Payments Bank

Context:

During the lockdown period till March end, 6.5 lakh transactions were effected through the IPPB (India Post Payments Bank).

Food Corporation of India (FCI)

Context:

FCI ramps up food grain supplies across the country during the lockdown due to COVID-19 outbreak.

About the FCI:

- Food Corporation of India (FCI) is a Public Sector Undertaking, under the Department of Food & Public Distribution, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, GOI.

- It is a statutory body set up in 1965 under the Food Corporations Act, 1964. It was established against the backdrop of major grains shortage, especially of wheat.

- **FCI Objectives:**

- To provide farmers remunerative prices

- To make food grains available at reasonable prices, particularly to vulnerable sections of society

- To maintain buffer stocks for food security

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- To intervene in market for price stabilization

About COVID-19

Context:

What do we know and what do we need to know about Novel Coronavirus.

Details:

Infection

- The virus infects the epithelial cells in the throat and lungs.
- SARS-CoV-2 binds to the ACE2 receptors on human cells, which are often found mostly in throats and lungs.
- Virus on the skin, lacking ACE2 expression, will be harmless.
- The virus enters through the body through the nasal passage, eyes and mouth.
- Our hands are the main instruments that take the virus to reach our mouth, nose and eyes.
- Washing hands with soap water for 20 seconds as often as possible helps prevent the infection.

Infectious dosage

- A dose of 700000 PFU was needed to infect a Macaque.
- PFU (Plaque forming unit) is a unit of measurement of sample infectivity.

  Although the animal did not show any clinical symptoms, the droplets from the nose and the saliva had a viral load.

  Humans will need a higher dosage than 700000 PFU to get infected.

  An animal study on genetically modified mice with ACE2 receptors showed that it could be infected with SARS with just 240 PFU. In comparison, it required 70,000 PFU of novel coronavirus to get infected.

Infectious period

- Length of time an individual can transmit the infection to others is not known precisely, but possibly up to 10-14 days.
- Artificially reducing the contagious period is a crucial method of reducing overall transmission.
- Hospitalisation, isolation, lockdown and quarantine are all effective methods.

Who can infect?

- Anyone infected with the virus can infect others even before the symptoms appear.
- Most carriers do not even show signs.
- Covering our mouth and nose when we cough or sneeze will help reduce the infection.
- The virus is present in the saliva, sputum and faeces of the infected person for the whole infectious period.

How we infect?

- Transmission is mostly via droplets.
- This requires relatively close contact, less than 6 feet.
- This is why it is recommended that we stay 1.5 metres away from each other in public places.

  Inanimate vector of disease, in particular phones, doorknobs, surfaces are a potential source for transmission, but not much is known about it.

  It is prudent to sanitise out hands after touching doorknobs, lift call buttons and counters in public places.

How many we infect?

- The average number of new infections caused by a typical infectious person, that is human transmissibility range (R0) is between 2.2 to 3.1.
- In simple words, one infected individual on the average infects about 2.2 to 3.1 persons.

  By physical distancing, we can artificially reduce the actual transmissibility, thus slowing the rate of infection.

Where did the virus come from?

- It is not from eating bat soup. Once you boil, the virus is decimated.

- Initially, it was speculated that the SARS-CoV-2 virus jumped from bat to humans. But recent genomes study show first it must have leapt from bat to an intermediary species before it latched on to humans.

- Another study indicates that a lineage of SARS-CoV-2 virus was circulating in humans before the disease outbreak.

How it evolved?

- SARS-CoV-2 has emerged either by:

- Natural selection of virulent strain in a non-human animal host before zoonotic transfer to humans, or

- Natural selection of virulent strain in humans following a zoonotic transmission.

  Only more studies will show which of the two is right.

  Scientists are still not clear what are the mutations in SARS-CoV-2 that allowed human infection and transmission.

When did SARS-CoV2 emerge?

- While there have been no documented cases of SARS-CoV2 before December 2019, preliminary genomic analyses suggest that the first human cases of SARS-CoV-2 appeared between mid-October and mid-December 2019.

- This means there was a period of unrecognised transmission in humans between the primary zoonotic event and the outbreak.

Can it infect animals?

- The molecular modelling suggests that SARS-CoV-2 can affect besides human, bat, civet, monkey and swine cells.

- It does not infect domestic animals or livestock. Consuming eggs or poultry will not result in SARS-CoV-2 infection.

Can one be infected twice?

- Experimentally infected macaques were not capable of being re-infected.

- Likewise, there is no evidence of reinfection with SARS-CoV-2 after recovery in humans.

- However, how long the immunity will last is unknown.

How severe is the illness?

- The majority of COVID-19 cases are mild (81%), about 15% need hospitalisation and 5% require critical care.

- That is, the vast majority of the infected will not even need hospitalisation.

Who are the most vulnerable?

- Healthcare workers

- People above 60 years of age

- People with prior cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, and respiratory conditions

What is the cause of death?

- Most of the deaths are caused by respiratory failure or respiratory failure combined with heart damage.

- Leakage of fluid into the lungs, which inhibits respiration and leads to morbidity, is the primary clinical condition.

- At present, the treatment for COVID-19 is primarily supportive care, including ventilation if necessary. Several therapeutic trials are ongoing, and the results are awaited.

Will the virus spread through air?

- In the air, the virus can survive only up to 2.7 hours. Therefore being in open spaces such as a balcony or the terrace is no harm.

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Is there a less virulent strain?

- While many strains are being identified, studies so far have not indicated any mutations that are linked to any changes in transmission or disease severity.

Will the onset of summer bring any respite?

- No strong evidence exists showing a reduction in transmission with the seasonal increase in temperature and humidity.

e-NAM

Context:

Union Agriculture Minister launches new features of e-NAM platform.

Details:

- The new features aim to strengthen agriculture marketing by farmers which will reduce their need to physically come to wholesale mandis for selling their harvested produce, at a time when there is critical need to decongest mandis to effectively fight against COVID-19.
- These software modules are:
- Warehouse based trading module in e-NAM software to facilitate trade from warehouses based on e-NWR (Electronic Negotiable Warehouse Receipts).
- FPO trading module in e-NAM whereby FPOs can trade their produce from their collection centre without bringing the produce to APMC.

  In addition to facilitate inter-mandi and inter-state trade at this juncture, enhanced version of logistic module has been released whereby aggregators of transport logistic platform have on-boarded which helps users to avail trackable transport facilities for transporting their produce.

Three modules have been launched for enhancing the effectiveness of e-NAM:

I) Launch of Negotiable Warehouse Receipt (e-NWRs) module in National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) software.

- Warehouse (Registered with WDRA – Warehousing Development and Regulatory Authority) trading module with payment feature is launched to enable small & marginal famers to directly trade their stored produce from selected WDRA registered warehouses which are declared deemed market by the State.
- Farmers will be able to place their produce in WDRA accredited warehouses.
- Already States of Telangana (14 warehouses) & Andhra Pradesh (23 warehouses) declared designated warehouses in the State as deemed market.
- **Benefits of e-NWRs integration with e-NAM:**
- Depositor can save the logistics expenses and will have better income.
- Farmers can sell the produce across the nation to get better price and at the same time avoid the hassle of mandis.
- Farmers will be able to place their produce in WDRA accredited warehouses and avail the benefit of pledge loan if required.
- Price stabilization by matching supply and demand through time and place utility.

II) FPO trading module

- FPO trading module is launched to enable FPOs to upload their produce from their premise/collection centres for bidding. They can upload the picture of the produce and quality parameters from their premises to help distant bidders to visualise the produce before bidding.
- FPOs have the option for delivery of produce either from their premises or by bringing to mandi premise after successful bidding. This will not only decongest the mandis but also reduce the logistics cost for the FPOs.
- Facility provided to FPO to upload assaying report/photo of their produce from their premise

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to enable traders to visualise the produce before bidding.

Benefits:

- This will not only decongest the mandis but also reduce the hassle of FPOs in dealing with mandis.
- This will help FPOs by reducing transaction costs (Transportation) and enhancing their bargaining power.
- Facilitates FPOs to avail online payment facility with ease of doing business.

III) Launch of Logistic Module

- Presently, e-NAM provides a database of individual transporters to the traders.
- However, as a quantum response to logistic need by traders, provision has been made for linking large logistic aggregator platforms, which will provide choices to users.
- Traders would be able to use the link to navigate to the logistics provider's website and select appropriate services.
- With these additions, more than 3,75,000 number of trucks from large logistic providers would be added for logistic purpose.
- **Benefits:**
- This will help in seamless transportation of agricultural produce.
- This will promote inter-State trade under e-NAM by providing online transport facilities for distant buyers.

Low Cost Temperature Gun

Context:

Naval Dockyard Mumbai designs low cost Temperature Gun.

Details:

- Naval Dockyard, Mumbai has designed and developed its own handheld IR based temperature sensor for undertaking screening of large number of personnel at the entry gates of the yard reducing the load on the security sentries at the gate.
- The instrument has been manufactured under Rs. 1000/- through in-house resources (which is a fraction of the cost of the Temperature Guns in the market).
- The non-contact thermometer has an Infrared sensor and an LED display integrated with a microcontroller which runs on a 9V battery.
- Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the non-contact thermometers or temperature guns have become scarce in the market and are being sold at a very high cost.
- The most preliminary method to screen a probable patient is to check for body temperature by non-contact means.

AarogyaSetu App

Context:

The Government of India launched a mobile app 'AarogyaSetu' developed in public-private partnership to bring the people of India together in a resolute fight against COVID-19.

About AarogyaSetu:

- The App joins Digital India for the health and well-being of every Indian.
- It will enable people to assess themselves the risk for their catching the Corona Virus infection.
- It will calculate this based on their interaction with others, using cutting edge Bluetooth technology, algorithms and artificial intelligence.
- Once installed in a smart phone through an easy and user-friendly process, the app detects other devices with AarogyaSetu installed that come in the proximity of that phone.
- The app can then calculate the risk of infection based on sophisticated parameters if any of these contacts is tested positive.

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- The App will help the Government take necessary timely steps for assessing the risk of the spread of COVID-19 infection, and ensuring isolation where required.
- The App's design ensures privacy-first. The personal data collected by the App is encrypted using state-of-the-art technology and stays secure on the phone till it is needed for facilitating medical intervention.
- Available in 11 languages, the App is ready for pan-India use from day-1 and has a highly scalable architecture.

Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PM-GKY)

Context:

The Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Finance had issued detailed guidelines on disbursal of money to beneficiaries of Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PM-GKY) through banks, during the 21-day lockdown to fight COVID-19.

National Corona Survey

Context:

Union Minister released the COVID 19 National Preparedness Survey 2020.

About the National Preparedness Survey on COVID-19 (National Corona Survey):

- The survey was conducted in 410 districts within 3 working days to attain a bird's eye view of the governance challenges of the nation while coping with the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Objectives of the Survey:**
- To develop a comparative analysis of COVID 19 preparedness across States.
- To highlight the main priorities and constraints of COVID 19 preparedness, as they are perceived by the civil servants working in the field.

- To access enabling factors in making institutional/logistics/hospital preparedness, etc.
- To capture trends to identify systemic and process related deficiencies, in combating COVID 19 in the districts of India.
- The survey was conducted across all districts of India, with responses from 410 civil servants who are providing field level leadership. District Collectors and IAS officers of (2014-2018) batches who have served as Assistant Secretaries in Government of India participated in the survey.

ECI further defers Rajya Sabha poll in view of COVID-19

What's in News?

Election Commission of India (ECI) has deferred the Rajya Sabha Polls in view of the current unforeseen situation of a public health emergency,.

- ECI, invoking its powers under Article 324 of the Constitution of India read with section 153 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 has further extended the period of Rajya Sabha election beyond the prescribed term(s) of 18 seats across seven States.

Article 324:

Article 324 of the Constitution provides that the power of superintendence, direction and control of elections to parliament, state legislatures, the office of president of India and the office of vice-president of India shall be vested in the election commission.

Measures to ensure farmers do not suffer during the lockdown period

What's in News?

For ensuring that the farmers do not suffer from any adverse fall out during the lockdown period, the Department of Agriculture Cooperation and Farmers Welfare is taking several measures for

smooth harvesting of Rabi Crop and sowing of the summer crop.

- Video conference has been conducted with all States and Insurance companies to review the payment of claims, crop loss survey and implementation of Smart Sampling Technique.

- For facilitating farm insurance, letters have been issued to all States to issue passes to representatives of concerned Insurance companies for co-witnessing Crop Cutting Experiments and to relax the norms for conducting field level survey for intimation received for Post-Harvest crop losses due to unseasonal rainfall and hailstorm.

- Phytosanitary certification for export consignments and Import releases of plant and plant products are continuing.

- For providing support to horticulture crops necessary coordination is being done with growers, aggregators, wholesalers, mandi associations, State Horticulture Missions, for smooth transport of the commodities and to sort out all difficulties.

- Kisan Call Centres are being operated by diverting calls to individual mobile numbers of Farm Tele Advisors, who are now operating from homes.

Lifeline UDAN Flights

What's in News?

Over 1 lakh km of aerial distance covered by Lifeline UDAN flights.

- As part of India's war against the novel Coronavirus pandemic, the Ministry of Civil Aviation has launched "Lifeline Udan".

- Under this initiative, flights are being operated for the movement of essential and medical supplies across the nation.

- The flights under Lifeline Udan are planned using a hub and spoke model.

- Cargo hubs have been set up at Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Hyderabad and Bangalore.

- The flights connect these hubs and therefrom to different parts of India.

- The North East Region, island territories and the hill states are being given special focus.

- On the international front of this initiative, Air India has established a cargo air-bridge between China and India.

- Regular cargo flights are likely to be operated by Air India for transporting critical medical equipment and supplies between the two countries.

Hack the Crisis – India

What's in News?

Minister of State Electronics & Information Technology, Communications and Human Resource Development launched Hack the Crisis – India.

- Hack the Crisis – India is an Online Hackathon to find working solutions for overcoming COVID 19 pandemic.

- This hackathon is part of a global initiative and is being organised by 'Hack A Cause – India' and 'Ficci Ladies Organization Pune' and supported by Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MEITY).

- Aim of this hackathon is to strengthen the fight against COVID19 (also known as Wuhan Coronavirus)

- The winning ideas from a few top participating teams, as implementable solutions on corona crisis, are expected to help India and global citizens.

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)

What's in News?

Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas & Steel interacted with hundreds of District Nodal

Officers (DNOs) of Oil Marketing Companies, to assess the distribution of LPG cylinders in districts, following the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown.

- DNOs are responsible for LPG deliveries in their assigned areas.

Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana

What's in News?

The Ministry of Rural Development is releasing the lump sum amounts @ Rs. 500/- per woman to Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) for April 2020.

- The Centre has announced a ₹1.7 lakh crore relief package – Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan (PMGK) Yojana in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and countrywide lockdown, providing free food and cash transfers to support the poorest and most vulnerable citizens during the crisis.
- There have been recent updates on the PM Garib Kalyan Yojana as declared by the Finance Minister on March 26th, 2020.
- Garib Kalyan package is a range of measures that the Government of India will take to alleviate the economic, health, and food-related distress of India's poor.

Challenge COVID-19 Competition (C3)

Context:

- The National Innovation Foundation (NIF) has invited citizens to participate in Challenge COVID-19 Competition (C3).
- National Innovation Foundation is an autonomous institute under the Department of Science and Technology, Govt. of India.

Objective:

- The initiative has been launched to create awareness and also intimately engage a wide cross-section of society with diverse backgrounds in providing and implementing solutions against COVID-19 pandemic.

Details:

- The NIF has invited interested innovators to send in their creative ideas and innovations for problems or issues like reducing transmission of Coronavirus. This will help supplement the efforts of the government in slowing or eliminating the spread further.
- Ideas are also invited for:
- Gainful engagement of people at home
- Ensuring healthy food for nutrition and boosting immunity, especially, at the time of lockdown when raw materials are limited,
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Rapid diagnostic testing facilities for capacity building of healthcare.
- Solutions for the problems focussing on the varying needs of the differently-abled, people with special needs.

  The selected technological ideas and innovations will be supported through incubation and dissemination support from the governmental agencies.

Silver-based disinfectant to fight COVID 19

Context:

- A Department of Science and Technology funded startup has developed chemical free silver based disinfectant to fight the COVID 19 pandemic.

Details:

- Weinnovate Biosolutions, a Pune based startup supported jointly by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and Department of Biotechnology (DBT), has come up with a non-

alcoholic aqueous-based Colloidal Silver solution for disinfecting hands and environmental surfaces.

- This liquid is noninflammable and free of hazardous chemicals and can be an effective sanitizer to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 infection.
- It has been developed through the NanoAgCide technology
- This sanitizer is based on the ability of the silver nanoparticles to prevent the synthesis of viral negative-strand RNA and viral budding.
- An Indian patent has been filed for the process of making colloidal silver, and a test license for making hand sanitizers and disinfectants has been granted.

Nanoparticles:

- Nanoparticles are rapidly emerging as effective solutions to a variety of issues related to COVID-19, from theranostics (therapy plus diagnostics) to disinfection and imaging.
- The relevance of nanoparticles is owing to their size (less than 100 nm), which is comparable to that of COVID-19 virus, and a plethora of functionalities such as targeting and drug delivery that can be tailored to match the needs.

CBDT

Context: The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has issued orders under section 119 of IT Act,1961 to mitigate any hardships to taxpayers arising out of compliance of TDS/TCS provisions.

Details:

- The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) is a part of the Department of Revenue in the Ministry of Finance.
- The CBDT provides inputs for policy and planning of direct taxes in India, and is also responsible for administration of direct tax laws through the IT Department.

Mahavir Jayanti

Context:

President's greetings on the eve of Mahavir Jayanti.

Details:

- Mahaveer Janma Kalyanak or Mahaveer Jayanti celebrates the birth of Vardhamana Mahavira, the 24th and the last Tirthankara of Jainism.
- It is one of the most important religious festivals of Jains.

Lifeline UDAN

Context:

Lifeline UDAN flights transport 161 tons of cargo across the country.

Food Corporation of India (FCI)

Context:

FCI sets an all-time record in a single day's transportation of food grains.

Online Teaching-Learning Process

Context:

The Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) has taken various steps for Online Teaching-Learning Process.

Details:

- In light of the ongoing situation with the COVID-19 outbreak, the Union HRD Ministry had directed the heads of all autonomous institutions coming under its ambit to take care of the academic welfare of the students.
- KVS has shared some action points with all the Principals for implementation to the extent possible, to encourage all teachers in the system to engage their students in learning through digital modes.
- **Using NIOS Platform:**

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- KVS has shared the schedule of lessons of the recorded and live programmes of NIOS for secondary and senior secondary classes from their SWAYAM PRABHA PORTAL.

  NIOS and NCERT are providing online lessons as well as telecasting lessons on TV.

Empowered Group chaired by CEO NITI Aayog, constituted by GOI

Context:

Empowered Group #6 on Coordinating with Private Sector, NGOs, and International Organisations for COVID-19-related Response Activities.

Details:

- Empowered Group Number 6 constituted to address the issues pertaining to identification of problems, effective solutions and formulation of plans with three groups of stakeholders namely:
- The UN agencies, World Bank, Asian Development Bank. Civil Society Organisations and development partners
- Industry associations – CII, FICCI, ASSOCHAM, NASSCOM

  The members of the Empowered Committee comprise the CEO of NITI Aayog, members of NDMA, PMO, MEA and the Cabinet Secretariat.

MPLADS

Context:

Cabinet approves non-operation of MPLADS for two years (2020-21 and 2021-22) for managing COVID-19.

Details:

- As part of the ongoing efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, the Union Cabinet has decided not to operate the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) for two years (2020-21 and 2021-22).

- These funds will be used to strengthen the Government's efforts in managing the challenges and adverse impact of COVID-19 in the country.

Exercise NCC Yogdan

Context:

NCC cadets start serving people during COVID-19 pandemic under Exercise NCC Yogdan.

Details:

- Civil and police administration have started requisitioning for services of senior division National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets in the fight against the Coronavirus pandemic.
- The Ministry of Defence (MoD) had allowed temporary employment of NCC cadets under 'Exercise NCC Yogdan' and guidelines were also issued in this regard.
- These cadets will give a helping hand to state and municipal authorities to augment relief efforts.
- The types of tasks envisaged for cadets include manning of helpline/call centres; distribution of relief materials, medicines, food/essential commodities; community assistance; data management and queue & traffic management and manning of CCTV control rooms.

About the National Cadet Corps (NCC):

Management of COVID-19 in National Parks/Sanctuaries/Tiger Reserves

Context:

In view of the spread of COVID-19 in the country and a recent news report on a tiger being infected with COVID019 in New York, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has issued an advisory regarding containing and management of COVID-19 in National Parks/Sanctuaries/Tiger Reserves.

The advisory has asked the Chief Wildlife Wardens of all States/UTs to:

- Take immediate preventive measures to stop the transmission and spread of the virus from humans to animals and vice versa, in National Parks/Sanctuaries/Tiger Reserves.
- Reduce the human-wildlife interface.
- Restrict the movement of people to National Parks/Sanctuaries/Tiger Reserves.
- Constitute a Task Force/Rapid Action Force with field managers, veterinary doctors, frontline staff, to manage the situation as quickly as possible.
- Create a 'round the clock' reporting mechanism with a Nodal Officer for swift management of any cases noticed.
- Set up essential services for emergency treatment of animals and their safe release back to their natural habitats, as and when required.
- Enhance disease surveillance, mapping and monitoring system through coordinated effort amongst various Departments.

For more information on wildlife protection in India, check the table below:

Updates on COVID-19

Context:

The government has released a few figures on the COVID-19 situation in the country.

Details:

- As of now, **4067 confirmed cases** and **109 deaths** have been reported. 291 persons have been cured/discharged after recovery.
- As per the currently available data, an analysis of the total confirmed cases has presented the following distribution:
- Gender distribution:
- 76% are male
- 24% are female
- Age distribution:
- 47% people – below 40 years age group
- 34% people – between 40 to 60 years age group
- 19% people – 60 and above age group
- Following observations are made while analysing the reported 109 deaths due to COVID-19:
- Gender distribution:
- 73% are male
- 27% are female
- Age distribution:
- 63% deaths reported for elderly people (60 and above)
- 30% deaths reported for people between 40 to 60 years
- 7% deaths reported for people below 40 years
- As of now, 86% death cases have exhibited comorbidity related to diabetes, chronic kidney issues, hypertension and heart related problems.
- Although 19% confirmed cases have been reported among the elderly, since 63% deaths have been observed among them, **elderly people form a high risk population**.
- Further, though 37% deaths are reported from people below 60 years, approximately, 86% of deaths amongst people with co-morbidities indicate that **young people with co-morbidities are also at high risk of COVID-19.**

Income Tax Appellate Tribunal

Context:

The Income Tax Appellate Tribunal holds All India Video Conference on 'The Direct Tax Vivad Se Vishwas Act, 2020'.

About the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT):

- The ITAT is a quasi-judicial institution that specializes in dealing with appeals under the Direct Taxes Acts.

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- It was formed in 1941.
- The orders passed by the ITAT are final, an appeal lies to the High Court only if a substantial question of law arises for determination.
- Starting with just six benches, currently, the ITAT has 63 Benches at 27 different stations covering almost all the cities having a seat of the High Court.
- The ITAT draws inspiration from its motto 'Nishpaksh Sulabh Satvar Nyay', which means impartial, easy and speedy justice.
- The ITAT is referred to as 'Mother Tribunal' being the **oldest Tribunal in the country**.
- More importantly, it is the success of the ITAT, which has prompted the Government of India to constitute similar Appellate Tribunals for indirect taxes i.e., Customs, Excise, Service Tax Appellate Tribunal (CESTAT), Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT), Railway Claims Tribunal, Foreign Exchange Appellate Board, etc.

National Highways Authority of India (NHAI)

Context:

NHAI achieves highest ever construction of national highways in FY 2019-20.

About the NHAI:

NHAI is the nodal agency of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways in India.

Nano Mission

Context:

DST invites short-term proposals for developing antiviral Nano-coating and Nano based material for scale up by industry and start-ups to combat COVID-19.

Details:

- The Department of Science and Technology, using the Science and Engineering Board (SERB) portal, is inviting ideas in the form of short-term proposals for developing antiviral Nano-coating and new Nano based material for use in Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), which can be transferred to a partnering industry or start-up for scale up.
- Such Nano coatings could contribute immensely in the emerging health care requirements in India's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.
- This is a part of the DST's Nano Mission.

About the Nano Mission:

- The Mission on Nano Science and Technology (Nano Mission) was launched by the GOI in 2007.
- The DST is the mission's nodal implementing agency.
- The chief aim of the mission is to create the background and infrastructure for R&D in Nano-science & technology.
- The mission has been working to help scientists, institutions and the industry in terms of promoting basic research, development of adequate manpower resources, international collaborations, augmentation the infrastructure for research and generation of socially useful products.

COVID-19 Testing

Context:

The Department of Science & Technology has funded "Module Innovations", a Pune-based healthcare start-up working on point of care diagnostics to build up on its platform technology for rapid diagnosis of diseases to develop a product for detecting COVID-19 with a 10 to 15 minute test.

Details:

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- Using the proven concept from its flagship product USense, Module is now developing **nCoVSENSEs** (TM) which is a rapid test device for the detection of antibodies that have been generated against COVID-19 in the human body.

- With the current stage that India is in, doing a mass screening is of extreme importance.

- With the rapid test device it will be possible to confirm infection in patients and also determine whether an infected patient has recovered and also identify the stage of infection in the patients.

- The current confirmatory method of Real-Time Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) through a proven method, takes a longer time and needs trained manpower. This new rapid test will help manage the problem in a more efficient way at a lesser cost.

How nCoVSENSe works?

- The nCoVSENSe test is aimed at detecting the IgG and IgM antibodies generated in the human body upon the onset of viral infection and is targeted against the Spike proteins making it specific for COVID-19.

  While the feasibility of the technology has been proved, the Proof of Concept (PoC) and Prototype illustrating functionality of product are to be demonstrated.

World Health Day

Context:

PM's message on World Health Day.

Details:

- April 7 is observed as 'World Health Day' worldwide.

- This was the day in 1948 when the World Health Organisation was founded.

- The theme for the World Health Day 2020 is **"Support Nurses and Midwives".**

- WHO chose the year 2020 as the "Year of the Nurse and Midwife" because of the contribution of nurses and midwives in making the world a healthier place.

- Nurses and other health workers are at the forefront of the COVID-19.

Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana

Context:

Pharmacists, popularly known as "Swasth ke Sipahi", of Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Kendra, are delivering essential services and medicines at the doorstep of patients and elderly under the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP).

Samadhan

Context:

The Ministry of Human Resources Development launches "Samadhan", a challenge to fight Covid-19 and future challenges.

Details:

- The Innovation Cell of the Ministry of Human Resources Development and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) in collaboration with Forge and InnovatioCuris launched a mega online challenge – SAMADHAN – to test the ability of students to innovate.

- The students participating in this challenge will search and develop such measures that can be made available to the government agencies, health services, hospitals and other services for quick solutions to the Coronavirus epidemic and other such calamities.

- Apart from this, through this "Samadhan" challenge, work will be done to make citizens aware, to motivate them to face any challenge,

to prevent any crisis and to help people get livelihood.

- Under the "Samadhan" challenge, students and faculty will be motivated for conducting new experiments and new discoveries and providing them with a strong base leading to a spirit of experimentation and discovery.

Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA)

Context:

MCA allows companies to hold Extraordinary General Meetings (EGMs) through VC or OAVM complemented with e-Voting facility/simplified voting through registered emails.

Details:

- Taking stock of the coronavirus situation, the MCA had earlier allowed all meetings of the Board of Directors up to 30th June 2020, to be conducted through Video Conferencing (VC) or other audio visual means (OAVM) vide its notification date 19.03.2020, including meetings on items where the physical presence of directors is otherwise required.

- In furtherance of the Government's objective of facilitating corporate compliances during the current lockdown period and other restrictions on account of COVID-19, the Ministry has issued a circular allowing companies to hold Extraordinary General Meetings (EGMs) through VC or OAVM complemented with e-Voting facility/simplified voting through registered emails, without requiring the shareholders to physically assemble at a common venue.

- The Companies Act, 2013 allows ordinary and special resolutions to be passed through postal ballot/e-voting route without holding a physical general meeting. However, in the present lockdown/social distancing conditions due to COVID-19, postal ballot facility cannot be utilized by the companies.

- The framework leverages the strengths of Digital India by using a combination of VC and e-Voting/simplified voting through registered emails to enable companies conduct their EGMs.

- As the meetings will be conducted over VC/OAVM, the facility for appointment of proxies has been dispensed with, while representatives of bodies corporate will continue to get appointed for participation in such meetings.

- This framework allows the companies to hold shareholders' EGMs through VC/ OAVM without compromising on the other requirements of law.

- As an additional check, all companies using this option are required to maintain a recorded transcript of the entire proceedings in safe custody, and public companies are also required to host this transcript on their website for greater transparency.

- Further, all resolutions passed through this framework will be required to filed with the RoC within 60 days, so that such resolutions may be viewed publicly.

iGOT e-learning Platform

Context:

The Department of Personnel and Training, under the Government of India, launches a digital platform to train all healthcare and COVID-19 warriors of India.

Details:

- The e-learning platform is for all front-line workers to equip them with the training and updates in coping with the coronavirus pandemic.

- Appropriate training will also prepare them for the subsequent stages of the pandemic.

- The target group is Doctors, Nurses, Paramedics, Hygiene Workers, Technicians, Auxiliary Nursing Midwives (ANMs), Central &

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State Govt. Officers, Civil Defence Officials, various Police Organisations, National Cadet Corps (NCC), Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS), National Service Scheme (NSS), Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS), Bharat Scouts & Guides (BSG) and other volunteers.

About iGOT Platform:

- The platform delivers curated, role-specific content to each learner at his place of work or home and to any device of his choice.
- iGOT platform is designed to population scale, and will provide training to around 1.50 crore workers and volunteers in the coming weeks.
- To begin with, nine courses on iGOT have been launched on topics like Basics of COVID, ICU Care and Ventilation Management, Clinical Management, Infection Prevention through PPE, Infection Control and Prevention, Quarantine and Isolation, Laboratory Sample Collection and Testing, Management of COVID 19 Cases, COVID 19 Training.
- Through its customized approach COVID warriors can learn about critical areas from this one-stop source and respond to the prevailing and emergent situations, by keeping themselves updated in a real-time manner.
- The platform is well equipped to cater to the demands of unlimited requests of learning at any time anywhere.
- The platform can be accessed by following an easy to use manual for desktop and mobile versions, thereby making it accessible for all.

Madhuvan Gajar

Context:

Biofortified carrot variety developed by farmer scientist benefits local farmers.

Details:

- Madhuban Gajar, a biofortified carrot variety with high β-carotene and iron content developed by a farmer scientist from Junagadh district, Gujarat is benefitting more than 150 local farmers in the area.
- It is being planted in an area of over 200 hectares in Junagadh, and the average yield, which is 40-50 t/ha, has become the main source of income to the local farmers.
- The variety is being cultivated in more than 1000 hectares of land in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh during the last three years.
- The Madhuvan Gajar is a highly nutritious carrot variety developed through the selection method with higher β-carotene content (277.75 mg/kg) and iron content (276.7 mg/kg) dry basis and is used for various value-added products like carrot chips, juices, and pickles.
- Among all the varieties tested, beta-carotene and iron content were found to be superior.
- In trials conducted by the National Innovation Foundation, it was found that the Madhuban Gajar carrot variety possesses a significantly higher root yield (74.2 t/ha) and plant biomass (275 gm per plant).
- This variety was developed by farmer-scientist Shri Vallabhhai Vasrambhai Marvaniya.
- During 1943, he found that a local carrot variety was profoundly used for fodder to improve the quality of milk.
- He selectively cultivated this variety and sold this carrot in the market at a good price. Since then, he, along with family, is working for the conservation and development of this cultivar.
- In the 1950s, he started cultivating this on a large-scale.
- He also started distributing the seeds to other farmers in his village and adjoining areas in the 1970s.
- During 1985, he started selling the seeds on a large scale.
- Shri Marvaniya was conferred with a National Award by the President of India during the Festival of Innovation (FOIN) – 2017.

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- He was also conferred with Padma Shri in the year 2019 for his extraordinary work.

Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)

Context:

PM salutes CRPF personnel, on its Valour Day.

Details:

- April 9 is observed as CRPF's Valour Day or Shaurya Diwas.
- On this day in 1965, CRPF personnel, despite being outnumbered, fought off an attack by a Pakistani force at Gujarat's Sardar Patel Post.
- 34 Pakistan soldiers were killed and four were captured.
- For more on this incident, check 'This Day in History' dated 9th April. **About the CRPF:**
- The Central Reserve Police Force was established by the enactment of the CRPF Act in 1949.
- Initially, it came into existence as the Crown Representative's Police in 1939 for internal security.
- Till 1965, CRPF guarded the India-Pakistan border.
- The primary mission of the CRPF is counter-insurgency operations.
- It also assists the State and Union Territories in police operations to maintain law and order.
- Apart from this, the force participates as a police force in the United Nations peace-keeping missions.
- The CRPF maintains a special forces unit known as Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (COBRA) to combat Maoist insurgents.

National Food Security Act (NFSA)

Context:

Foodgrains to be provided to non-NFSA beneficiaries with ration cards issued by State governments.

Details:

- The Government of India has directed the Food Corporation of India (FCI) to provide food grains @5 Kg per person per month for 3 months at the rates of Rs. 21/Kg for wheat and Rs. 22/Kg for rice uniformly across the country to all beneficiaries not covered under NFSA to whom ration cards have been issued by state governments under their schemes.

Swachhata App

Context:

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) launches a revised version of Swachhata App to handle queries specific to COVID-19.

Details:

- The Swachhata – MoHUA App, a popular grievance redressal tool for citizens under the ambit of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) already has over 1.7 Crore+ urban users across the country.
- This App has now been modified and strengthened further in order to enable citizens to get their COVID-related complaints also redressed by their respective Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).
- Nine additional categories have added to the App:
- Request for Fogging/Sanitation during COVID-19
- Violation of Quarantine during COVID-19
- Violation of Lockdown during COVID-19
- Report Suspected case of COVID-19
- Request Food during COVID-19
- Request Shelter during COVID-19
- Request Medicine during COVID-19

- Request assistance for COVID-19 patient Transport
- Request Waste Pickup from Quarantine Area

National Testing Agency

Context:

As advised by the Union HRD Minister, the National Testing Agency extends the scope for correction in the choice of centre cities in the online application form for JEE (Main) 2020.

DIKSHA Platform

Context:

The Government of India launches a training module for management of COVID-19 named 'Integrated Government Online training' (iGOT) portal on the DIKSHA platform of MHRD.

Details:

- To take care of the training needs of the frontline workers, the Government of India has launched a training module for the management of COVID-19 named 'Integrated Govt. Online training' (iGOT) portal on the Ministry of HRD's DIKSHA platform.

About DIKSHA Platform:

- MHRD's **'Digital Infrastructure Knowledge Sharing' (DIKSHA)** platform is an initiative for education and training.
- DIKSHA leverages the existing highly scalable and flexible digital infrastructures while keeping teachers at the centre.
- DIKSHA is intended to serve as a national digital infrastructure for teachers.
- All teachers across the nation will be equipped with advanced digital technology.
- DIKSHA portal will enable, accelerate and amplify solutions in the realm of teacher education.

- It will aid teachers to learn and train themselves for which assessment resources will be available.
- It will help teachers to create training content, profile, in-class resources, assessment aids, news, and announcement and connect with the teacher community.
- Both government and private organisations can integrate DIKSHA into their respective teacher initiatives.
- Currently, DIKSHA supports 10 Indian languages viz. Hindi, English, Gujarati, Bengali, Assamese, Marathi, Odia, Kannada, Tamil and Telugu, both for creating and viewing content.

Index of Industrial Production (IIP)

Context:

Quick Estimates of Index of Industrial Production and Use-Based Index for the Month of February 2020 (Base 2011-12=100) released.

TRIFED

Context:

TRIFED in collaboration with UNICEF & WHO launched a digital campaign through webinar for SHGs to ensure that Tribal Gatherers carry on their work safely.

Details:

- TRIFED launched through a Webinar, Virtual training to its Trainers and Self Help Groups (SHGs) on basic orientation on Covid-19 response and key preventive measures to ensure tribal gatherers carry on their work safely.
- It is aimed to reach more than 18,000 participants and would cover tribal regions across all the 27 States.
- To ensure tribal gatherers carry on their work safely, TRIFED has collaborated with UNICEF and WHO for developing a digital communication strategy for promoting a digital

campaign for Self Help Groups (SHGs) involved in this work, highlighting the importance of Social Distancing.

- UNICEF is providing the necessary support to the SHG Centres in the form of Digital Multimedia content, Webinars for Virtual trainings, Social Media campaigns (on social distancing, home quarantine, etc.) and Vanya Radio.

- Additionally, TRIFED has reached out to the Art of Living Foundation's #iStandWithHumanity Initiative with a Stand With Tribal Families component in providing the much-needed food and ration for the survival of the tribal community.

Bharat Padhe Online

Context

- Union HRD Minister launches 'Bharat Padhe Online' campaign to invite ideas to improve online education ecosystem

Details

- The campaign aims to invite the best brains in the country to share suggestions/solutions directly with the HRD Ministry to overcome constraints of online education.

- Further educators across the country can also come forward to contribute with their expertise and experience in the field of education.

- Thus limitations of the current online education scenario of India and challenges they face in traditional classrooms can be addressed through online education.

Central Institute of Plastics Engineering & Technology (CIPET)

- It was established in 1968 by Government of India with the assistance of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) at Chennai.

- The main objective of setting up of the institute was to develop manpower in different

disciplines of Plastics Engineering & Technology as no similar institute was in existence in the country.

- International Labour Organization (ILO) served as the executing agency.

- CIPET is a premier national institution under the Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers, Govt. of India fully devoted to Skill Development, Technology Support Services, Academic and Research (STAR) in all the domains of plastics

Objectives

- To provide qualified plastics professionals at various skill levels through academic Long term, short term, Skill Development & Entrepreneurship development programs in the field of Polymer Science & Technology.

- To offer Technology Support & Consultancy Services in the areas of Plastics Processing, Testing, Quality Control, Inspection, Design, Tool Room, CAD/CAM/CAE, Calibration & Application Development.

Context

- CIPET Institutes/Centres contribute Rs 86.5 lakh to local authorities/governments for COVID-19 relief work

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- They are protective gears designed to safeguard the health of workers by minimizing the exposure to a biological agent.

- Components of PPE are goggles, face-shield, mask, gloves, coverall/gowns (with or without aprons), head cover and shoe cover.

Context

- PMO reviews efforts of eleven Empowered Groups towards tackling COVID-19

- The production of PPEs is being ramped up and capacity building for healthcare personnel is being ensured.

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Piezoelectricity

- Piezoelectricity (also called the piezoelectric effect) is the ability of certain materials to generate an electric charge in response to applied mechanical stress.

- The word Piezoelectric is derived from the Greek word Piezein, which means to squeeze or press, and piezo, which is Greek for "push".

- The piezoelectric effect is a reversible process: materials exhibiting the piezoelectric effect (the internal generation of electrical charge resulting from an applied mechanical force) also exhibit the reverse piezoelectric effect, the internal generation of a mechanical strain resulting from an applied electrical field.

- French physicists Jacques and Pierre Curie discovered piezoelectricity in 1880

Piezoelectric Materials

There are many materials, both natural and man-made, that exhibit a range of piezoelectric effects.

- Some **naturally** piezoelectric occurring materials include Berlinite (structurally identical to quartz), cane sugar, quartz, Rochelle salt, topaz, tourmaline, and bone (dry bone exhibits some piezoelectric properties due to the apatite crystals, and the piezoelectric effect is generally thought to act as a biological force sensor).

- An example of **man-made** piezoelectric materials includes barium titanate and lead zirconate titanate.

Applications

- Piezoelectricity is exploited in a number of useful applications, such as the production and detection of sound, piezoelectric inkjet printing, generation of high voltages, electronic frequency generation, microbalances, to drive an ultrasonic nozzle, and ultrafine focusing of optical assemblies.

- It forms the basis for a number of scientific instrumental techniques with atomic resolution, the scanning probe microscopies, such as scanning tunneling microscope (STM), Atomic force microscopy (AFM)

- It also finds everyday uses such as acting as the ignition source for cigarette lighters, push-start propane barbecues, used as the time reference source in quartz watches

Context

- Researchers from Institute of Nano Science and Technology (INST), Mohali an autonomous institute under the Department of Science & Technology, have made computer based designs of nano-materials with superhigh piezoelectricity which can be the building blocks of futuristic nano-electronics for applications like ultrathin, next-generation nano-transistors.

- The research demonstrated induction of superhigh out-of-plane piezoelectricity via stacking one monolayer over the other in the 2D nanostructure.

Details

- The induction of this phenomenon is based on two-dimensional van der Waals Heterostructure (vdWH) comprising of 2D monolayers

- The vdWH is a new approach in materials design where different monolayers having complimentary properties are combined together to surmount their intrinsic limitations.

- When two monolayers are stacked over one another to constitute a vdWH, various factors affect the electronic properties.

  The dipoles arising at the interface due to the large charge density difference between the two constituent monolayers extend out into the interlayer region, which result in such an ultrahigh value in out-of-plane piezoelectricity.

Telemedicine Guidelines Approved for Homoeopathic Practitioners

What's in News?

An international webinar was organised by the Central Council for Research in Homoeopathy (CCRH) under the Ministry of AYUSH on 10th April 2020 on World Homoeopathy Day.

Details:

- Telemedicine guidelines for homoeopathic practitioners were announced and also the need to mobilise the AYUSH workforce to align with the COVID taskforce was emphasised.

- The event commemorated the 265th birth anniversary of Dr. Samuel Hahnemann, the founder of Homoeopathy.

Homoeopathy is one of the most popular medical systems in India, among the AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy) services.

PM CARES Fund

- PM CARES Fund is a public charitable trust set up by the government in the wake of the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic.

- Contribution made to 'PM CARES Fund' shall qualify as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) expenditure under Schedule VII of the Companies Act, 2013

Note:

- Contributions made to 'Chief Minister's Relief Funds' or 'State Relief Fund for COVID-19' shall not qualify as admissible CSR expenditure.

- Contribution made to State Disaster Management Authority to combat COVID-19 shall qualify as CSR expenditure.

- Payment of salary/ wages in normal circumstances is a contractual and statutory obligation of the company. Similarly, payment of salary/ wages to employees and workers even during the lockdown period is a moral obligation of the employers, as they have no alternative source of employment or livelihood during this period. Thus, payment of salary/ wages to employees and workers during the lockdown period (including imposition of other social distancing requirements) would not qualify as admissible CSR expenditure.

- If any ex-gratia payment is made to temporary / casual workers/ daily wage workers over and above the disbursement of wages, specifically for the purpose of fighting COVID 19, the same shall be admissible towards CSR expenditure as a onetime exception provided there is an explicit declaration to that effect by the Board of the company, which is duly certified by the statutory auditor.

PM Gareeb Kalyan Yojna

What's in News?

- EPFO has put in place Online Mechanism to credit EPF and EPS Accounts of Subscribers as per PM Gareeb Kalyan Yojna.

Details:

- Employees Provident Fund Organization (EPFO) is a statutory body under Union Ministry of Labour and Employment.

- EPF (Employees' Provident Fund Scheme 1952) and EPS (Employees' Pension Scheme 1995) are the two different retirement saving schemes under Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952, meant for salaried employees.

PMGK Yojana:

- The Centre has announced a ₹1.7 lakh crore relief package – Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan (PMGK) Yojana in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and countrywide lockdown, providing free food and cash transfers to support the poorest and most vulnerable citizens during the crisis.

- There have been recent updates on the PM Garib Kalyan Yojana as declared by the Finance Minister on March 26th, 2020.

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- Garib Kalyan package is a range of measures that the Government of India will take to alleviate the economic, health, and food-related distress of India's poor.

Central Administrative Tribunal

- The Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) was established in 1985 through the Administrative Tribunals Act.

- The CAT is responsible for adjudication or trial of matters connected with recruitment and conditions of service of personnel in public service in India.

- The CAT was created by the Act in 1985 under Article 323A of the Constitution of India. The Tribunal derives its jurisdiction, powers and authority from this Section.

- It was established via the 42nd Constitutional Amendment of the Constitution.

Convalescent-plasma therapy

What is convalescent-plasma therapy?

- Convalescent Plasma therapy involves transfusing certain components from the blood of people who have recovered from a virus attack into people who are very sick with the virus or people who are at high risk of getting the virus.

- When a pathogen like novel coronavirus infects, our immune systems produce antibodies.

- The antibodies span out to identify and mark the invading virus.

- White blood cells attach the identified intruders, and the body gets rid of the infection.

- The therapy, like blood transfusion, harvests the antibody from a recovered patient and ingest into a sick person.

- Helped by the antibody, the immune system mounts robust combat on the virus.

What are antibodies?

- Antibodies are one of the front-line immune response to an infection by a microbe.

- They are a particular type of proteins secreted by immune cells called B lymphocytes when they encounter an invader, such as a novel coronavirus.

- The immune system designs antibodies that are highly specific to each invading pathogen. A particular antibody and its partner virus are made for each other.

How the treatment is given?

- Blood is drawn from a person who has recovered from COVID-19 sickness.

- The serum is separated and screened for virus-neutralizing antibodies.

- Convalescent serum, that is the blood serum obtained from one who has recovered from an infectious disease and especially rich in antibodies for that pathogen, is then administered to a COVID-19 patient.

- The sick acquires passive immunisation.

- Potential donor would be examined before the blood serum is extracted and given to a sick person. First, the swab test must be negative and the potential donor has to be declared as cured. Then the recovered person has to wait for two weeks. Or else the potential donor should be asymptomatic for at least 28 days. Either of the two is mandatory.

How is it different from vaccination?

- This therapy is akin to passive immunization.

- When a vaccine is administrated, the immune system produces the antibodies. Thus, in a later date, when the vaccinated person is infected by that pathogen, the immune system releases the antibodies and neutralises the infection.

- Vaccination provides lifelong immunity.

- In the case of passive antibody therapy, the effect lasts only up to the time the antibodies injected remain the bloodstream. The protection given is temporary.

Challenges:

- This therapy is not simple to harness, primarily due to the difficulty of obtaining significant amounts of plasma from survivors.

- In diseases like COVID-19, where most of the victims are aged, suffering from other medical conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and so on, not all recovered patients can volunteer to donate blood.

TRIFED asks State Nodal Departments & Implementing Agencies to initiate procurement from available funds under 'MSP for MFP scheme'

What's in News?

- TRIFED under Ministry of Tribal Affairs has asked the State Nodal Departments and Implementing Agencies to initiate procurement of Minor Forest Produces (MFPs) at Minimum Support Price (MSP) from the available funds under MSP for MFP Scheme.

- TRIFED in collaboration with UNICEF is hosting Webinar sessions for the Van Dhan Self Help Group members of the Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs) for creating awareness among the tribal gatherers for following social distancing measures and maintaining necessary hygiene required for carrying out their operations.

anaushadhi Kendra

Context:

During the lockdown due to the spread of COVID-19 pandemic across the country, pharmacists of the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Kendras (PMJAKs) are delivering quality generic medicines at affordable prices to the common citizens of the country.

Details:

- Currently, more than 6300 PMJAKs are functioning across the country, covering 726 districts.

- PMJAKs are set up across the country so as to reduce the out of pocket expenses for health care under the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP).

- In the lockdown period, the PMBJP is also generating awareness through informational posts on their social media platforms, to help people protect themselves from the Coronavirus.

Border Roads Organisation (BRO)

Context:

The BRO opened the strategic Srinagar-Leh highway that connects Ladakh with the rest of the world.

Details:

- The highway (425 km road) was closed for four months due to heavy snowfall at **Zojila Pass**.

- This pass is located in the Kargil district of Ladakh.

- It connects Leh and Kashmir, and is importance since it links the UTs of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

- During winters, the pass remains closed due to heavy snowfall, cutting off the region of Ladakh during this period.

  There was an emergent need for stockpiling of essential commodities in the UT of Ladakh.

  Project Beacon and Project Vijayak cleared fresh snow around Zojilla at the height of 11,500 feet and made the road motorable.

  The projects were undertaken by the BRO.

About Border Roads Organisation (BRO):

- The BRO develops and maintains road networks in India's border areas and friendly neighbouring countries.

- Officers from the Border Roads Engineering Service (BRES) and personnel from the

General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF) form the parent cadre of the Border Roads Organisation.

- It is also staffed by officers and troops drawn from the Indian Army's Corps of Engineers on extra regimental employment (on Deputation).

- Headquartered in New Delhi, the BRO is under the Ministry of Defence, GOI.

YUKTI (Young India Combating COVID with Knowledge, Technology and Innovation)

Context:

The Union HRD Minister launched YUKTI.

About YUKTI:

- It is a unique web portal and dashboard to monitor and record the efforts and initiatives of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD).

- The portal intends to cover the different dimensions of COVID-19 challenges in a very holistic and comprehensive way.

- The portal will cover the various initiatives and efforts of the institutions in academics, research especially related to COVID, social initiatives by institutions and the measures taken for the betterment of the total wellbeing of students.

- The portal will cover both qualitative and quantitative parameters for effective delivery of services to the academic community at large.

- The portal will also allow various institutions to share their strategies for various challenges which are there because of the unprecedented situation of COVID-19 and other future initiatives.

- The portal will also establish a two-way communication channel between the Ministry and the institutions so that the Ministry can provide the necessary support system to the institutions.

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)

Context:

About 85 lakh PMUY beneficiaries have got the LPG cylinder in April 2020.

NRLM – National Rural Livelihood Mission

Context:

NRLM Self Help Group network rises to the challenge of COVID-19 situation in the country.

President's greetings on the eve of Birth Anniversary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

What's in News?

Father of the Indian Constitution, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born on 14 April 1891 at Mhow in the Central Provinces in British India (currently in Madhya Pradesh). This day is observed as 'Ambedkar Jayanti' in India.

- Ambedkar was a key figure in the Constituent Assembly of India and was the chairman of the Drafting Committee.

- For his role in the preparation of the Constitution, he is revered as the **'Father of the Indian Constitution'**.

- He also served as India's **first Law Minister** in the Interim government in 1947.

First harvest festivals of the year

What's in News?

The President of India's greetings on the occasion of Vaisakhi, Vishu, Rongali Bihu, Naba Barsha, Vaisakhadi, Puthandu, Pirappu, which are being celebrated in different parts of the country on 13th and 14th April, 2020.

- Vaisakhi, Vishu, Puthandu, Masadi, Vaishkhadi and Bahag Bihu which are being celebrated in different parts of the country.

- These are the first harvest festivals of the year.

- **Vaisakhi**, also pronounced as Baisakhi is a historical and religious festival in Sikhism as well as a celebration of the New Year.

- **Vishu** is a Hindu festival celebrated in the South Indian state of Kerala, Tulu Nadu region in Karnataka, bordering areas of Tamil Nadu and their diaspora communities.

- **Puthandu**, also known as Puthuvarusham or Tamil New Year, is the first day of year on the Tamil calendar and traditionally celebrated as a festival.

- **Poila Boishakh** is celebrated in West Bengal, and parts of Tripura. According to the Bengali calendar, it is the first day of the first month.

- **Bohag Bihu** or Rongali Bihu also called Xaat Bihu is a festival celebrated in the state of Assam and other parts of north-eastern India, and marks the beginning of the Assamese New Year.

- **Maha Bishuba Pana Sankranti** is the traditional new year day festival of Buddhists and Hindus in Odisha.

Jallianwala Bagh massacre

What's in News?

The Prime Minister pays tributes to the martyrs of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.

- On 13 April 1919, British troops fired at a gathering of unarmed Indians at the Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar leading to the deaths of at least a thousand people.

e-NAM

What's in News?

National Agriculture Market portal e-NAM to complete four Years on 14th April 2020.

- e-NAM or the e-trading platform (online trading portal) for the National Agriculture Market (NAM) was launched by the Prime Minister on April 2016.

- e – National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) is a pan-India electronic trading portal which nets the prevailing Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMC) Mandis for making a united national market for agricultural commodities.

- The portal has helped in realizing the vision of "One Nation, One Market" for Agri-produce.

Lifeline Udan

What's in News?

Airlines cover more than 2 lakh km under Lifeline Udan to transport medical supplies across the nation.

- As part of India's war against the novel Coronavirus pandemic, the Ministry of Civil Aviation has launched "Lifeline Udan".

Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme 2020-21

What's in News?

The Government of India, in consultation with the Reserve Bank of India, has decided to issue Sovereign Gold Bonds. The Sovereign Gold Bonds will be issued in six tranches from April 2020 to September 2020.

- The Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme was introduced in the Union Budget 2015-16 by the Union Cabinet.

- The scheme was launched as an initiative to reduce the demand for physical gold.

- It aims to invest a part of these physicals gold bars and coins that are purchased every year into financial savings in the form of gold bonds.

'Bharat Padhe Online' campaign

- 'Bharat Padhe Online' campaign is a one week long campaign for Crowd sourcing of Ideas for Improving Online Education ecosystem of India.

- The campaign aims to invite all the best brains in India to share suggestions/solutions directly with HRD Ministry to overcome constraints of online education while promoting the available digital education platforms.

Business Correspondent Sakhis and Bank Sakhis

What's in News?

Self Help Group women working as Business Correspondents for banks (BC Sakhis) and Bank Sakhis are playing a vital role in disbursement of first tranch of ex-gratia of Rs.500/- to women PMJDY accounts amidst COVID-19 Lockdown.

Details:

- COVID – 19 pandemic has resulted in a national lockdown leaving a large number of people without access to wages and employment.

- Those worst hit by this unprecedented pandemic and lockdown are daily wage labourers, migrants, homeless, the poor and many who form the floating population.

- The Union Government had announced the release of 500/- per month for 3 months in 20.39 Crore Women PMJDY accounts.

- Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), Ministry of Rural Development was given the responsibility to transfer the fund with the support of the Department of Financial Services and Banks.

- Government of India also released other DBT funds like Rs.2000/- to PM Kisan Yojana accounts, MGNREGA wages payments to all rural population to address the financial stress being faced by the community.

- Due to release of DBT funds, there was expected to rush at Bank premises for withdrawal of the amount.

- In most of the cases, the services of BC Sakhis (SHG women working as Business Correspondents for banks) were utilized for making payments to rural households.

- Most importantly, SHG members engaged as BC Sakhi/ Bank Sakhi are playing a vital role in ensuring the disbursement of financial relief packages provided by Government of India.

- Because of them, rural community facing socio-economic distress, have been able to access banking services at their door step in the unbanked areas through BC Point to meet their daily requirements during the lockdown period.

Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF)

What's in News?

The Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF), has invited Proposals for 'COVID-19 Indo-U.S. Virtual Networks' that would allow Indian and U.S. scientists and engineers currently engaged in COVID-related research to carry out joint research activities through a virtual mechanism, leveraging existing infrastructure and funding.

The Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF):

- The IUSSTF was established under an agreement between the Governments of India and the United States of America in March 2000.

- It is an autonomous bilateral organization jointly funded by both the Governments that promotes Science, Technology, Engineering, and Innovation through substantive interaction among government, academia, and industry.

- The Department of Science and Technology, Governments of India, and the U.S. Department of State are respective nodal departments.

Significance:

- As the world battles the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative that the S&T communities work together and share resources to address this global challenge.
- Science, Engineering, and Technology will play a critical role in finding solutions through the development of new vaccines, devices, diagnostic tools, and information systems, as well as strategies to help communities and nations manage and deploy resources to combat this pandemic.
- Collaboration across nations and organizations can leverage and share expertise across S&T communities and facilitate the development of a diverse, globally-engaged science, engineering, and technology-abled workforce, which can proactively work towards solutions for the Pandemic.

CollabCAD

What's in News?

Atal Innovation Mission, NITI Aayog and National Informatics Centre (NIC) have jointly launched CollabCAD.

CollabCAD:

- CollabCAD is a collaborative network, computer enabled software system, providing a total engineering solution from 2D drafting & detailing to 3D product design.
- The aim of this initiative is to provide a great platform to students of Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs) across country to create and modify 3d designs with free flow of creativity and imagination.
- This software would also enable students to create data across the network and concurrently access the same design data for storage and visualization.
- A customized version of CollabCAD for ATLs with features that are most relevant to school students to materialize their ideas and creativity into physical solutions has been developed to

enable designing without constraints and, thus, allowing creativity and innovation to thrive.
- AIM's collaboration with NIC's CollabCAD is a great platform for students to utilize indigenous, state-of-the-art made-in-India software for 3D modeling/slicing to use 3D Printing.

Atal Innovation Mission:

- In 2016, India launched Atal Innovation Mission.
- The Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) is a flagship initiative set up by the NITI Aayog to promote innovation and entrepreneurship across the length and breadth of the country.
- AIM's objectives are to create and promote an ecosystem of innovation and entrepreneurship across the country at school, university, research institutions, MSME and industry levels.
- AIM has set up state of the art Atal Tinkering Labs (dedicated innovation workspaces) in schools across all districts, across the country.

COVID-19 Lockdown

Context:

PM's address to the nation.

Details:

- The Prime Minister extended the lockdown in light of the COVID-19 pandemic situation in the country.
- For more on COVID-19, click on the linked article.

Ambedkar Jayanti

Context:

PM greets people on the occasion of Ambedkar Jayanti.

Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)

Context:

Union Agriculture Minister reviews ICAR activities during lockdown.

About ICAR:

- Three ICAR institutes are engaged in COVID-19 testing on humans.

Defense Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)

Context:

Defence Research & Development Laboratory (DRDL), Hyderabad has added another product to the portfolio of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) to combat COVID-19 by developing **COVID Sample Collection Kiosk (COVSACK).**

About COVSACK:

- The COVSACK is a kiosk for use by healthcare workers for taking COVID-19 samples from suspected infected patients.

- Patient under test walks into the kiosk and a nasal or oral swab is taken by a health care professional from outside through the built-in gloves.

- The kiosk is automatically disinfected without the need for human involvement, making the process free of infection spread.

- The shielding screen of the kiosk cabin protects the health care worker from aerosols/droplet transmission while taking the sample. This reduces the requirements of PPE change by health care workers.

- After the patient leaves the kiosk, four nozzle sprayers mounted in the kiosk cabin disinfect the empty chamber by spraying disinfectant mist for a period of 70 seconds.

- It is further flushed with water & UV light disinfection.

- The system is ready for next use in less than two minutes.

- Voice command can be given through two-way communication system integrated with the COVSACK.

- It is possible to configure COVSACK to be used either from inside or outside as required by the medical professionals.

- The COVSACK costs nearly Rs One Lakh and the identified industry based at Belgaum, Karnataka can support 10 units per day. The DRDO has designed and developed two units and handed over these to ESIC Hospital, Hyderabad after successful testing.

SWAYAMPRABHA

Context:

The NIOS (National Institute of Open Schooling) of HRD Ministry initiates a unique method to ensure effective schooling to reach the unreached directly at door step.

Details:

- Content is being made available online through 'SWAYAM' MOOC platform of the MHRD for various subjects from class 9th to 12th.

- Along with Self Learning Material, 'SWAYAM' portal provides video lectures and facility for self-assessment.

- The questions and queries of the learners are also being resolved through discussion forums.

  For those who do not have much access to the internet, these video lectures are telecast on the MHRD SWAYAMPRABHA TV channels with live sessions for students to interact with their teachers and subject experts.

  Learners can watch the lesson-based educational programs on three DTH Channels and the NIOS YouTube channel.

  Learners can ask questions directly to the subject experts from their home through phone call on the number displayed during live sessions and through 'Student Portal' of NIOS web site directly in live telecast.

A few private DTH operators have also agreed to air three Swayam Prabha DTH channels on their DTH platform.

People can request their DTH 'Service Provider' for these channels without any extra cost as these are free to air channels.

About SWAYAMPRABHA/SWAYAM PRABHA:

- SWAYAMPRABHA is an effective tool of learning for those who do not have internet access at their home.

- The SWAYAM PRABHA is a group of 32 DTH channels devoted to the telecasting of high-quality educational programmes on a 24X7 basis using the GSAT-15 satellite.

- The channels are uplinked from **BISAG**, Gandhinagar.

- BISAG is a State level nodal agency to facilitate the use of spatial and geo-spatial technologies for the planning and developmental activities pertaining to Agriculture, Land and Water Resource Management, Wasteland/Watershed Development, Forestry, Disaster Management, Infrastructure and Education.

- The Institute started its operations in April 1997 and was renamed as the "Bhaskaracharya Institute for Space Applications and Geo-informatics" in December 2003.

- It was formerly known as Remote Sensing and Communication Centre (RESECO).

Initiatives of Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers' Welfare to promote farming and allied sectors during lockdown

The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers' Welfare, Government of India is taking several measures to facilitate farming activities at the field level during the lockdown period.

The following are the measures taken:

1. The following exemptions were given by the GOI for agricultural operations during the lockdown keeping in view the harvesting and sowing season:

a. Agencies engaged in the procurement of agriculture products, including MSP operations;

b. Farming operations by farmers and farm workers in the field;

c. 'Mandis' operated by the Agriculture Produce Market Committee(APMC) or as notified by the State Government;

d. 'Mandis' include direct marketing facilitated by the State Government/UT administration, directly from the farmers/groups of farmers, FPOs, cooperatives, etc.;

e. Shops for seeds, fertilisers and pesticides;

f. Manufacturing and packaging units of seeds, fertilisers and pesticides;

g. Custom Hiring Centres (CHC) related to farm machinery;

h. Intra and inter-state movement of harvesting and sowing related machines like combined harvester and other agriculture/horticulture implements;

i. Cold storage and warehousing services;

j. Manufacturing units of packaging material for food items;

k. Transportation for essential goods;

l. Shops of agriculture machinery, its spare parts (including its supply chain) and repairs;

m. Tea industry, including plantation with maximum of 50% workers.

2. The **All India Agri Transport Call Centre** has been launched.

a. This Call Centre has been set up for coordination between States for inter-state movement of perishables like vegetables & fruits, agri inputs like seeds, pesticides and fertilizers, etc.

3. Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (**PM-KISAN**) Scheme

a. Under the PM-KISAN scheme, about 8.46 crore farmers have been benefitted and an amount of Rs. 16,927 crore has been released so far.

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4. Under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PM-GKY) about 5516 MT of pulses has been dispatched for delivery to the States/UTs.

5. The Railways has introduced new routes for the improved delivery of agricultural and horticultural produce and inputs.

6. Validity of star rating certification of accredited nurseries extended by NHB to September 2020 to ensure the availability of quality planting material to farmers.

7. Migratory beekeeping was facilitated by requesting states to allow intra and interstate movement.

8. Insurance claims have been disbursed to beneficiary farmers under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.

9. The due date for the conversion of agri-gold loans and other agri accounts into KCC account has been extended.More on KCC (Kisan Credit Cards) at PIB dated Feb 11, 2020.

10. Module of Uberisation of logistics aggregator has been launched on the e-NAM.

Uberisation refers to the utilisation of computing platforms such as, but not limited to, mobile applications or websites, in order to facilitate peer to peer transactions between clients and providers of a service, often bypassing the role of centrally planned corporations.

India's Foreign Trade

Context:

India's overall exports (Merchandise and Services combined) in April-March 2019-20 are estimated to be USD 528.45billion.

Details:

- This shows a negative growth of (-) 1.36 per cent over the same period last year.

- Overall imports in April-March 2019-20 are estimated to be USD 598.61billion, exhibiting a negative growth of (-) 6.33per cent over the same period last year.

- Rise in import in March 2020 was witnessed only in Transport equipment, which registered a growth of 11.94% over March 2019.

- **Trade Balance:**

- MERCHANDISE: The trade deficit for March 2020 was estimated at USD 9.76 billion as against the deficit of USD 11.00 billion in March 2019.

- SERVICES: As per RBI's Press Release dated 15th April 2020, the trade balance in Services (i.e. Net Services export) for February 2020 is estimated at USD 6.66 billion.

- OVERALL TRADE BALANCE: Taking merchandise and services together, overall trade deficit for April-March 2019-20 is estimated at USD 70.16 billion as compared to USD 103.32 billion in April-March 2018-19.

Wholesale Price Index (WPI)

Context:

The official Wholesale Price Index for 'All Commodities' (Base: 2011-12=100) for the month of March 2020 declined by 0.90% to 121.1 (provisional) from 122.2 (provisional) for the previous month.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

Context:

To address the unprecedented situation arising from the global outbreak of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), and to ramp up availability or production of various drugs, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has made an amendment to the EIA Notification 2006.

Details:

- All projects or activities in respect of bulk drugs and intermediates, manufactured for addressing various ailments, have been re-categorized from the existing Category 'A' to 'B2' category.

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- Projects falling under Category B2 are exempted from requirement of collection of Base line data, EIA Studies and public consultation.

The re-categorization of such proposals has been done to facilitate decentralization of appraisal to State Level so as to fast track the process.

This step of the government is with a view to help in increasing the availability of the important medicines/drugs in the country within short span of time.

This amendment is applicable to all proposals received up to 30th September 2020.

The states have also been issued advisories to expeditiously process such proposals.

Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT)

Context:

Over 10.2 lakh refunds worth Rs 4,250 crore issued in a week by CBDT to help taxpayers in the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

To know more about the CBDT, click on the linked article.

G20

Context:

Finance Minister attends the 2nd G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors Meeting.

Details:

- Minister Nirmala Sitharaman attended the virtual session of the 2nd G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (FMCBG) meeting under the Saudi Arabian Presidency, to discuss the global economic outlook amid evolving the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

- An Action Plan has been prepared by G20 members on the directions of G20 Leaders to protect lives, safeguard people's jobs and

incomes, restore confidence, preserve financial stability, revive growth and recover stronger, provide help to countries needing assistance, coordinate on public health and financial measures and minimise disruption to global supply chain.

Software Technology Parks of India (STPI)

Context:

Government of India gives 4 months' rental waiver to the IT companies operating from Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) centres.

Details:

- In light of the current coronavirus pandemic, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has decided to provide rental waiver to IT companies housed in STPI premises in the country from March to June, i.e., for 4 months period as of now.

About the Software Technology Parks of India (STPI):

- Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) is an autonomous society under the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, Government of India.

- It was established in 1991 with the objective of encouraging, promoting and boosting the export of software from India.

- STPI maintains internal engineering resources to provide consulting, training and implementation services.

- Services cover Network Design, System Integration, Installation, Operations and maintenance of application networks and facilities in varied areas.

- The STPI's major functions are to establish software technology parks in various locations in India, and to perform various financial management functions related to it.

- It has 60 centres across India.
- The STPI's Governing Council's Chairperson is the Union Minister for Electronics & Information Technology.

STPI Objectives:

- To promote the development and export of software and software services including Information Technology Enabled Services/Bio-IT.
- To provide statutory and other promotional services to the exporters by implementing Software Technology Park/Electronics and Hardware Technology Park Schemes and other such schemes which may be formulated and entrusted by the Government from time to time.
- To provide data communication services including value added services to IT/IT Enabled Services related industries.
- To promote micro, small and medium entrepreneurs by creating conducive environment for entrepreneurship in the field of IT/IT Enabled Services.

International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC)

Context:

The Union Finance Minister attended through video-conference the Plenary Meeting of the International Monetary and Financial Committee.

About the IMFC:

- The IMFC is the Ministerial-level committee of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- It has 24 members and monitors developments in global liquidity and the transfer of resources to developing countries.
- The IMFC meets twice a year, once during the Fund-Bank Annual Meetings in October, and again during the Spring Meetings in April.

- The Committee discusses matters of common concern affecting the global economy and advises the IMF on the direction of its work.

All India Council For Technical Education (AICTE)

Context:

AICTE gives instructions to colleges/institutions to ensure safety and academic welfare of students.

Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO)

Context:

As part of PMGKY package, the EPFO settles 3.31 Lakh COVID-19 claims in 15 days.

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)

Context:

Over 1.51 Crore free LPG cylinders distributed so far to the PMUY beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY).

Chitra GeneLAMP-N

Context:

Chitra GeneLAMP-N makes confirmatory tests results of COVID-19 possible in 2 hours.

Details:

- Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology, Trivandrum, an Institute of National Importance, of the Department of Science and Technology (DST), has developed a diagnostic test kit that can confirm COVID-19 in 2 hours at a low cost.
- The confirmatory diagnostic test, which detects the N Gene of SARS- COV2 using reverse transcriptase loop-mediated amplification of viral nucleic acid (RT-LAMP), will be one of the world's first few if not the first of its kind in the world.

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- The test kit, funded by the DST called Chitra GeneLAMP-N, is highly specific for SARS-CoV-2 N-gene and can detect two regions of the gene, which will ensure that the test does not fail even if one region of the viral gene undergoes mutation during its current spread.

- The tests performed at National Institute of Virology (NIV) Alappuzha (authorized by ICMR) show that Chitra GeneLAMP- N has 100% accuracy and match with test results using RT-PCR.

- This has been intimated to ICMR, the authority to approve COVID-19 testing in India, following which license needs to be obtained from the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) for manufacture.

- **Benefits of GeneLAMP-N:**

- Current PCR kits in India enable detection of E gene for screening and RdRp gene for confirmation. Chitra GeneLAMP-N gene testing will allow **confirmation in one test without the need for a screening test and at much lower costs.**

- The detection time is 10 minutes, and the sample to result time (from RNA extraction in swab to RT-LAMP detection time) will be less than 2 hours.

- A total of 30 samples can be tested in a single batch in a single machine allowing a large number of samples to be tested each day.

- The testing facility can be easily set up even in the laboratories of district hospitals with limited facilities and trained laboratory technicians.

- The results can be read from the machine from the change in fluorescence.

- The cost of testing with the new device for LAMP testing and the test kit for 2 regions of N gene (including RNA extraction) will be less than Rs 1000/test for the laboratory.

Heavy Metal Detection in Water

Context:

The Centre for Nano and Soft Matter Sciences (CeNS) has developed a compact solid-state sensor to detect heavy metal ions in water.

Details:

- It is a portable device which can help onsite detection in remote areas.

- The CeNS's research team has developed a compact solid-state sensor to detect the heavy metal ions, e.g., lead ions (Pb2+) down to 0.4 parts per billion (ppb) for efficient onsite detection.

- The sensor film was prepared by forming a composite between manganese doped zinc sulfide quantum dots and reduced graphene oxide on a glass substrate.

- These particular quantum dots are water-soluble and have high photoluminescence (~ 30 %) quantum yield, making them suitable for luminescence-based sensing.

- These quantum dots can be excited with a handheld UV light of 254 nm, thus making it a portable device even to remote areas.

- If a drop of water containing heavy metal ions such as mercury, lead, cadmium, etc. are added to the composite film, the emission of the film quenches within seconds.

Heavy metal ions in water:

- Heavy metal ions such as lead, mercury and cadmium pose severe potential threats to living beings as they can easily be accumulated in the body and cannot be detoxified by any chemical or biological processes.

- The health hazards associated with heavy metal ions in water demands the development of efficient and portable sensors for rapid onsite detection of these ions.

Kisan Rath Mobile App

- The app will facilitate farmers & traders in searching for transport vehicles for Primary and

Secondary transportation for movement of Agriculture & Horticulture produce.

- **Primary transportation** would include movement from Farm to Mandis, Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO) Collection Centre and Warehouses etc.

- **Secondary Transportation** would include movement from Mandis to Intra-state & Inter-state mandis, Processing units, Railway station, Warehouses and Wholesalers etc.

This mobile application is developed by the National Informatics Centre (NIC).

- It will bring together 5 lakh trucks and 20,000 tractors on the mobile platform for transporting farm produce to markets from the farm gate.

Significance:

- The Mobile Application named "Kisan Rath" facilitates Farmers and Traders in identifying the right mode of transportation for movement of farm produce ranging from foodgrain (cereal, coarse cereal, pulses etc), Fruits & Vegetables, oil seeds, spices, fiber crops, flowers, bamboo, log & minor forest produce, coconuts etc.

- This App also facilitates traders in the transportation of perishable commodities by Reefer (Refrigerated) vehicles during the lockdown.

Context

- Agriculture Minister has launched the Kisan Rath Mobile App.

National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC)

- NTPC is the largest power generating company in India.

- NTPC was incorporated with the objective of building large size thermal power stations, along with associated transmission systems, to accelerate the integrated development of the power sector in the country.

- In 2010, NTPC was granted the coveted status of 'Maharatna Company' by Government of India to make it a global giant in line with its vision "To be the world's largest and best power producer, powering India's Growth".

Price Support Scheme (PSS)

What's in News?

- Procurement of notified commodities at **Minimum Support Price (MSP)** from the farmers in several States in the Rabi 2020-21 season has started.

Details:

- Government of India through Central Nodal Agencies like **National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (NAFED) and Food Corporation of India (FCI)** has been striving to assure better returns for the farmers.

- The procurement of Pulses & Oilseeds at MSP from farmers under the **Price Support Scheme (PSS) scheme** in Rabi 2020-21 season is currently in progress in **Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana.**

Price Support Scheme (PSS):

- The Government's price policy for agricultural commodities seeks to ensure **remunerative prices to the growers for their produce** with a view to encourage higher investment and production and to safeguard the interest of consumers by making available supplies at reasonable prices with low cost of intermediation.

- Towards this end, the Government announces, Minimum Support Prices **(MSP) for 25 major agricultural commodities each year** in both the Crop seasons after taking into account the **recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).**

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- CACP recommends **MSP for twenty two (22) crops** and **Fair & Remunerative Price (FRP) for sugarcane**.

- Besides NAFED, the Government also organizes procurement operations of these agricultural commodities through various public and cooperative agencies such as FCI.

- The **expenditure and losses** due to procurement will be **borne by the Centre**.

Lifeline Udan

What's in News?

'Lifeline Udan' flights are being operated by Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) to transport **essential medical cargo to remote parts of the country** to support India's war against COVID-19.

Government amends the extant FDI policy

What's in News?

The Government of India has **reviewed the extant Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy for curbing opportunistic takeovers/acquisitions of Indian companies** due to the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Details:

- The Government has amended **para 3.1.1 of extant FDI policy** as contained in **Consolidated FDI Policy, 2017.**

- It has decided put all FDI proposals from **countries sharing border with India under the government approval route.**

- The so-called **automatic route**, under which the central bank simply had to be informed after money was invested, **has been blocked** in such cases.

- Companies whose beneficial ownership also lies in such countries will have to undergo **government scrutiny for any change in foreign holding**.

Why was the amendment made?

- The changes have been made largely to check the **growing influence of Chinese firms in Indian infrastructure companies and banks**.

- Recently, news surfaced that People's Bank of **China increased its stake in Housing Development Finance Corporation to 1.01 per cent from 0.8 per cent**.

- While **India shares a land border with Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, China and Afghanistan**, the move appears directed mostly at China.

- Inflows from Pakistan were under scrutiny anyway, and the other five do not have a past record of buying Indian assets.

Present Position:

- A non-resident entity can invest in India, subject to the FDI Policy except in those sectors/activities which are prohibited.

- However, a citizen of Bangladesh or an entity incorporated in Bangladesh can invest only under the Government route.

- Further, a citizen of Pakistan or an entity incorporated in Pakistan can invest, only under the Government route, in sectors/activities other than defence, space, atomic energy and sectors/activities prohibited for foreign investment.

Revised Position:

- **1.1(a):** A non-resident entity can invest in India, subject to the FDI Policy except in those sectors/activities which are prohibited.

- However, an entity of a country, which shares land border with India or where the beneficial owner of an investment into India is situated in or is a citizen of any such country, can invest only under the Government route.

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- Further, a citizen of Pakistan or an entity incorporated in Pakistan can invest, only under the Government route, in sectors/activities other than defence, space, atomic energy and sectors/activities prohibited for foreign investment.

- **1.1(b)**: In the event of the transfer of ownership of any existing or future FDI in an entity in India, directly or indirectly, resulting in the beneficial ownership falling within the restriction/purview of the para 3.1.1(a), such subsequent change in beneficial ownership will also require Government approval.

Concerns:

- Businesses in India should ideally be under Indian control. Yet, on a broader level, erecting new hurdles to foreign capital goes against our post-1991 policy approach, the idea of which was to open the economy to money from overseas for the sake of growth.

- In a globalized world, country-wise restrictions can also be gotten around by channelling a disguised investment through a transit country.

India Post delivers hope and essential items in far flung areas

What's in News?

The Postal Department during this time of Covid-19 crisis, has risen to the occasion in helping people of the country through its vast network of post offices across the country. **India Post** continues to be a deliverer of hope and essential items to millions of people in far flung areas.

Details:

- Instructions have been issued to specially focus on helping the downtrodden and needy people in urgent need of food items.

- The employees of Department of Posts (DoP) have **pooled their savings** to distribute food, dry rations and even masks to the needy in slums, migrant labourers and daily wage earners.

- **Punjab Postal Circle** started **"Food on Wheels"** for construction workers, hawkers, rickshaw pullers, attendants of patients of PGI and migrant labourers stuck in various parts of Chandigarh.

Minister has issued directions to Department of Posts to utilize speed post through post office and postmen as a **last mile connectivity to deliver these lifesaving medicines for cancer, kidney treatment and other life threatening diseases.**

Postal network is also offering facilities **for bank account opening and most importantly cash withdrawal at the doorstep of the poor people using Aadhar Enabled Payment System (AEPS).**

This has helped people in withdrawing Direct Benefit Transfer amounts sent to them under various pension schemes, MGNREGA and recently announced relief measures under PM Garib Kalyan Package.

Widow, disabled and old aged pensioners have been specially benefited by these payments at their doorsteps.

National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of India Launched

What's in News?

Union Minister for Culture (I/C) has launched the **National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of India** in New Delhi.

Details:

- India houses a repository of unique Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) traditions, 13 of which have also been recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

- The National ICH List is an attempt to recognize the diversity of Indian culture embedded in its intangible heritage.

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- It aims to raise **awareness about the various intangible cultural heritage elements from different states of India** at national and international level and **ensure their protection**. This initiative is also a part of the **Vision 2024 of the Ministry of Culture**.

- The present items in the list have been collated from the projects sanctioned under the **scheme for 'Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India'** formulated by the Ministry of Culture in **2013**.

- As of now the list has **more than 100 elements**. It also includes the 13 elements of India that have already been inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

- The list functions as a tentative list for any potential inscriptions on the **UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage.**

Classification:

Following UNESCO's 2003 Convention for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, this list has been classified into **five broad domains** in which intangible cultural heritage is manifested:

- Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;

- Performing arts;

- Social practices, rituals and festive events;

- Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;

- Traditional craftsmanship.

Power Ministry floats draft Electricity Act

What's in News?

- Supply of quality power at affordable prices is essential for sustained growth of the economy of the country.

- For further development of the power sector, Ministry of Power has issued draft proposal for **amendment of Electricity Act, 2003** in the form of **draft Electricity Act (Amendment) Bill, 2020.**

- **Suggestions have been invited from stakeholders within twenty one days.**

Major amendments proposed in the Electricity Act are as follows:

Viability of Electricity Distribution companies (Discoms)

- **Cost reflective Tariff:** To eliminate the tendency of some Commissions to provide for regulatory assets, it is being provided that the Commissions shall determine tariffs that are reflective of cost so as to enable Discoms to recover their costs.

- **Direct Benefit Transfer:** It is proposed that tariff be determined by Commissions without taking into account the subsidy, which will be given directly by the government to the consumers.

Sanctity of Contracts

- **Establishment of Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority:** A Central Enforcement Authority headed by a **retired Judge of the High Court** is proposed to be set-up with powers of the Civil Court to enforce performance of contracts related to purchase or sale or transmission of power between a generating, distribution or transmission companies.

- **Establishment of adequate Payment Security Mechanism for scheduling of electricity:** It is proposed to empower Load Dispatch Centres to oversee the establishment of adequate payment security mechanism before scheduling dispatch of electricity, as per contracts.

Strengthening the regulatory regime:

- **Strengthening of the Appellate Tribunal (APTEL):** It is proposed to increase the strength of APTEL to **seven apart from the Chairperson so that multiple benches can be set-up** to facilitate quick disposal of cases. It is also proposed to further empower the APTEL to enforce its decisions.

- **Doing away with multiple Selection Committees:** It is proposed to have **one Selection Committee for selection of Chairpersons and Members of the Central and State Commissions** and **uniform qualifications for appointments** of Chairperson and Members of Central and State Electricity Regulatory Commissions.

- **Penalties:** In order to ensure compliance of the provisions of the Electricity Act and orders of the Commission, section 142 and section 146 of the Electricity Act are proposed to be amended to **provide for higher penalties**.

Renewable and Hydro Energy:

- **National Renewable Energy Policy:** It is proposed to provide for a policy document for the development and promotion of generation of electricity from renewable sources of energy.

- It is also proposed that a minimum percentage of purchase of electricity from hydro sources of energy is to be specified by the Commissions.

- **Penalties:** It is being further proposed to levy penalties for non-fulfilment of obligation to buy electricity from renewable and/or hydro sources of energy.

Miscellaneous:

- **Cross border trade in Electricity:** Provisions have been added to **facilitate and develop trade in electricity with other countries.**

- **Franchisees and Distribution sub licensees:** Many States Distribution Companies have been assigning the task of distribution of electricity in a particular area or city to Franchisees / Sub-Distribution Licensees. However, there was a lack of clarity regarding the legal provisions related to this. It is proposed to provide that the Distribution Companies, if they so desire, may engage Franchisees or Sub-Distribution Licensees to distribute electricity on its behalf in a particular area within its area of supply, however, it will be the DISCOM which shall be the licensee, and therefore, ultimately responsible for ensuring quality distribution of electricity in its area of supply.

Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT)

Context:

CBDT revising return forms to enable taxpayers to avail the benefits of timeline extension due to COVID-19.

Government launches online data pool of critical human resource for combating and containing COVID-19

Context:

The Union Government has created an online data pool on https://covidwarriors.gov.in of doctors including AYUSH doctors, nurses and other health care professionals, volunteers from NYKs, NCC NSS, PMGKVY, ex Servicemen, etc. for use by the ground level administration at state, district or municipal levels.

Details:

- The portal contains state-wise and district-wise availability of the large pool of human resources from various groups along with contact details of the nodal officers.

- The dashboard is available for use by various authorities to prepare Crisis Management/Contingency Plans based on the

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available manpower, in coordination with nodal officers for each group.

- This database can also be used to utilise the services of volunteers for enforcing social distancing at banks, ration shops, mandis and for providing help to elderly, physically handicapped and orphanages.

- This will also help States/UTs to move human resources from one location to the other for their utilisation.

- This platform provides anytime onsite delivery of training material/modules through any device (mobile/laptop/desktop).

IIA scientists connect Lithium abundance in interstellar space to new Lithium rich red giants

Context:

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), an autonomous institute under the Department of Science &Technology, Govt. of India, have discovered hundreds of Li-rich giant stars indicating that Li is being produced in the stars and accounts for its abundance in the interstellar medium.

Details:

- The researchers have also associated such Li (lithium) enhancement with central He-burning stars, also known as red clump giants, thereby opening up new vistas in the evolution of the red giant stars.

- Lithium (Li) is one of the three primordial elements, apart from Hydrogen and Helium (He), produced in the big bang nucleosynthesis (BBN) whose models predict primordial Li abundance.

- However, the present measurement of Li in the interstellar medium and very young stars is about 4 times more than the primordial value.

- Thus, identifying sources of Li enrichment in our galaxy has been of great interest to researchers to validate the Big Bang Nucleosynthesis as well as a stellar mixing process.

- Apart from reactions in which high energy cosmic ray particles bombard with heavier nuclei such as carbon and oxygen – producing lighter particles such as Li, stars are also proposed as likely Li source in the galaxy.

- In general, stars are considered as Li sinks. This means that the original Li, with which stars are born, only gets depleted over stars' life-time as Li burns at relatively very low temperatures of about 2.5×10^6 K – a range which is easily encountered in stars.

- By employing data from large scale ground and space missions, the research team discovered hundreds of Li-rich giants.

- The researchers determined the evolutionary phase of these giants by analysing the relative positions of thousands of stars using their temperature and luminosity and also subjecting their independent data set to atmospheric oscillations analysis using data from Kepler Space Telescope, a NASA mission for discovering planets.

- By determining their characteristic frequency and period spacing of pressure (p)-modes and gravity (g)-modes, they could differentiate between the stars that have a He-burning core, or inert He ash at the centre due to Hydrogen fusion reaction.

- **Importantly, they showed for the first time that the Li enhancement in giants is associated only with central He-burning stars, which are also known as red clump giants.**

- This is an important discovery that will help to eliminate many proposed theories such as planet engulfment or nucleosynthesis during the red giant evolution in which helium at the centre is not burning.

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PM-KISAN

Context:

Under PM-KISAN Scheme Rs. 17,793 crores released for 8.89 crore farmers families during the lockdown.

New Development Bank (NDB)

Context:

Finance Minister attends the 5th Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of the New Development Bank through video-conference.

About the New Development Bank:

• The NDB was established by the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) in 2014, at the 6th BRICS Summit at Fortaleza, Brazil.

• In the **Fortaleza Declaration**, the leaders stressed that the NDB will strengthen cooperation among BRICS and will supplement the efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global development, thus contributing to collective commitments for achieving the goal of strong, sustainable and balanced growth.

The purpose of the Bank is to mobilise resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging market economies and developing countries to complement the existing efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global growth and development.

NDB has so far approved 14 projects of India for an amount of $ 4,183 million.

The NDB's President is K. V. Kamath (former chairman of ICICI Bank).

The NDB is headquartered in Shanghai, China.

Updates on COVID-19

For the latest updates on the COVID-19 situation in the country, check our COVID-19 page.

SWAYAM and SWAYAM Prabha

Context:

Union HRD Minister chairs the review meeting on SWAYAM and SWAYAM Prabha in New Delhi.

Details:

• SWAYAM is an online portal where more than 1900 courses are available for students to pursue.

• SWAYAM Prabha is a group of 32 DTH channels devoted to the telecasting of high-quality educational programmes on a 24X7 basis using the GSAT-15 satellite.

Surplus rice available with FCI allowed to be converted to ethanol

Context:

Surplus rice available with the FCI is allowed to be converted to ethanol for utilization in making alcohol-based hand-sanitizers and for blending in petrol.

Details:

• The National Policy on Biofuels, 2018 envisages that during an agriculture crop year when there is projected oversupply of food grains as anticipated by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, the policy will allow conversion of these surplus quantities of food grains to ethanol, based on the approval of the National Biofuel Coordination Committee (NBCC).

• Accordingly, the NBCC held a meeting in which it approved that the surplus rice available with the Food Corporation of India (FCI) may be converted to ethanol for utilization in making alcohol-based hand-sanitizers and in blending for Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) programme.

• The Government of India launched the EBP programme in 2003 for undertaking the blending of ethanol in petrol to address the environmental concerns due to fossil fuel burning, provide remuneration to farmers,

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subsidize crude imports and achieve forex savings.

A new model to predict ionospheric electron density can help communication/navigation

Context:

Researchers from Indian Institute of Geomagnetism (IIG), Navi Mumbai, an autonomous institute of the Department of Science & Technology, Govt. of India, have developed a global model to predict the ionospheric electron density with larger data coverage—a crucial need for communication and navigation.

Details:

• The research team has developed a new **Artificial Neural Networks based global Ionospheric Model (ANNIM)** using long-term ionospheric observations to predict the ionospheric electron density and the peak parameters.

• **Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs):**

• ANNs replicate the processes in the human brain (or biological neurons) to solve problems such as pattern recognition, classification, clustering, generalization, linear and nonlinear data fitting, and time series prediction, and very few attempts have been made to model the global ionosphere variability using ANNs.

Tracking the variability of the Ionosphere is important for communication and navigation.

The ionospheric variability is greatly influenced by both solar originated processes and the neutral atmosphere origin, and therefore, difficult to model.

Scientists have tried to model the ionosphere using theoretical and empirical techniques; however, the accurate prediction of electron density is still a challenging task.

In recent years, Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs) are showing the potential to handle more complex and non-linear problems.

Keeping these aspects in mind, a novel machine learning approach was implemented by the IIG team in the ionospheric model development using global ionospheric observations.

The researchers developed a neural network-based global ionospheric model by using an extensive database consisting of nearly two decades of global Digisonde (an instrument that measures real-time on-site electron density of the ionosphere by sending the radiofrequency pulses), Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) radio occultation and topside sounders observations.

These datasets were processed with various quality control measures to eliminate spurious data points (outliers) and prepared for the training.

Day number, Universal Time, latitude, longitude, F10.7 index (responsible for Photo-ionization), Kp (represents the disturbed space weather conditions), magnetic declination, inclination, dip latitude, zonal and meridional neutral winds were taken as inputs in the study.

The target (output) of ANNs is the electron density as a function of altitude for any given location and time.

The data was trained with the ANNs using a high-performance computer at IIG to develop the ANNIM.

The ANNIM predictions done by the IIG team matched with the incoherent scatter radar and the satellite in situ electron density observations.

Further, the ANNIM successfully reproduced large scale anomalies of the ionosphere.

The ANNIM also captured the general morphological features of the ionosphere during disturbed space weather periods, such as geomagnetic storms which occurs when the magnetic cloud originated from Sun (known as

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Coronal Mass Ejection (CME)) interacts with the Earth's magnetosphere.

The model developed by IIG researchers may be utilized as a reference model in the ionospheric predictions and has potential applications in calculating the Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) positioning errors.

DBT-BIRAC Call on COVID-19 Research Consortium

Context:

The Department of Biotechnology and the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) had invited applications on COVID-19 Research Consortium.

Details:

• A multifaceted approach is being adopted to ensure that vaccine candidates utilizing different platforms and at different stages of development are fast-tracked through this Research Consortium under funding from National Biopharma Mission.

• Both, repurposing of existing vaccine candidates for immediate protection of high-risk groups, and novel vaccine candidate development was considered while selecting proposals under this call.

• Funding support has been recommended to Cadila Healthcare Ltd for advancing the development of a DNA Vaccine candidate against Novel Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, and to Bharat Biotech International Ltd for COVID-19 vaccine candidate utilising the inactivated rabies vector platform.

• Furthermore, for the Phase III human clinical trials study of recombinant BCG vaccine (VPM1002) planned in the high-risk population, Serum Institute of India Private Limited (SIIPL) will be supported.

• The development of a novel vaccine evaluation platform at the National Institute of Immunology to support SARS-CoV-2 vaccine

development has also been approved for financial support.

• Production of purified immunoglobulin G, IgG, at a commercial scale from COVID-19 convalescent sera and production of high titers of equine hyperimmune globulin for the treatment of COVID infected patients on a large scale will be supported at Virchow Biotech Pvt Ltd.

• Financial support to OncoSeek Bio Pvt Ltd will be provided to create an in vitro Lung Organoid model.

• To boost indigenous production and to scale-up the production of molecular and rapid diagnostic tests, many companies will receive financial support.

• Development and deployment of contactless, affordable thermopile based ultrasonic sensors for the screening of COVID-19 suspects and indigenous production of novel PPE for healthcare professionals will also be supported.

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)

Context:

The Union Cabinet has given its approval to relax the mandatory requirement of Aadhaar seeding of data of beneficiaries of the States of Assam and Meghalaya and UTs of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh for release of benefits to them under PM-KISAN Scheme.

India COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness Package

Context:

Cabinet approves Rs. 15,000 Crore for "India COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness Package".

Details:

• The funds sanctioned will be utilized in 3 phases and for immediate COVID-19 Emergency Response, an amount of Rs. 7,774

Crore has been provisioned and the rest for medium-term support (1-4 years) will be provided under mission mode approach.

• The key objectives of the package include mounting emergency response to slow and limit COVID-19 in India through the development of diagnostics and COVID-dedicated treatment facilities, centralized procurement of essential medical equipment and drugs required for treatment of infected patients, strengthen and build resilient national and state health systems to support prevention and preparedness for future disease outbreaks, setting up of laboratories and bolster surveillance activities, bio-security preparedness, pandemic research and proactively engage communities and conduct risk communication activities.

• These interventions and initiatives would be implemented under the overall umbrella of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

• All health workers including Community Health Volunteers (ASHAs) have been covered with insurance under the "Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package: Insurance Scheme for Health Workers fighting COVID-19".

• Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), N95 masks and ventilators, testing kits and drugs for treatment are being procured centrally.

Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897

Context:

Promulgation of an Ordinance to amend the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 in the light of the pandemic situation of COVID-19.

Background:

• During the current COVID-19 pandemic, there have been instances of the most critical service providers i.e., members of the healthcare services being targeted and attacked by miscreants, thereby obstructing them from doing their duties.

• Members of the medical community, even as they continue to perform relentlessly round the clock and save human lives, have unfortunately become the most vulnerable victims as they have been perceived by some as carriers of the virus.

• This has led to cases of their stigmatization and ostracization and sometimes worse, acts of unwarranted violence and harassment.

• This tends to hamper the medical community from performing their duties to their optimum best and maintaining their morale, which is a critical need in this hour of crisis.

• While healthcare service personnel are duty-bound to serve without discrimination, the cooperation and support from society is a fundamental need for them to perform their duties with confidence.

• Several States have enacted special laws to offer protection to doctors and other medical personnel in the past.

• However, COVID-19 outbreak has posed a unique situation where harassment of the healthcare workforce and others working to contain the spread of the disease has been taking place at all fronts, in various places including even cremation grounds.

• The existing state laws do not have such a wide sweep and ambit. They generally do not cover harassment at home and workplace and are focused more on physical violence only.

• The penal provisions contained in these laws are not stringent enough to deter mischief mongering.

Details:

• In this context, the Union Cabinet has approved promulgation of an Ordinance to amend the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 to protect healthcare service personnel and property including their living/working premises against violence during epidemics.

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- The President has given his assent for the promulgation of the Ordinance.

- **The Ordinance provides for making such acts of violence cognizable and non-bailable offences** and for the compensation for injury to healthcare service personnel or for causing damage or loss to the property in which healthcare service personnel may have a direct interest in relation to the epidemic.

- The current Ordinance is intended to ensure that during any situation akin to the current pandemic, there is zero tolerance to any form of violence against healthcare service personnel and damage to property.

- Violence as defined in the Ordinance will include harassment and physical injury and damage to property.

- Healthcare service personnel include public and clinical healthcare service providers such as doctors, nurses, paramedical workers and community health workers; any other persons empowered under the Act to take measures to prevent the outbreak of the disease or spread thereof; and any persons declared as such by the State Government, by notification in the Official Gazette.

- **Penalty under the Ordinance:**

- Commission or abetment of such acts of violence shall be punished with imprisonment for a term of three months to five years, and with fine of Rs.50,000/- to Rs.2,00,000/-.

- In case of causing grievous hurt, imprisonment shall be for a term six months to seven years and with fine of Rs.1,00,000/- to Rs.5,00,000/-.

- In addition, the offender shall also be liable to pay compensation to the victim and twice the fair market value for damage of property.

Offences shall be investigated by an officer of the rank of Inspector within a period of 30 days, and trial has to be completed in one year, unless extended by the court for reasons to be recorded in writing.

VidyaDaan 2.0

Context:

Union HRD Minister launches national program VidyaDaan 2.0 for inviting e-learning content contributions.

Details:

- VidyaDaan is a common national programme to develop and contribute e-learning content and a chance to be recognized nationally.

- The content will be used on DIKSHA app to help millions of children across the country to continue their learning anytime and anywhere.

- VidyaDaan has a content contribution tool that provides a structured interface for the contributors to register and contribute different types of content (such as, explanation videos, presentations, competency-based items, quizzes, etc.), for any grade (from grade 1 to 12), for any subject as specified by the states/UTs.

- The contributions can be made by educationists, subject experts, schools, colleges, universities, institutes, government and non-government organisations, individuals, etc.

National Panchayati Raj Day

Context:

PM will interact with various Gram Panchayats across the country on 24th April, which is observed as the National Panchayati Raj Day.

Details:

- As the country is observing social distancing through lockdown, the Prime Minister shall be interacting with various participants through video-conferencing.

- The PM will also launch the unified **e-GramSwaraj** Portal and Mobile App on the occasion.

• The Unified Portal is a new initiative of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj which will provide Gram Panchayats with a single interface to prepare and implement their Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP).

Swamitva Scheme:

• This scheme will also be launched on the occasion.

• It provides for an integrated property validation solution for rural India.

• The demarcation of inhabited land in rural areas would be done by the use of latest surveying methods – Drones technology with the collaborated efforts of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, State Panchayati Raj Department, State Revenue Department and the Survey of India.

About the National Panchayati Raj Day:

• The Ministry of Panchayati Raj commemorates 24th April of every year as the National Panchayati Raj Day as the 73rd Constitutional Amendment came into force on this date.

• This Act institutionalised the Panchayati Raj system in the country in the year 1993.

• Every year, on this occasion, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has been awarding the best performing Panchayats/States/UTs across the country under the Incentivization of Panchayats in recognition of their good work for improving delivery of services and public goods.

• This year, three such awards viz. Nanaji Deshmukh Rashtriya Gaurav Gram Sabha Puraskar (NDRGGSP), Child-friendly Gram Panchayat Award (CFGPA) and Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) Award have been finalized which will be shared with the concerned States/UT.

Van Dhan Samajik Doori Jagrookta Abhiyaan

Context:

Initiatives of TRIFED in view of the COVID-19 situation.

Details:

• The current situation due to COVID-19 has dealt a serious blow to the livelihoods of the poor and marginalized communities including the tribal artisans and gatherers, being the most vulnerable people in the country.

• This is the peak season for harvesting and gathering of forest produce in many regions, which will lead to engagement of tribal gatherers and endanger their safety.

• TRIFED, under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, is addressing the situation by:

• Publicity and Awareness Generation

• Personal Protective Healthcare

• NTFP (Non-timber forest products) Procurement

About the Van Dhan Samajik Doori Jagrookta Abhiyaan:

• This scheme is intended to educate the tribals through the almost 15000 SHGs under the Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana spread across 28 States/UTs.

• TRIFED teamed up with UNICEF and WHO for launching a digital campaign spreading awareness about the importance of social distancing amid the coronavirus crisis in India.

• UNICEF is providing the necessary IEC materials (posters, flyers, leaflets, brochures, booklets, messages for health education sessions, radio broadcast or TV spots, etc.) for the campaign christened as " Van Dhan Samajik Doori Jagrookta Abhiyaan OR Van Dhan Social Distancing Awareness Movement".

• Extensive outreach through Train of Trainer Programs and Webinars focused on basic orientation on COVID-19 response, key

preventive behaviour, social media campaigns on social distancing, home quarantine has been initiated.

New Varieties of Anthurium

Context:

A woman innovator from Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, has developed ten varieties of Anthurium, a flower with high market value, by cross-pollination.

Details:

• Anthurium is a vast group of beautiful blooming plants available in a wide range of colours.

• The plants of the varieties have a high demand due to its use as indoor decorative plants.

• During the last year, over 8500 plants as well as flowers, have been sold in the market mainly in Pune and Thiruvananthapuram.

• The innovator has been propagating it through cuttings & seeds and supplying some plants and flowers throughout the country, but she was unable to meet the demand due to the time-consuming technique of propagation method.

• Therefore, the National Innovation Foundation – India (an autonomous body under the Department of Science and Technology) has facilitated mass multiplication and large scale production of four highly demanded varieties through tissue culture technique at the Indian Institute of Horticultural Research (IIHR), Bangalore, for the diffusion of the varieties in similar agroclimatic zones of the country.

• **Salient features of the new varieties of anthurium are:**

• Large beautiful flowers

• Different colours of spathe and spadix

• Long stalks

• Better shelf life

• Good market value

Anthurium:

• Anthurium is one of the best domestic flowering plants in the world.

• They are beautiful but also purify the surrounding air and remove harmful airborne chemicals like formaldehyde, ammonia, toluene, xylene, and allergens.

• Because of its importance in removing toxic substances from the air, NASA has placed it in the list of air purifier plants.

• Anthurium has larger economic importance because of its eye-catching and beautiful inflorescence and fetches a good market price.

Krishi Kalyan Abhiyan

Context:

The Krishi Kalyan Abhiyan (KKA) is being implemented in 112 Aspirational districts of the country.

Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana

Context:

More than 33 crore poor people received financial assistance of Rs 31,235 crore under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package.

Mobile Laboratory to test COVID-19 samples

Context:

The Defence Minister inaugurates DRDO developed Mobile Laboratory to test COVID-19 samples.

Details:

• The Minister inaugurated via videoconference a Mobile Virology Research and Diagnostics Laboratory (MVRDL) developed by DRDO in association with ESIC Hospital, Hyderabad and Private industry.

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- The facility can test more than 1000 samples in one day.

- The Mobile Viral Research Lab is the combination of a BSL 3 lab and a BSL 2 lab essential to carry out the activities.

- The labs are built as per WHO and ICMR Bio-safety standards to meet international guidelines.

- The system has built in electrical controls, LAN, Telephone cabling, and CCTV.

Indian Institute of Food Processing Technology (IIFPT)

Context:

IIFPT supports the battle against COVID-19 by manufacturing and supplying nutrient-rich foods to COVID-19 patients.

About IIFPT:

- The IIFPT is a pioneer research and educational institution under the Ministry of Food Processing Industries, Government of India.

- It was started by eminent scientist Dr. V. Subrahmanyan as an R&D lab in the Modern Rice Mill complex of the Thanjavur Co-operative Marketing Federation (TCMF) at Tiruvarur, Tamil Nadu.

- The mandate of the Institute at its inception was to seek solutions for preserving high moisture paddy because the paddy harvest season in Southern India coincided with the tail end of the South West monsoons.

- The Institute was later upgraded as a national laboratory with the name Paddy Processing Research Centre (PPRC) in 1972.

- At the time of up-gradation the mandates of the Institute were also changed and the scientists in the Institute focused their research in identifying technologies for post-harvest procession and preservation of paddy.

- The Institute was moved to its current location at Thanjavur in 1984.

- Considering the vital importance of strengthening R&D efforts in the post-harvest processing, preservation and value addition of raw agricultural produce, the Ministry of Food Processing Industries strengthened and upgraded the PPRC as a National Institute in February 2008 and renamed it as Indian Institute of Crop Processing Technology (IICPT).

- In 2017, it was again renamed to its current name, IIFPT.

- It currently focuses on providing solutions to all food processing areas including fish, meat and dairy products processing through intensive research and development activities.

- It is engaged in the R&D of food grain processing, value addition, by-product utilization through bio-processing, process and product development.

- IIFPT offers B.Tech., M.Tech. and Ph.D. programs in Food Process Engineering and M.Tech. programs in Food Science and Technology and Ph.D. in Biotechnology.

World Book and Copyright Day

Context:

On the occasion of World Book & Copyright Day, the Union Minister of HRD participates in a webinar on Post-COVID Publishing Scenario organized by National Book Trust, India and FICCI.

Details:

- World Book and Copyright Day is a celebration to promote the enjoyment of books and reading.

- Each year, on 23 April, celebrations take place all over the world to recognize the scope of books.

- On this occasion, UNESCO and the international organizations representing the

three major sectors of the book industry – publishers, booksellers and libraries, select the World Book Capital (WBC) for a year to maintain, through its own initiatives, the impetus of the Day's celebrations.

• The WBC for 2020 is Kuala Lampur.

UNESCO initiated this celebration, which was observed for the first time in 1995.

• The date of 23 April was chosen since it was the date (not day) on which several prominent authors such as William Shakespeare (as per the Julian Calendar), Inca Garcilaso de la Vega and Miguel de Cervantes (as per the Gregorian Calendar) died.

• By championing books and copyright, UNESCO stands up for creativity, diversity and equal access to knowledge, with the work across the board – from the Creative Cities of Literature network to promoting literacy and mobile learning and advancing Open Access to scientific knowledge and educational resources.

• The **National Book Trust** (established in 1957) is an autonomous publishing house under the Union HRD Ministry.

Nano Mission

Context:

As part of the Nano Mission programme, the Department of Science and Technology (DST) has approved support for upscaling an antiviral nano-coatings.

e-GramSwaraj Portal and Mobile App

• The Unified Portal is a new initiative of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

• It will provide the Gram Panchayats with a single interface to prepare and implement their Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP).

Significance

• The portal will ensure real time monitoring and accountability.

• The portal is a major step towards digitization down to the Gram Panchayat level.

National Panchayati Raj Day

Background

• 24th of April is observed as Panchayati Raj Day because, on this day in 1993, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment was implemented, setting up the three-tier panchayat system — village panchayats, panchayat unions and district panchayats — for grass root-level governance.

Details

• Accordingly, the Government of India decided in consultation with the States to celebrate 24th April as National Panchayati Raj Day.

• The commemoration is being anchored by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

• The first National Panchayati Raj Day was celebrated in 2010. Since then, the National Panchayati Raj Day is celebrated on April 24th, every year, in India.

• Every year on National Panchayati Raj Day, Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj organises National Conference and awards best performing Gram Panchayats with 'The Panchayat Shashakatikaran Puraskar/Rashtriya Gaurav Gram Sabha Puraskar'.

Quotes by Mahatma Gandhi

• "When the panchayat raj is established, public opinion will do what violence can never do."

• "The voice of the people may be said to be God's voice, the voice of the Panchayat."

Key Statements

• **Manmohan Singh in 2010** urged panchayats to play a big role in helping the Centre tackle the

rebels by working more effectively and ensuring administrative transparency.

• He mentioned that if Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) functioned properly and locals participated in the development process, the **Maoist threat could be countered.**

• **Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015** called for an **end to the practice of "husbands of women sarpanches" or "sarpanch pati"** exercising undue influence on the work of their wives elected to power.

Context

• Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi interacted with Sarpanchs of Gram Panchayats throughout the country through Video Conferencing, on the occasion of National Panchayati Raj Day 2020.

Swamitva Scheme

• The scheme provides for an integrated property validation solution for rural India.

• Through this scheme, the surveying and demarcation of inhabited land in rural areas will be done by the use of latest surveying methods such as drone technology, with the collaborated efforts of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, State Panchayati Raj Departments, State Revenue Departments and Survey of India.

Significance

• The scheme will ensure streamlined planning, revenue collection and provide clarity over property rights in rural areas.

• This will open up avenues for applying for loans from financial institutions by the owners.

• Disputes related to the property would also be settled through the title deeds allotted through this scheme.

Biggest operation for distribution of pulses underway

What's in News?

In order to distribute one kg of pulses to about 20 crore households for three months in the country, a massive **operation for transport and milling of pulses is underway**.

Details:

• In order to meet the protein needs of people during this on-going crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Central government had decided to provide one kg of milled and cleaned pulses to each National Food Security (NFSA) household for three months.

• This is being carried out under the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY).

Rohtang Pass

What's in News?

Border Roads Organisation clears Rohtang Pass three weeks in advance despite COVID-19 lockdown.

Rohtang Pass:

• It is the arterial road connecting **Lahaul and Spiti district** of **Himachal Pradesh** from the rest of the country.

• It is present on the **Pir Panjal Range of the Himalayas**.

• **River Ravi** rises west of **the Rohtang pass in the Kullu Hills** of Himachal Pradesh.

INST scientists find low-cost metal-free nanomaterial towards disinfection of garments under visible light exposure

What's in News?

• Scientists at the Institute of Nano Science and Technology (INST) have found a low-cost **metal-free nanomaterial for visible light microbial disinfection** which can be an **alternative to silver and other metal-based materials**.

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- INST is an autonomous institute under the Department of Science and Technology.

Details:

- The scientists have tested **carbon nitride quantum dots (g-CNQDs)** for **visible-light-driven antibacterial activity** and found it to be efficient.

- These nanomaterials possess **enhanced biocidal activity** attributed to larger surface area of g-CNQDs having more reactive sites and optical absorption both in the ultraviolet and visible regions.

- The g-CNQDs have the ability to **generate Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS)**. The ROS rapidly interact and damage the immediately available biological macromolecules such as lipids present on the cell membrane or envelope and proteins present on the cellular surface, towards inactivation of the microorganism.

- The **mechanism of inactivation is non-specific to a particular pathogen**, **as lipid and protein are major components of the inhabitants of the microbial world**.

- The scientists are exploring ways of incorporating doped and undoped carbon nitride-based materials into cloth fabrics that can continuously produce reactive oxygen species (ROS) under optimal humidity and temperature for the antimicrobial activity.

- It was explained that aerosol droplets generated during sneezing have enough moisture that might help in ROS mediated disinfection of any infectious agents in the droplet, once it comes into contact with the nanomaterial sewn fabric under sunlight or ambient white light exposure.

- The **dependence on visible light is also advantageous over regular ultraviolet mediated disinfection**, which requires cautious handling of the UV light-emitting devices.

Advantages:

- The team has suggested it to be a viable anti-bacterial alternative to metal/non-metal semiconductors and expensive silver, thus making it cost-effective.

- It is also **biocompatible with mammalian cells**.

8th webinar of 'Dekho Apna Desh'

What's in News?

The Ministry of Tourism organised the 8th webinar of "Dekho Apna Desh" series on "North East India – Experience the Exclusive Villages".

Prelims Facts – Assam:

- The bell metal industry of Assam is the **second-largest handicraft sector after bamboo craft**.

- Bell metal is an **alloy of copper and tin**.

- The craftsmen of this industry are referred to as **'Kahar' or 'Orja'**.

Sualkuchi is situated on the northern banks of the Brahmaputra.

- It is one of the **world's largest weaving villages where 74% of the households are engaged in weaving exquisite silk fabrics** ranging from the golden Muga to the ivory white Pat and the light beige Eri or Endi silk. It is famous for its centuries-old heritage of weaving.

- People here support the concept of **Ahimsa Silk breeding** where silk is obtained without killing the silk worms.

- It is a noble step towards creating an **eco-friendly environment**.

The endangered species of the **greater adjutant stork** finds an exclusive home in **Dadara**.

- It is called **Hargila in Assamese**.

- It is the world's most endangered of the stork species.

Manas National Park in Bansbari (140 kms from Guwahati) is **a UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site.**

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Majuli is one of the largest river islands of the world.

• It is situated in the midst of the river Brahmaputra.

• Majuli is a hub of **Assamese neo-Vaishnavite culture**, initiated around the 15th century by the revered Assamese saint **Srimanta Sankardeva** and his disciple **Madhavdeva**.

• It is known as the **cradle of Assamese civilization**.

Basaveswara Jayanti

Context:

PM pays homage to Lord Basaveshwara on Basava Jayanthi.

Details:

• Basava Jayanthi is an annual event celebrated in the honour of the birth of Vishwaguru Basaveshwara, the 12th century philosopher and social reformer.

India Meteorological Department (IMD)

Context:

Likely formation of a Low Pressure area over south Andaman Sea & neighbourhood around 30th April 2020.

Details:

• As per the forecast guidance from various numerical weather prediction models and the environmental and thermo-dynamical conditions prevailing over the region, a **Low Pressure Area** is very likely to form over the south Andaman Sea and neighbourhood around 30th April 2020.

• It is very likely to intensify further during the subsequent 48 hours and very likely to move north-northwestwards initially and then north-

northeastwards along & off the Andaman & Nicobar Islands during 30th April – 3rd May 2020.

• The Cyclone Warning Division of the India Meteorological Department says that the system is under continuous surveillance and the concerned state governments are being informed regularly.

• During these dates, the fishermen are advised not to venture out into the sea.

Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT)

Context:

The CBDT has denied asking for a report from IRS officers or IRS Association about suggestions to tackle the COVID-19 outbreak, as is being circulated on various social media.

Hydrogen Fuel Bus and Car Project

Context:

NTPC Ltd, India's largest power producer and a central PSU under the Ministry of Power, has invited Global Expression of Interest (EoI) to provide 10 Hydrogen Fuel Cell (FC) based electric buses and cars in Leh and Delhi.

Details:

• The move to procure Hydrogen Fuel Cell based vehicles is the first of its kind project in the country, wherein a complete solution from green energy to the fuel cell vehicle would be developed.

• The initiative, which has been undertaken with support of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, will also harness renewable energy for generation of hydrogen and develop its storage and dispensation facilities as part of pilot projects at Leh and Delhi.

• The move to launch hydrogen powered vehicles aims at decarbonizing the mobility segment.

SVAMITVA Scheme

Context:

The Union Minister of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj issued guidelines regarding the SVAMITVA scheme, a new initiative of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

Details:

• SVAMITVA scheme, a collaborative effort of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, State Panchayati Raj Departments, State Revenue Departments and Survey of India, aims to provide an integrated property validation solution for rural India, engaging the latest Drone Surveying technology, for demarcating the inhabited land in rural areas.

• The program is currently being implemented in six states – Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

• Under this, mapping of rural housing land can be done using the latest survey methods and drones.

• This scheme will help in streamlining planning and revenue collection in rural areas and ensuring clarity on property rights.

• The scheme will also enable the creation of better-quality Gram Panchayat Development Plans engaging Drone Surveying technology.

• The aim of this scheme is to provide people in the rural areas with the right to document their residential properties so that they can use their property for economic purposes.

Petersberg Climate Dialogue

Context:

India, along with 30 countries, deliberates on issues of Climate Change in the first ever virtual Petersberg Climate Dialogue.

About the Petersberg Climate Dialogue:

• The first virtual Climate Dialogue, was the eleventh session of the Petersberg Climate Dialogue.

• This has been hosted by Germany since 2010 to provide a forum for informal high-level political discussions, focusing both on international climate negotiations and the advancement of climate action.

• The virtual XI Petersberg Climate Dialogue was co-chaired by Germany and the United Kingdom, the incoming Presidency of the 26th Conference of Parties (COP 26) to United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

• The dialogue saw participation from ministers and representatives of about 30 countries.

• The Climate Dialogue was originally an initiative of German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

• It is hosted by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety.

ADB's COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support Programme (CARES Programme)

Context:

India signed $1.5 billion loan with the ADB to support India's COVID-19 immediate response.

Details:

• This move focuses on immediate priorities such as disease containment and prevention, as well as social protection for the poor and economically vulnerable sections of the society, especially women and disadvantaged groups.

• The loan was granted under the Asian Development Bank's COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support Programme (CARES Programme).

• Earlier, the ADB's Board of Directors approved the loan to provide budget support to the government to counter and mitigate the adverse health and socio-economic impact of the pandemic.

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• Building on the CARES Programme, ADB is also in dialogue with the government for further possible support for stimulating the economy, support strong growth recovery, and to build resilience to future shocks.

• This includes the support for the affected industries and entrepreneurs, particularly micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), by facilitating their access to finance through credit guarantee schemes, MSME integration into global and national value chains through enterprise development centres, and a credit enhancement facility for infrastructure projects.

• Strengthening of public service delivery will be another important agenda, including the extension of comprehensive primary health services in urban areas, and of secondary and tertiary health care systems through PPP modalities.

Jal Shakti Abhiyan

Context:

Jal Shakti Abhiyan gears up for monsoon.

About the Jal Shakti Abhiyan:

• The scheme was launched in 2019 and it covered 256 water stressed districts across the country.

• This 'Abhiyan' is a mass movement to bring all the stakeholders under one ambit of water conservation drive.

• Under this Abhiyan, more than six and a half crore people became part comprising of State Govts, Central Govt, Civil Society Organisations, Panchayati Raj Institutions and Communities.

• More than seventy five lakh traditional and other water bodies and tanks were renovated and around a crore water conservation & rainwater harvesting structures were created.

• **Focus areas of the Jal Shakti Abhiyan:**

• Water conservation and rainwater harvesting

• Renovation of traditional and other water bodies

• Reuse of water and recharging of structures

• Watershed development

• Intensive afforestation

Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare

Context:

To ensure that there is no shortage of food grains in the country during the lockdown period, the Ministry has made certain exemptions to the farming community.

Details:

• The exemptions made for farming during the lockdown are:

• Farming operations by farmers and farm workers in the field;

• Agencies engaged in procurement of agriculture products, including MSP operations;

• 'Mandis' operated by the Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC)or as notified by the State Government;

• Shops and manufacturing/packaging units for Seeds, Fertilizers and Pesticides;

• Intra and inter-state movement of harvesting and sowing related machines like combined harvester and other agriculture/horticulture implements;

• Cold storage and warehousing services;

• Transportation for essential goods;

• Shops of agriculture machinery, its spare parts (including its supply chain) and repairs;

• Custom Hiring Centres (CHC) related to farm machinery.

The technology initiatives of the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers' Welfare include:

New modules were launched in e-Nam.

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e-NAM integrated with e-NWR: Warehouse based trading module in e-NAM software to facilitate trade from warehouses based on e-NWR (Electronic Negotiable Warehouse Receipts).

FPO module which enables uploading of produce, bidding and payment from their Collection Centres directly.

KISAN RATH App launched: Read more on PIB dated 17th April, 2020.

All India Agri Transport Call Centre was launched in April, 2020. This Call Centre has been set up for coordination between States for inter-state movement of perishables like vegetables & fruits, agriculture inputs.

The government has launched the Kisan Credit Card (KCC) Saturation Drive in February 2020 for ensuring benefits of KCC to PM-KISAN

The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana has been made voluntary for all farmers considering the demand of farmers while there is no change in farmers' share of premium.

All the Best
Jai Hind ☺

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