Mains CURRENT QIP –E&Y July-2020

4E:EXPLAINATION-ELABORATION-ENUMERATION-EXAMINATION

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Editorial & You

QIP- Mains-2020

July 1st-15th 2020

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Editorial

July 1st -15th, 2020

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GS-II : International Relations

In ending standoff, magnanimity must prevail

Context

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke in Shanghai just five years ago, in 2015, he recounted to the **Indian community living there** how China's President Xi Jinping took him to his native village in **Xian province** and showed him the book written by the **seventh century Buddhist monk, Xuanzang,** whose travels connected the birthplaces of both leaders.

This was symbolic, he said of the bond between India and China in terms of aatmiata (soulful intimacy), nikatata (closeness) and bhaichaara (solidarity). There could not be more genuine and sincere affirmation of the spirit of friendship.

Keep a cool head

Presently, India is on the brink of regarding **China as Enemy Number One.** This has happened because of a bloody, **hand-to-hand combat**, without firearms, between Indian and Chinese soldiers in the Galwan Valley in Ladakh, which left **20 Indian soldiers** dead and many more wounded.

Both sides have accepted that the border between the two countries must be settled by agreement for the sake of peace.

China has **refused to recognise the McMahon line** and the demarcation of boundaries done by the British colonial power.

Pending a final settlement of the boundary, India and China signed the **Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas, in 1993**.

Another similar agreement (**Agreement on Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas**), signed in **1996** contains a specific clause related to the use of firearms by both sides: "**Neither side shall open fire, cause bio-degradation, use hazardous chemicals, conduct blast operations** or hunt with guns or explosives **within two kilometres** from the Line of Actual Control. This prohibition **shall not apply to routine firing activities in small arms firing ranges.**"

Tragically, they fought much **more barbarically**, with nail-studded sticks, knives and stones, causing inhuman suffering.

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This incident threatens unofficial partition of territories that has stood the good test of time: **Aksai Chin is claimed by India**, but China, de facto, rules; China claims Arunachal Pradesh, but India, constitutionally, rules.

China's record

During his visit to India in **April 1960**, **China's Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai made a proposal** to settle the boundary dispute. It was **rejected by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru**.

Today, **China regards itself as a superpower in the making**, which implies that negotiation will be condescending, tantamount to **"my way or the highway**".

China has flexed its muscle. It **refused to recognise the authority** of the **Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA),** established under the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**.

The **PCA rejected China's legal claims**. It ruled that China had breached its obligations under the **Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea and Article 94 of UNCLOS** concerning maritime safety, and that **China violated international obligations**.

China has **not paid any heed to international opinion** that supports **unimpeded commerce, freedom of navigation, overflights**, and **peaceful resolution** of disputes in the South China Sea.

The same hubris has made China more intolerant of infrastructure built by India, while it continues to build its own along that frontier.

Weighing in on the options

What must matter to India is whatever is good for its people. **Focusing** on strengthening **military might**, when the economy is suffering and COVID-19 is taking its toll, will not be wise.

Nor is it wise to call for a boycott of Chinese imports. Sanctions and boycotts are justifiable only when there is strong moral justification.

Boycott of South Africa during the **Apartheid period** was justified and it served its purpose in **hastening South Africa's turn** to **equality and democratic governance**.

Arguably, there is **moral justification for sanctions against Israel** if it expands its **illegal settlements in the West Bank and Palestine territories.**

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Moral outrage has been triggered by actions of regimes in South Africa and Israel. But India's border dispute with China calls for **peaceful resolution, not moral outrage.**

If India **boycotts goods** from China, it will **hurt itself more** and barely make a dent in China's economic prospects.

India is lauded as the **pharmacy of the world** because it is able to import **essential raw materials from China**.

India's **sports goods exports** are likewise dependent on imports from China.

The world buys Chinese goods because their **quality and price** are compelling.

It has been reported that Steve Jobs wanted to change the iPhone screen barely three days before its formal launch. China's factory that assembled the phone for Apple mobilised its workforce to get the screens replaced in quick time.

India should emulate China in its manufacturing practices and agility to adapt to international demand.

There is little parity between India and China in trade terms; there is much more parity in military might, at present, compared to the 1960s.

The home watch

It is unfortunate that in many cities in India, people from the **North-east,** who have features resembling Chinese, have been **ostracised.**

India must be on guard, in the aftermath of current tensions with China, not to unleash any kind of hostility against anyone, especially **resident Chinese nationals**.

India must learn the hard lesson, which it did not in 1962, that warm and gushing expressions of friendship towards China will not stop hostilities; only pragmatic and shrewd diplomacy can do that.

Oscillating to the opposite end and attacking China as the enemy is not wise.

GS-III : Internal security

Control, not delete: On China apps ban

Context

Citing concerns to both **data security and national sovereignty**, the Indian government on June 29 announced it would **block 59 widely** used apps, most linked to Chinese companies.

Threat to Sovereignty

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These include the popular **video-sharing social networking app TikTok**, a mobile browser called **UC Browser**, and a file-sharing app called **SHAREit**.

What is common to all three is their **wide user base in India**, with each claiming more than **100 million monthly active users**, and their **origins in China**.

Explaining the ban, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology cited "**the emergent nature of threats**" posed by the apps and "**information available**" that they are engaged in activities "**prejudicial to sovereignty and integrity of India**, **defence** of India, security of state and public order".

The **apps, according to the Ministry**, had been reported for "**stealing and surreptitiously transmitting users'** data in an unauthorized manner to **servers which have locations outside India**", which "impinges upon the **sovereignty and integrity of India**".

From the perspective of **data security and privacy**, there is indeed a strong case to be made to more **strictly regulate apps** that handle vast **amounts of user data.**

Timing of the move

But the government might have done the right thing for the wrong reasons.

The timing of the move, coupled with the fact that it has chosen to **block the apps** outright, **rather than ensure** they were complying with the law, suggests the **ban is less motivated** by **privacy concerns** than about **sending a message to China** amid the tensions along the border.

After all, **privacy and data security** concerns are not limited only to Chinese apps.

If sending a message about China is the motivation, the ban is more signalling than substance.

It may **help the government show the public it is taking China on,** even if it will have no impact on deterring Chinese behaviour on the border, which will require a **tough diplomatic and military response**.

The tensions on the border, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, have ignited a much-needed debate on **India's economic dependencies on China.**

India **remains reliant on Chinese products** in several **critical and strategically sensitive sectors**, from **semiconductors** and **active pharmaceutical ingredients** to the **telecom sector**, where Chinese vendors are involved not only in India's **4G network** but in on-going **5G trials as well**.

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India faces tough choices going forward in dealing with its deep economic embrace of China. Hitting the delete button on social media and gaming apps barely scratches the surface of the problem.

GS-III : Economic Issues

Utilise MGNREGA to the fullest capacity

By, Brinda Karat is a member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) Polit Bureau and a former Rajya Sabha MP

Context

The role of the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)** as a **lifeline for the working poor** in rural India has been proved once again with the experience of the lockdown.

Delayed action

The Central government revised lockdown guidelines to allow MGNREGA work only from April 20, nearly a month after the nationwide lockdown was imposed, and released funds for it belatedly.

But once the money reached the States, the results are evident. Whereas the number of households who got work in April 2020 was the **lowest in several years at 95 lakh**, in May the number went up to 3.05 crore.

Till the third week of June, **2.84 crore households** had got work, much higher when compared to the same months last year.

With an average **23 days of work and a daily wage of ?200**, households who got work earned an **average of ?1,500 a month**.

The Central government **released ?38,000 crore for MGNREGA work**, of which **70% has already been utilised**.

With the **return of migrant workers** to their **home States** and with substantial numbers having completed the quarantine period, the demand for work is bound to increase.

The **remaining ?8,000 crore fund** available to the States is **clearly insufficient**. It is therefore **essential for the Central government to release the second tranche** without delay.

Work provided to few

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Even in these months where there has been a welcome increase in workers who got work, it is extremely disturbing that as many as **1.82 crore workers** who demanded work **were turned back**.

According to figures available on the Ministry's website, in this fiscal year, **8.07 crore workers demanded work**, but work was provided **only to 6.25 crore workers**.

Recently we heard the Prime Minister and the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister hardsell the record of employment provision in the State claiming that one crore jobs had been provided in a single day.

This is certainly a novel interpretation of statistics. What is the nature of the work? Are they permanent jobs? Are they one-day jobs such as work on MGNREGA sites can be? In **U.P., over one crore workers** had applied for work under MGNREGA, but **more than one third** of them were **turned back.**

Similarly in **Bihar**, which also has a **large number of returning migrant workers,** 12 lakh workers of the 41 lakh workers who applied were turned back.

In spite of a legal provision of **unemployment allowance** not a single rupee in compensation has been paid.

Now that the **monsoons** have set in, this **issue becomes** all the more relevant. During the **rainy season** even though **demand is high,** work **provision is low.**

It is therefore essential for **the Central government to ensure** that **States are provided with the funds to pay unemployment allowance** to all workers demanding work.

In this context of the need to strengthen MGNREGA, the announcement of the Central government's "new" scheme, the **Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan**, to provide **work to migrant workers** in **116 selected districts**, raises several questions.

First, **what is the criteria for selection**?

Why, for example, should the States of **West Bengal and Chhattisgarh** be omitted when **reverse migration** is particularly high in these States? Of the ?4,794 crore spent between June 20 and June 28, Bihar received more than 50% of the fund.

As noted earlier**, Bihar has had a poor record of implementation of MGNREGA**.

Second, according to the **list of 25 kinds** of work available under this "**scheme**" it is clear that **almost every single one** of them is already covered under the **convergence programmes of MGNREGA**.

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What is the new "**skill mapping**" required for this since this work is already covered under MGNREGA?

The nature of the work is **manual work,** mainly **construction and earth work,** including work to **lay cables**, ostensibly to take Internet connections to rural areas.

It is unstated but clear that this will benefit **private telecom companies**.

Most importantly, how will this new scheme impact the MGNREGA work in these selected districts?

There is **no clarity** on this **critical issue** in the **set of guidelines** issued by the **Ministry of Rural Development, the nodal Ministry for this scheme**.

Last year, **under MGNREGA**, in these **116 districts** taken together, an average of just **43.7 workdays were created**, which was lower **than the national average of 50 days**.

This **poor record of provision** of work may have been one of the reasons for the **higher rates of migration** from these districts.

Instead of new schemes why should MGNREGA not be expanded to give work to all workers?

This is a **legal right**, whereas the **Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan** has **no such legal binding** on the administration.

The scheme is **primarily meant for migrant workers** in those districts where their numbers are **25,000 or more**.

That means in these **selected districts** women who comprise a **smaller percentage of migrant workers** will be **largely excluded.**

However, **women in these districts** had a **high demand for work** reflected in the fact that the average of women working in MGNREGA in these districts last year was **53.5%,** which was higher than the average for the rest of India. So unless this work in 116 districts is in addition to MGNREGA, women will suffer.

Potential for MGNREGA

MGNREGA should not be diluted in the name of the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan. **The potential for MGNREGA** to provide relief to the suffering of **rural India** should be utilised to its **fullest capacity**.

This will also require a **removal of the restriction** of only one person per household to make every individual eligible.

The **cap of 100 days** should be removed to **expand it to at least 200 days**.

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Unemployment allowance should be guaranteed for all those turned away from work. And importantly, the government must ensure the release of funds on an emergency basis.

GS-III : Economic issues

Making trade more digitised

Context

India's exports in April 2020 contracted **by 60% year-on-year**. There was a **37% fall** in the **twenty-foot equivalent units** handled by the **Jawaharlal Nehru Port in April 2020** as compared to April 2019.

The steep decline in world trade lays bare the **significance** of a more **digitised trading environment**, with minimal manual touch points.

With the pandemic, the **slump in international trade** is unpredictable. As **countries slowly emerge** out of this, new demand and supply chains will form, that will be **located in countries** that re-orient their existing trade structures.

Upgradation, digitisation, automation

Globally, **digitisation of procedures** and **lower human intervention** are **the two major pillars** that drive trade across borders.

Post India's ratification of the **Trade Facilitation Agreement** of the World Trade Organization in April 2016, reforms focused on **infrastructural upgradation, digitisation and automation.**

Schemes such as **Direct Port Entry and Direct Port Delivery**, and the **Radio Frequency Identification system** and **Single Window Interface for Facilitating Trade,** were all aimed at reducing the **time and cost of clearance of goods**.

The **Port Community System** was aimed at seamlessly **integrating all maritime trade-related stakeholders** on a single platform.

And **e-SANCHIT (e-Storage and computerised handling of indirect tax documents)** was aimed at reducing human intervention.

These and other interventions speak of the government's focus on effective logistics and smooth export-import (EXIM) procedures at Indian borders.

This resulted in continuous **improvement in India's Ease of Doing Business ranking,** particularly in the **'trading across borders'** parameter on which it **ranked 68 in 2020**.

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With the current crisis, ports across **India demand a greater leap** in **trade facilitation** measures to expedite the movement, release and clearance of goods.

While different interventions of the government have positively developed the **port ecosystem**, there are still **some gaps** that need to be bridged.

These are particularly with respect to the **standardisation and coordination** of **processes across ports**, and awareness and acceptability of new initiatives among the users which depends on the adaptability and ease of linkage between multiple systems.

Gaps to be filled

Some of the delay in moving to a **paperless trade ecosystem** can be attributed to gaps in the **effective implementation** of digital platforms.

First, shortcomings in the functionality of the system and technical glitches result in **limited use of the system** or **parallel use of hard copy.**

For example, the **absence of a shipping line delivery order** in **customs and terminal systems** results in usage of hard copy for cargo movement.

Second, **lack of connectivity/message exchanges** between different stakeholders' systems results in **delayed cargo clearance.**

Third, there are many issues with respect to **training and capacity** building amongst the users, restricting the optimal utilisation of digital platforms.

Like in the rest of the world, in India too the **operations of multiple stakeholders** in the **logistics and trade ecosystem** including customs brokers, **shipping lines, freight forwarders**, transport operators, **port custodians**, **container freight stations** and **border management authorities** have been restricted.

This indicates the **need to further augment the digital infrastructure** in the trade ecosystem.

With trade volumes **contracting and economic indicators shrinking**, the **present crisis presents** an opportunity to develop new systems and enhance existing platforms while at the same time changing the **attitude of stakeholders** on the ground.

While some immediate steps are needed to survive the crisis, it is imperative to work on a **permanent road map** which addresses some of the gaps highlighted.

Enhanced **integration of systems and coordination** between them should ideally result **in exchange of messages** and sharing of input data between them on a real-time basis.

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Promoting use of a **multi-stakeholder single platform** like the **Port Community System** can streamline EXIM procedures, moving towards a digitally engaged and enhanced trading environment.

These efforts will be instrumental towards improving India's trading ecosystem and achieving the desired target of Ease of Doing Business (ranking under 50) set by the Prime Minister's Office.

The more digitised our trade facilitation infrastructure, the more immune we will be to future disruptions.

GS-II : Governance

Police reform and the crucial judicial actor

Context

At my vantage point as someone working in the criminal justice system, the only emotion that the seemingly **senseless act of violence** inside a **police station in Thoothukudi**, Tamil Nadu, evokes, is of extreme weariness.

How many more times **must powerless citizens suffer** the blows of a lathi or a baton, the kicks of patent leather boots, be violated by the "wooden rollers" around their private areas, not to mention spending hours inside a police lockup, all as a part of an "investigation" by police searching for "truth"?

Judiciary as beacon

This fatal violence by **state actors** is a **cruel reminder** of just how little unshackling has happened in the **domain of policing** to free this essential public sphere from the demons of its heritage and become an active participant in **sustaining a democratic polity and not a colony**.

It becomes natural to look towards the **judiciary** as the source of hope and action, and it is unsurprising to know that the **Madurai Bench** of the Madras High Court has taken notice of the Thoothukudi violence on its own and is "closely" monitoring the situation.

The **Madras High Court** acted in the **best traditions of constitutional** courts in India, which have often passed **various directions** to try and ameliorate the problem of police violence.

So much so that scholars have called the **Supreme Court of India** as the **only institution working towards police reforms** in the Indian state.

This acclaim largely comes from the **top court's interventions** in the **1990s** through cases such as **Joginder Kumar v. State of UP** [AIR 1994 SC

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1349] and **D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal** [(1997) 1 SCC 416], where guidelines were passed to try and secure two rights in the context of any state action — a **right to life and a right to know**.

Through the guidelines, the Court sought to **curb the power of arrest**, as well as ensure that an **accused person** is **made aware** of **all critical information** regarding her arrest and also **convey this to friends and family immediately** in the event of being taken in custody.

It took a decade, and in the form of amendments, as the **Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Act, 2008** to give statutory backing to these judicial guidelines; it remains part of the law today.

The Supreme Court went even further, and perhaps too far, in the case, **Prakash Singh v. Union of India [(2006) 8 SCC 1],** where it pushed through **new legislation** for governing police forces to be passed by States across India.

A key component of the new legislation was a robust setup for accountability that contemplated a **grievance redress mechanism.**

That it took reportedly **11 years** for the **State of Tamil Nadu** to actually implement **Prakash Singh** (a law passed in 2013 but only given effect in 2017), and that **several States remain in contempt** of the **Supreme Court's judgment**, give some insights into how seriously the issue of police reform ranks in the scheme of things for governments.

Judicial concern with police violence is also witnessed in a different manner — judicial support for "scientific" investigations. The support and fascination for techniques such as **narcoanalysis**, ensuring **video recording of investigations**, p**assing orders for installing closed-circuit television cameras inside police stations**, all comes from a place of grudging acceptance by courts about how often police employ physicality to obtain evidence.

Through technology, then, the hope is to reduce a **need for interacting** with the **body as a source of evidence**, and to gradually **delegitimise and dismantle** a set of archaic **practices reliant upon** the use of **force as a means to extract the "truth**".

Systemic failures

Constitutional courts have seemingly tried to **change our reality** of police brutality for well over two decades.

Yet, we are still here, with some reports (of course, not by the state) suggesting that across India there are as many as **five custodial deaths a day.**

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While this is undoubtedly a product of **continued institutional apathy** towards the **issue of police reform**, I would argue that it is also clear enough evidence that the **judiciary's approach** of simply **passing directions and guidelines**, has proven to be a failure, and that it is the ordinary magistrate, and not the constitutional court, who is the judicial actor wielding real power to realise substantial change in police practices.

There is a reason why the **judiciary** is **commonly called the weakest branch**: All the noble intentions in the world **cannot help transform** the mere **words of a court order into reality**.

This **needs money and a power of immediate implementation**, **neither of which courts have**.

In fact, the **gap between the highest court and the lowly police officer** in India has been demonstrated through studies which show how despite **criminal laws** being struck down as unconstitutional, **they continue to be enforced in various parts of the country by local police.**

Culture of impunity

At the same time, **constitutional courts** must **shed the institutional baggage** which often leads to them protecting the supposedly vulnerable morale of police.

This tendency was on display when the Madras High Court reportedly saw the Thoothukudi incident as the result of a "few bad apples" ruining a system's reputation.

Rather than minimise, perhaps it is time to consider **sanctions at a larger scale** and impose **monetary penalties** at the district level, to drive home the message that the **erring actions of one officer** must be seen as a **failure of the force itself**.

Finally, **constitutional courts could strike** an inspired move by reorienting their guidelines to **try and change** the practices of magistrates, over whom they exercise **powers of superintendence**, as **opposed to other non-judicial actors**.

For it is the **local magistrate** before whom **all arrested and detained** persons must be **produced within 24 hours**, and thus becomes the **point of first contact** for a citizen with the constitutional rule of law that Indians take so much pride in.

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The **Thoothukudi incident** has brought to fore what appears to have been **inexcusable lapses by the magistrate**.

It is **tragic that the laxity apparently** on display there in **remanding accused persons** to further custody (both the police and judicial), is not the exception but the norm, in my experience.

Data | Five States including Tamil Nadu recorded over **100 custodial deaths but zero police convictions between 2001-18**

The **overworked magistrate,** struggling with an **ever-exploding** docket, is very often in a rush **to get done** with the "**remand case**", rather than treat an arrested person with the care and the consideration that she deserves and is entitled to.

This is **not the fault of the magistrate** but the **crystallisation of a systemic failure** which **constitutional courts are indirectly** responsible for, and could do much to change.

GS-III : Disaster management in India

Lax on safety: On Nevveli and Vizag disasters

Context

Two **deadly industrial disasters**, in **Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh**, leading to the loss of at least eight lives and causing serious injuries to many, once again underscore the value of safety protocols.

Neyveli and Vizag disasters

In a **boiler blast at the Neyveli thermal power station**, six people were killed and a dozen workers suffered severe burns, while a **toxic chemical leak** at a pharmaceutical plant in Visakhapatnam led to two deaths immediately.

These and two other recent disasters, also at a Neyveli power plant and the **LG Polymers factory in the Visakhapatnam area**, have come at a stressful time when India is trying to find its feet in the midst of the pandemic.

What happened in Neyveli on Wednesday is inexplicable, since the power producer had encountered a boiler furnace blowout only on May 7, and had ordered a review of its infrastructure and processes.

Without meticulous care, **boilers are dangerous pieces** of equipment**. High-pressure and superheated steam** make for a **lethal combination,** if their release mechanism is not kept in good order, and there is an explosion.

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For this very reason, they are **regulated strictly** under the **Indian Boilers Act**, at least on paper.

The terrible consequences of **lax boiler safety** were evident three years ago in **Rae Bareli, when a blast at an NTPC power plant** killed a few dozen people.

The **gas leak in Visakhapatnam** apparently involving **benzimidazole**, a **chemical used in pharmaceuticals**, raises questions on maintenance and operational procedures.

The probe into how vapours of a stable but acutely toxic chemical escaped should lead to an upgrade to safety protocols.

In the Neyveli incident, there is a **suggestion that the boiler** was **not in operation** as it had tripped and was in the process of being revived.

Since the major operations of this equipment **involve a furnace** and **production of steam**, what led to an unexpected blowout?

NLC India, a **key power producer**, has an **obligation** to present a transparent report on why its facilities are beset by mishaps.

Steps to be taken

Occupational safety demands that **boilers are operated** by **trained personnel**, but some of those on the ground have been described as **contract employees.**

It will take an **independent probe** to determine whether **cost calculations** guided staffing decisions in such a hazardous sector.

The **response of the Centre and States** to **industrial accidents** is usually to **stem public outrage** by **announcing compensation for victims.**

A **transparent inquiry** that leads to a **fixing of responsibility** and **reform is a low priority**.

This culture must change. Such **accidents are mostly preventable**, and **occur rarely in the industrialised world**, because of impeccable attention to safety.

India's aspirations to industrialise should be founded on safety.

GS-III : Science and Technology

Promise and delivery: On India's first COVID-19 vaccine

Context

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India's **first indigenous COVID-19 vaccine (COVAXIN)** developed by a Hyderabad-based company in **collaboration with the ICMR** is all set to be tested on humans.

Clinical Trials of COVAXIN

The permission from **the Drugs Controller General of India** to carry out **phase-1 and phase-2** human clinical trials was based on the **safety and efficacy results** of studies on **mice, rats and rabbits**.

The **phase-1 trial** of the **candidate vaccine** using **inactivated (killed) novel coronavirus** will begin this month to test its safety.

The virus used for developing the vaccine was isolated by the **Pune-based National Institute of Virology** from samples collected in India.

Meanwhile, a **Pune-based company** is all set to manufacture two-three million doses of the **University of Oxford vaccine(ChAdOx1)** if the results of its phase-1 clinical trial, which are expected in the first week of July, are encouraging.

In addition, the two companies are collaborating with universities and a biotechnology company to develop three more vaccines.

Importance of Indigenous Vaccine

With the pandemic raging and no antivirals available to treat severe COVID-19 patients, a vaccine that is even partially effective and protects for about a year will be in demand.

An **indigenous vaccine** will mean **guaranteed availability for Indians**, while a **significant percentage** of the Oxford vaccine manufactured in India will be earmarked for local consumption.

This is **one reason** why many countries are earnestly attempting to develop a vaccine. According to WHO, **17 candidate vaccines** are in various stages of a human clinical trial, while **132 are in a pre-clinical trial stage.**

China's COVID-19 vaccine

On June 25, **China's CanSino Biologics COVID-19 vaccine**, became the **first off the block** when it was approved for use by the military for a period of one year.

The **phase-1 and phase-2 trials** found the vaccine to be safe with a "**potential to protect**" against the disease.

It is unclear if the vaccination will be optional or mandatory. While this is not the first time that countries have made vaccines under development **available to the**

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military even before the completion of the trial, there is **growing concern that speeding up vaccine development** by **bypassing certain crucial stages** of the trial process may prove counterproductive.

Way ahead

While many expect science to find a quick-fix, **experts envisage 12-18 months to get a vaccine commercialised**, if at all. But that timeline is already seen as aggressive.

If scientists develop a **safe, efficacious vaccine soon**, public trust in science could grow substantially but there would be serious consequences **if it fails**, particularly on the safety aspect. **Regulatory agencies have a responsibility** to ensure COVID-19 vaccines deliver what they promise.

GS-I : Social issues

Striking a blow against Assam's inclusive ethos

Context

The **Assam government** recently decided to **promulgate a law** to make the **Assamese language compulsory in all schools,** both public and private**, including the Kendriya Vidyalayas**, from **Classes I to X**.

The **State Governor** has already given a **formal assent** to the **Cabinet's decision**.

Exempted areas

However, the **law will not be applicable** in **Barak Valley, Bodoland Council and other Sixth Schedule areas**, where **Bengali, Bodo and other indigenous languages will take precedence**.

Other Issues

The '**Assamese nationalists**' are of course happy. Some are even demanding for it to be **made compulsory in the exempted areas**.

However, none of them is talking about what effects it will have on communities such as the **Misings, Deoris, Rabhas** and the other smaller tribes and their mother tongues.

Data and politics

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Statistical data have often been used as a **tool to construct** the **linguistic hierarchy** and **homogenisation in a region**.

We have seen that happen in **north India** with the **census-driven communal split of Hindi-Urdu**, **presuming Muslims to be Urdu** speakers, while **Hindus to be Hindi speakers**.

Crucially, this politics **marginalised languages such as Magadhi, Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Garhwali** with their rich literary and linguistic traditions as **mere dialects of the Hindi language**.

And this was a political number game to ensure the **dominance of Hindi and Hindi-Hindu elites,** nationally.

Census data are often used to portray a '**danger**' to the **Assamese language** — the '**infiltration' of Bengali-speaking communities** is considered to be the **primary reason**.

The **number of Assamese speakers** as per the **2011 Census** comes to **48.38% of the population**.

In **1971**, the percentage of speakers was **at 60.89%.** So, it seems the number of Assamese speakers considerably declined in these four decades.

But this **data need to be looked at empirically**. It has to be noted that **most tribal communities speak Assamese** but return their own **respective languages** as their mother tongues.

For example, in the **Mising tribe**, which I belong to, a **large majority speak Assamese**.

This is not because of school education, but mainly because of the fact that **Assamese is the dominant market language**, at least in the Brahmaputra Valley.

Impact on tribal languages

The **imposition of Assamese** has had adverse effects on tribal languages, especially on those **which do not enjoy any constitutional protection.**

Decline in the tribal languages

Tribal languages are generally on a **steady decline**. For instance, while the **Mising tribe** reported a **rate of increase of 41.13%** in the number of speakers in the 2001 Census, by **2011** it was merely **14.28%.**

Similarly, the **Deoris** which reported a decadal increase of **56.19%** in the 2001 Census, the increase percentage by **2011** had declined to **15.79%.**

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It is to be noted that only the **Dibongiya clan** of the Deoris now speak the language.

The **Rabhas community** provides for a more curious case. The community reported an increase of **18.23% in the number of speakers** in the 2001 Census.

By **2011,** the number of speakers had decreased to **-15.04%,** almost completely obliterating the language.

Other tribes such as the **Sonowal-Kacharis and Tiwas** have almost completely lost their languages.

Tribal communities since long have been **demanding linguistic and territorial protection** and attention from the State government.

On October 30, 1985, the **government of Assam**, in response to a long struggle by the **Mising community**, through a gazette notification introduced the **Mising Language** as an **additional subject** in Classes 3 and 4 in the **Mising-dominated areas.**

The Assam government was supposed to take up various tasks such as appointing Mising language teachers, translating books into Mising, and also introducing Mising textbooks. But only 230 teachers were appointed till 1994, after which the whole process came to a halt. Further, the agreed upon clause of introducing Mising as the medium of instruction never took off.

Impacts of forced homogenisation

Tribal communities have always **resisted attempts of forced homogenisation**. It was in response to the **Official Language Bill** in **1960 t**hat the **Khasi** along with other tribal communities started protesting, ultimately leading to the **formation of Meghalaya**.

The **Bodo movement** for autonomy also finds its **roots in this bill**. Tribes have often highlighted that the '**Assamese nationalism'** discourse was **narrow and rarely** included **other communities**.

Tribes such as the **Misings, Deoris, Rabhas**, etc. have still consistently supported the Assamese movement **against the imposition of Bengali language or Hindi in Assam**.

But in turn they now find themselves **consistently marginalised,** with their **linguistic and cultural heritage** derecognised by the State and the hegemonic forces.

The CAA factor

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The **anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) movement** could have been a point of departure in the '**Assamese Nationalism'** discourse.

A new **definition of 'Assamese indigenous'** was seen **emerging**. This definition **was inclusive of tribal and other non-Assamese communities** and was **based on domicile rather than language alone**.

Demands were raised for **protection of indigenous land, culture and languages** during the course of the struggle.

There was also the **fear of infiltration** that the **CAA bill** promoted. The government is in fact manipulating this element of fear by raising **linguistic nationalism** to **weaken the inclusive and anti-hegemonic build-up in the anti-CAA movement in Assam.**

The timing of the government's decision to bring in a law making Assamese mandatory in schools clearly exposes its intentions. It was first announced in January 2020.

As a job requirement

Adding to this, the Home Minister of Assam states that the government is also mulling over a **separate legislation** which will make **only those who learned Assamese** till their matriculation suitable for **government jobs in Assam**.

These moves are **clear indications** of a **non-inclusive homogenised Assamese nationalism** taking precedence over the **inclusion of minority linguistic and cultural aspirations**.

Such a move alienates various linguistic identities such as those of tribes such as the Misings, Deoris and Rabhas, etc. and **limits the definition of 'Axomiya'** to just the **speakers of the language**.

This law will only **increase the marginalisation** of these communities, triggering **social conflicts** once again.

GS-II : Government policies

Streaming for reading

By, Brij Kothari is on the faculty of IIM-Ahmedabad and the founder of PlanetRead

Revolutionary potential

A **national implementation of SLS (Same Language Subtitling)** on existing **general entertainment content (GEC)** on TV and streaming platforms, also known as **Over-The-Top (OTT),** would **revolutionise reading literacy** in India, in addition to having massive national impact in two other domains, that

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of **media access among Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH)** people and of **language learning.**

India is **globally the first country** where the **mainstreaming of SLS** on **TV and streaming content** is being advanced for **mass reading literacy.**

When **SLS is implemented on TV** in all b, as broadcast policy now stipulates, it will automatically **give daily reading practice** to an **estimated 600 million weak readers** who currently cannot read and understand simple text, like a newspaper.

Within three to five years of **regular exposure to SLS** on entertainment content already watched, many of them will become functional and some **even fluent readers**.

Close to a **billion viewers in India** watch on a**verage 3 hours and 46 minutes of TV every day** (**FICCI-EY, 2019).** No other activity, nationally, comes close to commanding **four billion person-hours every day.**

SLS has the **proven power to transform much of TV and OTT** content consumption **into routine reading practice** that is **inescapable, subconscious, sustainable, scalable, and extremely cost-effective.**

COVID-19 has further highlighted the **potential of the SLS solution** for upping the **nation's mass reading skills**.

Globally, **1.4 billion children**, and in **India 300 million**, have been **locked out of schools**.

Even prior to COVID-19, the **primary education system's** long-standing crisis was captured in the well-known outcome that **half of India's rural children** in **Class 5 could not read a Class 2-level text**.

The '**Accessibility Standards'** of the **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB),** framed in September 2019 under the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016**, require **50% of all entertainment content** on **TV to carry captions** in the same language, **or SLS, by 2025**.

Perhaps, the **onus is on Doordarshan** to implement its own parent Ministry's standards, before private channels can be obligated to do the same.

Taking Netflix to court in the U.S.

A policy quirk is that the **MIB's Accessibility Standards do not automatically apply** to the content on **OTT platforms,** even though the **content overlap is over 90%.**

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In the U.S., the **National Association of the Deaf (NAD)** took **Netflix to court** on this issue, citing that its **lack of closed-captioning** on streaming content was a **violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act**.

Netflix lost and **was ordered to caption** all **its streaming content by 2014**, and to **continue captioning content** hosted thereafter.

This explains **why OTT platforms** globally now offer **captioning or SLS on all English content**, because they have a **legal obligation** to do so.

Way ahead

In India, OTT platforms are currently in a dance with the government, arguing for **self-regulation**.

Going by historical precedent, the only languages that OTT platforms provide SLS in are those that have been mandated generally in a country in the '**Global North'.**

The '**Global South' is lagging in this regard,** thus missing out on a simple and affordable intervention that it needs the most to address its **low-reading literacy challenge.** India could take the **lead by mandating SLS on all Indian language content hosted by OTT platforms**.

For further details about OTT (Over-the-top) platform , Read:- https://www.aspireias.com/daily-news-analysis-current-affairs/Digital-innovation-is-the-way-forward-Over-the-top-platform

GS-II : Education

Reforming India's digital policy

The **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)** just released its latest **World Investment Report** and projected that **FDI to developing Asian economies could drop by as much as 45%.**

Digital Services as panacea for bridging gaps

One sector that is expected to buck this trend is **digital services.** Now more than ever, it is clear that **digital services** have become **critical to every 21st century economy**.

Quite literally, **digital services** are filling gaps when national or global emergencies interrupt more traditional modes of commerce.

Digital services enable **access to and delivery** of a wide array of products across multiple sectors, **from healthcare to retail distribution** to financial services.

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Even in the midst of **the COVID-19 pandemic,** investments in **digital services** continue to flow at record levels globally, outpacing investment in nearly **every other sector**.

India is an **ideal destination** for increased FDI flows in the **digital services sector** and offers **undeniable potential** for innovative homegrown **start-ups** not least because of its huge and increasingly digitised population.

However, Indian **government policies** will be **key determinants** in how quickly and at what level the Indian economy attracts new investment, fosters **Indian innovation**, and expands its exporting prowess.

Three pending measures

Currently, there are **three pending reform measures** under consideration that are likely to affect **India's growth trajectory** in digital services for years to come —

1. the Personal Data Protection Bill (PDPB),
2. the e-commerce policy, and
3. the Information Technology Act Amendments.

It may be difficult to reconcile these approaches with India's strong interest in promoting data privacy, protecting its democratic institutions, and encouraging FDI and India's position as a global leader in information technology.

There is uncertainty about when these changes will be completed and implemented.

Also, the course of the **India-U.S. trade relationship** is uncertain, as signs of progress are continually interrupted by setbacks in the form of new restrictions.

The **bilateral relationship** is an important **factor in realising** the potential for **greater trade and investment** in digital services.

The **strategic relationship** has been growing, reflecting how their historic ties have evolved over time.

India and the U.S. are yet to conclude negotiation on a bilateral trade agreement that could address some digital services issues, and the U.S. **just initiated a "Section 301"** review of **whether digital services taxes in 10 countries constitute "unfair" trade measures**, including **India's equalisation levy.**

India will be **host of the G20 nations in 2022**, and it appears clear that post-COVID-19 international cooperation and approaches to good governance in the digital sphere will be top-priority initiatives. The steps India takes now could well establish itself as a true global leader.

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GS-II : Governance

India's torture culture needs to end now

Context

By now, everyone has heard of the tragic deaths of P. Jayaraj and J. Benicks, a father-son duo in a small town in Thoothukudi. Jayaraj, 58, was arrested by the police following an altercation with them on keeping his son's mobile phone shop open in violation of lockdown rules. After Benicks was also taken into custody, the two were mercilessly thrashed to death.

Being found guilty of the '**offence' of keeping a shop open during the lockdown** would have ordinarily granted Jayaraj and Benicks a **maximum of only three months of imprisonment**.

The series of events, starting with the cruel lockdown enforcement methods and concluding with the utterly gruesome and entirely avoidable deaths, is a sign that we are living with a **completely broken system of law enforcement.**

Endemic to police culture

The Tamil Nadu Police has acquired notoriety (famous) over the decades for employing **torturous methods** for law enforcement.

Torture is, in fact, an **integral part of police culture all over the country.** Indeed, it would not be amiss to argue that this culture in India today is **reminiscent of the brutality** of the **colonial police forces** that we are so keen to forget.

Official data also accept that police torture is a reality, compelling case found in reports made by NGOs and observers over the years, including by the **Asian Centre for Human Rights**, **Amnesty International** and People's Union for Democratic Rights.

The **data on torture** show that it is not only an integral part of India's policing culture; in some investigations (such as terror cases), it is treated as the centrepiece.

The fact is that the **current laws facilitate such torture**, such as through the admissibility **of confessions** as **evidence** under the **Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act** and the **Prevention of Terrorism Act**, which continues refurbished as the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act.

Unfortunately, **policing** has also **not mainstreamed the upgrade** to newer technologies, **like DNA analysis**, which can directly impact law enforcement practices.

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The official position on **state-sponsored or state-endorsed torture** can be seen in a **2017 quote** by India's then **Attorney-General.**

In his **opening speech in Geneva** at the country's universal periodic review at the **United Nations Human Rights Council**, the Attorney-General invoked **Gandhi and Buddha**, stating that "India...believe[s] in peace, non-violence and upholding human dignity. As such, the concept of torture is completely alien to our culture and it has no place in the governance of the nation." This would be a textbook example of hypocrisy, if ever.

What we really need is a **recognition that torture** is **endemic** and a **systemic problem,** and the only answer lies in **stringent legal framework** that is aligned with and committed to the **principles of international law under the UN Convention Against Torture (UNCAT)** to which India has been a signatory since 1997.

Supreme Court on torture

Even before India signed **the UNCAT**, our **Supreme Court** had brought about **glorious jurisprudence** highlighting the many problems with the country's torture culture.

In **Raghbir Singh v. State of Haryana (1980),** the Court was "deeply disturbed by the diabolical recurrence of police torture resulting in a terrible scare in the minds of common citizens that their lives and liberty are under a new peril when the guardians of the law gore human rights to death."

These sentiments were revisited in **Francis Coralie Mullin v. Union Territory of Delhi (1981) and Sheela Barse v. State of Maharashtra (1987),** where the Court condemned cruelty and torture as violative of **Article 21.**

This interpretation of Article 21 is **consistent with the principles contained in the UNCAT.**

The UNCAT **aims to prevent torture** and **other acts of cruel**, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment around the world.

Although **India signed the UNCAT in 1997**, it is **yet to ratify it**.

In 2010, a weak **Prevention of Torture Bill** was passed by the Lok Sabha, and the Rajya Sabha later sent it to a Select Committee for review in alignment with the UNCAT. But the Committee's recommended law, submitted in 2012, never fructified, as the then UPA government allowed the Bill to lapse.

By 2017, the **Law Commission had submitted its 273rd report** and an accompanying **draft torture law.** But the Supreme Court dismissed the petition on

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grounds that the **government cannot be compelled to make a law by mandamus**; treaty ratification was a political decision; and that it was a policy matter.

This rejection was a **sign of the Supreme Court turning its back** on its own glorious jurisprudence, and its efforts to aid law-making in the past, whether in using the **Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women** (**CEDAW**) to reform the law around **workplace sexual harassment**; or **customary international law in environmental cases**; or the **right to privacy** — this long and varied list is revelatory of a proactive Court that sees itself as responsible for nudging Parliament into legislative action.

#EndTortureToday

There have been opportunities for 23 years to enact a law on torture, but they have been studiously avoided. State consultation also has no meaning.

It is evident that **all governments enjoy the status quo**, where the **police are used as a tool for self-preservation**.

The **#BlackLivesMatter** movement, led by the people, started a national debate in the U.S. on policing, **including radical reforms** such as **defunding and disarming the police**.

Way ahead

Only the people can rise up against these practices, just as they are doing in other parts of the world. And by people, I include **important stakeholders like the Bar, the media, civil society and student groups**

GS-II : International Issues

In an uncertain world, a seat at the global high table

Context

India will be back in the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** for a **two-year term** beginning **January 1, 2021** at a critical time in the history of the UN.

India is serving for the **eighth time** and has a record of contributing to some of the seminal resolutions of the UNSC.

India's **reputation for taking balanced positions and consensus building** will be welcomed by the other members.

All about the contest

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The basic **contest for the non-permanent seats** takes place in the **respective regional groups** and their **sub-groups**.

Voting in the General Assembly is to fulfil the requirement of countries having to secure a **two-thirds majority of the member states**.

If there is regional endorsement, all countries, except those with any grievance against the candidates, vote for them and they sail through easily. But **regional endorsement** is **becoming difficult** as countries inscribe their names years in advance and those squatting countries have to be persuaded to vacate the place through various means.

Last time, it was **Kazakhstan** which **vacated the place for India**; **this time, it was Afghanistan**. India could not have got the endorsement without such gestures from **friendly countries**.

Voting process in UNGA

Voting in the General Assembly is not without its own excitement. The two-thirds majority is assured, but the **competition is to secure** all **the votes cast**.

But no one gets that as the **ballot is secret** and **adversaries may vote against the candidates.** For instance, out of the **192 votes cast**, India got 184 and no one will ever know the eight countries that did not vote for India.

But it is a matter of concern that **there are so many countries with grievances against India.** In the order of the number of votes received by each one, the countries elected were **Mexico, India, Norway, Ireland and Kenya**.

Since **there was no endorsement in the African Group**, **Kenya had to go for a second round against Djibouti**.

Kenya was the favourite of the West and **Djibouti was supported by China** and the **Islamic states**.

In the Western European and Others Group, Canada lost to Ireland in a contentious contest.

Voting process during COVID-19

One special feature this year was the COVID-19 effect. Ambassadors were allowed to enter the General Assembly Hall one by one to cast their ballots instead of the simultaneous voting that usually takes place.

The **campaign was also unconventional** — it took place through **Zoom conversations** and the **sharing of brochures and pamphlets** rather than through meetings at bars and restaurants serving haute cuisine around the UN.

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The candidates **may also have saved money** as this is normally an occasion for splurging.

The new Permanent Representative of India, **T.S. Tirumurti**

Need for UN reforms

How far the UN will be able to reform itself in the new situation remains uncertain. The **expected changes after 9/11** never materialised because of **vested interests and traditional positions**.

The **UN did not succeed** in **either defining terrorism** or in adopting the **Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism**. **Counter-terrorism will be one of the highest priorities for India at the UNSC**.

Permanent membership

India's election as a **non-permanent member** has understandably ignited the hope that its **quest for permanent membership** of the Council may succeed.

Nothing is farther from the truth. Operating within the provisions of the Charter is one thing and seeking to amend the Charter to add new permanent members is quite another.

The debate has thrown up many ideas, but till today, **none of the proposals has the possibility of securing two-thirds majority** of the General Assembly and the **votes of the five permanent members**.

It is fairly certain that **no expansion of the permanent members will take place** under the **existing provisions of the Charter**.

India's performance in the Council may earn it respect, but it will not lead to its elevation to permanent membership as the **opposition to any expansion is not India-specific.**

India will have a **higher profile at the UN** for the **next two years** as the **non-permanent members** have a **collective veto** over **every resolution in the Council.**

Permanent members can prevent adoption of resolutions by themselves, but they **need at least nine votes** to **get a resolution passed**.

India will also have a **rare peep into the consultations chamber of the UNSC**, which is **closed to non-members of the Council**.

Way ahead

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India's mission in New York has earned a reputation that it is next only to the permanent members in influence. But whether it will be able to deal with traditional challenges in novel ways will depend on the turns and twists in an uncertain world.

GS-III : Health

Staying alert: On monitoring non-COVID-19 diseases

Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP)

The **Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP),** the backbone of **India's disease monitoring network**, is responsible for **alerting the Centre and the wider world**, on a **weekly basis**, about the **emergence of disease outbreaks**, a **surge in novel pathogens,** the **rate of spread** and **remedial action taken**.

Major focus –only on COVID-19

On average, there are **30-40 such alerts**. However, the advent of **COVID-19 appears** to have veiled the country from any other disease.

For one, the latest **weekly report** available on the **IDSP website** is from Week 12 (March 16-22). It records a **mere six outbreaks/disease alerts across the country**.

In the same week last year, there were **17 alerts; in 2018, there were 28; and in 2017, there were 45.** In Week 11 this year, there were 28 alerts, 12 of which were for COVID-19 and these corresponded to the 110 cases of the disease that were reported in that week of March from when the disease escalated.

With movement at a standstill, hospitals shut, and only testing and treatment for COVID-19 available at government healthcare facilities, the **reporting of other diseases suffered.**

The **neglect of other diseases** has been independently borne out, for instance, by a **reduction in the notifications of fresh tuberculosis** infections and a **general decline in claims under the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme**.

The other explanation is that akin to a **decline in deaths from accidents**, the lockdown has contributed to a **decline in transmission of contagious diseases.**

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Many of the outbreaks that are routinely reported involve pathogens contracted from **contaminated water** or **those airborne** that spread through **social interaction.**

While the reasons for the decline could be deliberated upon, what is unacceptable is the **lack of public updates** since March 12.

The IDSP also **faces a manpower crunch** and, mirroring the experience of **public health facilities** in other countries, is trying to **recruit in the middle of a pandemic**.

Way ahead

If the country has, as a policy, decided to **'unlock' and restore pre-pandemic routines**, then this should also apply to **routine surveillance** for other diseases.

It's debatable how useful this would be to improve COVID-19 surveillance, but it is essential in **improving overall surveillance** as well as providing timely updates to the public and international health agencies. The pandemic needs serious focus, but India cannot afford to ignore other killers.

GS-III : Economic Issues

Reset rural job policies, recognise women's work

Context

* The **COVID-19 pandemic** has had a huge **impact on women's work**, but as **official statistics do not capture women's work adequately** and accurately.

Important Data

* A survey by the **Azim Premji University**, of 5,000 workers across 12 States — of whom 52% were women workers — found that **women workers** were **worse off than men during the lockdown**.

* Among **rural casual workers**, for example, **71% of women** lost their jobs after the lockdown; the figure was 59% for men. Data from the **Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE)** also suggest that job losses in April 2020, as compared to April 2019, were larger for rural women than men.

The pre-COVID-19 situation

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* According to **national labour force surveys**, a **quarter of adult rural women were in the labour force** (or counted as "workers" in official data) in **2017-18**.
* If we examine data from **time-use surveys**, that is, surveys that collect information on all activities undertaken during a **fixed time period (usually 24 hours**), the picture changes radically.
* There are **no official time-use survey data**: the **National Statistical Office** did conduct a time-use survey in 2019 but the results are not available.
* I use detailed, **village-level time-use surveys** from Karnataka, with data for 24 hours a day for seven days consecutively over two agricultural seasons in 2017-18, to illustrate the ground-level situation.
* Taking time spent in economic activity (or what falls within the production boundary in the **System of National Accounts** or SNA) and using the **standard definition of a worker as one who spent "major time"** during the **reference week** in economic activity, time-use data show that, although there were **seasonal variations** in work participation, almost **all women came within the definition of "worker" in the harvest season.**

Crisis of regular employment

* These data suggest —that rural women face a crisis of regular employment.
* In other words, when **women are not reported as workers**, it is because of the **lack of employment opportunities** rather than it being on account of any "withdrawal" from the labour force.
* A **second feature** of **rural women's work**, brought to light by **gender-disaggregated data** at the **household level** in villages across India surveyed by FAS (Foundation of Agrarian Studies) , is that **women from all sections of the peasantry,** with some regional exceptions, **participate in paid work outside the home**.
* In thinking of the potential workforce, thus, we **need to include women** from **almost all sections of rural households** and not just women from rural labour or manual worker households.
* A third feature of our **village-level findings** is that **younger and more educated women** are **often not seeking work** because they **aspire to skilled non-agricultural work**, whereas older women are more willing to engage in manual labour.

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* A fourth feature of rural India is that **women's wages** are **rarely equal to men's wages,** with a few exceptions. The **gap between female and male wages** is highest for **non-agricultural tasks** — the new and growing source of employment.
* Finally, an **important feature of rural India** pertains to the **woman's work day.** Counting **all forms of work** — economic activity and care work or work in cooking, cleaning, child care, elderly care — a **woman's work day** is exceedingly **long and full of drudgery**.
* In the FAS time-use survey, the **total hours worked by women** (in economic activity and care) ranged from **61 hours to 88 hours in the lean season**, with a maximum of **91 hours** (or 13 hours a day) in the **peak season.** No woman puts in less than a **60-hour work-week**.

Lockdown and jobs

* A rapid rural survey conducted by FAS showed that in large parts of the country where **rain-fed agriculture is prevalent**, there was **no agricultural activity during the lean months** of March to May.
* In **areas of irrigated agriculture**, there **were harvest operations** (such as for rabi wheat in northern India) but these were **largely mechanised.**
* In **other harvest operations**, such as for **vegetables**, there was a growing tendency to use **more family labour** and **less hired labour on account of fears of infection.**
* Put together, while agricultural activity continued, employment available to women during the lockdown was limited.
* **Employment and income in activities allied to agriculture**, such as **animal rearing, fisheries and floriculture** were also adversely affected by the lockdown.
* During the lockdown, the **demand for milk fell by at least 25%** (as hotels and restaurants closed), and this was reflected in either lower quantities sold or in lower prices or both.
* For women across the country, incomes from the sale of milk to dairy cooperatives shrank. Among fishers, men could not go to sea, and women could not process or sell fish and fish products.
* **Non-agricultural jobs** came to a **sudden halt as construction sites**, brick kilns, petty stores and eateries, local factories and other enterprises shut down completely.

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* In recent years, **women have accounted** for more than **one-half of workers in public works**, but **no employment** was available through the **National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS)** till late in April.
* One of the new sources of women's employment in the last few decades has been government schemes, especially in the health and education sectors, where, for example, **women work as Anganwadi workers or mid-day meal cooks**.
* During the pandemic, Accredited Social Health Activists or **ASHAs, 90% of whom are women**, have **become frontline health workers** , although they are not recognised as "workers" or paid a regular wage.

Effect on health and nutrition

* Managing household tasks and provisioning in a situation of **reduced incomes and tightening budgets** will have **long-term effects** on **women's physical and mental health.**
* The already **high levels of malnutrition** among rural women is likely to be exacerbated as households cope with reduced food intake.

A new road map

* It is important to redraw the picture of the rural labour market by including the contribution of women.
* **Expansion of the NREGS**, a medium and longer term plan needs to generate **women-specific employment in skilled occupations** and in businesses and new enterprises.
* In the proposed **expansion of health infrastructure** in the country, women, who already play a significant role in health care at the grass-root level**, must be recognised as workers and paid a fair wage(ASHA workers)**.
* Attention must be paid to **safe and easy transport** for women from their homes to workplaces.
* Further, as the COVID-19 infection spreads, given a higher likelihood of cases among men than women, the **burden on women as earners and carers is likely to rise.**

It is time for women to be seen as **equal partners** in the task of transforming the rural economy.

GS-II : International issues

Lessons for India: On Italian marines case

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Context

* The long quest for justice for the two Kerala fishermen shot dead by Italian marines from the **Enrica Lexie** about **20.5 nautical miles (Contiguous zone)** off India's coast in February 2012 has ended in disappointment.

Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruling

* An **international arbitration court** has ruled that **India does not have jurisdiction to try the marines**, who, it held, were entitled to immunity as they were acting on behalf of a state.
* The **Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague** admitted that both **India and Italy had concurrent jurisdiction** in the matter but concluded that the **marines' immunity** precluded India's jurisdiction.
* In India's favour, the **PCA found** that the **Italian vessel had violated the right and freedom of navigation of the Indian fishing vessel** under **UNCLOS**, and that the action, which caused loss of lives, property and harm, merited compensation.
* **PCA rejected a key argument** by **Italy that India**, by leading the Italian vessel into its territory and arresting the marines**, violated** its obligation to cooperate with measures to **suppress piracy** under **Article 100 of UNCLOS**.
* The **fishing vessel was within the country's Contiguous Zone** and it was quite clear that the **offence warranted arrest and prosecution under domestic law.**
* With the **piracy angle ruled out**, a **regular trial** was in order. The Union government should have taken over the prosecution and ensured a quick trial.

Diplomatic fallout

* However, as legal tangles were being sorted out, and India was dealing with the diplomatic fallout, the marines managed to obtain orders to leave the country.
* The **Supreme Court ruled** that **only the Centre, and not Kerala, can prosecute the marines.**

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* **National Investigation Agency** invoked the **Suppression of Unlawful Acts against Safety of Maritime Navigation and Fixed Platforms on Continental Shelf Act, 2002.**
* This caused a diplomatic furore as it **provides for the death penalty**. The **EU threatened** to impose **trade sanctions**. Ultimately, it took time for these charges to be dropped.
* The **PCA's award**, which **is final and has been accepted by India**, is a huge setback for the expectation that the two marines would face a criminal trial in India.
* In the end, **Italy succeeded in taking the matter out of India's hands**. It should now make good on its commitment to have the marines tried under its domestic laws.

GS-III : Health

Bend it like Italy: On flattening the COVID-19 curve

Context

* Five months after WHO declared COVID-19 as a public health emergency of international concern and three-and-half months after it called the disease a pandemic, its spread does not seem to be slowing down globally.

Spike in the cases globally

* Instead, infections and the death toll continue to rise alarmingly. After a sharp increase in March, the fresh cases reported have steadily increased, **breaching the 10 million mark** on June 29; the **death toll too touched a grim milestone of 0.5 million.**
* **June** alone accounted for **60% of all cases reported** so far. The second half of June has been particularly bad with over **1,50,000 cases reported almost daily**.
* The highest reported on a single day since the outbreak in China; U.S. (2.7 million), Brazil (nearly 1.5 million) and India (0.6 million) have been driving the spike.
* On July 1, the U.S. witnessed the single largest spike of nearly 50,000 cases, which is more than the total number of cases reported by Singapore, South Korea and other countries.

Cases in India

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* The **acceleration of fresh cases** began in the first week of May and increased sharply in June. While **Maharashtra has the most cases**, infections in Tamil Nadu and Delhi have been steadily increasing.
* With over **92,000 cases, Delhi has surpassed China (nearly 85,000)** while Mumbai (just over 82,000) and Chennai (64,689) are close behind.
* Delhi increased the number done per day to close **to 20,000 with a concomitant increase** in cases to reach a peak of over 3,900 before falling by nearly 40% in the last few days.
* Though belated, Tamil Nadu began aggressively testing in hotspot areas in Chennai a fortnight ago.
* Moving from a smaller number of **targeted tests to increased community testing** about two weeks ago has led to the **test positivity rate reducing from 35% to about 20%** in certain areas in **Chennai**.
* A **test positivity rate of about 20%** is **highly suggestive of community spread** in these areas.

Way ahead

* Equally important is **tracing and isolating contacts**. Tamil Nadu, however, has the **lowest case fatality rate of 1.3%** compared with **4.4% in Maharashtra, 3.1% in Delhi**, and 5.6% in Gujarat.
* It is important for every State to take a leaf out of **Maharashtra**'s book and **test large numbers** daily unmindful of the rise in fresh cases each day.
* **Dithering on testing, tracing, isolating and treating** will inevitably lead to **uncontrolled spread and increased deaths**, undermining efforts to contain the pandemic.

After all, China, Italy, and Spain have demonstrated that it is possible to bend the curve through a comprehensive approach that is centred around testing.

GS-III : Internal security

Impact of ban on Chinese apps

Context:

* The Indian government's move to ban 59 apps of Chinese origin.
* The Indian government has banned 59 apps of Chinese origin, citing data security and national sovereignty concerns. These include popular ones such as **TikTok, SHAREIt, UC Browser, CamScanner**, Helo, Weibo, WeChat and **Club Factory.**

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* The government has invoked powers under **Section 69A of the Information Technology (IT) Act** read with the relevant provisions of the **Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking of Access of Information by Public) Rules 2009.**
* The government seems to have adopted the emergency route under Section 69A of the IT Act to issue ban orders. The **emergency route** allows content to be blocked on the **directions of the Secretary, Department of IT**, who must record his reasons for doing so.
* The order of the Secretary, Department of IT, must be **placed before the government committee within 48 hours.** Based on the recommendations of this committee, the order can then be finalised or vacated.

Reasons for the ban:

* The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has stated that its actions were based on reports and complaints about misuse of the apps for stealing and surreptitiously transmitting users' data in an unauthorised manner to servers which have locations outside India.
* The Ministry has stated that the decision to block the 59 apps was to safeguard the sovereignty and integrity of India and protect data & privacy of the Indian users.
* The Ministry is also said to have received "**exhaustive recommendations" from the Home Ministry's Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre for the ban.**

Impact on users:

* Installed apps may continue to exist on mobile devices. But now that the latest versions of the apps have been removed from Google's Play Store and Apple's App Store, users will not be able to access updated versions in future.
* If a notice goes out to internet service providers asking that data flow from these apps be halted, that could impact the functioning of existing, installed apps.
* The banned apps have a large user base in India. Users of banned browsers or video apps may shift to similar offerings from other apps.

Impact on Indian economy:

* The move to ban the apps could impact India in terms of investments and employment. ByteDance Ltd., the parent company of Tiktok had proposals of

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investments worth $1 billion in India. With the ban this will probably remain suspended, potentially impacting job creation.

Impact on Chinese app providers:
* It is most likely that the move was aimed at Chinese economic interests.
* The potential loss of advertising revenue impacts app-makers.
* Though TikTok's Indian business yields cover a small proportion of its total revenue, but with quicker user adoption more recently, the stakes seem to be getting higher for the banned apps.

China's response to the ban:
* China has claimed that India's measure selectively and discriminatorily aims at certain Chinese apps on ambiguous grounds and runs against fair and transparent procedure requirements, abuses national security exceptions, and is violative of the WTO rules.
* China also argues that the move goes against the general trend of international trade and e-commerce, and is not conducive to consumer interests and the market competition in India.

Legality of the move:
* The legal order that empowers the designated authority to implement the ban is yet to be made public.
* Though **Rule 16 of the Blocking rules** requires **strict confidentiality** to be maintained **regarding blocking requests**, complaints received, and actions taken, the government ought to disclose the orders passed (subject to relevant redactions that may be required) in the interests of transparency and accountability.
* Also, and as recognised by the Supreme Court recently in the **Anuradha Bhasin case**, publishing such orders is the only way in which the reasons and rationale for the decision can be judged.

GS-III : Economic issues
Why has Indian Railways opened doors for private players?
Context:
* Issue of expansion and the modernisation of Indian Railways by opening up to the private sector.

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Background:

* According to data maintained by the **World Bank, in 2018** India had **68,443 route kilometres of railways**. It is among the **four largest rail networks in the world, along with the United States, China, and Russia.**

Challenges:

* According to the **Railway Board estimates** around **five crore intending passengers could not be accommodated during 2019-20** for want of capacity, and there was **13% travel demand** in excess of supply during **summer and festival seasons**.
* Without an expansion, and with growth of road travel, the share of the Railways would steadily decline in coming years.
* The **steady shift of passenger and freight operations from the Railways to other modes of travel** was affecting economic growth, by as much as **4.5% of GDP-equivalent**.

Bibek Debroy committee:

* In **2015, the expert panel chaired by Bibek Debroy** and constituted by the Ministry of Railways, recommended **liberalisation and not privatisation in order** to allow entry of new operators to encourage growth and improve services.
* It also made it clear that a **regulatory mechanism** was a prerequisite to **promote healthy competition** and protect the interests of all stakeholders.

Details:

* Indian Railways has launched the process of opening up train operations to **private entities on select routes**. Indian Railways has invited **Request for Qualifications** proposals, for scrutiny of vendor capabilities to bring modern trains for operations on **existing rail infrastructure.**
* The **Railway Board** has set a tentative schedule for **private train operations, expected to begin in 2023 and in 12 clusters.**

Significance of the move:

* From a passenger perspective, this could mean more train services, particularly between big cities.
* Though the present proposal is only for a fraction of the total train operations — **5% of the 2,800 Mail and Express services** operated by Indian Railways, The

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overall objective, however, is to introduce a new **train travel experience for passengers** who are used to travelling by aircraft and air-conditioned buses. This could help revive positive sentiment towards rail travel and help increase the revenues for the railways.

* The present move could help bring in **new-generation trains** and **attract investments of around Rs. 30,000 crore.**
* As per available estimates, a **one rupee push in the railway sector** would have a forward linkage effect of **increasing output in other sectors by Rs. 2.50.**
* The move will allow the government to monetize its expensive fixed assets such as track, signalling and stations.
* Despite having the fourth largest network of railway tracks, India still has lower rail density, indicating the scope for expansion. Private investments could help realize this potential.

Way forward:

* An important aspect of the proposal would be the provision of the **independent regulator**. Only an independent regulator could incentivize and embolden the private players to enter the sector.
* The Government of India has notified the resolution to set up a **Rail Development Authority** as a "**recommendatory/advisory" body,** advising government on, among other things, promoting competition, efficiency and economy, and protecting consumer interests.
* The attractive parts of the railways could be opened for private exploitation.
* Train services operated by Indian Railways cover several classes of passengers, meeting the social service obligation to connect remote locations, and adopting the philosophy of cross-subsidy for passengers in low-cost trains through higher freight tariffs.
* Private operators should not be expected to shoulder the burden of universal service norms, and may focus on revenue.

GS-III : Health

Surely, even if slowly: On a COVID-19 vaccine

Context

* A letter by the **ICMR's head, Dr. Balram Bhargava**, to doctors last week, preparing to test a vaccine for human trials, appeared to be coercing them into getting a vaccine ready by August 15.

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Issues in hastening the process of vaccine trials

* However, there was no rationale extended for why the date August 15 cropped up.
* Given the crisis at hand, **regulatory agencies** the world over have **relaxed rules** on drug testing and vaccine trials.
* This is why drugs such **as remdesivir and favipiravir** — despite **limited evidence of success** — have made it to the bedside of patients.

Important checkpoints in the vaccine development

* Vaccines are an entirely different game. The basic philosophy of all vaccines involves introducing fragments — in some cases the whole virus, albeit in a weakened form — into healthy volunteers.

1. Therefore, the **first checkpoint** is that the vaccine candidate should **not sicken a healthy person**.
2. The second hurdle is that a vaccine must **stimulate the immune system** just enough to get it to produce **protective antibodies.** In other words, it must be efficacious and finally, only if all were to go well, it must be tested in several thousand people in real world conditions.
3. And they must be shown, over time, to be better protected than those who were unvaccinated.

* Each one of these steps is necessary to ensure that the vaccine can be released for public use.
* The **Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech**, the makers of '**Covaxin**', has experience and credibility in vaccine manufacture.
* 'Covaxin' is developed from a strain of SARS-CoV-2 isolated at NIV. However, this only makes it one of hundreds of potential vaccines being tested and the consensus of experts is that **no vaccine can be readied** for use **until next year.**

Way ahead

* Till the development of vaccine, the behavioural changes on social distancing and an insistence on wearing masks in public.
* The pandemic has brought into focus the unavoidable role of uncertainty. New aspects of the disease are being brought to light, sometimes every day. The best strategy, in the midst of such flux, is to maintain absolute transparency, and proceed surely, even if slowly.

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GS-II : International Relations

India must not cast anchor in 'Enrica Lexie'

Context

* Italy has achieved its basic objective in the **Enrica Lexie-St. Antony matter .** Italy it wanted its two marines, Massimiliano Latorre and Salvatore Girone, to stand trial for killing two Indian fishermen, Ajeesh Pink and Valentine Jelastine, not in India but in Italy.
* The marines were part of a security contingent on the Enrica Lexie, an **Italian commercial oil tanker** while Pink and Valentine were on the Indian fishing boat, St. Antony. The incident took place on February 15, **2012, in India's Contiguous Zone, 20.5 nautical miles off the Kerala coast.**

Present and past

* On July 2, 2020, the ITLOS gave Italy full satisfaction on this crucial point although in a split 3-2 verdict, and on shaky grounds.
* The tribunal, established by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) under the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), held that the marines were "**entitled to immunity** in relation to the acts that they committed during the incident of 15 February, 2012, and that India is precluded from exercising its jurisdiction over the Marines".
* ITLOS had asked both countries to "**suspend all court proceedings**" and "**refrain from initiating new ones**" that may "**aggravate the dispute**" or prevent the implementation of the Arbitral Tribunal's decision.
* Accordingly, the **judicial proceedings against the Italian marines** in India **were suspended.** In May 2016, the Supreme Court of India allowed Girone who was on bail in India to return to Italy pending the decision of the Tribunal; Lattore was already there because of medical reasons.

The small print

* It is highly unlikely though that any Italian court will convict Lattore and Girone for Pink and Valentine's unjustified killing.
* Only the operative portion of the tribunal's award is available till now. The **detailed award** is being **scrutinised by India and Italy** for redactions of those portions either country feels are confidential, and therefore cannot be publicly disclosed.

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* The Ministry of External Affairs statement on the award notes "The Tribunal observed that India and Italy had **concurrent jurisdiction** over the incident and a valid legal basis to **institute criminal proceedings** against the marines."
* Prima facie then the **tribunal should have allowed the case to continue in India** for the victims were Indians and the Enrica Lexie came voluntarily to India and after investigations a case was lodged against Lattore and Girone.
* however, the tribunal majority found a way to ensure that the case should continue in Italy by agreeing with the Italian plea that the marines **had immunity for they were state officials**.

A dangerous precedent

* India's stand that **UNCLOS is not concerned** with issues relating to immunity was strong.
* **Immunity of state officials** has to be governed by specific **multilateral or bilateral treaties or agreements**. It should not be tangentially brought in to **settle issues of jurisdiction**.
* Besides, even if Italian marines are considered as state officials, they were **deployed on an Italian commercial vessel**. Italy did so **unilaterally without the cover** of any **multilateral or bilateral arrangement.**
* There **is no convention** that **such persons as the marines** in such cases are **immune from local criminal jurisdiction**; **only heads of states, heads of governments and foreign ministers customarily enjoy immunity abroad apart from accredited diplomats who are covered by the Vienna Convention.**
* Thus, the **tribunal's decision on the marines' immunity** sets a **dangerous precedent.**
* **Countries may now be tempted to enact specific laws** to give **immunity to their military and para-military personnel** and others by declaring them b and thereafter place them on different kinds of **commercial craft** and use them for adventurous purposes.
* This **can lead** to **an increase in tensions** generally and especially between inimical states, and more so if there are problems relating to fishermen **between contiguous states.**

New Delhi must be focused

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* India can take satisfaction that the tribunal found that by firing on the St. Antony, Italy was guilty of "**violating India's freedom and right of navigation**".
* Consequently, it held that "**India is entitled to payment of compensation** in connection with loss of life, physical harm, material damage to property and moral harm" perpetrated by Italy.
* Now it is incumbent on the government to ensure that **Italy is made to pay fully for the loss of life** and the suffering it has caused in this matter.
* Any lapse on this count will be inexcusable. Considerations of good relations with Italy or with the European Union (EU) which had stood beside Italy throughout this matter should not be allowed to influence these specific negotiations.
* The government should also ensure that it **closely monitors** the case **proceedings in the Italian court** against Lattore and Girone.
* The government should instruct the Embassy in Rome that a diplomat should always be present during court proceedings. It should not accept Italy's pleas that this would not be possible when confidential information is being presented before the court.
* If the Italians had gone to the extreme in supporting the marines, India must not show any laxity in securing justice for Pink and Valentine even in an Italian court.

GS-II : Election

Re-enfranchise the forgotten voter

By, C.R. Kesavan is a former member of the Prasar Bharati Board. M.V. Rajeev Gowda is a former Member of Parliament and Chairman of the Congress party's Research Department

Context

* In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** has made it possible for **senior citizens above the age of 65 to vote by postal ballot**, given that they are at greater risk from exposure to the novel coronavirus.
* Hitherto, this **option was available only** to **disabled citizens and those above 80 years.**

Migrants on the margins

* We would urge that the same postal ballot be extended to **migrant workers.**

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* **Internal migrant workers** constitute about **13.9 crore** as in the **Economic Survey of 2017**, that is nearly a **third of India's labour force**.
* They travel across India in search of an economic livelihood, in the **construction sector, as domestic work, in brick kilns, mines, transportation, security, agriculture**, etc.
* Many never intend to settle down and wish to **return to their native villages and towns** once their work is completed or the working season ends.
* Often they toil in **exploitative low-wage jobs**, **lacking identity** and **proper living conditions**, without access to welfare and unable to exercise their voting rights.
* **Migrant workers** become **quasi-disenfranchise**d, **forgotten voters** because they **cannot afford to return home** on election day to choose their representatives.
* The **callous attitude** toward the **plight of migrants** exhibited by some State governments leads to the conclusion that this group **does not constitute a vote bank** worthy of attention.
* **Internal migrant workers** do **not enrol as voters** in their place of employment since they **find proof of residence** hard to provide.
* Many **are seasonal migrants** who would **rather vote in their villages** if they **could afford to return** home.

Task before the ECI

* Ensuring that every Indian who is eligible to vote can do so must be a central mission for the ECI.
* It is a matter of pride that India currently has over **91.05 crore registered voters** and in the **2019 general election**, a record **67.4%, i.e., 61.36 crore voters, cast their vote.**
* The ECI would do well to focus attention on the one-third, a substantial 29.68 crore, who did not cast their vote. **National Election Study** surveys have shown that about **10% of registered voters refrain from voting due to a lack of interest in politics**. That leaves approximately **20 crore voters who want to vote but are unable to do so.**
* Of these there are about **three crore Non Resident Indians (NRIs).** Only **about one lakh NRIs have registered to vote**, presumably because voting requires their **physical presence in India**.
* Of them, about **25,000 voted in the 2019 election**s.

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Yes, there is a model

* Does our system enable any form of voter portability that can serve as a model for re-enfranchising migrant workers?

* Yes. **Service voters (government employees)** posted away from home can vote through the **Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS).**

* **Classified service voters (e.g., military personnel)** can do so through their **proxies.**

* The ECI has said that it is **testing an Aadhaar-linked voter-ID** based solution to enable electors to cast **their votes digitally** from anywhere in the country.

* It will be some time in the future before this becomes a functional reality. While developing this solution, we must ensure that the **linkage with Aadhaar** does not result in the exclusion of eligible individuals.

* Migrants should be able to physically vote in their city of work based on the address on their existing voter IDs and duration of their temporary stay.

* A '**One Nation One Ration Card'** is being ushered in to enable migrant workers and their family members to access **Public Distribution System** benefits from any **fair price shop** in the country.

* Similarly, voting must be viewed not just as a **civic duty** but as a **civic right.**

* We must demonstrate the political will to usher in '**One Nation One Voter ID,**' to ensure native ballot portability and empower the forgotten migrant voter.

* A quote attributed to **Thomas Jefferson goes: "We... do not have government by the majority. We have government by the majority who participate."** Ensuring that every Indian voter can participate in elections is imperative to ensure a democratically inclusive India.

GS-III : Economic Issues

There's no one to fill Mahalanobis's shoes

Context

* In Poverty and Famines (1981), Amartya Sen argued that poor distribution of food, wartime inflation, speculative buying and panic hoarding were important reasons for the devastating Bengal famine of 1943.

Survey of the Bengal famine

* **Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis**, **India's 'Plan Man'** and the **architect of the country's statistical system**, conducted a large-scale sample survey

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of **Bengal's famine-ravaged villages** between July 1944 and February 1945 for **causal analysis**, and to assess the extent of the disaster and an estimate of the number of people affected.

* The **planning, preparations, challenges** and findings of the survey are documented in an article in Sankhy?, and in another article in The Asiatic Review, both published in 1946, among others.

* This survey provided very useful findings. It showed that **one-fourth of the number of families** (1.5 million people) who had owned **rice land** before the famine had **either sold in full or in part their rice land or had mortgaged it**.

* It also showed that the **economic position of nearly four million people** deteriorated **during the famine**.

* **Economic differences** became further accentuated during the famine. However, **roughly 85% of the families** maintained their status quo, showing that a large degree of **economic inertia** had persisted even under famine conditions.

*** Bengal's famine survey** reminds us that we **need estimates** of the **millions who will lose jobs or livelihoods** and of the hundreds of millions whose economic conditions will deteriorate in today's COVID-19-hit India.

* Mahalanobis is perhaps more relevant today when the accuracy of **different sorts of data** — from **economic data to COVID-19 data** — is under the scanner.

* Starting from the first area sample in the whole world for **jute forecast in 1934**, Mahalanobis built up a strong and trustworthy statistical heritage in India through his tireless efforts over the years, supplemented by his efficiency, wisdom, leadership, innovative ideas and brilliance.

* Mahalanobis envisaged **large-scale sample surveys as statistical engineering** rather than pure theory of sampling.

* He was instrumental in establishing the **National Sample Survey (NSS) in 1950** and the **Central Statistical Organization in 1951.**

Importance of accurate data

* Mahalanobis was very careful about **data accuracy in his surveys**. In **Kautilya's Arthashastra**, there is mention of the need **for cross-checking by an independent set of agents for data collection**: "Spies under disguise of householders (**Grihapatika, cultivators**), who shall be deputed by the Collector-General for espionage, shall ascertain the **validity of accounts** (of **Gopas, the village officers and Sthanikas, the district officers**) regarding the fields, right

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of ownership and remission of taxes with regard to houses, and the caste and profession regarding families..." (Chapter XXXV).
* This might have prompted Mahalanobis to have an **independent supervisory staff** during the conduct of field operations by the NSS for collection of reliable data.
* Mahalanobis was "a physicist by training, a statistician by instinct and an economist by conviction".
* His initial training in Physics might have made him conscious about errors in measurement and observation. Students even called him the **Professor of Counting and Measurement**, using the initials of his name.
* The desire to have built-in cross-checks and to get an estimate of errors in sampling led him to introduce the **Inter-Penetrating Network of Subsamples**, which is now considered as the curtain-raiser for re-sampling procedures like Bootstrap, a revolutionary concept of statistics indeed.
* First, even in pre-COVID-19 India, it's widely reported that surveyors were facing tremendous resistance from people due to some sociopolitical reasons.
* None other than **Pronab Sen, Chairman of the Standing Committee on Economic Statistics,** and former Chief Statistician, expressed his concern that the **survey system** is already in "**deep trouble",** and conducting household surveys with the Census as the frame would be "very tough" going ahead.
* The **problem will intensify due to COVID-19**. It was not easy to conduct surveys in famine-hit Bengal either.
* Through August 1944, 80 field workers were beset by malaria; half of them later dropped out of the project.

Use of technology
* Note that Mahalanobis never shied away from technology, whether in bringing statistical technology through volumes of Biometrika in his voyage from England, or even bringing computers to India.
* The Mahalanobis-led Indian Statistical Institute procured **India's first computer in 1956 and the second in 1959**.

GS-III : Health
Before the next health crisis
Context

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4E:EXPLAINATION-ELABORATION-ENUMERATION-EXAMINATION

* Stalking the efforts of the government and the private sector to revive the economy in the time of COVID-19 are two dangers to people's health — **air pollution and greenhouse gases —** and a **weak public health system**.

A noxious cocktail

* The avoided number of early deaths from dirty air quality in recent months in China is estimated to have exceeded the number of those who have died from COVID-19.
* There is an **association between pollution levels in cities** (despite the improvements during the pandemic) and **COVID-19 infections and death rates**, a link observed in **New York City** and the northern provinces of Italy.
* Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu, in the top tier of pollution concentration, have also seen high deaths and infections per thousand people.
* Of course, **other factors too decide morbidity and mortality**.
* COVID-19's toll has differed considerably across States — Kerala and Tamil Nadu, for example, have a lower COVID-19 mortality rate. These States stand out with good healthcare systems.
* Globally some **9 million premature deaths** a year are associated with **air pollutants**, such as fine particulate matter, known as **PM 2.5.**
* Regrettably, 14 of the world's 20 most polluted cities are in India. The air in **Ghaziabad, Delhi, and Noida** is particularly hazardous. Last year, a public health emergency was declared as post-Diwali New Delhi's air quality index approached **500, the "severe plus emergency" category.**
* Adding to this **noxious cocktail** are GHGs like **carbon dioxide, causing global warming and damaging health**.
* Despite the plunge during the lockdown, atmospheric carbon emissions are a record high because of **past accumulation**.
* Ranked as the **world's fifth most vulnerable country** to climate change, India must respond to alerts on **communicable diseases** linked to **GHGs.**
* Global warming intensifies heat waves and worsens respiratory illnesses. **Locust swarms** in Jaipur and Gurugram have been linked to climate change.
* Evidence is also emerging on a **link between global warming and the emergence of diseases**. **Mosquito-borne diseases** in India have been connected to **global warming** through both **increased rainfall and heat waves**

Need for a new plan

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* **Spending on reducing air pollution** and GHGs provides estimated **health benefits of 1.4 to 2.5 times more than the cost of the actions**.
* **Delhi, set to overtake Tokyo as the most populous city by 2030**, needs to deal with **transport**, responsible for **two-fifth of the PM 2.5 in the skies.**
* Reforms should encourage **public transportation** in place of the 10 million vehicles, expand electric vehicles, and provide inter-connectivity between the metro and buses.
* In managing health risks, **emission reduction** should be coupled with a **stronger public health system**. Right now, government spending on **health is just 1.6% of GDP**, low for a lower middle-income country.
* Most countries, including India**, fail the test of readiness for health disasters, according to the 2019 Global Health Security Index.**
* The cleaner air the country is still breathing during the pandemic should be a powerful motivation.
* Scientific warnings do not indicate the time and place of calamities but do call for confronting air pollution and global warming and strengthening health systems before the next health emergency that is surely going to happen.

GS-III : Economic Issues

Rolling back the induced livelihood shock

Context

* Several news reports and surveys on the plight of India's less-privileged workforce during the lockdown have highlighted the massive scale of falling incomes and loss of means of livelihood.
* Many have been pushed into various depths of poverty depending on how vulnerable their occupations were.

Pre-shock conundrum

* **Irregular updating of official poverty lines and unavailability of data** on **consumption expenditure** from **National Sample Surveys** in recent years have added to the ambiguity around poverty estimation in India.
* According to the **household consumption expenditure** reported in **the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), 2017-18** (which **replaces the employment-unemployment surveys of the National Sample Survey Office**) and applying **State-specific poverty** lines (used by the erstwhile Planning Commission in 2011 based on the **Tendulkar Committee recommendations**,

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adjusted with current price indices), about **42% or around 56 crore people were 'officially' poor** before the lockdown was announced.
* Highlighting how closely packed people are towards the lower half of the consumption expenditure distribution, **another 20 crore people** were within a **narrow band 20% above the poverty line**.
* In most parts of the country, this amounts to a few hundred rupees over the poverty line threshold. A modest dip in earnings — and hence a fall in consumption spending — would push a majority of them into the vortex of poverty and hunger.

A poverty deepening
* Our estimates from the **PLFS data** extrapolated for the **year 2020** suggest that about an **additional 40 crore people** were **pushed below the poverty line due to the lockdown.**
* Around **12 crore** of this lockdown-induced newly poor are in **urban areas and another 28 crore people in rural areas.**
* Those who were already poor are going to suffer a further worsening in their quality of life, a phenomenon known as **poverty deepening.**
* Before the lockdown, around **16% of the population** had per capita consumption expenditure of about a **third of the poverty** line, managing their daily expenses with **?30 per day or less**.
* After the lockdown this could swell to more than **62 crore (47%)** people pushed to such **extreme poverty**.

Inadequate state responses
* The second economic stimulus package announced by the Finance Minister exposes the class nature of the current political dispensation more than ever.
* A token increase of **National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) wage by ?20 (?182 to ?202)** seems like a joke in the light of the overall magnitude of the crisis.
* Undoubtedly, a revamped, **expanded NREGA** needs to be made the fulcrum of the rural recharge.
* The **demand for work** is anticipated to **increase by 25%** with reverse migration-fuelled increase in rural labour supply.
* The revamped scheme would require providing **90 million workers** guaranteed employment of 20 days of work/month for at least the next six months. This means an additional financial stimulus of **?1.6-lakh crore.**

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* **Universalisation of the Public Distribution System** has been widely talked about **but needs better equity focus** in implementation.
* Recent experience of expanding **food coupons to non-ration card** holders in Delhi suggests that such measures are likely to **exclude marginalised communities including Dalits and Muslims** at the lowest strata of the work hierarchy.
* The exclusion errors **of IT-based attempts** to coverage have **huge social costs in the form of accentuated hunger.**

Stabilising urban economy

* Given the magnitude of the destabilisation, an **urban employment guarantee programme** becomes a dire necessity to stabilise the urban economy.
* A 'direct' employment programme implemented through municipal corporations could be introduced to guarantee 20 days of work.
* This can be used to develop **key social infrastructure** in urban areas including **slum development, drinking water supply, toilet construction, parks and common areas, urban afforestation and social forestry.**
*An 'indirect' branch of this programme can be used **to encourage a revival of small and medium enterprises (SMEs)** in the most prominent clusters.
* This could include employer-contractor facilitated programmes to provide **wage subsidy** of an equivalent amount as in the **direct programme to employers of urban SMEs,** other business establishments and construction sector projects.

GS-II : International Relations

India's foreign relations and the course of history

By, Chinmaya R. Gharekhan, a former Indian Ambassador to the United Nations, was Special Envoy for West Asia in the Manmohan Singh government

Context

* The Prime Minister Narendra Modi's public and undisguised reference to China's expansionism in his address to Indian troops last week, on July 3 in Ladakh was so obvious that the Chinese lost no time in rejecting the allegation.

Down memory lane

* The Prime Minister's talk of **Chinese expansionism** reminded me of what **Mrs. Indira Gandhi** told me more than once during the time I served in her Prime Minister's Office. She said: "**I can think of a time down the road in future**

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when we might have normal, peaceful relations with Pakistan, but never with China because China basically is an expansionist power."
* She **distrusted China** as she did other countries including the Soviet Union. She surely did not trust Pakistan.
* Perhaps her basic approach in foreign policy was that in **international relations, there is no such thing as trust.** U.S. President Ronald Reagan talked of '**Trust, but verify"; Mrs. Gandhi's approach seemed to be: "Verify and still not trust".**

Nehru, China and Kashmir
* **Jawaharlal Nehru**, on the other hand, had convinced himself that China will not attack India. His Defence Minister, **V.K. Krishna Menon**, likely played a big part in inclining Nehru towards this conviction.
* Whatever his reasons, there is no doubt that his China policy was hugely faulty.
* But Nehru **did not commit any Himalayan blunder in Kashmir**. When a **ceasefire was called for in January 1949,** it was not because he was pacifist by nature or that **he trusted the United Nations or any other country to label Pakistan as aggressor** and persuade it to vacate the aggression.
* The **reality on the ground was that the Indian Army** was in no position to **run over the whole of Jammu and Kashmir** at that time.
* In his response to a letter Albert Einstein wrote to him a few weeks before Independence, Nehru **described foreign policy** as essentially **"selfish".**
* He was also clear in his mind **that India's interest lay with the West.** India needed **technology and other assistance** which he was convinced could be obtained only from America.
* The **Soviets, he believed, were of no use in this matter**.
* It was only after the **Americans concluded the military agreement with Pakistan** and started giving it massive quantities of arms that Nehru began looking to the Soviet Union.

Handling Pakistan
* Mrs. Gandhi has been **similarly accused of being naive and too trusting** when she allowed **Pakistan's 90,000 prisoners of war (POWs)** to return to their country **without getting anything in return.**

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* Again, **at Simla**, nobody could state with conviction if she really believed that Pakistan's **Zulfikar Ali Bhutto** would live up to his commitment, oral as it was, to transform the **ceasefire line** into an **international border**.
* It is nobody's idea that India should give up its claims to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir or Aksai Chin; the question is only about reiterating the claims publicly and in a charged atmosphere. As they say, all foreign policy is essentially domestic policy and this is true of all governments everywhere and at all times.
* The foreign policy is decided by the government of the day based on the national interest. One government might conclude that the civil nuclear deal with the United States served India's national interest; some other government ruled by some other party or even the same party but at another time and in different circumstances may think otherwise.

GS-II : International Relations

Days of disengagement: On India-China LAC standoff

Context

* After two months of stand-off along the LAC, news that India and China are discussing a full disengagement must be welcome relief. The conversation between the Special Representatives, India's NSA Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, on Sunday, which led to the announcement, has given hostilities a necessary pause.

Disengagement and De-Escalation to be ensured

* The next step will be to see their agreements carried out and to ensure that **Chinese troops withdraw** as promised on each of the three points discussed: **Galwan, Hot Springs and Gogra.**
* It was during a **disengagement verification** operation by the Indian troops that **the Galwan clash** is believed to have occurred.
* **Disengagement and de-escalation** must be **accompanied** by **defined "end-points"** for troops to withdraw to, to ensure they do not **reoccupy positions vacated.**
* Monday's statements have also set out a course of engagements — these include **diplomatic and military parleys**, meetings of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs, and further talks between the **Special Representatives.**

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Important steps to be taken after disengagement

* **A full inquiry** is needed of the **build-up to the clash** and the circumstances surrounding the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers.
* The government must consider **whether it will continue** its course of **economic counter-measures against China**, including the **banning of apps, investment restrictions, and an import slowdown**.
* Whether high-level contacts, such as the **informal summit** between Mr. Modi and Chinese President Xi will be resumed; the leaders have not communicated directly during this crisis.
* The **government should inform the country** about the progress as well as considered measures such as **"buffer zones",** the **patrolling-free period,** and the reasons for the **decision to pull back Indian troops in the areas of disengagement**.
* The government must also continue to work towards its stated goal of **restoring** the **"status quo ante**" or the position of troops to the situation in April, before the mobilisation began.

Way ahead

* As a process to restore peace begins, restoring "status quo ante" in bilateral trust may be more difficult for the foreseeable future. But, in small steps over time, India and China must return to a more balanced relationship.

GS-I : Social issues

Police terror and the theatre of law

Context

* The murder of Jayaraj and Benicks at the hands of the local police in **Sattankulam, Tamil Nadu** has provoked national outrage. The bare bones of the incident are widely known. A small shopkeeper is picked up for a trivial offence, taken to the **local police station**. His son too is detained. Both are mercilessly thrashed. The **hospital** to which they are taken, admits that they have blood clots all over their body but gives false certificates of fitness. The **magistrate** remands them to judicial custody without examining their abused bodies, merely waving consent from far away.

State and the law

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* The **modern state** emerged by **gathering power** dispersed among rivalrous, local strongmen and **depositing it in a single set** of **inter-related institutions**, now endowed with a monopoly of force and violence.
* These institutions were meant to **function independently of the ruler** — they do not belong to him, are not part of his personal estate. Instead, they **work for the entire public.**
* The Jayaraj-Benicks case makes us doubt if such a **modern, impersonal state exists in India.** It shows first that our political institutions, including the judicial machinery**, are far from independent of the will of the rulers;** rather, they work at their **personal command**.
* Second, **local policemen think of themselves as sovereigns** in their own little territory, **executors of 'laws'** they invent on the go.
* At the very least, they believe that they **partake in sovereign power**, protected by lawmakers sitting higher up. Indian society continues to **consist of rival power groups**, each with a '**private' police** force at their mercy**, coercing local populations** to behave according to rules crafted at will.
* It is as if the entire country is splintered into **little fiefdoms**, each believing to have a **monopoly of violence**.
* Third, **police brutality is a routine**, banal feature of everyday life of the poor.
* The wanton actions of the police are woven into the fabric of **daily social interactions.** The **police uniform plays a symbolic role** expressing that anyone who dons it has power, prestige and the backing of the entire official apparatus.
* This **social superiority** sanctions **extra-legal behaviour** that often has the stamp of rampaging criminality.
* After all, nothing done by the Sattankulam police was by the rule book; everything from the first to the last violent moment was **extra-legal**.

Law as performance

* **Our society** is meant to be governed by the **rule of law** implemented by a state above it, impartially arbitrating social disputes.
* In **reality, it is an arena where everyone fights with all their might** over **material resources, power, status, ideas,** and crucially, the control of the legal machinery.
* **To get the law on your side brings** enormous advantage, for once under control, it functions at **your pleasure**, largely to benefit you.

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* But since **democracy requires that the law work for everyone**, a performance must be staged to sustain this **myth, a make-believe world created for ordinary people that 'all is well'.**

*The **performance of law courts** is like **theatre or a film** that seduces spectators into a reality of its own making.

* **Winners at the ballot box** appear to earn the **right to rule** by **arbitrary power.** They **control and regulate whole populations** at their pleasure, **exactly as the maharajas of yesteryears**.

Excessive force

* Undeniably, **any system of law depends on the deployment of force.** But its use must be **consistent with the dignity of a person**.

* Rule of law requires the **presence of constraints on excesses**.

* Excessive violence, for instance torture in pursuit of information and confession, is illegal in most decent societies.

* The European thinker, Michel Foucault, has argued that **torturous spectacles, common in Medieval ages,** have given way to **punishment in disciplinary institutions** isolated from society.

* Yet, as we know, public lynchings have not disappeared in our own times. Indeed, residual elements of the public display of violence are evident even in the Jayaraj-Benicks case. Flogged in an enclosed public space, their bloodied bodies must have been brought to the hospital in full public glare, then taken to be shown to the public magistrate, and when declared dead, publicly handed over to the family.

The purpose of brutality

* The Hindu reported that the day before detention, Jayaraj sympathetically went up to unpaid workers of a shop nearby, asking them to stand their ground, even as an abusive policeman had threatened to punish them if they did not disperse.

* Upon learning this, the police felt this openly challenged their authority, an act of aggression not just on the state but on their very person.

* From then on, their wrath knew no bounds. The Hindu also reported that illegal sand mining and the sale of illicit liquor are common in the area. It appears that any form of challenge to a police force that plays a key role in maintaining this corrupt and criminal order had to be dealt with swiftly, harshly. A crack in the system must not be allowed to open further, filled immediately.

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GS-II : International Relations

In stand-off, keeping an eye on the nuclear ball

Context

* Despite domestic and external challenges, there is now growing evidence that the **People's Republic of China (PRC) continues to expand its nuclear arsenal**, which is worrisome but at the same time, not be surprising.
* China is pursuing a **planned modernisation of its nuclear arsenal** because it **fears the multi-layered missile defence capabilities** of the **United States**.
* It is **arming its missiles with Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicles (MIRVs)** capabilities to **neutralise America's missile shield. China's DF-31As**, which are **road mobile Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), are equipped with MIRVs and potent penetration aids.**

Estimates and what it means

* The **Peoples Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF)** also fields a range **of Medium Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs) and Short-Range Ballistic Missiles (SRBMs)**.
* The PRC's ballistic **missile tests in 2019 were the highest among the designated Nuclear Weapon States (NWS).**
* **China's Lop Nur** was the site of **Chinese sub-critical testing** since the PRC adopted a moratorium on hot testing in 1996, enabling China to miniaturise warheads and develop new designs that have been progressively integrated into its nuclear arsenal.
* The PRC also sits on a **sizeable inventory of fissile material**. China, according to the **International Panel on Fissile Materials (IPFM)** is estimated to **possess 2.9+-0.6 metric tonnes** of **Weapons-grade Plutonium (WGP) compared to India's is 0.6+-0.15 tonnes of WGP.**
* **China's expansion** is cause for concern because even as the **U.S. and Russia are attempting to reduce the size of their respective arsenals,** the PRC is on an **expansionist mode**.
* The **Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)** observes that **China's nuclear arsenal** has risen from **290 warheads in 2019 to 320 warheads in 2020.**
* This increase might not seem large relative to the size of the nuclear arsenal of the U.S. and Russia but it indicates a gradual shift toward a larger arsenal.

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* This presents India with challenges because New Delhi has to contend with a nuclear-armed Pakistan as well.
* The Indian nuclear arsenal, according to the SIPRI, stands at roughly **150 nuclear warheads** with the **Pakistani slightly ahead with 160 warheads.**
* The **Chinese state mouthpiece, Global Times**, has recently called for a **1,000-warhead nuclear arsenal**, underlining the motivation of the PLA and the hard-line factions of the Communist Party of China (CPC) to match U.S. and Russian nuclear force levels.
* The conventional military balance between Indian and Chinese forces along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) presents significant challenges for Indian decision-makers. Given the variegated and highly sophisticated nature of Chinese nuclear capabilities relative to India, they give Beijing considerable **coercive leverage.**
* Beijing is communicating that an **escalatory response from New Delhi** will incur **punitive responses with China** mounting **aggressive military action** at several points along the LAC.
* Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) mounted a **rapid tactical offensive** to occupy small territory **at Pangong Tso** and caught the Indian Army by surprise.
* Notwithstanding efforts to de-escalate particularly at **Patrolling Point 14 (PP-14) in the Galwan River Valley, Hot Springs and Gogra,** Chinese ground units have consolidated their position in the Pangong Tso area and the entire stretch of the LAC.
* To be sure, India is doing the same, but the **Fingers 4 to 8 in Pangong Tso**, where the PLA is entrenched, is a serious potential flashpoint as the Indian Army is locked in an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation against its Chinese adversary.

More challenges for India

* Consequently, Indian decision-makers need to be aware of the PLARF's **land-based missile forces.** The PRC is believed to base a part of its nuclear arsenal in inland territories such as in the **Far-Western Xinjiang Region, which is close to Aksai Chin**.
* China's land-based missiles are a primarily road mobile and could play a key role in any larger conventional offensive the PLA might mount against Indian forces along the LAC.
* Korla in **Xinjiang is believed to host DF-26 IRBMs** with a range of **4,000 kilometres**, which can potentially strike targets across most of India.

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* Their mobility gives them a **high degree of survivability**. The **DF-26 IRBMs** can be armed with **either a conventional or nuclear warhead**.
* Since the **IRBMs could be either conventional or nuclear tipped**, assessing Chinese trip-wires will make things tricky as the PLARF's conventional and nuclear forces are likely to be embedded together, presenting challenges for both the Indian civilian and military leadership.

Be on guard

* Thus, **conventional escalation between Chinese and Indian forces** along the LAC must **factor the role of nuclear weapons** and their impact on military operations executed by the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force.
* India's **Strategic Forces Command (SFC)** needs to be on a heightened state of alert to ward off **Chinese nuclear threats** and brinksmanship as well as geared to support India's conventional forces.
* While escalation of the current stand-off between Indian and Chinese forces is not inevitable, it would be a terrible mistake on the part of the Indian government to ignore the possibility, because it might not come from New Delhi but Beijing.

GS-II : International Relations

More sabre-rattling, more isolation

Context

* The **Philippines invoked the dispute settlement mechanism of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 2013** to test the legality **of China's 'nine-dash line'** regarding the **disputed Spratlys**.
* In response, the **Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA)** at The Hague decreed in its July 12, 2016 judgment that the **line had "no legal basis." China dismissed the judgment as "null and void."**
* The South China Sea (SCS) is important not just to its littoral countries. It has been **a transit point** for trade since early medieval times, contains abundantly **rich fisheries**, and is a repository of **mineral deposits and hydrocarbon reserves.**

The PCA verdict

* The **PCA award undermined the Chinese claim**. It held that none of the features of the Spratlys qualified them as islands, and there was no legal basis for China to claim historic rights and to the resources within the 'nine-dash line'.

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* The **UNCLOS provides that islands must sustain habitation** and the **capacity for non-extractive economic activity**.
* Reefs and shoals that are unable to do so are considered low-tide elevations.
* The award implied that **China violated the Philippines Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)**. It noted that China had aggravated the situation by undertaking **land reclamation and construction,** and had **harmed the environment** and violated its obligation to preserve the ecosystem.
* Given that their economic ties with China are deepening, it may appear that the **ASEAN countries are bandwagoning with China**.
* In reality, there is **growing discontent**. While **avoiding military confrontation with China**, they are **seeking political insurance, strengthening their navies**, and b
* Vietnam has added **six Kilo-class, Russian-origin submarines** to its navy. **France, Germany and the Netherlands, respectively, have supplied Formidable-class stealth ships to Singapore**, **patrol boats to Brunei Darussalam**, and **corvettes to Indonesia.**
* **Japan is partially funding the upgradation of the Indonesian coast guard**. Indonesia and the Philippines are in early stages of exploring procurement of the **BrahMos missile from India**. The other ASEAN countries that have shown interest are Thailand and Vietnam.
* Growing **Chinese muscularity in the SCS** is visible in the increased patrolling and **live-fire exercising by Chinese naval vessels**; ramming and **sinking of fishing vessels** of other claimant countries; **renaming of SCS features; and building of runways, bunkers, and** habitation for possible **long-term stationing of personnel on the atolls claimed by China.**
* Chinese **exploration and drilling vessels** compete aggressively with those of other littoral countries in the disputed waters.
* Petronas has been prospecting for oil in the Malaysian EEZ.
* The festering regional resentment against China resulted in the unmuting of the ASEAN response to the growing Chinese footprint in the SCS at its 36th Summit on June 26, 2020.
* China might have overreached by showing its aggressive hand prematurely. There is a growing chorus of protest against China. Having Vietnam, Japan and the U.S. riled up about its actions is nothing new for China.
* Indonesia protested to China about Chinese vessels trespassing into its waters close to the **Nantua islands**, towards the south of the SCS. The Philippines

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protested to China earlier this year about violations of Filipino sovereignty in the **West Philippine Sea**

* It also wrote to the UN Secretary General (UNSG) in March disputing China's claim of "historic rights in the South China Sea." Two months later, Indonesia too wrote to the UNSG on this issue. It expressed support for compliance with international law, particularly the UNCLOS, as also for the PCA's 2016 ruling.

* Yet, when a Chinese firm bid to develop the **Subic Bay**, this was disallowed on the grounds that the use of **archipelagic waters** was **exclusively reserved for Filipinos** and that **foreign investment** regulations prohibited foreign equity for the utilisation of marine resources in archipelagic waters.

* Another recent decision, to extend the **Visiting Forces Agreement** with the **U.S. for six months** "in light of political and other developments in the region," as expressed by the Philippines Foreign Secretary, is a **strategic setback for China**.

* Only this June, the Philippines commissioned a beaching ramp on the **Pag-Asa Island**. A **Filipino C-130 landed on its runway,** which is being repaired. The **Philippines is about to induct its first missile-capable frigate, built in South Korea**, into its navy.

* A complicating factor for China is **Russia's growing military and economic equities in the SCS**. **Russia and Vietnam** have a **defence cooperation relationship,** which they are committed to strengthening. China has objected to Rosneft Vietnam BV prospecting within the Chinese defined 'nine-dash line.' Rosneft has also been invited by the Philippines to conduct oil prospecting in its EEZ.

India's relevant options

* From India's perspective, foreign and security policy in its larger neighbourhood covers the entire expanse of the Asia-Pacific and extends to the Persian Gulf and West Asia.

* India straddles, and is the fulcrum of, the **region between the Suez and Shanghai**, **between West and East Asia**, and between the **Mediterranean and the SCS**.

* The **SCS carries merchandise to and from India**. It follows that India has a **stake in the SCS**, just as China has in the Indian Ocean.

* India must continue to **actively pursue its defence diplomacy outreach** in the Indo-Pacific region: **increase military training** and **conduct exercises** and

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exchanges at a **higher level of complexity**, extend **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief activities**, **share patrolling of the Malacca Strait with the littoral countries**, etc.

* The Comprehensive **Strategic Partnerships that India has concluded with Australia, Japan, Indonesia, the U.S., and Vietnam could be extended to Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore**.

* India must also buttress the **military capacity of the tri-service Andaman and Nicobar Command**. According to one of its early Commanders-in-Chief, Lt. Gen. Aditya Singh, the manner in which the 368 islands, have been neglected "can only be termed as criminal."

* These have immense geo-strategic value, as they overlook Asia's maritime strategic lifeline and the world's most important global sea lane. In this time of turbulence, India cannot afford to continue undervaluing one of its biggest assets.

GS-III : Environment

Green-lighting ecological decimation amidst a pandemic

Reasons for increase in pandemics

* Few countries are witnessing such severe direct and indirect devastation on account of the COVID-19 pandemic as India. Yet, there is little attention on the roots of our vulnerability

* Our vulnerabilities lie not just in the absence of equitable access to food, healthcare and housing but go to the heart of **global development models** that **sacrifice environmental resilience** for **limitless economic growth** and wealth accumulation.

* The **21st century** has seen multiple **lethal epidemics**. **Two** were serious enough for the World Health Organization to designate as **pandemics.**

* The **accelerating destruction of wild habitats, forests** and **diversified food systems for urbanisation, mining, and industry** means pathogens which were once largely confined to animals and plants in the wild are **now better positioned to infect humans**.

* The **expansion of monoculture cropping** and **livestock farming** systems, coupled with **dense human settlements** dependent on **narrow diets** of global commodity crops and meat, **are eliminating the biodiversity and distance barriers** that **lent resilience** to the **human species and domesticated plants and animals**.

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* **A virulent pathogen** can then **trigger an epidemic** that much more easily. As long as we do not address this **march to unsustainability**, we will remain **vulnerable to pandemic outbreaks**.

Drawing the wrong lesson

* It is troubling then that our governments are drawing the opposite lesson from the COVID-19 challenge.
* Through the lockdown, '**expert' bodies of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** have considered, and in many cases cleared, **multiple industrial, mining** and **infrastructure proposals** in **critical wildlife habitats**, and life and livelihood-sustaining forests.
* These include **the Etalin Hydropower Project** in the biodiversity-rich **Dibang valley of Arunachal Pradesh**; a coal mine in Assam's **Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve**; **diamond mining in the Panna forested belt**; a coal mine to be operated by Adani Enterprises with a coal-fired power plant **in Odisha's Talabira forests**; a **limestone mine in the Gir National Park**; and a geo-technical investigation in the **Sharavathi Lion-Tailed Macaque Sanctuary in Karnataka**.

Draft Environment Impact Assessment

* No meaningful public consultation can take place amidst a pandemic and repeated lockdowns. Yet, ignoring petitions ranging from environmentalists to students groups, the MoEFCC pressed ahead with a June 30 deadline for feedback on its draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification. It took a Delhi High Court ruling to extend the deadline to August 11.
* As per the draft, **starting a project before obtaining environmental approvals will no longer be a violation**, and it can be **regularised post-facto**.
* **Public hearings are riddled** with problems and their content routinely **ignored while awarding clearances**, but they remain the **only opportunity of voice for project-affected peoples** and environmental and social experts.
* Instead of strengthening them, the **notification proposes** to **exempt a wider range of projects from hearings**, including those which **authorities can arbitrarily designate as 'strategic'**.

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* The draft even allows for a class of projects to **secure clearance without putting out any information in the public domain.**
* Despite demands from environmentalists, the **draft notification** says virtually **nothing on improving monitoring, and compliance with clearance conditions and safeguards**.
* This when the lockdown period itself has seen a horrific gas leak in Visakhapatnam, and a blowout of an oil well in Baghjan. In both instances, incalculable damage was caused to human and non-human lives by violating environmental laws.
* **Safeguarding the environment and front-line communities seems nowhere on the government's agenda**.
* Rather, its **priorities are "unleashing coal",** as tweeted by the Coal Minister, and green clearances for "**seamless economic growth**", as tweeted by the Environment Ministry in the lockdown weeks.
* The sum effect of all the above moves will be **further environmental degradation.**
* The effects of these are overwhelmingly borne by Adivasi and other marginalised groups, as village heads from **Chhattisgarh's Hasdeo Arand forests** reminded Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a recent letter, while opposing his government's plan **to auction their ancestral forests as coal blocks.**
* It takes a steadfast commitment to ecological illiteracy to argue that wanton environmental destruction will deliver never-ending, seamless growth. These **giant leaps backward will not make us atmanirbhar (self-reliant).** Rather, they **will further endanger habitats and lives,** and **intensify our vulnerability to infectious diseases and related socio-economic shocks**.

GS-II : Indian Polity

The social contract needs to be rewritten

Finding cause

* The world does not seem to have answers to many of the problems thrown up by the epidemic, especially those faced by the poorest of the poor.
* No doubt, some small countries have claimed victory in containing the impact of the disease, but their claim appears to be hollow and even myopic; the fact is that these countries are affluent, and have sealed their boundaries.
* There is a view that **mankind's ancestors**, in the **course of evolution,** formed the **concept of social groups** and resultant rules they would abide by.

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* This is the **most rudimentary form of what is known as the 'social contract theory'**. When monarchies and empires prevailed, it was easy to understand a social contract — to obey an **identifiable sovereign,** who in turn was deemed to be god's representative on earth.
* But **democratically elected governments have found it more difficult to derive the same legitimacy.** With the growth of **fundamental freedoms, such as those of speech and expression**, unquestioning obedience to governmental authority began to fade.
* **Unquestioned obedience** is the **holy grail of every autocrat**. Some governments yearn for it. **Modern society and modern governments also use the social contract theory** to claim **legitimacy for their actions**, but rely more on the theory as expounded by **Hobbes and Rousseau**.
* While **Hobbes believed that man, in Nature, was "solitary, nasty and brutish", for Rousseau, man, in Nature was "born free".**
* However, both agreed that the **social contract comprises two distinct agreements**;

1. **first, people agreed to establish society by collectively and reciprocally renouncing the rights** they had against one another in unbridled nature and
2. **second, they agreed to confer upon one (or more) among them, the authority and power to enforce the initial contract**.

* Thus, the social contract comprises **people agreeing to live as one under common laws and in enforcing those common laws justly**.
* Modern day governments take this further. **Their fundamental credo** is that **society is best-served if a government or other type of institution takes on executive or sovereign power**, with the **consent of the people.**

Consolidating power

* We have seen governments go still further and use the power democratically invested in them to decide what is in the best interest of the people.
* Thus, there is a **bending of individual free will** towards the **collective will**.
* Ironically most such leaders constantly invoke "the will of the people" when consolidating executive power. So, the **social contract** is being **used by modern governments to justify greater aggrandisement** of **power** in the hands of the sovereign, under the **garb of "public good".**

The case of two Indias

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* The **novel coronavirus pandemic** has laid bare the falsity of this image.
* For example, access to information about this pandemic has not been equal. The access to resources to avoid the disease has not been equal. And, of course, access to treatment has not been equal.
* There are two Indias.

1. The first is an India that observes social distancing, buys its groceries and provisions by observing all precautions and largely obeys governmental directives about COVID-19 prevention.
2. The second is an India that crowds railway terminals to travel long distances, sometimes for days, to get back to native towns, and when that fails, decides to resort to the drastic step of even walking those hundreds of kilometres, defying all governmental directives.

* It is for the second India that the impact of COVID-19 has hit hardest and the impact has nearly nothing to do with the disease.
* It is often said that "we are all in this together". But hardly so. We are not sharing the brunt of the pandemic with the poorest of India, the voiceless millions.
* **Professor H.L.A. Hart** once said, "**freedom (the absence of coercion**) can be valueless to those victims of unrestricted competition too poor to make use of it; so it will be pedantic to point out to them that though starving they are free".
* The **pandemic-caused crisis** has shone a light on how governmental methods to deal with a crisis largely come to the aid of only those with a voice.
* **All societies** have some **measure of inequality.** However, in deeply unequal societies (**where the Gini Coefficient exceeds 0.4, for instance**) different strata of society will have very different needs to deal with a crisis of this nature.
* We have **seen societies with lower Gini Coefficients** deal with the **crisis far better,** because a uniform approach works perfectly when society is perfectly equal.

For those in governance

* The **source of power in an unequal society is centralised,** the response to the **crisis will result in unequal relief** to different strata of society. **The more unequal the society, the more decentralised the response should be**.
* The **social contract which imbues a centralised sovereign** with overreaching powers has **clearly failed on this occasion**, and will continue to fail every time a similar challenge is posed.
* **The centralised sovereign will work well against a mighty external aggressor, but not against a microscopic pathogen.**

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* What is required is not just a decentralised approach but also a state which is sensitive and responds not only to the needs of those who cry out for help but also meets the requirements of those who are voiceless.

* **Thomas Hobbes described the mighty state as a "Leviathan"** which would rule by the will of the majority.

* He argued that once a ruler is chosen, citizens lose all rights except those the ruler may find it expedient to grant. While no elected government would publicly espouse such a position, it is the unwritten premise underlying every rule and diktat which is issued.

* As seen above, a Leviathan has its uses, as for example, in times of war or in a fight against terrorism. **The novel coronavirus cannot be defeated by a Leviathan.**

* COVID-19 can **only be defeated by an empowered populace.** The

GS-III : Economic Issues

A case for extension: On rural jobs scheme

* The finding that 8.4 lakh poor households have completed at least 80 days of the 100-day limit for work under the MGNREGS and 1.4 lakh among those have completed the full quota, should come as no surprise.

* While these numbers are a fraction of the **4.6 crore households** which have **benefited from MGNREGS this year**, the fact that many poor households have nearly completed their full quota of employment under the scheme in just the last two months (May-June 2020) is a **reflection of the distress** that has driven them to take recourse to it.

* With the economy **reeling after extended lockdowns** following the COVID-19 pandemic **and migrant labourers losing jobs** in urban areas and **returning to their rural homes to avoid destitution**, the scheme has come as **a huge relief to** poor families.

* The **government's decision to extend it into the monsoon season** has also benefited households.

* Data from this year show that in nearly **two-thirds of the States, demand for MGNREGS work** has **doubled or even tripled** in a number of districts compared to the previous year.

* **Only in States where kharif crop was sown**, the demand was **relatively lower.**

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* The **fairly good monsoon this season** should help with providing for **more agricultural jobs beyond the MGNREGS works** as well, but the surging rate of demand for work under the scheme suggests that **it is time the government thought about extending the limit, at least on a State-by-State basis.**
* The **swell in agrarian employment** in the monsoon season notwithstanding, the **excess supply of labour** owing to **reverse migration from the cities could depress wages.**
* This makes an extension of the limit of work days under the MGNREGS even more imperative.
* Since its implementation over a decade ago, the **scheme** has acted as insurance for **rural dwellers** during crop failures and agrarian crises.
* But the **Centre's outlook towards it continues to limit it only as a "fall-back" option for the poor**.
* Even before the COVID-19-induced crisis, a lack of demand and falling consumption among the poor were constraining the economy.
* The MGNREGS, if utilised as more than just an insurance scheme and as a vehicle for rural development, could potentially address that problem.
* Besides alleviating distress, this could also boost consumption and aid economic recovery. **An extension of the 100-day limit** and comprehensive implementation of the **scheme in rural areas** can be the first step.

GS-II : Judiciary

Owning up to criminalisation in politics

Supreme court orders to check criminalisation of politics

* A **February 2020 Supreme Court judgment on criminalisation in politics** may have far-reaching consequences for Indian democracy.
* It will first be **implemented in the coming Bihar elections** in October 2020.
* The **Court has asked the political parties** to state "**the reasons for such selection, as also as to why other individuals without criminal antecedents could not be selected as candidates**."
* If a political party fails to comply, it would be "... in **contempt of this Court's orders/directions**."
* In other words, the **political party and its leadership** would for the first time have to **publicly own up to criminalisation of politics.**
* They had been denying it all these years. Earlier orders state that

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(a) each candidate shall submit a sworn affidavit giving financial details and criminal cases;

(b) each candidate shall inform the political party in writing of criminal cases against him or her; and

(c) the party shall put up on its website and on social media as well as publish in newspapers the names and details of such candidates.

Why did the Court pass such an order?

* The judgment notes that "In **2004, 24% of the Members of Parliament had criminal cases** pending against them; in **2009, that went up to 30%;** in **2014 to 34%;** and in **2019 as many as 43%** of MPs had criminal cases pending against them."

An ever-present crisis

* We are in the midst of more **immediate crises** — the **COVID-19 outbreak, the economic recession** due to the lockdown, the **migrant workers crisis, small businesses** shutting down in many sectors, **massive unemployment**, a highly **stressed banking** and **financial sector**, and now the **conflict with China**.
* Added to this is an **ever-present silent crisis**: the steady **deterioration in politics over decades**, with the decline accelerating in the past 16 years.
* As politics dominates the bureaucracy, and reins in business, civil society and the media, **we need governance that is free of the "criminal" virus**.
* The result has been that we get bad governance, and survey after survey show that people around the country are unhappy with the **quality of governance.**
* **Given limited choices**, they vote as best as they can. But no matter how many parties are changed, **governance does not really improve**, a few exceptions apart.
* Using **money power to buy MLAs and MPs** sometimes makes a **mockery of election outcomes**. Meanwhile, **electoral bonds bring secrecy back into political funding.**
* Several laws and court judgments have not helped much, as the data show. **One reason is lack of enforcement of laws and judgments**.

Being vigilant

* Therefore in the coming Bihar elections we need to be far more vigilant. This includes **monitoring the affidavits of candidates**, **working with the**

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Election Commission to ensure that information is promptly available on their websites, and **widely circulating this information to voters** using all the social media tools available.
* It also includes monitoring compliance with the Supreme Court judgment to see if details of tainted candidates are promptly put up on their websites, and on their social media handles, along with proper reasons for giving them ticket.
* The **Court has said that "winnability" cannot be cited as a reason.** Voters also need to be **vigilant about misuse of money, gifts and other inducements** during elections.
* **Till we realise that people who bribe us for votes cannot be trusted, change will be very slow**.
* A root cause diagnosis shows that political party leaders are squarely responsible for this state of affairs as they field such candidates. **Mahatma Gandhi taught us that to solve a problem, we have to confront the real issue.**

Way ahead
* In conclusion, we may not see dramatic changes in the quality of candidates. Campaigns may continue to be more and more personal and even abusive. We may not see a big change in money power, or in buying of MLAs post-elections in the case of a hung Assembly.
* But all these steps are required, however insignificant they may seem. All the dozen and more Supreme Court judgments on electoral reforms since 2002 are in fact responses to citizen initiatives. Not one initiative has come from the political system. The strategy so far has been to methodically try and break down the solid wall of corruption.

GS-III : Economic Issues
The problem of being over-reliant on one revenue stream
Context
* The **U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's** regulations regarding student visas have thrown U.S.-based international students into turmoil.
* The regulation adds a new dimension to the pandemic-riddled academic year by **denying entry to students enrolled in fully online programmes and requiring existing students to either switch to campuses with at least one in-person course or risk deportation.**

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* As disruptive an impact as this may have for students, there is another potentially larger impact that warrants inspection: the impact on **university finances.**

Withdrawal of public funds

* The past several decades have seen an **ever-increasing relative withdrawal of public funds from universities globally**, even as demand for higher education access has grown.
* The perception of college as a means to higher income, combined with the emphasis on competition-driven efficiency, has meant a global trend of **replacing college grants with loans and tuition fees, or other private forms of funding.**
* Proponents of this process have also argued that **this helps increase the autonomy of universities.**
* This phenomenon has been **particularly pronounced in the U.S. — tuition costs have been steadily rising and a greater share of the cost of education is placed on students and their families** with some supplementation by federal, state or private loans.
* Unlike domestic students, **international students (with a few exceptions) are not eligible for federal college loans** and rely on **payment either out of pocket or from private loans.**
* There is also **less domestic pressure to reduce tuition rates** or provide concessions for them, and the risk of advocacy from the students themselves is somewhat less given their precarious visa status.
* In a normal year, the **pool of international college applicants** for a given school is **much larger than the number of positions available**, so a **rise in tuition cost will still likely see all these seats filled**.
* Finally, the college route has proven highly popular for those seeking to eventually immigrate.
* The **ultimate outcome of these factors** is that international students can in general be relied on to pay much more than their domestic counterparts, **making them attractive for universities** looking to **boost their revenue streams**.
* Indeed, the **U.S. Department of Commerce** estimated that international students contributed about **$44.7 billion in 2018** to the **U.S. economy (including tuition, housing, and other private consumption).**

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* The shuttering of campuses and restricted international travel have made the fall semester a less attractive prospect for both returning and **new students uninterested in paying the full price for a curtailed college experience**.
* By adding additional visa-related questions over and above everything else, universities find themselves in an even more uncertain position.
* Committing to an **online-only model risks** reducing international student intake even further.
* Conversely, **having in-person classes to secure revenue streams** puts **students at risk** and could anyway lead to potentially costly shutdowns mid-semester.
* There will also likely be increased **friction between university administrations and campus unions.**

Limited solutions

* There are also **limitations for university administrations** seeking to find solutions **beyond tuition revenue**.
* **Additional public funds** seem exceedingly unlikely, and existing relief via the **CARES Act (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act)** has fallen short.
* **Private research grants** are another potential source, but these funds are themselves likely to be diminished due to the pandemic.
* Some **universities possess endowments**, i.e. large sums of money that are invested and then used as an income source, but these are also unlikely to be of much help — the fluctuating markets have severely impacted most endowments' investment incomes, and the underlying capital cannot easily be touched due to both university policy and potential restrictions that donors have attached to their usage.
* In short, **universities with already limited fiscal space** will now find themselves even **further squeezed by the ICE regulations** affecting an **important revenue source**.
* Larger colleges have already begun to push back — **the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University have filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the ICE**.
* There are discussions being held in other schools about using **loopholes to offer in-person courses without requiring students to actually turn up to campus**.

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* In the event that these efforts fail, however, the **economic pressures will be large particularly for smaller schools** with less clout.

Way ahead

* Going forward, there is a need for U.S. universities to reflect on the vulnerabilities created by a system over-reliant on any one revenue stream, and in the long term reconsider the legitimacy of the steady privatisation of higher education.

GS-III : Health

None gains: On U.S. withdrawal from WHO

Withdrawal of USA from WHO

* On July 6, when the number of novel coronavirus cases and deaths in the U.S. reached over 2.8 million and nearly 0.13 million, respectively, the U.S. officially notified the United Nations of its intention to withdraw membership from the World Health Organization.
* This comes after President Donald Trump announced on May 29 his **decision to halt funding** and pull out of the global health body.
* After accusing **WHO of being "China-centric"** on multiple occasions, this unfortunate development is one more attempt by Mr. Trump to **deflect blame for gross mismanagement of the crisis**.
* In a May 18 letter, he **officially demanded that the WHO** make "major substantive improvements" in 30 days while charging that the global body **lacked "independence" from China**, was slow to respond to the threat, and had "**repeatedly made inaccurate or misleading claims" about the virus**.
* Since **the decision has apparently been taken without the approval of Congress**, and as the **withdrawal will become effective only on July 6 next year**, there is **a possibility that Congress or courts might reverse the withdrawal**.
* Already, **Democratic challenger Joe Biden** has promised to **revoke it if elected President**.
* There is much at stake and unsurprisingly **Congress is already under pressure from academia and medical associations to reject the withdrawal.**

Weaknesses in the Global Health Body

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***** The capricious decision to withdraw from WHO will have dire **consequences for global public health**.

* The departure of the U.S. will be a significant blow to the WHO in terms of loss of technical expertise and, according to Mr. Trump, an **annual funding of about $450 million.**

* The pandemic has clearly brought to the fore several shortcomings and weaknesses in the global health body.

* For instance, the **2005 revision** of the **International Health Regulations** made it **mandatory for countries to notify the WHO of all events that may constitute an international public health emergency and to "respond to requests for verification of information regarding such events"**.

* Yet, the **WHO has limited power** to **ensure compliance** by member States, including limitations in independently verifying member states' official reports.

Impacts on USA

* If the U.S. was majorly involved in the **2005 IHR revision**, it will now have **no role to play** in **strengthening the WHO.**

***** It will **lose a seat at the table** to **determine the virus** strain to be used for **developing influenza vaccines** (flu killed over 34,000 people in the U.S. in 2018-19), and have no access to new influenza virus samples for research.

* With no more U.S. scientists embedded in the WHO in key roles, including outbreak response teams like the one that visited Wuhan, it will **lose out on health intelligence** that will compromise the **country's response to international disease outbreaks**. In the end, none gains from a further weakened WHO.

GS-II : Education Policy

Invisible loads, arbitrary deletions

Context

* The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has announced a reduction in the **curriculum for the year 2020-2021 for Classes IX to XII**.

* This is a measure they have adopted in **view of the reduced number of class hours** available this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

* The **CBSE circular** says that the move has been finalised by the respective **Course Committees** with the approval of **the Curriculum Committee and Governing Body of the Board.**

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* The **shedding of portions from the science syllabi** is **faulty from two perspectives** — of **basic sciences and of critical reasoning and thinking.**

***** The treatment of the physics curriculum is an example of the former while that of biology falls into the latter category.

Basic topics removed

* The proposed syllabus for Classes XI–XII physics presents quite a shock. While many basic topics such as **Newton's laws**; motion along a straight line and basic concepts of **heat** have been removed, more advanced topics corresponding to these have been retained, for instance, the topic work, **power and energy**, **which uses the concepts of Newton's laws; motion in a plane**, which expands on linear motion; and kinetic theory of gases, which builds on heat, **have been retained**.
* This is only a sample. In **physics, many fundamental and basic** topics have been **deleted** whereas the **concepts building on them have been retained**.
* So, **teachers will have to teach the deleted portions anyway**, in order to build the next level of concepts. Sure enough, the CBSE circular further says, "The Heads of Schools and Teachers may ensure that the topics that have been reduced are also explained to the students to the extent required to connect different topics," while emphasising that the "reduced syllabus will not be part of the topics for internal assessment and year-end board exams."
* The **resultant syllabus is twice damaging** —

1. first, the deletion being only nominal adds an **invisible burden on teachers,** and
2. second, that it is **not going to be used to examine the students** may just **encourage rote learning.**

In basic science topics, it is much better to retain the fundamentals and, if need be, remove the higher application levels. On the contrary, the steps taken by the CBSE are in the opposite direction.

Tragic and ironic

* At the **other end of the spectrum is biology**. In the biology syllabus, **higher-level topics such as ecology, environmental science and evolution** have been **arbitrarily removed.**
* It is not just that topics like these connect the student to real-life situations, it is ironic that such a deletion should happen at the time of the pandemic.

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* The point has been noted by the group, **Indian Society of Evolutionary Biologists (ISEB)**, which has released a note addressing these deletions.
* According to the **observations of ISEB**, "**This pandemic has tragically highlighted** the **consequences of our neglect of evolution** and ecology in school and higher education in India. Understanding practically every aspect of a zoonotic pandemic requires a thorough grounding in diverse areas of ecology and evolution, including species interactions, population dynamics, coevolutionary dynamics, evolution of host range expansions, and the transmission dynamics of pathogens. A direct consequence of our neglect of ecology and evolution is the relative paucity of epidemiologists in India."
* The group further observes that the removal of most of evolution and ecology, including systematics and the diversity of life, from the Class X-XII syllabus is not only dangerously tragic, but ironic as well.
* A **science curriculum** is a holistic entity. The truncations and deletions suggested by the CBSE in the Class XI-XII syllabus **violate the cohesiveness and holistic nature of the planned curriculum**.
* It would be far better to allow the students a gap year to pursue their own interests. The alternative, of course, would be to take into account the voices of all stakeholders in the area of education and do a careful job of trimming the syllabus.

GS-III : Economic Issues

Do we need a fiscal council?

Context

* The government **needs to borrow and spend more** now in order to support **vulnerable households and engineer economic recovery**. But that will mean a **steep rise in debt** which will jeopardise medium-term growth prospects, an issue prominently flagged by all **the rating agencies** in their recent evaluations.
* The government can signal its virtue by **establishing some new institutional mechanism** for **enforcing fiscal discipline**, such as for example a **fiscal council**.
* The suggestion of a fiscal council actually predates the current crisis. It was first recommended by the **Thirteenth Finance Commission** and was subsequently endorsed by the **Fourteenth Finance Commission** and then by the **FRBM (Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management) Review Committee headed by N.K. Singh.**

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Present in 50 countries

* According to the **International Monetary Fund (IMF),** about 50 countries around the world have **established fiscal councils** with **varying degrees of success**.
* Abstracting from country-level differences, a **fiscal council, at its core**, is **a permanent agency** with a **mandate to independently assess** the **government's fiscal plans** and projections against **parameters of macroeconomic sustainability**, and put out its **findings in the public domain**.
* The expectation is that such an **open scrutiny** will keep the government on the **straight and narrow path of fiscal virtue** and hold it to account for any default.
* Do we really need a fiscal council? Sure, we do have a chronic problem of fiscal irresponsibility, but is a fiscal council the answer? Recall that back in 2003 when FRBM was enshrined into law, we thought of that as the magic cure for our fiscal ills.
* The FRBM enjoins the government to conform to **pre-set fiscal targets**, and in the **event of failure to do so**, to explain the **reasons for deviation**.
* The government is also required to submit to Parliament a '**Fiscal Policy Strategy Statement' (FPSS)** to demonstrate the credibility of its fiscal stance.
* Yet, **seldom have we heard an in-depth discussion in Parliament** on the government's fiscal stance; in fact the **submission of the FPSS often passes off without even much notice**.
* If the problem clearly is **lack of demand for accountability**, how will another instrumentality such as a fiscal council for supply of accountability be a solution?
* It can be argued that a fiscal council will in fact be a solution because it will give an **independent and expert assessment** of the government's fiscal stance, and thereby aid an **informed debate in Parliament**.

The council's mandate

* Consider for example the model suggested by the **FRBM Review Committee**.
* As per that, the fiscal council's mandate will include, but not be restricted to, making **multi-year fiscal projections, preparing fiscal sustainability analysis, providing an independent assessment** of the Central government's fiscal performance and compliance with fiscal rules, **recommending suitable changes to fiscal strategy** to **ensure consistency of the annual financial**

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statement and **taking steps to improve quality of fiscal data**, **producing an annual fiscal strategy report** which will be released publicly.

* The **fiscal council** will give **macroeconomic forecasts** which the Finance Ministry is expected to use for the budget, and if the Ministry decides to differ from those estimates, it is required to explain why it has differed.

* As of now, both the **Central Statistics Office (CSO) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** give **forecasts of growth and other macroeconomic variables**, as do a host of public, private and international agencies.

Why should there be a presumption that the fiscal council's forecasts are any more credible or robust than others? Why not leave it to the Finance Ministry to do its homework and defend its numbers rather than forcing it to privilege the estimates of one specific agency?

* Besides, forcing the Finance Ministry to use someone else's estimates will dilute its accountability. If the estimates go awry, it will simply shift the blame to the fiscal council.

* Another argument made in support of a fiscal council is that in its **role as a watchdog**, it will **prevent the government from gaming the fiscal rules** through **creative accounting**.

* But there is **already an institutional mechanism** by way of the **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)** audit to check that. If that mechanism has lost its teeth, then fix that rather than create another costly bureaucratic structure.

Starting it small

* Let us, despite my arguments above, grant that a fiscal council will indeed add value. Then the way forward is to **start small and scale it up** if it proves to be a positive experience. I would suggest the following low cost and reversible start-up.

* A week before the scheduled budget presentation, let the **CAG, a constitutional authority**, **appoint a three-member committee** for a five-week duration with a **limited mandate of scrutinising** the **budget after** it is presented to **Parliament for its fiscal stance** and the integrity of the numbers, and give out a public report.

* The **CAG's office** will provide the **secretarial and logistic support** to the **committee from within its resources**.

* The **Finance Ministry, the RBI, the CSO and the Niti Aayog** will **each depute an officer** to serve in the secretariat. The committee will be wound up after submitting its report leaving no scope for any mission creep.

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* Bureaucratic expansion is a one way street. It is wise to cross the river by feeling the stones.

GS-II : Governance

Crime as punishment: On the killing of Vikas Dubey

Context

* The Uttar Pradesh Police's account of the killing of Kanpur gangster Vikas Dubey on Friday, even if taken at face value, is a startling admission of serious ineptitude.

Extra Judicial Killings

* **The possibility that his death is officially sanctioned** retribution for the murder of eight policemen who were part of the team that went to arrest him on July 3 is hard to dismiss out of hand.
* A hardened criminal, who had **62 cases against him** before his gang allegedly shot dead eight policemen last week, was supposedly being transported without handcuffs; he snatched weapons from those escorting him, according to the police version of the incident.
* Indeed, this is no more than a **self-indictment of the state police**, whose conduct has raised far too many questions in the recent past.
* There is **no good explanation for driving** such a suspect through the night across more than 600 km from Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh where he was arrested on Thursday.
* The brutal last episode of Dubey's serial crimes should be no defence if the shooting turns out to be an **extra-judicial killing.**
* **Any demand of probity and accountability in police and military** is often contested on the supposed ground that it emerges from a support for criminals, terrorists or enemies of the state by influential political and public figures.
* There is no question that crimes such as those Dubey was involved in must be met with exemplary punishment.
* The **process of establishing guilt and executing punishment** is not an **incidental part of justice**, but its **integral soul**.
* A **fair and transparent trial** cannot be dispensed with in order to satisfy cries for vengeance.
* **Social sanction of instant justice by state agents** might have leached into institutions that are mandated to enforce the rule of law.

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* Last year, when the Cyberabad police shot dead four people accused in a case of gang rape and murder, people celebrated in the streets.
* The **courts and the National Human Rights Commission** have also **shown a lenient approach in such cases.**
* **Goading the police on to deliver instant justice**, or even **tolerating such behaviour**, creates an **atmosphere of impunity** that could lead to **murder of innocent people** as happened with the **custodial deaths in Tamil Nadu**.
* **Support for such killings** by the police will not make a society more just. **Mob justice is no justice at all**. When law enforcers short-circuit due process, the damage to state institutions is severe and long-lasting.

GS-II : Governance

Reform with caution: On criminal laws reform

Context

* The formation of a '**Committee for the Reform of Criminal Laws'(Ranbir Singh)** by the Union Home Ministry with an apparently short time frame and limited scope for public consultation has caused considerable disquiet among jurists, lawyers and those concerned with the state of criminal justice in the country.

Lack of consensus

* Few would disagree with the idea that the current laws governing crime, investigation and trial require meaningful reform.
* There have been **several attempts in recent decades** to overhaul the body of criminal law, comprising the **Indian Penal Code of 1860** vintage, the **Code of Criminal Procedure that was rewritten in 1973**, and the **Indian Evidence Act that dates back to 1872**.
* However, **comprehensive legal reform** is something that requires careful consideration and a **good deal of deliberation**.
* One criticism against the latest Committee is that it **has begun its work in the midst of a pandemic.** This **may not be the ideal time for wide consultations**.
* **Activists and lawyers functioning in the hinterland** may be at a particular disadvantage in **formulating their opinions**.
* The **panel's mandate appears quite broad**: "to recommend reforms in the criminal laws of the country in a principled, effective, and efficient manner which ensures the safety and security of the individual, the community and the nation; and

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which prioritises the constitutional values of justice, dignity and the inherent worth of the individual."

* This is vague and open to multiple interpretations. **It is also not clear why the Law Commission has not been vested with this task.**

* The **lack of diversity in what is an all-male**, Delhi-based committee has also been adversely commented upon.

* In **2003, the Justice V.S. Malimath Committee** on **reforms in the criminal justice system** had come up with some far-reaching suggestions, some of which became part of changes in criminal law.

* However, it also attracted **criticism over the suggestion** that the **standard of evidence be reduced from "beyond reasonable doubt" to "clear and convincing".**

* The **Justice Verma panel** came up with a comprehensive and progressive report on **reforms needed in laws concerning crimes against women in 2013** in barely one month, but its speed was probably due to the limited mandate it had.

Way ahead

* If at all criminal law is to be reformed, there should be a genuine attempt to reach a **wide consensus** on ways to speed up trials, protect witnesses, address the travails of victims, improve investigative mechanisms and, most importantly, eliminate torture.

* An impression should not gain ground that wide-ranging changes are sought to be made within a short time frame and based on limited inputs from the public. Reform is best achieved through a **cautious and inclusive approach.**

GS-III : Health

Is airborne transmission of COVID-19 a risk?

Context

* On Monday, July 6, 239 scientists from 32 countries put their signatures on an open letter that said COVID-19 is also transmitted via aerosols. Titled It is Time to Address Airborne Transmission of COVID-19, and addressed to the World Health Organization (WHO), they said there was enough evidence to show that viruses are released during exhalation, talking, and coughing as micro droplets small enough to remain aloft and pose a risk of exposure at distances **beyond 1-2 metres** from someone who is infected (over the 3 feet–6 feet recommended for physical distancing between people to avoid transmission).

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What do the scientists believe?

* There is significant potential for inhalation exposure to viruses in **microscopic respiratory droplets** (microdroplets) at short to medium distances (up to several metres, or room scale.
* Responding to the letter, in Oxford Academic — Clinical Infectious Diseases, Dr. Benedetta Allegranzi, WHO's technical lead for infection prevention and control, was cited in media reports on Tuesday as saying, "**there was evidence emerging of airborne transmission of the coronavirus, but that it was not definitive**."
* She went on to say that the "... possibility of airborne transmission in public settings — especially in very specific conditions, crowded, closed, poorly ventilated settings that have been described, cannot be ruled out."

What are aerosols? How different are they from respiratory droplets?

* In common understanding, **aerosols are minute particles** that are **expelled under pressure**, as in the case of **fine mist** from a jar of perfume, or a can of roach repellent.
* However, aerosol is a term used to **broadly refer to particles suspended** in the air; they could include **fine dust, mist, or smoke**.
* In the context of transmission of viruses, as in this case, aerosols are read as **micro droplets, much smaller (5 microns or less)** than respiratory droplets, and take a longer time to drop to the floor.
* They will be expelled by people **breathing, laughing or singing**, as against **respiratory droplets that are expelled with forceful acts** such as **sneezing or coughing**.
* As per the open letter, "**at typical indoor air velocities** [5], a 5 micron droplet will **travel tens of metres**, much greater than the scale of a typical room, while settling from a height of 1.5 m to the floor."
* As they remain suspended in the air for longer, an individual who is COVID-19 positive is likely to infect people standing even at a distance of 1-2 m in a small, poorly ventilated room. "This poses the risk that people sharing such environments

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can potentially inhale these viruses, resulting in infection and disease," the signatories endorsed.

* That **respiratory droplets transmit COVID-19 infection** has dominated the discourse from nearly the beginning of the epidemic, and has guided the path that interventions have taken thus far, including **wearing masks, keeping distance, and hand washing routines**.

Is there evidence to prove that aerosols transmit SARS-CoV-2?

* In its response, WHO did say that there was need to watch the area for possible exposure to aerosols causing the infection, but insisted that the evidence was not yet entirely compelling, except in health-care settings where aerosol emission is common.
* A Reuters report cited Jose-Luis Jimenez, a chemist at the University of Colorado Boulder who signed the paper, trying to explain the historical reluctance to accept the notion of aerosol transmission."If people hear airborne, healthcare workers will refuse to go to the hospital," he said.
* Or people will buy up all the highly protective N95 respirator masks, "and there will be none left for developing countries".

Does the open letter to the World Health Organization present enough proof?

* It says: "**Airborne transmission appears** to be the only plausible explanation for several superspreading events investigated which occurred under such conditions... and others where recommended precautions related to direct droplet transmissions were followed."
* Further, the letter says, "It is understood that **there is not as yet universal acceptance of airborne transmission** of SARS-CoV-2; but in our collective assessment there is more than enough supporting evidence so that the precautionary principle should apply. In order to control the pandemic, pending the availability of a vaccine**, all routes of transmission must be interrupted.**"
* A study in their review of records from a Chinese restaurant, observed no evidence of direct or indirect contact between the three parties. In their review of video records from the restaurant, they observed no evidence of direct or indirect contact between the three parties.
* Earlier, a letter in The **New England Journal of Medicine**, titled **"Aerosol and Surface Stability of SARS-CoV-2** as Compared with SARS-CoV-1",

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suggested that **SARS-CoV-2 remained viable** in **aerosols for up to three hours**, but the generation was done via a **high-powered machine that is unlikely to be replicated in real-life situations**.

* The signatories of the letter said many studies conducted on the spread of other viruses, including respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus, and influenza, show that viable airborne viruses can be exhaled and/or detected in the indoor environment of infected patients.

* "This poses the risk that people sharing such environments can potentially inhale these viruses, resulting in infection and disease. There is every reason to expect that SARS-CoV-2 behaves similarly, and that transmission via airborne micro droplets is an important pathway."

What is the future?

* **Providing sufficient and effective ventilation** as far as possible in public buildings, schools and hospitals, avoiding overcrowding in public buildings and transportation systems are recommended, besides, supplementing general ventilation with airborne infection controls such as local exhaust**, high efficiency air filtration**, and **germicidal ultraviolet lights.**

GS-II : International Relations

Should Kuwait's draft expat bill worry India?

Context

* The Kuwait National Assembly (NA) is discussing several proposals to **reduce the share of foreigners in the country's population**, which is **now pegged at 70%.**

* There are many proposals under consideration, and one is to put caps on the number of emigrants in the country. In this, the plan is that Indians should not exceed 15% of Kuwaiti citizens, while Egyptians, Bangladeshis and Filipinos among others must not each exceed 10% of Kuwaitis.

* The head of the Parliamentary Human Resources Development Committee, MP Khalil Al-Saleh, is pushing for a drastic reduction in the number of expatriates. Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister Of Interior and State For Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh had also promised last week to send a draft law to the NA within two weeks.

Where is the proposal headed?

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* **Kuwait's Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah** had said, "the **ideal population structure** is to have **70 per cent Kuwaitis and 30 per cent non-Kuwaitis**".Currently, it is the other way around

Why has this proposal come up in the middle of a pandemic?

* **Kuwaitis are a minority in Kuwait**. Of the total population of 4.3 million, Kuwaitis are 1.3 million, which is less than one third. There are more Indians than Kuwaitis in Kuwait — 1.45 million, according to one account.
* However, statistics available on the website of the Indian Embassy in Kuwait puts the number at above a million. If Indians cannot exceed 15% of Kuwaitis, the cap would be around two lakh. Migration studies experts warn that calculations regarding the potential numbers that could be affected by the law are based on estimates which are various.
* "**Gulf countries are not very open about population data because citizens are a minority**," an Indian working with a Gulf Cooperation Council government said.
* This has been a lingering concern in all **GCC countries — Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates** — but the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic renewed the debate.
* In the past, high unemployment among the natives, economic crisis and demographic imbalance had triggered **movement for nationalisation of the workforce**. **Arab Spring** added a new concern of political stability among the regimes. **COVID-19** exposed the huge concentration of certain populations among the expatriates, and the resulting imbalances.

What is the profile of the Indian community in Kuwait?

* According to the Indian Embassy in Kuwait, besides the million-plus who are in the country as legal workforce, there are about **10,000 Indian nationals who have overstayed their visas.**
* The Indian community in Kuwait has been growing at 5-6% per annum until the economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic put an abrupt stop to immigration to the country.
* Indians are the largest expatriate community and Egyptians are the second largest.
* Three fourths, or about 7.5 lakh Indians are males as against only 2.5 lakh females.
* It is estimated that 5.23 lakh Indians are deployed in the private sector, as **construction workers, technicians, engineers, doctors, chartered**

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accountants, IT experts, etc. About 1.16 lakh are dependents and there are about **60,000 Indian students** studying in **23 Indian schools** in the country; about 3.27 lakh are **domestic workers (i.e. drivers, gardeners, cleaners, nannies, cooks and housemaids**) who are not allowed to bring their spouses/children into the country.

* About **28,000 Indians work for the Kuwaiti government in various jobs** such as nurses, engineers in national oil companies, and a few as scientists. In 2018, India received nearly $4.8 billion from Kuwait as remittances.

What happens now?

* Around **eight million Indians work in the GCC countries**. **Around 2.1 million of them are from one State — Kerala.** Other major contributors to the Indian expatriate communities in GCC countries are **Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, West Bengal, Punjab and Rajasthan.**
* A renewed push for **nationalisation of jobs and diversification of expatriates is possible.**
* However, the structure of the GCC economies makes any dramatic change unlikely. Nationalisation of government jobs can be achieved to a significant extent, but the private sector will continue to draw the majority of its workforce from abroad.
* There is a **social stratification in GCC countries** that has **natives at the top, followed by white professionals from the U.S. and Europe**, **immigrants from other Arab countries** and then **others including workers from India**.
* "There is a **division of labour among these classes** and that cannot be changed in a hurry. **Replacement of Indian or Asian workers** on a large scale is not possible, and **native Arabs will not do certain categories of work**," said the official.

GS-III : Internal security

How is India building up the squadron strength of its air force?

Context

* On July 2, the **Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) chaired by Defence Minister** Rajnath Singh approved defence deals worth **?38,900 crore** which includes procurement of **21 MiG-29 fighter jets** for the Indian Air Force (IAF) along with **upgradation of 59 existing MiG-29 jets** in the IAF inventory and procurement of **12 Su-30MKI aircraft from Russia.**

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What are the major deals approved?

* The Defence Ministry said the **MiG-29 procurements and upgradation** from Russia are estimated to cost **?7,418 crore** while the **12 Su-30 MKIs, which will be licence-produced by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL),** are estimated to cost **?10,730 crore.**
* Other deals approved by the DAC include **Pinaka rocket ammunition**, **long-range land attack missile system of over 1,000** km range and close to 250 Astra Beyond Visual Range (BVR) air-to-air missiles for the IAF.
* The **Astra Mk-1 has been integrated on the Su-30MKI jets** and is being inducted into the force. **An ungraded variant, the Astra Mk-II** is under development by the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).**

What are the new fighter jets for?

* The **IAF currently has 30 fighter squadrons** against a sanctioned **strength of 42 squadrons** and is set to phase out its MiG-21 fighters in the next few years further reducing the strength.
* As seen during the **Balakot air strikes (Pakistan) i**n February 2019, air power will be key to swiftly respond to any short escalations and especially relevant amid the ongoing stand-off with China on the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
* The 21 MiG-29s to be procured from Russia have already been manufactured for an unfulfilled order and will now be upgraded and delivered to India.
* These will add to the three MiG-29 squadrons in service with the IAF which are already undergoing an upgrade.

What other steps is the Indian Air Force taking to address the shortage?

* In July-end, the **IAF will start adding the first batch of the 36 Rafale multi-role jets** contracted from France.
* Another deal for **83 Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Mk-1A** estimated to cost ?38,000 crore is expected to be signed in the next two months which the IAF Chief Air Chief, Marshal R.K.S. Bhadauria, termed as “top priority”.
* The deal has assumed even greater importance with the emphasis on indigenisation in defence advocated by the Finance Minister recently.
* The IAF currently has **one squadron of LCA** in initial operational configuration (IOC) and in May, it constituted the **second LCA squadron** with one aircraft in the final operational clearance (FOC) configuration. It is scheduled to get 20 IOC

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aircraft and 20 FOC aircraft in all and will eventually operate 123 LCA including the 83 Mk-1A aircraft.
* The more capable and larger LCA Mk-2 is under development which the IAF is keen to add in large numbers.
* An **indigenous fifth generation advanced medium combat aircraft (AMCA)** is also under development and is expected to make first flight by **2032**.
* There is also a tender for 114 fighter jets that has been floated to global aircraft manufacturers to be manufactured in India under technology transfer.
* The IAF is also **upgrading all aircraft** in its current inventory to make up for the shortfall. The **Jaguar, Mirage-2000, MiG-29 fighters are all being upgraded** and negotiations are on with Russia for a **major upgrade of the Su-30MKI fleet.**

What about budgetary allocations?
* The defence budget has been going down as a percentage of the GDP, and the novel coronavirus pandemic has put further budgetary constraints on military modernisation.
* For instance, the defence allocation for 2020-21 is pegged at ?3.37-lakh crore excluding defence pensions which accounts for **1.5% of the GDP.**
* There is a steep rise in defence pensions, 13.5%, from ?1.18-lakh crore in revised estimates of last year to ?1.34-lakh crore this year. The ?3.37-lakh crore allocated is 5.67% higher compared to the budget estimate of last year and just 1.8% higher compared to the revised estimates of 2019-20 which stood at ?3.31 lakh crore.
* Of the total capital allocation of ?1.13-lakh crore, the IAF got 38% which comes to ?43,281 crore, but in real terms the capital allocation for IAF has gone down from the revised estimates of 2019-20 which was ?44,869 crore.
* In comparison, last year, the IAF had committed liabilities, payments for deals already signed for, of over ?47,000 crore which was more than its entire capital allocation.
* The IAF has signed several major deals which include 36 Rafale jets from France, S-400 air defence systems from Russia, Apache attack helicopters and Chinook heavy lift helicopters from the U.S. among others.

GS-II : International Relations
The sum and substance of the EU's China dilemma
Context

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- **Europe and China have been major partners** for a generation. According to the **Global Office of the International Comparison Program at the World Bank**, China and the European Union (EU) jointly account for **nearly 35% of global GDP in PPP terms**.
- **Europe championed China's case for World Trade Organization (WTO) membership and China supported the 'European Project'**.
- A single example is sufficient to demonstrate how critical China is for European prosperity. Between **1995 and 2012**, **Germany, Europe's economic powerhouse, enhanced its industrial value by 37%,** the **largest chunk of which came from supply chains** not in the United States but in **China.**

Behind the presumption

- Therefore, when on June 9, Josep Borrell Fontelles, the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, publicly proclaimed that "**China is without doubt one of the key global players**. We have to **engage with China** to achieve our global objectives, based on interests and values", a logical assumption might be that there is unlikely to be any change in the Europe-China relationship after the novel coronavirus pandemic.
- In **March 2019,** the **EU Commission published "A Strategic Outlook",** describing China as, **simultaneously, a cooperative partner, an economic competitor and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance.**
- This was the product of a long process of distillation during which the political and security dimensions began to jostle with the economics that had been the primary determinant of China-EU ties for two decades.

Red flags go up (Issues between China and Europe)

- China's efforts to cultivate separate European sub-constituencies like the **16+1 Format with the Central and Eastern European States**, and meetings with the Nordics and the Southern Europeans; the sailing of **the PLA Navy into the Baltic Sea** for joint exercises with Russia in 2017; cross-sectoral hybrid threats including information operations in European countries; Chinese behaviour in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean; and its targeted acquisition of key high-technology companies such as **Kuka in Germany** or key **ports like Piraeus in Greece,** began to raise red flags in the Chancelleries of Europe.

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- China's economic and financial practices backed by **strategic motives threatened unity and the European project** itself, since it appeared to undo their efforts in terms of connectivity, regulatory frameworks and the building of a single European entity.
- Thus, even before the pandemic, the "**Strategic Outlook" recommended that the EU should shift towards "a more realistic, assertive and multifaceted approach" to China.**
- China's early handling of COVID-19, and even more importantly, the clumsy Chinese efforts to use the confusion inside Europe to their propaganda advantage, led the EU to make a rare and blunt accusation against China on June 10, 2020: "Foreign actors and certain third countries, in particular **Russia and China**, have engaged in **targeted influence operations and disinformation campaigns** around **COVID-19 in the EU**, its neighbourhood and globally, seeking to **undermine democratic debate and exacerbate social polarisation**, and improve their own image in the COVID 19 context."
- China's **aggressive actions in the South China Sea, on the Line of Actual Control with India, and in Hong Kong**, among others, have also gained European eyeballs, so much so that even though China remains critical to European economic health, the **EU Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen**, after the virtual Summit with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on June 22, 2020, said that Europe's relations with China are "**simultaneously one of the most strategically important and one of the most challenging that we have**".
- **This then is the European dilemma.**

Determinants and focus now

- The European debate is no longer simply about **market access**, **industrial subsidies, over-capacity in steel** and **hi-tech industries**; **stealing of IPR**, and **China's assertive approach** to the **security, resilience and stability of digital networks**.
- It has begun to turn towards how to **balance economic co-dependency and co-prosperity with China's strategic global intentions** and efforts to **seek military supremacy** and its bearing on European security.
- In the trinity of determinants identified by the EU in March 2019 — namely **[negotiating] Partner, [economic] Competitor and Systemic Rival** — the last dimension is gradually becoming the dominant political narrative.

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- **China also views Brussels as increasingly antagonistic**. **Yuan Peng, President of China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations,** which belongs to China's intelligence services, has opined in a stellar article on June 17, titled "The Coronavirus Pandemic and a Once-in-a-Century Change", that "**Europe's star is fading**".
- Ironically, the **retreat of the U.S. from global leadership** is providing **the Chinese with the means to take advantage**, even when they no longer deem it in their strategic interests to support the "European Project".
- During recent EU-China leader level meetings, the Chinese have downplayed the differences. Yuan Peng puts it thus: "**The United States, Europe and Japan have common interests in curbing China, but China, Europe and Japan also have much to gain in tapping the potential of their relations**."
- The Chinese intention is to delay the former by dangling the economic carrot.

Sentiments after pandemic

- None of this should lead to the inference that the EU will follow the U.S. in 'de-coupling' or join an 'against-China' camp.
- The **European Union Chamber of Commerce in China**, which recently released its **Business Confidence Survey 2020**, says that most **European businesses are chiefly "in China, for China".**
- European companies still hope that China's President Xi Jinping will use this pandemic to **make fundamental reforms in the way that Deng Xiaoping and Zhu Rongji** did in 1992 and 1998, respectively.
- **European companies still regard China as the biggest potential market**.
- The deteriorating relationship between China and the U.S. is causing many new investors to look for alternative investment spaces. If either the Chinese fail to restore their end of the global supply chains or if the world demand cannot be revived, more companies will tend to look elsewhere.

A role for India

- Political conditions are favourable especially after the withdrawal of the United Kingdom.
- The Europeans recognise India's role in helping provide peace and prosperity in the **Indo-Pacific.**
- But we are not the only economic alternative for Europe in the aftermath of COVID-19.

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- If the **Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement(BTIA)** can be put back on track or, at the very least, if we conclude a new investment agreement, and if we are ready to join in high-technology collaboration including 5G and artificial intelligence, we may be able to align our stars.
- This will require imagination from our side, but Europe will also need to **change its positions on trade in goods** and be ready to **accommodate India on services**.

The opportunity for India and the EU to build a partnership that is both economic and strategic is there for the taking in a post-COVID-19 strategic scenario.

GS-III : Climate Change

Sure power: On India's solar strategy

- India's **installed base** of this **solar power source is about 35 gigawatts** (GW), and its projected addition of capacity until 2024 in a COVID-19 affected future is estimated by the industry to be of the order of 50 GW.
- Viewed against the goals set five years ago for **the Paris Agreement** on climate, of installing **100 GW of solar power by 2022,** there could be a sharp deficit.

Domination of China

- Combined with **low domestic cell manufacturing capacity at 3.1 GW** last year, and **heavy reliance on China**, high ambition must now be supported by aggressive official policy.
- The Chinese story is one of a **steady rise from insignificant manufacturing capability in the 1990s,** to virtual dominance through **active government support** in identifying and **acquiring top technologies globally, importing critical raw materials** such as **polysilicon**, acquiring **solar manufacturers abroad**, and investing in third countries with ready capability.
- Importantly, the domestic market was treated with great importance while promoting exports.

Opportunity for India

- The pandemic presents a critical opportunity for India to plan a **green deal, on the lines of what the EU** has committed itself to: that future **growth and employment should align itself to environmental and sustainability objectives,** particularly in **energy production**, away from dirty fuels such as coal.

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- There is no better time than now to **make solar energy a strategic sector**, giving it as much **importance as defence.**
- As the architect of the **International Solar Alliance,** which attracted about 120 nations at its launch, **India needs to show leadership** to advance the **manufacture and absorption of solar photovoltaic infrastructure in low- and middle-income countries**.
- Industry must get help to set up facilities and avail low cost financing — both important elements in China's rise — and be able to invest in **intellectual property.**
- A forward-looking programme should also look at emerging trends in **deploying solar innovatively**.
- These include newer technologies such as **aesthetic photovoltaic window** and **roof tiles for buildings**, **multi-role urban structures**, and greater use of residential and commercial buildings to deploy more panels.

GS-III : Health

Hardly smart about urban health care

Context

- The novel coronavirus pandemic has largely been **an urban crisis** so far, with megacities such as **Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai** accounting for most of the COVID-19 positive cases.
- Indian cities are not only facing a **public health crisis** but also a larger emergency of **economic issues and livelihoods**.

Still an urban dream

- Over the last decade-and-a-half, cities have started receiving more policy attention from the government, with dedicated national-level programmes on urban development.
- The **'Smart Cities Mission', completed five years**, in June 2020. The Mission had sought to make **100 selected cities "smart**", primarily through an **"Area-Based Development**" model under which a **small portion of the city** would be upgraded by **retrofitting or redevelopment.**
- **Many of the projects undertaken under the 'Smart Cities Mission' are behind schedule.** According to the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs,** of the **5,151 smart city projects across the 100 cities**, while around 4,700 projects have been tendered, **only 1,638 projects have been completed**.

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- In terms of expenditure, **of the total investment of ?2,05,018 crore, only projects worth ?26,700 crore have been completed**.

A blind spot

- Most of these Smart Cities are now reeling under the devastation caused by COVID-19. Some cities have been using the **Integrated Command and Control Centres created under the 'Smart Cities Mission'** as "war rooms" for monitoring real time data regarding the spread of the virus. However, tackling the larger public health and economic fallout remains a more difficult challenge.
- In fact, the **'Smart Cities Mission'** has given **short shrift to basic services such as public health**. An analysis of the smart city projects under the Mission shows that **only 69 of over 5,000 projects** undertaken under the Mission were for **health infrastructure**.
- These projects are for an estimated cost of ?2,112 crore, amounting to just around **one per cent of the total mission cost**.
- While one could argue that **health infrastructure is not a core element of a "smart" city,** the '**Smart Cities Mission' was never focused merely on technology**; it had the stated aim of improving the quality of life of urban residents.
- Further, **public health is an essential local government function** in India's constitutional scheme.
- As per the 12th Schedule of the Constitution, introduced by the 74th Amendment, **"public health" is one of the 18 functions that are to be devolved to the municipalities**.
- However, **public health infrastructure of cities has often been neglected** over the years and new programmes such as the 'Smart Cities Mission' have further driven local governments away from their core responsibilities.

Strengthening local capacities

- The COVID-19 crisis has **exposed the weaknesses in the institutional and human capacity of Indian cities** to handle a **public health emergency**.
- Despite the renewed policy focus on cities, **India's urban local bodies** continue to be **financially and administratively weak** and heavily understaffed.
- There is also **high level of vacancy of Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers**, the **frontline public health workers** carrying out contact tracing, in urban areas, especially in COVID-19 hotspot cities such as Mumbai.

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- The **relative success of Kerala** in containing the pandemic has shown how a **decentralised political and administrative system** with strong local governments and **high investment in local public** health care can be effective.
- To tackle the COVID-19 crisis, it is important to **strengthen local government capacities, invest heavily in urban public health systems**, and promote programmes that improve the livelihoods of urban vulnerable communities.
- Programmes such as the **National Urban Livelihoods Mission** and **National Urban Health Mission**, which have lately received limited focus and resources, need to be strengthened.

Way ahead

- Further, it is time to consider the **introduction of a national urban employment guarantee programme** that assures jobs for urban residents and strengthens the capacities of urban local bodies.
- **Kerala has been running such a scheme since 2010** and States such as **Odisha, Himachal Pradesh and Jharkhand** have also recently launched similar initiatives in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.
- As Indian cities face an unprecedented challenge, it is important to get the priorities of urban development right and invest in programmes that improve the health and livelihoods of its residents.

GS-II : Education Policy

Nurturing citizens in social studies

Context

- The decision of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to **exclude certain subjects from the list of topics of study** in the **social science curriculum for Classes 9 to 12** with the objective of **reducing by 30% the "load"** while retaining "core concepts".
- The stated rationale of the move is the disruption caused by COVID-19 to the academic year. The exercise covers other subjects too, but the focus of this analysis is on the social sciences .
- Democratic societies the world over have developed methodologies of nurturing young citizens in essential values and procedures and none have so far abandoned them on account of the pandemic.

Salient features of curriculum

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- The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on its website indicates **nine salient features of the senior secondary school curriculum** for **Classes 11 and 12** for the years **2020-2021**.
- It mentions that the curriculum strives to "provide ample scope for **physical, intellectual and social development of students**".
- The curriculum also strives to "**uphold Constitutional values such as Socialism, Secularism, Democracy, Republican character, Justice, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Human Dignity of Individual and Unity and integrity of the Nation by encouraging value-based learning activities.**"
- With some abridegments, therefore, the features reiterate the values mentioned in the Preamble of the Constitution of India.
- Item 4 of the salient features says the curriculum strives to "**nurture Life-Skills by prescribing curricular and co-curricular activities** to help **improve self-esteem, empathy towards different cultures** etc."
- There is, however, **no mention of Fundamental Duties (Article 51A of the Constitution)**; of the duty "**to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture**" and of the duty "to develop the **scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of enquiry and reform**".
- It would be argued in defence of abridgements that the CBSE curriculum for Classes 9 and 10 has identical wording for items 3 and 4 and that the themes are therefore covered at an earlier stage of school education.
- This is to presume that levels of student comprehension between Classes 9 and 11 or 10 and 12 remain static and do not need upgradation either in teaching or in understanding.

Being 'politically conscious'

- Our system of **democratic governance** is based on the Constitution that prescribes **universal adult suffrage** with the voting age now being 18, after the **61st Amendment of 1988**.
- It was then argued formally in Parliament that "the **present-day youth are literate and enlightened and the lowering of the voting age** would provide to the unrepresented youth of the country an opportunity to give vent to their feelings and help them become a part of the political process.The present-day youth are very much politically conscious. It is, therefore, proposed to reduce the voting age from 21 years to 18 years.'

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- In other words, and since the general average school-leaving age after Class 12 is 16-17 years, this objective of being "politically conscious" is to be attained suddenly at the age of 17 and without the benefit of formal instruction on fundamental principles of our polity.
- And if this **formal instruction on the principles of the Constitution** is **not available to the young person** at that age, she or he has no option but to **resort to informal knowledge** acquired through **hearsay and media or social media** with all the tilt or **prejudice of demagogy and propaganda** that go with it.
- In this context, it is useful to **examine the relevant portions of the Draft National Education Policy 2019** with a Message from the Minister of Human Resource Development.
- It has on page 96 a section on '**Development of Constitutional Values'**. It states that "the process and the content of education at all levels will also aim to **develop Constitutional values in all students**, and the capacities for their practice... Some of these Constitutional values are: **democratic outlook and commitment to liberty and freedom; equality, justice, and fairness; embracing diversity, plurality, and inclusion; humanness and fraternal spirit; social responsibility and the spirit of service; ethics of integrity and honesty; scientific temper and commitment to rational and public dialogue; peace; social action through Constitutional means; unity and integrity of the nation, and a true rootedness and pride in India with a forward-looking spirit to continuously improve as a nation**."
- The other objectives mentioned in this section are diversity, plurality humanness, fraternal spirit, scientific temper and commitment to rational dialogue.

GS-II : Governance

Enabling people to govern themselves

Context

- Governance systems at all levels, i.e**. global, national, and local**, have experienced stress as a fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Breakdowns in many subsystems had to be managed at the same time — in **health care, logistics, business, finance, and administration**.
- The complexity of handling so many subsystems at the same time have overwhelmed governance**. Solutions for one subsystem backfired on other subsystems. For example, lockdowns to make it easier to manage the**

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health crisis have made it harder to manage economic distress simultaneously.

A mismatch is evident

- **Human civilisation advances** with the **evolution of better institutions to manage public affairs**.
- **Institutions of parliamentary democracy**, for example, and the limited liability business corporation, did not exist 400 years ago. Institutions of global governance, such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, did not exist even 100 years ago.
- **These institutions were invented to enable human societies to produce better outcomes for their citizens.**
- They have been put through **a severe stress test** now by the global health and economic crises. The test **has revealed a fundamental flaw in their design**.
- There is **a mismatch in the design of governance institutions** at the global level (and also in India) with the challenges they are required to manage.
- **Designed like machines for efficiency**, they are trying to fit **themselves into an organic system of the natural environment** coupled with human society.
- It seems that **government institutions are square pegs forcing themselves into round holes.**

Interconnected issues

- **The global challenges** listed in the **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations**, which humanity must urgently address now, are **systemic challenges**.
- All these **systemic problems are interconnected with each other. Environmental, economic, and social issues cannot be separated** from each other and solved by experts in silos or by agencies focused only on their own problems.
- Even if experts in different disciplines could combine their perspectives and their silo-ed solutions at the global level, they will not be able to solve the systemic problems of the SDGs.
- Because, their solutions must fit the specific conditions of each country, and of each locality within countries too, to fit the shape of the environment and the condition of society there.

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- **Solutions for environmental sustainability along with sustainable livelihoods cannot be the same in Kerala and Ladakh,** or in Wisconsin and Tokyo.
- **Solutions must be local**.
- Moreover, **for the local people to support** the implementation of solutions, **they must believe the solution is the right one for them**, and not a solution thrust upon them by outside experts.
- Therefore, they **must be active contributors of knowledge** for, **and active participants in**, the creation of the solutions.
- Moreover, the knowledge of different experts — about the environment, the society, and the economy — must come together to fit realities on the ground.

A case for local systems

- Governance of the people must be not only for the people. It must be by the people too.
- Gandhiji and his economic advisers, **J.C. Kumarappa** and others, developed their **solutions of local enterprises** through observations and experiments on the ground (and not in theoretical seminars in capital cities).
- **E.F. Schumacher, founding editor of the journal, Resurgence**, and author of Small is Beautiful, had pointed out by the **1970s, the flaws in the economics theories that were driving public policy in capitalist as well as communist countries.**
- He had proposed a **new economics**, **founded on local enterprise**, very consistent with **Gandhiji's ideas.**
- **Elinor Ostrom, the first woman to win the Nobel Prize in Economics**, in 2009, had developed the **principles for self-governing communities from research on the ground in many countries, including India.**
- When there are scientific explanations for why **local systems solutions are the best**, if not the **only way to solve complex systemic** problems.

The district Collector

- The key IAS functionary in India's governance is the District 'Collector' was to **collect revenues and to maintain law and order**.
- When, **after Independence**, the Indian state took up a **large welfare** role, he also became the **District 'Deliverer' of government** largesse.

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- It strengthened the **image of a paternalist government** taking care **of its wards.**
- The **District Deliverer's task became complicated** when the **numbers of government schemes multiplied** — some designed by the central government, and others by State government.
- The **schemes were managed by their own ministries and departments** in the capitals, with **local functionaries** of those departments as the points of contact with citizens.
- At a **meeting of IAS officers in Shimla with the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG),** sometime in 2013, to understand **why government schemes were not producing enough benefits for people on the ground,** an officer presented a **list of over 300 schemes** that were operational in her district.
- The **citizens did not know how many schemes there were** and **what they were entitled to.** And even she found it hard to disentangle the schemes.
- The pandemic has not passed yet, but evidence is emerging that some States in India, such as Kerala, have weathered the storm better than others.
- A hypothesis is that those **States and countries** in **which local governance was stronger have done much better than others**.
- This is worthy of research by social and political scientists looking for insights now **into design principles for good governance** systems that can solve problems that the dominant theory of government is not able to solve.
- The **dominant theory in practice** of **good government** is **'government of the people, by the government, for the people'**.
- Which slips easily into '**government of the people, by the government, for the political party in power'**.

Way ahead

- Even when government is for the people, as a deliverer of services, money into their bank accounts, (and money for building toilets), it is not good enough.
- The government has to **support and enable people to govern themselves**, to **realise the vision of 'government of the people**, **for the people, by the people'**.

GS-I : Climatology

Gains from rains: on monsoon performance

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Context

- So far, India appears to be having a good run with the monsoon. As of the most recent data available from the India Meteorological Department (IMD), **rainfall during the season has been 14% more than what is usual for this period**.

Monsoon pattern in India

- The **month of June only accounts for about 17% of the monsoon rainfall** spanning June-September.
- It is the month during which the monsoon sets in and that process can sometimes be delayed for as much as a week.
- June is also when the monsoon begins its journey from two extremities of the country.
- **One branch starts its journey northwards from Kerala and the other wing — called the Bay of Bengal branch** — enters India **from the southeast.**
- **Both branches eventually converge in the north** and usually, this **merging and strengthening of the monsoon currents** over the **mainland takes at least until July 15.**
- The IMD never forecasts the possible rainfall likely during June because of the vagaries involved in onset and the pace of the journey.

2020 monsoon pattern (Important data)

- This year, two significant things happened. The **monsoon set in at a textbook date of June 1**.
- This was even after concerns **that Cyclone Amphan** that had ravaged West Bengal **would delay the monsoon's entry into India** from the Andaman Sea.
- The second factor was the **record pace at which the monsoon covered the country.**
- Along with the monsoon onset this year, the IMD announced a revision to the onset and withdrawal dates across several cities.
- According to this, **the monsoon covered India's northern and western borders no later than July 8 as opposed to the previous historical date of July 15**.
- This year, however, **the monsoon broke even this speed limit and covered the country by June 25** — at a pace that was unprecedented since 2013.
- The net result of all this**: more rainy days in June** and a fairly even distribution across the country.

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- The IMD's records show that **only on four days in that month** did daily rainfall drop below its historical normal.
- Except for northwest India, which is staring at a 3% deficit, the rainfall in **east, south and central India has posted surpluses of 13%-20%.**
- While good rains in June signal farmers to prepare the soil and sow kharif crop, the **most important months are July and August**.
- These **two months account for two-thirds of the monsoon rain**. This is also the time the monsoon goes into so-called 'break' conditions.
- Prolonged breaks, or an absence of rainfall, can even lead to drought.

Way ahead

- In spite of significant improvements in data gathering and technological advancement, **meteorological agencies cannot yet reliably forecast** the **advent of a break or how long it can last**.
- What is critical is that 'normal rains' also obscure the possibility of heavy rains or severe droughts in districts or over larger areas. Therefore, **short and medium range forecasts need to be strengthened and effectively communicated to the people.**

GS-IV : Ethics

Sending the right message

Context

* **Miscommunication** has rocked numerous aspects of the response to COVID-19. Sometimes, scientists who ought to provide clear, unambiguous public health information have failed to do so because of **political interference.**
* At other times, even when key public health messages were clearly articulated, **some reporters misperceived grey areas and ongoing debates as scientific chaos**.
* There has also **been mistrust in the efficacy of medical management** and cynicism among those who follow public health messages from governments regarding the pandemic.

Communicating vital information

* Some people are **seen removing their masks** to speak to others in close proximity or even to cough, but otherwise wear them diligently in public as a badge of **civic honour.**

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* The message that is entirely lost is that **even simple masks can largely stop expelled droplets from a person's nose or mouth**; thus, we protect one another from infection when we wear masks.
* People suspected of having flu-like symptoms are shunned or, worse, physically assaulted. On the other hand, there seems to be little or no awareness that **asymptomatic cases may be everywhere**.
* **U.S. President Donald Trump has been one of the worst possible communicators of vital information** during the crisis.
* A **few Americans reportedly drank bleach** in response to his suggestion that it **would perhaps work inside the body**.
* There were also open disagreements between Mr. Trump and medical experts who shared the stage with him during daily media briefings.
* In any crisis where science matters, messages that ask people to change their behaviour have to be very clear to be understood and followed.
* Providing **instructions on medication, treatment choices, physical distancing, testing and wearing masks requires elaborating on the reasons**, so that **people understand the logic.**
* Instead of trying to manage the news, providing **sufficient funding for public health research** and allowing scientists to work freely and give independent reports to the **press without censorship** are vital to a good health system.
* **Transparency and clarity** on what **public health proposals** are being considered would build faith and confidence in the government.

Climate change communication

* Some commentators have wondered whether COVID-19 and climate change communication matters are alike.
* While some aspects seem similar, I believe they are quite different, although there are insights to be learned from experience with the latter.
* For several years, a **few scientists and the fossil fuel** and **petrochemical industry have deliberately muddied the facts** and the messaging on climate change.
* For instance, in the U.S., the Koch Brothers are major sponsors of smokescreens concerning climate change. The **Koch Family Foundations** are reported to have spent over $125 million to finance 92 groups that **have attacked climate change science and policy solutions,** from 1997 to 2017.

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* In an article in **The New York Times** (July 10, 2019), one learns that funds even from corporations, like **Google and Amazon**, which have publicly committed themselves to supporting climate change action, were funnelled into groups like the **Competitive Enterprise, a Washington-based think tank that challenges anthropogenic climate change.**
* **Lawyers and experts** who previously worked with the **tobacco industry** and helped them lie about tobacco being seriously harmful to health have been f**unded by conservative think tanks like the George C. Marshall Institute** to support the climate change denial industry.
* Their strategy has been to maintain the controversy and therefore keep any fake confusion alive.
* By **roping in scientists, establishing research groups and appointing spokespersons who maintain doubt**, they are **co-opting scientific trappings without deploying scientific logic and methods**.
* The **same approach has been applied to tobacco smoking**, **DDT, acid rain, the ozone hole** and some nutrition studies. These activities therefore **end up looking and sounding like legitimate science**.
* While the **focus of the confusion in the case of climate change is deliberate and planned,** in the case of COVID-19, scientists did not know much about the SARS-CoV-2 virus when the pandemic broke.

Responsibility towards the public

* **Communicating science** means **explaining details** to the public without condescension, admitting mistakes, promptly rebutting pseudo-science, being **guided by data and interpreting the logic for policies undertaken.**
* Listening to scientists and putting their advice into practice can lead to better management of the pandemic, as seen in New Zealand and some Southeast Asian countries.
* It is essential that those who can influence decisions, such as civil servants and scientists, along with the politicians making decisions, be guided by a sense of responsibility towards the public.

GS-II : International Relations

Lost opportunity: On India losing Chabahar project

Importance of Chabahar

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- Right from the beginning of its tenure, the government has underlined the geostrategic importance it attaches to the **Chabahar port project**.
- The project, **signed in 2003**, has been a symbol of traditionally important India-Iran ties.
- Connected **by sea lanes to ports on India's west coast**, **Chabahar would form the fulcrum of India's outreach to Russia and Central Asia,** enhancing connectivity, energy supplies and trade.
- Given that **Pakistan had blocked Indian aid to Afghanistan and all trade over land,** Chabahar provided India an **alternative to permanently bypass its troublesome neighbour.**
- As a result, the government fast-tracked plans for the project, and in 2016, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was in Tehran to sign **a trilateral trade and transit agreement with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani.**
- According to the MoUs, **India would be granted a 10-year lease** to **develop and operate two terminals and five berths**, access to the **Chabahar free trade zone**, and the opportunity to build the **628 km rail line from Chabahar to Zahedan,** just across the border from Afghanistan.
- The **government acted quickly to develop Chabahar port facilities,** sent **exports to Afghanistan in 2018,** and has moved over **half-a-million tonnes of cargo**, including grains and food supplies, for Afghanistan again, through the port.

Delay in the Railway line construction

- However, the **rail line has never taken off** for a number of reasons despite a commitment from state-owned IRCON, to undertake its construction at an estimated $1.6 billion.
- The main hurdle has been the **fear of American penalties.**
- Even though India was able to **negotiate a sanctions waiver for the Chabahar port and rail line** from the U.S., few international construction and equipment partners were willing to sign on to the project; New Delhi has also dragged its feet on the matter.
- After appeals to India, including one issued by its Foreign Minister Javad Zarif when he visited Delhi in January this year, Iran decided to go on its own, by beginning to lay tracks for the line connecting Chabahar to Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, last week.

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- Regardless of the reasons **for India's inability to join the railway project,** the decision can only be seen as an opportunity lost.
- The impression that India wavered due to U.S. pressure, especially after **India cancelled oil imports from Iran**, also **questions New Delhi's commitment to strategic autonomy.**
- While Iran claims it will fund the railway using its own resources, it seems to have embarked on the **Chabahar-Zahedan project** with a confidence borne from an i**mminent deal with China for a 25-year, $400 billion strategic partnership** on **infrastructure, connectivity and energy projects.**
- In a world where connectivity is seen as the new currency, India's loss could well become China's gain, and New Delhi must watch this space, created by its exit, closely.

GS-II : International Relations

The standoff and China's India policy dilemma

Context

* The June 15 incident of a violent face-off between Chinese and Indian troops at the Line of Actual Control (LAC), causing casualties on both sides, took China's strategic community by storm, while the intense debate and discussions that followed, rather than generating a consensus, brought out China's many dilemmas vis-à-vis India.

No accident

* On one side of the debate are China's top India watchers such as Lin Minwang and Zhang Jiadong, from Fudan University, and Li Hongmei from the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS) among others, who believe that the present conflict is not an "accident" but an "**inevitable result"** of what they perceive as "**India's long-standing speculative strategy on the China-India border".** From Doklam to Kashmir to India's "unending infrastructure arms race" at the LAC, they say, **Beijing was "fed up" and "had to teach India a lesson**".
* **Their key argument** is that **China-India relations hold no great prospect in the current international situation**.
* There is **no possibility of a negotiated settlement of the border dispute any time soon**. India is already a **"quasi-ally" of the U.S**. with **no scope for reversal**.
* With **opportunities for cooperation at the global level** diminishing, **regional competition intensifying** and the earlier system of

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effective management of bilateral differences crumbling beyond control, periodic violent conflicts, they predict, are **the "new normal" in China-India ties.**
* China, they argue, **should reconsider its prevalent strategic thinking** that **India is not its main strategic challenge** and, therefore, **peace needs to be maintained in its direction** as much as possible.

Handling a resurgent India
- To deal with a resurgent India, Chinese hardliners suggest a policy of **"three nos": "no weakness, no concession and no defensive defence".**
- In other words, China should take all opportunities to crack down on India, take the initiative to hit it hard whenever possible.
- This, it is argued, will not damage China-India relations; on the contrary, it will make it more stable.
- Didn't the **1962 China-India war help China to maintain peace and stability on the western front** for a long time and directly eliminate American and Soviet ambitions to use India to contain China?
- In this backdrop there is **renewed interest among certain sections** of the **Chinese strategic community** to: keep India under control by **destabilising the entire border region, creating tension across the board, from the McMahon Line in the east to the Aksai Chin area in the west**; take the **initiative to attack and seize territories under India's control from Kashmir to Arunachal Pradesh,** and **weaken India internally, by supporting the cause of Maoists, Naga separatists and Kashmiris.**

Some criticism
- However, on the **other side** of the debate are **Chinese political thinkers and professors such as Zheng Yongnian and Yu Longyu** among others, who in their analysis of the Galwan Valley incident, have been somewhat **critical about China's policies towards India**, which they say remain mostly tactical, of a "reactive nature" and are characterised by a **"tit-for-tat" approach** without any **clear strategic intent**.
* This, according to them, **stokes extreme nationalism in India** and **unites the otherwise divided nation against China**, which not only harms China's interests but **might eventually draw China into an untimely military conflict.**

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* They criticise those vying to "teaching India a lesson" as being "short-sighted" and not "psychologically prepared for the rise of India". China, they argue, **lacks understanding of the fact that India**, as a rising power, **is very important to China and will be increasingly crucial** in the future, with **China-India relations** evolving as the most important **pair of relations after China-U.S. links**.

* If China-India ties are damaged beyond repair, they warn, **India alone or in association with other countries will cause "endless trouble for China".**

* For instance, an **openly hostile India will use every possible means to prevent China from reaching the Indian Ocean**.

* On the other hand, the **decoupling of China-India relations** will further **strengthen the "anti-China alliance"** between the U.S., **Japan, Australia, Vietnam, Indonesia and other countries**, who will actively take the initiative to reshape global industrial chains, use the **Indo-Pacific Strategy** to **check and balance China's military and economic power**, and expand international organisations such as the **G-7 to weaken China's influence in international affairs.**

Opinion on scenarios

* On a similar note, various **commentaries in the Chinese press** highlight that **downgrading China-India relations** to the level of **India-Pakistan relations or a 'Kashmirisation'** of the China-India border is easier said than done as this will require a complete reversal of China's present LAC policy of being **"reasonable, profitable and economical".**

* Strategically too, they say, it is "**unwise" for China to take the initiative** to get into a **comprehensive military conflict with India** — "**a big country with comparable military strength**"— at this point in time.

* The general view among these military analysts is that if **China has an advantage in terms of psychology, equipment, and logistics mobilisation**, **India too has advantage on various fronts such as deployment, supply line, practical war experience, topography, and climate among others.**

***** If **India's disadvantage remains** in the fact that **its capital lies** well **within the bombing range of China**, **China's key disadvantage is its particularly long supply lines.**

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* Therefore, if the conflict ends in a short period of time, it will benefit China. But if it is prolonged, China will be disadvantaged.
* If a war starts, they argue, **India will make all efforts to prolong it as long as possible**, and the **U.S. is likely to help India** to attain this objective.
* Even if the two sides ended in a tie, in India it will be counted a victory and the national morale will rise sharply; on the contrary, in China, the morale will decline if it cannot beat India decisively. Therefore, **in its effort to "teach India a lesson", they fear, China might lose more than it would gain.**

What India must note

* The overall consensus within this group is that it is still not the time to 'resolve' the India problem.
* Instead, China, for now, should strive to make India retreat without a military conflict, maintain **basic peace and stability** at the borders, and, at the minimum, not deliberately push it towards the U.S.
* Meanwhile, **China simultaneously carries out its strategy of weakening India internally** by **leveraging its social and political** differences, completing its strategic encirclement, **improving troop deployment in the Tibet region** to **secure the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor**, and **stationing Chinese troops in the Gwadar Port (Arabian Sea)**, so as to secure China's Indian Ocean sea routes, among other interests.

Way ahead

* In the words of another Chinese strategist, Yin Guoming, rather than winning a war, China should aim at attaining a comprehensive and overwhelming advantage in geopolitics vis-à-vis India, which cannot be altered by war.
* As we, in India, seek to reset ties with Beijing in the post-Galwan era, we should take note of the **ongoing Chinese debate on India**, factor **in its many internal contradictions** and perceived vulnerabilities vis-à-vis India, and **leverage the same to our benefit.**

GS-II : International Relations

India should believe in the EU

- The EU and India have much in common. Both aim to enhance **strategic autonomy and their global standing**. Diversifying strategic value chains is also a common interest, as is the urgent need to **address climate change.**

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- On purely economic terms, the **EU is India's first trading partner and the biggest foreign investor,** with **€67.7 billion** worth of investments made in 2018, equal to **22% of total FDI inflows**.
- But there is still room for improvement — especially when compared to **EU investments in China which, in the same year, amounted to €175.3 billion.**
- **Enhanced business cooperation** can help **both the EU and India** diversify their **strategic value chains** and reduce economic dependency — notably on China.
- India could succeed in attracting EU investment that might be moving out of China, but to do so, it must address the **mutual trust deficit**. **Facilitating people's mobility and connectivity** is a good way to improve **mutual understanding** and create opportunities for innovation and growth.

Talks on FTA

- A new study from the European Parliament assesses the potential impact of an **EU-India trade agreement at between €8 billion and €8.5 billion gains from increased trade for both sides**, with a more significant increase of **trade gains likely to flow to India**.
- The study also refers to **additional potential gains** from enhanced coordination on the **provision of global public goods**, such as **environmental standards.**
- On climate change, the EU is building on its ambitious target to render the continent **carbon-emission neutral by 2050**, through its new industrial strategy, the **Green Deal**.
- "Investing in **fossil fuel-driven recovery** is a wasted opportunity, and we only have one chance to make it right", says the Executive Vice President of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans.
- Should both the EU and India succeed in transforming into carbon-neutral economies by 2050, we all would gain from the investment.
- The Indo-Pacific region is increasingly the focus of attention, so India should capitalise on its geopolitical leverage there. **Stronger cooperation** with **like-minded, democratic powers** can support this effort, especially towards **assertive competitors like China**.
- Even India's strongest bilateral relations with individual EU member states do not come close to the potential of dealing effectively with the EU as a whole.

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Ruptures caused by COVID-19

- The measures put in place at supranational level show a strong willingness to buttress the fundamental pillars on which the EU is built. The "**Next generation EU proposal**" submitted by the European Commission has surprised many by its bold approach.
- This is indeed a game-changer, not only in its financial implications — as it allows the EU to take on debt — but because it shows that the ties that **bind the EU extend** well **beyond treaties and individual members' self-interest.**
- The EU champions the **rules-based international order**, which is being increasingly challenged by the proliferation of exceptionalism.
- The EU and India must join forces to promote sustainable reform of multilateral institutions, with the World Trade Organization (WTO) first in line.

GS-IV : Ethics

Putting victims on trial

Context

- In late June, a single bench of the **Karnataka High Court** granted **anticipatory bail to a man accused of rape**.
- One of the first reasons mentioned for granting bail was that the **seriousness of the offence alone cannot be a ground for depriving a citizen of her/his liberty**.
- While this is true, the **Court ought to have considered** that in cases of rape, the issue in granting bail is not just seriousness of the offence, but the very real **possibility of intimidation of the complainant**, which would **prevent her from being an effective witness in the trial**.
- Furthermore, the **Court anchored its reasoning** in unsubstantiated, **damaging inferences drawn from the behaviour** of the complainant.

Rape myths

- **Rape myths or stereotypes** are widely held, **false and prejudicial notions about rape, rapists, and the survivors of rape**.
- The underlying assumption of such stereotypes is that '**genuine' victims/survivors can be recognised** by the discernibly **common patterns of behaviour they exhibit.**

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- To begin with, '**genuine' victims/survivors of rape are expected not to** put **themselves in situations which, it is believed**, might lead to rape.
- These situations may include anything that is seen as a **social taboo** for women: whether it is **drinking, partying**, or indeed, as stated by the defence in the **infamous Nirbhaya case,** simply being out at night.
- The implication here is either that **willingness to participate in such activities is equivalent to consent to sex**, or that engaging in social taboo is tantamount to inviting rape.

Shifting the burden onto the victim

- Another common stereotype is that 'genuine' victims/survivors physically resist their assailants or shout for help.
- For instance, in **Mahmood Farooqui v. NCT of Delhi (2017),** the High Court of Delhi had held that the **complainant's 'feeble no'**, even when spoken, would **not be sufficient evidence of lack of consent.**
- This case also repeated the widely held belief of Courts that where the victim/survivor had a past sexual history with the accused, her consent would be assumed, and any 'unwillingness' or 'hesitation' on her part would be disregarded.
- The greatest evil of rape myths or stereotypes is that they put the **victim, rather than the accused and society, on trial.**
- The focus shifts from whether the accused committed the offence to whether the victim/survivor's **behaviour met patriarchy's exacting standards**.
- With the narrative that the victim/survivor could have avoided the rape, or indeed, asked for it, the **blame is conveniently shifted from large-scale social and systemic failures to the victim/survivor herself.**
- The **rape law for adults in India**, as amended in 2013, specifically states that **failure to resist cannot be taken as evidence of consent**.
- In fact, consent, whether verbal or non-verbal, has been defined to mean 'unequivocal voluntary agreement'.
- **Passive submission (which may arise out of fear or deep-rooted social conditioning**) or acquiescence to non-sexual acts such as **drinking together**, cannot and **should not be equated with consent to sex**.
- The 2013 Amendment also laid down that **consent would mean** willingness to **participate in a 'specific' sexual act**.

No universal script

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- It is impossible and unjust to have a universal script against which the behaviour of individual victims/survivors is assessed, because each person and each circumstance is distinct.
- Rape myths and stereotypes echo the deeply entrenched patriarchal **biases of the players in our criminal justice system, and of society at large.**
- When used in **judgments, they become a permanent part of the legal record.**
- As precedent, they create a chilling effect for all future victims/survivors of rape, making the criminal justice system even more unapproachable than it is.

This calls for urgent and renewed efforts towards sensitisation and for the need to make sensitivity in handling sexual offences part of our judicial incentive structure.

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All the best

Jai Hind ☺

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