

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK - 1
MAY, 2020

MAINS

PRELIMS

CULTURE

- Global Basava Jayanthi

ECONOMY

- Operation Twist
- Swamitva Scheme

ENVIRONMENT

- Largest Arctic Ozone hole closes itself up
- Petersberg Climate Dialogue (PCD)

GEOGRAPHY

- Tropical Cyclones over North Indian Ocean

GOVERNANCE

- Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)
- Chakmas and Hajong

HEALTH

- COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure
- Support (CARES) Program
- Immunity Passport
- Multi-System Inflammatory State

GOVERNANCE

- NEET does not violate right of Minorities: SC

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

- First-ever Digital Geological Map of moon
- Hydrogen Fuel Cell
- Mismatched Black Holes Merge
- NIF boosts new varieties of Anthurium

- Livelihood of 1.6 billion informal workers worldwide at risk: ILO
- Reshaping the Online Education

ECONOMY

- South China Sea Chaos
- USCIRF 2020 Annual Report

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

- The Kesavananda Bharti Case

POLITY

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The current affairs articles are segregated from prelims and mains perspective, such separation is maintained in terms of structure of articles. Mains articles have more focus on analysis and prelims articles have more focus on facts.

However, this doesn't mean that Mains articles don't cover facts and PT articles can't have analysis. You are suggested to read all of them for all stages of examination.

CURRENT AFFAIRS ANALYST

WEEK- 1 (MAY, 2020)

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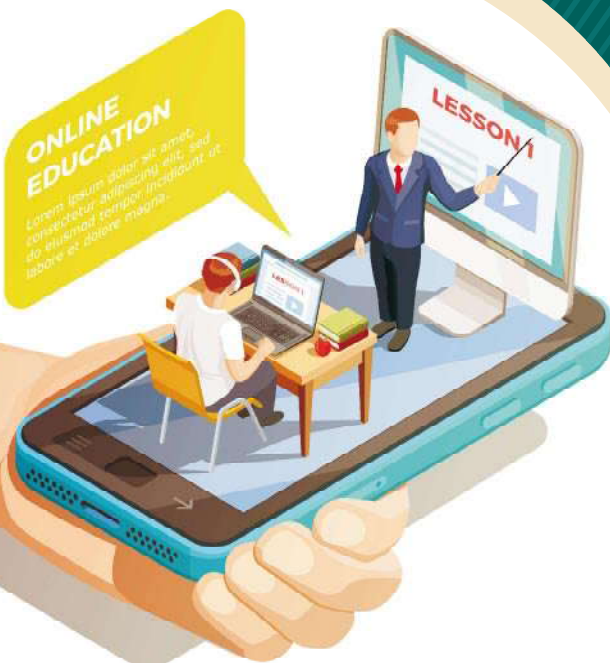
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SECTION: A
(MAINS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

LIVELIHOOD OF 1.6 BILLION INFORMAL WORKERS WORLDWIDE AT RISK: ILO

CONTEXT

Approximately 1.6 billion workers in the informal economy, nearly half of the global workforce, are in immediate danger of having their livelihoods destroyed because of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has warned in its report.

◎ BACKGROUND:

- As the world grapples with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, vulnerable workers in the informal sector at global level have been hit hard.
- As vendors working in close quarters and or as frontline care-workers in households, many are particularly vulnerable to contracting the virus.
- Countries that had full lockdown measures primarily enforced three measures on social distancing, according to the ILO report:
 - Mandatory workplace closure
 - Mandatory internal travel controls
 - Mandatory shutdown of public transport
- Partial lockdown measures, according to the report, meant that at least one of the above three measures were mandatory.
- While necessary phases of lockdown are threatening livelihoods in the informal economy, government relief efforts are frequently only reaching formal workers and businesses.

◎ ANALYSIS:

How will it impact the informal economy?

- The latest ILO data on the labour market impact of the COVID-19 pandemic reveals the devastating effect on workers in the informal economy and on hundreds of millions of enterprises worldwide.
- According to **the ILO Monitor third edition: COVID-19 and the world of work**, the drop in working hours in the current (second) quarter of 2020 is expected to be significantly worse than previously estimated.
- Of the total global working population of 3.3 billion, about 2 billion work in the "informal economy", often on short-term contracts or self-employment, and suffered a 60% collapse in their wages in the first month of the crisis.
- Of these, 1.6 billion face losing their livelihoods.
- Close to 1.1 billion workers lived and worked in countries that were in a total lockdown situation,

with an additional 304 million in countries that had partial lockdown measures.

- These workers together represent 67 percent of informal employment across the world.
- Asia and Africa both account for nearly 916 million workers from the informal economy, with an additional 178 million in countries that are in partial lockdown.
- There are 772 million informal workers under complete lockdown in the Asia Pacific region alone, according to ILO estimates, with 77 million in countries with partial lockdown measures.
- The number of workers from Africa stuck under complete lockdown measures numbered close to 164 million, while close to 101 million informal workers were under partial lockdown measures.
- Without alternative income sources, these workers and their families will have no means to survive.

Impact on enterprises:

- Worldwide, more than 436 million enterprises face high risks of serious disruption.
- These enterprises are operating in the hardest-hit economic sectors, including some 232 million in wholesale and retail, 111 million in manufacturing, 51 million in accommodation and food services, and 42 million in real estate and other business activities.

The situation in India:

- The unemployment rate fell to 21.1 percent in the week ended April 26, lowest during the coronavirus lockdown period, according to the **Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy**.
- The rate of unemployment was 26.2 percent rate in the preceding week of the month.
- While the unemployment rate declined, the labour participation rate further plunged in the period.
- The labour participation rate has dropped from 42.6 percent in the week of March 22 which was just before the national lockdown to 35.4 percent in the latest week ended April 26 i.e. a 7.2

percentage point fall, implying that 7.2 percent of the working age population have quit the labour markets during this lockdown

- The national lockdown did not just throw 72 million out of the labour force but it also drove another 85 million to some kind of desperation to look for jobs in the midst of a national lockdown when none were available.
- This desperation suggests that people were highly vulnerable to a loss of livelihood caused by the national lockdown.

What is needed at the moment?

- The ILO calls for urgent, targeted and flexible measures to support workers and businesses, particularly smaller enterprises, those in the informal economy and others who are vulnerable.
- Measures for economic reactivation should follow a job-rich approach, backed by stronger employment policies and institutions, better-resourced and comprehensive social protection systems.
- International co-ordination on stimulus packages and debt relief measures will also be critical to making recovery effective and sustainable.
- International labour standards, which already enjoy tripartite consensus, can provide a framework.

About ILO:

- The only tripartite U.N. agency, since 1919 the International Labour Organization (ILO) brings together governments, employers and workers of 187 member States, to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men.
- The ILO was founded in 1919, in the wake of a destructive war, to pursue a vision based on the premise that universal, lasting peace can be established only if it is based on social justice.
- Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, the ILO became the first specialized agency of the UN in 1946.
- India, a Founding Member of the ILO, has been a permanent member of the ILO Governing Body since 1922.

CONCLUSION:

As the Coronavirus and the employment crisis is evolving at a fast rate, the need to protect the most vulnerable becomes even more urgent. For millions of workers, no income means no food, no security and no future. Millions of businesses around the world are barely breathing. These are the real faces of the world of work. It's time to support both workers and business, particularly smaller enterprises and those in the informal economy.

RESHAPING THE ONLINE EDUCATION

CONTEXT

With the coronavirus creating havoc globally closing down schools, colleges, universities and other educational institutions, the education sector is under tremendous pressure. However, this is a major opportunity for technology-based education organizations and online education.

◎ BACKGROUND:

- In the wake of COVID-19 and evolving situation, given that the universities and the schools are shut down, more and more students are opting for online courses.
- According to UNESCO monitoring, more than 100 countries have closed their educational institutions, impacting half of the world's student population.
- In what amounts to a grand global experiment in remote learning, schools and colleges around the world have cancelled in-person training and moved to online instruction.
- Daily watch minutes are almost doubled in the past two to three days as students are at home and attending regular classes.
- Many students and professionals are also signing up for online classes, for entrance exams like the JEE, NEEET, UPSC, SSC or for upskilling.
- Professionals are thinking beyond the traditional notions of learning to further excel their careers, using the power of Internet and advanced tools and technologies.
- This signals a massive opportunity for education providers to reinvent learning to meet the needs of a new economy.

◎ ANALYSIS:

Scope of online education in India:

- India holds an imperative place in the worldwide education industry. The nation has more than 1.5 million schools with more than 260 million students enrolled and around 751 universities and 35,539 colleges.
- India has one of the biggest advanced education frameworks on the planet.
- Online education goes beyond the realms of secondary, post secondary and tertiary education.
- It also includes courses and modules for competitive exam preparation, professional skill enhancement, and other non-academic subjects.
- The online education in India is evolving at a swift pace. The number of internet users is expected to

reach 730 million by 2020, almost double from what it is today at 432 million.

- India may replace China to have the second largest users after the US.

Constitutional provisions about Education at a glance:

Education was sole responsibility of state till 1976 but constitutional amendment made it concurrent subject.

● Fundamental Rights

- **Article 21A:** Right to Education
- **Article 28:** Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions.
- **Article 29:** Equality of opportunity in educational institutions.
- **Article 30:** Right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.

● Directive Principles:

- **Article 41:** Right to work, to education and to public assistance in certain cases
- **Article 45:** Provision for free and compulsory education for children and Provision for early childhood care and education to children below the age of six years
- **Article 46:** It provides for special care to the promotion of education and economic interests of the scheduled caste, scheduled tribes and the weaker sections of society.

New National Education Policy:

- At the launch of India's 2020-21 Budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman spoke about the need to make India's young people more employable through better higher education opportunities.
- By 2030, India is set to have the largest working-age population in the world. Not only do they need literacy, they need both job and life skills.
- The government is currently working on a new national education policy. A draft version of the

policy outlines the important role online learning could play in reforming India's education system and expanding access to higher education.

- The policy encourages Indian institutions not only to develop their own online programs, but also to recognize and award credit for online programs offered by foreign institutions.
- The policy proposes that some foreign institutions may be invited to operate in India -- something the country has long resisted.

Government initiatives promoting online education in India:

Digital India initiative in mind, the government is aiming to give online education a big push, in an attempt to widen the reach of higher education. Following are the major initiatives taken by the government to promote online education in India:

- **SWAYAM:** The 'Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds' (SWAYAM) is an integrated platform for offering online courses and covering school (9th to 12th) to Post Graduate Level.
- **SWAYAM Prabha:** It is an initiative to provide 32 High Quality Educational Channels through DTH (Direct to Home) across the length and breadth of the country on 24X7 basis.
- **National Digital Library (NDL):** It is a project to develop a framework of virtual repository of learning resources with a single-window search facility.
- **Free and Open Source Software for Education (FOSSEE):** FOSSEE is a project promoting the use of open source software in educational institutions.
- **E-Yantra:** It is a project for enabling effective education across engineering colleges in India on embedded systems and Robotics.
- **Other major initiatives include:**
 - ▶ UG/PG MOOCs for non-technology courses
 - ▶ e-PG Pathshala or e-content containing modules on social science, arts, fine arts, natural and mathematical science
 - ▶ CEC-UGC YouTube channel
 - ▶ Vidwan – a database of experts who provide information to peers and prospective collaborators,
 - ▶ NEAT – an initiative by AICTE based on the PPP model to enhance the employability skill among students, in collaboration with Education Technology Companies and National Digital Library (NDL), a repository of learning resources with single window facility.

- ▶ Many noteworthy initiatives have been taken up like Spoken Tutorial, Google Classroom and so on.

Significance of online education:

- **Cost effectiveness:** If online education becomes a norm, no doubt the benefits are many, including cost effectiveness.
- **Quality education for all:** Students may also no longer travel to other countries to attain a quality education that they are not able to receive in their home country for socio-economic or political reasons.
- **Access to everyone irrespective of location:** Online learning helps to eliminate borders and barriers, both social and physical. Online courses are a great solution to the challenges that these people face as they are provided with high-quality education and on their own place and time.
- **A wide field:** Increase in employment is another important aspect of this revolution. With Online Education, skillful trainers and teachers can expand their reach. Students in India can receive education by the top notch professors and instructors in the world.
- **Updated knowledge:** Online Education provides professionals with the flexibility to improve and update their skill set while working simultaneously. This helps them in staying updated about the existing advancements and technologies.

The perils of online learning:

- **Not considerable as a permanent option:** Despite the high momentum, online options are still not considered permanent alternatives to classrooms. The sector can at best make a useful supplementary learning system.
- **Lack of cultural experience:** It needs to be understood that it is not just the classroom that prompts many to study internationally, but also the irreplaceable cultural experiences that international study offers.
- **Uncertainty & quality issues:** Other issues, such as uncertainty over accreditation and quality control also remain unresolved.
- **Lack of infrastructure:** Lack of proper IT infrastructure in smaller education centers can be a deterrent as well.
- **Issue for poor households:** A sudden shift to online learning is bound to worsen the learning gap for low-income households, poor districts, and poorer countries. Online education is an elite concept that will only work well in developed countries. In India, where midday meals have

great appeal to school children, setting up online classes is not a feasible idea.

- Online education in India faces many practical issues, like:
 - ▶ stable electricity
 - ▶ a reliable internet connection
 - ▶ lack of awareness on cybersecurity and other technical glitches
- The above challenges could easily impede a student or teacher's ability to get the most out of the education experience. Overall, moving

the physical education to the virtual world is a mammoth task, but with policymakers and leaders in the education sector taking the realm, overcoming these challenges is not insurmountable.

◎ CONCLUSION:

Summing it up, at this stage, online education is all set to transform the education scenario in India and the world. However, it would require a significant change in pedagogy to take advantage of innovation in this space.



SOUTH CHINA SEA CHAOS

CONTEXT

A United States Navy warship conducted a “freedom of navigation operation” aimed at challenging China’s claims in the South China Sea, the second such operation in as many days near disputed islands that the US has accused Beijing of militarizing.

◎ BACKGROUND:

- The move came amid a rise in US-China tensions over the novel coronavirus epidemic, in which Washington has accused Beijing of hiding and downplaying the initial outbreak after the virus emerged late last year in the Chinese city of Wuhan.
- The US State Department had earlier said China was taking advantage of the region’s focus on the coronavirus pandemic to “coerce its neighbours”.
- Recently, China sought to further advance its territorial claims when it announced that the Parcel and the nearby Spratly Islands, Macclesfield Bank and their surrounding waters would be administered under two new districts of Sansha city, which China created on nearby Woody Island in 2012.
- It also announced official Chinese names for 80 islands and other geographical features in the South China Sea, including reefs, seamounts, shoals and ridges, 55 of them submerged in water.
- It also established a “mental-health facility” in Mischief Reef, which has been declared by the international tribunal in The Hague as within the Philippines’ exclusive economic zone.
- China stakes its claim to the sea on its controversial nine-dash line demarcation; a 2,000 kilometre (1,242 mile) U-shaped dashed line that first appeared in maps of revolutionary China in the 1940s.

◎ ANALYSIS:

Knowing the South China Sea:

- South China Sea is bounded on the northeast by the **Taiwan Strait** (by which it is connected to the East China Sea); on the east by **Taiwan** and **the Philippines**; on the southeast and south by **Borneo**, the southern limit of the **Gulf of Thailand**, and the east coast of the **Malay Peninsula**; and on the west and north by the **Asian mainland**.
- Most of its hundreds of small islands, islets and rocks were originally uninhabited. The Parcel

and Spratly chains contain the biggest islands. Scarborough Shoal (Bajo de Masinloc or Panatag Shoal) is a small outcrop in the east.

- Beijing and most other countries know it as the South China Sea. Hanoi calls it the East Sea and Manila officially refers to it as the West Philippine Sea.

Importance of South China Sea:

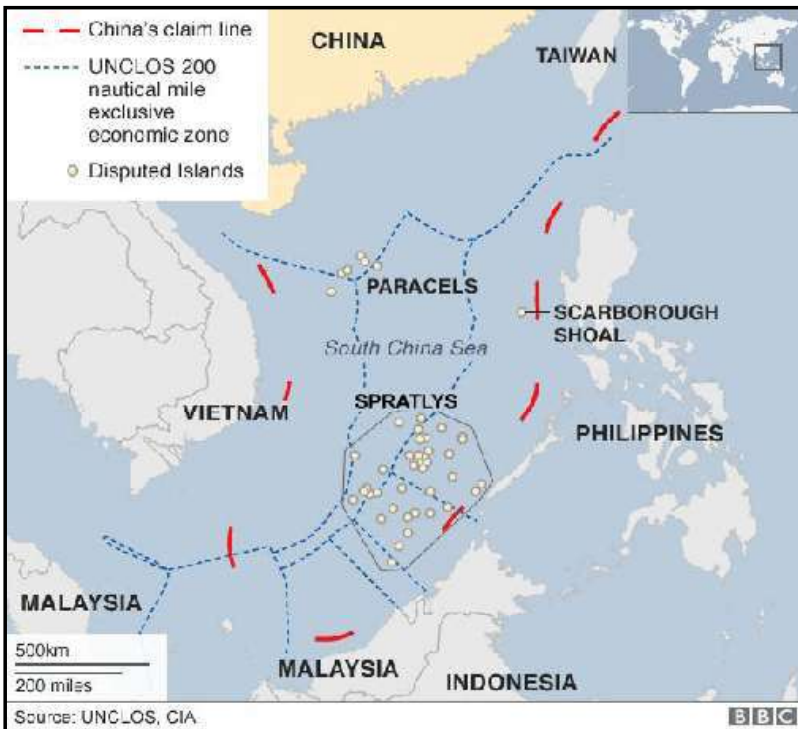
- The South China Sea is a key commercial thoroughfare connecting Asia with Europe and Africa, and its seabed is rich with natural resources. One third of global shipping, or a total of US\$3.37 trillion of international trade, passes through the South China Sea.
- About 80 percent of China’s oil imports arrive via the Strait of Malacca, in Indonesia, and then sail across the South China Sea to reach China.
- The sea is also believed to contain major reserves of natural resources, such as natural gas and oil.
- The South China Sea also accounts for 10 percent of the world’s fisheries, making it a key source of food for hundreds of millions of people.
- The sea is home to some of the world’s biggest coral reefs and, with marine life being depleted close to coasts, it is important as a source of fish to feed growing populations.

What is the issue all about?

- The South China Sea, one of the world’s busiest waterways, is subject to several overlapping territorial disputes involving China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei.
- There are six players in the complex web of overlapping territorial claims in the South China Sea.
- China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei use differing versions of history to back their assertions of sovereignty.
- China claims the biggest share, maintaining its right to almost 90 percent of the South China Sea, occupying all of the Parcel Islands and nine reefs in the Spratley’s, including Fiery Cross Reef and Johnson South Reef.
- The conflict has remained unresolved for decades but has emerged as a flashpoint in China-US relations in Asia.

- It is a dispute over territory and sovereignty over ocean areas, and the Paracels and the Spratlys - two island chains claimed in whole or in part by a number of countries.
- Alongside the fully fledged islands, there are dozens of rocky outcrops, atolls, sandbanks and reefs, such as the Scarborough Shoal.
- Over the years, the claimants have seized control of a raft of sea features, including rocks, islands and low-tide elevations.

- It showed the two island groups falling entirely within its territory. Those claims are mirrored by Taiwan.
- However, critics say China has not clarified its claims sufficiently - and that the nine-dash line that appears on Chinese maps encompassing almost the entirety of the South China Sea includes no coordinates.
- It is also not clear whether China claims only land territory within the nine-dash line, or all the territorial waters within the line as well.



What role does the US play in the dispute?

- The US has wide-ranging security commitments in East Asia, and is allied with several of the countries bordering the South China Sea, such as the Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam.
- Furthermore, the South China Sea is a vital trade route in the global supply chain, used by American companies who produce goods in the region.
- The Spratlys, called the Nansha Islands by China, are in the southern portion of the 1.3 million square mile-South China Sea.
- While several countries have claims on the island chain, the US has long accused China of militarizing the Spratly Islands by deploying anti-ship cruise missiles and long-range surface-to-air missiles to Chinese outposts there.

Who claims what?

- China claims more than 80 percent, while Vietnam claims sovereignty over the Paracel Islands and the Spratly Islands.
- The Philippines asserts ownership of the Spratly archipelago and the Scarborough Shoal, while Brunei and Malaysia have claimed sovereignty over southern parts of the sea and some of Spratly Islands.
- China claims by far the largest portion of territory - an area defined by the "nine-dash line".
- China's "nine-dash line" is a geographical marker used to assert its claim. It stretches as far as 2,000km from the Chinese mainland, reaching waters close to Indonesia and Malaysia.
- Beijing says its right to the area goes back centuries to when the Paracel and Spratly island chains were regarded as integral parts of the Chinese nation, and in 1947 it issued a map detailing its claims.

- Although the US does not officially align with any of the claimants, it has conducted **Freedom of Navigation operations**, designed to challenge what Washington considers excessive claims and grant the free passage of commercial ships in its waters.

Regulation of South China Sea:

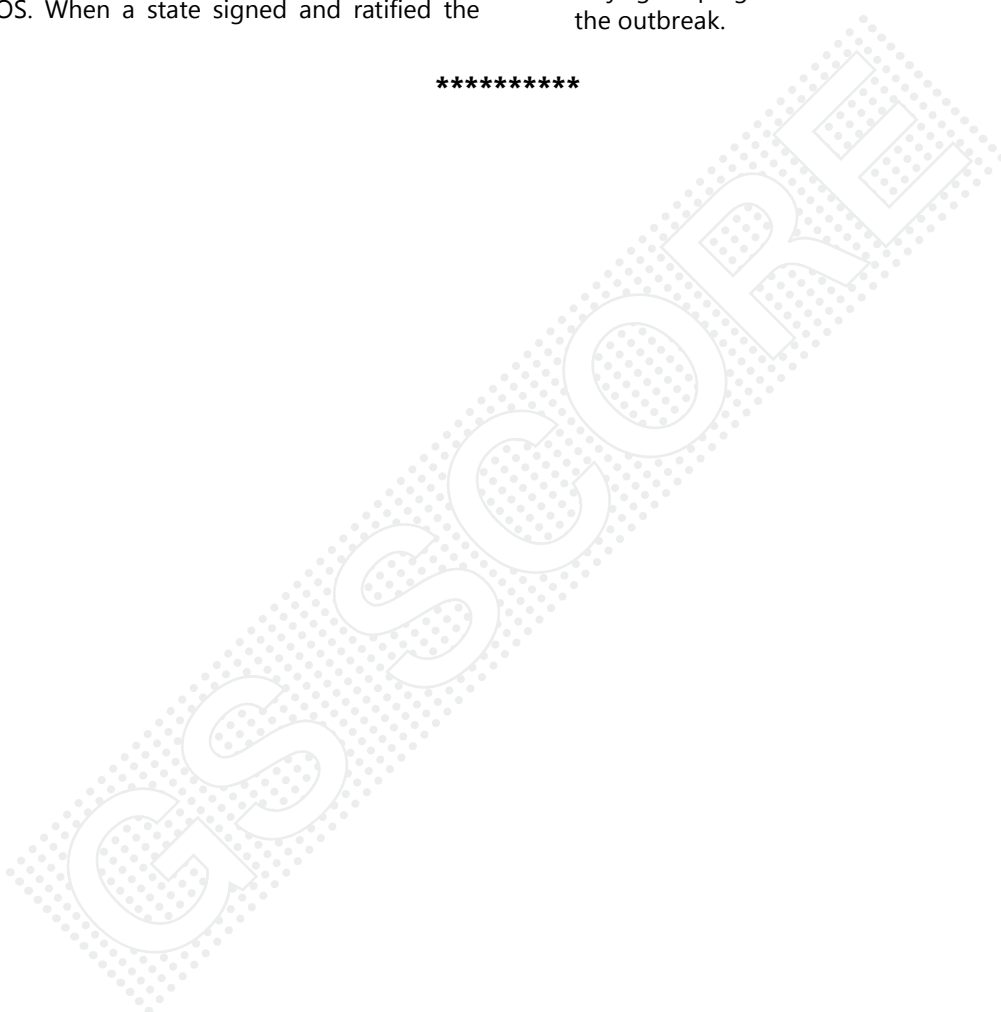
- All the claimants in the South China Sea – Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam – are parties to the two most important legal mechanisms dealing with multilateral disputes:
 - the United Nations Charter (UN Charter)
 - the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
- Under the regimes of these conventions, state parties have the obligation to settle their disputes by peaceful means, such as negotiation, regional arrangements, international arbitration, or courts/tribunals.

- Unlike the UN Charter, UNCLOS goes a step further and prescribed detailed methods of solving conflicts at sea for its parties in Chapter XV.
- In general, the consent of states is placed at the center of all dispute settlement mechanisms.
- However, UNCLOS particularly opens a chance for a state party individually to bring its conflict with another state before an international court or arbitration when it comes to certain types of disputes.
- These are called compulsory procedures, entailing binding decisions in section 2 of chapter XV of UNCLOS. When a state signed and ratified the

Convention, it is understood that it has agreed with this settlement means in advance.

◎ **CONCLUSION:**

China and the Philippines, along with Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan, have been locked for decades in an increasingly tense conflict over mostly barren islands, reefs and atolls and rich fishing waters in the South China Sea. However, the coronavirus pandemic has been a growing source of tension between the world's two largest economies, with both Washington D.C. and Beijing heaping criticism on each others' handling of the outbreak.



USCIRF 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

CONTEXT

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom has re-entered India into its list of 'Country of Particular Concern' because of the Modi government's policies and treatment towards the Muslim population.

◎ BACKGROUND:

- The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, a government body that monitors conditions abroad and U.S. responses, moved India to its category of greatest concern in an annual report.
- USCIRF, as the group is called, has no power to enforce its recommendations, but the State Department is required to consider them.
- India last received a similar rating from the watchdog in 2004, also a period of heightened concern over a Hindu nationalist government's treatment of religious minorities, especially Muslims and Christians.
- In 2002, more than 1,000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed in three days of riots in the state of Gujarat.
- This is the first time in more than 15 years that India has been designated a "country of particular concern".
- In fact, the 2006 Annual Report had appreciated the "positive developments" in affecting freedom of religion.
- The 2013 report had said "there has been no large-scale communal violence against religious minorities in India since 2008", but had pointed out that in some cases, redressal had been slow and ineffective.
- The annual reports for the last two years have been warning India of a "continued downward trend" with regards to religious tolerance and religious freedom violations.
- Fundamental right to freedom of religion is guaranteed under **Articles 25, 26, 27 and 28 of Part III of the Indian Constitution.**
 - ▶ **Article 25:** Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion
 - ▶ **Article 26:** Freedom to run religious affairs
 - ▶ **Article 27:** No person shall be compelled to pay any tax for the promotion or maintenance of any religion
 - ▶ **Article 28:** Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions
- It is religious freedom in the background of a secular state. It eliminates God from the matters of the state and ensures that no one shall be discriminated against on the ground of religion.
- Also, India acceded to the **International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)** and so pledged to adhere to the international standards of human rights enshrined in the treaty.

Key-highlights of the Report:

- The report documents significant developments during 2019, including remarkable progress in Sudan and a sharp downward turn in India, and make recommendations to enhance the U.S. government's promotion of freedom of religion or belief abroad in 2020.
- Instead of using its own "Tier 2" category, as in past reports, the 2020 Annual Report recommends 15 countries for placement on the **State Department's Special Watch List (SWL)** for severe violations.
 - ▶ These include four that the State Department placed on that list in December 2019—Cuba, Nicaragua, Sudan, and Uzbekistan—as well as 11 others—Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Central African Republic (CAR), Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, and Turkey.
- USCIRF had recommended Sudan, Uzbekistan, and CAR for CPC designation in its 2019 Annual Report; the SWL recommendations this year are based on improved conditions in those countries.

◎ ANALYSIS:

What is freedom to religion?

- According to the Constitution of India, freedom to run religious affairs include the freedom to establish and maintain charitable institutions either to manage its own affairs in the matters of religion or to acquire and own movable and immovable property and to take care of such property, without infringing the law.

- The 2020 Annual Report further recommends to the State Department six non-state actors for designation as “entities of particular concern” (EPCs) for systematic, ongoing, egregious violations.
 - ▶ These consist of five groups that the State Department designated in December 2019—al-Shabaab in Somalia, Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Houthis in Yemen, Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) in Afghanistan, and the Taliban in Afghanistan—plus one other—Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Syria.
- **Countries of particular concern:** The state department designates nine “countries of particular concern” on religious freedom – China, Eritrea, Iran, Myanmar, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.
- Pakistan, India’s historic rival, was added by the state department in 2018 after years of appeals by the commission, which was appalled by attacks on minorities and abuse of blasphemy laws.
- In its latest report, the commission asked that all nine countries remain on the list. In addition to India, it sought the inclusion of four more – Nigeria, Russia, Syria and Vietnam.
- It called on the US to impose punitive measures, including visa bans on Indian officials believed responsible and grant funding to civil society groups that monitor hate speech.

USCIRF:

- USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission, the first of its kind in the world, dedicated to defending the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad.
- USCIRF reviews the facts and circumstances of religious freedom violations and makes policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress.
- Established by the US Government in 1998 after the inaction of the International Religious Freedom Act, recommendations of USCIRF are non-binding to the State Department.
- Traditionally, India does not recognize the view of the USCIRF. For more than a decade, it has denied visas to members of the USCIRF.

What’s there for India in the report?

- In the 2020 edition of its annual report on International Religious Freedom, the USCIRF

alleged that in 2019, religious freedom conditions in India “experienced a drastic turn downward”, with religious minorities under increasing assault.

- In India, **the Citizenship (Amendment) Act** potentially exposes millions of Muslims to detention, deportation, and statelessness when the government completes its planned nationwide **National Register of Citizens.**
- Detailing Modi government’s policies in recent months that targeted Muslim population in particular, the report featured various BJP leader’s hateful comments against minority population.
- The report **recommended to the US government** to impose targeted sanction on Indian government agencies and officials responsible for severe violations of religious freedom by freezing those individuals’ assets and/or barring their entry into the United States under human rights-related financial and visa authorities, citing specific religious freedom violations.
- The USCIRF Commissioner appreciated Pakistan’s efforts saying, **“One of the things that has been important for us with Pakistan, is that the government has been willing to engage in dialogue about how religious freedom concerns can be addressed.”**

How India reacted?

- India rejected the observations made for the country in the USCIRF Annual Report. It’s biased and tendentious comments against India are not new. But on this occasion, its misrepresentation has reached new levels.
- The organization has not been able to carry its own Commissioners in its endeavour.
- India regards it as an organization of particular concern and will treat it accordingly.

© CONCLUSION:

Indeed, the issue is serious. The level of violence is expected to increase as the perpetrators continue to enjoy impunity for their crimes. Similarly, as the victims of such atrocities are forgotten by the government, they have little faith in ever seeing any justice done. This can only lead to ever-growing mistrust between the government and religious minorities in India. Nothing will change unless the government takes decisive steps to address the issue of religiously motivated violence.

THE KESAVANANDA BHARTI CASE

CONTEXT

India is celebrating 47 years of the decision in *Kesavananda Bharti v. State of Kerala*, wherein the Supreme Court of India laid down the 'Basic Structure Doctrine'.

◎ BACKGROUND:

- Exactly 47 years ago, the Supreme Court passed its landmark judgment in *Kesavananda Bharati vs State of Kerala*, considered among the most significant constitutional cases in India's judicial history.
- By a 7-6 verdict, a 13-judge Constitution Bench ruled that the 'basic structure' of the Constitution is inviolable, and could not be amended by Parliament.
- The basic structure doctrine has since been regarded as a tenet of Indian constitutional law.
- The Constitution of a country is the fundamental law of the land. It is based on this document that all other laws are made and enforced.
- Under some Constitutions, certain parts are immune from amendments, and are given a special status compared to other provisions.
- Since the Indian Constitution was first adopted, debates have raged as to the extent of power that Parliament should have to amend key provisions.
- In the early years of Independence, the Supreme Court conceded absolute power to Parliament in amending the Constitution, as was seen in the verdicts in *Shankari Prasad (1951)* and *Sajjan Singh (1965)*.
- The reason for this is believed to be that in those initial years, the apex court had reposed faith in the wisdom of the then political leadership, when leading freedom fighters were serving as Members of Parliament.
- In subsequent years, as the Constitution kept being amended at will to suit the interests of the ruling dispensation, the Supreme Court in *Golaknath (1967)* held that Parliament's amending power could not touch Fundamental Rights, and this power would be only with a Constituent Assembly.
- He had certain pieces of land in the sect which were owned by him in his name.
- The state government of Kerala introduced the **Land Reforms Amendment Act, 1969**. According to the act, the government was entitled to acquire some of the sect's land of which Keshvananda Bharti was the chief.
- On 21st March 1970, Keshvananda Bharti moved to Supreme Court under **Section 32 of the Indian Constitution for enforcement of his rights which guaranteed under:**
 - ▶ **Article 25 (Right to practice and propagate religion)**
 - ▶ **Article 26 (Right to manage religious affairs)**
 - ▶ **Article 14 (Right to equality)**
 - ▶ **Article 19(1)(f) (freedom to acquire property)**
 - ▶ **Article 31 (Compulsory Acquisition of Property)**
- When the petition was still under consideration by the court, the Kerala Government another act i.e. **Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act, 1971**.
- After the landmark case of **Golaknath v. State of Punjab**, the Parliament passed a series of Amendments in order to overrule the judgment of the *Golaknath* case.
- In 1971, the 24th Amendment was passed, In 1972, 25th and 29th Amendment were passed subsequently.
- All these amendments were under challenge in *Kesavananda*. Since *Golaknath* was decided by 11 judges, a larger bench was required to test its correctness.
- Therefore, 13 judges were to sit on the *Kesavananda* case.

◎ ANALYSIS:

How it all started?

- Keshvananda Bharati was the chief of Edneer Mutt which is a religious sect in Kasaragod district of Kerala.

Issues of the case:

- Whether constitutional amendment as per Article 368 applicable to fundamental rights also?
- Whether 24th Amendment Act 1971 is valid?

- Whether Section 2(a), 2(b) and 3 of 25th amendment is valid?
- Whether 29th Amendment Act 1971 is valid?

The Doctrine of Basic Structure:

- According to the 'Doctrine of Basic Structure', the Parliament has **unlimited power** to amend the Constitution subject to the sole condition that such amendments must not change the **basic structure of the Constitution**.
- The Parliament should not in any manner interfere with the basic features of the Constitution without which the Constitution will be left spiritless and lose its very essence.
- The basic structure of the Constitution was not mentioned by the bench and was left to the interpretation of the courts.
- The Courts need to see and interpret if a particular amendment violates the basic structure of our Indian Constitution or not.
- The court found that as contended by the respondents actually there is a difference between ordinary law and an amendment.
- Keshvananda Bharti's case to some extent overruled Golaknath's case. The court, in this case, answered the question which was left unanswered in Golaknath's case in relation to the power of Parliament to amend provisions of the Constitution.
- The court found that the word 'amend' which was included in Article 368 does not refer to amendments that can change the basic structure of the constitution.
- If Parliament wants to amend a particular provision of the Constitution then such amendment would need to go through the test of basic structure.
- It was also decided that since the Parliament has an unlimited power to amend the Constitution subject to the basic structure then Parliament can also amend Fundamental Rights as far as they are not included in the basic structure of the Constitution.
- 24th Amendment was upheld by the Bench whereas the 25th Amendment's 2nd part was struck down.

- The 25th Amendment's validation was subjected to two conditions:
 - ▶ The court agreed that the word amount and compensation is not equivalent to each other but still the amount which is provided by the Government to the landlords should not be unreasonable.
 - ▶ The amount need not be equal to the market value but should be reasonable and closely related to the present market value.
- The 1st part of the 25th Amendment was upheld but it was subject to the provision that the prohibition of judiciary's reach will be struck down.

The judgment in Kesavananda Bharati:

- The Constitutional Bench, whose members shared serious ideological differences, ruled by a 7-6 verdict that Parliament should be restrained from altering the 'basic structure' of the Constitution.
- The court held that under Article 368, which provides Parliament amending powers, something must remain of the original Constitution that the new amendment would change.
- The court did not define the 'basic structure', and only listed a few principles — federalism, secularism, democracy — as being its part. Since then, the court has been adding new features to this concept.
- The majority opinion was delivered by Chief Justice of India S M Sikri, and Justices K S Hegde, A K Mukherjea, J M Shelat, A N Grover, P Jaganmohan Reddy, and H R Khanna. Justices A N Ray, D G Palekar, K K Mathew, M H Beg, S N Dwivedi, and Y V Chandrachud dissented.

◎ CONCLUSION:

Since Kesavananda, the 'basic structure' doctrine has been interpreted to include the supremacy of the Constitution, the rule of law, Independence of the judiciary, doctrine of separation of powers, federalism, secularism, sovereign democratic republic, the parliamentary system of government, the principle of free and fair elections, welfare state, etc.

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GLOBAL BASAVA JAYANTHI

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
 - Global Basava Jayanthi – 2020 held digitally by connecting followers in India and abroad.
- ◎ **ABOUT:**
 - Basava Jayanthi is an annual event celebrated in the honour of the birth of Vishwaguru Basaveshwara or Lord Basavanna, the 12th century philosopher and social reformer and the founding saint of the **Lingayat faith**.

Quick facts about Basavanna:

- Basavanna was born in Karnataka's Ingaleshwar, Bagewadi town, which is 20 km away from Hungund taluk.
- He grew up in Kudalasangama and married Gangambikel, the daughter of Bijjala's (one of the famous Chalukya kings) prime minister.
- Some of the works credited to Basavanna include Vachana such as the Shat-sthala-vachana, Kala-jnana-vachana, Mantra-gopya, Ghatachakra-vachana and Raja-yoga-vachana.
- Basava advocated that every human being was equal, irrespective of caste and that all forms of manual labour were equally important.
- **In 2015, the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi, inaugurated the statue of Basavanna along the bank of the river Thames at Lambeth in London.**
- Furthermore, Basavanna is the first Kannadiga in whose honour a commemorative coin has been minted in recognition of his social reforms.
- He is also known as Bhaktibhandari (literally, the treasurer of devotion), or Basaveswara (Lord Basava).

- The festival is observed by people of the **Lingayat community** mostly in **Karnataka** and parts of **Maharashtra, Telangana** and **Andhra Pradesh** with much fanfare.
- On this day, people exchange greetings, meet each other and remember Lord Basavanna, recite his teachings and vachanas.
- The objective of the festival is to pass the message of '**Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**' (**universal brotherhood**). His message found expression in the form of Vachanas that define a new way of looking at God and life.

Lingayat community:

- The Lingayat/Veerashaiva community, a politically dominant group in Karnataka, are devotees of Shiva.
- The Lingayats follow 12th-century saint-philosopher Basavanna who had rejected ritualistic worship and pre-eminence of the Vedas.
- The Veerashaivas sect of the community also worships Shiva idols and practises other Hindu customs.
- The Lingayats consider the Veershaivas to be part of Hinduism as they follow Hindu customs while the Veerashaivas think the community was an ancient religion established by Shiva and Basavanna was one of its saints.

Anubhava Mantapa:

- Basavanna staunchly believed in a caste-less society where each individual had equal opportunity to rise up in life.

- To give force to the noble mission, he conceptualised **Anubhava Mantapa** – an academy of **mystics, saints and philosophers of the Lingayata faith and acted as the fountainhead of thoughts on common human values** and ethics.
- Presided over another great mystic **Allama Prabhu**, the Anubhava Mantapa also had numerous Sharanas – people from the lower strata of society – as participants.
- Basavanna himself joined as a participant in the Anubhava Mantapa with other greats like **Akka Mahadevi** and **Channabasavanna**.

Vira Saiva movement:

- Basavanna was a reformer. He became the leader of the Vira Saiva movement. He established a cult that is accepted today by many people.
- It developed a school of poor priests. It abolished the old priestly class. It adopted the vernacular as the medium for inculcating the supreme truth into the people. It gave to women an important place in religious and social life.
- It prescribed one ideal of realisation for every individual, high or low.

OPERATION TWIST

◎ CONTEXT:

- **With the objective to help monetary transmission, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to bring back its bond swapping programmed billed as India's Operation Twist.**

◎ ABOUT:

- Operation Twist was a term given to a monetary policy tool used by the United States on two occasions to influence market interest rates.
 - the original "Operation Twist" was conducted in 1961
 - the second one was in 2011
- In both scenarios, the objective was to lower long-term interest rates.
- The financial tool also helps in either reducing liquidity in the market or increasing it, based on the simultaneous sale and purchase of bonds.
- Operation Twist was first introduced to the world by the US in a bid to lower long-term interest rates and to provide a boost to the economy by making credit cheaper for businesses, industries and other borrowers.
- In both scenarios where the US initiated Operation Twist, it was to combat a period of recession and prolonged slow growth.
- Like the United States, India has been encountering a period of a prolonged period of slow growth since the first half of 2019.
- The simultaneous purchase and sale of bonds or securities through open market operations (OMOs) help in changing the shape of the yield curve.
- In India's context, Operation Twist is a bid to bring down interest rates on long-term loans--something that it has failed despite five rate cuts by RBI this year.

Open market operation:

- Open market operation is the sale and purchase of government securities and treasury bills by RBI or the central bank of the country.
- The objective of OMO is to regulate the money supply in the economy.
- When the RBI wants to increase the money supply in the economy, it purchases the government securities from the market and it sells government securities to suck out liquidity from the system.

- RBI carries out the OMO through commercial banks and does not directly deal with the public.
- OMO is one of the tools that RBI uses to smoothen the liquidity conditions through the year and minimise its impact on the interest rate and inflation rate levels.

Key-highlights:

- The RBI will conduct purchase and sale of government securities under open market operations (OMO) for Rs. 10,000 crore each on 27 April.
- Typically, the central bank conducts OMO sales to suck out excess liquidity in the financial system, or OMO purchases to infuse liquidity in a single day.
- The central bank will purchase long-dated securities with tenor between 6-10 years aggregating Rs. 10,000 crore, while it will sell short-dated securities maturing June 2020, October 2020 and April 2021.
- The benchmark 10-year bond yield dropped 20 basis points to 6.02% from previous closing of 6.22% following the announcement.

- RBI had last used this tool in January when the debt market was showing signs of stress due to government's borrowing program of Rs. 7.1 lakh crore for fiscal year 2019-20.
- Operation Twist had helped in better transmission of the central bank's 135 basis points of rate cuts last year.

Impact of the decision:

- The central bank's simultaneous sale and purchase of government bonds, along the lines of the US Federal Reserve's Operation Twist, is expected to stimulate private sector borrowing.
- This move will help to neutralise liquidity in the system as RBI looks to bring down rates.
- It is expected to bring down rates even on corporate bond papers. This will force banks to pass on lower rates to customers.

SWAMITVA SCHEME

◎ CONTEXT:

- **PM Narendra Modi launched the Swamitva scheme on Panchayati Raj Divas. The scheme is already being run in pilot mode across 6 states.**

◎ ABOUT:

- 'Swamitva Yojana' or Ownership Scheme aims to map residential land ownership in the rural sector using modern technology like the use of drones.
- It will create property ownership record of land in villages and empower rural population with grant of official document confirming their ownership of land titles.
- **Measurement:** The residential land in villages will be measured using drones to create a non-disputable record. It is the latest technology for surveying and measuring of land.
 - Drones will draw a digital map of every property falling within the geographical limits of a village and demarcate the boundaries of every revenue area.
- The scheme will be carried out in close coordination with the Central Panchayati Raj ministry, Survey of India, Panchayati Raj departments and Revenue departments of various states.

- **Property card:** Property card for every property in the village will be prepared by states using accurate measurements delivered by drone-mapping.
 - These cards will be given to property owners and will be recognised by the land revenue records department.
- The scheme is piloted by the Panchayati Raj ministry of the Union government.
- The property records for a village will also be maintained at the Panchayat level, allowing for the collection of associated taxes from the owners.
- The money generated from these local taxes will be used to build rural infrastructure and facilities.

What was the need of such scheme?

- The need for this Yojana was felt since several villagers in the rural areas do not have papers proving ownership of their land.
- In most states, survey and measurement of the populated areas in the villages has not been done for the purpose of attestation/verification of properties.

Benefits of the scheme:

- **Clarity over property rights:** The Swamitva scheme helps to map rural inhabited lands using drones and latest survey methods. It will ensure streamlined planning, revenue collection and provide clarity over property rights in rural areas.
- **Easy financing:** This will open up avenues for applying for loans from financial institutions by the owners.
- **Settled disputes:** Disputes related to property would also be settled through the title deeds allotted through this scheme.
- **Appreciation of property value:** Freeing the residential properties including land of title disputes and the creation of an official record is likely to result in appreciation in the market value of the properties.
- **Better utilisation of funds:** The accurate property records can be used for facilitating tax collection, new building and structure plan, issuing of permits and for thwarting attempts at property grabbing.

LARGEST ARCTIC OZONE HOLE CLOSES ITSELF UP

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
 - Scientists have revealed that the largest hole ever observed in the ozone layer above the Arctic last month has healed itself.
- ◎ **ABOUT:**
 - The ozone layer protects Earth from Sun's harmful ultraviolet rays. It is found in Earth's stratosphere, a layer of the atmosphere around 10–50 kilometres above sea level.
 - Stratospheric ozone is constantly produced by the action of the sun's ultraviolet radiation on oxygen molecules (known as photochemical reactions).
 - Ozone is found in two different parts of our atmosphere.
 - **Ground level or "bad" ozone:** It is a human health irritant and component of smog. It is found in the lower atmosphere (troposphere) and has nothing to do with the "ozone hole."
 - **High level or "good" ozone:** It occurs in the stratosphere and accounts for the vast majority of atmospheric ozone.
 - Although ozone is created primarily at tropical latitudes, large-scale air circulation patterns in the lower stratosphere move ozone toward the poles, where its concentration builds up.

Ozone:

- Ozone is a special form of oxygen, made up of three oxygen atoms rather than the usual two oxygen atoms.
- It usually forms when some type of radiation or electrical discharge separates the two atoms in an oxygen molecule (O_2), which can then individually recombine with other oxygen molecules to form ozone (O_3).

How ozone works?

- The sun emits electromagnetic radiation at different wavelengths, meaning energy at different intensities.
- The atmosphere acts like a multi-layer shield that protects Earth from dangerous solar radiation.
- The stratospheric ozone layer absorbs ultraviolet (UV) radiation, preventing dangerous UV rays from hitting Earth's surface and harming living organisms.
- Ozone is good at trapping a type of radiation called ultraviolet radiation, or UV light, which can penetrate organisms' protective layers, like skin, damaging DNA molecules in plants and animals.
- There are two major types of UV light: UVB and UVA.
 - **UVB** is the cause of skin conditions like sunburns, and cancers like basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma.
 - **UVA** light is even more harmful than UVB, penetrating more deeply and causing a deadly skin cancer, melanoma, and premature aging.

Formation of hole in the ozone layer:

- The hole formed earlier this year and reached its maximum size in March some 11 miles above the surface of the Earth.
- It was the largest ozone hole ever documented over the Arctic, beating the previous record holder, which was observed during the 2011 winter.
- Scientists had attributed the forming of the hole in the ozone layer above **the North Pole to unusually low temperatures in the atmosphere above the region.**
- The researchers from the German Aerospace Center (DLR) discovered the hole using data from the Copernicus Sentinel-5P satellite.

Reason behind Ozone depletion:

- Ozone depletion occurs when chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and halons—gases formerly found in aerosol spray cans and refrigerants—are released into the atmosphere (see details below).
- CFCs and halons cause chemical reactions that break down ozone molecules, reducing ozone's ultraviolet radiation-absorbing capacity.

Reasons behind recovery:

- According to the scientists the recovery of the hole is not due to the reduced pollution levels due to COVID-19 lock down. The closing was because of a phenomenon called the polar vortex.
- High-altitude currents called polar vortex are responsible for bringing cold air to north pole and the subsequent healing of the ozone layer.

PETERSBERG CLIMATE DIALOGUE (PCD)

© CONTEXT:

- The 11th Petersberg Climate Dialogue (PCD) took place in a virtual format and brought together ministers from 30 countries to discuss climate action.

◎ **ABOUT:**

- The Petersberg Climate Dialogue series was launched in 2010, after the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference, and has been held annually.
- The event is hosted annually by Germany. The Dialogue facilitates open discussions in small groups on key issues in international climate policy.
- The Dialogue is intended to “create a space for close and constructive exchanges among ministers” on climate action.

A decisive meeting for climate diplomacy:

- The virtual XI Petersberg Climate Dialogue was **co-chaired by Germany and the United Kingdom (UK)** and was attended by about 30 countries including India.
- The Dialogue is of particular importance this year as **COP26**, originally scheduled for November, has been postponed to an unknown date in 2021 due to the coronavirus.
- At the summit, the EU was set to announce its intention to raise its current climate target for 2030.
- Under the **Paris Accord**, governments promised to do so every five years, taking into account the latest scientific findings.

Paris Accord:

The Paris Agreement is a landmark environmental accord that was adopted by nearly every nation in 2015 to address climate change and its negative impacts.

The deal aims to substantially reduce global greenhouse gas emissions in an effort to limit the global temperature increase in this century to 2 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels, while pursuing means to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees.

- However, current commitments are not enough to keep global warming below 2°C.
- The European Commission has decided to increase the EU’s climate target from the current 40% reduction in emissions to 50 or 55%.
- However, the German government has not yet agreed on which of the two figures it would support.
- The Commission is currently conducting a public consultation, looking to propose a new target in September.

Way forward:

Until further notice, the next key date for international commitments on climate change will remain the EU-China Summit, set to take place in Leipzig from 13 to 15 September. If the European Union announces a renewed climate target in time, it could use this opportunity to draw China, the world’s largest emitter, into its wake.

TROPICAL CYCLONES OVER NORTH INDIAN OCEAN

◎ **CONTEXT:**

- **The India Meteorological Department (IMD) released a detailed list of names of tropical cyclones over north Indian Ocean, including the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean.**

◎ **ABOUT:**

- Indian Meteorological Department was established in the year 1875 with its headquarters at Calcutta.
- The headquarter was shifted to Shimla in 1905, to Pune in 1928 and then to Delhi in 1944.
- Worldwide, there are six **Regional Specialised Meteorological Centres (RSMCs)** and five regional **Tropical Cyclone Warning Centres (TCWCs)** which issue advisories and names of tropical cyclones.

- The IMD is one of the six RSMCs to provide tropical cyclone and storm surge advisories to 13 member nations, which include **Bangladesh, India, Iran, Maldives, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, the UAE and Yemen.**

The New List:

- The list comprises names of 13 cyclones each for the 13 Member countries including Bangladesh, India, Iran, Maldives, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, The UAE and Yemen, totaling to 169.
- The names for India include **Gati, Tej, Murasu, Aag, Vyom, Jhar, Probaho, Neer, Prabhanjan, Ghurni, Ambud, Jaladhi and Vega.**
- Some of the names for Bangladesh are Nisarga, Biparjoy, Arnab and Upakul, and Nivar for Iran
- Tropical cyclones forming over different ocean basins are named by the concerned RSMCs & TCWCs.
- For north Indian Ocean, including Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea, the RSMC, New Delhi, assigns the name to tropical cyclones following a standard procedure, an IMD release stated.

What are Tropical Cyclones?

- Tropical cyclones, also known as typhoons or hurricanes, are among the most destructive weather phenomena.
- They are intense circular storms that originate over warm tropical oceans, and have maximum sustained wind speeds exceeding 119 kilometres per hour and heavy rains.
- However, the greatest damage to life and property is not from the wind, but from secondary events such as storm surges, flooding, landslides and tornadoes.
- Tropical cyclones are referred to by different names depending on where they originate in the world.
 - **Hurricanes** occur in the Atlantic Ocean and the eastern north Pacific Ocean.
 - **Typhoons** occur in the western Pacific Ocean.
 - **Tropical cyclones** occur in the south Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean.

What is the need to give name to cyclones?

- Naming of Tropical Cyclones helps the scientific community, disaster managers, media and general masses to:
 - identify each individual cyclone.
 - create awareness of its development.
 - remove confusion in case of simultaneous occurrence of TCs over a region
 - remember a TC easily
 - rapidly and effectively disseminate warnings to much wider audience

BODOLAND TERRITORIAL COUNCIL (BTC)

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
 - Assam Governor Professor Jagdish Mukhi has taken over the administration of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) after the expiry of the present Council's term.
- ◎ **ABOUT:**
 - The Bodoland Territorial Council was constituted under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India in 2003 after the signing of Memorandum of Settlement on 10th February 2003 between the Government of India, the Government of Assam and

Bodo Liberation Tigers, to fulfill economic, educational and linguistic aspiration and the preservation of land-rights, socio-cultural and ethnic identity of the Bodos; and to speed up the infrastructure in BTC area.

- The Council aims at bringing about accelerated progress to one of the most backward region of the state of Assam with special focus on the development of the Bodo people in the field of education, preservation of land rights, linguistic aspiration, culture and its ethnic identity.
- Area: The BTC's jurisdiction is over four districts of Assam — Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirang and Udalguri — and they are collectively known as Bodoland Territorial Administrative Districts.
- Communities: Major communities residing in BTC include Bodos, Assamese, Bengalis, Koch-Rajbongshis, Rabhas, Garos, Adivasis, Muslims and Nepalis, etc.

Sixth schedule of the Constitution:

- The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India (Articles 244(2) and 275(1)) provides for decentralized self-governance and dispute resolution through local customary laws in parts of the North East which are mainly tribal areas.
- It contains provisions as to the Administration of Tribal Areas in the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.

- ◎ **BACKGROUND:**
- Election to the 40 constituencies of the council, scheduled on April 4, could not be conducted in the wake of the lockdown imposed to contain the coronavirus outbreak.
 - In view of the expiry of the term of the Bodoland Territorial General Council, Governor Jagdish Mukhi has resolved to assume the administration of the BTC with immediate effect in public interest in exercise of powers vested in him under sub paragraph 2 of Para 16 of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.
 - Under Article 356 of the Constitution, if elections are postponed for unavoidable reasons like war, epidemic or natural disaster, the Governor may issue a proclamation after obtaining the consent of the President, wherein the executive authority is exercised through the Governor, who has the authority to appoint other administrators to assist him.
 - The administrators are usually non-partisan retired civil servants.

This order will take immediate effect and will, unless terminated earlier or extended further, remain in force for a period of six months. The decision will serve justice towards people of the region for good administration to fight against COVID-19.

CHAKMAS AND HAJONG

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
- The Rights and Risks Analysis Group (RRAG) urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to intervene with the Government of Arunachal Pradesh against massive hunger and starvation among 65,875 Chakmas and Hajongs, who are citizens of India, because of their exclusion from the “economic package for vulnerable sections in these difficult times of Covid-19 pandemic.”
- ◎ **ABOUT:**
- The Chakmas and Hajongs are citizens of India.
 - The Chakmas and Hajongs, originally residents of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of the former East Pakistan, had to flee when their land was submerged by the Kaptai dam project in the 1960s.
 - Buddhists by faith, the Chakmas faced religious persecution in East Pakistan along with the Hajongs, who are Hindus.

- Out of those who reached India, most of them were Chakmas and only 2,000 were Hajong.
- The groups entered India through what was then the Lushai Hills district of Assam (today's Mizoram).
- While some stayed back with Chakmas already living in the Lushai Hills, the Indian government moved a majority of the refugees to present-day Arunachal Pradesh.

Key-highlights:

- On 12th April 2020, the State Government of Arunachal Pradesh announced the "economic package for vulnerable sections in these difficult times of Covid-19 pandemic", among others, to provide "5 kg Rice / person and 1 kg pulses / person to PHH and AAY beneficiaries under Pradhan Mantri Garib Ann Yojana".
- However, on 14 April 2020, the State of Arunachal Pradesh issued another notification stating that "any Tea Estates/ Commercial establishments/ individuals" of Diyun circle, Changlang district can purchase the Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS) of the rice received from Food Corporation of India at the "rate of Rs 27.00 per kg for wholesale selling and at the rate of Rs 29 for retail selling".
- The order dated 14 April 2020 targets the Chakmas and Hajongs who live under Diyun circle of Arunachal Pradesh.
- They do not have ration cards as the State Government had illegally and arbitrarily seized their ration cards vide order on 25 October 1991 and therefore, they have to buy under the OMSS.

Denial of food:

- The denial of food is a violation of the right to life guaranteed under:
 - Article 21 of the Constitution of India
 - Judgment of the Supreme Court in National Human Rights Commission Vs State of Arunachal Pradesh & Anr dated 9 January 1996 that "***the State of Arunachal Pradesh, shall ensure that the life and personal liberty of each and every Chakma residing within the State***".
- The Chakmas and Hajongs having suffered State sponsored discrimination in the last 56 years are extremely poor, below the poverty line but are being forced to buy at rice Rs 29 per kg because their ration cards were illegally and arbitrarily seized by the State government of Arunachal Pradesh in 1991.

Way forward:

Calling starvation of the Chakmas and Hajongs especially children an act of grave inhumanity and cruelty, the RRAG urged to provide all Chakmas and Hajongs rice at Rs 5 per kg immediately till June 2020 or any time as may be extended by the Union of India and take all necessary measures to fully implement the National Food Security Act including identification of eligible households among the Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh, and their right to receive foodgrains at subsidised prices by persons belonging to eligible households under Targeted Public Distribution System, nutritional support to pregnant women and lactating mothers, nutritional support to children etc.

COVID-19 ACTIVE RESPONSE AND EXPENDITURE SUPPORT (CARES) PROGRAM

◎ CONTEXT:

- The Government of India and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) signed a \$1.5 billion loan that will support the government's response to the novel coronavirus disease

(COVID-19) pandemic, focusing on immediate priorities such as disease containment and prevention, as well as social protection for the poor and economically vulnerable sections of the society, especially women and disadvantaged groups.

◎ **ABOUT:**

- This loan has been signed under ADB's Covid-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support Programme (CARES Programme).
- The quick-disbursing fund is part of a larger package of support that ADB will provide in close coordination with the government and other development partners.
- This amount will be used to focus on the containment and prevention of the novel coronavirus along with ensuring social protection for economically vulnerable sections of the society, especially women and disadvantaged groups.

Asian Development Bank:

- ADB is an international development finance institution whose mission is to help its developing member countries reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of their people.
- Headquartered in Manila, and established in 1966, ADB is owned and financed by its 69 members, of which 49 are from the region and 19 are from other parts of the globe.
- India became a member of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) as a founding member in 1966.

CARES Programme:

- This programme will contribute directly to the improvement of access to health facilities and care, as well as social protection for more than 80 crore people, including families below the poverty line, farmers, healthcare workers, women, senior citizens, people with disabilities, low wage earners, and construction workers.
- The CARES Program is funded through the **Covid-19 Pandemic Response Option (CPRO)** under the **ADB's Countercyclical Support Facility**.
- CPRO was established as part of ADB's \$20-billion expanded assistance for developing member countries' Covid-19 response.

Measures taken by India to contain COVID-19:

- India has taken several decisive measures to contain the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, including a \$2 billion health sector spending programme to expand hospital facilities and ramp up test-track-treatment capacity.
- It has also extended insurance coverage to frontline health workers engaged in Covid-19 response.
- India's central bank, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), also took monetary measures to provide relief to the people and the business.
- It slashed policy rates, eased asset quality norms, provided loan moratoriums, taken measures to support exporters and allowed states to borrow more to meet their financing requirements.
- It has also pumped in massive liquidity to support banks, non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), mutual funds as well as taken measures to push the flow of funds to the MSMEs and the corporate sector.

Significance of the funding:

- The package will reinforce the much-needed fiscal response and strengthen emergency health measures.

- It will also support the government's response to the pandemic, focusing on immediate priorities such as disease containment and prevention, as well as social protection for the poor and economically vulnerable.

IMMUNITY PASSPORT

◎ **CONTEXT:**

- **The coronavirus pandemic has now shut down the activities and economies in many countries that are experiencing increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases. Experts are thinking about strategies for opening up once things start slowing down. A few countries have started considering issuing “immunity passports”.**

◎ **ABOUT:**

- The idea for the “immunity passport” or a “back to work” pass is this: If you've been infected with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, and recover, then you have immunity that will protect you from getting the disease again for some amount of time.
- However, it is not known for certain that whether people do have immunity once they've recovered and how long that immunity would last.

How immunity is developed?

- The development of immunity to a pathogen through natural infection is a multi-step process that typically takes place over 1-2 weeks.
- **Response:** The body responds to a viral infection immediately with a non-specific innate response in which macrophages, neutrophils, and dendritic cells slow the progress of virus and may even prevent it from causing symptoms.
- **Adaptive response:** This non-specific response is followed by an adaptive response where the body makes antibodies that specifically bind to the virus. These antibodies are proteins called **immunoglobulins**.
- **Recognition & elimination:** The body also makes T-cells that recognize and eliminate other cells infected with the virus. This is called **cellular immunity**.
- This combined adaptive response may clear the virus from the body, and if the response is strong enough, may prevent progression to severe illness or re-infection by the same virus.
- This process is often measured by the presence of antibodies in blood.

What did the WHO say?

- As per the World Health Organization, governments should not issue so-called “immunity passports” or “risk-free certificates” as a way of easing lockdowns.
- There is currently no evidence that people who have recovered from Covid-19 and have antibodies are protected from a second infection.
- Such a move could actually increase virus transmission. People who assumed they were immune might stop taking precautions.
- Some governments have considered permitting people who have recovered to travel or return to work.
- Most studies carried out so far showed that people who had recovered from infection had antibodies in their blood - but some of these people had very low levels of antibodies.
- This suggested that another part of the body's immune response - T-cells, which eliminate infected cells - may also be “critical” for recovery.

How would this help us in the response to the coronavirus pandemic?

- If everything works, the antibody tests and the assumption that recovered people get enough immunity to not get COVID-19 again, then immunity passports would help us get out of stay-at-home orders and economic shutdown.

- In theory, people who have an immunity passport could safely return to work because they would not get sick again and start passing the virus around. As tests become available, then business and activity could slowly return to normal.

MULTI-SYSTEM INFLAMMATORY STATE

◎ **CONTEXT:**

- Doctors have picked up a slight rise in the number of children of all ages needing intensive care treatment for a condition called “multi-system inflammatory state”.

◎ **ABOUT:**

- Multi-system inflammatory state is a severe immune response that can affect the body in multiple ways, most importantly by making the blood vessels leaky, a condition called Kawasaki disease.
- This leads to low blood pressure and a build-up of fluid in the lungs and organs. It is extremely serious.
- Patients need urgent intensive care to support the heart, lungs and sometimes other organs such as the kidneys.

Symptoms:

- The children have overlapping symptoms of two diseases:
 - toxic shock syndrome: TSS is where bacteria gets into the body and releases harmful toxins that cause a temperature and flu-like symptoms, as well as nausea and vomiting and a loss of consciousness in severe cases.
 - unusual Kawasaki disease: A rare vascular condition that is the main cause of acquired heart disease in under-18s in the UK
- But other symptoms have also been observed in children, including **abdominal pain, gastrointestinal problems and heart inflammation.**
- There is no evidence that the condition is caused by any change in the virus, as that would have shown up in adults first.
- But it may be a post-infection inflammatory response triggered by the coronavirus.
- This has been seen in adults, who tend to be more ill in the second phase of the infection, when the initial lung disease gives way to inflammatory damage.

Is it related to Covid-19?

- That is the concern, but doctors don't know. Hospitals have seen it in children who have tested positive and negative for the coronavirus, but test results are not 100% reliable.
- It may be a rare coronavirus-related inflammatory syndrome that has taken time to come to light, or it may be caused by another pathogen entirely.
- The NHS said it was important for clinicians to be aware of any emerging links so they can give children the right care quickly.

- ◎ **WAY FORWARD:** At present, Doctors and infectious disease experts are not sure about the new condition. They are still learning about the condition because it is still very new.

NEET DOES NOT VIOLATE RIGHT OF MINORITIES: SC

◎ **CONTEXT:**

- In an important judgment, the Supreme Court held that the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test, a single entrance exam for admission to medical and dental courses, would not violate the rights of minorities to run their own institutions.

◎ ABOUT:

- The National Eligibility Entrance Test (NEET), formerly the All India Pre-Medical Test (AIPMT), is the qualifying test for MBBS and BDS programmes in Indian medical and dental colleges.
- It is conducted by the **National Testing Agency (NTA)**.
- The NEET exam is conducted online and in 11 languages — English, Hindi, Marathi, Odia, Tamil, Marathi, Urdu Bengali, Telugu, Kannada, and Assamese. The duration of the examination is three hours and a candidate needs to answer 180 questions.
- The exam paper is divided into three sections — Physics, Chemistry and Biology (Botany and Zoology).

What are Minority Educational Institutions?

- National Commission for Minority Educational Institution Act, 2004 has defined:
 - **'Minority'** for the purpose of this Act, means a community notified as such by the Central Government;
 - **'Minority institution'** means a college or institution (other than a University) established or maintained by a person or group of persons from amongst the minorities.

Constitutional rights accorded to minorities:

- **Article 30** of the constitution of India gives minorities the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
- **Under Art 30(1)(a)**, minority educational institutions enjoy right to education as a Fundamental Right. In case the property is taken over by state, due compensation to be provided to establish institutions elsewhere.
- **Article 30 (1)(b):** The right to administer educational institutions of their choice.
- **Article 30 (2):** No educational institution has a right to get government aid. But under Article 30(2), the state, in granting aid, cannot discriminate against minority institutions.

◎ BACKGROUND:

- The ruling came on a bunch of petitions originally filed in 2012 by the Christian Medical College, Vellore and others, challenging the notifications for NEET issued by the Medical Council of India (MCI) and the Dental Council of India (DCI).
- The Medical Council of India amended its regulation on March 10, 2017, providing for common counselling for admission to MBBS and post-graduate medicine courses on the basis of NEET.
- These notifications were struck down in 2013 by a three-judge bench with 2:1 majority. The court had then held that MCI and DCI did not have the power to introduce NEET through these notifications.
- However, hearing review petitions against the 2013 judgment, a five-judge bench in April 2016 opened the cases for fresh hearing and permitted NEET to be conducted in the meantime.
- The main argument put forth by the petitioners was that NEET took away the right of the religious and linguistic minority institutions to administer their business, including the right to admit students from the minority community in terms of their own standards.

The bone of contention:

- The top court rejected a plea by minority-run Christian Medical College (Vellore) and others to conduct their own test for admission to under-graduate and post-graduate medical courses.
- The unaided minority institutions contended that State has no power to compel them to admit students through a single centralised national examination such as NEET.
- The unaided minority professional colleges have the fundamental rights to choose the method and manner in which to admit its students, subject to satisfying the triple test

of having a fair, transparent and non-exploitative process.

- They claimed the system of examination of some of the institutions is wider on an all-India basis, and they test general ability also, whereas, in NEET, evaluation is based on three subjects, namely, Physics, Biology and Chemistry.
- They have an elaborate procedure of the assessment, and they do not admit students only based on their theoretical knowledge.

Key-highlights of the judgement:

- A bench of Justices Arun Mishra, Vineet Saran and MR Shah said the NEET has been prescribed by the legislature in the **larger public interest**.
- The prescription of NEET is definitely in order to improve the medical education, co-related to the improvement of public health.
- NEET intends to weed out evils from the system and various malpractices which decayed it.
- The regulatory measures in no way interfere with the rights to administer the institution by the religious or linguistic minorities.
- In its ruling, the bench said,

*"We hold that there is no violation of the rights of the unaided/ aided minority to administer institutions under **Articles 19(1) (g) (right to practice profession) and 30 (right minorities to establish and administer institution) read with Articles 25 (freedom to practice religion), 26 (freedom to manage religious affairs) and 29(1) (right to conserve distinct language and culture) of the Constitution** by prescribing the uniform examination of NEET for admissions in the graduate and postgraduate professional courses of medical as well as dental science."*

- ◎ **CONCLUSION:** The Supreme Court has taken the decision by considering the overall national scenario. In such case, there cannot be any exemption, otherwise, there would be no end to such claims and multiple examination.

FIRST-EVER DIGITAL GEOLOGICAL MAP OF MOON

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
 - The first ever digital, unified, global, geological map of the moon was released virtually by the United States Geological Survey (USGS), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Lunar Planetary Institute.
- ◎ **ABOUT:**
 - Called the '**Unified Geologic Map of the Moon**', it is a 'seamless, globally consistent, 1:5,000,000-scale geologic map'.
 - The moon the closest cosmic body to Earth through which space discovery can be attempted and documented has always piqued the interest of humanity.
 - The researchers built on the original digital renovation of the six 1:5,000,000-scale lunar geologic maps comprising of the near, central far, east, west, north and south sides that was released in 2013.
 - The final map consists of 43 geologic units across the entire lunar surface, broken down into groups based on characteristics like materials of craters, basins, terra, plains and volcanic units.
 - Data from recent satellite missions to the moon and resources data from NASA's Apollo Missions were used to come up with the map.

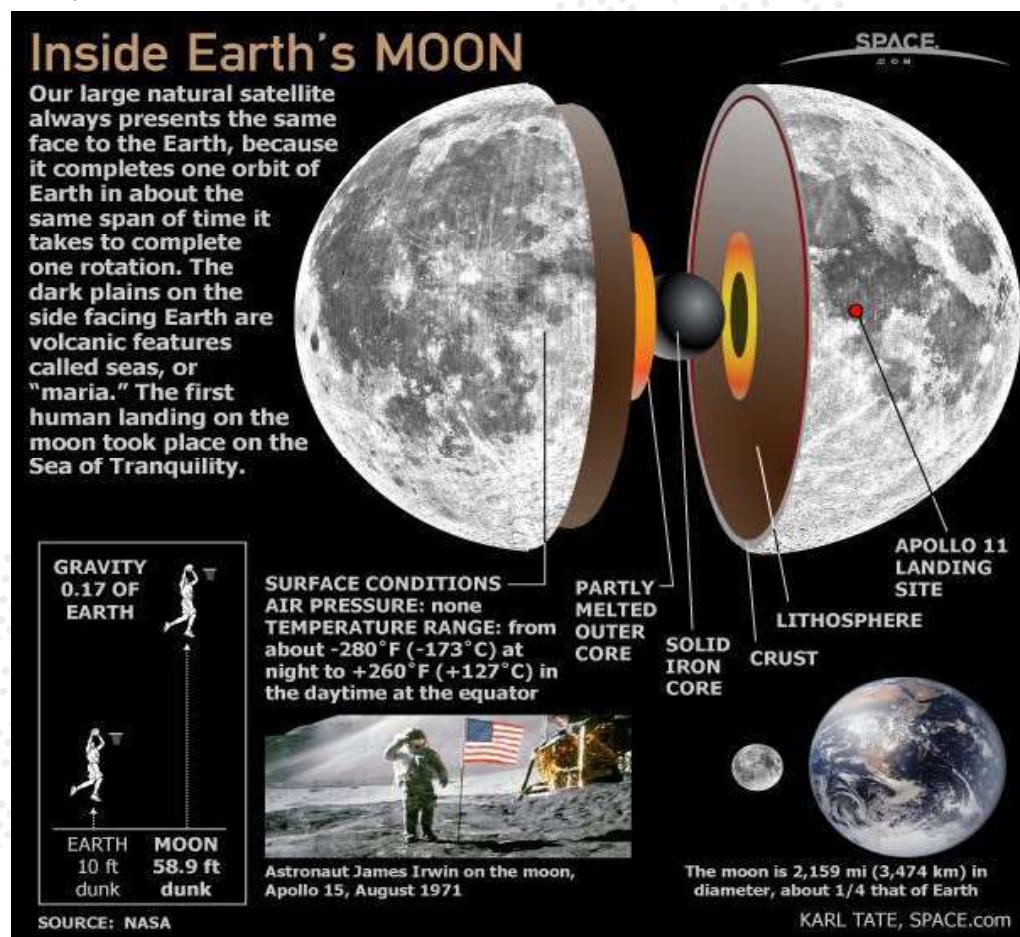
This version of the map is a digital release only available in GIS and PDF formats. The map can be downloaded from the Unified Geologic Map of the Moon website.

The mapping process:

- To make the digital map a reality, scientists used information gathered from six Apollo-days regional maps, interpolated with more recent satellite missions to lunar space.
- The existing historical maps were redrawn to line them up with more modern datasets. This preserved previous observations and geological interpretations.
- In addition to merging new and old data, USGS researchers also worked on a unified description of stratigraphy — also called **rock layers** — on the surface of the moon.
- This helped resolve issues from previous maps, when rock names, ages, and descriptions were periodically inconsistent.

The moon profile:

- The Moon, otherwise known as Luna, is the only natural satellite of Earth.
- It was created 4.6 billion years ago, and it is widely accepted that it was created when Earth collided with a planet-sized object called Theia.
- It's the fifth-largest moon in our solar system and is the second brightest object in the sky (after the Sun).



Orbital characteristics

- **Average distance from Earth:** 238,855 miles (384,400 km)
- **Perigee (closest approach to Earth):** 225,700 miles (363,300 km)
- **Apogee (farthest distance from Earth):** 252,000 miles (405,500 km)
- **Orbit circumference:** 1,499,618.58 miles (2,413,402 km)
- **Mean orbit velocity:** 2,287 mph (3,680.5 km/h)

Moon's South Pole:

- The moon's South Pole is especially interesting because the area is much larger than the North Pole and there could be possibility of presence of water in these permanently shadowed areas.
- Further, the South Pole region also contains the fossil record of the early Solar System.

Missions targeting Lunar South Pole:

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) 'Chandrayaan 2', is an active mission that targets the Lunar South Pole for exploration.
- Like Chandrayaan, other moon missions like the Artemis (human spaceflight programme), that is a crewed exploration programme of NASA, plan to send humans to the Lunar South Pole by 2024 and in due course of time, establish a permanent presence on the moon.
- These present and future moon missions' success can be further helped by the digital map of the moon.

Significance of this new map:

- This map provides vital information for new scientific studies by connecting the exploration of specific sites on the moon with the rest of the lunar surface.
- It has very practical implications. The geology of the moon is very important for planning future missions and establishing scientific objectives.
- It will serve as a blueprint for future human missions and a source of research and analysis for the educators and the general public interested in lunar geology.

HYDROGEN FUEL CELL

◎ CONTEXT:

- NTPC Ltd, India's largest power producer and a central PSU under Ministry of Power, has invited Global Expression of Interest (EoI) to provide 10 Hydrogen Fuel Cell (FC) based electric buses and an equal number of Hydrogen Fuel Cell based electric cars in Leh and Delhi. The EoI has been issued by NTPC's wholly owned subsidiary, NTPC Vidyut Vyapar Nigam (NVVN) Limited.

◎ ABOUT:

- A fuel cell is a device that converts chemical potential energy (energy stored in molecular bonds) into electrical energy.
- A PEM (Proton Exchange Membrane) cell uses hydrogen gas (H₂) and oxygen gas (O₂) as fuel. The products of the reaction in the cell are water, electricity, and heat.

Hydrogen + Oxygen = Electricity + Water Vapour

- This is a big improvement over internal combustion engines, coal burning power plants, and nuclear power plants, all of which produce harmful by-products.
- Since O₂ is readily available in the atmosphere, we only need to supply the fuel cell with H₂ which can come from an electrolysis process (see Alkaline electrolysis or PEM electrolysis).

What is Hydrogen?

- Hydrogen is the simplest element. An atom of hydrogen consists of only one proton and one electron.
- It's also the most plentiful element in the universe. Despite its simplicity and abundance, hydrogen doesn't occur naturally as a gas on the Earth – it's always combined with other elements.

- Water, for example, is a combination of hydrogen and oxygen (H₂O).
- Hydrogen is high in energy, yet an engine that burns pure hydrogen produces almost no pollution.
- NASA has used liquid hydrogen since the 1970s to propel the space shuttle and other rockets into orbit.
- Hydrogen fuel cells power the shuttle's electrical systems, producing a clean byproduct – pure water, which the crew drinks.

Key-highlights:

- The initiative, which has been undertaken with support of Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, will also harness renewable energy for generation of hydrogen and develop its storage and dispensation facilities as part of pilot projects at Leh and Delhi.
- The PSU has been taking various technology initiatives to provide complete e-Mobility solution for public transport including creation of public charging infrastructure and providing electric buses to State/City Transport Undertakings.
- In this regard, 90 public charging stations in various cities and battery charging and swapping station at Faridabad for e-3-wheelers have already been commissioned.
- Similarly, e-Bus solution for Andaman & Nicobar Administration is under implementation.

Significance of the move:

- The move to launch hydrogen powered vehicles aims at decarbonizing mobility segment.
- The move to procure Hydrogen Fuel Cell based vehicles is first of its kind project in the country, wherein a complete solution from green energy to the fuel cell vehicle would be developed.

Direct emissions from a fuel cell vehicle are just water and a little heat. This is a huge improvement over the internal combustion engine's litany of greenhouse gases. Fuel cells have no moving parts. They are thus much more reliable than traditional engines.

MISMATCHED BLACK HOLES MERGE

© **CONTEXT:** • Scientists working with the LIGO and Virgo gravitational-wave observatories have detected an oddball event: the merger of two black holes of notably different sizes.

© **ABOUT:**

- All 10 black hole mergers detected in the first two observing runs had binary components with similar masses.
- But the new event, called GW190412, involved objects of about 8 and 30 solar masses, respectively.
- This asymmetry made the “hum” of overtones in the gravitational waves clear for the first time, enabling researchers to narrow in on the binary's properties.
- The merger occurred roughly 2 billion light-years away, tilted from our line of sight by about 45°. Before the two black holes came together, the larger one was spinning fairly slowly — roughly 40% the maximum permitted by gravity.
- This is the first time researchers have been able to confidently measure the spin of a black hole about to merge.

GW190412:

- The gravitational-wave observatories detected the signal, designated **GW190412**, at the start of the third observing run, which happened in two segments spanning April 1 to October 1, 2019, and November 1, 2019, to March 27, 2020.

- The third observing run would have run through April, but was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- So far the collaboration has 56 confirmed candidates from this run, two of which now have published analyses. Scientists are actively analyzing the rest.

What is a black hole?

- A black hole is a place in space where gravity pulls so much that even light cannot get out. The gravity is so strong because matter has been squeezed into a tiny space.
- This can happen when a star is dying.
- Because no light can get out, people cannot see black holes. They are invisible. Space telescopes with special tools can help find black holes.

The special tools can see how stars that are very close to black holes act differently than other stars.

NIF BOOSTS NEW VARIETIES OF ANTHURIUM

◎ CONTEXT:

- National Innovation Foundation-India (NIF) has recently boosted new varieties of Anthurium. These flowers with high market value, help to purify air are cultivated by a lady innovator from Kerala.

◎ ABOUT:

- Anthurium (*Anthurium spp.*) is a vast group of beautiful blooming plants available in a wide range of colors.
- Anthurium is one of the best domestic flowering plants in the world. They are beautiful but also purify the surrounding air and remove harmful airborne chemicals like **formaldehyde, ammonia, toluene, xylene, and allergens**.
- Its importance of removing toxic substances from the air, NASA has placed it in the list of air purifier plants.
- Anthurium has larger economic importance because of its eye-catching and beautiful inflorescence and fetches a good market price.

The new development:

- D Vasini Bai, a women innovator from Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, has developed ten varieties of Anthurium by cross-pollination.
- The uniqueness of these varieties are large and medium-size flowers with uncommon color combinations of spathe and spadix (viz. light and dark orange, magenta, green and rose color combination, dark red and white colors).
- She has also developed a new method for raising the seedlings in limited space using corrugated asbestos sheets.
- For transplanting grown-up seedlings, she uses concrete troughs instead of pots.
- These methods have helped her in growing more plants in limited space, thus reducing the costs and maintenance and increasing the income at the same time.
- She sells the Anthurium flowers and plants to local florists as well as in cities like Pune and Mumbai at an average price of rupees 60-75 per flower.

Significant achievements of Vasini Bai:

- Vasini Bai has received a number of awards and recognition for developing the Anthurium varieties.

- In 2017, she was awarded with state award at the Ninth National Biennial competition organized by National Innovation Foundation-India (NIF) by the then President of India Shri Pranab Mukherjee.
- Her interest in developing new Anthurium variety instigated in the late 1970s. In 1980, she manually cross-pollinated for the first time.
- After years of experiments in 1985, she developed the first variety of Anthurium-Dora (single plant with 8-10 leaves and multiple flowers with orange-colored spathe).
- She continued her work, and during 1985–2000, she developed another five varieties viz. Dora- I, Dora –II, Dora –III, Dora –IV and Dora – V.
- The other five varieties Akash, George, Giant Pink, JV Red, and JV Pink were developed later through manual cross-pollination.

National Innovation Foundation (NIF):

- The National Innovation Foundation (NIF) is India's national initiative to strengthen the grassroots technological innovations and outstanding traditional knowledge.
- Its mission is to help India become a creative and knowledge-based society by expanding policy and institutional space for grassroots technological innovators.
- It was set up with the support of **Honey Bee Network**.
- NIF scouts, supports and spawns' grassroots innovations developed by individuals and local communities in any technological field, helping in human survival without any help from formal sector.

MISCELLANEOUS

CURRENT AFFAIRS

1st GOVT. HOSPITAL IN COUNTRY TO SUCCESSFULLY LAUNCH PLASMA THERAPY TREATMENT FOR COVID-19

- The **King George Medical University in Uttar Pradesh** has become the first government hospital in the country to successfully launch the plasma therapy treatment for the COVID-19 patients.
- The **plasma was already secured from the three recovered COVID-19 patients** who were treated at KGMU itself.
- If this patient recovers successfully then it will be a great step in treating the serious patients with the **help of plasma transfusion therapy**.

AYUSH MINISTRY INSTRUCTS FOR HERBAL TREATMENTS, SARANDA FOREST DIVISION MAKES IMMUNITY BOOSTER DRINKS

- With spreading pandemic of COVID-19, Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Sidha and Homeopathy (AYUSH) has come up with **various measures to provide herbal drinks to strengthen the immunity in people to help them fight the viral infection**.
- Under its directives, AYUSH Ministry has instructed officials of **Saranda Forest Division in West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand** - a house to many medicinal plants, to come up with novel ideas from the long-practiced traditional herbal treatments.
- The department has come up with **immunity booster herbal drinks made from barks of Arjun trees, Tulsi leaves, Guava leaves and other immune building herbs** to be consumed by our frontline warriors.
- Ministry of AYUSH in its important directives have instructed the forest officials of Saranda Forest Division to prepare such drinks **with connivance with the tribal community practising them since long**.
- Saranda Forest has been **house to several medicinal plants**, and the immunity booster drink prepared by the team comes from the same. The **idea is being taken from Kilimili**, a word used in local language for a traditional tribal herbal medicine house.

CHEMICALS, PETROCHEMICALS INDUSTRY BECOMES TOP EXPORTING SECTOR FOR 1st TIME

- Union Minister of Chemicals and Fertilizers congratulated the chemicals and petrochemicals industry on **becoming the top exporting sector of the country for the first time**.
- **India's chemical exports rose by 7 per cent** to 2.68 lakh crore rupees during April-January period of the last fiscal, and **became the top exporting sector in the country for the first time**.
- The Minister assured full support to the industry **towards making India a leading global hub for manufacturing of chemicals and petrochemicals**.

INDIA, CHINA TO REGISTER POSITIVE GROWTH RATE DESPITE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC: IMF

- International Monetary Fund (IMF) has said **India and China are the only two major countries, which will register a positive growth rate** despite Coronavirus pandemic.
- In its latest edition of World Economy report, **IMF has projected India's GDP growth to be 1.9 per cent in 2020 from 5.8 per cent in January**. For China, it has projected a growth rate of 1.2 per cent.
- Despite global economy hitting the worst recession since the Great Depression of 1930s, **India and China are likely to bounce back strongly in 2021** with India expected to grow at 7.4 per cent and China at 9.2 per cent.

NLC INDIA COMMENCES COAL PRODUCTION AT TALABIRA-II & III OPENCAST COAL MINE

- NLC India has commenced coal production at its **Talabira-II and III Opencast Coal Mine in Odisha**.
- **Tamil Nadu-based Navratna company** said its production marked the entry of NLC India into the coal mining sector in the state.
- The **Talabira II and III coal mines were allotted to this Navratna firm in 2016** to meet the requirement of its existing and future coal-fired power plants.
- The company had said that the production of 20 million tonnes of coal per annum from these two coal blocks would **fuel its 4,200 MW thermal power projects in that state**.
- During 2019-2020, the company also achieved a renewable energy generation capacity of 1404 MW comprising 1353 MW of solar and 51 MW of wind power.

RBI ANNOUNCES SPECIAL LIQUIDITY FACILITY FOR MUTUAL FUNDS OF RS. 50,000 CRORE

- The Reserve Bank of India announced a **Special Liquidity Facility for Mutual Funds (SLF-MF)** of 50,000 crore rupees with a **view to easing liquidity pressures on MFs**.
- The **heightened volatility in capital markets in reaction to COVID-19 has imposed liquidity strains on Mutual Funds**, which have intensified in the wake of redemption pressures related to closure of some debt MFs and potential contagious effects therefrom
- The Apex bank has said that under the Special Liquidity Facility for Mutual Funds (SLF-MF), **the RBI shall conduct repo operations of 90 days tenor at the fixed repo rate**.
- The SLF-MF is **on-tap and open-ended** and banks can submit their bids to avail funding on any day from **Monday to Friday** (excluding holidays).
- The scheme is **available from till 11th of May** or up to utilization of the allocated amount, whichever is earlier.
- The funds availed under the SLF-MF shall be used by banks exclusively for meeting the liquidity requirements of MFs by extending loans, and by undertaking outright purchase of and or repos against the collateral of investment grade corporate bonds, Commercial Papers (CPs), debentures and Certificates of Deposit (CDs) held by MFs.

REMITTANCES TO INDIA LIKELY TO DROP BY 23% THIS YEAR: WORLD BANK

- As per World Bank, **remittances to India are likely to drop by 23 per cent** from 83 billion US Dollars last year to 64 billion US Dollars this year due to the Corona virus pandemic, which has resulted in a global recession.
- According to a **World Bank report on the impact of the COVID-19 on migration and remittances**, the remittances are projected to decline sharply.
- The projected fall, which would be **the sharpest decline in recent history**, is **largely due to a fall in the wages and employment of migrant workers**, who tend to be more vulnerable to loss of employment and wages during an economic crisis in a host country.
- **Remittances are a vital source of income for developing countries**, they help families afford food, health care and basic needs.

TRIFED ASKS STATE NODAL DEPARTMENTS, IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES TO INITIATE PROCUREMENT OF MFPS AT MSP

- The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) which **functions under Ministry of Tribal Affairs** has asked the State Nodal Departments and Implementing Agencies to initiate **procurement of Minor Forest Produces (MFPS) at Minimum Support Price (MSP)** from the available funds under MSP for MFP Scheme.
- **TRIFED in collaboration with UNICEF is hosting Webinar sessions** for the Van Dhan Self Help Group members of the Van Dhan Vikas Kendras.
- Its objective is to **create awareness among the tribal gatherers for following social distancing measures** and maintaining necessary hygiene required for carrying out their operations.

T. S. TIRUMURTI APPOINTED AS AMBASSADOR/PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF INDIA TO UN

- **T. S. Tirumurti** has been appointed as the next **Ambassador or Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations**.
- Tirumurti is an **IFS officer of 1985 batch**. He is currently the Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs.
- He **replaces Sayyad Akbaruddin**.

UIDAI PERMITS AADHAAR UPDATION FACILITY THROUGH CSC

- To make Aadhaar updating easier for citizens, Unique Identification Authority of India, UIDAI has permitted Common Service Centre, **CSCs, which are designated banking correspondents of banks, to offer Aadhaar services**.
- **UIDAI has set June deadline for the commencement of the work** after CSCs with banking facilities upgrade their required infrastructure and get other necessary approvals.
- IT Minister urged CSC Village Level Entrepreneurs to **start the Aadhaar work with responsibility and as per instructions issued by UIDAI in this regard**.

UK UNVEILS 100% STATE-BACKED 'BOUNCE BACK LOAN SCHEME' FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

- United Kingdom's Finance Minister has unveiled a 100 per cent state-backed 'Bounce Back Loan Scheme' for the small businesses **to help them tide through the coronavirus pandemic lockdown**.
- The new fast-track finance scheme, would help **bolster the existing package of support available to crisis-hit UK businesses**.
- Under the scheme, qualifying small businesses can apply online **to borrow between 2,000 pounds and 50,000 pounds as interest-free loans for the first 12 months**.

US FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION APPROVES FIRST AT-HOME COVID-19 TEST KIT

- In a major development, the US Food and Drug Administration has approved the first at-home COVID-19 test kit, which is **expected to bring coronavirus testing to the doorsteps of every household**.

- The test kit, costing 119 dollars in the US, has been **developed by LabCorp, an American company** with a network of medical laboratories across the country.
- Under certain circumstances with doctor supervision, **a test can be mailed to a patient, and the patient can perform the self-swab** and then mail it back to get the results.

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