

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK-2
AUGUST
2020

MAINS

- A quarter of Bangladesh has been inundated with floodwaters: NASA

CLIMATE CHANGE

- Defence Manufacturing

DEFENCE

- MGNREGA in times of COVID-19 4. Reviving the Indian Economy post COVID-19

ECONOMY

- Pakistan's New Political Map

FOREIGN POLICY

- War over Three Language Formula

GOVERNANCE

- Hiroshima marks 75th A-Bomb Anniversary

WORLD HISTORY

PRELIMS

- Ayodhya's Ram Temple, a 3-Storey Structure with Nagara Style Architecture

ART & CULTURE

- RBI announces economic measures to counter the coronavirus impact on economy
- RBI sets up panel for stressed loans resolution norms
- RBI to brought startups under Priority Sector Lending (PSL)

ECONOMY

- UNESCO-IOC Tsunami-Ready Recognition to Odisha Communities

ENVIRONMENT

- Trump signs order against hiring H-1B visa holders for federal contracts

FOREIGN POLICIES

- US votes against Cuba on UNHRC

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

- Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak's 100th Death Anniversary

MODERN HISTORY

- EWS quota problem referred to Constitution Bench

POLITY

- Ammonium nitrate linked to catastrophic Beirut explosion

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

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— **NOTE** —

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- 2 (AUGUST, 2020)

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SECTION: A

(MAINS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

A QUARTER OF BANGLADESH HAS BEEN INUNDATED WITH FLOODWATERS: NASA'

CONTEXT

Nearly a quarter of Bangladesh has been inundated with floodwaters, according to latest satellite images of the country captured by NASA recently.

◎ BACKGROUND

- Bangladesh has been a vulnerable state for much of its short existence.
- People in this flood-prone country have coped with rising water levels with a combination of innovation, flexibility and resilience – but the extremes the environment is now throwing at them might be beyond anyone's endurance.
- As climate change accelerates, the pressures on rural Bangladeshis mount.
- Historically, people in Bangladesh had worked around seasonal flooding; farming for part of the year and retreating when water levels rose, or seeking work in the cities as land became unusable.
- By the end of the century, however, sea levels are expected to rise along the Bangladesh coastline by up to 1.5m.
- And that will come with more extreme seasonal fluctuations in sea levels. Disastrous storms and unusually high tides currently occur once each decade, but could become as regular as three to 15 times each year by 2100.

- As a result, rural Bangladeshis face a stark choice; change their way of life or seek employment and a home elsewhere.

What NASA has found?

- Images acquired by NASA show the scale of flooding, and were recorded over more than a month between June 2 and July 25.
- The image captured on July 25, 2020, shows an enormous patch of blue on the map, where floodwaters have inundated.
- In the June 2 photo, the blue patch is much smaller as flooding had only just begun then.
- More than four million people have been affected and at least 100 had died in Bangladesh as of July 28.
- Most of Bangladesh is low-lying and is drained by the Ganga (Padma), Brahmaputra (Jamuna) and Meghna rivers and their tributaries.
- It is the longest-lasting flooding in Bangladesh in 1988, and has been termed the worst flooding in a decade.



**Water appears navy blue and black; clouds are white or cyan; and vegetation is bright green.*

- The Bangladesh Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre reported water levels along the Jamuna River were at or above "danger level" as of July 31.
- Almost a million homes were inundated and more than 1,500 square kilometres (600 square miles) of farmland were damaged across the country. Several areas are also isolated due flooded roads, it added.
- The country has not been able to prepare well for the monsoon this year as much of the flood-prevention infrastructure like embankments and dykes destroyed in earlier monsoons has not recovered yet.

The current situation in Bangladesh

- The physiography of Bangladesh is characterized by two distinctive features: a broad deltaic plain subject to frequent flooding, and a small hilly region crossed by swiftly flowing rivers.
- Bangladesh is crisscrossed by 230 rivers, including 53 shared with India.
- A four-month monsoon season, from June through September, routinely inundates this riverine country.
- Meanwhile, a quarter of Bangladesh's landmass, bound on the south by the northern Indian Ocean, hovers less than seven feet above sea level.
- And as floods grow increasingly frequent and severe, the 163 million who make their home in Bangladesh, the world's most populous delta, know little escape from water.
- Often referred to as "ground zero for climate change," Bangladesh ranked sixth on the 2018 Global Climate Risk Index, and for many Bangladeshis, particularly the rural communities in low-lying coastal areas, those risks are already unmanageable.
- Riverbank erosion displaces 50,000 to 200,000 people here each year. Thousands more flee every time a major cyclone hits the coast.

Neighbouring countries

- Northeastern parts of India too, that lie close to the neighbouring Bangladesh are also currently experiencing a lot of floods, especially Assam.

- China, too is reeling from major flooding near Wuhan, the original epicentre of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.C

Is monsoon the reason behind the situation?

- Monsoons in Bangladesh are intense, with over 80 per cent rain taking place during the season between June and October.
- The country receives most of its rainfall during the summer — June to October.
- Even though flooding is common during these months, this year's water damage has been particularly devastating.
- Downpours during monsoon season are nothing new. Rains beat down across much of South and East Asia every year from late spring through early fall, when the region sees temperatures and moisture levels increase and a seasonal change in the direction of prevailing winds.
- The wet period has historically provided an important relief from the relentless dry heat of summer, cooling the air and quenching thirsty crops and wildlife.
- But in recent years, amid the climate crisis, monsoon season has gotten far worse. Last year was the first monsoon season in recorded history to not begin its withdrawal by October 1, and the severity and length of this year's floods are also remarkable.
- The United Nations has estimated that this year's flooding could be the most prolonged since 1988.

What is the reason behind this?

- **Riverbank erosion is the primary cause of climate displacement inland.** Up to 50% of those now living in Bangladesh's urban slums may be there because they were forced to flee their rural homes as a result of riverbank erosion.
- Those who live on Bangladesh's river islands, known as **chars**, are especially at risk. Located within some of the world's most powerful river systems, chars can be formed or completely eroded over weeks or even days.
- River flooding is also a cause of displacement inland, and along with erosion is likely to become more significant under climate change, as rainfall both increases and becomes more erratic, and the melting Himalayan glaciers alter river flows.

- As rainfall patterns change, the drier north-western regions of Bangladesh are **at risk of drought**, which drives people away through **destruction of crops and disruption of livelihoods**. While not currently a major factor in displacement, this risk is expected to rise as climate change progresses.
- **Landslides**, also induced by increasingly erratic rainfall, affect the hilly north-eastern and south-eastern regions of Bangladesh and can cause displacement by destroying homes and property, and disrupting agriculture.

Rivers, the midwives of Bangladesh

- Rivers are the midwives of Bangladesh.
- The Ganges and Brahmaputra pour from the Himalayas and converge with the Meghna River to form the world's fourth largest drainage, which flows into the Bay of Bengal.
- Monsoon rains routinely put a quarter of the country underwater. The flooding brings hardship, but it also nurtures the rice that feeds one of the most densely populated nations on Earth.

- The country itself is born from those rivers. An estimated 1 billion tons of sand and silt flow downstream every year and settles in the delta, counteracting relentless erosion.
- Geologically, Bangladesh is a giant sandbox, 90 meters deep in places.

◎ CONCLUSION

Bangladesh, a vast river delta that barely rises above the sea at the best of times, is buffeted by natural forces including flooding rivers and cyclones blowing in from the bay. Over decades, the country has developed defenses: warning systems, storm shelters, salt-resistant crops, and 139 polders near the coast—a 5700-kilometer network of walls to protect farmland from inundation. But humanmade infrastructure is not infallible and can cause problems of its own. As climate change becomes a reality with rising seas and stronger storms, there is need of strong measures.

DEFENCE MANUFACTURING

CONTEXT

Domestic defence production continues to lag

Key-Highlights

- When it was first talked of Make-in-India, it seemed quite possible since a big component of this was to be equipment for the armed forces; so with the demand completely in the government's control, it was just the supply side that needed to be fixed and, for that, the government was liberalising FDI rules to allow more strategic partnerships with top global suppliers.
- In reality, however, little changed and defence orders for private Indian firms have been few and far between.
- Manufacturer like L&T have talked of shutting down a gun factory they had opened to meet a 100-field-gun order; L&T supplied the guns, but the order was curtailed as there was no more money. Part of this has to do with the economy slowing, and, within this, the share for capital expenditure has been dwindling.
- While defence expenditure rose from Rs 285,005 crore in FY15 to a budgeted Rs 471,378 crore in FY21, capex rose at a slower pace, from Rs 73,531 crore to Rs 113,602 crore in FY21.
- when the latest Defence Production and Export Promotion Policy talks of doubling the size of the domestic industry to Rs 175,000 crore in five years—of this, the export target is Rs 35,000 crore—it seems more than a bit of a stretch.
- While former defence Minister cleared several large-ticket purchases, but the actual placement of orders can take decades. So while there is talk, as there is now, of increasing FDI limits to make India a more friendly investment destination, this is missing the point.

Defence industry of India

- The Defence industry of India is a strategically important sector in India. With strength of over 1.44 million active personnel, it is the world's largest military force. India has the world's largest volunteer military of over 5.1 million personnel.
- The total budget sanctioned for the Indian military for the financial year 2019 is \$60.9 billion. In 2020, India with third largest annual defence budget (US\$70 b) behind USA (US\$732 b) and China (US\$261 b), and second largest defence imports behind Saudi Arabia.

- The military budget of India is about 1.49% for year 2018–19 of the total GDP. However, it spends nearly an equal amount in importing arms from other countries.

Arms Exports

- India's track record as an arms exporter has been modest due to export restrictions on the manufacturing organisations like Ordnance Factory Board (OFB). OFB exports Arms and Ammunition, Weapon Spares, Chemicals & Explosives, Parachutes, Leather and Clothing items to more than 30 countries worldwide.
- However, due to liberal policies adopted by the government in recent times, there has been a substantial increase in India's defence exports. According to the latest official data given in the upper house of Indian Parliament - the Rajya Sabha, India's defence export has jumped by 700% in just two years.

Indigenization of military hardware

- India has been pushing for greater indigenisation of military hardware as India imports around 70 percent (by value) of its high-tech defence hardware such as aircraft, ships, submarines, missiles etc. mainly from Russia, Japan, Israel and United States.
- FDI policy: Upto 100% FDI in the Defence industry: Up to 49% under the automatic route and FDI above 49%: through Government route, where it is likely to result in access to modern technology.

Reasons to invest:

- India's requirements on defence are catered largely by imports. The opening of the Defence sector for private sector participation will help foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) to enter into strategic partnerships with Indian companies. This will enable them to leverage the domestic markets as well as aim at global markets. Besides helping in building domestic capabilities, it will also bolster exports in the long term.
- Since 2014 the Ministry of Defence has signed more than 180 contracts with the Indian Industry, as of December 2019. These contracts were valued over USD 25.8 Bn approximately.
- Favourable government policy which promotes self-reliance, indigenisation, and technology

upgradation. The policies also aim at achieving economies of scale, including the development of capabilities, for exports in the defence sector.

- India's extensive modernisation plans with an increased focus on homeland security and growing attractiveness as a defence sourcing hub.

Growth drivers in defense manufacturing:

- Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) has been revised in 2016 and special provisions for simulating growth of domestic defence industry have been introduced:
 - DPP focuses on institutionalising, streamlining and simplifying defence procurement procedure to give a boost to "Make in India" initiative. It aims to promote indigenous design, development and manufacturing of defence equipment, platforms, systems and sub-systems. It also aims to enhance the role of MSMEs in the Defence industry.
 - A new category of capital procurement: Buy Indian - Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured (IDDM) has been introduced to encourage indigenous design, development and manufacturing of defence equipment.
 - Preference has been given to 'Buy (Indian)', 'Buy and Make (Indian)' and 'Make' categories over 'Buy (Global)' and 'Buy and Make (Global)' categories. A clear and unambiguous definition of indigenous content is provided.
 - The 'Make' Procedure has been simplified with provisions for funding of 90% of development cost by the Government to Indian industry.
 - Separate procedure for 'Make-II' category has been notified under DPP to encourage indigenous development and manufacture of defence equipment. Number of industry friendly provisions such as relaxation of eligibility criterion, minimal documentation, provision for considering proposals suggested by industry/

individual etc. have been introduced in this procedure.

Challenges

- Major weapon platforms have a normal service life of about 40-50 years. Therefore, what we manufacture today must remain combat-relevant in the decades ahead. But with technology advancing at an exponential rate and warfare evolving, many major platforms run the risk of becoming obsolete in just 2-3 decades.
- We still do not have an entire Military Industrial Complex (MIC) ecosystem that combines government agencies, R&D, suppliers, component manufacturers, and technology adoption firms that integrate sub-systems into a working whole.
- China's R&D expenditure (USD 275 billion in 2018) is about 2.2 percent of its GDP, that is, more than Japan, Germany and South Korea together. India's spending on R&D has been stagnant at 0.6-0.7 percent of its GDP.
- Insofar as foreign firms relocating to India is concerned, they will go where it makes economic sense. And currently, given the economic ravages wrought globally by the pandemic, cash-starved companies are unwilling to abandon existing supply chains and invest in new operations.
- Foreign firms from major defence hardware exporting countries find difficulty as there are literally no incentives, because of a lack of proper monitoring mechanism and issues related to intellectual property rights.

CONCLUSION:

Indigenisation is a potential game changing solution for India. It is, therefore, in GoI's best interest to seriously invest in the strengthening of our indigenous defence industry, and to re-orient policy and research in a manner that stimulates growth in the sector.

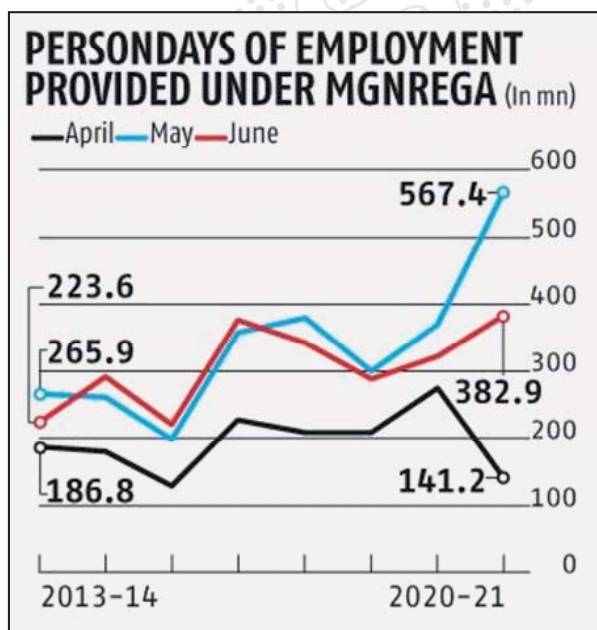
MGNREGA IN TIMES OF COVID-19

CONTEXT

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has been one of the main avenues for the Centre to provide employment to returning migrants and others in rural areas who have been rendered jobless due to the lockdown..

What is the current situation?

- MGNREGA continues to attract rural labourers pushed into distress due to the Covid-19 crisis triggering calls for increasing the mandatory workdays to 200 and raising the minimum wages under the scheme to Rs 600 per day.
- Data sourced from the MGNREGA website shows that in June 2020 around 43.7 million households sought work under the scheme that was the highest in last seven years, maintaining a trend seen in May as well.
- The surge in work demanded under the scheme comes after more than 20 million migrants returned to villages from the cities to avoid COVID-19 lockdown announced in March.
- To provide more work to the migrant laborers, the Central government in May raised the budget under the scheme by Rs 40,000 crore for 2020-21, taking the full year allocation for the scheme to over Rs 100,000 crore for the first time ever.
- The additional funds is meant to generate additional 0.2 billion person-days of work in 2020-21 over and above the budgeted 2.8 billion person-days.



Mandate of Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (MGNREGA)

- The mandate of the MGNREGA is to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

Problems facing MGNREGA

- **Low wage rate:** The low wage rates have resulted in lack of interest among workers in working for MGNREGA schemes, making way for contractors and middle men to take control, locally.
- **Insufficient budget allocation:** MGNREGA's success at the ground level is subject to proper and uninterrupted fund flow to the states. But the fund allocation is insufficient to ensure proper implementation on the ground.
- **Regular payment delays:** Despite the order of the Supreme Court and initiatives and GO (Government Order) by the Union Ministry of Finance, no provision has yet been worked out in the MIS for calculation of full wage delays and payment of compensation for the same.
- **Workers penalised for administrative lapses:** The ministry withholds wage payments for workers of states that do not meet administrative requirements within the stipulated time period. It is beyond any logic as to why workers would be penalised for administrative lapses.
- **The banking puzzle:** Due to great rush and poor infrastructure, the bank passbooks are not updated in many cases. Often, the workers do not get their wages during times of need due to the hassle and the cost involved in getting wages from the bank.
- **Faulty MIS data:** There is a growing pile of evidence on how real-time MIS has made MGNREGA less transparent for workers, reduced accountability of frontline functionaries and aided in centralisation of the programme.
- **Non-payment of unemployment allowance:** There are a huge number of unemployment allowances being shown in the MIS currently.

- **Genuine job cards being deleted to meet 100% DBT targets:** While the government has been boasting about Aadhar-based savings, the reality is that a huge number of genuine job cards and ration cards are getting deleted and genuine people have been deprived of their due entitlements.

Suggestions:

- **Creation of awareness:** The awareness programmes should be organized at war footing in the rural areas for educating people about these special provisions, which can go a long way in bringing further improvements in the implementation of the programme.
- **Training of Gram Sabha & Panchayat members:** The specialised training programmes be organised in the rural areas preferably in the village panchayats so that these functionaries get proper training for the better execution of the works.
- **Exposure visits:** It is recommended that Gram Sabha and panchayat members should be sent for exposure visits to other states like Andhra Pradesh, Kerala where NREGA has done wonderful work.
- **Effective supervision:** To curb corruption & malpractices, it is a requirement that MGNREGA works are properly monitored and supervised.
- **Increase in wages:** The wage rates to be paid under NREGA should be revised on one hand and subsequently every year there should be enhancement in the existing wage rates by a reasonable percentage say around 10-15% or so.
- **Availability of worksite facilities:** Women workers, particularly those with children, face major inconvenience due to lack of Creche facility and toilets. So the steps should be taken to provide adequate worksite facilities.

- **Increase in employment (man working days):** The programme has the provision for 100 days employment per household. As such if a household who has more than one adult member, the mandays should be increased suitably however with some ceiling.
- **Skill generating work** -The MGNREGS should develop a relevant instrument to provide skill generating work and activities for literate beneficiaries instead of engaging them completely in manual work.
- **Participation of Women:** Women participation can be enhanced by appointing female supervisors on MGNREGS works. Women should be involved in the selection of works, which can create further mainstream employment in the village.
- **Action against Corruption:** Strict actions should be taken against the officers and other employees who are found involved in misguiding the persons who make their approaches to them to know about the Government Schemes for employment opportunities.

CONCLUSION:

The government has done the right thing by stepping up allocations both for MGNREGA and PDS grains. But in the end, MGNREGA cannot be any more than a scheme that provides employment during the agricultural lean season for landless labourers and marginal cultivators. Now, the focus has to be on getting people, including the migrant labourers, back to normal work. Also, it may be inferred that above suggestions, if taken care of, will definitely make MGNREGA a real instrument for overall rural upliftment, in general & improve the lot of the rural poor s, in particular.

REVIVING THE INDIAN ECONOMY POST COVID-19'

CONTEXT

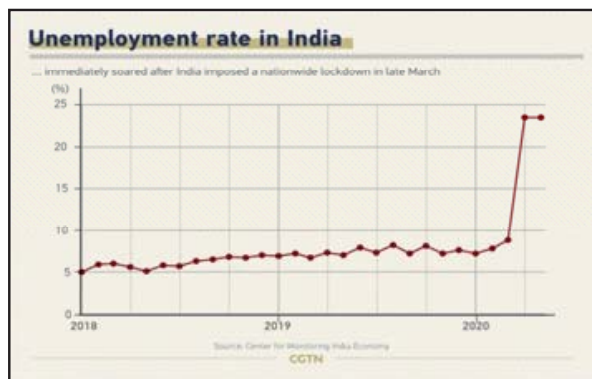
The economic impact of COVID-19 has been much discussed. There is unanimity among economists that the global economy will experience one of its worst years in history. India is no exception and its economy is expected to contract significantly.

The current economic situation

- The Pandemic has caused a shock for the Indian economy as well. The four legs on which the Indian economy had been growing have all been impacted adversely.
 - Consumption: because of the Demand shock caused by Lockdown and Social distancing.
 - Manufacturing: hit by large scale Supply chain disruptions: Even in case of essential services for which there is a demand, no one is able to produce due to this disruption in the last 60 days
 - Exports: on a pause mode as global consumers pause
 - Capital flows: Pandemic causes risk aversion and Emerging markets have felt the impact of capital outflows or slowdowns in Capital Inflows.
- All this and general psychological fear about the Pandemic have impacted our economy. Some have tried to compare the 2020 Economic shock to the 2008 Financial crisis, but that is completely inaccurate.
- The 2008 crisis was restricted to liquidity for the banking sector. This current shock is deeper and broader and impacts almost the entire real economy.
- It is a larger stop sign across areas like consumption, demand, manufacturing, supply chain and capital.

Understanding the 'true' impact on economy

- **Reversal of economic progress:** Economic contraction is not merely a GDP number for economists to analyse and debate. It means a reversal of many years of progress.
- **Slipping back into poverty:** A significant number among the weaker sections of society may slip back into poverty, a rare occurrence for a developing nation.
- **Severe unemployment:** Many enterprises may shut down. An entire generation may be lost due to severe unemployment. A contracting economy can adversely impact the ability to feed and educate our children owing to a shortage of financial resources.



- There is extreme duress among India's poor. At a time when agriculture activity has been robust, data show that just in the month of June, 62 million people demanded work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) programme at minimum wages.
- This is thrice the usual number and 10 times more than the total number employed by the entire listed corporate sector.
- It is evident that most of them are displaced non-agricultural workers, struggling to make ends meet.
- Such is the scale and enormity of despair in our labour force. Fortuitously, the MGNREGA programme has proved to be a bedrock of support in such times but it is not enough.
- **More liquidity:** A meaningful cash transfer can restore confidence in these families. Money in the hands of people can provide an immediate sense of security and confidence, which is the cornerstone to restoring economic normalcy.

Economic Projections

- The previous growth estimate of 5.8% made by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for FY21 was slashed down to a paltry 1.9%. The International Monetary Fund called it the worst downturn in the global economy since the Great Depression.
- The World Bank has estimated India's growth for the same fiscal at a mere 1.5%-2.8% - the lowest since the 1991 economic reforms.

◎ CHALLENGES

- **Lack of revenues:** The government requires significant financial resources. However, finances are already stretched with a major shortfall in revenues. New avenues for tax revenues are not feasible in the short term. Higher borrowing by the government is inevitable. India cannot afford to be too fiscally restrained in these distressing times.
- **Low demands:** India is facing a structural demand problem, one that predates the COVID-19 shock. This challenge has been exacerbated over the past few months as jobs have been lost and incomes have collapsed.
- **Lack of investment:** Investment shrank by almost 3% over the year. Until then, India hadn't seen investment shrink for almost two decades, according to World Bank data. (It grew about 10% in 2018-19.) And this shrinkage began well before the pandemic — in April 2019. In India, the virus struck an economy with pre-existing conditions.

Steps taken by the Government

- The Government announced ₹ 20Lcr (\$c. \$281bn) Atma Nirbhar Bharat COVID-19 Economic stimulus package.
- Though a number of economists believe that the actual stimulus package amounts only 2% of the GDP in reality, as opposed to the 10% claimed by the Government.
- Most critics affirm that it fails to provide the stimulus that the economy needs.
- The salient features of the package include
 - ▶ a stimulus to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through a ₹3Lcr (\$40bn) loan scheme
 - ▶ helping other stressed business sectors such as Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), power distribution companies and the real estate sector
 - ▶ provisioning of free food grains to migrant workers for the next two months
 - ▶ provisioning of a ₹ 1Lcr (\$13bn) subsidy to agricultural cooperative societies
 - ▶ hiking the allocation for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) by ₹ 40,000cr (\$5.3bn)

- ▶ extension of credit facilities to street vendors, interest subvention for small businesses, etc.

What needs to be done to 'flatten the Corona curve'?

- **Instant action:** The deleterious impact of an economic contraction is long and deep, especially on the poor. It is thus imperative to act with utmost urgency to nurse the economy back to good health.
- **Injecting confidence:** The slowdown in economic activity is both a function of external factors such as the lockdown and behavioural changes of people and enterprises, driven by fear. The foundation for reviving our economy is to inject confidence back in the entire ecosystem. People must feel confident about their lives and livelihoods. Entrepreneurs must feel confident of reopening and making investments. Bankers must feel confident about providing capital. Multilateral organisations must feel confident enough to provide funding to India. Sovereign ratings agencies must feel confident about India's ability to fulfil its financial obligations and restore economic growth.
- **Reviving the banking sector:** There is urgent need to revive the banking sector. Reviving the sector is not merely about capital infusion or disinvestment of public sector banks. Allowing institutions such as the RBI, public sector banks, bankruptcy boards, securities and insurance regulators to function freely and professionally is the foundational step to restoring confidence in the financial system. It is critical to allow processes such as the insolvency process to function smoothly without intervention.
- **More borrowings:** India must make full use of loan programmes of international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

◎ CONCLUSION

Recovery needs reform. India has postponed competitiveness-enhancing measures long enough. In a crisis of this magnitude, there are no excuses left.

PAKISTAN'S NEW POLITICAL MAP

CONTEXT

Pakistan released a new political map that claimed all of Jammu and Kashmir as Pakistan territories, on the eve of the first anniversary of revocation of Article 370. It also includes Ladakh, Sir Creek and Junagadh.

◎ BACKGROUND

- India faces territorial issues with many of its neighbors. Over the past 70 years, it has succeeded to resolve its boundary issues only with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.
- The un-demarcated boundaries with Myanmar, Bhutan and lately with China, Pakistan and Nepal have often flared up into tensions.
- However there seems no end to boundary disputes with China and Pakistan, which often turn into a major military and diplomatic standoffs.

◎ ANALYSIS

The new political map

- On paper, the map links Pakistan with Chinese-administered territory via the Shaksgam Valley, a

part of the Gilgit-Baltistan region ceded to China by Pakistan under their 1963 border settlement.

- To the east is the Aksai Chin region – the limit of China's claims in Kashmir which it has controlled since a 1962 war with India.
- Between the two lies the Siachen Glacier, an undefined area at the northern extreme of the de facto border between Pakistani- and Indian-administered Kashmir known as the Line of Control – not to be confused with the Line of Actual Control, which separates Indian- and Chinese-controlled territory in the region.
- The new map showed Pakistan frontier clearly marked with India with the entire Kashmir as its territory.
- However, the part of Kashmir and Ladakh border with China was not marked and described as Frontier Undecided.



- Similarly, the Line of Control had been extended to the Karakoram Pass, clearing showing Siachen as part of Pakistan. The LoC had been marked by a red dotted line.
- The J&K had been described as Disputed Territory Final status to be decided in line with relevant UNSC resolutions.
- Another change in the map showed that the international border lines lies along the eastern bank of Sir Creek, which was previously along the western bank.

What is Sir Creek?

- Sir Creek is a 96-km strip of water disputed between India and Pakistan in the Rann of Kutch marshlands.
- Originally named Ban Ganga, Sir Creek is named after a British representative.
- The Creek opens up in the Arabian Sea and roughly divides the Kutch region of Gujarat from the Sindh Province of Pakistan.
- Apart from strategic location, Sir Creek's core importance is fishing resources. Sir Creek is considered to be among the largest fishing grounds in Asia.

The other inclusion is that of Junagadh, also in coastal Gujarat.

Junagarh

- Junagarh is situated in the western state of Gujarat at the foothills of the Girnar Hills.
- The city of Junagarh takes its name from the fort that encloses the old city.
- Junagarh was an important trade center as testified by the Ashokan edicts dating from 250 BC.
- At the time of partition, the Nawab of Junagarh opted to take his tiny state into Pakistan. However, the predominantly Hindu population forced the Nawab to leave the country instead.

Is it a copy?

- Such maps were published in 1947-48 when Mohammed Ali Jinnah was Pakistan's first governor general.
- But the Islamic Republic had to rework the map that then had also included East Pakistan or the present day Bangladesh.

A 'tit-for-tat'?

- The move is timed with the first anniversary of the abrogation of Article 370, which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir.
- Pakistan's inclusion of J&K and Ladakh appears to be a tit-for-tat for India's inclusion of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir as part of the union territory of Jammu & Kashmir, and of Gilgit Baltistan as part of Ladakh in the new map the government released on November 2 after the re-organisation of J&K came into effect on October 31 last year.

Major border dispute with Pakistan

- **Jammu and Kashmir:** It is the center of the major dispute between Pakistan and India. Three wars have been fought between the two countries over Jammu and Kashmir.
- **Siachen Glacier:** The Siachen Glacier is located in the eastern Karakoram in the Himalayas just east of the Actual Ground Position Line between India-Pakistan. India controls all of the Siachen Glacier itself, including all tributary glaciers. At 70 km (43 mi) long, it is the longest glacier in the Karakoram and second-longest in the world's non-polar areas.
- **Saltoro Ridge:** The Saltoro Mountains is a subrange of the Karakoram Heights or of Saltoro Ridge. They are located in the heart of the Karakoram, on the southwest side of the Siachen Glacier.
- They are claimed as part of Ladakh union territory by India and as part of Gilgit-Baltistan by Pakistan.
- In 1984, India assumed military control of the main peaks and passes of the range, with Pakistani forces into the glacial valleys just to the west.
- **Sir Creek:** The Sir Creek is a 96 km (60 mi) strip of water disputed between India and Pakistan in the Rann of Kutch marshlands. Pakistan claims the line to follow the eastern shore of the estuary while India claims a center line

How would it impact?

- The impact of PM Khan's cartographic hallucination on India-Pakistan ties is very significant.
- By reopening the **1947-48** maps, Pakistan has given up on bilateralism of **1972 Shimla Agreement** and **1999 Lahore Declaration** - the two agreements that committed both nations to resolving bilateral disputes bilaterally - and paved a way for unilateralism.

Is Pakistan working in collusion?

- But the map is also telling commentary about Pakistan's relationship with its 'iron brother' China that has been engaged in a standoff with India for the last three months in East Ladakh.

- PM Khan, who is often accused of reducing Pakistan as a client-state of Xi Jinping's China, has not only kept Shaksgam Valley and Aksai Chin out of its cartographic expansion but also left this frontier undefined to let China draw the line on the map.

Boundary disputes with China

- Aksai Chin:** Located in the northwestern part of the Tibetan Plateau, it is approximately 35,241 sq km in size, administered by China and part of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region. India considers it a part of its union territory of Ladakh.
- Depsang Plains:** The Depsang Plains are located on the border of the union territory of Ladakh and disputed zone of Aksai Chin. The Chinese Army controlled most of the plains during its 1962 war with India, while India controls the western portion of the plains.
- Demchok, Chumar:** Both in the Leh district of Ladakh, controlled by India.
- Kaurik, Shipki La:** In the Kinnour district of Himachal Pradesh.
- Nelang, Pulam Sumda, Sang, Jadhong and Lapthal:** In the Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand.
- Barahoti:** In the Chamoli district of Uttarakhand whose grazing fields are disputed by China, which is also in the state of Uttarakhand and is controlled by India.
- Trans-Karakoram Tract:** An area of nearly 5,800 square kilometers (2,239 sq mi) along both sides of the Shaksgam River, is entirely administered by China as a part of Kargilik County in the Kashgar Prefecture of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region.

- Arunachal Pradesh:** Arunachal Pradesh is a state of India created on Jan. 20, 1972, and located in the far northeast. The majority of the territory is claimed by China as part of South Tibet.

- It is quite evident that Pakistan has followed Nepal. Kathmandu had issued a map to emphasize its illegal claims on Lipulekh, Limiyadhura and Kalapani in India's Uttarakhand on 21 May 2020.
- It is not mere coincidence that both Pakistan and Nepal are close allies of Beijing with the latter pumping in money in form of infrastructure aid to prop up both regimes.

India's take on the issue

- India, like Pakistan, claims Kashmir in its entirety and has no interest in pursuing a United Nations-supervised plebiscite, supported by Islamabad, for the region's residents to decide which country they should join.
- While the Indian government has dismissed the new Pakistan map as a "political absurdity", the map opens up the route for unilateralism by India should it choose to invoke it in future as Islamabad has indulged in unilateralism by issuing a new map that depicts territories firmly under Indian control as Pakistani territory.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps, the move to redraw the Pakistani map stemmed from the need to satisfy the jingoistic domestic constituency. Diplomatically, the redrawing of the map will have no impact whatsoever on India.

WAR OVER THREE LANGUAGE FORMULA

CONTEXT

After the release of the New Education Policy 2020, the Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu protested against the policy accusing it of imposing Hindi and Sanskrit.

◎ BACKGROUND

- The Union Government had constituted Education Commission in 1964 under the Chairmanship of **Prof. D.S. Kothari** to review the 'entire educational setup and recommend changes'.
- The report touched upon every aspect of education — aims, objectives, structure, syllabus, teaching methods, pay structure, language in education, science, strength of the class, etc.
- M.C. Chagla, the then Union Education Minister, hailed the report as the '**Teachers' Magna Carta**'.
- Addressing the issue of language in education, the Commission recommended 'Three Language Formula' as a means to Social and National Integration.
- A different 'Three Language Formula' had already been recommended by the Central Advisory Board of Education in 1956 and a simplified version of the same was recommended by the Conference of Chief Ministers in 1961.
- The National Policy on Education (1964) that came after the Kothari Commission Report made 'Three Language Formula' a policy.
- Accordingly, all students would study in mother tongue from Class I-IV. In Class V-VIII, the student would study two languages — regional language and English and Hindi depending on the region.
- The non-Hindi States would make Hindi mandatory and the Hindi States were expected to offer a Southern language.
- The implementation of these recommendations, however, was not uniform across the country.

◎ ANALYSIS

What is the 'three language formula'?

The National Education Policy 2020 has 'emphasised' on the use of mother tongue or local language as the medium of instruction till Class 5 while, recommending its continuance till Class 8 and beyond.

- In India, the 'three-language formula' has its roots back in the year 1961.
- The formula means that students in Hindi-speaking states should learn a modern Indian language, apart from Hindi and English and, in non-Hindi-speaking

states, Hindi along with the regional language and English.

- **First language:** The First Language that students should study is the 'Mother tongue' or the regional language
- **Second language:** In Hindi-speaking states, the second-language would be English or some other language belonging to Modern India. In Non-Hindi states, the second language will be English or Hindi.
- **Third language:** In Hindi-speaking states, the third language would be English or some other language belonging to Modern India, but the one that is not chosen as the second language. In Non-Hindi states, the third language will be English or some other language belonging to Modern India, but the one which is not chosen as the second language.

Hindi imposition

- The Dr.K. Kasturirangan Committee Draft Report of 2019 made a subtle change in the 'Three Language Formula.'
- It made Hindi mandatory in non- Hindi speaking States. (Later the Hindi mandatory rule was withdrawn after Southern States raised objection)
- The Draft Report removed the necessity to study a Southern language for the Hindi speaking States.
- Instead, it inserted the term 'modern Indian language.' Modern Indian Languages are the ones listed under the VIII Schedule of the Constitution of India.
- Thus a student in a Hindi speaking area could study Hindi as First language, Second language and English.

How Constitution of India deals with language?

- Currently, the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution contains 22 official languages- Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Bodo, Santhali, Maithili and Dogri.

- Article 346 of the Indian Constitution recognizes 'Hindi' in 'Devanagari' script as the **official language** of Union government India.
- However, the Constitution did not declare Hindi as the National language, it rather accorded Hindi the status of 'official language' along with English.

Article 350A:

- Article 350A of the Constitution deals with the facilities for instruction in mother-tongue at the primary stage.
- It shall be the endeavour of every State and of every local authority within the State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the 'mother-tongue' at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups; and the President may issue such directions to any State as he considers necessary or proper for securing the provision of such facilities.

Article 351:

- Article 351 provides a directive for development of the Hindi language.
- It shall be the duty of the Union to promote the spread of the Hindi language, to develop it so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India and to secure its enrichment by assimilating without

interfering with its genius, the forms, style and expressions used in Hindustani and in the other languages of India specified in the Eighth Schedule, and by drawing, wherever necessary or desirable, for its vocabulary, primarily on Sanskrit and secondarily on other languages.

Why Tamil Nadu is opposing?

- Tamil Nadu felt that the 'Three Language Formula' was a ploy to introduce Hindi into Non-Hindi States and resisted the implementation.
- Tamil Nadu adopted a two language formula — Tamil and English. Hindi speaking States did not adopt a South Indian language.
- They too went for a two language formula. Hindi speaking States don't have a need for a South Indian language same as the Southern States do not have a need for Hindi.

◎ CONCLUSION

Today, India needs the acceptance of 'multilingualism' for the diversity to continue in all domains. It needs to concentrate on the effective teaching/ learning of languages — regional language and English in South, regional language and English in the Hindi belt, regional language and English in the North East. Knowing only one language is a handicap. It's time to pay attention to increasing the language proficiency level of students.

HIROSHIMA MARKS 75TH A-BOMB ANNIVERSARY

CONTEXT

The city of Hiroshima in western Japan marks the 75th anniversary of the world's first nuclear attack

◎ BACKGROUND

- The United States dropped the first atomic bomb (*the uranium bomb known as "Little Boy"*) on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, destroying the city.
- By the end of 1945, about 140,000 people — mostly civilians, and around 40% of the city's population prior to the attack — had died either in the blast or as a result of aftereffects.
- The US dropped a second bomb (*"Fat Man," a plutonium bomb*) three days later on the southern city of Nagasaki, which is estimated to have claimed a further 74,000 lives in 1945 alone.
- Japan declared its surrender days later, on August 15, 1945, ending World War II and, more broadly, its aggression toward Asian neighbors that had lasted nearly half a century.
- The device that exploded over Hiroshima destroyed about two-third of the city's structures.
- The atomic bombing of Japan was a hugely significant final act of the most destructive global conflict in human history.
- Simultaneously, it signalled the dawn of the atomic age, the arms race between the US and the Soviet Union and - before too long - the cold war.

◎ ANALYSIS

Why did the US drop the bomb?

- Japan was a fierce enemy of the US and its allies, Britain, China and the Soviet Union during World War II.
- By 1945, the allies had turned the tide of the war and pushed the Japanese forces back from many locations.
- The decision to take nuclear action against Japan is widely justified as a measure designed to end World War Two and thus save countless lives that might otherwise have been lost in battle.
- The atomic assaults were viewed by the US as a swift alternative to an ongoing Allied attempt to invade Japan, a plan that had so far proved unnervingly messy.
- The Japanese had publicly stated their intent to fight to the bitter end, and were using tactics such as kamikaze attacks, suicide attacks by Japanese fighter pilots against US warships.

- In July 1945, US President Harry Truman and allies demanded the "immediate and unconditional" surrender of Japan, but Japan did not issue a clear response.
- Shortly after, the US attacked Hiroshima, chosen because it was seen as a "strategically sound" target based on calculations around weather conditions, aircraft range, military impact and the impact on "enemy morale"

Why was Hiroshima chosen as a target?

- Hiroshima was a major Japanese military hub with factories, military bases and ammunition facilities.
- Historians say the United States picked it as a suitable target because of its size and landscape, and carefully avoided fire bombing the city ahead of time so American officials could accurately assess the impact of the atomic attack.
- The United States said the bombings hastened Japan's surrender and prevented the need for a U.S. invasion of Japan.
- Some historians today say Japan was already close to surrendering, but there is still debate in the U.S.

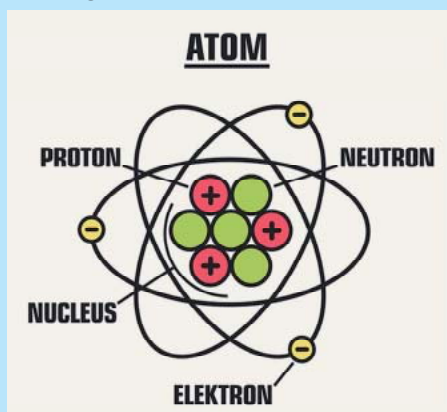
What effect did radiation have?

- Many people exposed to radiation developed symptoms such as vomiting and hair loss. Most of those with severe radiation symptoms died within three to six weeks.
- Others who lived beyond that developed health problems related to burns and radiation-induced cancers and other illnesses.
- The impact of the bomb was so terrific that practically all living things - human and animal - were literally seared to death by the tremendous heat and pressure set up by the blast.
- Thousands more died from their injuries, radiation sickness and cancer in the years that followed, bringing the toll closer to 200,000.
- But the damage did not end there. The radiation released from the explosion kept causing suffering.
- Five to six years after the bombings, the incidence of leukaemia increased noticeably among survivors. After about a decade, survivors began suffering from thyroid, breast, lung and other cancers at higher than normal rates.

- Survivors have a higher risk of developing cataracts and cancer. About 136,700 people certified as "hibakusha," as victims are called, under a government support program are still alive and entitled to regular free health checkups and treatment.
- Health monitoring of second-generation hibakusha began recently.
- Japan's government provided no support for victims until a law was finally enacted in 1957 under pressure from them.

What is an atomic bomb?

- An atom is the basic unit of matter. The nucleus of an atom is made of smaller particles called protons and neutrons. Other atomic particles called electrons surround the nucleus.
- Elements are the simplest chemical substances and consist of atoms that all have the same number of protons.
- In the 1930s, scientists showed that nuclear energy could be released from an atom, either by splitting the nucleus (fission) or fusing two smaller atoms to form a larger one (fusion).
- As the second world war erupted, intense research focused on how to artificially induce nuclear fission by firing a free neutron into an atom of radioactive uranium or plutonium.
- Through their efforts, scientists found a way to induce a chain reaction within a bomb that would generate an unprecedented amount of energy.
- An atomic bomb causes massive destruction through intense heat, pressure, radiation and radioactive fallout. At the hypocentre (centre of the blast), the heat is so intense, it vaporises people and buildings.



How the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki Changed the World?

- Whether or not the atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki should be viewed as a horrific necessity or an ethically indefensible aberration, it's impossible to deny the powerful historic precedent that they set.
- By granting the world a terrifying vision of the apocalyptic horror that nuclear warfare can inflict, the strikes on Japan have cast a long shadow over the last seven decades.
- The bombing was only a small part of the overall coverage of World War II (or barely mentioned at all).
- It was the start of the Cold War.

Can the world afford any future nuclear war?

- If a nuclear weapon were to be detonated over a city today, first responders - hospitals, firemen, aid organisations - would simply be unable to help.
- Nuclear weapons are depicted as so inhumane as to justify global prohibition of their production, retention or use.
- Any future nuclear warfare is predicted to have far more severe humanitarian and environmental consequences than the 1945 strikes on Japan.

The 'World' 75 years later

- There are growing tensions between global powers.
 - Relations between Russia and the US, the two nuclear superpowers, are under significant strain and both are modernising their nuclear arsenals.
 - Meanwhile, strategic competition between the US and China has sparked fears of a new cold war. There are a range of disputes between the two countries which could lead to a further deterioration in relations.
- At the same time, international arms control and disarmament mechanisms have begun to unravel.
- In 2019, the US withdrew from the **Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty**, which had banned nuclear-capable, land-launched missiles with a range between 500km and 5,500km, accusing Russia of non-compliance.
- The US also withdrew from the **Open Skies Treaty**, which allowed mutual surveillance of each country's territories.
- The **New Start agreement**, the last remaining limit on US and Russia arsenals, is set to expire in February 2021. While it's positive that negotiations have begun, it is not at all clear the treaty will be extended.

- There has been little progress on other arms control and global disarmament initiatives.
- There have also been challenges to nuclear **non-proliferation**. The withdrawal of the US from the nuclear accord with Iran was a step backwards that has undermined efforts to avert nuclear proliferation in the region.
- Efforts to dissuade North Korea from pursuing nuclear weapons have failed, with the country having conducted **six nuclear warhead tests since 2006**.

Is the world ready for 'Denuclearisation'?

- Seventy-five years later, the long-term goal of a nuclear weapon-free world remains a distant aspiration and there are several reasons to think that the level of nuclear weapons-related risk is rising.
- Though, denuclearisation advocacy has also been taken up globally in recent years.
- In 2017, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to **ICAN - the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons** – which successfully lobbied the UN General Assembly to hold a conference to negotiate a treaty banning nuclear weapons.
- The text of the **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons** was adopted by 122 states in 2017.
- States that wish to become parties to the treaty must commit to the total elimination of nuclear weapons. As of today, 60 states have signed the treaty, and of those, 13 have ratified it. Thirty-seven more ratifications are needed to make the treaty binding.
- However, none of the nine nuclear powers (United States, Russia, United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea) support the ban.
- Australia's refusal to endorse the ban is tied to this political reality. It is one of 30 "nuclear-weapon-endorsing-states" who rely on the nuclear "protection" of allies.
- The government argues for a "building blocks" approach instead, favouring incremental steps towards nuclear disarmament.

Counting the nuclear warheads

- The number of nuclear warheads has dropped from a peak of around 70,000 in the mid-1980s to about 14,000 today.
- But in the past 25 years, India, Pakistan and North Korea have established themselves as nuclear states

- China has expanded its modest arsenal.
- The United States and Russia — far and away the largest nuclear powers — have begun extricating themselves from treaties that have bound them since the end of the Cold War. 92% of these weapons are held by the US and Russia.

The people of Japan, very recently, have had legitimate cause to fear the nuclear threat posed by North Korea.

What the world needs to do?

- Re-energising the agenda:** Given the rising tensions and uncertainty, there is an urgent need to re-energise the global nuclear non-proliferation agenda and reduce the risk of the use of nuclear weapons. This is why Labour will place arms control and non-proliferation efforts at the heart of its foreign policy commitment to peace-building.
- Similar political commitments:** Addressing rising nuclear risk requires the same political commitment and statecraft that achieved disarmament breakthroughs in the past.
- Completing commitments:** Members must look to finally complete the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Any testing of nuclear weapons has the potential to undo much of the progress we have seen on arms control over the last 60 years. Under a Labour government, the UK ratified the CTBT but currently France and Russia are the only other nuclear-armed states to have ratified it. Britain should become a renewed advocate for the treaty.
- Strengthening the NPT:** In the same vein, the global powers must look to strengthen the NPT.
 - Turning 50 this year, the NPT is the most important treaty in the history of nuclear disarmament, but there are important non-signatories outside the agreement.
 - The 2020 review conference for the treaty, which has been postponed due to Covid-19 to 2021, is an important opportunity to reinvigorate the multilateral disarmament agenda and address the lack of progress on the commitments made in 2010.

© CONCLUSION

Today, after 75 years, the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki continue to work hard to ensure that the consequences of the atomic bombings are not lost to history. It reminds the world that nuclear weapons could unleash if used again. The responsible word demands and needs a 'denuclearised future'.

01

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AYODHYA'S RAM TEMPLE, A 3-STOREY STRUCTURE WITH NAGARA STYLE ARCHITECTURE

◎ CONTEXT:

The Ram Temple in Ayodhya will be built in the Nagara style of architecture and on the lines of North Indian temple architecture. It will comprise three stories with pillars and domes. It will be double the size of the previous planned design.

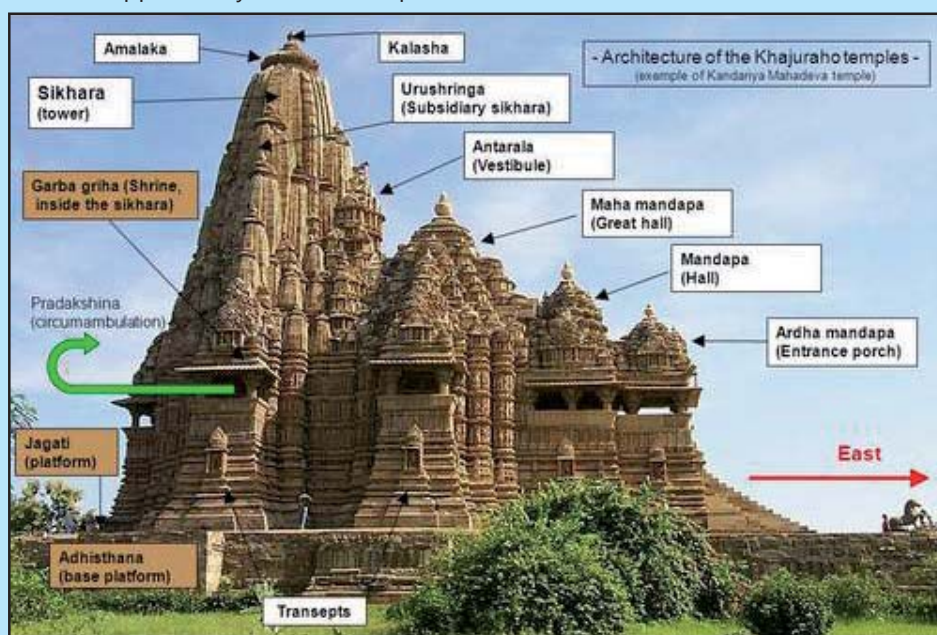
◎ ABOUT:

The Nagara or North Indian Temple Architecture:

- The Nagara style is mainly associated with the land between the Himalayas and Vindhyas.
- The basic plan of Nagara temple is square, with a number of graduated projections (rathakas) in the middle of each face which gives it a **cruciform shape** in the exterior.
- A temple tower or a conical or convex shikhara marks the elevation of the temples.
- The shikhara consists of several layers of carved courses usually crowned by an amalaka (notched ring stone).
- The two basic factors of the style- the cruciform plan and the curvilinear shikhara are visible in northern temples from the 6th century CE, in the late Gupta period.
- Earlier temples began with a single projection on each face and the plan came to be known as triratha. Later in the course of time, the number of projection was increased. The Dashavatara temple at Deogarh, UP, and the brick temple at Bhitargaon, UP are examples of early Nagara style of temples.

Basic components of a temple:

- **Garbhagriha or Sanctum:** Earlier, it was just a small cubicle with a small entrance but as time passed, it grew into a large chamber. It houses the idol or image of the deity.
- **Mandapa:** The entrance to the temple and it features space for a large number of worshippers to gather at this place. It can be described as a hall which has a roof supported by a number of pillars.



Shikhar or Vimana: It is a mountain-like spire which is generally seen in the temples that were constructed after fifth century AD. In North India style, it is called Shikhar while in South India it is called Vimana. Shikhar has a curved shape while Vimana has a pyramidal tower-like shape.

- **Antrala or vestibule:** The mandapa in front of garbhagriha is called as Antrala or vestibule.
- **Mahamandapa or Gudhamandapa:** The large wall in front of Antarala is called Mahamandapa or Gudhamandapa.
- **Ardhamandapa or half porch:** There is also a smaller mandapa in front of Mahamandapa which is called as Ardhamandapa or half porch. This is followed by Dwara or doorways.
- **Pradakshinapath:** The garbhagriha is surrounded by a corridor or circulatory path called Pradakshinapath.

- © **BACKGROUND:**
- The design was revamped after the Supreme Court in 2019 paved the way for the construction of a temple at a spot in Ayodhya where devotees believe Lord Ram was born.
 - The court directed the Centre to allot an alternative five-acre plot for building a new mosque in Ayodhya.
 - The mosque in Ayodhya was demolished in December 1992 by 'karsevaks' who claimed an ancient Ram temple had stood on the same site.

RBI ANNOUNCES ECONOMIC MEASURES TO COUNTER THE CORONAVIRUS IMPACT ON ECONOMY

- © **CONTEXT:**
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced a slew of measures in order to provide relief for the ongoing Coronavirus outbreak in India, following a three-day meeting of its six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC).

Key-Highlights of the measures

- Repo rate unchanged at 4%
- Reverse repo rates unchanged at 3.35%
- Accommodative stance maintained
- Allows one-time restructuring of corporate loans
- LTV ratio for gold loans relaxed to 90% from 75%
- Introduces mechanism of Positive Pay for all cheques of value Rs 50,000 and above
- Additional special liquidity facility of Rs 10,000 crore to be provided to NABARD & NHB

On Forex

- Ratio of forex reserves to external debt has increased from 76% to 85.5%
- Forex reserves rose by USD 56.8 billion in FY21 so far from April to July
- Forex reserves now stand at USD 534.6 bn or 13.4 months of import

On inflation

- MPC expects headline inflation to remain elevated in Q2FY21

- MPC expects headline inflation to ease in the second half of FY
- Inflation pressures evident across all sub-groups
- More favourable food inflation may emerge on bumper rabi crop
- High pump prices of fuel could impart cost pressure
- Inflation base effect favourable in H2
- External demand expected to remain anaemic due to pandemic

Outlook on the current scenario

- For 2021, real GDP growth is expected to be negative
- Space for further monetary action is available but advisable to be judicious
- MPC will remain watchful w.r.t. inflation dynamics to further use space available on monetary side when appropriate
- 250 bps rate cut is working through the system
- Portfolio inflows to EMs have resumed and EM currencies have appreciated
- Early signs of revival in May/June subdued in July due to renewed surge in Covid-19 cases
- High frequency indicators have leveled off after resumption of local lockdowns
- Producer sentiment on input prices remains muted
- Supply chain disruptions persist with implications on prices of food & non-food items
- Protein based food items could be a pressure point
- OMOs, Twist, LTRO & TLTRO measures being sterilised via reverse repo ops

Additional Measures to Address COVID-19-Triggered Disruptions

The rise of COVID-19 cases under fragile macroeconomic and financial conditions has forced the central bank to come out with additional measures. The objective of these measures is to:

- enhance liquidity support for financial markets, other stakeholders
- further ease financial stress due to COVID-19 disruptions, strengthen credit discipline
- improve credit flow
- deepen digital payment systems
- augment customer safety in cheque payments
- facilitate innovations across financial sector

The Monetary Policy Process

Monetary policy refers to the policy of the central bank with regard to the use of monetary instruments under its control to achieve the goals specified in the Act. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is vested with the responsibility of conducting monetary policy. This responsibility is explicitly mandated under the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.

- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) constituted by the Central Government under Section 45ZB determines the policy interest rate required to achieve the inflation target.
- The Reserve Bank's Monetary Policy Department (MPD) assists the MPC in formulating the monetary policy.
- This is the first scheduled policy review since February.

- The RBI's six-member Monetary Policy Committee has already met twice outside its bi-monthly cycle, first in March and then in May, on account of the fast-changing macroeconomic situation arising from the coronavirus pandemic.

RBI SETS UP PANEL FOR STRESSED LOANS RESOLUTION NORMS'

◎ CONTEXT:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) constituted the proposed expert committee under the chairmanship of veteran banker K.V. Kamath to make recommendations on norms for the resolution of COVID-19 related stressed loans.

◎ ABOUT:

- The Committee will be headed by K.V. Kamath.
 - K V Kamath, a career banker, was till 2009 the MD & CEO of ICICI Bank.
 - Kamath in his last stint was associated with the **BRICS led New Development Bank (NDB)** as Chairman and Director, a position he had assumed in 2015.
- The other members of the Committee are as follow:
 - Diwakar Gupta (effective September 1, 2020, after the completion of his term as Vice President, ADB)
 - T.N. Manoharan (effective August 14, 2020, after the completion of his term as Chairman, Canara Bank)
 - Ashvin Parekh, Strategy Advisor (CEO, Indian Banks' Association, as the Member Secretary)
- The **Indian Banks' Association (IBA)** will function as the secretariat to the committee and the committee will be fully empowered to consult or invite any person it deems fit.

Indian Banks' Association (IBA)

- Indian Banks' Association (IBA) is an association of Indian banks and financial institutions.
- It was formed on 26 September 1946 in Mumbai as a representative body of management of banking operating in India.

- The committee will submit its recommendations to the apex bank, which will notify them along with modifications, if any, in 30 days.

◎ BACKGROUND

- As part of the statement on **Developmental and Regulatory Policies** released along with the **Monetary Policy Statement**, the Reserve Bank has announced a 'Resolution Framework for Covid19-related Stress', as a special window under the **Prudential Framework on Resolution of Stressed Assets** issued in 2019.
- The resolution framework envisages constitution of an expert committee by the RBI to make recommendations on the required financial parameters to be factored in into the resolution plans, with sector-specific benchmark ranges for such parameters.
- The Expert Committee shall also undertake the process validation for the resolution plans to be implemented under this framework, without going into the commercial aspects, in respect of all accounts with aggregate exposure of Rs 1500 crore and above at the time of invocation



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Impact of COVID-19 on new and existing stressed assets:

- COVID 19 and consequent lockdowns have caused economic disruptions across the world, on account of disrupted supply chains and altered consumption patterns.
- In India, this disruption has been aggravated by the migrant labour crisis, and the prevalence of slow growth and high unemployment even prior to the lockdown.
- This is likely to exacerbate the existing twin balance sheet problem.

Stressed assets

- Stressed assets = NPAs + Restructured loans + Written off assets
 - **Non-Performing Assets:** A loan whose interest and/or installment of principal have remained 'overdue' (not paid) for a period of 90 days is considered as NPA
 - **Restructured asset:** Restructured asset or loan are that assets which got an extended repayment period, reduced interest rate, converting a part of the loan into equity, providing additional financing, or some combination of these measures.
 - **Written off assets:** Written off assets are those the bank or lender doesn't count the money borrower owes to it.

RBI TO BROUGHT STARTUPS UNDER PRIORITY SECTOR LENDING (PSL)'

◎ **CONTEXT:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) brought startups under the purview of priority sector lending (PSL), a move that will make it easier for startups to raise funds from banks.

◎ **ABOUT:** **What is Priority Sector Lending?**

- The RBI mandates banks to lend a certain portion of their funds to specified sectors-- agriculture, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), export credit, education, housing, social infrastructure, renewable energy and others.
- The idea behind this is to ensure that adequate institutional credit reaches some of the rather vulnerable sectors of the economy, which otherwise may not be attractive for banks from the profitability point of view.

The existing guidelines:

- Under existing guidelines, bank loans up to a limit of Rs 150 million for purposes like solar power generators, biomass power generators, wind mills, micro-hydel plants and for non-conventional energy based public utilities like street lighting systems and remote village electrification are currently eligible to be classified under priority sector loans under the '**Renewable Energy**' category.
- For individual households, the loan limit is Rs 1 million per borrower.
- The PSL guidelines were last reviewed by the RBI in April 2015.
- The revised guidelines also aim to encourage and support environment friendly lending policies to help achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Startups

- Startups are companies or ventures that are focused around a single product or service that the founders want to bring to market.
- These companies typically don't have a fully developed business model and, more importantly, lack adequate capital to move on to the next phase of business.
- Most of these companies are initially funded by their founders.
- Startups were considered under the MSME category and were required to show three years of profitability.

Significance of the step

- **Low cost debts:** This move will help startups free up their equity and raise low cost debt. Banks will now see startups more seriously while providing them loans.
- **Reducing dependency:** The inclusion of startups in the PSL category is expected to add value by reducing dependence on equity capital.
- **More liquidity:** It will enhance the liquidity options available to startups.

UNESCO-IOC TSUNAMI-READY RECOGNITION TO ODISHA COMMUNITIES'

◎ CONTEXT:

Odisha has achieved another milestone in disaster management. Venkatraipur in Ganjam and Noliasahi in Jagatsinghpur have been recognised by UNESCO-IOC as Tsunami-Ready Communities.

◎ ABOUT:

- The Indian Ocean Tsunami Ready Programme of IOC-UNESCO is a community performance-based programme.
- It facilitates tsunami preparedness as an active collaboration of the community, community leaders, and national and local emergency management agencies.
- The main objective of this programme is-
 - to improve coastal community preparedness for tsunami emergencies
 - to minimize the loss of life and property
 - to ensure structural and systematic approach in building community preparedness.
- The Tsunami Ready program is implemented by the Odisha State Disaster Management Authority (OSDMA).

Tsunami

- A tsunami is a series of great sea waves caused by an underwater earthquake, landslide, or volcanic eruption.
- More rarely, a tsunami can be generated by a giant meteor impact with the ocean.
- A tsunami is not a single wave but a series of waves, also known as a wave train. The first wave in a tsunami is not necessarily the most destructive. Tsunamis are not tidal waves.

How Odisha is emerging as a role model?

- The UNESCO recognition to Odisha is an outcome of the efforts of the government to promote tsunami preparedness through active collaboration of public, community leaders, and national and local emergency management agencies.
- Odisha has emerged as a role model in disaster preparedness with decades of positive intervention by the government, civil society groups, and NGOs.
- The state has won praise from numerous national and international organisations, including the United Nations, for its deft handling of cyclones Phailin and Fani.
- **Odisha State Disaster Management Authority (OSDMA)** won the IT Excellence Award, 2019, for its innovative conception by using information technology in the field of disaster management.
 - The OSDMA was established in 1999, much before the Disaster Management Act was passed in 2005, and the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) was constituted in 2001.

Significance of the recognition

- **Emerging as a role model:** The recognition by the UNESCO is a great achievement for Odisha for their Tsunami preparedness. It would make Odisha a role model for tsunami preparedness. With this award, the state is motivated to make the balance 326 villages and urban local bodies Tsunami ready in a time period of one year.
- **International recognition:** With this recognition, India becomes the first country to implement Tsunami Ready in the Indian Ocean Region and Odisha, the first state to achieve this feat.

TRUMP SIGNS ORDER AGAINST HIRING H-1B VISA HOLDERS FOR FEDERAL CONTRACTS'

◎ **CONTEXT:** In a huge blow to Indian IT professionals eyeing the US job market, President Donald Trump signed an executive order preventing federal agencies from contracting or subcontracting foreign workers -- mainly those on H-1B visa -- from hiring.

◎ **ABOUT:** **What is H-1B visa?**

- The H-1B is a visa in the United States under the Immigration and Nationality Act, which allows US employers to temporarily employ foreign workers in speciality occupations.
- A speciality occupation requires the application of a specialised knowledge and a bachelor's degree or equivalent of work experience.
 - The duration of a stay is three years and can be extended up to six years.
 - Once this period is over, the visa holder will need to re-apply.
- The law says that employers must generally withhold Social Security and Medicare taxes from the wages paid to employees in H1B visa status.
- A person in the H-1B visa status must continue to be employed by the employer in order to stay in the H-1B status.
- In case the employment ends for any reason, the employee must leave the United States, unless the person applies for and is granted change in status or finds another employer with the H-1B status.
- Apart from the H-1B visas, the US government also issues L1 visas which allow companies to transfer highly skilled workers to US for a period of up to seven years.
- H-2B visas allow food and agricultural workers to seek employment in the US.

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◎ BACKGROUND

- The move came over a month after the Trump administration in June 23 suspended the H-1B visas along with other types of foreign work visas until the end of 2020 to protect American workers in a crucial election year.
- The new restrictions took effect from June 24.

The impact on Indians:

- The proclamation issued will immediately affect the processing of all new H-1B, H-2B, J and L visa categories.
- This would mean that those who do not have a valid non-immigrant visa as of June 23 and those who are outside the US, will not be allowed to enter the country until December 31 2020.
- While about 70% of the H-1B and L-1 visas are granted to Indian nationals, this June Ban is unlikely to have a major, immediate impact on Indian IT/ITeS companies as only a relatively small number of H-1B employees will be affected.
- However, those workers in essential services in the food sector have been given a reprieve and their entry shall be decided by the consular officer of the immigration services.
- Suspension of the H1-B visas by the US will cost domestic IT firms Rs 1,200 crore and have a marginal 0.25-0.30 per cent impact on their profitability.

The new order however will not impact H-1B, H2B, J and L visa holders and their spouses or children who are already in the US.

US VOTES AGAINST CUBA ON UNHRC'

◎ CONTEXT:

The United States has urged UN members not to support Cuba's bid to join the organisation's Human Rights Council.

◎ ABOUT:

- The UN Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and make recommendations on them.
- The UNHRC has "the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year".
- The Human Rights Council replaced the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR).

Membership

- The Council is made up of 47 UN Member States, which are elected by the UNGA through a direct and secret ballot. The General Assembly takes into account the contribution of the candidate states to the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as their voluntary pledges and commitments in this regard.
- The seats are distributed geographically and are awarded for a period of three years. Members are not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms.
- Seats on the Council are distributed as follows:
 - **African States:** 13 seats
 - **Asia-Pacific States:** 13 seats
 - **Latin American and Caribbean States:** 8 seats
 - **Western European and other States:** 7 seats
 - **Eastern European States:** 6 seats

The upcoming elections

- As the UN Human Rights Council is set to elect 15 new members this fall, Russia and China are both vying for seats at the 47-nation group.
- Cuba, which sat on the UNHRC in 2014-2016 and 2017-2019, has applied to fill one of the regional vacancies for 2021-2023.

India and UNHRC

- India has been elected eight times to the UN Security Council.
- India was elected to the United Nations' top human rights body for a period of three years beginning January 1, 2019.
- India has been seeking a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council as a member of the G4, an organization composed of Brazil, Germany, Japan, and India, all who are currently seeking permanent representation.

LOKMANYA BAL GANGADHAR TILAK'S 100TH DEATH ANNIVERSARY'

◎ CONTEXT:

One of the firebrand freedom fighters and the strongest proponent of 'purnaswaraj' or 'total self-rule', Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak's 100th death anniversary was observed on August 1, 2020.

◎ ABOUT:

- Bal Gangadhar Tilak was a scholar, a writer, mathematician and a philosopher. He was given the title, 'Lokmanya', which means 'beloved leader' by his followers.
- Lokmanya Tilak received his education at the Deccan College in Pune and he earned his Bachelor's degree in 1876, in mathematics and Sanskrit. Later he also studied law at the University of Bombay.
- He founded the Deccan Education Society in 1884 with an aim to educate common people in English.
- Lokmanya Tilak founded and edited two newspapers - Kesari in Marathi and The Mahratta in English. He used his pen as a weapon to criticise the colonial rulers.
- Bal Gangadhar Tilak tirelessly contributed to help the country break free from the British rule.
- Part of the Lal-Bal-Pal (Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal) troika, Bal Gangadhar Tilak was called 'father of the Indian unrest' by British colonial rulers.
- He was imprisoned a number of times including a long stint at Mandalay in Myanmar. During his years in prison, he spent his time reading and writing. He wrote the famous 'Gita Rahasya' - an analysis of the Karma Yoga which finds its source in The Bhagavad Gita.
- While Jawaharlal Nehru called him the 'father of Indian revolution', Mahatma Gandhi described Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak as 'the maker of modern India'.

Poorna Swaraj

- Bal Gangadhar Tilak, often referred to as the 'father of the Indian unrest', was one of the first revolutionists who not only raised their voice against the British Raj in India but also channelised the patriotism and anguish of the general public towards the unsettling oppression, tyranny and injustice inflicted on Indians under the colonial rule, to the attainment of **poornaswaraj** (complete independence).
- On 26 January 1930, the Indian National Congress, in an electrifying resolution, declared Purna Swaraj - complete freedom from the British Raj.

- The Indian National Congress met in Lahore in December 1929. In December 1929, after Jawaharlal Nehru was elected the party president, the Indian National Congress passed a resolution for 'purnaswaraj' or complete independence from the British.
- One option before the Congress was to demand Dominion Status, under which India would have still remained at least nominally under British rule.
- The Congress rejected this option, and instead asked for Purna Swaraj, which means Full Independence.

Swaraj is my birth right and I shall have it-LokmanyaTilak

EWS QUOTA PROBLEM REFERRED TO CONSTITUTION BENCH'

◎ CONTEXT:

The Supreme Court referred to a five-judge Bench the "substantial question of law" whether or not grant of 10% reservation to economically weaker sections of the society is 'unconstitutional' and violates the 50% ceiling cap on quota declared by the courtroom itself.

◎ ABOUT:

The EWS Quota

- It provides for 10% reservation in government jobs and educational institutions for EWS, by amending Articles 15 and 16 that deal with the fundamental right to equality.
- While Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, Article 16 guarantees equal opportunity in matters of public employment.
- An additional clause was added to both provisions, giving Parliament the power to make special laws for EWS like it does for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes.
- The states are to notify who constitute EWS to be eligible for reservation.

Key-Highlights of the development

- A 3-judge Bench led by Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde mentioned the first query for the Constitution Bench to determine is whether or not "economic backwardness" might be the only criterion for granting quota in authorities jobs and academic establishments for individuals who would in any other case should compete within the basic class.
- The three-judge Bench had refused to remain the implementation of the Constitution (103rd Amendment) Act, which offers the 10% quota, when it had reserved for orders a year in the past.
- Several petitioners had challenged the validity of the Constitutional Amendment, saying the 50% quota restrict was a part of the Basic Structure of the Constitution.
- The financial reservation was launched within the Constitution by amending Articles 15 and 16 and including clauses empowering the State governments to supply reservation on the premise of financial backwardness.

What's the need to refer to a larger bench?

- A reference to a larger Bench means that the legal challenge is an important one.
- As per Article 145(3) of the Constitution, "**the minimum number of Judges who are to sit for the purpose of deciding any case involving a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of this Constitution" shall be five.**
- The Supreme Court rules of 2013 also say that writ petitions that allege a violation of fundamental rights will generally be heard by a bench of two judges unless it raises substantial questions of law. In that case, a five-judge bench would hear the case.
- Laws made by Parliament are presumed to be constitutional until proven otherwise in court. The SC had refused to stay the 103rd Amendment.

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- A reference will make no difference to the operation of the EWS quota.

Why is the quota challenged?

- The law was challenged primarily on two grounds.
 - **Violating the Basic Structure of the Constitution:** This argument stems from the view that the special protections guaranteed to socially disadvantaged groups is part of the Basic Structure and that the 103rd Amendment departs from this by promising special protections on the sole basis of economic status.
 - Violating the fundamental right to practise a trade/profession: Another challenge has been made on behalf of private, unaided educational institutions. They have argued that their fundamental right to practise a trade/profession is violated when the state compels them to implement its reservation policy and admit students on any criteria other than merit.

AMMONIUM NITRATE LINKED TO CATASTROPHIC BEIRUT EXPLOSION'

◎ **CONTEXT:** Beirut was declared a “disaster city”, in the wake of a huge explosion in the port of the Lebanese capital that left at least 135 people dead and 5,000 injured, caused by over 2,700 tonnes of ammonium nitrate kept in storage for over six years.

◎ **ABOUT:** Ammonium nitrate, the substance

- In its pure form, ammonium nitrate (NH_4NO_3) is a white, crystalline chemical which is soluble in water.
- It is the main ingredient in the manufacture of commercial explosives used in mining and construction.
- In India, The Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012, under The Explosives Act, 1884, define ammonium nitrate as the-
“compound with formula NH_4NO_3 including any mixture or compound having more than 45 per cent ammonium nitrate by weight including emulsions, suspensions, melts or gels but excluding emulsion or slurry explosives and non explosives emulsion matrix and fertilizers from which the ammonium nitrate cannot be separated”.

Regulation of Ammonium Nitrate in India

- The manufacture, conversion, bagging, import, export, transport, possession for sale or use of ammonium nitrate is covered under **The Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012.**
- The rules also make storage of ammonium nitrate in large quantities in populated areas **illegal in India.**
- For the manufacture of ammonium nitrate, an Industrial licence is required under the **Industrial Development and Regulation Act, 1951.**
- A license under the Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012 is also required for any activity related to ammonium nitrate.

Is it explosive?

- Pure ammonium nitrate is not an explosive on its own. It is classified as an **oxidiser (Grade 5.1)** under the **United Nations classification of dangerous goods.**
- If mixed with ingredients like fuel or some other contaminants, or because of some other external factors, it can be very explosive.

- However, for combinations to explode, triggers like detonators are required. Many Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) used by terrorists around the world have ANFO as the main explosive, triggered by primary explosives like RDX or TNT.

Is stored ammonium nitrate a major fire hazard?

- Large quantities of stored ammonium nitrate are regarded as a major fire hazard.
- The explosion of large storage can happen primarily in two ways.
 - **Contact with explosive mixture:** One is by some type detonation or initiation because the storage comes in contact with explosive mixture.
 - **Fire or heat generation:** Second, the blast can result due to a fire which starts in the ammonium nitrate store because of the heat generated due to the oxidation process at large scale.

There are several documented examples of deadly ammonium nitrate fire and explosion incidents in the past, some with large numbers of fatalities like in China in 2015 and in Texas in 1947.



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