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POLITY

1) Shekatkar Committee

About the Committee:
- The Committee is a 11-member committee, appointed by the erstwhile Defence Minister in mid-2016 headed by Lt. Gen. D.B. Shekatkar (Retd).
- It had the mandate to suggest measures to enhance combat capability and rebalance defence expenditure of the armed forces.
- It made about 99 recommendations from optimising defence budget to the **need for a Chief of the Defence Staff.**
- From those 65 recommendations pertaining to the Army were approved in August 2017.

What is the office of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)?
- The CDS is a highest military office that oversees and coordinates the working of the three Services, and offers seamless tri-service views and single-point advice to the Executive (Prime Minister) on long-term defence planning and management, including manpower, equipment and strategy, and above all, "jointsmanship" in operations.

Measures as recommended by the Committee and taken up for implementation include:
- Optimization of Signals Establishments to include Radio Monitoring Companies, Corps Air Support Signal Regiments, Air Formation Signal Regiments, Composite Signal Regiments and merger of Corps Operating and Engineering Signal Regiments.
- Restructuring of repair echelons in the Army to include Base Workshops, Advance Base Workshops and Static / Station Workshops in the field Army.
- Redeployment of Ordnance echelons to include Vehicle Depots, Ordnance Depots and Central Ordnance Depots apart from

streamlining inventory control mechanisms.
- Better utilization of Supply and Transportation echelons and Animal Transport units.
- Closure of Military Farms and Army Postal Establishments in peace locations.
- Enhancement in standards for recruitment of clerical staff and drivers in the Army.
- Improving the efficiency of the National Cadet Corps.

Why in News?
- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has approved a proposal for the abolition of 9,304 posts in the Military Engineering Service (MES).This is in line with the recommendations of the Lt. Gen. D.B. Shekatkar (Retd.) Committee, which had suggested measures to enhance combat capability and rebalance armed forces' expenditure.

News in Detail:
- This step of abolition of around 9300 posts of basic and industrial staff will lead to significant savings.
- Almost 70% of the budget is used for payment of salaries and allowances and leaves very little money for actual infrastructural development.
- Restructuring of Workforce: The committee also recommended to restructure the civilian workforce in a manner that the work of the MES could be partly done by departmentally employed staff and other works could be outsourced.
- Its goal is to make the MES an effective organisation with a leaner workforce, well equipped to handle complex issues in an efficient and cost-effective manner.
- The recommendations can save up to ₹25,000 crore in defence expenditure, if implemented over the next five years.

2) National Green Tribunal (NGT)

About NGT:

- The National Green Tribunal, established in 2010, as per the National Green Tribunal Act is a **specialised judicial body** equipped with expertise **solely for the purpose of adjudicating environmental cases in the country.**
- The Tribunal is tasked with providing effective and expeditious remedy in cases relating to environmental protection, conservation of forests and other natural resources and enforcement of any legal right relating to the environment.

Powers and Jurisdiction:

- The **Tribunal's orders are binding** and it has **power to grant relief in the form of compensation and damages to affected persons.**
- The Tribunal has jurisdiction **over all civil cases** involving a substantial question **relating to the environment.**
- The Tribunal is not bound by the procedure laid down under the Code of Civil Procedure 1908, but shall be **guided by principles of 'natural justice'.**
- The Tribunal has **powers to review its own decisions.** If this fails, the decision can be challenged before the Supreme Court within ninety days.
- While passing any order/decision/ award, it shall apply the principles of sustainable development, the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle.
- Any person seeking relief and compensation for environmental damage involving subjects in the legislations mentioned in **Schedule I of the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010** may approach the Tribunal which are:
1) The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974;
2) The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Cess Act, 1977;
3) The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980;
4) The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981;
5) The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986;
6) The Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991;
7) The Biological Diversity Act, 2002.
- Any person aggrieved by an order/direction of any of the Appellate Authorities under the legislations mentioned above can also challenge them before the National Green Tribunal.

Why in News?

- A **styrene** *(Refer Science and Technology section)* **gas leak** has claimed at least 11 lives and affected thousands of residents in five villages in Visakhapatnam.
- The gas leak caused **acute breathlessness** among many people, a few of whom **asphyxiated** to death.
- The National Green Tribunal's order on the Visakhapatnam gas tragedy found LG Polymers prima facie liable under the 19th century English law principle of **"strict liability"**, which was made redundant in India by the Supreme Court in 1986.
- Lawyers say the term **"absolute liability"** should have been used instead.

What is the Strict Liability Principle?

- Under it, a party/company is not liable and need not pay compensation if a hazardous substance escapes its premises by accident or by an 'act of God' among other circumstances.

What is the Absolute Liability Principle?

- Under it, a party/company in a hazardous industry cannot claim any exemption. It has to mandatorily pay compensation, whether or not the disaster was caused by its negligence.

Background:

- The court found that strict liability, evolved in an 1868 English case called Rylands versus Fletcher, provided companies with several exemptions from assuming liability.
- **Absolute liability**, on the other hand, provided them with **no defence or exemptions.**
- The principle of **absolute liability is part of Article 21 (right to life)**.
- The **National Green Tribunal Act of 2010 has adopted 'absolute liability'.**
- **Section 17** mandates that the Tribunal should apply the **'no fault principle'** even if the disaster caused are an accident.
- "The **NGT statute recognises only absolute or non-fault liability.**
- That is, a hazardous enterprise is liable even if the disaster is an accident and not caused by the negligence of the company.

- The Act of 2010 fully incorporated the principle of 1986 Oleum gas leak judgment.

- The Supreme Court, in the M.C. Mehta vs Union of India 1987, found strict liability principle inadequate to protect citizens' rights and replaced it with the absolute liability principle.
- Oleum gas leaked from a fertiliser plant of Shriram Food and Fertilisers Ltd. complex at Delhi, causing damages to several people.
- Oleum or fuming sulfuric acid refers to solutions of various compositions of sulfur trioxide in sulfuric acid or sometimes more specifically to disulfuric acid (also known as pyrosulfuric acid).

ENVIRONMENT

1) OLive Ridley turtles
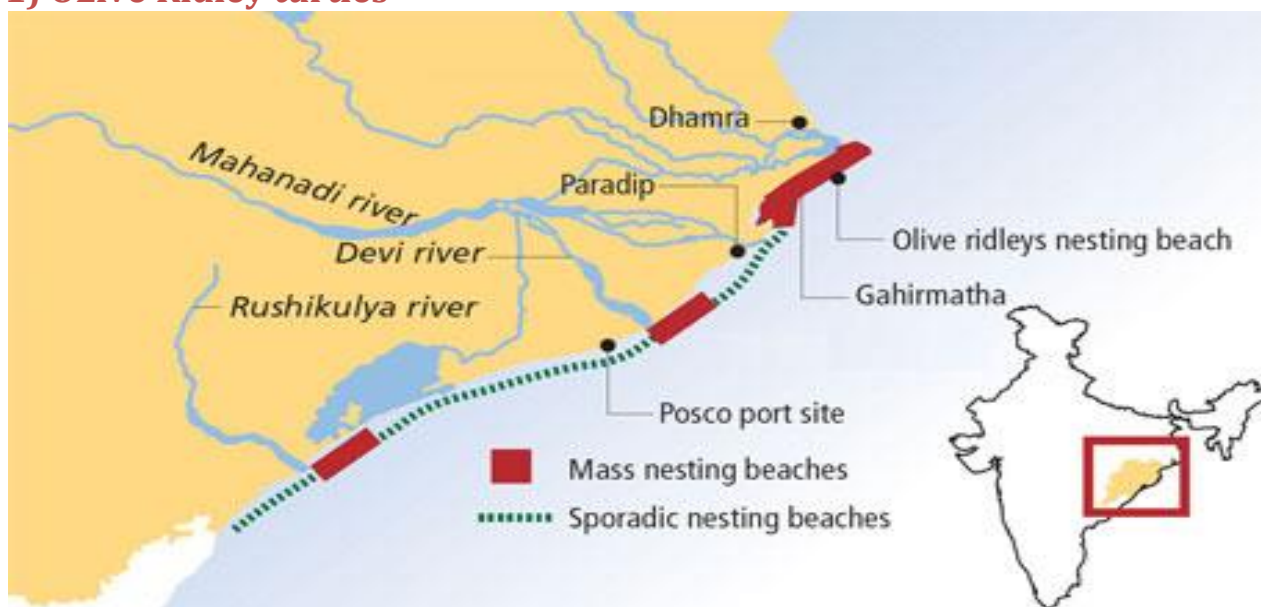
About:

- The name for this sea turtle is tied to the colour of its shell—an olive green hue.
- Though they are found in large numbers, their nesting area is limited.
- The olive ridley is globally distributed in the tropical regions of the South Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans.
- They are listed under the **vulnerabl**e category in the IUCN Red list and are also protected under the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972.
- In India, states like Maharashtra, Goa, and the offshore Andaman islands witness sporadic nesting of olive ridley turtles
- But, Odisha is the state in India that sees **mass nesting** of olive ridley turtles.
- Rushikulya and Gahirmatha are the two principal mass nesting sites at this point in Odisha.

Why in the news?

- Mass nesting of Olive ridley turtles have started at Rushikulya rookery.

2) Sundarbans

About:

- The Sundarbans mangrove forest, one of the largest such forests in the world (140,000 ha), lies on the delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers on the Bay of Bengal.
- The site is intersected by a complex network of tidal waterways, mudflats and small islands of salt-tolerant mangrove forests, and presents an excellent example of ongoing ecological processes.
- The area is known for its wide range of fauna, including 260 bird species, the Bengal tiger and other threatened species such as the estuarine crocodile and the Indian python.
- The forest in India is divided into the Sundarbans Tiger Reserve and 24 Parganas (South) Forest Division, and together with the forest in Bangladesh is the only mangrove forest in the world where tigers are found.
- Population censuses of Royal Bengal Tigers estimate a population of between 400 to 450 individuals, a higher density than any other population of tigers in the world.

- Sundarbans is also declared as a world heritage as well as a Ramsar site.

Why in the news?
- According to the West Bengal Forest Department, the tiger count for the year 2019-20 rose to 96, from 88 in 2018-19.
- The increase in the number by eight was significant as it was the biggest annual jump reported from the Sunderbans.
- While 23 tigers were found in 24 Parganas (South) Division, 73 big cats tigers were recorded inside the four divisions of the Sunderban Tiger Reserve.
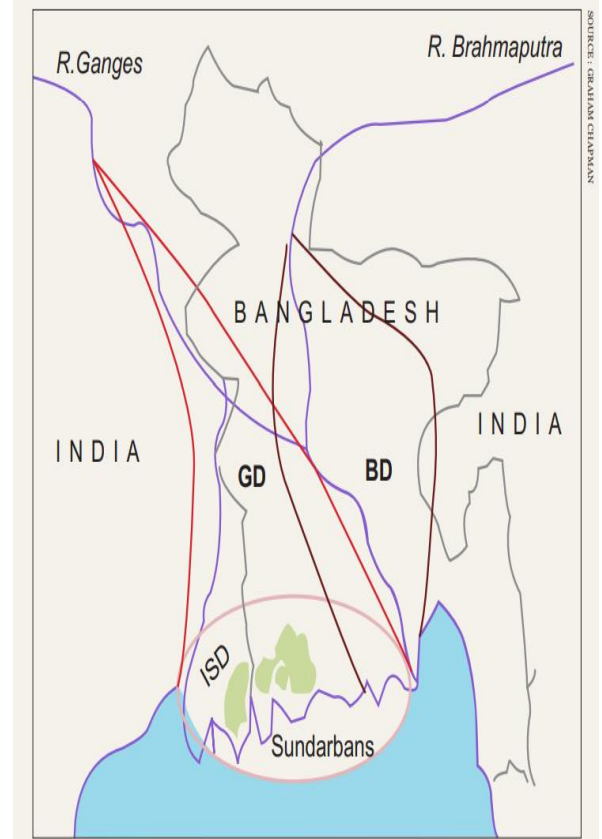
ECONOMY

1) NBFCs
What is a Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC)?
- An NBFC is a company registered under the **Companies Act, 1956** which provides banking services without meeting the legal definition of a bank.
- They engage in the business of loans and advances, acquisition of shares, bonds, etc. issued by Government or local authority. They also deal in other marketable securities of a like nature, leasing, hire-purchase, insurance business, chit business.
- Housing Finance Companies, Merchant Banking Companies, Stock Exchanges, Companies engaged in the business of stock-broking/sub-broking, Venture Capital Fund Companies, Nidhi Companies, Insurance companies and Chit Fund Companies are examples of NBFCs.
- The working and operations of NBFCs are regulated by **the RBI.**

What is the difference between banks & NBFCs?
- NBFCs lend and make investments and hence their activities are similar to that of banks; however there are a few differences:
1) NBFC cannot accept demand deposits;
2) NBFCs cannot issue cheques drawn on itself;
3) Deposit insurance facility of Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation is not available to depositors of NBFCs, unlike in the case of banks.

Why in News?
- In a move that could give a huge relief to the NBFCs facing a cash crunch, the State Bank of India (SBI) has decided to extend the loan moratorium for three months to these entities.
- A moratorium is a period during a loan term when the borrower is not obligated to make a payment.

2) INR-USD Derivative trading
What is a Derivative?
- A derivative is a contract between two parties which derives its value/price from an underlying asset. Generally stocks, bonds, currency, commodities and interest rates form the underlying asset.
- The most common types of derivatives are **futures, options, forwards and swaps.**

Futures and Options
- A futures contract is an agreement between two parties to buy or sell an asset at a certain time in the future at a certain price. Here, the **buyer is obliged** to buy the asset on the specified future date.
- An options contract gives the buyer the right to buy the asset at a fixed price. However, there is **no obligation on the part of the buyer** to go through with the purchase.

Why in News?
- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has inaugurated the rupee-dollar currency derivatives in the form of futures and options at the India International Exchange Limited (India INX).
- Currency derivatives are financial contracts between the buyer and seller involving the exchange of two currencies at a future date, and at a stipulated rate.
- Currency Derivatives Trading is suitable for those interested in reducing their foreign exchange rate risk.

About India INX
- The India International Exchange Limited is **India's first international stock exchange.**
- It is located at the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC), GIFT City in Gujarat.
- It is a **subsidiary of BSE Limited.**

3) Government borrowing
What is government borrowing?
- Government borrows through issues of government securities called G-secs and Treasury Bills.
- It falls under **capital receipts** in the Budget document. The government usually resorts to market borrowing to make up for mismatch between its revenue and expenditure.

How does increased government borrowing affect govt finances?

- Bulk of the government's fiscal deficit comes from its **interest obligation** on past debt. If the government resorts to larger borrowings then its interest costs also go up risking higher **fiscal deficit**.
- Increased government borrowing may also lead to **Crowding out effect.**
- It means that, when a government increases borrowing to spend and boost economic activity, it leads to an increase in interest rates. Eventually, when the interest rate gets high enough, only the government is able to afford the cost of borrowing–private firms are then "crowded out" of the market.

Why in News?
- The government has increased its market borrowing estimate by Rs 4.2 lakh crore to Rs 12 lakh crore for the current fiscal year to deal with the expected shortfall in revenue due to the impact of COVID-19 crisis on the economy.
- The Union Budget for 2020-21 had pegged gross borrowing in the new fiscal at Rs 7.8 lakh crore, higher than Rs 7.1 lakh crore estimated for 2019-20.
- With the increase in estimate, the government would have to revise upwards its fiscal deficit target from 3.5% pegged for the current fiscal year.

4) Confederation of Indian Industry
About CII
- The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) is a non-government, not-for-profit, industry-led and industry-managed organization.
- Founded in 1895, it is India's premier business association which works to create and sustain an environment conducive to the development of India, partnering industry, Government, and civil society, through advisory and consultative processes.
- CII is headquartered in New Delhi.

Why in News?
- The Confederation of Indian Industry has urged the government to announce an immediate stimulus package of Rs 15 lakh crore, which translates into 7.5% of GDP, with COVID-19 crippling the Indian economy.
- The broad elements of the stimulus include cash transfers amounting to Rs 2 lakh crore to Jan Dhan account holders.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1) European Union

About European Union

- The European Union (EU) is a unique **economic and political union** between 27 EU countries.
- The **United Kingdom**, which had been a founding member of the EU, left the organization in 2020.
- The EU was created by the **Maastricht Treaty**, which entered into force on November 1, 1993. The treaty was designed to enhance European political and economic integration by creating a single currency (the euro), a unified foreign and security policy, and common citizenship rights and by advancing cooperation in the areas of immigration, asylum, and judicial affairs.
- Additionally, the **Treaty of Lisbon**, enacted in 2009, gave the EU more broad powers that included being authorized to sign international treaties, increase border patrol, and other security and enforcement provisions.
- EU's headquarters is currently located in Brussels, Belgium.
- Currently, the euro is the official currency of 19 out of 27 EU member countries which together constitute the **Eurozone**, officially called the **euro area**.

Why in News?

- European Union has predicted that the eurozone economy will suffer a recession of historic proportions this year because of the coronavirus pandemic.
- The eurozone economy is forecast to contract by 7.7% this year.

2) Vande Bharat Mission & Operation Samudra Setu

About Vande Bharat Mission

- It is India's major mission to **evacuate stranded Indians from other countries** due to the coronavirus pandemic and subsequent lockdown.
- The Mission, which is focused on the Gulf and the South Asian regions, is expected to involve 64 flights, bringing back 15,000 nationals from different parts of the world through 14 Indian airports.

Why in News?

- The Vande Bharat Mission is expected to cover Russia, Ukraine, Germany, Spain and east Europe in the third week of May.

Operation Samudra Setu

- In addition to this, the Navy also dispatched two ships, INS Jalashwa and INS Magar, to Maldives under Operation "Samudra Setu" to repatriate stranded Indian citizens.

3) Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

About AIIB

- The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is an international development bank that provides financing for infrastructure projects in Asia.
- Headquartered in **Beijing**, it began operations in 2016.
- It includes 102 members worldwide (**India** is a founder member of AIIB).
- AIIB consists of two classes of membership: **regional and non-regional members.** Regional members hold **75% of the total voting power** in the Bank.
- **China** is the largest shareholder with 26.64 per cent voting shares in the bank. **India** is the second largest shareholder with 7.6 per cent voting shares followed by **Russia** 6.0 per cent.
- India is the biggest borrower of AIIB.

AIIB Membership
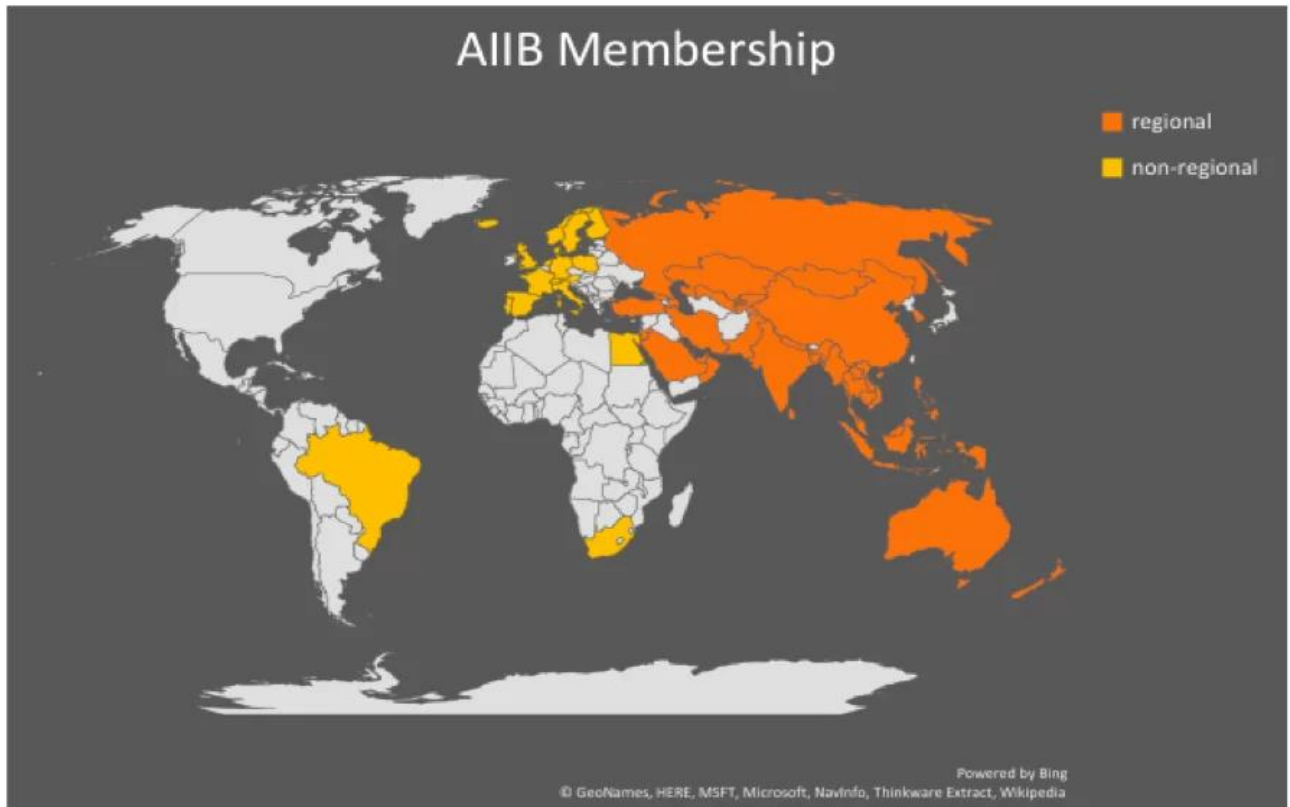
- **Why in News?**
- The Government of India has taken a $500 million loan from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank to support its emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to strengthen the preparedness of the country's public health systems.

- This is part of a $1.5 billion project being co-financed by the World Bank, which approved a $1 billion loan for this purpose at the beginning of April.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1) Unicode Consortium

About

- The Unicode Consortium is a non-profit corporation devoted to developing, maintaining, and promoting **software internationalisation standards and data.**
- The work of the Consortium is particularly focused on the **Unicode Standard,** which specifies the **representation of text in all modern software products** and standards.
- The standard was created on an encoding foundation large enough to support the writing systems used by all the world's languages.
- The Unicode Standard assigns code to characters from different languages in the world so that they can be understood and displayed across software platforms.
- The character support provided by Unicode thus enables computers to support virtually every language in use in the world today, and for users and programmers to develop content in their own native language.
- Members of the Consortium include major computer corporations, software producers, database vendors, governmental entities, research institutions, international agencies, various user groups, and interested individuals.

Why in News?

- The Unicode Consortium has accepted the proposal to add Tamil two characters to the Telugu characters for transcribing religious Tamil texts.

More in News

- The proposal was to 'borrow' the characters (LLLA) ఴ and (RRA) ఱ so that Tamil texts can be transcribed into Telugu without worrying about equivalents.
- However, the proposal has faced criticism from both the Telugu and Tamil-speaking people.

2) UV Blaster- disinfection tower by DRDO

About DRDO

- The **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)** is the R&D wing of the Ministry of Defence, Government of India.
- It has a vision to empower India with cutting-edge defence technologies and a mission to **achieve self-reliance in critical defence technologies** and systems.
- It is a network of more than 50 laboratories, headquartered in **Delhi**.
- DRDO was formed in **1958** from the amalgamation of the **Technical Development Establishment (TDEs)** of the Indian Army and the **Directorate of Technical Development & Production (DTDP)** with the **Defence Science Organisation (DSO).**
- It covers various disciplines, like aeronautics, armaments, electronics, combat vehicles, missiles, advanced computing and simulation, special materials, information systems and agriculture.

Why in News?

- The DRDO has developed an ultra violet (UV) disinfection tower, named UV Blaster, for rapid and chemical-free disinfection of high infection-prone areas

More about named UV Blaster

- The equipment is useful for high tech surfaces like **electronic equipment, computers and other gadgets** in laboratories and offices that are not

- suitable for disinfection with chemical methods.
- The product is also effective for areas with large flow of people such as airports, shopping malls, metros, hotels, factories and offices
- It was designed and developed by **Laser Science & Technology Centre (LASTEC)** (of DRDO) based in **Delhi** with the help of New Age Instruments and Materials Private Limited, Gurugram.

3) Long March-5B - China's largest carrier rocket

About Long March-5B
- The Long March 5B rocket is a new version of the Long March 5 launcher, **China's most powerful rocket.**
- It is designed to loft massive payloads upto **25 metric tons** into low Earth orbit.
- The Long March 5B version — using a **"stage-and-a-half"** launch architecture — is tailored to launch large modules for China's planned space station.

Why in News?
- China successfully carried out the first ever launch of its largest carrier rocket, Long March-5B, which was carrying a new-generation spacecraft.

Chinese space pursuit
- China was the third country to put a man in space with its own rocket in 2003 after the former Soviet Union and the United States.
- China aims to complete a multi-module, inhabited space station around 2022.
- China recently announced the Mars mission named Tianwen 1. Tianwen, or Questions to Heaven, is a poem written by the ancient Chinese poet Qu Yuan.
- Another Long March 5 rocket is scheduled to haul China's **Chang'e 5 robotic lunar mission** into space later this year.
- Chang'e 5 will attempt to **retrieve samples from the moon's surface** and return them to Earth.
- China has been racing to catch up with Russia and the United States to become a major space power by 2030.

4) Patriot Missile System
About

- The Patriot missile defense system is a **ground-based, mobile** missile defense **interceptor** deployed by the **United States** and many other nations.
- The Patriot system detects, tracks, and engages UAVs, cruise missiles, and short-range or tactical ballistic missiles.

Why in News?
- The U.S. is pulling out four of its powerful Patriot missile systems from Saudi Arabia, after determining that the threat from Iran that sparked an arms buildup in the region last year had waned.

5) Styrene gas
What is styrene?
- Styrene is an **organic** compound with the formula **C8H8**.
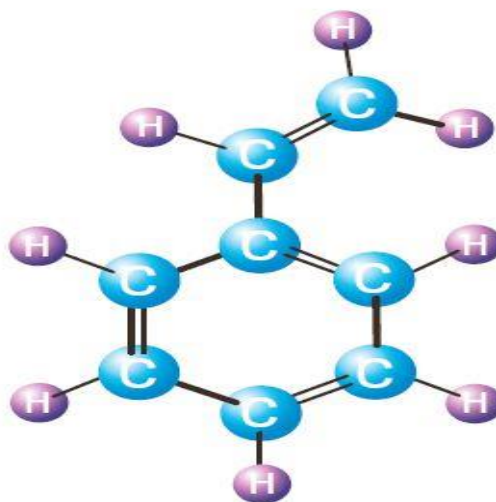
Molecular structure of styrene (C_8H_8), with bonding in the form $C_6H_5CH=CH_2$. Used for synthesis of plastics, it is stored as a liquid in factories but evaporates rapidly.

- It is a **derivative of benzene (C6H6).**

- It is **stored in factories as a liquid**, but **evaporates easily**, and has to be kept at temperatures under 20°C.

What is styrene used for?
- Styrene is the main raw material for synthesis of **polystyrene**.
- Polystyrene, in turn, is a **versatile plastic** that is used to make parts of various appliances such as refrigerators or micro-ovens; automotive parts; and parts of electronics such as computers; and also to manufacture disposable cups and in food packaging.
- Styrene is also used as an **intermediate to produce copolymers** — which are polymers derived from one or more species of monomers such as styrene.

What happens when exposed to styrene?
- **Short-term** exposure to the substance can result in **respiratory problems**, irritation in the eyes, irritation in the mucous membrane, and gastrointestinal issues.
- **Long-term** exposure could drastically affect the **central nervous system** and lead to other related problems like peripheral neuropathy.
- It could also lead to cancer and depression in some cases.

Why in News?
- A styrene gas leak has claimed at least 11 lives and affected thousands of residents in five villages in Visakhapatnam.
- The gas leak caused **acute breathlessness** among many people, a few of whom **asphyxiated** to death.

6) PLACID Trial
- ### What is a randomized controlled trial?
- They are the most reliable method available for **testing new treatments.**
- The scientific design of a randomized controlled trial is as follows:
- **Randomized**: The researchers decide randomly as to which participants in the trial receive the new treatment and which receive a placebo, or fake treatment.
- **Controlled**: The trial uses a control group for comparison or reference. In the control group, the participants do not receive the new treatment but instead receive a placebo or reference treatment.

Why in News?

- ICMR has initiated a **multi-centre clinical trial** called PLACID trial, "Phase-II Open-Label, **Randomised Controlled Trial**, to assess the safety and efficacy of **Convalescent Plasma** (refer *Pulse No. 46*) to Limit COVID-19 associated Complications in Moderate disease".

Status of Plasma Therapy
- Convalescent plasma therapy is an experimental procedure for COVID-19 patients.
- At this moment, the ICMR does not recommend this as a treatment option outside of clinical trials.
- The Union Health Ministry recently warned against its use, saying that the plasma therapy for treatment of coronavirus patients is at an **experimental stage** and has the potential to cause life-threatening complications.
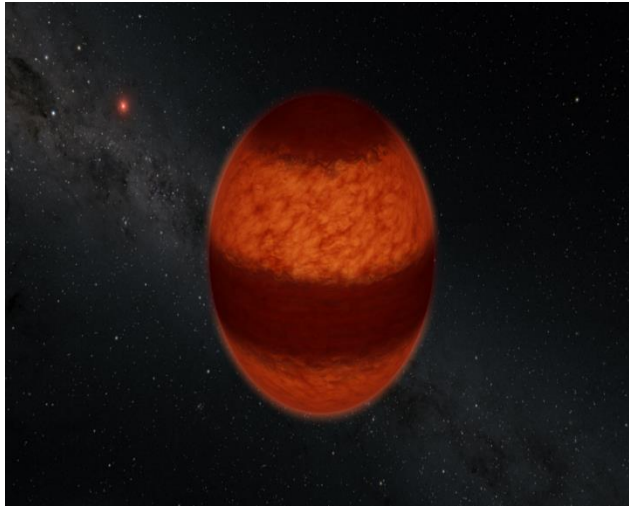
7) Luhman 16A - a brown dwarf
What is a brown dwarf?
- Brown dwarfs are objects which have a size between that of a giant planet like Jupiter and that of a small star.
- Brown dwarfs are also called **failed stars,** because their masses are intermediate to the largest planets and the smallest main sequence stars.
- Their masses being too small, they are **unable to sustain fusion** of their hydrogen to produce energy.
- It is believed that some of the more massive brown dwarfs fuse deuterium or lithium and glow faintly.
- Starting in 1995, astronomers have been able to detect a few nearby brown dwarfs.
- All of the brown dwarfs discovered so far are parts of a **binary system.**
- A binary system is one in which two stars orbit around one another.

Why in News?
- A group of international astrophysicists have identified cloud bands on the surface of Luhman 16A, one of a pair of binary brown dwarfs in the Vela constellation.

About Luhman 16

- Luhman 16 is a binary star system, the **third closest system to the Sun** after **Alpha Centauri** and **Barnard's** star.
- At a distance of about 6.5 light years from the Sun, this pair of brown dwarfs referred to as Luhman 16A and Luhman 16B orbit each other, casting a dim light.

News in Detail

- The scientists, by using the **Very Large Telescope** at **European Southern Observatory, Chile**, found that Luhman 16A had band-like clouds in its atmosphere, whereas it was absent in Luhman 16B.
- They have used an idea put forth nearly two decades ago by Indian astrophysicist **Sujan Sengupta**, who is at the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bengaluru, that the light emitted by a cloudy brown dwarf, or reflected off an extrasolar planet, will be polarised.
- He suggested that a polarimetric technique could serve as a potential tool to probe the environment of these objects.
- Subsequently, many astronomers detected polarisation of brown dwarfs.

Polarization of Light

- Natural sunlight and almost every other form of artificial illumination transmits light waves whose electric field vectors vibrate in all perpendicular planes with respect to the direction of propagation.
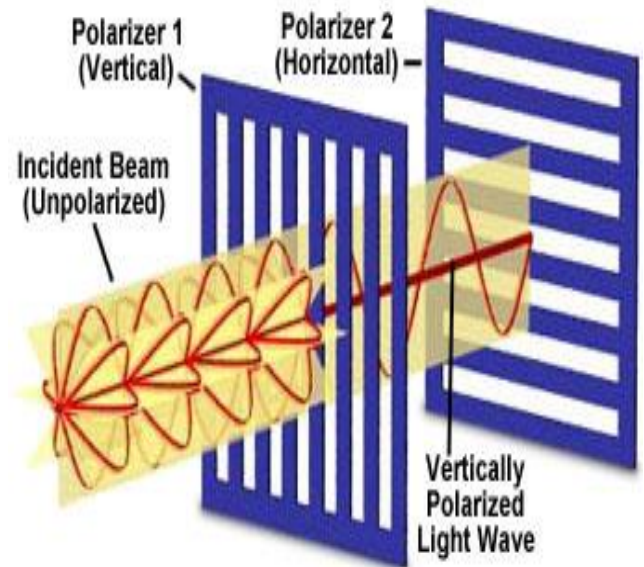

Figure 1

- When the **electric field vectors are restricted to a single plane** by filtration, then the light is said to be polarized with respect to the direction of propagation and all waves vibrate in the same plane.

ART & CULTURE

1) Sherdukpen community of Arunachal Pradesh

Who are they?

- The **Buddhist** Sherdukpen community is the last honey hunting group of **Arunachal Pradesh,** whose total population is estimated to be 4,500.
- The honey-hunting skill of the Sherdukpen community and the associated indigenous craftsmanship is on the verge of extinction with just half-a-dozen men now practicing it.
- The honey harvesting has traditionally been done twice a year.
- The bees make honey from wild flowers in June-July and primarily from **rhododendron** in October-November.

Why in News?

- Kezang D. Thongdok's film *Chi Lupo*, about the Sherdukpen community, was adjudged the best documentary at the 10th Dada Saheb Phalke Film Festival Awards 2020.

PIB ANAYSIS

1) Aarogya Setu Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS)

About Aarogya Setu App

- Aarogya Setu Mobile App is developed by the **Ministry of Electronics and IT.** It enables people to assess themselves the risk of their catching the Corona Virus infection.
- It will calculate this based on their interaction with others, using cutting edge **Bluetooth technology, algorithms and artificial intelligence**.
- All the citizens are urged to download the mobile application. This is designed to keep a user informed, in case she/he cross paths with someone who has tested positive.
- The user, upon installation of Aarogya Setu, is asked to answer a number of questions. In case some of the answers suggest COVID-19 symptoms, the information will be sent to a Government server.
- The data will then help the Government take timely steps and initiate the isolation procedure if necessary and it also alerts if someone comes in close proximity with a person tested positive.
- It is available in **11 languages-10 Indian languages and English.**

Why in News?

- Aarogya Setu IVRS services implemented to cater to people having a feature phone or landline.

News in Detail:

- For including the citizens with feature phones and landline under the protection of Aarogya Setu, the "Aarogya Setu Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS)" has been implemented.
- This service is available across the country.
- This is a toll-free service, where citizens are asked to give a missed call to the number 1921 and they will get a call back requesting for inputs regarding their health.

2) Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra Route

About Kailash Mansarovar Yatra:

- Mount Kailash(above 6,600 meters)located in the Tibet region of China, is one of the most important pilgrimages for Indians and is known to be the abode of Lord Shiva.
- Kailash Manasarovar Yatra is considered as a spiritual pilgrimage for Hindus, Jains and Buddhists, and has a cultural and religious significance.
- Every year the Ministry of External Affairs organises the Kailash Manasarovar Yatra.

Why in News?

- Recently, the Ministry of Defence has dedicated to the Nation a new 80-km road which connects Dharchula to Lipulekh known as Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra Route significantly reducing the travel time for Yatris.

Importance :

- It will boost the Local trade and Economic growth in the region.
- It will save the devotees an 80 km track and reduce the journey by 6 days proving to be the shortest and cheapest route.
- There is no air travel involved in yatra and the majority of the travel 84% is in India and only 16% in China compared to other routes in which 80% of road travel is in China.

News in Depth

THE HINDU EDITORIALS

1) Conducting elections during a pandemic

Constitutional crisis in Maharashtra:

- The current Chief Minister of Maharashtra Thackeray, took oath to his office on November 28, 2019 **without being elected to either legislative assembly or legislative council.**
- **Article 164(4)** of Indian Constitution states that 'A Minister who for any period of six consecutive months is not a member of the Legislature of the State shall at the expiration of that period cease to be a Minister.'
- Thus he will have to get elected to either of the houses of the state legislature before May 24, as Article 164(4) of the Constitution stipulates.
- However, **EC deferred elections indefinitely** for legislative council by using its powers under **Article 324** of the Constitution, along with **Section 153 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.**

Choices ahead

- **Double application of Article 164(4)**
- A double application of Article 164 (4) to extend this period for another six months was out of the question as the Supreme Court, in S.R. Chaudhuri v. State of Punjab and Ors (August 17, 2001), had declared that it would **undermine the principle of representative government.**

Getting nominated under governor quota

- **Article 171(3)(e) coupled with Article 171(5)** empowers the Governor to nominate an individual with "special knowledge or practical experience".
- There is also the legal issue of Thackeray having to be nominated to the Legislative Council on one of its two vacancies.
- According to **Section 151A of Representation of the People Act 1951**,

election or nomination to the post cannot be done if "the remainder of the term of a member in relation to a vacancy is less than one year".

- The terms of the two vacancies in the Legislative Council end on June 6.
- The governor nominates 12 of the Council's 78 members and the six-year term of all the nominees ends on June 6.
- It could be argued that the Governor's nomination is reserved for "persons having special knowledge or practical experience in respect of such matters as the following, namely: Literature, science, art, co-operative movement and social service" under the Constitution, courts cannot interfere with the Governor's decision even when a political appointment is made.
- However, the Maharashtra cabinet recommended Thackeray's name to the Governor for one of the vacant posts in the Upper House.
- The Governor, however, put the proposal undecided for over a fortnight.

So what is the option left?

- The Prime Minister and the Election Commission promptly intervened to avert the political crisis by announcing that **polls to nine legislative council seats in Maharashtra will be held on May 21.**

Why to hold elections in the midst of a Pandemic?

- Some experts say that the **COVID-19 pandemic could last for two years.**
- Deferring elections for such a long time would be **against the spirit of democracy and federalism**, which are the basic components of the Constitution.
- As a result, holding elections seems to be the only way out.

Challenges ahead:

- **Responsibility lies with EC**

- By deciding to hold elections during a pandemic, the EC has taken up a big responsibility. Though only the 288 members of the Vidhan Sabha will be voting in this election, the EC will have to **ensure strict implementation of the Health Ministry's guidelines.**
- But a bigger cause for concern for the EC are the upcoming Assembly elections for Bihar (which must be concluded by November 29, 2020), West Bengal (May 30, 2021), Assam (May 31, 2021), Kerala (June 1, 2021), Tamil Nadu (May 24, 2021) and Puducherry (June 8, 2021).

Tough to defer Loksabha/Assembly elections beyond 6 months

- Unlike the Rajya Sabha/Legislative Council elections which can be postponed indefinitely, the **EC can postpone elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for a period of only six months**, the constitutionally defined limit between two sessions of the House/Assembly (Article 85(1) and Article 174(1) of the Constitution, respectively).
- For a further period of extension, **two possibilities** lie before the executive.
  - The first is provision to **Article 172(1)** whereby during a state of **Emergency,** an election can be postponed for one year in addition to a period of six months after Emergency is lifted. The condition in agreement to the above said provision, is that a state of Emergency can be declared only if there is a **threat to the security and sovereignty** of the nation, **not if there is an epidemic or a pandemic.**
  - The second option is to declare **the President's rule in the State, enabled by Article 356(1)** of the Constitution. But its limits have been repeatedly defined by the Supreme Court.

Is India the only country to hold elections during COVID-19 Pandemic?

- India will **not be the only country** to hold elections during this pandemic.
- According to the **International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, nine countries** have already held national elections and referendums during this public health crisis.
- **Among them is South Korea**, which, under strict guidelines, managed to pull off a near-perfect national election recording the highest voter turnout of 66.2% in 28 years.

Lessons from South Korea

- South Korea just conducted its **national election with 44 million voters** in the midst of the pandemic which serves as a good source of inspiration for the EC.
- South Korea disinfected polling centres, and mandated that voters practise physical distancing, wear gloves and masks and use hand sanitiser.
- Voters had their temperatures checked on arrival at the booths.
- Those who had a temperature above 99.5 degrees Fahrenheit were sent to booths in secluded areas.
- The interests of infected voters and the interests of those suspected of having the virus were not ignored: COVID-19-positive voters were allowed to mail their ballots, while self-quarantined voters were allowed to vote after 6 p.m.

Measures to be taken:

- The EC could **take into account the measures that South Korea took** to prepare a perfect plan.
- The EC could **adopt targeted measures for older voters** who are more vulnerable to COVID-19.
- Options like **proxy voting under a well-established legal framework, postal voting, and mobile ballot boxes** can be explored.
- The EC has a difficult task of sticking to its goal of **'No Voter Left Behind' while also ensuring that the elections do not turn into a public health nightmare.**

Conclusion:

- The COVID-19 pandemic is a big threat to the established world order as it quickly transforms fragile and vulnerable democracies into autocracies in the name of public safety.
- A large and well-established democracy like India responding to this crisis is the biggest challenge before it.

2) India needs to enact a COVID-19 law

- The nationwide lockdown has been central to the government's strategy to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

Laws governing lockdown

- The lockdown has been carried out by State governments and district authorities on the directions of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs under the **Disaster Management Act of 2005.**
- The act intends "to provide for the effective management of disasters and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto".
- Under the Act, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) was set up under the leadership of the Prime Minister, and the National Executive Committee (NEA) was chaired by the Home Secretary.
- On March 24, 2020, the NDMA and NEA issued orders directing the Union Ministries, State governments and authorities to take effective measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and laid out guidelines illustrating which establishments would be closed and which services suspended during the lockdown period.
- Taking a cue from the guidelines, the State governments and authorities exercised powers under the **Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897** to issue further directions.
- District authorities such as the Commissioner of Police, Greater Chennai, have consequently issued orders to impose Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code in public places.
- Cumulatively, these orders constitute the legislative umbrella governing the lockdown.

Issues with the laws:
- **Is it the Primary intention of the act?**
- Though the invoking of the Disaster Management Act has allowed the Union government to communicate seamlessly with the States, serious questions remain whether the Act was originally intended to or is sufficiently capable of addressing the threat of a pandemic.
- **Battling COVID-19 with a colonial-era law**
- The use of the archaic Epidemic Diseases Act reveals the lack of necessary responsiveness of government authorities in providing novel and innovative policy solutions to address a 21st century problem.

Why Epidemics Act 1897?
- In the **absence of any new legislation to fight epidemics**, Indian States had to resort to this colonial-era law to manage the outbreak.
- The law arms the State with emergency powers that allow it to carry out search operations as well as penalise people violating the provisions of the law.

- **Section 188 of IPC- ineffective provisions**
- Any violation of the orders passed would be prosecutable under Section 188 of Indian Penal Code, which is a very ineffective and broad provision dealing with disobedience of an order issued by a public servant.
- Proceedings under Section 188 can only be initiated by private complaint and not through a First Information Report.
- Thus offences arising out of these guidelines and orders have a weak basis in terms of criminal jurisdiction thereby weakening the objectives of the lockdown.

International precedents:
- **U.K. enacted the Coronavirus Act, 2020,** which is a comprehensive legislation dealing with all issues connected with COVID-19 including emergency registration of healthcare professionals, temporary closure of educational institutions, audio-visual facilities for criminal proceedings, powers to restrict gatherings, and financial assistance to industry.
- **Singapore has passed the Infectious Diseases Regulations, 2020,** which provides for issuance of stay orders which can send 'at-risk individuals' to a government-specified accommodation facility.
- Both the U.K.'s and Singapore's laws set out **unambiguous conditions and legally binding obligations.** As such, under Singaporean law, the violators may be penalised up to $10,000 or face six months imprisonment or both in contrast to Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code which has a fine amount of ₹200 to ₹1,000 or imprisonment of one to six months.

Issues to be addressed:

- **Lack of consolidated policy**
- No inclination towards drafting or enacting a COVID-19-specific legislation that could address all the issues preemptively.
- A consolidated, pro-active policy approach is absent.
- **Lack of coordination between centre and state**
- Ad hoc and reactive rule-making, as seen in the way migrant workers have been treated has exposed the lack of coordination between the Union and State governments.

Way forward:
Need to enact a COVID 19 law:
- The circumstances call out for legislative leadership, to assist and empower States to overcome COVID-19 and to revive their economic, education and public health sectors.
- As health is a State subject, without an overarching law for medical emergencies like this, many States are left uncertain without protection.

Following the National Disaster Management Guidelines (NDMG) of 2008
- It stated that the Epidemic Diseases Act 1897 needs to be repealed. This Act does not provide any power to the Centre to intervene in biological emergencies. It has to be substituted by an Act which takes care of the prevailing and foreseeable Public health needs including…international spread of diseases."
- By following this India would have had a comprehensive Act where it would not have had to take recourse to a 123-year-old law.

3) Resuscitating multilateralism with India's help
- The COVID-19 pandemic has brought out many challenges.
- Most challenges confronting the world and likely to confront it in the future, are **cross-national in character.** They respect no national boundaries and are not amenable to national solutions.
- These challenges are **cross-domain in nature**, with strong feedback loops. A disruption in one domain often cascades into parallel disruptions in other domains.
- The intersection of cross-national and cross-domain challenges **demands multilateral approaches.** They require **empowered international institutions of governance.** Underlying these must be a **spirit of internationalism**, a sense of belonging to a common humanity.
- But there has been an **upsurge in narrow nationalism**, an assertion of narrow interests over pursuit of shared interests and a **fostering of competition among states rather than embracing collaboration.**
- In this context, Prime Minister Narendra Modi says that we all have to face the challenge of COVID-19 pandemic together with the resolution of **'Collaborate to Create'."** Thus the pandemic may serve as an opportunity to India to revive multilateralism which is possibly at its weakest today.

Issues related to multilateralism:
Failure of multilateral institutions
- Multilateral institutions becoming **incapable of dealing with the misuse of existing rules** or loopholes within the existing rules (e.g. via forced technology requirements, intellectual property rights violations, and subsidies) by several countries **to gain an unfair advantage in trade relations is a great concern.**
- For example,
1. The **paralysis of all three functions of the World Trade Organization (WTO)** — negotiation, dispute settlement, and transparency.
2. Severely **dented credibility of the World Health Organization (WHO)** in dealing with COVID-19 crisis.

Consequences:
- There could be a **return to autarkic economic and trade policies** and an even deeper and more pervasive anti-globalisation sentiment.
- (Autarkic countries are those which do not participate in international trade and which do not receive any outside support or aid.)

Reforming multilateralism
- To argue for a multilateral rules-based system we must always address the issue

of the goals and values that underpin the rules.

- **Need for policies that reflect multilateralism**
- There is a **need for reassurance and policies** that reflect a renewed commitment to the very existence of multilateralism.
- Countries like the USA should realise that autarchy is not the way forward (of this global crisis) and remain committed to strengthening global supply chains which are based on the promise of ensuring global stability is need of the hour.
- **Cooperation with likeminded countries**
- There is an urgent need for some strategic decoupling, handled smartly in cooperation with other like-minded countries.

Role for India in reviving multilateralism:

- The current crisis in multilateralism could be a remarkable opportunity for India, a country whose pluralism, democracy, and liberalism have often been underestimated by the West.
- **Shift from non alignment to multi alignment**
- Indian foreign policy has moved from a policy of non-alignment (policy of being neutral with US and USSR blocs) to the policy of Multi-alignment (India is having friendly relations with almost all great powers and developing world) in the post cold war era.
- This is the very essence of India's foreign policy and the economic policy of India today.
- **Working with Alliance for Multilateralism**
- India could work closely with the Alliance for Multilateralism (an initiative launched by Germany and France) to shape both the alliance itself and the reform agenda at large.
- Working together with a group of countries from the developed and developing countries could further amplify India's voice.

4) The mark of zero: On containment of COVID-19 cases in Kerala

Context:

- The **small number of COVID_19 cases** reported so far in Kerala demonstrates how **excellent** its **containment efforts** have been.
- More remarkable is that nearly **95 percent of those infected have fully recovered**, and there have been just three deaths — a **case fatality rate of 0.6% against the national average of 3.3%.**

Successful containment strategy- How was it possible for them?

Led from the front
- Kerala **did not wait for directions from the Centre** but instead led from the front.

Acted at the earliest
- When the number of cases increased to 12 on March 10, a day before WHO declared the coronavirus a pandemic, Kerala **shut down all educational institutions** and entertainment centres, banned large gatherings and appealed to people to avoid visiting religious places.

Applied the learnt lessons from Nippah
- Since it realised the merits of containing virus transmission by **quickly tracing all the contacts** during the 2018 Nipah outbreak, it repeated that to perfection this time.

Perfect epidemiological protocols
- Kerala has very good health-care infrastructure in place, but what sets it apart from the other States is the manner in which it **followed textbook epidemiology protocols perfectly,** and beyond, and well before the ICMR advocated them, as well as the entire health-care infrastructure working in tandem despite being decentralised.

Complete involvement of all
- Political leadership, and **complete involvement of the government at all levels** with the **bureaucracy** and **local community** have been a huge advantage.
- Active involvement of all the stakeholders who **complement each other** especially during the crisis has worked in Kerala's favour

High literacy rate
- The very **different health-seeking behaviour** and **high literacy** too have played a pivotal role in the war against the virus.

Conclusion:

- **ICMR admired the State for the "unparalleled" containment and testing strategies and referred to it as the "Kerala model".**
- These are not measures put in place to fight coronavirus but what has been a **legacy of the State. It is a success born out of decades-old social revolution and development.**
- This is also the reason why other States, even if they surpass the measures adopted by Kerala to fight the virus, may not be able to achieve the same level of success.

RSTV BIG-PICTURE

1) Pakistan's anti-India propaganda exposed

DISTURBING TREND

■ **2012:** An anti-Islam film, Innocence of Muslims, sparked off protests in different parts of the country. The government is wary that any incendiary film or visual can disturb peace in India

■ **2012:** Rumours sparked by SMS fuelled mass exodus of north eastern (in pic) people from many parts of the country

■ **2010:** Iran TV sparked off violent protests in Jammu & Kashmir in September 2010, after it telecast unverified reports about the desecration of the holy Quran. The authorities banned its telecast in the Valley

■ **2010:** A local cable TV telecast of mass protests in Kashmir fuelled further violence, leading to the channel being banned

Context:
- Recent media reports claim that Pakistan has launched cyber warfare against India by spreading fake propaganda on alleged Islamophobia in India.
- The Hindustan Times reported that authorities in India have linked several social media posts that targeted India and Prime Minister Modi to Pakistan.

What is the Background?
- Intelligence agencies in Pakistan have been exploiting social media platforms to fuel anti-Indian sentiments in the Gulf countries to put a strain on the times of India with the west Asian countries.
- Earlier, Pakistan used similar tactics when certain sections of Article 370 were revoked in 2019, but failed miserably.

What are the issues all about?

- For almost the last two weeks, Pakistan-based groups, backed by its spy agency the ISI, have been carrying out a new wave of cyber warfare against India, where they are creating fake Twitter handles and impersonating members of the royal family from the Gulf countries to spread anti-Indian sentiments in the Gulf.
- What is more worrying is that these cyber attacks are going to increase and evolve even further in the coming times.
- These newly bought domains will be converted to media outlets and will be used to spread fake news.
- Since these media outlets will have an Indian domain name, they will carry more trust value among the Indian and international readers who will visit them.

What is the motive?

- The aim of this Pakistan-backed warfare is not just to create noise and chaos on social media but to hurt India's economic interests in the Gulf countries from where India received roughly $35 billion as remittance annually in 2017 from the millions of workers deployed in these countries.
- The issue of these fake handles became so problematic that the Ministry of External Affairs had to reach out to officials in Gulf countries to clear the "misconceptions and doubts".
- In the wake of the fake news being peddled by these handles which gave an impression that things had soured between India and Kuwait, the government of Kuwait came out in the open and reiterated its desire to maintain and deepen its friendly ties with New Delhi, as well as its intention not to support any interference in India's internal matters.
- Kuwait had to take this step after tweets by several Twitter handles started appearing stating that the government of Kuwait had asked the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the international community to intervene against an alleged rise of Islamophobia in India.

How to handle this?
- In theory, India's cyber warfare is handled by the National Cyber Coordination Centre (NCCC) that comes under the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS).
- It is the NCCC which coordinates cyber security intelligence and handles national cyber security.
- It started functioning from April 2015. However, as the last two weeks' developments show, the NCCC is failing to handle the heat that is coming from Pakistan-based cyber groups.
- Officials say that one of the main problems that make India vulnerable to organised cyber-attacks is the presence of too many organisations to tackle the cyber threat.
- In the extremely well researched and rich-on-content article by Captain Sanjay Chhabra titled "India's National Cyber Security Policy (NCSP) and

Organization—A critical assessment" published in the prestigious Naval War College Journal, the author perhaps sums up best the problem that is being faced by India—too many cooks.

Conclusion
- The details of Operation Glowing Symphony, that have been made public, make for interesting reading as to how the US officials derailed the entire ISIS cyber resources which contributed vastly to its eventual death. The way US agencies infiltrated, took over ISIS social media handles, pages, taking out its infrastructure and preventing ISIS members from communicating and posting propaganda, is a lesson that people sitting in Delhi need to learn.

2) How COVID-19 will reset trade and Commerce?

Context:
- As the virus spreads across the globe, most countries are choosing the strongest form of social distancing.
- As a result, entire sectors of the economy are shuttered or forced to operate at a fraction of their normal capacity.

What is the Background?
- As the virus spreads across the globe, most countries are choosing the strongest form of social distancing.
- As a result, entire sectors of the economy are shuttered or forced to operate at a fraction of their normal capacity.

What are the reasons behind?
- There will be a change in global trading pattern, emerging because of:
1. Shifting of Companies out from China to other emerging economies like India, Vietnam, Thailand, etc.
2. A slump in global oil prices.

3. Countries would be cautious to put their investment outside their borders.
- As a result of these factors, countries would try to keep the major supply chain within its contour.
- This would eventually lead to an increase in trade within the countries while the trade across would not resume sooner.

What is the impact of slowdown on Indian industries?
- There will be a graded impact on different industries; Industries those will be badly hit are: Airlines, Travel & Tourism, Entertainment, Logistics, Automobile, Export, Retail Banking, Financial Services etc
- Industries those will grow are:Pharmaceuticals, Telecommunication, food and essentials, education, etc
- Production and manufacturing capabilities will be impacted due to large scale migration.
- The services sector will also be impacted as they are hugely dependent on the economies of the west, which will be in recession according to various agencies.
- This may give rise to unemployment in some sectors.

What is the way forward?
- The government should re-look into its policies to make the economy revive and grow.
- Create a better environment for global companies coming to India.
- Create an environment for MNCs by making easy availability of capital like land, simplify the tax structure, and have clear-cut policies regarding FDIs & FIIs.
- Formulate policies like Vietnam to attract global investments.
- Provide adequate financial provision to industries so it can regain its basic starting point.
- Make incentives announced by the government to quickly reach the specified industries.
- India must continue to push forward its digital diplomacy.
- Prepare a solid exit plan of lockdown in the graded form to finally revive economic activities.

Conclusion
- Retail industry is estimated to take 9-12 months to recover amid the pandemic.

- The demand for non-essential retail is projected to open with 40% of the value noted in pre-Covid times.
- The cost of business across non-essential sectors is likely to increase by 30-35% post lockdown.
- According to industry representatives, reorganisation of labour-intensive construction and infrastructure sectors will take about three months after the lockdown is over mainly because of large-scale labour migration from urban areas to villages.

3) Immigration Halts around the world

Context:
- A federal judge in the United States refused to suspend President Donald Trump's recent executive order that put a 60-day ban on green cards for most immigrants due to the coronavirus crisis.
- Trump's order came last week, after he vowed that he'd halt immigration to the United States during the Covid-19 crisis.

What is the Background?
- But in the end he limited the order to a 60-day freeze on most green cards while still allowing visa-processing for hundreds of thousands of temporary employees like farm workers and crop pickers, who make up the majority of immigrants in the US.
- As a result of the pandemic, many other countries too have implemented restrictions on entry and exit, visa and work permit issuance, closed borders, tightened quarantine rules and taken other measures to protect themselves.

What are the impacts?

- The move would not impact those in the country on a temporary basis and would apply only to those looking for green cards in hopes of staying.
- The order would be focused on preventing people from winning permission to live and work in the U.S.
- While a hard stop on immigration would normally affect millions of people, much of the immigration system has already ground to a halt because of the pandemic.
- Almost all visa processing by the State Department has been suspended for weeks.
- Travel to the U.S. has been restricted from much of the globe.
- And Trump has used the virus to effectively end asylum at U.S. borders, including turning away children who arrive by themselves and putting a hold on refugee resettlement — something Congress, the courts and international law hadn't previously allowed.

What are green cards?
- They give immigrants legal permanent residence and the opportunity to apply for American citizenship.
- In a typical year, nearly one million green cards are issued in the US.
- The majority - roughly 70% - go to those with relatives living in the US, according to a 2018 report from the US Senate.
- For employment-based green cards, a common form of the residency status, roughly 80% are issued to those already in the country, shifting from a temporary visa to permanent residence.

What is the criticism?
- Thousands of foreign-born health care workers are currently treating people with COVID-19 and working in critical sectors of the economy and the government is more interested in fanning anti-immigrant flames than in saving lives.
- Some say it made "sense" and would keep jobs for unemployed Americans.
- While such a move would usually affect millions, travel bans to prevent the spread of Covid-19 have already effectively halted immigration, making some question how much of a difference this will really make.

- This announcement doesn't really change anything unless the embassies were to open up next week or in the next 60 days.

Conclusion
- The H-2B visa program is used by U.S. companies to fill tens of thousands of seasonal jobs in areas like landscaping, seafood processing and in service jobs at hotels and theme parks. In March, amid pressure by Congress and a tight job market, the administration raised the annual quota to its highest level under Trump. That move angered people who favor more restrictive immigration policies, including some supporters of the president who view foreign workers willing to accept lower wages as unfair competition to American labor.

4) Confronting World's dependence on China
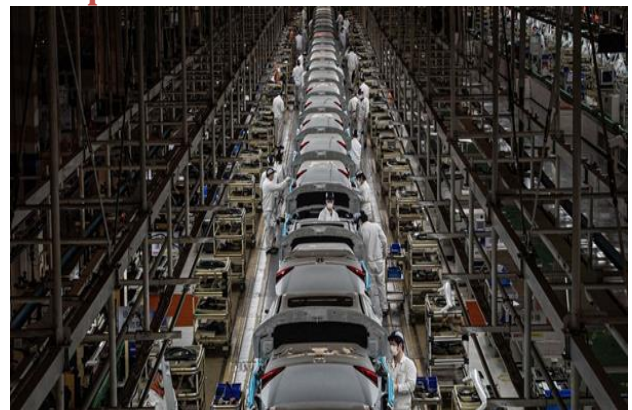
Context:
- The Coronavirus pandemic is forcing global companies to diversify their manufacturing away from China to other emerging and frontier markets.
- This pivot became particularly urgent since the outbreak of COVID-19 wreaked havoc on China-based supply chains, exposing the world's over dependence on China.
- The supply shock has hit corporate revenues hard due to lost output, sparking a recession.

What are the statistics?

- Many countries around the world are over-dependent on china for a variety of sectors like Health, Food, Telecom, minerals and so on.
- For example, about 93% of API (Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient) imports of the

USA and more than 60% of API imports of India come from China.

- China provided goods at a cheap rate which kept import bills for many countries low.
- Because of these reasons no country wants to directly confront China as we saw recently when they bared the supply of rare-earth minerals to Japan .

What are the problems associated with China?

- Being the world's 2nd largest economy (by Nominal GDP) China didn't consider its responsibilities in containing the virus due to which it had to impose several lockdowns and that impacted the global supply chains.
- China is too big as a part of the global economy and no other counties are able to afford its alternative.
- China is not a fully-fledged market economy.

What are the post COVID-19 concerns for China?

- IMF's (Real) GDP growth estimates for China this year is only about 1.2% and their Purchasing Manufacturing Index has also shown a decline in the recent month.
- The Unemployment rate in China has also surged at about 6-7%.
- The inflation numbers in China suggests that it may hugely raise its savings rate.
- This will reduce the buying capacity of Chinese, which can result in their e-commerce companies being far less able to finance and control the financial architecture of the rest of the world.
- Though several restrictions are eased and markets are opened-up chances of getting infection still remain very high.
- Therefore, people may sort to hedge themselves by not coming out.
- China has to also address some political issues if countries ask for the investigation on origins of COVID-19 and demand compensations.

Conclusion

- The world should come together with a coherent strategy to bring an alternative to China. Plurilateral FTAs must be worked out effectively to control Chinese dominancy in world trade. Countries can gradually build shorter and regional supply chains for critical sectors and enhance their own capabilities. On international forums like G-20, the countries must discuss China's hegemonistic position.

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