

My Notes....

NATIONAL

COVID-19 TESTING FREE FOR PMJAY

The Government has decided to make the testing and treatment for COVID-19 available under Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PM JAY). The testing and treatment of COVID -19 is already available for free in the public facilities. Now, more than 50 crore citizens, eligible under the **Government of India's** health assurance scheme will be able to avail free testing through private labs and treatment for COVID-19 in empanelled hospitals, the National Health Authority (NHA) said in a statement on 4 April 2020.

What

- The statement further said that the empanelled hospitals can use their own authorised testing facilities or tie-up with an authorized testing facility.
- These tests would be carried out as per the protocol set by Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) and by private labs approved/registered by ICMR.
- Similarly, treatment of COVID-19 by private hospitals will be covered under AB-PMJAY.
- Making testing and treatment available under Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY will significantly expand our capacities by including private sector hospitals and labs and mitigate the adverse impact of this catastrophic illness on the poor.
- The Central government's decision comes with the objective to increase the supply of testing and treatment facilities and increase access to them by roping in the private sector through AB-PM JAY scheme.
- As per the ICMR guidelines for COVID-19 testing by private laboratories in India, the test is to be conducted by laboratory which has NABL accreditation for real-time PCR assay for RNA virus. Laboratory tests should be only offered when prescribed by a qualified physician for COVID-19 testing.
- The NHA said that this decision will also help attract more private sector players for providing testing and treatment for COVID-19.
- Active private sector involvement will be critical in case there is a surge in the number of COVID-19 patients that need care. States are in the process of enlisting private

Ayushman Bharat

- Ayushman Bharat, a flagship scheme of Government of India, was launched as recommended by the National Health Policy 2017, to achieve the vision of Universal Health Coverage (UHC).
- This initiative has been designed to meet Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its underlying commitment, which is to "leave no one behind."
- Ayushman Bharat is an attempt to move from a segmented and segmented approach of health service delivery to a comprehensive need-based health care service.
- This scheme aims to undertake path breaking interventions to holistically address the healthcare system (covering prevention, promotion and ambulatory care) at the primary, secondary and tertiary level.
- Ayushman Bharat adopts a continuum of care approach, comprising two interrelated components, which are - Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs), Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY).

sector hospitals that can be converted into COVID-19 ONLY hospitals.

9. Information on symptoms, testing and treatment for COVID-19 can be accessed from the website of the MoHFW and by calling the national COVID-19 helpline 1075.
10. NHA is the apex agency of the Government of India responsible for the design, roll-out, implementation and management of Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PM JAY) across the country.

Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY)

1. The second component under Ayushman Bharat is the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojna or PM-JAY as it is popularly known.
2. This scheme was launched on 23rd September, 2018 in Ranchi, Jharkhand by the **Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi.**
3. **PM-JAY is the world's largest health insurance/ assurance scheme** fully financed by the government.
4. It provides a cover of Rs. 5 lakhs per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization across public and private empanelled hospitals in India.
5. PM-JAY provides cashless access to health care services for the beneficiary at the point of service, that is, the hospital.
6. PM-JAY envisions to help mitigate catastrophic expenditure on medical treatment which pushes nearly 6 crore Indians into poverty each year.
7. It covers up to 3 days of pre-hospitalization and 15 days post-hospitalization expenses such as diagnostics and medicines.
8. There is no restriction on the family size, age or gender.
9. All pre-existing conditions are covered from day one.
10. Public hospitals are reimbursed for the healthcare services at par with the private hospitals.

CABINET APPROVES ORDINANCE TO REDUCE SALARIES

The Union Cabinet on 6 April 2020 approved an ordinance to reduce the salaries, allowances and pensions of Members of Parliament (MPs), including the Prime Minister, by 30 per cent for one year and the amount would be utilised in the fight against coronavirus. The President, Vice-President and Governors of all states have also voluntarily decided to take pay cuts as a social responsibility amid the coronavirus crisis, Union Minister Prakash Javadekar said, adding that the money would go to the Consolidated Fund of India.

What

1. The Union Cabinet had approved an ordinance amending the Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament Act, 1954. The move will see reduction in the allowances and pension of MPs by 30 per cent from April 1, 2020 for a year.
2. The Cabinet also gave its nod to the temporary suspension of MPLAD Funds during 2020-21 and 2021-22 in view of the adverse impact of the outbreak of COVID-19 in India. The consolidated amount of MPLAD Funds for 2 years – Rs 7,900 crores – will go to Consolidated Fund of India.
3. Earlier in the day, in a first, Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired a meeting of the Union Cabinet via video link amid the nationwide coronavirus lockdown.
4. Besides Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Home Minister Amit Shah were **present at the PM's official residence. Other members of the Cabinet were** connected via a video link from their offices and residences.

What is the 'Consolidated Fund'?

1. Consolidated Fund of India is the most important of all government accounts. Revenues received by the government and expenses made by it, excluding the exceptional items, are part of the Consolidated Fund.
2. This fund was constituted under Article 266 (1) of the Constitution of India. All revenues received by the government by way of direct taxes and indirect taxes, money borrowed and receipts from loans given by the government flow into the Consolidated Fund of India.
3. All government expenditure is made from this fund, except exceptional items which are met from the Contingency Fund or the Public Account.
4. Importantly, no money can be withdrawn from this fund without the **Parliament's approval**.

7TH ECONOMIC CENSUS EXTENDED

The Government has extended by six months the data collection period for the Seventh Economic Census, the only source of information on the large unorganized sector in the country. The period during which collection of statistics for 7th Economic Census may be completed is hereby extended by another 6 months till 30th September 2020. The survey has engaged around 1 million people in fieldwork and data is collected through a door to door survey of each household and commercial establishment under the provisions of Collection of Statistics Act 2008.

What

1. The ministry had put on hold various economic surveys including those to measure unemployment and domestic tourism besides a multiple indicator survey, till March 31 in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. It has been carrying out the Seventh Economic Census since July 29 last year, but the pace of its data collection slowed.
3. The economic census is being held this year after a gap of five years, for which MoSPI has partnered with CSC e-Governance Services India Ltd.
4. Seventh Economic Census has been carried out since July 29 last year but due to a slower pace, the data collection got extended by 6 months.
5. Under the provision of the Collection of Statistics Act, 2008, the data is collected through the door to door surveys of each household and commercial establishment.
6. The survey engages around 1 million people in the fieldwork of data collection.
7. The economic census has been held after a gap of five years. For the survey, MoSPI has partnered with CSC e-governance Services India Ltd.

Flashback

1. Indian Economic census is the census that is made through counting all the entrepreneurs in the country.
2. The units that are involved in any economic activities related to the agricultural or non-agricultural sector.
3. The sectors that are taken for the census must be engaged in the production or distribution of goods or services.
4. The government launched a planning scheme 'Economic Census and **Surveys' in 1976**.
5. The Central Statistical Organisation conducted the first economic census in collaboration with the Directorate of Economics & Statistics (DES) in 1977.

DISSOLUTION OF CAPART NOTIFIED

Rural development ministry has notified the dissolution of the Council for Advancement **of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART)** as a society and its merger in the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRD &PR) with effect from May 1, 2020. The Union cabinet had in October last year approved the dissolution of CAPART and its subsequent merger with NIRD&PR.

What

1. Post the merger, services of all the existing employees of CAPART shall stand transferred to NIRD and PR and they would be deemed to be the employees of NIRD and PR on and from May 1, 2020 for all purposes.
2. Besides, the service conditions of existing employees of CAPART shall be governed by the service rules applicable to the employees of NIRD & PR by reckoning their length of service from the date of their appointment in CAPART.
3. Actual posting, placement and other matters relating to the employees of CAPART shall be decided in consultation with the central government by NIRD & PR and such decision shall be made within six months from May 1, 2020.
4. Moreover, the sanctioned strength of the staff of NIRD & PR shall stand enhanced and all activities, assets and liabilities of CAPART as existing shall stand transferred to NIRD & PR.

About the CAPART

1. **Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART)** was launched in 1986.
2. It works as a nodal agency for catalyzing and coordinating the emerging partnership between voluntary organizations and the Government for sustainable development of rural areas.
3. The scheme was formed at that time by merging CART and PADI which refer to Council for Advancement of Rural Technology and People's Action for Development India respectively.
4. CAPART is an autonomous body registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860. It is chaired by the Union Minister for Rural Development.

About NIRD&PR

1. The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRD&PR), an autonomous organisation under the Union Ministry of Rural Development, is a premier national centre of excellence in rural development and Panchayati Raj.
2. Recognized internationally as one of the UN-ESCAP Centres of Excellence, it builds capacities of rural development functionaries, elected representatives of PRIs, bankers, NGOs and other stakeholders through inter-related activities of training, research and consultancy.
3. The Institute is located in the historic city of Hyderabad in Telangana state.
4. The NIRD&PR celebrated its Golden Jubilee Year of establishment in 2008.
5. In addition to the main campus at Hyderabad, this Institute has North-Eastern Regional Centre at Guwahati, Assam to meet the NE-regional needs.

THE CENTRE AMENDS MINING LAW

Removal of sand deposits from agricultural fields after floods will not require green clearance now, with the Centre amending the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act. In its notification, the Ministry of Environment has said that extraction of ordinary clay or sand by manual mining, by the 'kumhars' (potter) to prepare earthen pots, extraction of clay or sand by manual mining by earthen tile makers shall be exempted from the condition of acquiring environmental clearance.

What

1. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is in the receipt of representations for waiver of requirement of prior environmental clearance for borrowing of ordinary earth for roads; and manual extraction of lime shells (dead shell) etc., within intertidal zone by the traditional community," the ministry said while making amendments in mineral laws.
2. It said exemption from the requirement of environmental clearance shall also be given to Removal of sand deposits on agricultural fields after flood by farmers.
3. Customary extraction of sand and ordinary earth from sources situated in Gram Panchayat for personal use or community work in villages.
4. Community works, like, de-silting of village ponds or tanks, construction of village roads, ponds or bunds undertaken in Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment and Guarantee Schemes, other Government sponsored schemes and community efforts.
5. Extraction or sourcing or borrowing of ordinary earth for linear projects such as roads, pipelines, etc. Dredging and desilting of dams, reservoirs, weirs, barrages, rivers and canals for the purpose of their maintenance, upkeep and disaster management.
6. Digging of wells for irrigation or drinking water purposes and digging of foundation for buildings and excavation of ordinary earth or clay for plugging of any breach caused in canal, nallah, drain, waterbody, etc., to deal with any disaster or flood-like situation upon orders of the District Collector or District Magistrate or any other competent authority as well as activities declared by the State Government under legislation or rules as non-mining activity shall not require prior green nod.

INDIA REVOKES BAN ON EXPORT OF HCQ

India on 7 April 2020 announced that it had rescinded its earlier ban on the export of malaria drug hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), which is now being used in countries such as the U.S. as a possible line of treatment for COVID-19. In view of the humanitarian aspects of the pandemic, it has been decided that India would licence paracetamol and HCQ in appropriate quantities to all our neighbouring countries that are dependent on our capabilities. We will also be supplying these essential drugs to some nations that have been particularly badly affected by the pandemic, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said.

What

1. In a notification on March 25, the government placed HCQ on a restricted items list, and then put a blanket ban on any export of the drug on April 4. The latest decision, which was taken at a high-level meeting on April 6, effectively overturns the previous notification.
2. The **drug's efficacy is not yet** clinically proven; Mr. Trump has been a proponent of its use, calling it a "gamechanger".
3. The Indian Council for Medical Research has also cleared HCQ to be used as a prophylaxis, or preventive medication, by doctors, nurses and other health staff.
4. Despite the requirement, the Centre said it had assessed that current stocks of HCQ and other drugs that had been freed

How is it being used?

1. The drug can help tame an overactive immune system. It's been used since the 1940s to prevent and treat malaria, and to treat rheumatoid arthritis and lupus.
2. It's sold in generic form and under the brand name Plaquenil in the United States.
3. Doctors also can prescribe it "off label" for other purposes, as many are doing now for COVID-19.

for export were sufficient for “for all possible contingencies. The MEA also denied criticism that its decision to reverse its ban had been taken under pressure from the U.S. and other countries.

PM EXTENDS NATIONAL LOCKDOWN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced an extension of lockdown till May 3. Emphasising the importance of the next one week in the fight against coronavirus, he appealed to all the countrymen to stop the spread of the Covid-19 disease to newer areas. PM said that certain relaxations can be given in those areas that have shown promise in fighting the disease. An assessment will be done for the next one week of all the blocks, districts and states based on which the relaxations can be given. States like Maharashtra, Odisha, Delhi, Telangana, Punjab and Tamil Nadu have announced the extension till April 30. The 21-day national lockdown was scheduled to end today on April 14.

The big takeaways:

1. India did not wait for the problem to increase and acted in advance to stop the crisis from getting worse. We started screening at airports even before there was a single case in the country. India had mandatory 14-day isolation even before the case count touched 100.
2. The country has 220 testing labs now, over 1 lakh beds arranged and over 600 dedicated hospitals for Covid-19.
3. The path we chose is the correct path. Social distancing and lockdown have benefited the country immensely.
4. From an economic perspective, India has paid a lot but it pales in significance when compared to protection of lives.
5. For next one week, till April 20 every town, district, state will be examined carefully and assess how the area has fared on tackling the coronavirus. Those areas, which have shown improvement and show promise, certain relaxations can be given.
6. Government rolled out PM Garib Kalyan Yojana to take care of those who are most affected due to lockdown. States and Centre are working to minimise the difficulties faced by farmers as this is the harvesting period for Rabi crops.
7. There is enough stock of essential items in the country.

INTERNATIONAL

UN TO POSTPONE CLIMATE MEET COP26

COVID-19 spread has forced the UN body to postpone its flagship annual climate change conference which was scheduled to be held at Glasgow in United Kingdom (UK) in November. This crucial meet will now be held in 2021 -- the first year of the operationalisation of the the Paris Agreement. Though the postponement is welcomed by experts and civil societies across the globe, they insist that the postponing COP26 (26th session of the conference) does not mean postponing climate action which is a non-negotiable global priority.

What

1. Dates for a rescheduled conference in 2021, hosted in Glasgow by the UK in partnership with Italy, will be set out in due course following further discussion with parties (countries), said the COP Bureau of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
2. **It said, “In light of the ongoing, worldwide effects of COVID-19, holding an ambitious, inclusive COP26 in November 2020 is no longer possible.**
3. Rescheduling will ensure all parties can focus on the issues to be discussed at this

- vital conference and allow more time for the necessary preparations to take place.
4. Under the Paris Agreement, which is to be operationalised from January 1 next year, countries including India are expected to take climate actions as per their respective commitments to keep the average global temperature rise within 2 degree Celsius by 2100 from the pre-industrial (1850-1900) level.
 5. The UK government had come under tremendous pressure to take a call on holding COP26 in a situation when the pandemic intensified in the country and others parts of the globe including Italy which is the partner country for this **year's UN climate change** conference.
 6. Italy was to host a number of key preparatory events such as a Youth Event and the Pre-COP Summit in Milan from September 28 to October 2.
 7. Even the Scottish government announced this week that the SEC Arena - where COP26 was to take place - will be turned into a field hospital to cope with COVID-19 cases.
 8. The world is currently facing an unprecedented global challenge and countries are rightly focusing their efforts on saving lives and fighting COVID-19.
 9. Other UN climate meetings, scheduled to be held in June in Bonn, **has also been postponed. It'll now be held in October. Many countries** were expected to announce their new commitments of climate action during COP26 in November.
 10. Current climate plans put the world on track for a catastrophic 3 or 4 degrees of warming. In these uncertain times, a postponement of COP26 gives governments more time to increase their climate pledges.
 11. It is also expected in current circumstances that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) - UN body for assessing the science related to climate change - may not be able to submit its sixth assessment report (AR6) on climate change on time.
 12. It is anticipated that some or all of the original schedule for the finalization of the Sixth Assessment Report – the three Working Group reports and the Synthesis Report – including milestones and deadlines for activities for the preparation of these reports, could shift, in consultation with the National Focal Points, with further adjustments to the schedule taken as the situation evolves, said the IPCC in a statement.

Flashback

1. The UNFCCC is one of three Conventions that have come out of the historic 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.
2. The Rio summit gave rise to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) under which countries have agreed to restrict the emissions of greenhouse gases, first through the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 and now through the Paris Agreement that was finalised in 2015 and becomes operational next year.
3. It also gave rise to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) which too has delivered an international arrangement to protect and use biodiversity.
4. It also gave rise to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).
5. The UNFCCC holds its general meetings every year, while CBD and CCD meet every two years.

HISTORIC OPEC+ DEAL

The **world's top oil producers pulled off a historic deal** to cut global crude output and put an end to a devastating price war. After a week-long marathon of bilateral talks and four days of video conferences with government ministers from around the world, an agreement finally emerged to tackle the impact of the global pandemic on demand. The talks almost fell apart because of resistance from Mexico, but came back

from the brink after a weekend of urgent diplomacy — with the clock ticking down to the market open.

What

1. Opec+ will cut 9.7 million barrels a day — just below the initial plan of 10 million. This comprises around 10 per cent of the global supply.
2. Mexico appeared to have won a diplomatic victory as it will only be required to cut 100,000 barrels — less than its prorated share.
3. With the virus paralysing air and ground travel, demand for gasoline is collapsing and crude prices have plunged to 18-year lows. That threatened the future of the US shale industry and the stability of oil-dependent states, while piling more challenges on central banks fighting the fallout from the pandemic.
4. The question now for the oil market is whether the cuts will be enough to throw a floor under prices as demand for energy craters.
5. With countries around the world extending their lockdowns, the death toll mounting in New York, and unemployment exploding in the US, the oil market is far more worried about consumption than supply.
6. The deal caps a tumultuous month when Brent crude, the global benchmark, plunged to its lowest in nearly two decades, falling toward \$20 a barrel.
7. Earlier this year, it traded above \$70 a barrel. OPEC+ ministers had to race onto a video conference call, less than four hours before the oil market reopened, to close the deal.
8. Trump became the first American president to push for higher oil prices in more than 30 years, reversing his personal opposition to the cartel.
9. **The production deal doesn't take effect until May 1, leaving OPEC+ countries, which have significantly increased production over the last month, able to continue flooding the market for nearly another three weeks.**
10. Under the deal, Saudi Arabia will cut its production just a fraction under 8.5 million barrels a day -- its lowest level since 2011.
11. The OPEC+ deal measures the Saudi cut from a baseline of 11 million barrels a day, **the same as Russia. But in reality the kingdom's production will decline from a much higher level.** In April, Saudi Arabia boosted output to a record 12.3 million barrels a day as part of its war with Russia for market share.

UNGA ADOPTS RESOLUTION TO FIGHT COVID-19

The UN General Assembly has unanimously adopted its first resolution on the coronavirus pandemic co-sponsored by India and 187 other nations, calling for **intensified global cooperation to defeat the deadly disease that is causing “severe disruption” to societies and economies. The resolution titled ‘Global solidarity to fight the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)’ was the first such document on the pandemic to be adopted by the world body.** The UN Security Council is yet to discuss the coronavirus outbreak, even as the total number of cases across the world crossed one million.

What

1. The resolution, adopted on 3 April 2020, said the 193-member General Assembly notes with great concern the threat to human health, safety and well-being caused by the pandemic.
2. **It recognises the** “unprecedented effects of the pandemic, including the severe disruption to societies and economies, as well as to global travel and commerce, and the devastating impact on the livelihood of people.
3. The resolution called for intensified international cooperation to contain, mitigate and defeat the pandemic, including by exchanging information, scientific knowledge and best practices and by applying the relevant guidelines recommended by the World

Health Organization.

4. It also emphasised the need for full respect for human rights, and stresses that there is no place for any form of discrimination, racism and xenophobia in the response to the pandemic.
5. Recognising that the COVID-19 pandemic requires a global response based on unity, solidarity and renewed multilateral cooperation, the resolution said the General Assembly reaffirms its commitment to international cooperation and multilateralism and its strong support for the central role of the United Nations system in the global response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.
6. The resolution was sponsored by Ghana, Indonesia, Liechtenstein, Norway, Singapore and Switzerland.
7. Since the General Assembly is not holding meetings due to the pandemic, the resolution was adopted under a silence procedure. The draft resolution was under silence procedure until April 2 at 6pm.
8. According to the new voting rules, if there were no objections to the resolution within the specified time period from member states, the President of the General Assembly Tijjani Muhammad-Bande would circulate a letter confirming adoption.
9. A second draft resolution titled Declaration of solidarity of the United Nations in the face of the challenges posed by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) , sponsored by Russia and supported by the Central African Republic, Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela was not approved by the General Assembly.
10. The resolution called for refraining from raising trade barriers, imposing new export restrictions or implementing protectionist and discriminatory measures inconsistent with the World Trade Organization rules, and not to apply any unilateral coercive measures undertaken without the mandate of the Security Council.

What is UNGA?

1. The UNGA or United Nations General Assembly is the parliament of the world, where all the 193 UN member states are represented.
2. The UNGA is the deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the UN.
3. The UNGA along with the UNSC are two of the six main organs of the United Nations.
4. The UNGA takes a decision on important matters such as peace and security, discusses various global issues and budgetary matters.
5. The assembly also decides on matters such as the admission of new members.

ASSISTANCE TO AFGHANISTAN BY CHABAHAR PORT

An Indian ship on 12 April 2020 began its journey to **Iran's Chabahar port**, carrying a major consignment for Afghanistan of wheat and anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine, which is being used in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. 251 containers carrying the first consignment of 5,022 MT of wheat out of a total gift of 75,000 MT from India to Afghanistan set sail from the Kandla Port to the Chabahar Port. The remaining consignments will follow in the weeks ahead.

What

1. India is giving 5, 00,000 tablets of HydroxyChloroquine to Afghanistan for health professionals and COVID-19 positive cases, the Embassy of India in Kabul said.
2. The initiative comes a month after Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a video-conference with South Asian leaders, including Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, leading to the integration of Afghanistan in **India's regional strategy for the**

containment of the disease through the SAARC COVID-19 Emergency Fund.

3. The use of the Chabahar port is being viewed as symbolically important as it is the first time India is using it for a humanitarian mission since the top leaders of Iran criticised India for the violence in Delhi during the last week of February that led to the killing and displacement of Muslim citizens.
4. The violence broke out during the February 24-25 visit of U.S. President Donald Trump to India when the U.S. sanctions on Iran were highlighted.
5. **India's use of the Chabahar port** for the humanitarian mission, an Iranian diplomatic source hinted that Iran had asked for support of the international community to defeat U.S. sanctions as they had hampered its fight against the disease.

Why Chabahar port is important for India

1. India is one of a handful of countries that continued trade links with Iran despite it being isolated by Western countries against its disputed nuclear programme. New Delhi is Tehran's second-biggest oil client after Beijing.
2. The Chabahar port will cut transport costs/time for Indian goods by a third. The port is likely to ramp up trade among India, Afghanistan and Iran in the wake of Pakistan denying transit access to New Delhi for trade with the two countries.
3. Iran plans to turn the Chabahar port into a transit hub for immediate access to markets in the northern part of the Indian Ocean and in Central Asia.
4. About a fifth of the oil consumed worldwide each day passes through the Strait, a shipping choke point that separates the Persian Gulf from the Gulf of Oman and Indian Ocean.
5. The Chabahar port, located in the Sistan-Baluchistan Province on Iran's southern coast, will also set up India's road access to four cities in Afghanistan.

USA HALTS WHO FUNDING

US President Donald Trump said he has instructed his administration to halt funding to the World Health Organization over its handling of the coronavirus pandemic while his administration reviews its response to the global crisis. Donald Trump, at a White House news conference, said the WHO had "failed in its basic duty and it must be held accountable." He said the group had promoted China's "disinformation" about the virus that likely led to a wider outbreak of the virus than otherwise would have occurred. The United States is the biggest overall donor to the Geneva-based WHO, contributing more than \$400 million in 2019, roughly 15% of its budget.

What

1. The hold on funding was expected. Trump has been increasingly critical of the organization as the global health crisis has continued, and he has reacted angrily to criticism of his administration's response.
2. The decision drew immediate condemnation. American Medical Association President Dr. Patrice Harris called it "a dangerous step in the wrong direction that will not make defeating COVID-19 easier" and urged Trump to reconsider.
3. The Republican president has accused the WHO of being too lenient with China in the earliest days of the pandemic, causing unnecessary deaths by failing to impose a travel ban on China.
4. The U.S. death toll from COVID-19, the highly contagious respiratory illness caused by the virus, topped 25,700 on 14 April 2020 than 600,000 known U.S. infections, according to a running Reuters tally.

5. Millions of Americans have lost their jobs, and the U.S. economy has been crippled as citizens have stayed home and businesses were ordered to close, casting a shadow over Trump's hopes of being re-elected in November.

How much does the U.S. give WHO?

1. The **U.S. is the WHO's largest contributor.**
2. The **organisation's funding is of two types** — assessments or member dues and voluntary contributions.
3. The total funds for the 2020-2021 biennium included \$957 million in assessments and \$4.9 billion in voluntary contributions.
4. Over the last decade, the **U.S.'s assessed contributions have been in the \$107-\$119 million range** while voluntary contributions have been in the \$102-\$402 million range, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, a health-focused non-profit.
5. For the 2018 and 2019 biennium, the **U.S. contributed about 20% of WHO's budget**, according to a National Public Radio (NPR) report.
6. This money went as assessment fees (\$237 million) or pledges towards programmes (over \$656 million) from voluntary contributions.
7. The major share of the U.S. programmatic funding went towards polio eradication (\$158 million), increasing access to essential health and human services (\$100 million) and vaccine-preventable disease (\$44 million), according to the NPR.

ECONOMY

MEGA MERGER TAKES EFFECT

The government's mega merger plan to strengthen the financial system came into effect on 1 April 2020, combining 10 state-run banks into four. Announced in August last year, the merger combines Punjab National Bank, Oriental Bank of Commerce and United Bank into one lender managing business worth Rs 17.95 lakh crore. Similarly, Canara Bank stands merged with Syndicate Bank; Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank with Union Bank of India, and Indian Bank with Allahabad Bank. The big consolidation in the country's public banking sector is part of the government's plan of making India a \$5-trillion economy by 2025.

What

1. As the merger scheme takes effect, the four banks that will assume the operations of six others in addition to their own are: Punjab National Bank, Canara Bank, Union Bank and Indian Bank.
2. The branches of the six lenders will operate as part of the four anchor banks, according to the RBI. In turn, customers and depositors of the merged banks will be treated as customers of the four banks.
3. The merger comes into force as the country entered the seventh day of a 21-day nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of the deadly coronavirus pandemic, which is threatening world growth.
4. The move to combine the 10 banks into four at the end of August last year came at a time lenders in the country struggled against a mountain of debt and fraud running into thousands of crores.
5. Vowing to clean up the banking sector, the government has said that the state-run banks will be strengthened and repositioned to take the economy to the \$5-

trillion mark.

6. The Centre injected about Rs 2.6 lakh crore of taxpayers' money into state-run banks over the last five years to revive the sector.
7. Meanwhile, the Indian economy - already starting at the worst pace of expansion recorded in more than 11 years - now stares at the fallout from the coronavirus outbreak, which forced the government to announce a 21-day lockdown this month.

Flashback

1. On 30 August 2019, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the **government's decision** to merge 10 state-owned banks to create four large entities or lenders.
2. Under the plan, Oriental Bank of Commerce and United Bank of India will be merged with Punjab National Bank; Canara Bank with Syndicate Bank; Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank with Mumbai-based Union Bank of India; and Allahabad Bank with Indian Bank.
3. That will mean a consolidation of banks in India from 27 before 2017, to 12 after the merger goes through.
4. For years, expert committees starting from the M Narasimham Committee have recommended that India should have fewer but bigger and better-managed banks to ensure optimal use of capital, efficiency of operations, wider reach and greater profitability.
5. The logic is that rather than having several of its own banks competing for the same pie (in terms of deposits or loans) in the same narrow geographies, leading to each one incurring costs, it would make sense to have large-sized banks.

SBI LISTS GREEN BONDS ON INDIA INX

BSE's India International Exchange (India INX) on 2 April 2020 said state-owned SBI has listed green bonds of USD 100 million (about Rs 750 crore) on its debt listing platform. The bank has listed green bonds of USD 100 million under its USD 10 billion global medium term note programme on **India INX's Global Securities Market Green Platform (GSM)**, the exchange said in a statement.

What

1. The issuance has been done in very challenging market conditions. We **welcome SBI's green bond** issuance on our GSM platform, India INX MD and CEO V Balasubramaniam said. The State Bank of India (SBI) has earlier also listed its maiden green bond issuance on India INX of USD 650 million, he added.
2. It is an extremely important transaction for the country especially in this critical situation. We believe this issuance will

Flashback

1. In 2007, green bonds were launched by few development banks such as the European Investment Bank and the World Bank.
2. The World Bank issued the first official green bond in 2009.
3. Subsequently, in 2013, corporates too started participating, which led to its overall growth.
4. Yes Bank was the first bank to come out with a issue worth Rs 1,000 crore in 2015.
5. Following this, few other banks too had green bond issuances.
6. CLP India was the first Indian company to tap this route.

reassure confidence in the country's strength in the international bond market.

3. A green bond is like any other regular bond but with one key difference: the money raised by the issuer are earmarked towards financing 'green' projects, i.e. assets or business activities that are environment-friendly.
4. Such projects could be in the areas of renewable energy, clean transportation and sustainable water management.
5. Green bonds enhance an issuer's reputation, as it helps in showcasing their commitment towards sustainable development.
6. It also provides issuers access to specific set of global investors who invest only in green ventures.
7. With an increasing focus of foreign investors towards green investments, it could also help in reducing the cost of capital.

INDIA USES WTO PEACE CLAUSE

India has used the peace clause of the WTO to provide excess support measures to rice farmers for marketing year 2018-19 in order to meet the domestic food security needs of its poor population. Under the Peace Clause, WTO members refrain from challenging any breach in the prescribed subsidy ceiling given by a developing nation at the dispute settlement forum of the Geneva-based organisation. Subsidies over and above the prescribed ceiling are seen as trade distorting. The limit is fixed at 10 per cent of the value of food production for developing countries like India.

What

1. In a notification, India has informed the World Trade Organisation (WTO) that the value of its rice production was USD 43.67 billion in 2018-19 and for that it provided subsidies worth USD 5 billion, which is in excess of the prescribed 10 per cent ceiling.
2. **India's breach of commitment for rice, a traditional staple food crop** under a provision of the Agreement on Agriculture arises from support provided in pursuance of public stockholding programmes for food security purposes, which were in existence as of the date of the Bali Ministerial Decision on Public Stockholding for Food Security Purposes.
3. It said that the **country's public stockholding programmes for food security** purposes (covering rice and a number of other commodities) have been consistently reported to the WTO.
4. The stocks under the programme are acquired and released in order to meet the **domestic food security needs of India's poor and vulnerable population, and not to** impede commercial trade or food security of others, the notification said.
5. For these reasons, the breach of the limits for rice is covered by the peace clause set out in the Bali Ministerial Decision on Public Stockholding for Food Security Purposes and the General Council Decision. This is the first time any country has invoked the peace clause.
6. It is a test case to see if in such circumstances, like the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, **the WTO members give primacy to the developing countries' food security or if** developed countries will seek market access.
7. Before the harvest during each Rabi / Kharif crop season, India announces the minimum support prices (MSP) for procurement on the basis of the recommendation of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), which along with other factors, takes into consideration the cost of various agricultural inputs and a reasonable margin for farmers for their produce.
8. The Centre and state governments, through their agencies such as Food Corporation of India (FCI), National Agricultural Cooperative Federation of India (NAFED) and others, procure foodgrains from farmers at the MSP in order to meet the overall demand of different welfare schemes.

IND-RA MAINTAINS STABLE OUTLOOK

India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) on 7 April 2020 retained a stable outlook on the Indian education sector for 2020-21, driven by sustained rise in enrolments for higher studies. Although the nationwide lockdown will adversely impact the household income, especially of the ones at bottom of the pyramid and may lead to school dropouts, Ind-Ra **believes the government's ongoing initiatives like the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, Samagra Shiksha and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme would support the sector.**

What

1. According to the report, the education market is likely to expand by 5-6 per cent in FY21, driven mainly by growing enrolments in higher education which increased by 2.07 per cent annually in FY19. Ind-Ra expects the market size of the education sector to touch Rs 6,48,300 crore in FY21.
2. The budgetary allocation for mid-day meals in schools was increased by about 11 per cent year-on-year to Rs 11,000 crore in FY21. The budgetary allocation towards education also increased to Rs 99,311.5 crore in FY21, which will improve the infrastructure and quality of education.
3. The government initiatives towards the new education policy and emphasis on research-oriented higher educational institutions or universities are likely to improve the educational standards in the country.
4. Also, the government initiatives towards increasing funding options for educational institutions through external commercial borrowings and foreign direct investments will positively impact the international positioning of the Indian education sector.
5. Ind-Ra has also maintained a stable outlook on its rated educational institutions portfolio for FY21 on the expectation of a sustained increase in enrolments, a moderate increase in revenue and comfortable operating profitability.
6. The educational institutes realise full-year fee either at the time of admissions or in 2-4 instalments, the lockdown is unlikely to have a major impact on their annual revenues.
7. However, since the school leaving examinations are not yet complete and the lockdown may delay the admission process, education institutes without a liquidity buffer may face a liquidity crunch in case of delayed admissions.

Flashback

1. India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) is India's most respected credit rating agency committed to providing India's credit markets accurate, timely and prospective credit opinions.
2. Built on a foundation of independent thinking, rigorous analytics, and an open and balanced approach towards credit research, Ind-Ra has grown rapidly during the past decade, gaining significant market presence in India's fixed income market.
3. Ind-Ra currently maintains coverage of corporate issuers, financial institutions (including banks and insurance companies), finance and leasing companies, managed funds, urban local bodies, and structured finance and project finance companies.
4. Headquartered in Mumbai, Ind-Ra has seven branch offices located in Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Pune.
5. Ind-Ra is recognised by the Securities and Exchange Board of India, the Reserve Bank of India and National Housing Bank.
6. Ind-Ra is a 100% owned subsidiary of the Fitch Group.

8. The report noted that COVID-19 may bring in a paradigm shift in the way professional courses are taught.
9. The adoption of the digital platform to impart teaching will gain significant traction.

1.

SDF FOR COVID-19 PROJECTS

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Development Fund (SDF) has allocated \$5 million for Covid-19 related projects in its member states, said a press release from the organisation on 7 April 2020. The objective of the US\$ 5 million allocation is to provide fund support to the Member States in their efforts and to protect the people of the SAARC Member States by mitigating the financial losses and severe socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

What

1. To be eligible for the funding, the project would have to involve at least three member nations, the SDF said. The Bhutan-based body was mandated to build regional integration and economic cooperation through project funding among its member states.
2. Its eight member states include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
3. The approval process, project implementation, fund disbursement, management, monitoring and reporting shall be as per the existing SDF-Board approved policy, and practices of SDF and Social Window.
4. The SDF is currently implementing 90 projects in all SAARC member states under its three funding windows, economic, infrastructure and social, with a total fund commitment of \$198.24 million.

Flashback

1. SAARC Development Fund (SDF) was established by the heads of the eight SAARC Member States in April 2010 with the aim to promote the welfare of the people of SAARC region, improve their quality of life, and accelerate economic growth, social progress and poverty alleviation in the region.
2. SDF has three funding windows i.e. Social, Economic and Infrastructure Window.
3. The Social Window focuses on funding projects on poverty alleviation, improving health and education, and so on.
4. Economic Window funds non-infrastructure projects related to trade and industry development, agriculture and so on.
5. Infrastructural Window funds projects in areas such as energy, power, transportation, etc

WB APPROVED AN EMERGENCY FUND FOR INDIA

The World Bank (WB) on 3 April 2020 approved \$1-billion emergency financing for India to tackle the coronavirus outbreak, which has claimed many lives and infected 2,500 others in the country. The World Bank's first set of aid projects, amounting to \$1.9 billion, will assist 25 countries, and new operations are moving forward in over 40 nations using the fast-track process, the bank said. The largest chunk of the emergency financial assistance has gone to India -- \$1 billion.

What

1. In India, \$1 billion emergency financing will support better screening, contact tracing, and laboratory diagnostics; procure personal protective equipment; and set up new isolation wards," the World Bank said after its Board of Executive Directors approved the first set of emergency support operations for developing countries

- around the world, using a dedicated, fast-track facility for COVID-19 response.
2. In South Asia, the World Bank also approved \$200 million for Pakistan, \$100 million for Afghanistan, \$7.3 million for Maldives and \$128.6 million for Sri Lanka.
 3. The World Bank said it is now working to grant up to \$160 billion over the next 15 months to support measures to tackle the pandemic which will focus on the immediate health consequences and bolster economic recovery.
 4. The broader economic program will aim to shorten the time to recovery, create conditions for growth, support small and medium enterprises, and help protect the poor and vulnerable.
 5. There will be a strong poverty focus in these operations, with an emphasis on policy-based financing, and protecting the poorest households and the environment.
 6. The World Bank Group is taking broad, fast action to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and we already have health response operations moving forward in over 65 countries.
 7. The poorest and most vulnerable countries will likely be hit the hardest, and our teams around the world remain focused on country-level and regional solutions to address the ongoing crisis.
 8. According to the bank, USD 100 million will support Afghanistan to slow and limit the spread of COVID-19 through enhanced detection, surveillance, and laboratory systems, as well as strengthen essential health care delivery and intensive care.
 9. In Pakistan, USD 200 million will support preparedness and emergency response in the health sector and include social protection and education measures to help the poor and vulnerable cope with the immediate impacts of the pandemic.
 10. Responding to widespread supply chain disruptions, the World Bank is helping countries access critically needed medical supplies by reaching out to suppliers on behalf of the governments.
 11. The World Bank is encouraging others to provide financial support to developing countries for the COVID-19 health response.

Flashback

1. The World Bank is like a cooperative, made up of 189 member countries.
2. These member countries, or shareholders, are represented by a Board of Governors, who are the ultimate policymakers at the World Bank.
3. Generally, the governors are member countries' ministers of finance or ministers of development.
4. They meet once a year at the Annual Meetings of the Boards of Governors of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund.
5. The governors delegate specific duties to 25 Executive Directors, who work on-site at the Bank.
6. The five largest shareholders appoint an executive director, while other member countries are represented by elected executive directors.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

E-PORTAL 'YUKTI' LAUNCHED

Union human resource development minister Ramesh Pokhriyal "Nishank" on 12 April 2020 launched a web-portal 'YUKTI' - Young India Combating COVID with Knowledge, Technology and Innovation. YUKTI is a portal to monitor and record the efforts and initiatives of MHRD which have been taken in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak. The portal intends to cover the different dimensions of COVID-19 challenges in a

very holistic and comprehensive way.

What

1. The Union HRD Minister said, "At present, our primary aim is to keep our academic community healthy, both physically and mentally, and to enable a continuous high-quality learning environment for learners. The portal is an effort of the MHRD to achieve this goal in these difficult times.
2. The portal will include the various initiatives and efforts of the institutions in academics, research especially related to COVID, social initiatives by institutions and the measures taken for the betterment of the total wellbeing of the students.
3. The portal will also allow various institutions to share their strategies for various challenges posed by COVID-19 and other future initiatives.
4. The portal will establish a two-way communication channel between the MHRD and the institutions so that the Ministry can provide the necessary support system to the institutions.
5. This portal will help in critical issues related to student promotion policies, placements related challenges and physical and mental well-being of students in these challenging times.

ICMR RECOMMENDS ANTIBODY TEST

To ensure speedy detection of coronavirus cases, those residing in COVID-19 hotspots or areas which have reported large numbers of cases may have to undergo a rapid antibody blood test or serological test for the viral infection. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) in its interim advisory has recommended the use of the rapid antibody test in the **country's coronavirus hotspots**. The decision for the recommendation was taken at an emergency meeting of the National Task Force, formed to deal with the health crisis, held on 3 April 2020.

What

1. Population in hotspot areas may be tested using rapid antibody tests. Antibody positives to be confirmed by RT-PCR (reverse transcription-PCR) using throat/nasal swab, and antibody negatives to be quarantined at home, the ICMR said in its interim advisory.
2. The Health Ministry has identified 20 existing and 22 potential COVID-19 hotspots across the country.
3. The results of the antibody tests, similar to other blood tests, are available in 15-30 minutes.
4. Presently the government uses the PCR (polymerase chain reaction) tests to detect coronavirus from samples of the throat or nasal swab of people with symptoms or high-risk individuals who might have come in contact with positive patients.
5. "Rapid tests" — serological or blood tests — as an alternative to the longer, swab-based tests routinely being used. Kerala has already rolled out

What is a serological test?

1. According to the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Serology tests are blood-based tests that can be used to identify whether people have been exposed to a particular pathogen.
2. Serology-based tests analyse the serum component of whole blood.
3. The serum includes antibodies to specific components of pathogens, called antigens.
4. These antigens are recognized by the immune system as foreign and are targeted by the immune response.
5. Blood has two components, a matrix called plasma and the blood cells.
6. The plasma minus the components of whole blood that cause it to clot is known as serum.

such tests; Maharashtra appears set to do so, while Chhattisgarh has sought permission.

DRDO CREATES PSE AND FFM

With the help of M/s D H Ltd, Ghaziabad, in a short time of around four days, one of the labs of DRDO, Vehicle Research Development Establishment (VRDE), Ahmednagar, has designed full body disinfection chamber called PSE. This can be used at the military facilities as well as malls, hospitals, office buildings and other critical facilities.

What does this do?

1. According to DRDO it is a walk through enclosure which would allow one person at a time to walk through for being decontaminated and it has a portable system which is equipped with a sanitiser and soap dispenser.
2. Meant for the defence personnel, this will start using a foot pedal at the entry, and electrically operated pumps will create a disinfectant mist of hypo sodium chloride.
3. The mist spray is set to operate for 25 seconds and stops automatically on completion of the process. Through the spraying of the disinfectant, the personnel will be expected to keep his eyes closed.
4. It comes with a roof mounted and bottom tanks and has a capacity of 700 litres and around 650 personnel can walk through before the next refill.
5. The chamber has see through glass for monitoring and has lights fitted for night time checks. And according to DRDO there is a separate cabin for the operator to monitor the operations.

Full Face Mask (FFM)

1. Face protection mask for health care professionals handling COVID-19 patients has been designed and developed by Research Centre Imarat (RCI), Hyderabad and Terminal Ballistics Research Laboratory (TBRL), Chandigarh.
2. It is lightweight and is easy to wear for long hours.
3. The A4 size Over-Head Projection (OHP) film for face protection has been used which is commonly available.
4. The frame which holds the film has been made using Fused Deposition modeling (3D printing).
5. Polylactic Acid filament is used for 3D printing of the frame. This Polylactic Acid filament is thermoplastic and has been derived from renewable resources such as corn starch or sugarcane and is biodegradable.
6. As an update, daily TBRL is producing around one thousand face shields and supplying to Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh.
7. Also, around 100 have been produced at RCI and have been handed over to **Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC), Hyderabad**.
8. Based on the successful trials, there is now a demand for 10,000 shields from PGIMER and ESIC Hospitals.

NASA'S SUNRISE SOLAR MISSION

NASA has selected a new mission called the Sun Radio Interferometer Space Experiment or simply the SunRISE to study how the Sun generates and releases giant space weather storms into planetary space. The SunRISE is an array of six CubeSats operating as one very large radio telescope which will be built and launched no

earlier than July 1, 2023.

What

1. The six small spacecrafts — each about the size of a toaster oven — will be stationed around 10 km apart into the geosynchronous Earth orbit and work together to capture radio images of low-frequency emissions from solar activity.
2. These images will help create 3D maps of solar particle bursts to pinpoint where giant particle bursts originate on the Sun and how they evolve as they expand outward into space.
3. NASA believes that the information will also help determine what initiates and accelerates these giant jets of radiation.
4. Not only will such information improve understanding of how our solar system works, but it ultimately can help protect astronauts travelling to the Moon and Mars by providing better information on **how the Sun's radiation affects the space environment** they must travel through.
5. The space agency had selected the SunRISE project in August 2017 as one of two Missions of Opportunity proposals to conduct an 11-month mission concept study.
6. In February 2019, NASA approved a continued formulation study for SunRISE for an additional year. Now, the mission has been deemed ready to begin design and building with a total budget of \$62.6 million.

UNUSUAL OZONE HOLES OVER THE ARCTIC

Scientists have noticed a strong reduction of ozone concentrations over the Arctic. **This 'mini hole' in the ozone layer** is believed to have been caused by unusual atmospheric conditions, including freezing temperatures in the stratosphere. The ozone layer is a protective layer of gas in the stratosphere that shields Earth from **the Sun's harmful ultraviolet radiation that can otherwise cause skin cancer and cataracts** along with other environmental issues. As per a press release shared by the European Space Agency (ESA), scientists from the German Aerospace Center (DLR) used data from the Copernicus Sentinel-5P satellite to notice the unusually strong depletion of ozone over the northern polar regions.

What

1. **Mini ozone holes over the North Pole aren't rare**, but the depletion over the Arctic this year is much larger compared to previous years.
2. As per the ESA, cold temperatures (below -80°C), sunlight, wind fields and substances such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) are responsible for the ozone layer.
3. Even though both the north and south poles of the planet endure ozone losses during winter, the **Arctic's ozone depletion tends to be significantly less than Antarctica**.
4. Although Arctic temperatures do not usually fall as low as in Antarctica, this year, powerful winds flowing around the North Pole trapped cold air within what is known as the polar vortex— a circling whirlpool of stratospheric winds.
5. By the end of the polar winter, the first sunlight over the North Pole initiated this unusually strong ozone

Ozone recovery

1. As per the Scientific Assessment of Ozone Depletion data of 2018, the ozone layer in parts of the stratosphere has recovered at a rate of 1-3 per cent per decade since 2000.
2. At these projected rates, the Northern Hemisphere and mid-latitude ozone is predicted to recover by around 2030, followed by the Southern Hemisphere around 2050, and Polar Regions by 2060.

depletion—causing the hole to form. However, its size is still small compared to what can usually be observed in the southern hemisphere.

EXPEDITION 63

NASA astronaut Chris Cassidy along with two Russian cosmonauts Anatoly Ivanishin and Ivan Vagner reached the International Space Station (ISS) for a six-month-long mission named Expedition 63. The trio, who will undertake more than 160 science investigations during their six-month sojourn, reached the International Space Station on 9 April 2020. The astronauts had taken a flight of more than six hours on the Soyuz MS-16 spacecraft which had departed from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.

What

1. The astronauts were welcomed by NASA flight engineers Andrew Morgan, Jessica Meir and Commander Oleg Skripochka who are presently leading space science missions on the ISS.
2. Skripochka is leading Expedition 62 along with Meir and Morgan on the ISS. After staying with the astronauts of Expedition 62 for eight days, Cassidy and his mission mates will be on their own as the Expedition 62 will be wound up by April 17 and Skripochka and his team will head back to the Earth.
3. As part of their expedition, Cassidy along with Ivanishin and Vagner will undertake research in Biology, Earth sciences, human research and technology development. Expedition 63 is being headed by Chris Cassidy.
4. A formal change of command ceremony aboard the ISS will also take place on April 15. The ceremony, in which Skripochka will pass the baton to Cassidy, will be telecast live on the NASA television.
5. Cassidy, Ivanishin and Vagner will complete their mission by October this year and a new mission with another set of astronauts will replace them. For more than 20 years, humans have lived continuously on the ISS.
6. Various missions have been undertaken to make new breakthroughs and lead path-breaking research in space science. So far more than 239 astronauts from a total of 19 countries have been to the International Space Station leading 2800 space science investigations.

Flashback

1. The International Space Station (ISS) is a multi-nation construction project that is the largest single structure humans ever put into space.
2. Its main construction was completed between 1998 and 2011, although the station continually evolves to include new missions and experiments.
3. It has been continuously occupied since Nov. 2, 2000.
4. The ISS includes contributions from 15 nations. NASA (United States), Roscosmos (Russia) and the European Space Agency are the major partners of the space station who contribute most of the funding; the other partners are the Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency and the Canadian Space Agency.
5. The space station flies at an average altitude of 248 miles (400 kilometers) above Earth.

MISCELLANEOUS

NEW DEADLINE FOR TOKYO OLYMPICS

The International Olympic Committee has set June 29, 2021 as the new deadline for the qualification period of the Tokyo Olympics, which has been rescheduled to next year in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a communication to all National Olympic Committee (NOC) Presidents, Secretary Generals and Chef de Missions, IOC Director of Solidarity and NOC relations, James McLoed has initiated the revised qualification principles of Tokyo Olympics 2020. According to the letter dated April 2, the revised sport entries deadline has now been set for July 5, 2021.

What

1. The new qualification period deadline is 29 June, 2021 and the IFs (international federations) can define their own qualification period deadlines should the deadline be prior to this date.
2. The revision of the qualifications systems will be finalised as quickly as possible to give certainty to athletes and NOCs.
3. We understand that at this time these are unlikely to include the full details now on the dates and locations of the specified events, recognising that these will follow later as the impacts of COVID-19 and its related restrictions become clearer.
4. We aim to finalise the adapted qualifications systems by mid-April, with the details on specific events to follow when available.
5. Mcloed said that the IFs retain full discretion to define the new ranking deadline and pathway in the scenario where quota allocation was originally based on ranking.
6. The IOC recognises the sensitivity of such decisions. A sport-specific balance needs to be found between protecting those athletes who were close to qualifying based on the previous 2020 deadlines whilst also ensuring the participation of best athletes at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 by allowing the top performers of the 2021 season to qualify.
7. The COVID-19 outbreak has created a major health scare around the globe and has severely affected all activities around the world, including sports which witnessed the postponement of 2020 Tokyo Olympics to next year.
8. As per the revised schedule announced by the International Olympic Committee, the Summer Games will now be held from July 23 to August 8, exactly a year after the global sporting event was originally scheduled.

Flashback

1. The International Olympic Committee is a non-governmental sports organisation based in Lausanne, Switzerland.
2. Founded by Pierre de Coubertin and Demetrios Vikelas in 1894, it is the authority responsible for organising the modern Summer and Winter Olympic Games.
3. The IOC is the governing body of the National Olympic Committees (NOCs), which are the national constituents of the worldwide Olympic Movement.

LOW-COST FACE SHIELDS FOR DOCTORS, NURSES

IIT Roorkee has developed a low-cost face shield in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic in the country. The development comes after the shortage of personal protective gear was reported from various hospitals across the country. The collaboration between the students and faculty members of the institute will result in the first line of defence for the healthcare workers at AIIMS Rishikesh which is handling the patients of Coronavirus.

What

1. The shield developed by the institute has been made using 3D print technology which would provide an extra layer of protection against novel Coronavirus. More than a thousand face shields have been dispatched for the doctors and healthcare staff of AIIMS Rishikesh.
2. The face shield which looks like a large version of spectacles has been designed at an economical rate.
3. The institute has said that the cost of an individual sheet was Rs 45. However, it has also said that on a large scale, the cost can be brought down to Rs 25 per shield. The face shields were designed at Tinker Lab of IIT Roorkee.
4. This is our humble contribution towards the healthcare professionals who are risking their lives to save mankind from the threat of Coronavirus, Coordinator of Tinker lab, Akshay Dvivedi, said. IIT-Jodhpur has also developed a set of face shields on similar lines using 3d print technology.
5. Apart from the recent development, the institute has also designed cost-effective ventilators to aid the treatment of critical cases of Covid-19.
6. The cost of the ventilators has been estimated up to Rs 25,000 which is far less than a high-end ventilator which comes for around Rs 5 lakh.

Flashback

1. 3D printing or additive manufacturing is a process of making three dimensional solid objects from a digital file.
2. The creation of a 3D printed object is achieved using additive processes. In an additive process an object is created by laying down successive layers of material until the object is created.
3. Each of these layers can be seen as a thinly sliced horizontal cross-section of the eventual object.
4. 3D printing is the opposite of subtractive manufacturing which is cutting out / hollowing out a piece of metal or plastic with for instance a milling machine.
5. 3D printing enables you to produce complex shapes using less material than traditional manufacturing methods.

WORLD HEALTH DAY 2020

Every year on April 7, World Health Day is celebrated to spread awareness regarding health all over the world. It is held under the sponsorship of the World Health Organization (WHO). This year, the day holds additional significance as it has fallen between the global health emergency caused by the outbreak of COVID-19. The First World Health Assembly, held in 1948, asked to create a World Health Day to raise global awareness on specific themes related to health in order to highlight an area of importance for the WHO. Therefore, since 1950, the World Health Day has been marked on April 7 every year. The WHO uses the day to mark the launch of a long-term programme, in relation to which activities are undertaken and resources are provided much beyond April 7.

What

1. For 2020, which is the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, according to the WHO, the theme is to celebrate these key medical professionals who are often undermined.
2. The international health agency said that in the COVID-19 response, nurses have played such an important role in providing quality care and treatment, addressing fears of patients and even collecting data for clinical studies, that without nurses, the

response to the pandemic would not have been possible.

3. Thus, the WHO will use this year to highlight the status of nursing all over the world and will remind world leaders about the crucial role they play in order to ensure a healthy world. The tagline for this year is 'Support Nurses and Midwives'.
4. In relation to this, on 7 April 2020 the WHO released a report titled 'State of the **World's Nursing Report – 2020**', which highlights the global nursing situation at the moment.
5. According to the report, 70% of the global health and social workforce is made up of women, and a considerable portion of this is represented by nurses and midwives.
6. The WHO report said that health for all would depend on the availability of an adequate number of nurses and midwives who are well-trained, educated, regulated and also supported.
7. Moreover, these nurses and midwives should also receive pay and recognition in tune with the quality of care and the service provided by them.

COVID-19 EMERGENCY PACKAGE FOR STATES

The Centre has approved the COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness package aimed at boosting national and state health systems to support procurement of essential medical equipment and drugs, and strengthening of surveillance activities. In a letter to the additional chief secretaries, principal secretaries and commissioners (Health) of all states and UTs, the Health Ministry said the 100 per cent centrally funded package will be implemented in three phases from January 2020 to March 2024.

What

1. The centre on 9 April 2020 sanctioned Rs 15,000 crore package to strengthen India's fight against the novel coronavirus.
2. The funds allocated will be utilized for immediate COVID-19 Emergency Response (amount of Rs 7774 crores) and rest for medium-term support (1-4 years) to be provided under mission mode approach.
3. The "COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness Package" will be implemented in three phases - from January 2020 to June 2020, from July 2020 to March 2021 and from April 2021 to March 2024. The fund will be divided among all states and union territories.
4. The key objectives of the package include mounting emergency response to slow and limit COVID-19 in India through the development of diagnostics and COVID-19 dedicated treatment facilities, centralized procurement of essential medical equipment and drugs required for treatment of infected patients, strengthen and build resilient National and State health systems to support prevention and preparedness for future disease outbreaks, setting up of laboratories and bolster surveillance activities, biosecurity preparedness, pandemic research and proactively engage communities and conduct risk communication activities.
5. The centre on March 27 had announced a Rs 1.7 lakh crore relief package aimed at providing a safety net for those hit the hardest by the Covid-19 lockdown, along with insurance cover for frontline medical personnel.
6. About 800 million people will get free cereals and cooking gas apart from cash through direct transfers for three months. Till now , a total of 223 labs comprising a network of 157 government & 66 private laboratories are conducting rigorous screening processes.
7. The health ministry has already disbursed Rs. 4113 Crore to all the States and UTs for dealing with the emergency COVID response.
8. According to the letter, the Union Health Ministry is releasing funds for states and Union territories under the National Health Mission for implementation of phase 1

up to June 2020.

9. The key activities to be implemented under Phase 1 include support to states and UTs for development of dedicated COVID-19 hospitals, isolation blocks, ICUs with ventilators oxygen supply in hospitals, strengthening of laboratories, hiring of additional human resources and incentives to human resource and community health volunteers.
10. It also includes strengthening of identified laboratories and expansion of diagnostic capacities and mobility support for sample transport.
11. The ministry has also asked states and UTs to use the funds for the procurement of personal protective equipment, N-95 masks and ventilators over and above what is being procured and supplied by the central government.

AEROSOL BARRIER DEVELOPED

Helping the country in fighting COVID-19, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) **has successfully demonstrated its new product** 'Enclosure for Intubation Procedure – Aerosol Containment Box'. Designed by RCI, Hyderabad & TBRL, Chandigarh, DRDO Laboratories, Acrylic and Perspex materials have been used **respectively. There is a transparent cube which covers the patient's head up to the chest and acts as a safety barrier against transmitting droplets from patients while giving treatment.**

Importance of Aerosol Containment Box

1. There are two circular ports **which allow the health worker's hands to pass and** perform the airway procedures. The acrylic/perspex material used is 50 per cent lighter thermoplastic compared to glass making it easy to handle.
2. The Enclosure for Aerosol Containment is useful while taking samples from a suspected patient, during intubation, observation or during treatment to completely avoid droplets and aerosols emanating from them due to cough & sneeze.
3. So far according to the DRDO two sizes of Aerosol Containment, Boxes are designed and developed for use by adult patients and child patients.

Why is the enclosure important?

1. The use of the enclosure is meant to safeguard against the spread of viral contamination of COVID-19 to reach the gown, gloves, face mask, eye shield, shoes and also on the floor of the hospitals effectively safeguarding health care workers.
2. RCI, Hyderabad has manufactured prototype units at local industry partners at Hyderabad and a demonstration has been carried out by a team of doctors at ESI Medical College, Hyderabad.
3. The design is validated and accepted. The design of TBRL has been tested and qualified at PGIMER, Chandigarh.
4. **The production of required quantities of 'Enclosure for Intubation Procedure – Aerosol Containment Box' is being done at industries located in Hyderabad and Chandigarh.**

'BAT CORONAVIRUS' IN INDIAN BAT SPECIES

As the world grapples with the coronavirus pandemic, researchers have found the presence of a different kind of coronavirus -- bat coronavirus (BtCoV) -- in two bat species from Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Puducherry and Tamil Nadu, according to a first of its study by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). According to the study published in the Indian Journal of Medical Research, there is no evidence or research to claim that these bat coronaviruses can cause disease in humans, said Dr Pragya D Yadav, Scientist at the National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune and also the first author of study. Twenty-five bats of Rousettus and Pteropus species from Kerala,

Himachal Pradesh, Puducherry and Tamil Nadu were found positive for BtCoV.

What

1. These bat coronaviruses have no relation with SARS-CoV2 responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic, Yadav said, adding that Pteropus bat species were earlier found positive for Nipah virus in 2018 and 2019 in Kerala.
2. Bats are considered to be the natural reservoir for many viruses, of which some are potential human pathogens.
3. In India, an association of Pteropus medius bats with the Nipah virus was reported in the past. It is suspected that the recently emerged severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) also has its association with bats, the objective of the study titled 'Detection of coronaviruses in Pteropus and Rousettus species of bats from different states of India' stated.
4. In the present scenario of changing demography and ecological manipulations, it is challenging to have checks on the encounters of bats with other animals and humans, the study stated, highlighting that the need for active and continuous surveillance remains crucial for outbreak alerts for bat-associated viral agents with epidemic potential, which would be helpful in timely interventions.
5. Although CoVs in the subfamily coronavirinae do not usually produce clinical symptoms in their natural hosts (bats), accidental transmission of these viruses to humans and other animals may result in respiratory, enteric, hepatic or neurologic diseases of variable severity.
6. It is still not understood as to why only certain CoVs can infect people, the study said. The scientists stressed on the need of proactive surveillance of zoonotic infections in bats.
7. The detection and identification of such viruses from bats also recommends cross-sectional antibody surveys (human and domestic animals) in localities where the viruses have been detected.
8. Similarly, if the epidemiological situation demands, evidence-based surveillance should also be conducted, the study said while emphasizing on the need of developing strong mechanisms for working jointly with various stakeholders such as wildlife, poultry, animal husbandry and human health departments.
9. In conclusion, our study showed detection of bat CoVs in two species of Indian bats. Continuous active surveillance is required to identify the emerging novel viruses with epidemic potential.
10. Throat and rectal swab samples of two bat species -- Rousettus and Pteropus -- from seven states were screened for the bat coronavirus during which the representative samples collected from Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Puducherry and Tamil Nadu tested positive while those from Karnataka, Chandigarh, Punjab, Telengana, Gujarat and Odisha came out negative.
11. The reverse-transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) tests and sequencing were used for the confirmation of the findings.