

My Notes....

NATIONAL

'GARIB KALYAN ROJGAR' LAUNCHED

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 20 June 2020 launched an employment scheme (Garib Kalyan Rozgar Abhiyaan) with an outlay of Rs 50,000 crore for migrant workers who returned to their home states during the coronavirus-induced lockdown. The 'Garib Kalyan Rozgar Abhiyaan' will be implemented on a mission mode in 125 days in 116 districts of six states -- Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Odisha -- that received the maximum numbers of migrant workers back.

What

1. It will help expedite implementation of 25 public infrastructure works and those related to augmentation of livelihood opportunities.
2. These 25 works are related to rural housing for the poor, plantations, provision of drinking water through Jal Jeevan Mission, and construction of panchayat bhavans, community toilets, rural mandis, rural roads, cattle sheds and anganwadi bhavans, according to the Ministry of Rural Development, which is the nodal ministry for the project.
3. Under the scheme, the basket of a wide variety of works will ensure that each migrant worker is able to get an opportunity of employment according to his skill in the coming 125 days, the programme will also prepare for expansion and development of livelihoods over a longer term.
4. This scheme will focus on durable rural infrastructure and providing modern facilities like Internet in the villages.
5. The Garib Kalyan Rozgar Abhiyaan was launched by Modi via video conference in

Key points of the Scheme

1. The 'Garib Kalyan Rozgar Abhiyaan' campaign is for our 'shramik' workers who returned to their villages during the lockdown.
2. The campaign is of 125 days, which will work in mission mode.
3. It will involve intensified and focused implementation of 25 different types of works to provide employment to migrant workers on one hand and create infrastructure in the rural regions of the country on the other, with a resource envelope of Rs 50,000 crore.
4. A total of 116 districts with more than 25,000 migrant workers each across Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Odisha have been chosen for the campaign and includes 27 aspirational districts.
5. The 25 schemes of the government will be brought together and would help build gram panchayat bhavans and anganwadi centres, assist in national highway works, railway works and water conservation projects among others.

- a village in Khagaria district of Bihar in the presence of the chief ministers of five states -- Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand -- and a minister from Odisha.
6. The mission will be a convergent effort between 12 different ministries/ departments such as Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, Road Transport and Highways, Mines, Drinking Water and Sanitation, Environment, Railways, Petroleum and Natural Gas, New and Renewable Energy, Border Roads, Telecom, and Agriculture.
 7. The prime minister said he got the idea for the scheme from a group of migrant workers, trained in white washing, who repaired and painted a government school in Unnao in Uttar Pradesh as a thank you gesture.
 8. A total of 25,000 "returnee" migrant workers across Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Odisha have been chosen for the campaign. Garib Kalyan Rozgyar Abhiyan is separate from the MGNREGS.
 9. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) ensures 100 days of employment per household in a year.
 10. MGNREGS is applicable across the country and a large number of works are allowed under the scheme even working on own farms by small Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe farmers is allowed and the government pays wages to them.
 11. The Garib Kalyan Rozgar Yojana is a one-time scheme for providing employment to migrant workers who returned during the lockdown near their villages.
 12. This scheme is only applicable to 116 districts with a selected list of works initially for 125 days. Later it could be extended.

INDIA ELECTED NON-PERMANENT MEMBER OF UNSC

India was elected as non-permanent member of the powerful UN Security Council for a two-year term on 17 June 2020, winning 184 votes in the 193-member General Assembly. Along with India, Ireland, Mexico and Norway also won the Security Council elections held on 17 June 2020. There were 192 Member States present for voting and the 2/3 required majority was 128.

What

1. India will sit in the most powerful UN organ, for two years beginning on January 1, along with the five permanent members China, France, Russia, UK and the US as well as non-permanent members Estonia, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia and Vietnam.
2. India was a candidate for a non-permanent seat from the Asia-Pacific category for the 2021-22 term. Its victory was a given since it was the sole candidate vying for the lone seat from the grouping.
3. **New Delhi's candidature** was unanimously endorsed by the 55-member Asia-Pacific grouping, including China and Pakistan, in June last year.
4. Previously, India has been elected as a non-permanent member of the Council for the years 1950-1951, 1967-1968, 1972-1973, 1977-1978, 1984-1985, 1991-1992 and most recently in 2011-2012.
5. The UN General Assembly on 17 June 2020 conducted elections for President of the 75th session of the Assembly, five non-permanent members of the Security

Council and members of the Economic and Social Council under special voting arrangements put in place due to COVID-19 related restrictions.

6. Turkish diplomat and politician Volkan Bozkir was elected as President of the 75th session of the UN General Assembly. He was the endorsed candidate from among the Western European and other States.
7. In adherence to social distancing guidelines due to the coronavirus pandemic, the 193 UN Member States were allotted different time slots to cast their votes in the General Assembly Hall for the crucial elections.
8. Eight time slots were allocated to Member States to cast their ballots, in adherence to social distancing guidelines. The time slot for India to cast its ballot was 11:30 am-12noon.
9. President of the UN General Assembly Tijjani Muhammad-Bande oversaw the proceedings in the General Assembly Hall and the tellers also observed the whole process.
10. For the two vacant seats from among the African and Asia-Pacific States, Djibouti, India and Kenya were the three candidates.
11. For the one vacant seat from among the Latin American and Caribbean States, one endorsed candidate was Mexico. For the two vacant seats from among the Western European and other States, Canada, Ireland and Norway were the three candidates.

Flashback

1. The 15-member Security Council has five permanent members – the US, the UK, France, Russia and China – and 10 Non-permanent.
2. Each year the General Assembly elects five non-permanent members for a two-year term.
3. The 10 non-permanent seats are distributed on a regional basis as follows: five for African and Asian States; one for Eastern European States; two for the Latin American and Caribbean States; and two for Western European and other States.
4. To be elected to the Council, candidate countries need a two-thirds majority of ballots of Member States that are present and voting in the Assembly.

INDIA GETS EXTENSION AT THE WASHINGTON ACCORD

India has got an extension of the Permanent Signatory Status at the Washington Accord for six more years, Union Minister of Human Resources Development Ramesh Pokhriyal said. The minister further said that the membership of the Accord is recognition of the quality undergraduate engineering provided in the country and will open future avenues for engineering education in the country.

What

1. The membership is not only recognition of the engineering education in the country but also will help it come on the world class level.
2. Membership at the Washington Accord can also be leveraged when it comes to the mobility of the Indian professionals around the world.
3. The development will also encourage and facilitate the mobility of the Engineering professionals at the international level.

4. Indian Engineering professionals who are engaged with the Information Technology sector have made the mark in multinational companies around the world.
5. However, apart from the professional competence and skill set of the Indian professionals, increasing protectionism in countries like the United States and European region have raised concerns about the mobility of the Indian professionals.
6. With the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic and the slowdown in the economy, fears have arisen that the mobility of Indian professionals will take another hit.

Flashback

1. Earlier, In June 2015, India became a permanent member of the Accord which helps Indian engineering graduates get a level playing field in postgraduate studies and jobs in the United States, the UK and many other European and prominent countries.
2. The Washington Accord was signed in 1989, is a multi-lateral agreement between bodies responsible for accreditation or recognition of tertiary-level engineering qualifications within their jurisdictions who have chosen to work collectively to assist the mobility of professional engineers.
3. India had been a provisional signatory of the WA since 2007, which has the USA, UK, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Ireland, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, Turkey, Australia, Canada and Japan as signatories.

INDIA GETS ITS FIRST CCA REPORT

India will experience warmer days and nights along with frequent heavy rainfall spells causing floods till the end of 21st century, summarised a report titled 'Climate Change Assessment (CCA) report over Indian region'. **The** first-of-its-kind report for the Indian region, however, did not specify regions or states that would suffer due to these weather conditions in the future. Until now, climate assessment reports published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) were referred to in order to plan policies and mitigation measures.

What

1. The study, spearheaded by climate experts at India Meteorological Department (IMD) and Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), has considered atmospheric and ocean data for the period between 1951 and 2015. It has chapters on temperature, rainfall and climate modelling.
2. According to the report, **the country's annual all**-India rainfall during this period showcased a declining trend. Reduced rainfall activity was particularly observed along the Indo-Gangetic plains and Western ghats. Both these belts are known to house some of the wettest locations in the country.
3. In an agrarian country like India, cultivation along these belts could take a hit under reduced rainfall conditions, warned experts. An increase in anthropogenic activities over the northern hemisphere could have played some role for this declining rainfall.
4. Contrarily, the number of heavy rainfall days and events has gone up during the same period. This, in turn, was found to cause heavy flooding leading to loss of life,

- property and livelihoods. Being highly localised events, land use, along with concentration of aerosols, was attributed for this increased rainfall.
5. Heatwaves to severe heatwave conditions, over larger geographical areas than present day, could be a norm in the coming years, the report highlighted. Normally, heatwaves are reported between March and May, with a spell lasting for a week to 10 days.
 6. There are warming trends recorded between 1951 and 2015, with significant warming noticed between 1986 and 2015. The mean surface air temperature can rise anywhere between 1.39 and 2.70 degrees Celsius during two epochs — 2040 – 2069 and 2070 – 2099, stated the report.
 7. The annual mean and maximum temperatures were noted to have jumped by 0.15 degrees Celsius, whereas the minimum temperatures soared by 0.13 degrees Celsius, between 1951 and 2015.
 8. Among the seasons, pre-monsoon (March to May) is reported to have greater warming, followed by the post-monsoon (October to December) season. Warming remained the least from June to September, the monsoon season, over the country.
 9. Similar to spikes in heavy rainfall days, there will be more warmer days and warmer nights in the near future.

PM EXTENDS PMGKAY

In order to help the poor tide over the economic slump caused by Covid 19 lockdown, PM Narendra Modi on 30 June 2020 announced extension of the Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY) till November. The scheme, started to distribute ration among the poor after the Covid 19 lockdown was announced, was to end today (30 June 2020).

What

1. The government has decided to extend the Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Yojana till Diwali and Chhat Puja that is till November.
2. This means the scheme that gives free ration to 80 crore people will continue till November. Government will give every member of the family 5 kg wheat or 5 kg rice apart from one kg of grams.
3. The expansion of this scheme will cost Rs 90,000 crore (to the exchequer). If we add expenses incurred in the last three months, it is Rs 1.5 lakh crore.
4. **PMGKAY is one of the main components of the Centre's Rs 1.70 lakh crore relief package under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana for the poor to "help them fight the battle against coronavirus".**
5. It was announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on March 26. The scheme involves providing additional 5 kg foodgrain free to 80 crore National Food Security Act (NFSA) beneficiaries, over and above their monthly entitlement. Initially, it was for three months—April, May and June only.
6. Earlier, the government was giving one kg daal along with 5 kg wheat or rice. The milling of pulses, however, had ended up delaying delivery and distribution of daal. It is expected changing it to grams will speed up delivery.
7. The Government had made an additional allocation of 1.20 crore metric tons of

- foodgrains under PMGKAY for three months (April-June, 2020).
8. Out of about 40 lakh metric tonnes monthly allocation, States have distributed about 93 percent in April, 92 percent in May and 74 percent in June.
 9. West Bengal is the only State that has not distributed any foodgrains for the months of May and June. While some States, for instance Bihar and Delhi have distributed less foodgrains than the national average.
 10. The PMGKY had surprised the world as the food distribution under the scheme was two and half times the population of the US, 12 times the population of the UK and twice the population of the EU.

Elements of the PMGK package

1. Medical insurance cover of Rs 50 lakh for all health workers (doctors, paramedics, Asha workers etc.) treating patients.
2. Help for the poor and those engaged in the unorganised sector.
3. Help for the poor engaged in the organised sector.
4. Help for construction workers.
5. Use the money already available **in the “district (-level) mineral fund” to pay for medical testing and screening for the coronavirus.**

INDIA IN WORLD COMPETITIVENESS INDEX 2020

India continues to remain ranked 43rd on an annual World Competitiveness Index compiled by Institute for Management Development (IMD) with some traditional weaknesses like poor infrastructure and insufficient education investment keeping its ranking low, the international business school said on 16 June 2020. Singapore has retained its top position on the 63-nation list. Denmark has moved up to the second position (from 8th last year), Switzerland has gained one place to rank 3rd, the Netherlands has retained its 4th place and Hong Kong has slipped to the fifth place (from 2nd in 2019).

What

1. The US has moved down to 10th place (from 3rd last year), while China has also slipped from 14th to 20th place.
2. Among the BRICS nations, India is ranked second after China, followed by Russia (50th), Brazil (56th) and South Africa (59th).
3. India was ranked 41st on the IMD World Competitiveness Ranking, being produced by the business school based in Switzerland and Singapore every year since 1989, but had slipped to 45th in 2017 before improving to 44th in 2018 and then to 43rd in 2019.
4. India continues to struggle on the list and the recent country rating downgrade by Moody's reflects the uncertainties regarding the economy's future.
5. Moody's has threatened the country with a downgrade to junk and that would put India in a terrible position to attract foreign capital. So the urgency for the government should be to fix the short-term problems—and this requires improving the credibility of the government itself.
6. With the exception of Singapore, the Philippines, Taiwan and the Korean Republic, most Asian economies dropped in rankings this year, the IMD said.

7. The reason for the Asian economies' less stellar performance as a region, this year is partly the result of the trade frictions between China and the US, particularly because these economies are highly dependent on trade with China.
8. About Singapore, which moved to the top rank last year, the IMD said its position is largely driven by the relative ease of setting up business, availability of skilled labour and its cutting-edge technological infrastructure.
9. The IMD said the impact of COVID-19 on the competitiveness ranking has partially been captured by executives' opinions about the effectiveness of the different health systems.
10. In the ASEAN countries included in the survey, only Singapore and Thailand have a positive performance in the effectiveness of the health infrastructure.

ASIA'S FIRST-EVER CGR MANUFACTURING FACILITY

International Zinc Association (IZA), in collaboration with Madhav KRG Group launched **Asia's first**-ever Continuous Galvanized Rebar (CGR) manufacturing facility in Punjab on 29 June 2020. The project will be supported by Hindustan Zinc Limited.

What

1. The first-of-its-kind facility will produce a new product, Continuously Galvanized Rebar (CGR).
2. CGRs are value added rebars for higher life and low maintenance of infrastructure to provide significant cost savings compared to other corrosion resistant rebar systems.
3. With an annual capacity of over 30,000 tonne, the plant will manufacture ZnCoat TempCore TMT bars under the brand name, 'Jyoti'.
4. This will be the first brand in Asia to apply CGR technology that will increase life span of these rebars thereby reducing the overall maintenance cost.
5. In the last ten years, Indian zinc demand has grown at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4-5%. However, usage of galvanized rebars and especially CGRs has been limited despite the fact that it bonds in par with concrete than uncoated rebar, thereby doubling the life of big concrete structures.
6. Galvanized steel and rebars are environment friendly and cost effective and possess properties that enhances life of any structure with minimum maintenance.
7. The commissioning of the new CGR facility will further increase the usage of zinc in steel industry and will support the much awaited need of supplying galvanized rebar in the construction industry.
8. Galvanizing has been used for more than 100 years to protect structures exposed to different environmental conditions from corrosion.
9. Realizing the importance of this technique, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had outlined a plan to spend about USD 1.5 trillion earlier this year, to upgrade and build infrastructure over the next five years to shore up economic growth, boosting the outlook for zinc, use of galvanized steel to prevent corrosion.
10. Over 1,000 delegates (India and International) including ministry officials, opinion leaders, zinc producers, galvanizers, end users of galvanized products, Industry executives from Railways, highway authorities, NHRPL and design consultants attended the launch event.

NAGALAND DECLARED 'DISTURBED AREA'

The Centre on 30 June 2020 declared the entire Nagaland as "disturbed area" for a further period of six months till December-end. In a notification, the home ministry said the central government is of the opinion that the area comprising the whole Nagaland is in such a disturbed and dangerous condition that the use of armed forces in aid of the civil power is necessary.

What

- Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 the central government hereby declares that whole of the said State to be a 'disturbed area' for a period of six months with effect from 30th June, 2020 for the purpose of that Act, the home ministry said.
- Nagaland has been under the coverage of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) for almost six decades and it was not withdrawn even after a framework agreement was signed on August 3, 2015, by Naga insurgent group National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak Muivah) General Secretary Thuingaleng Muivah and government interlocutor R N Ravi in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- The decision to maintain the status quo in Nagaland regarding coverage of AFSPA, a law slammed by many civil society groups as "draconian", came amidst reports of deteriorating law and order situation there.
- The AFSPA gives the armed forces sweeping powers to search and arrest, and to open fire if they deem it necessary for "the maintenance of public order".

What's the origin of AFSPA?

- The Act came into force in the context of increasing violence in the Northeastern States decades ago, which the State governments found difficult to control.
- The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Bill was passed by both the Houses of Parliament and it was approved by the President on September 11, 1958. It became known as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958.
- AFSPA gives armed forces the power to **maintain public order in "disturbed areas"**.
- They have the authority to prohibit a gathering of five or more persons in an area, can use force or even open fire after giving due warning if they feel a person is in contravention of the law.

What is a "disturbed area"?

- A disturbed area is one which is declared by notification under Section 3 of the AFSPA.
- An area can be disturbed due to differences or disputes between members of different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities.
- The Central Government, or the Governor of the State or administrator of the Union Territory can declare the whole or part of the State or Union Territory as a disturbed area.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs would usually enforce this Act where necessary, but there have been exceptions where the Centre decided to forego its power and leave the decision to the State governments.

INTERNATIONAL

FIRST JOINT VENTURE HYDROPOWER PROJECT

India and Bhutan on 29 June 2020 signed a pact for the construction of the 600 MW Kholongchhu joint venture hydroelectric project in Bhutan that is to be completed in five years. The agreement for the project between the Bhutanese government and the Kholongchhu Hydro Energy Limited was signed in the presence of Indian foreign minister S Jaishankar and his Bhutanese counterpart Tandi Dorji. The two ministers joined the event via video link.

What

1. The Kholongchhu Hydro Energy Limited is a joint venture between **Bhutan's Druk Green Power Corporation (DGPC)** and **India's Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam Limited (SJVNL)**.
2. The signing of the concession agreement will lead to commencement of construction and other works of this first Joint Venture Hydroelectric Project between India and Bhutan. The project is expected to be completed in the second half of 2025.
3. The 600 MW run-of-the-river project is located on the lower course of the Kholongchhu River in Trashiyangtse district in eastern Bhutan.
4. The project includes an underground powerhouse of four 150 MW turbines with water impounded by a concrete gravity dam of 95 metres height.
5. Both Jaishankar and his Bhutanese counterpart talked of the importance of hydropower development within the India-Bhutan sphere of cooperation describing it as **"mutually beneficial."**
6. Last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during a visit to Bhutan, had inaugurated the 720 MW Mangdechhu hydroelectric project in the presence of his Bhutanese counterpart.
7. With this, four hydroelectric projects of bilateral cooperation (336 MW Chukha Hydro electric project, the 60 MW Kurichhu Hydro Electric project, the 1,020 MW Tala Hydro Electric Project and the 720 MW Mangdechhu Hydro Electric Project) totalling over 2,100 MW, are operational in Bhutan.

NATIONAL SECURITY LAW FOR HONG KONG PASSED

China's parliament passed national security legislation for Hong Kong on 30 June 2020, setting the stage for the most radical changes **to the former British colony's** way of life since it returned to Chinese rule 23 years ago. The law comes in response to **last year's often**-violent pro-democracy protests in the city and aims to tackle subversion, terrorism, separatism and collusion with foreign forces. Amid fears the legislation will crush the **global financial hub's rights and freedoms**, and reports that the heaviest penalty under it would be life imprisonment, prominent pro-democracy activist Joshua Wong said he would quit his Demosisto group.

What

1. It marks the end of Hong Kong that the world knew before. The legislation pushes Beijing further along a collision course with the United States, Britain and other Western governments, which have said it erodes the high degree of autonomy the city was granted at its July 1, 1997, handover.

2. **The United States began eliminating Hong Kong's special status under U.S. law on 29 June 2020, halting defence exports and **restricting the territory's access** to high-technology products.**
3. The legislation may get an early test with activists and pro-democracy politicians saying they would defy a police ban, amid coronavirus restrictions, on a rally on the anniversary of the July 1 handover.
4. **At last year's demonstration**, which came amid a series of pro-democracy protests, a crowd stormed and **vandalised the city's legislature.**
5. A majority in Hong Kong opposes the legislation, a poll conducted for Reuters this month showed, but support for the protest movement has slipped, now getting the backing of a slim majority.
6. Hong Kong is one of many developing conflicts between China and the United States, on top of trade, the South China Sea and the coronavirus pandemic.
7. The European Union has said it could take China to the International Court of Justice in The Hague over it. China has hit back at the outcry, denouncing **"interference" in its internal affairs.**

Flashback

1. Hong Kong was handed back to China from British control in 1997, but under a unique agreement - a mini-constitution called the Basic Law and a so-called "one country, two systems" principle.
2. Under the same agreement, Hong Kong had to enact its own national security law - this was set out in Article 23 of the Basic Law.
3. But its unpopularity means it has never been done - the government tried in 2003 but had to back down after protests.
4. The "one country, two systems" principle is enshrined in a document called the Basic Law - Hong Kong's mini constitution.
5. That came into effect on 1 July 1997, the day British rule ended and the territory was returned to China. That agreement is only valid for 50 years.

HYDEL POWER PROJECT UNDER CPEC

A tripartite agreement was signed between a Chinese company and the governments of Pakistan and China on 25 June 2020 for construction of a 1,124-megawatt hydropower project at Kohala on the Jhelum river at a cost of \$2.4 billion. Prime Minister Imran Khan, who witnessed the signing ceremony at his office, termed the agreement "the country's biggest-ever foreign investment". Pakistan-occupied Kashmir's prime minister was also present on the occasion.

What

1. The accord represents the largest power sector investment by an independent power producer (IPP) under Beijing's multi-billion dollars' worth China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), including the Gwadar Master Plan.
2. The prime minister said the government had resolved to focus on a "green and clean power generation" through hydroelectricity in order to reduce dependence on imported fuel.

3. The government welcomed the investment as it could set a precedent for the country to move towards sources of clean energy.
4. The project, a part of CPEC, has been awarded to Kohala Hydropower Company (KHCL), which is a subsidiary of China's Three Gorges Corporation (CTGC).
5. The country was making good progress when it was producing hydropower, but then it started banking on imported fuel. This made not only the local industry non-competitive, but also put an additional burden on foreign reserves.
6. Electricity generation through imported fuel, had adversely affected the environment as Pakistan was placed by experts on a list of nine states most likely to be badly affected by climate change.
7. The CPEC is a flagship infrastructure-related project conceived by Chinese President Xi Jinping as part of Beijing's expanded multi-billion dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that aims to create more efficient commercial links between the continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe. Bajwa is also the chairman of the CPEC authority.
8. Since last year, the work on the CPEC-funded Kohala Hydropower Project has been in jeopardy as the Chinese contractor was demobilised following a controversy over downstream environmental flows.
9. The 1,124MW (megawatt) Kohala Hydropower Project, is being built on the Jhelum River in PoK under CPEC. It has been awarded to the Kohala Hydropower Company Ltd (KHCL), a subsidiary of China Three Gorges Corporation (CTGC).
10. The signing of the Hydel project comes at a time when India and China have been involved in high-level military talks to disengage following the Galwan Valley incident in the Ladakh region, where 20 Indian soldiers were killed on June 15 in a violent clash with the Chinese Army.

CHINA LAUNCHES LAST SATELLITE FOR ITS BDS

China on 23 June 2020 successfully launched the last satellite of its BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS), touted to be a competitor to the Global Positioning System (GPS) of the US, taking another step to becoming a major space power. The satellite was launched on 23 June 2020 morning from the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre in southwest China's Sichuan Province. The satellite, the 55th in the family of BeiDou that means "Big Dipper" in Chinese, was successfully sent into space by a Long March-3B carrier rocket.

What

1. The launch will mark the completion of the country's domestically developed BeiDou network, one of the four global navigation networks alongside with the US' GPS, Russia's GLONASS and the European Union's Galileo.
2. India too is building its navigational system called the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS), with an operational name of NAVIC.
3. Some of the countries like Pakistan are using BDS. China is also promoting its use in the countries signed-up for its mega Belt and Road Initiative, (BRI).
4. Compared to previous generation series, the constellation of BDS-3 with an array of 30 satellites flying on three different orbit planes - three at the GEO, three at the inclined geosynchronous orbits, and 24 at the medium Earth orbit - have higher

bandwidth.

5. They enable enhanced communication capability and carrying more accurate and stable domestically developed atomic clocks to improve the precision of timing and navigation services.

Flashback

1. The first BeiDou satellite entered orbit in 2000, and started providing positioning, navigation, timing and messaging services to domestic users in China and users in the Asia-Pacific region in December 2012.
2. The BDS system started providing global services at the end of 2018, when construction of the BDS-3 primary system had been completed.
3. This mission will complete the BDS-3 system, which, according to Wu Di, a scholar with the satellite positioning technology centre of Wuhan University, will further enhance the quality of services of the system for global users providing stronger signals.

FRANCE WITH INDIA'S COVID RESPONSE

France and India on 18 June 2020 signed an agreement with Paris committing 200 million euros to support Delhi's Covid response. The credit financing agreement was signed by Dr C.S. Mohapatra, Additional Secretary - DEA, and Bruno Bosle, Director - AFD (French Development Agency) in India in the virtual presence of Emmanuel Lenain, Ambassador of France to India. Through this loan, France will work **with India to increase the state and central governments' capacities** to support the **country's most vulnerable** people in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

What

1. The programme design, developed by the World Bank in collaboration with the **Indian authorities, seeks to optimize and scale up the Indian Government's existing** social protection measures.
2. Focusing on boosting the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojna, the programme will provide further benefits to low-income families to ensure that the health, social and economic shocks arising from Covid-19 do not endanger people's well-being or their contribution to the **country's economic growth in the long run.**
3. The programme also seeks to protect essential frontline workers of the pandemic, including those in healthcare, sanitation, and security, by providing them with health insurance.
4. Social assistance programmes will also be put in place for migrant workers and low-income urban households that may be unable to seek compensation under PMGKY.
5. **Indian Government's rollout of the PMGKY is a testament to its commitment** to ensuring that the most vulnerable sections of society are protected, and it is this commitment that France, through the French Development Agency and its partners, is determined to support.
6. The World Bank is the lead funder of this programme, which is supported by AFD and other multilateral and bilateral development banks.
7. Agence Française de Développement (AFD – French Development Agency) Group is a public financial institution that finances, supports and accelerates transitions towards a more just and sustainable world.

ECONOMY

BANKING REGULATION ORDINANCE 2020 PROMULGATED

President Ram Nath Kovind has promulgated the Banking Regulation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020 to bring all urban cooperative banks and multi-state cooperative banks under the supervision of the RBI in order to protect the interest of depositors. The Ordinance amends the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 as applicable to cooperative banks, an official statement said on 27 June 2020.

What

1. The Ordinance seeks to protect the interests of depositors and strengthen cooperative banks by improving governance and oversight by extending powers already available with RBI in respect of other banks to Co-operative Banks as well for sound banking regulation, and by ensuring professionalism and enabling their access to capital.
2. The amendments do not affect existing powers of the State Registrars of Co-operative Societies under state co-operative laws.
3. The amendments also do not apply to Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) or co-operative societies whose primary object and principal business is long-term **finance for agricultural development, and which do not use the words “bank”, “banker” or “banking” and do not act as drawees of cheques.**
4. The Ordinance also amends Section 45 of the Banking Regulation Act, to enable making of a scheme of reconstruction or amalgamation of a banking company for protecting the interest of the public, depositors and the banking system and for securing its proper management, even without making an order of moratorium, so as to avoid disruption of the financial system.
5. There are 1,482 urban cooperative banks and 58 multi-state cooperative banks having about 8.6 crore depositors with a total savings deposit of about Rs 4.85 lakh crore.
6. The decision assumes significance in the wake of scams in cooperative banks, including the Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank, affecting lakhs of customers who are facing difficulty in withdrawing their money due to restrictions imposed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
7. The RBI had placed regulatory curbs on PMC Bank on September 23, 2019, after finding out certain financial irregularities and misreporting of loans given to real estate developer HDIL.
8. Earlier this month, the RBI had put restrictions on withdrawals from **People’s Co-operative Bank, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh.**
9. Finance Minister **Nirmala Sitharaman had introduced ‘The Banking Regulation (Amendment) Bill, 2020’ in the Lok Sabha on March 3, 2020, which is pending approval.**
10. The proposed law sought to enforce banking regulation guidelines of the RBI on cooperative banks.
11. In her February 1 Budget speech, Sitharaman had proposed amendments to the Banking Regulation Act with an aim to increasing professionalism and improving governance among the cooperative banks.
12. Co-operative banks are financial entities established on a co-operative basis and

belonging to their members.

13. This means that the customers of a co-operative bank are also its owners. These banks provide a wide range of regular banking and financial services. However, there are some points where they differ from other banks.

14. Broadly, co-operative banks in India are divided into two categories - urban and rural. Rural cooperative credit institutions could either be short-term or long-term in nature.

15. Further, short-term cooperative credit institutions are further sub-divided into State Co-operative Banks, District Central Co-operative Banks, Primary Agricultural Credit Societies.

16. Meanwhile, the long-term institutions are either State Cooperative Agriculture or Rural Development Banks (SCARDBs) or Primary Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (PCARDBs).

17. On the other hand, Urban Co-operative Banks (UBBs) are either scheduled or non-scheduled. Scheduled and non-scheduled UCBs are again of two kinds- multi-state and those operating in a single state.

Flashback

1. In India, co-operative banks are registered under the States Cooperative Societies Act.
2. They also come under the regulatory ambit of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) under two laws, namely, the Banking Regulations Act, 1949, and the Banking Laws (Co-operative Societies) Act, 1955.
3. They were brought under the RBI's watch in 1966, a move which brought the problem of dual regulation along with it.
4. The problem of rural credit was the key reason behind the advent of the co-operative movement in India, which began with the passage of the Co-operative Societies Act in 1904.
5. The next addition was the Co-operative Societies Act, 1912, which focussed on the need for regulation of such societies and hence the establishment of appropriate bodies to oversee their functioning.

INDIA RETAINS ITS POSITION ON PPP BASIS

India has retained and consolidated its position as the third-largest economy after China and the US in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP) for 2017, said the government on 23 June 2020 quoting the World Bank data. PPP of the rupee per dollar at the gross domestic product (GDP) level rose to 20.65 in 2017 from 15.55 in 2011, while the exchange rate of a dollar to a rupee rose to 65.12 from 46.67 during the period.

What

1. The Price Level Index (PLI), the ratio of a PPP to its corresponding market exchange rate, which is used to compare the price levels of economies, improved to 47.55 in 2017 from 42.99 in 2011.
2. In 2017, India retained and consolidated its global position, as the third-largest economy, accounted for 6.7 per cent (USD 8,051 billion out of world total of USD 119,547 billion) of global GDP in terms of PPPs as against China (16.4 per cent) and

- the US (16.3 per cent), respectively.
3. India is also the third-largest economy in terms of its PPP-based share in global actual individual consumption and global gross capital formation, said the release of the National Statistical Office (NSO).
 4. The World Bank has released new PPPs for the reference year 2017, under the International Comparison Program (ICP), that adjust for differences in the cost of living across economies of the world. Globally, 176 economies participated in the 2017 cycle of ICP.
 5. The ICP is the largest worldwide data collection initiative, under the guidance of UN Statistical Commission (UNSC), with the goal of producing PPPs, which are vital for converting measures of economic activities to be comparable across economies.
 6. Along with the PPPs, the ICP also produces PLI and other regionally comparable aggregates of GDP expenditure.

Flashback

1. India has participated in almost all ICP rounds since its inception in 1970.
2. As per the release, in 2017, India retained its regional position, as the second-largest economy, accounted for 20.83 per cent of the regional gross domestic product (GDP) in terms of PPPs where China was at 50.76 per cent (first) and Indonesia at 7.49 per cent (third).
3. India is also the second-largest economy in terms of its PPP-based share in regional actual individual consumption and regional gross capital formation.
4. The next ICP comparison will be conducted for the reference year 2021.

BORROWING LIMIT UNDER MSF ENHANCED

Amid the ongoing economic woes created by the coronavirus pandemic, the Reserve Bank has decided to extend the enhanced borrowing facility provided to the banks to meet their liquidity shortages till September 30. The RBI, as a temporary measure, had increased the borrowing limit of scheduled banks under the marginal standing facility (MSF) scheme from 2 per cent to 3 percent of their Net Demand and Time Liabilities (NDTL) with effect from March 27, 2020.

What

1. Under the MSF, banks can borrow overnight funds at their discretion by dipping into the Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR). This relaxation, which was granted till June 30, 2020, has now been extended till September 30.
2. On a review, it has now been decided to extend this enhanced limit till September 30, 2020, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said in a circular.
3. Banks may continue to access overnight funds under the MSF against their excess SLR holding. The marginal standing facility rate currently stands at 4.25 per cent.
4. The RBI has also extended the relaxation on the minimum daily maintenance of the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) at 80 per cent for a further period of three months till

September 25, 2020.

5. On March 27, the minimum daily maintenance of the CRR was reduced from 90 per cent of the prescribed CRR to 80 per cent till June 26, 2020.

6. This was done in view of the continuing of hardships faced by banks in terms of social distancing of staff and consequent strains on reporting requirements.

Flashback

1. Marginal standing facility (MSF) is a window for banks to borrow from the Reserve Bank of India in an emergency situation when inter-bank liquidity dries up completely.
2. Banks borrow from the central bank by pledging government securities at a rate higher than the repo rate under liquidity adjustment facility or LAF in short.
3. The MSF rate is pegged 100 basis points or a percentage point above the repo rate.
4. Under MSF, banks can borrow funds up to one percent of their net demand and time liabilities (NDTL).

AHIDF APPROVED

The government on 24 June 2020 announced a Rs 15,000 crore infrastructure development fund with an interest subsidy scheme to promote investment by private players and MSMEs in dairy, meat processing and animal feed plants, a move which is expected to create 35 lakh jobs. The fund is part of the Rs 20 lakh crore stimulus package announced in May to help people affected by the lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19. An interest subvention of 3-4 per cent will be provided to farmer producer organisations, MSMEs and private players for setting up of dairy, meat processing and animal feed plants, an official release said.

What

1. The Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) was approved in the Cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
2. Animal Husbandry Minister Giriraj Singh said the government had earlier approved the Dairy Infrastructure Development Fund (DIDF) worth Rs 10,000 crore for incentivizing investment by the cooperative sector for development of dairy infrastructure.
3. The MSMEs and private companies also need to be promoted and incentivized for their participation in processing and value addition infrastructure in the animal husbandry sector.
4. The AHIDF would promote infrastructure investments in dairy, meat processing and animal feed plants. Farmer producer organizations (FPOs), MSMEs, Section 8 companies, private companies and individual entrepreneurs would be eligible to benefit from the fund.
5. The minister said the beneficiaries will have to contribute 10 per cent margin towards the proposed infra project and the rest 90 per cent would be a loan component to be made available to them by scheduled banks.
6. For the first time, we will give interest subvention up to 3 per cent to private players for setting up processing infrastructure for dairy, poultry and meat.
7. In an official statement, the government said that 3 per cent interest subvention

- will be given to eligible beneficiaries from non-aspirational districts. About 4 per cent interest subvention would be given to beneficiaries from aspirational districts.
8. Aspirational districts are those that are affected by poor socio-economic indicators. There are about 115 such districts in the country.
 9. The government said that there will be a two-year moratorium period for repayment of loans with six years repayment period thereafter.
 10. Besides, the Centre would also set up a Credit Guarantee Fund of Rs 750 crore to be managed by National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) which would provide credit guarantee to the projects which are covered under the MSME defined ceilings.
 11. The guarantee coverage would be upto 25 percent of the credit facility of the borrower.
 12. The AHIDF with the interest subvention scheme for private investors will ensure availability of capital to meet upfront investment required for these projects and also help enhance overall returns/ pay back for investors.
 13. Such investments in processing and value addition infrastructure by eligible beneficiaries would also promote exports. Since almost 50-60 per cent of the final value of dairy output in India flows back to farmers, the growth in this sector can have a significant direct impact on farmer's income.
 14. Size of the dairy market and farmers' realization from milk sales is closely linked with development of organized off-take by cooperative and private dairies.
 15. Thus, investment of Rs 15,000 crore through AHIDF would not only leverage several times more private investment but would also motivate farmers to invest more on inputs thereby driving higher productivity leading to increase in farmers income.

INDIA'S POSITION IN SWISS MONEY

India has moved down three places to 77th rank in terms of money parked by its citizens and enterprises with Swiss banks at the end of 2019, while the UK has retained its top position, as per the latest data from **Switzerland's central bank**. India was ranked 74th in the previous year. An analysis of the latest annual banking statistics released by the Swiss National Bank (SNB) showed that India remains ranked very low when it comes to money parked by Indian individuals and enterprises in Swiss banks, including through their India-based branches, accounting for just about 0.06 per cent of the aggregate funds parked by all foreign clients of Switzerland-based banks.

What

1. In comparison, the top-ranked UK accounted for close to 27 per cent of the total foreign funds parked with Swiss banks at the end of 2019.
2. According to the latest SNB data, funds parked by Indian individuals and enterprises in Swiss banks, including through India-based branches, fell by 5.8 per cent in 2019 to 899 million Swiss francs (Rs 6,625 crore).
3. **The data is for 'total liabilities' of Swiss banks towards Indian clients taking into account all types of funds of Indian customers at Swiss banks, including deposits from individuals, banks and enterprises. This also includes data for branches of Swiss banks in India, as well as non-deposit liabilities.**
4. These are official figures reported by banks to the SNB and do not indicate the

- quantum of the much-debated alleged black money held by Indians in Switzerland.
5. These figures also do not include the money that Indians, NRIs or others might have in Swiss banks in names of third-country entities.
 6. Among the top-ranked jurisdictions, the UK is followed by the US, West Indies, France and Hong Kong in the top five.
 7. A number of countries have seen their funds falling in Swiss banks in recent years amid a global clampdown against the erstwhile banking secrecy walls in the Alpine nation.
 8. In terms of percentage change in the aggregate amount during 2019, Central African Republic saw the biggest increase of over 3,600 per cent, while Iraq and North Korea also figured among the top-ten countries in terms of rise in their figures of nearly 500 per cent and 110 per cent, respectively.
 9. The decline was highest for Maldives at over 97 per cent. It has been often alleged that Indians and other nationals seeking to stash their illicit wealth abroad use multiple layers of various jurisdictions, including tax havens, to shift the money to Swiss banks.
 10. Also, with Switzerland putting in place an automatic information exchange framework with India and various other countries, the famed secrecy walls of Swiss banks are said to have crumbled.

India among top 3 nations getting Swiss info

1. India figures among the top-three countries getting detailed information from Switzerland about bank accounts and beneficiary ownership of entities established by their residents in the Alpine nation, according to the latest study by OECD's Global Forum on transparency and exchange of information for tax purposes.
2. India is also rated as 'largely compliant' by this OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) body.
3. The Global Forum review said Switzerland has made "significant improvements in the areas of availability of legal ownership information, exchange of information on deceased persons and requests based on stolen data".
4. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an intergovernmental economic organisation with 37 member countries founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade.

Top Countries

1. The top-five countries alone account for more than 50 per cent of the aggregate foreign funds parked with the Swiss banks, while the top-10 account for nearly two-thirds.
2. The top-15 countries account for nearly 75 per cent of all foreign money in Swiss banks, while the contribution of the top-30 is almost 90 per cent. The top-10 countries also include Germany, Luxembourg, Bahamas, Singapore and Cayman Islands.
3. Only 22 jurisdictions have 1 per cent of more of the total foreign funds

- parked with Swiss banks and these include China, Jersey, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Panama, Italy, Cyprus, UAE, Netherlands, Japan and Guernse
- The countries ranked higher than India also include Kenya (74th), Mauritius (68th), New Zealand (67th), Venezuela (61st), Ukraine (58th), Philippines (51st), Malaysia (49th), Seychelles (45th), Indonesia (44th), South Korea (41st), Thailand (37th), Canada (36th), Israel (28th), Turkey (26th), Mexico (26th), Taiwan (24th), Saudi Arabia (19th), Australia (18th), Italy (16th), UAE (14th), Netherlands (13th), Japan (12th) and Guernsey (11th).

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

FORMATION OF IN-SPACE ANNOUNCED

The Union Cabinet 24 June 2020 announced the formation of the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACE) to promote the participation of private industries in space activities, including planetary exploration missions. The Cabinet decision comes weeks after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the opening up of the space sector for private entities.

What

- IN-SPACE will provide a level playing field for private companies to use Indian **space infrastructure and will guide them** “through encouraging policies and a friendly regulatory environment”.
- However, IN-SPACE will not be a separate institution but work as an extension into ISRO, said Minister of State for Atomic Energy and Space, Jitendra Singh. The Department of Space comes under the PMO.
- The Cabinet also said that the **public sector enterprise** ‘New Space India Limited **(NSIL)**’ would endeavour to re-orient space activities from a ‘supply driven’ model to a **‘demand driven’ model**, thereby ensuring optimum utilisation of ISRO’s space assets.
- The reforms, will allow ISRO to focus more on research and development activities, new technologies, exploration missions and human spaceflight programme.
- It also hinted at the participation of private entities in some of the planetary exploration missions through an ‘announcement of opportunity’ **mechanism**.
- The latest announcement comes as ISRO prepares for its third planned lunar exploration mission Chandrayaan-3 and its first manned mission to space, Gaganyaan.

Key benefits of the reforms

- The space sector can play a major catalytic role in the technological advancement and expansion of our industrial base.
- The proposed reforms will enhance the socio-economic use of space assets and activities, including through improved access to space assets, data and facilities.
- The newly created Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACE) will provide a level playing field for private companies to use Indian space infrastructure.

4. It will also hand-hold, promote and guide the private industries in space activities through encouraging policies and a friendly regulatory environment.
5. The Public Sector **Enterprise** **New** Space India Limited **(NSIL)** will endeavour to re-orient space activities from a **'supply driven' model to a 'demand driven' model**, thereby ensuring optimum utilization of our space assets.
6. These reforms will allow Isro to focus more on research and development activities, new technologies, exploration missions and human spaceflight programme.
7. Some of the planetary exploration missions will also be opened up to the private **sector through an 'announcement of opportunity' mechanism.**
8. As India is among a handful of countries with advanced capabilities in the space sector, these reforms the sector will receive new energy and dynamism, to help the country leapfrog to the next stages of space activities.
9. This will not only result in an accelerated growth of this sector but will enable Indian Industry to be an important player in the global space economy.
10. With this, there is an opportunity for large-scale employment in the technology sector and India becoming a global technology powerhouse.

Flashback

1. NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), incorporated on 6 March 2019 (under the Companies Act, 2013) is a wholly owned Government of India company, under the administrative control of Department of Space (DOS).
2. NSIL is the commercial arm of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) with the primary responsibility of enabling Indian industries to take up high technology space related activities and is also responsible for promotion and commercial exploitation of the products and services emanating from the Indian space programme.
3. To satisfy the needs of its customers, NSIL draws upon the proven heritage of the Indian Space **Program and ISRO's vast experience in diverse** branches of Space Technology.

FIRST COVID 19 LIFE SAVING DRUG

Researchers in England say they have the first evidence that a drug can improve COVID-19 survival: A cheap, widely available Steroid called dexamethasone reduced deaths by up to one third in severely ill hospitalised patients. Results were announced on 16 June 2020 and researchers said they would publish them soon. The study is a large, strict test that randomly assigned 2,104 patients to get the drug and compared them with 4,321 patients getting only usual care.

What

1. The observation was based on a clinical trial called RECOVERY (Randomised Evaluation of COVid-19 therapy) to test potential treatments for Covid 19, including a steroid treatment with low-dose dexamethasone.
2. The drug was given either orally or through an IV. After 28 days, it had reduced deaths by 35% in patients who needed treatment with breathing machines and by

- 20% in those only needing supplemental oxygen. It did not appear to help less ill patients.
3. Steroid drugs reduce inflammation, which sometimes develops in COVID-19 patients as the immune system overreacts to fight the infection.
 4. This overreaction can prove fatal, so doctors have been testing steroids and other anti-inflammatory drugs in such patients.
 5. The World Health Organization advises against using steroids earlier in the course of illness because they can slow the time until patients clear the virus.
 6. Researchers estimated that the drug would prevent one death for every eight patients treated while on breathing machines and one for every 25 patients on extra oxygen alone.
 7. This is the same study that earlier this month showed the malaria drug hydroxychloroquine was not working against the coronavirus.
 8. Other methods of treatment in the ongoing trial include the HIV drug Lopinavir-Ritonavir, antibiotic Azithromycin, anti-inflammatory treatment Tocilizumab, and Convalescent plasma.
 9. Hydroxychloroquine, the malaria drug promoted by US President Donald Trump, has been stopped due to lack of efficacy.

Flasback

1. Dexamethasone is listed as the performance-enhancing steroid in the World Anti-Doping Agency's (Wada) 2019 list of prohibited drugs and has been described as a "specified substance" attracting punishment if found in a sportsperson's body system.
2. On the Wada's website under the 'prohibited in-competition substances' category, Dexamethasone is listed as a 'glucocorticoids' which are prohibited when administered by oral, intravenous, intramuscular or rectal routes.
3. Apart from Dexamethasone, the other glucocorticoids include Betamethasone, Budesonide, Cortisone, Deflazacort, Fluticasone, Hydrocortisone, Methylprednisolone, Prednisolone, Prednisone and Triamcinolone.

INDIA'S FIRST MOBILE LABORATORY FOR COVID-19

Union minister Harsh Vardhan on 18 June 2020 launched a mobile laboratory for coronavirus testing which can be deployed in rural areas and help in promoting last-mile testing. The mobile lab, also called I-Lab or Infectious Diseases Diagnostics Lab, can run 50 RT-PCR and about 200 ELISA tests in a day. A double set of machines can help increase the capacity to about 500 tests per day in 8 hours shift.

What

1. The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) under the Ministry of Science and Technology along with the Andhra Pradesh Med-tech Zone (AMTZ) has initiated DBT-AMTZ COMManD (COVID-19 Medtech Manufacturing Development) consortia to address the shortage of critical healthcare technologies in India and move progressively towards a stage of self-sufficiency.
2. AMTZ is Asia's first medical equipment manufacturing ecosystem, uniquely

- dedicated for medical technology and supported by various ministries. The mobile testing lab is an outcome of this initiative.
3. This mobile testing facility will be deployed through the DBT testing hubs to remote regions of the country for coronavirus testing.
 4. There are now over 20 hubs in the country with 100 testing laboratories and these have tested more than 2,60,000 samples.
 5. In the near future with all these collective and cooperative efforts, India will achieve self-sufficiency in healthcare technologies leading **towards** 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat'.
 6. DBT Secretary Renu Swarup said through the concerted efforts of Indian scientists, the country has achieved a capacity of producing over 5 lakh testing kits per day, exceeding the target of having one lakh test kits by May 31.
 7. She also noted that I-Lab has been created in a record eight days by the Andhra Pradesh Med-tech Zone team with the support of DBT.

INDIAN FIND COVID-19 GENE IN WASTEWATER

Scientists in India have for the first time detected genetic material of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in wastewater, a breakthrough that paves the way for using wastewater-based epidemiology (WBE) for real-time surveillance of COVID-19 in the country. The study, led by scientists in IIT-Gandhinagar, found that increased gene copies of the virus **in Ahmedabad's wastewater matched the incidence of the disease in the city.** With this, India joins the ranks of a handful of countries doing WBE on COVID-19, Andrew Singer, an environmental microbiologist at the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology said.

What

1. WBE is a promising approach to understand the status of disease outbreak in a certain catchment by monitoring viral load in wastewater.
2. Recent studies had reported that the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) is present in the faeces of infected individuals. Genetic material (RNA) from the virus has been found in sewage entering treatment plants.
3. Because treatment plants collect wastewater across large regions, measuring the level of RNA in untreated wastewater may provide a valuable insight into the percentage of people infected within a region.
4. In the latest study released on June 18, scientists from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Gandhinagar collaborated with the Gujarat Biotechnology Research Centre (GBRC) and the Gujarat Pollution Control Board (GPCB).
5. They studied samples of wastewater collected on May 8 and May 27 from the Old Pirana Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP) in Ahmedabad.
6. All the three SARS-CoV-2 genes — ORF1ab, N and S — were found in the wastewater coming into the treatment plant, said the researchers, who have submitted their **study for publication in the international journal Science of the Total Environment**. They noted that no gene was spotted in the effluent leaving the plant after treatment.
7. The gene copy loading – the quantity of the genetic material of the virus – detected on May 27 was almost 10 times more than that detected on May 8.
8. According to the scientists, WBE was an effective tool during outbreaks of other viruses such as poliovirus and hepatitis A.

9. The Ahmedabad study aims at assisting concerned authorities and policymakers to formulate or upgrade COVID-19 surveillance to have an explicit picture of the phase of the pandemic.

IIT-BOMBAY DEVELOPS DHRUVA

IIT-Bombay has developed a homegrown receiver chip - Dhruva – that can be used in smartphones and navigation devices to find locations and routes within the country. Dhruva will receive signals **from India’s NAVIC group of navigation** satellites as well as the US Global Positioning System-based satellites to determine these accurately under all weather conditions. The radio frequency receiver chip was designed in 18 months by students and researchers at IIT Bombay. It can receive in multiple frequency bands and handle weak signals.

What

1. It can be converted into digital bits and processed by any standard digital signal processor (DSP) **to determine one’s location precisely.**
2. There were many design challenges to make the receiver work under all environmental conditions. We came up with patentable innovations, set up our internal review structure so that no bug passes through.
3. India has had a fleet of navigational satellites for a few years, but there have been no commercial receivers so far that could receive its signals in multiple frequencies.
4. The nine satellites under NAVIC were built as an alternative to the GPS, as part of **India’s space agency’s efforts to make the navigation system accessible for commercial** applications.
5. The Dhruva project was funded by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), with SAMEER (Society for Applied Microwave Electronics Engineering and Research) as the nodal agency.
6. The research team also interfaced with the Space Applications Centre of the Indian Space Research Organisation.
7. Getting a production-worthy RF chip designed in 18 months is an outstanding achievement for the students. Typically, in the industry setting, it takes about nine months to take a chip from conception to tape-out.

OZONE LEVELS HAVE INCREASED IN INDIAN CITIES

A new analysis of summer air quality trends during the national lockdown that started on March 25, 2020, reveals a mixed trend. While the PM2.5 and NO2 curves fell and flattened dramatically in cities – a phenomenon that hogged the national attention -- tropospheric ozone pollution increased and even breached standards in several cities, according to a study conducted by Centre for Science and Environment (CSE). The study has emerged from a new analysis of 22 mega and metropolitan cities in India.

What

1. CSE researchers point out that ozone is primarily a sunny weather problem in India that otherwise remains highly variable during the year.

2. It is a highly reactive gas; even short-term exposure (one hour) is dangerous for those with respiratory conditions and asthma. That is why ozone has a short-term standard – one hour and eight hours, as opposed to 24 hours for other pollutants.
3. Ozone is not directly emitted by any source but is formed by photochemical reactions between oxides of nitrogen (NOx) and other volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and gases in the air under the influence of sunlight and heat. Ozone can be controlled only if gases from all sources are controlled.
4. This pandemic-led change in air quality has helped us understand summer pollution. Normally, every year, winter pollution is what draws our attention.
5. The characteristics of summer pollution are different: there are high winds, intermittent rains and thunderstorms, and high temperature and heat waves.
6. This is in contrast to winter -- with its inversion, lower mixing height of air, and cold and calm conditions that trap the air and the pollutants in it, said Anumita Roychowdhury, executive director-research and advocacy, CSE.
7. Studies from the Indian Institute of Technology- Kanpur in 2015 and a joint study by The Energy Research Institute (TERI) and the Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI) in Delhi in 2018 have shown that during summer, Delhi experiences relatively higher contribution of dust compared to winter; also, the share of secondary particles that form from the gases in the atmosphere, is comparatively lower.
8. This pandemic has shown that big reduction is possible only if all regions clean up together and at a scale and with speed across all critical sectors including vehicles, industry, power plants, waste, construction, use of solid fuels for cooking and episodic burning.
9. **There is a need for an agenda for a ‘blue sky and clear lungs’ for the post-pandemic period to sustain the gains. This action must also ensure the co-benefit of reducing both particulate and gaseous emissions, including ozone.**

How CSE analysed

1. CSE has analysed trends in PM2.5, PM10, NO2, and ozone in 22 cities across 15 states and the National Capital Territory of Delhi for the period January 1, 2019 to May 31, 2020. This also includes spatial trend analysis of ozone in selected cities.
2. The most granular data (15-minute averages) has been sourced from the Central Pollution **Control Board’s (CPCB)** official online portal, the Central Control Room for Air Quality Management - All India.
3. This has analysed over 23 million data points recorded by 116 air quality monitoring stations or about 50 per cent of the existing network under the Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring System (CAAQMS) of the CPCB.
4. All cities with three or more CAAQMS stations are included in this analysis; more have been chosen to ensure geographical and demographical representation. However, this study does not include modelling to isolate the impacts of lockdown or any other impacts.

PLASMA BANK

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on 29 June 2020 stated that a 'plasma bank' will be established in the national capital to help treat COVID-19 patients. The 'plasma bank' will be set-up at the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences in Delhi. Anyone who needs plasma will need a recommendation from a doctor. People can take plasma from relatives and known people.

What is Plasma therapy?

1. Plasma (the yellowish liquid component of blood) from a recovered Covid-19 patient contains antibodies that may help fight the disease when infused into the bodies of another person suffering from Covid-19. These antibodies are capable of fighting the virus that causes the illness and also helps in faster recovery.
2. Because it takes a few weeks for antibodies to form, the hope is that transfusing **someone else's antibodies could help patients fight the virus before their immune system kicks in.**

Platina

1. Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray on 29 June 2020 launched convalescent plasma therapy-cum- trial project for treatment of critical Covid-19 patients with a state medical education department official calling it the largest initiative of its kind in the world.
2. Convalescent plasma therapy, also called passive antibody therapy, seeks to obtain plasma from the blood of people who have recovered from the infection to inject into patients undergoing treatment.
3. The project, titled 'Platina', is the largest convalescent plasma therapy-cum-trial project in the world.
4. The trial will be held in 17 medical colleges under the department of medical education and drugs, and four BMC- run colleges in Mumbai.
5. All critical patients will receive two doses of 200 ml convalescent plasma free of cost.

MISCELLANEOUS

US SUSPEND H1B, OTHER VISAS

US President Donald Trump has suspended the entry of certain foreign workers in the United States until the end of 2020. The visa suspension could open up 525,000 jobs for US workers. The presidential proclamation that temporarily blocks foreign workers entering on H-1B visas, are for skilled employees, and L visas, for managers and specialised workers being transferred within a company. Trump also blocked those entering on H-2B seasonal worker visas, which are used by landscapers and other industries. The suspension also applies to J-1 holders "participating in an intern, trainee, teacher, camp counselor or summer work travel program."

What

1. The proclamation exempts those already in the United States, as well as valid visa holders overseas, but they must have an official travel document that permits entry into the United States.
2. The measure also exempts food supply chain workers and people whose entry is deemed in the national interest.

3. The suspension will include work-authorized J visas for cultural exchange opportunities, including camp counselors as well as visas for the spouses of H-1B workers.
4. The effects of the proclamation may not be immediately felt as the issuance of work visas had already dramatically declined due to the coronavirus pandemic.
5. However, visa categories including H-1B, H-2B, H-4, J-1, J-2, L-1, and L-2 will be the most affected.
6. Businesses including major tech companies and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce said the visa suspension would stifle the economic recovery after the damage done by the pandemic.

The following visa categories are affected:

H-1B

1. The United States grants 85,000 H-1B visas every year to 'high-skilled' workers, often in the technology industry.
2. They are generally valid for up to six years.

H-2B

1. H-2B visas are for seasonal non-agricultural labor. The United States issues 66,000 per year, although it sometimes grants additional visas based on demand.
2. They are generally valid for up to three years and are popular in industries like food processing, hotel work, and landscaping.

H-4

1. H-4 visas are for the spouses and children of H-1B and H-2B holders. The proclamation does not explicitly address them, but does restrict entry for "any alien accompanying or following to join" restricted categories.
2. They are valid for the duration of the H-1B visa.

J-1

1. J-1 visas are for cultural and educational exchange. The order applies to J-1 holders "participating in an intern, trainee, teacher, camp counselor, au pair, or summer work travel program."
2. They are valid for up to seven years, depending on program type, and there is no annual cap.

J-2

1. J-2 visas are for the spouses and dependents of J-1 holders.
2. It is valid for the duration of the J-1 visa.

L-1

1. L-1 visas are for high-level and specialized company employees.
2. They are generally valid for up to seven years and there is no annual cap.

L-2

1. L-2 visas are for the dependents of L-1 holders.
2. They are valid for the duration of the associated L-1 visa.

THE MOUNTAIN STRIKE CORPS

As tensions between India and China remain high on the disputed border following the death of at least 20 Indian soldiers, a search for military options is leading to questions about the current status of the mountain strike corps, sanctioned seven years ago but stalled two years ago for lack of funds. With only one of its two divisions raised, it now exists in a truncated shape while being tested for **Army's new integrated battle group (IBG)** concept.

What

1. Preliminary role for the truncated mountain strike corps is for an offensive – not limited to the east, but in Ladakh as well – in that sense, it is a dual role.
2. It will definitely come into play if a war breaks out, a military official said. But others contend that had the full raising gone as per schedule, the mountain strike corps could have been an effective deterrent, raising costs for trans-LAC incursions by China.
3. Used as a testbed for the IBG model devised under the previous Army chief General Bipin Rawat, the Panagarh-headquartered 17 Corps now exists in a different form than was sanctioned in 2013.
4. The new IBG model was tested in a major exercise, Him Vijay, in the eastern theatre last October, to validate the concept of a swift offensive in the high mountains along the China border.
5. The first division of the mountain strike corps was raised in the eastern sector but the raising of the second division at Pathankot in 2017-18 was never completed.
6. The raising was stopped due to a paucity of funds with the government, along with a rethink within the Army over the limitations in launching a full-fledged strike corps at the current levels of border infrastructure.
7. Funds had always been a major issue for the raising of the strike corps, even when the initial raising expenditure of about Rs 65,000 crore was not additionally allocated but considered to be a part of the normal budget.
8. This led to the Army dipping into its resources for equipping the newly raised units, which caused an alarming fall in its War Wastage Reserves (WWR).
9. WWR are collections of military material and ammunition with the Army that can sustain a 40-day intense war.
10. As the then defence minister, the late Manohar Parrikar, explained to journalists, the mountain strike corps was not a financially viable project and those funds could be better utilised to modernise the Army.
11. When the concept of IBG was finalised in 2018, this mountain strike corps became one of the testbeds along with the Pathankot-based 9 Corps.
12. Under the new concept, 17 Corps is supposed to have three IBGs, each comprising around 4,000 soldiers under a Major General, directly under the operation control of the Corps headquarters.
13. The IBG concept is envisaged to create in the mountain strike corps, an ability to move, deploy and launch limited offensives in the mountains very quickly.
14. The aim of raising the mountain strike corps in a non-defensive role was to create **capabilities to deter China's** aggressive behaviour along the 3,488 km long Sino-

India border.

15. This had followed the raising of two new divisions in 2010 to strengthen the deployment in Arunachal Pradesh, along with an armoured, artillery and infantry brigade for other sectors of the LAC.

URJIT PATEL APPOINTED AS NIPFP CHAIRMAN

Former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Urijit Patel has been appointed as the chairperson of National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP), an official statement said on 19 June 2020. Patel will start his four-year tenure on June 22, succeeding former NIPFP chairman, Vijay Laxman Kelkar.

What

1. The NIPFP was set up as an autonomous research organisation by the finance ministry, Planning Commission and some state governments and academicians.
2. The **institute's governing body consists of three representatives** of the finance ministry, one from the RBI and Niti Aayog each, three representatives of sponsoring state governments, three distinguished economists, three heads of sister research institutions, and members of other sponsoring agencies and invitees.
3. Patel took over as the 24th governor of the RBI in 2016, succeeding Raghuram Rajan. In 2018, he became the first RBI governor to resign due to personal reasons and held the post for the shortest term since 1992.
4. Prior to that, he served as a deputy governor of the central bank handling monetary policy, economic policy research, statistics and information management, deposit insurance, communication and Right to Information.
5. Building up to his abrupt departure from the top post, Patel differed with the government on various issues like its intervention in central bank's autonomy, capital transfer to government and the dual regulation of public and private sector banks among others.

INTERNATIONAL YOGA DAY 2020

Every year, June 21 is recognised as International Yoga Day but due to social distancing measures adopted by most countries, the theme set by United Nations for this year is "Yoga for Health – Yoga at Home". The World Health Organization mentions yoga as a means to improve health in its Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018–2030: More active people for a healthier world.

What

1. The proposal was first introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his address during the opening of the 69th session of the General Assembly, in which he said: "Yoga is an invaluable gift from our ancient tradition.
2. Yoga embodies unity of mind and body, thought and action, a holistic approach that is valuable to our health and our well-being. Yoga is not just about exercise; it is a **way to discover the sense of oneness with yourself, the world and nature.**"
3. The first Yoga Day celebration was held at Rajpath in New Delhi, where PM Modi and other dignitaries also performed around 21 yoga asanas and created two Guinness World Records.

4. **The first record was for being the world's largest yoga class with 35,985 people and the second one was for having the maximum number of participating nationalities that is 84.** Last year in Dehradun, Modi had performed yoga with over 50,000 enthusiasts.

SC AGREES TO ALLOW RATH YATRA

The Supreme Court (SC) on 22 June 2020 agreed to allow the annual Rath Yatra in Puri from 23 in a very "restricted manner" in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The apex court, which had earlier stayed this year's Rath Yatra, said it will leave it to the Jagannath Temple Management Trust and Odisha government to conduct the festival in a very restricted manner without allowing devotee congregation. The state said it will coordinate with the Centre to hold the Rath Yatra.

What

1. Earlier in the day, the Centre told the apex court that Rath Yatra in Puri can be allowed without public participation in view of the coronavirus pandemic and said the "tradition of centuries may not be stopped". The Odisha government also supported the Centre's stand in the apex court.
2. It is a matter of faith for crores. If Lord Jagannath will not come out tomorrow, he cannot come out for 12 years as per traditions, said Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who mentioned the matter before a bench headed by Justice Arun Mishra.
3. All 'sebayats' and 'pandas' who have tested negative (for COVID-19) can participate in rituals as may be decided by HH Shri Shankaracharya.
4. People may not congregate and seek blessings on TV during live telecast. Raja of Puri and the temple committee may supervise arrangements of these rituals, Mehta told the bench.
5. The Puri Rath Yatra, which is attended by lakhs of people from across the world, is scheduled from June 23 and is held over 10-12 days.

WORLD'S FIRST YOGA UNIVERSITY OUTSIDE INDIA

As part of the 6th International Yoga Day commemorations, the **world's first yoga** university outside India has been launched in Los Angeles, offering programmes that combine scientific principles and modern research approaches to the ancient Indian practice. The Vivekananda Yoga University (VaYU) was jointly launched on 23 June 2020 by Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan and Chairperson of the Standing Committee on External Affairs P P Chaudhary during a virtual event held at the Consulate General of India in New York. Eminent Indian yoga guru Dr HR Nagendra, Chancellor of Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana (SVYASA), is the first Chairman of VaYU.

What

1. Muraleedharan said Swami Vivekananda gave the message of universal brotherhood from the US, and through the first of its kind yoga university outside India, the message of yoga will be broadcast from America to the world.
2. **As the symbol of India's culture and heritage**, yoga has become the means for unity and brotherhood in the world. Through the medium of yoga, we can give the message of world peace that yoga provides mental balance and emotional stability.

3. The event was jointly hosted by the Consulate General and Jaipur Foot USA Chairperson and founding director of VaYU Prem Bhandari.
4. Nagendra, well known as the yoga consultant to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, said Swami Vivekananda heralded the grandeur of Indian yoga dimension to the world through his famous speech in Chicago in 1893.
5. Inspired by his teachings and the solutions he has given to meet challenges of the modern era, we took up this entire process of bringing yoga into the academic dimension.
6. VaYU would produce best modern-day yoga practitioners who would not only spread peace but make planet Earth a better place to live.
7. The university is a prime example of people to people connections between India and the US.

Flashback

1. Coinciding with the summer solstice, June 21 is observed as International Yoga Day, recognising the many benefits of the ancient Indian practice of yoga. The year 2020 marks the 6th International Yoga Day.
2. The United Nations theme for this year is “Yoga for Health – Yoga at Home”, which takes into account the social distancing measures announced by most countries.
3. The UN proclaimed June 21 as International Day of Yoga by passing a resolution on December 11, 2014, during the 69th session of the General Assembly.