

## My Notes....

### NATIONAL

#### INDIA'S CDRI AGAINST COVID-19 DISASTER

At a time when countries are fighting individual battles against Covid-19, **India's** global Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) is being seen as an international forum that can unitedly combat the pandemic which has already claimed more than 17,000 lives worldwide. The United Nations (UN) has already partnered the initiative launched last year with about 40 countries supporting it.

What

1. **Prime Minister Narendra Modi's** convening meeting of the heads of states of South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) nations, an intergovernmental organisation of eight countries, last week has drawn special attention of the UN.
2. The PM pledged \$10 million in emergency funds to tackle the Coronavirus epidemic in the region where any member country can use the funds for immediate action.
3. Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Maldives and Bhutan pitched in with another \$3.5 million.
4. Mami Mizutori, head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), told that the CDRI, launched by PM Modi at the UN Climate Action Summit in 2019 and supported by UNDRR, emphasizes the importance of public health infrastructure.
5. India does not see the COVID-19 outbreak as simply a health issue but has taken an all-of-government, all-of-society approach which is very much in the spirit of the **Sendai Framework,** she said and appreciated India's donation of \$10 million towards creation of Emergency Covid-19 fund for SAARC nations.
6. **India's donations to a regional response fund** and willingness to help other nations with their response is "international solidarity of the highest order and I can only commend India for its approach.
7. The PM also promised development of online training capsules for training emergency response teams in the region towards their capacity building.
8. An Integrated Disease Surveillance Portal is in the process of being set up which can trace possible virus carriers and the entire chain of infected people. India has offered to share software for this virus surveillance portal along with training of staff.
9. CDRI is meant to support countries to build capacities for climate resilient infrastructure, the purpose of the international forum is to achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs). A robust health infrastructure is a key to the SDG objectives, particularly in pandemic outbreaks like the Covid-19.

#### Flashback

1. **UN Secretary General's Climate Action Summit** in New York on September 23, Prime Minister had announced the launch of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) and invited all countries to join it.
2. **CDRI has sometimes been seen as India's response to the Belt Road Initiative, China's ongoing multi-billion-dollar programme to recreate the ancient Silk Route trading links.**
3. Unlike BRI, CDRI is not an attempt by India to create or fund infrastructure projects in other countries, having said that, international initiatives like these are not without any strategic or diplomatic objective.

## PERMANENT COMMISSION FOR WOMEN IN NAVY

The Supreme Court on March 17 cleared permanent commission for women in the Navy and asked the Centre to complete the modalities within three months. A Bench headed by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud said there cannot be 101 excuses for not granting gender equality in the armed forces and a level playing field is needed. Denying permanent commission to women officers who have served the nation would result in a serious miscarriage of justice.

What

1. The Bench, also comprising Justice Ajay Rastogi, **rejected the Centre's stand** that sea sailing duties cannot be granted to SSC (Short Service Commission) women officers in the Navy because its Russian vessels do not have washrooms for them.
2. Such arguments, the court said, are contrary to the **Centre's policy of 1991 and 1998** which lifted the statutory bar on the induction of women officers in the Navy.
3. The Bench quashed the prospective effect of the policy barring women officers inducted before 2008 from being granted permanent commission in the Navy. It also granted pension benefits to women officers who have retired and were not granted permanent commission.
4. It said there cannot be gender discrimination in granting permanent commission to women officers in the Navy after the statutory bar was lifted by the Centre to allow entry of women.
5. Once statutory bar was lifted to allow entry of women officers then male and female officers are to be treated equally in granting permanent commission.
6. It said that there is enough documentary evidence to suggest women officers in the Navy have brought accolades to the force.
7. Under the Short Service Commission (SSC), women naval officers retire in 10 years. If permanent commission is granted, women officers will be entitled to serve for four more years, totalling to 14 years.
8. In February, the SC had upheld a 2010 Delhi High Court ruling, which directed the Centre to ensure that women are given permanent commission in the Indian Army on par with male officers, including a command post.

### Flashback

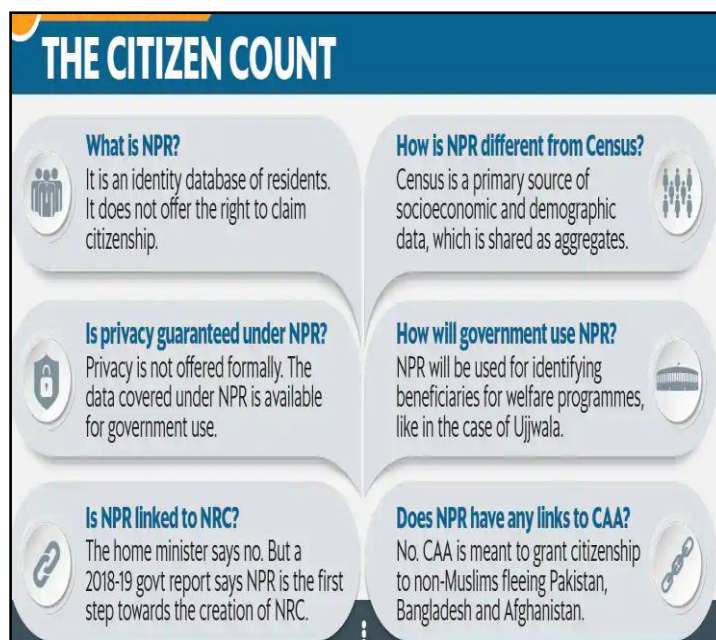
1. The induction of women officers in the Army started in 1992.
2. They were commissioned for a period of five years in certain chosen streams such as Army Education Corps, Corps of Signals, Intelligence Corps, and Corps of Engineers.
3. Recruits under the Women Special Entry Scheme (WSES) had a shorter pre-commission training period than their male counterparts who were commissioned under the Short Service Commission (SSC) scheme.
4. In 2006, the WSES scheme was replaced with the SSC scheme, which was extended to women officers.
5. They were commissioned for a period of 10 years, extendable up to 14 years.

## MHA DEFERS CENSUS 2021, NPR

The government has decided to defer the first phase of Census 2021 as well as the updation process of the National Population Register (NPR) in view of the coronavirus outbreak, an order issued in this regard by the Ministry of Home Affairs said on 25 March 2020 evening. In view of COVID-19 outbreak & nationwide lockdown due to the pandemic, the first phase of Census India 2021, that is, the house listing operation & NPR updation is postponed until further order.

## What

1. The exercise involves participation of large number of central and state government officials as they visit every house to record the data.
2. The Census 2021 was scheduled to be conducted in two phases. While the first phase included house listing and housing census during April-September 2020, the second phase included population enumeration 9 February 2021 to 28 February 2021.
3. The updation of National Population Register was proposed to be done along with the first phase of Census 2021 in all states and UTs except Assam. This is the first time that the exercise has been deferred in the history of India.
4. The country was placed under a lockdown for the next 21 days last night. The lockdown was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his second address to the nation within a week on 24 March 2020.
5. According to the Health Ministry data, the number of coronavirus cases in the country has mounted to 562. The virus has claimed over 10 lives so far.



## WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT

The United Nations has declared **Finland as the world's happiest nation for the third consecutive year**. Researchers for the World Happiness Report asked people in 156 countries to evaluate their levels of happiness by taking into account factors such as GDP, social support, personal freedom, and levels of corruption in each nation. Finland is followed by Denmark, Switzerland, Iceland, Norway, Netherlands, Sweden, New Zealand and Austria. Luxembourg stepped in to the top 10 for the first time this year at the 10th spot, Canada is ranked 11, Australia at 12 and the United Kingdom at 13 in the ranking. The US is in the 18th spot.

## What

1. India is ranked 144, way lower than its neighbors. Nepal is ranked 15, Pakistan is at the 29, Bangladesh at 107 and Sri Lanka at 130.
2. The happiest countries are those where people feel a sense of belonging, where they trust and enjoy each other and their shared institutions, John Helliwell, one of the authors of the report, said in a statement.
3. There is also more

### Flashback

1. The World Happiness Report is a landmark survey of the state of global happiness that ranks countries by how happy their citizens perceive themselves to be.
2. The World Happiness Report 2020 for the first time ranks cities around the world by their subjective well-being and digs more deeply into how the social, urban and natural environments combine to affect our happiness.
3. This is the eighth World Happiness Report.

- resilience, because shared trust reduces the burden of hardships, and thereby lessens the inequality of well-being.
4. The countries at the bottom of the list were those affected by violence and extreme poverty. Zimbabwe, South Sudan, and Afghanistan were among those classified as the least happy countries.
  5. **Finland's long dark winters were reputed to be behind high levels of alcoholism and suicide.** But its residents enjoy a high quality of life, security and public services, with rates of inequality and poverty.
  6. **The data for this year's World** Happiness Report was collected in 2018 and 2019, thus not impacted by the widespread restrictions imposed by many countries to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19).
  7. However, the authors of the report predicted that the lockdown in many countries could boost happiness in the future.
  8. The most frequent explanation seems to be that people are pleasantly surprised by the willingness of their neighbours and their institutions to work in harness to help each other.

## CENTRAL SANSKRIT UNIVERSITIES BILL 2019

Parliament on 16 March 2020 passed a bill to upgrade three deemed Sanskrit universities into central universities. The Central Sanskrit Universities Bill, 2019 was passed by voice vote in Rajya Sabha. Earlier the bill was passed by Lok Sabha.

What

1. The Bill seeks to upgrade three deemed to be universities in Sanskrit -- Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, Sri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth and Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth Tirupati -- into central universities.
2. The bill was moved in Rajya Sabha by human resource minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank.
3. "Based on the persistent demand from Sanskrit scholars and academia, the MHRD has initiated a proposal to convert the three deemed-to-be universities into central universities to make them a seat of Sanskrit learning of national and international repute.
4. There are 45 central universities in India currently, out of which, 40 are functioning under the supervision of Ministry of Human Resources Development (HRD), the education ministry.
5. According an earlier release from the Union government, the Central Sanskrit University Bill, 2019 was listed among 27 Bills for introduction, consideration and passing in the Winter Session of Parliament began on November 18.

## 1ST INDIGENOUS LCA IN SKIES

Airborne for around 40 minutes, the first Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) in FOC standard (SP-21) took to the skies on 17 March 2020. This was the maiden flight of this aircraft which was piloted by Air Cmde KA Muthana (Retd), who is the Chief Test Flying (Fixed Wing). This feat was achieved by the HAL in 12 months once the Drawing Applicability List (DAL) and SOP by Center for Military Airworthiness and Certification (CEMILAC) were released.

What does the FOC aircraft have onboard?

1. According to HAL the FOC aircraft are equipped with advanced features.
2. These include Air-to-Air refuelling, Beyond Visual Range (BVR) missile system, and other features.
3. It also comes with a lot of improvements. These manufacturing improvements are

based on the operational feedback of LCA IOC fleet with IAF.

4. According to highly placed sources, Indian Air Force (IAF) is planning to order another Squadron of FOC standard.

So Far

1. The IAF has placed order 40 indigenous LCAs. These orders placed with HAL include 16 fighters each in Initial Operational Clearance (IOC) and Final Operational Clearance (FOC). Also, the order includes 8 trainers, explained a HAL officer.
2. The **IAF first inducted the LCA in squadron 'Flying Daggers' in 2016.**
3. With the increased thrust towards technology development, HAL has told the IAF that **it can fly the LCA 'Tejas' with hot refuelling capacity.**
4. This aircraft jointly developed by HAL and ADA has carbon-fibre composite (CFC) structures and skins, and a modern glass cockpit.

## AIRCRAFT (AMENDMENT) BILL 2020

**A Bill to improve India's aviation safety ratings** and provide statutory status to regulatory institutions like the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) got the Lok Sabha's nod on 17 March 2020. The Aircraft (Amendment) Bill, 2020 provides for statutory backing to the DGCA, Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) and the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB).

What

1. Responding to issues raised by members during the discussion on the bill, Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Puri said while air fares needed to remain affordable, it was also necessary that the airline business remains viable.
2. He said the civil aviation sector has been deregulated and the government does not set air fare. Speaking on the stress the sector is undergoing because of the coronavirus outbreak, Puri said the industry would emerge from these challenges.
3. On the issue of disinvestment of Air India, the minister said the national carrier was losing Rs 26 crore per day before the coronavirus outbreak. The figures would be higher as several routes have been shut following the outbreak of the virus globally.
4. Earlier, moving the Bill for discussion and passage, Puri said there was a need to provide statutory backing to regulatory bodies as they were set up under executive order.
5. The Bill also provides for **keeping aircraft belonging to the country's armed forces** outside the purview of the Aircraft Act, 1934.
6. The Bill proposes to increase the fine for violations of rules from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 1 crore. The Bill would bring regulation regarding air navigation services under its purview.

## MTPA BILL CLEARED

The Lok Sabha 17 March 2020 passed a Bill to extend the upper limit for permitting abortions from the present 20 weeks to 24 weeks for "special categories of women", **including** rape survivors, victims of incest, differently-abled and minors. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) (MTPA) Bill, 2020 which seeks to amend the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 was passed by a voice vote.

What

1. Original Bill was brought in 1971, India was amongst one of the first few countries in the whole world to legalise abortion in order to provide legal and safe abortion services to women who required to terminate a pregnancy due to certain threptic, eugenics

- or humanitarian grounds, Health Minister Harsh Vardhan told.
2. However, with the passage of time and advancements of medical technology for safe abortion, there is a scope for increasing upper gestational limit for terminating pregnancies, especially for vulnerable women, like survivors of rape, incest, minor girls or differently abled women and for pregnancies with substantial foetal abnormalities detected late in the pregnancy, the minister said.
  3. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had constituted a Group of Ministers headed by Union Minister Nitin Gadkari to look at his this Bill. The Bill was approved by Cabinet and Law ministry subsequently before being placed in the House for passage.

## RE POWER GENERATION AS ESSENTIAL SERVICES

The government on 26 March 2020 classified renewable energy (RE) generation as an essential operation and allowed the movement of products needed for it. The ministry of new and renewable energy asked all states to exempt renewable energy generating stations from Section 144, nationwide lockdown, curfew and any restrictions in the movement of necessary staff and products.

What

1. Renewable energy generating stations generate electricity and supply to the grid when conventional power plants may not be running at optimal levels due to fuel supply concerns.
2. The letter was addressed to chief secretaries, all district magistrates, police commissioners, urban local bodies and municipal corporations of all states.
3. Renewable energy, often referred to as clean energy, comes from natural sources or processes that are constantly replenished.
4. For example, sunlight or wind keep shining and blowing, even if their availability depends on time and weather.
5. There are many forms of renewable energy. Most of these renewable energies depend in one way or another on sunlight.
6. Wind and hydroelectric power are the direct result of differential heating of the Earth's surface which leads to air moving about (wind) and precipitation forming as the air is lifted.
7. Solar energy is the direct conversion of sunlight using panels or collectors. Biomass energy is stored sunlight contained in plants.
8. Other renewable energies that do not depend on sunlight are geothermal energy, which is a result of radioactive decay in the crust combined with the original heat of accreting the Earth, and tidal energy, which is a conversion of gravitational energy.

## INTERNATIONAL

### INDIA NOT OBLIGED TO ACCEPT WTO PANEL'S REPORT

India is not obliged to implement recommendations the World Trade Organization's dispute panel has made about the **country's export promotion schemes**, the government told Parliament. The panel, in its report issued to members on October 31, 2019, had ruled that India's export-related schemes (including for special economic zones or SEZ) are in the nature of prohibited subsidies under the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures and are inconsistent with WTO norms. India appealed at the WTO's appellate body after it was given 180 days to withdraw the SEZ scheme.

## What

1. Due to non-functioning of appellate body (of the WTO's dispute settling mechanism), the appeal has been kept in suspension.
2. Till the appeal is disposed of, India is under no obligation to implement the recommendations of the panel, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said.
3. In a separate reply, Goyal told Parliament that India is involved in 15 disputes at the WTO, mostly against the US.
4. The disputes where India is a complaining party are countervailing duty by the US on Indian steel products; measures by America concerning non-immigrant visas; renewable energy programmes of the US; and import duties imposed on steel and aluminium products by America.
5. WTO disputes where India is a responding party include prohibition by India on import of poultry and poultry products filed by the US, and import duties on certain information and communication technology goods filed by the EU, Japan and Taiwan.

### Flashback

1. Dispute settlement or dispute settlement system (DSS) is regarded by the World Trade Organization (WTO) as the central pillar of the multilateral trading system, and as the organization's "unique contribution to the stability of the global economy.
2. A dispute arises when one member country adopts a trade policy measure or takes some action that one or more fellow members consider to be a breach of WTO agreements or to be a failure to live up to obligations.

## ADB TO INVEST IN NIIF'S FOF

Asian Development Bank (ADB) will now join the Government of India (GOI) and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) as an investor in one of the instruments of National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) of India. ADB will invest \$100 million equivalent in the NIIF Fund of Funds (FoF). **With ADB's** investment into the NIIF platform, the FoF has now secured \$700 million in commitments. NIIF's FoF is targeted at India-focused PE fund managers who rely on international investors for large-scale fundraising as domestic institutions such as Indian pension funds and insurance companies have not been significant investors in PE funds.

## What

1. Mid-market entrepreneur-led companies are the backbone of most growth sectors in India and are responsible for millions of jobs.
2. These companies are hungry for growth equity, and efficient allocation of capital to them, tied-in with good governance, highest environmental, and social standards and strong business principles, is an imperative, said a NIIF statement.
3. NIIF FoF was established in 2018 with the objective of creating a vehicle to provide India-focused private equity fund managers with a go-to institutional investor operating at scale and based in India.
4. The FoF invests in a variety of sectors and strategies through third-party managed funds. So far, it has made commitments to three funds aggregating to over Rs 2,600 crores (\$350 million).
5. The three funds are focused on green energy and climate; middle-income and affordable housing and entrepreneur-driven mid-market growth companies, operating across diversified sectors.
6. Additionally, the managers of the three funds have raised \$1.1 billion equivalent

- alongside NIIF's investments, demonstrating the institution's ability to crowd-in capital besides its own investments.
7. According to Sujoy Bose, managing director & chief executive officer, NIIF, said, **"ADB's commitment** to NIIF Fund of Funds during these extraordinary and challenging times is highly meaningful.
  8. It reflects ADB's confidence in the continued growth and potential of the Indian economy, its skilled private equity fund managers and the large pool of determined entrepreneurs who seek capital to grow and strengthen their companies."
  9. ADB has been an investor in India-focused PE funds for over two decades and this investment also **highlights NIIF's** approach to partner with high-quality institutional investors who are not just providers of capital but are also contributors of **expertise during NIIF's** period of development.
  10. With this capital infusion, the FoF will be able to increase its support to India-focused PE fund managers at a time when their global fundraising prospects may be **challenging in the short term."**
  11. NIIF anchored by the Union Government is a joint investment platform for international and Indian investors with a mandate to invest equity capital in domestic infrastructure. It manages over \$4 billion of capital commitments across three funds, each with its distinct investment strategy.
  12. The funds have investment mandates to invest in infrastructure assets and related businesses that are likely to benefit from the long-term growth trajectory of the Indian economy.
- The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)

  1. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is a multilateral development bank with a mission to improve social and economic outcomes in Asia.
  2. Headquartered in Beijing, began operations in January 2016 and have now grown to 102 approved members worldwide.
  3. By investing in sustainable infrastructure and other productive sectors in Asia and beyond, the bank will better connect people, services and markets that over time will impact the lives of billions and build a better future.
  4. The United Nations has addressed the launch of AIIB as having potential for "scaling up financing for sustainable development" and to improve the global economic governance.
  5. The starting capital of the bank was \$100 billion, equivalent to **2/3 of the capital of the** Asian Development Bank and about half that of the World Bank.
  6. The bank was proposed by China in 2013 and the initiative was launched at a ceremony in Beijing in October 2014.
  7. It received the highest credit ratings from the three biggest rating agencies in the world, and is seen as a potential rival to the World Bank and IMF.

## FIRST EVER UN ADOPTS 4 RESOLUTIONS THROUGH EMAIL

The U.N. Security Council unanimously adopted four resolutions on 30 March 2020, with its 15 members voting by email for the first time because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Members voted to keep troops in **Sudan's restive Darfur region until the end** of May and maintain the U.N. political mission in Somalia until June 30. They extended the mandate of the U.N. panel of experts for North Korea until April 30, 2021 **and they stressed the importance of supporting the U.N.'s far-flung peacekeeping operations.**



What

1. The **U.N.'s most powerful body** has been meeting by video because of COVID-19, which has hit New York City, where the U.N. has its headquarters, exceedingly hard.
2. The last council meeting in the headquarters complex was on March 12, when a resolution was adopted extending the mandate of the U.N. peacekeeping mission in **South Sudan and welcoming** “encouraging developments” **toward peace**.
3. A resolution sponsored by the United Kingdom and Germany extends the joint United Nations-African Union peacekeeping force in Darfur known as UNAMID until May 31 when **the council said it will decide on** “**the responsible draw-down and exit**” of UNAMID.
4. **The council said it also intends to establish** “a follow-on presence to UNAMID” at the same time.
5. The Darfur conflict began in 2003 when ethnic Africans rebelled, accusing the Arab-dominated Sudanese government of discrimination.
6. The government in Khartoum was accused of retaliating by arming local nomadic Arab tribes and unleashing them on civilian populations — a charge it denies. In recent years, as the result of a successful government military campaign, the rebellion has been reduced to a single rebel faction.
7. There has been pressure, including from the Trump administration, to scale down the UNAMID force in response to reduced fighting and security conditions. It was **established in 2007 and was one of the U.N.'s most expensive operations**, with a ceiling of 15,845 military personnel and 3,403 police in June 2016.
8. China, which holds the rotating council presidency in March, sponsored a resolution adopted unanimously stressing “the crucial role” that **U.N. peacekeepers play** “**in achieving conditions for stability and a lasting peace,**” and urging countries where they are deployed to ensure their freedom of movement.
9. U.N. peacekeeping currently has over 100,000 field personnel including military, police and civilians from over 120 countries deployed in 13 active missions across three continents.
10. **The resolution expresses** “grave concern about security threats and targeted attacks” **against peacekeepers in many missions, condemns** “in the strongest terms” all violence and killings of peacekeeping personnel, and calls for prompt investigation and prosecution of those responsible for attacks against them.

## UNSC ADOPTS RESOLUTION FOR PEACEKEEPERS

The UN Security Council (UNSC) has unanimously adopted Resolution 2518, a first of its kind, vowing to take all-dimensional measures to ensure the safety and security of peacekeepers. This is the first resolution on the safety and security of peacekeepers and is well-received by the broad membership as a timely fit for the current peacekeeping situation in line with the expectations of the international community. The resolution was sponsored by China and co-sponsored by 43 countries, including Italy, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, South Africa, Russia, Spain, Turkey and Vietnam, according to the statement.

What

1. It covers areas such as training, health, technology, partnerships, including strengthening training system, improving health security and relief capabilities, requiring peacekeeping missions to strengthen communication with host countries and build mutual trust, improving the level of technology application, strengthening coordination mechanism arrangements, and supporting the African Union and other regional organizations' capacity-building through partnerships.
2. For 72 years, UN peacekeeping operations have played a significant role in the political settlement of hot-spot issues as an effective means of maintaining

international peace and security, according to the statement.

3. There are currently more than 95,000 peacekeepers on active duty in 13 mission areas.
4. The challenges faced by these operations were on the rise, with traditional and non-traditional security factors posing serious threats to the security of peacekeepers.
5. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the UN and a crucial year for the implementation of the "Action for Peace" initiative.
6. China is a major contributor and troop contributor to UN peacekeeping operations and a strong supporter and important participant in UN peacekeeping operations.
7. China has promoted the adoption of the resolution on the safety and security of peacekeepers, with the aim of demonstrating its firm support for UN peacekeeping operations, fulfilling its commitment to multilateralism, pushing the international community towards increasing its input in peacekeeping operations and taking practical measures to ensure the safety and security of peacekeepers and improve peacekeeping operations.
8. The work of the Security Council faces serious practical difficulties posed the COVID-19 pandemic.
9. As the sponsor of the draft resolution and presidency for this month, China has maintained consultations with other council members by telephone, video, mails, among others.

#### Flashback

1. India has suffered the highest number of fatalities (164 out of 6,593 personnel) among countries that have sent forces to the United Nations peacekeeping mission since 1948.
2. Ethiopia and Rwanda have contributed the highest number of personnel, followed by three Asian countries — Bangladesh, India and Nepal. These five nations together account for a third of the total peacekeeping force.
3. **India lost most of its personnel to "malicious acts"** (deaths due to factors like revolution, riots, sabotage, terrorism and murder). Accidents and illness were other causes.
4. Nearly 80% of the Indian peacekeepers are deployed in Central African Republic and South Sudan in various sections.

## ECONOMY

### ECONOMIC PACKAGE FOR COVID-19

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharama on 26 March 2020 announced the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Scheme, under which the government would provide a relief package of Rs 1.7 trillion to the underprivileged, poor and migrant workers affected by a lockdown amid the Covid-19 crisis. The FM also stated that workers like nurses, paramedics and sanitation staff, who were on the frontline of the war against the virus, would be provided a medical insurance cover of Rs 50 lakh per person.

What

1. Prime Minister Gareeb Kalyan scheme to have two parts — cash transfer and food security
2. Covid-19 package to take care of the welfare concerns of the poor and migrant workers who have been suffering because of a nationwide lockdown
3. Insurance cover for healthcare workers attending to Covid-19 patients: Rs 50 lakh per

person

4. Two million health workers to benefit from the insurance scheme

Two silos of PM Gareeb Kalyan scheme

Pradjhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Anna Yojana

1. 800 million poor people in the country to get 5 kg of rice/wheat per month free of cost, in addition to the 5 kg they already get.
2. Additionally, each household to get 1 kg of preferred dal for free for the next three months

Cash transfer scheme: Nine sub-parts

1. Farmers: First instalment of the PM-KISAN payment of Rs 2,000 to be frontloaded; move to benefit 87 million
2. MGNREGS: Wage increased from Rs 182 to Rs 202 per day. Wage increase to benefit 50 million families, as there will be about 2000 increase in their income. Poor widows, aged, and divyang: Ex-gratia of Rs 1,000 for the next three months, in two instalments. 30 million people to benefit. transfers to be done through direct benefits transfer (DBT)
3. Women with Jan Dhan Yojana accounts: 200 million to benefit from Rs 500 ex-gratia for the next 3 months
4. Beneficiaries of the Ujjwala scheme: 80 million households benefitted from the gas cylinders provided under the scheme. These beneficiaries will get free cylinders for three months in view of the disruption the coronavirus lockdown will cause.
5. Women in self-help groups: 6.3 million SHGs get up to Rs 10 lakh collateral-free loans under the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya National Rural Mission scheme. The cap has been doubled to Rs 20 lakh. The move will benefit 70 million households
6. Organised sector workers: Two parts to this. First, the Government of India will pay the EPF contribution of both employee and employer for the next three months. This will be for all those establishments which have up to 100 employees, 90 percent of whom earn less than Rs 15,000 a month
7. And second, in what will benefit 8 million employees and 400,000 establishments, the EPFO regulation will be amended to allow the withdrawal of up to 75 per cent of their corpus as non-refundable advance, or three months' salary, whichever is less
8. Construction workers: States to be directed to utilise the Rs 31,000 crore welfare fund for building and construction workers for the benefit of 35 million workers in the midst of the coronavirus crisis
9. District mineral fund: State govts to be urged to utilise this fund for medical screening, medical testing and providing health care services in the wake of the coronavirus crisis

## EPFS 1952 AMENDED AMID LOCKDOWN

The labour ministry has allowed over 6 crore subscribers of retirement fund body EPFO to withdraw an amount not exceeding their three months basic pay and dearness allowance from their EPF account in view of the lockdown to fight COVID-19. The ministry has issued a notification in this regard on 28 March 2020 to amend the Employees' Provident Fund Scheme (EPFS) 1952, a labour ministry statement said. The decision is taken in view of lockdown across the country to fight COVID-19.

What

1. The notification permitted non-refundable withdrawal not exceeding the basic wages and dearness allowance for three months or up to 75 per cent of the amount standing to the credit of their EPF account, whichever is less.
2. The COVID-19 has been declared pandemic and therefore employees working in

establishments and factories across entire India, who are members of the EPF Scheme, 1952 are eligible for the benefits of non-refundable advance. A sub-para (3) under para 68L has been inserted in the EPF scheme, 1952.

3. The amended Employees Provident Fund (Amendment) scheme, 2020 has come into force from March 28.
4. Following the notification, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has issued directions to its field offices for promptly processing any applications received from members to help them fight the situation.
5. In its communication, the EPFO has stated that officers and staff must process claims of EPF subscribers promptly so that relief reaches the worker and his family to help them fight with COVID-19.

#### Flashback

1. The Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) is a savings tool for the workforce.
2. It is a scheme managed under the Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952, by the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO).
3. Under the EPF scheme, an employee has to pay a certain percentage from his pay and an equal amount is contributed by the employer.
4. The employee gets a lump sum amount (which includes his own and employer's contributions) with interest upon retirement or two months after switching jobs.

## ORDINANCE FOR PM-CARES FUND

The government on 31 March 2020 brought in an Ordinance to give effect to various relief measures, including extended deadline for filing income tax, customs and central excise returns, to help taxpayers tide over the coronavirus crisis. The "Taxation and Other Laws (Relaxation of Certain Provisions) Ordinance, 2020" got assent of the President on 31 March 2020.

What

1. The Ordinance also amended the provisions of the Income Tax Act to provide the same tax treatment to PM-CARES Fund as available to the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund.
2. Therefore, the donation made to the PM CARES Fund shall be eligible for 100 per cent deduction under section 80G of the IT Act. Further, the limit on deduction of 10 percent of gross income shall also not be applicable for donations made to PM CARES Fund, an official statement said.

#### Flashback

1. The Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM CARES Fund) was created on 28 March 2020 following the COVID-19 pandemic in India.
2. The fund will be used for combating, containment and relief efforts against the coronavirus outbreak and similar pandemic like situations in the future.
3. The Prime Minister is the chairman of the trust. Members will include the defence, home and finance ministers.
4. The fund will also enable micro-donations. The minimum donation accepted for the PM CARES Fund is ₹10 (14¢ US).
5. The donations will be tax exempt and fall under corporate social responsibility. The Prime Minister had said that the PMO had received many requests to help in the war against COVID-19. Accordingly, the fund was set up and will be used for disaster management and research.

3. With the promulgation of the Ordinance, the last date for filing income tax returns for 2018-19 as well as that for linking PAN with biometric ID Aadhaar has been extended by three months to June 30.
4. The date for making various investment/payment for claiming deduction under Chapter-VIA-B of IT Act which includes Section 80C (LIC, PPF, NSC etc.), 80D (Mediclinam), 80G (Donations), etc. has been extended to June 30, 2020.
5. Hence, the investment/payment can be made up to June 30, 2020, for claiming the deduction under these sections for FY 2019-20.
6. Also, the last date for furnishing of the central excise returns due in March, April and May 2020 has been extended to June 30, 2020.
7. The govt has brought in an Ordinance on March 31 which provides for extension of various time limits under the Taxation and Benami Acts.
8. It also provides for an extension of time limits contained in the rules or notification which are prescribed/ issued under these Acts, an official statement said.

## AMENDED FINANCE ACT PASSED

Parliament on 23 March 2020 passed amendments to the Finance Act, with the introduction of a monetary threshold of Rs 15 lakh for taxing non-resident Indians (NRIs), an equalisation levy for e-commerce operators, increased TDS **compliance for cash withdrawals by those who haven't filed income tax returns for three years**, and a lower rate of tax collected at source (TCS) for remitting education loan money overseas as some of the amendments introduced. The amendments introduced a Rs 15 lakh threshold for **taxing NRIs' Indian income** if the person qualified as a deemed resident by staying in India for 120 days or more as against no monetary limit earlier in the Budget.

What

1. The liability to pay tax on such deemed resident will be only in respect of business controlled in India or profession set up in India, and that too when such income exceeds the threshold of say Rs 15 lakh.
2. **Further, such persons have been categorised as 'not ordinarily resident' if they reside in India for 120 days or more but less than 182 days**, Rakesh Nangia, chairman of Nangia Andersen Consulting, said.
3. The government also expanded the ambit of the equalisation levy for non-resident e-commerce operators involved in supply of services, including online sale of goods and provision of services, with the levy at the rate of 2 per cent.
4. Equalisation levy at 6 per cent has been in force since 2016 on payment exceeding Rs 1 lakh a year to a non-resident service provider for online advertisements.
5. The amendments also lowered TCS rate to 0.5 per cent from 5 per cent for transfer of money overseas through Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) if the fund is borrowed from banks and specified institutions to fund education.
6. The government has introduced compliance layers on cash withdrawal over Rs 1 crore by specifying that a person who has not filed an income tax return for three 3 preceding years would be liable for a 2 percent TDS on cash withdrawal for Rs 20 to Rs1 crore, and 5 per cent in the amount exceeds Rs 1 crore.
7. In another significant change, the government has withdrawn 0.1 per cent TCS from being applicable to exporters, which was proposed as an anti-evasion measure on sale of goods over Rs 50 lakh in a year and 1 per cent if the seller does not have PAN or Aadhaar.
8. Exempting exports from TCS is a big relief to exporters and extension of TCS deadline to October 1, 2020 will give a breather to taxpayers to build up their IT systems.

9. Also, the government extended the tax exemption given to sovereign wealth funds to global pension funds as well. In the Union Budget 2020-21, the government had announced a 100 per cent tax exemption on long-term capital gains, dividend and interest on investment into infrastructure made by sovereign wealth funds (SWFs). This was applicable for investments made on or before March 2024, and held on for a minimum period of three years.
10. The changes in the Finance Bill make it attractive for pension funds as well to pursue long term investments in the infrastructure sector in India.

## DPP 2020 UNVEILED

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on 20 March 2020 unveiled an updated Defence Procurement Procedure-2020 (DPP-2020) — the procurement manual that has, for the last 18 years, governed the purchase of weapons and equipment from the defence capital budget. DPP-2020, which is still in draft form, aims to promote higher indigenous content in defence equipment manufactured in India, including under licence from foreign vendors. DPP-2020 proposes to raise by 10 per cent the indigenous content stipulated in the current procedure, DPP-2016, for various categories of procurement. For example, if DPP-2016 currently mandates an indigenisation level of 50 per cent for acquisitions in the **“Make” category**, DPP-2020 will raise that to 60 per cent.

### What

1. A simple and realistic methodology has been incorporated for verification of indigenous content for the first time, stated the Ministry of Defence (MoD).
2. **In another measure designed to promote “Make in India”, DPP-2020 introduced a new procurement category, entitled “Buy (Global-Manufacture in India)”.**
3. For equipment bought from the international market, with the intention to subsequently build it in India with technology transfer, this category stipulates a minimum indigenous content of 50 per cent of the value of the contract.
4. To meet this difficult indigenisation requirement, only the minimum necessary numbers would be bought from abroad in ready-built condition; while a larger number would need to be manufactured in India.
5. **This category would be given a higher preference than the current “Buy Global” category, which involves buying equipment built abroad.**
6. In another innovative addition, DPP-2020 **proposed to incorporate “leasing” of equipment as a new acquisition category.** Leasing involves periodical rental payments to the lessor country/company, which works out cheaper than buying the equipment outright, which requires huge capital outlays.
7. This (leasing) will be useful for military equipment not used in actual warfare like transport fleets, trainers, simulators, etc.
8. In fact, India already leases one of its most potent naval combat platforms from Russia — the nuclear propelled attack submarine, INS Chakra. The new DPP will provide a policy framework for more such leases.
9. DPP-2020 also proposed to introduce a new chapter for procuring software and systems related projects. In such projects, obsolescence is very fast due to rapid changes in technology; and flexibility in the procurement process is required to keep up with the technology.
10. **Another new DPP chapter is proposed to deal with “post contract management”,** which lays down clear guidelines for issues that arise during the contract period, which typically lasts for several decades in defence contracts.
11. DPP-2020 **also proposed to introduce a comprehensive new chapter for the “Make” category of procurement.** This deals with equipment designed and built by Indian defence companies, especially start-ups and innovators, and weapons realised

- through research projects of the Defence R&D Organisation (DRDO).
12. In a measure that will be welcomed by both Indian and foreign defence firms, DPP-2020 proposes that “field evaluation trials”, in which the military evaluates the equipment before approving it; will henceforth be conducted by specialised trial wings.
  13. The objective of trials will be to nurture competition rather than elimination (of a product) for minor deficiencies, stated the MoD.
  14. The new policy also proposed new offset guidelines that encourage foreign vendors to discharge offset obligations through building and exporting products rather than components.
  15. The policy proposes higher multipliers for procurement from small industry and from units established in the two Defence Industrial Corridors in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.
  16. **The policy proposed to widen the scope of “product support”, to include contemporary concepts in vogue in modern western militaries. According to the MoD, these include “Performance Based Logistics, Life Cycle Support Contract, Comprehensive Maintenance Contract, etc. to optimise life cycle support for equipment.”**
  17. The draft DPP-2020 was prepared by MoD committee headed by its acquisitions chief, Apurva Chandra. The committee was set up in August 2019.

## DIRECTION UNDER BOCW WELFARE CESS ACT

In a first major step for the unorganised sector to tide over the Covid-19 pandemic during the lockdown, the Central government on 24 March 2020 directed the states to transfer cash into the bank accounts of construction workers from the unutilised welfare funds meant for them. Labour and Employment Minister Santosh Kumar Gangwar wrote a letter to all the chief ministers of states and union territories, urging them to utilise a total of Rs 52,000 crore lying vacant in the Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Cess Fund. There are about 35 million construction workers in the country registered under the Building and Other Construction Workers (BOCW) Welfare Cess Act, 1996.

What

1. The government has invoked Section 60 of the Act to issue directions to the State government to frame a scheme **“for transfer of adequate funds in the bank accounts of construction workers, through direct benefit transfer mode.”**
2. The amount to be granted to the construction workers may be decided by the respective state governments and union territories.
3. The financial assistance at this point in time would help to mitigate the financial crisis of our construction workers to some extent and boost their morale to deal with this epidemic, the letter issued by the labour minister stated.
4. The country had about 50 million construction workers and the states can also launch a drive to register more workers under the Act so that the rest of the unaccounted construction workers are also able to take benefit of the cash transfer.
5. Some state governments have already announced relief to workers by utilising money from the cess fund.
6. Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh has declared an immediate relief of Rs 3,000 to each registered construction worker in the state and Himachal Pradesh will also provide one-time relief of Rs 1,000 to such workers.
7. To provide relief to employers, the government has extended the last date for filing returns under eight labour laws and 10 central rules for the year 2019 till April 30, 2020.

- The central government will not initiate legal action against establishments if they failed to file returns till the end of February due to the coronavirus pandemic, a letter issued by the Chief Central Labour Commissioner said.

## NEW COMMODITIES IN ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES

The Essential Commodities Act or ECA was enacted in 1955 to make certain commodities available to consumers at fair prices. It is used by the Government to regulate the production, supply and distribution of commodities it declares 'essential'. The list of items under the ECA includes drugs, fertilisers, pulses and edible oils, petroleum and petroleum products.

What

- The Centre can include new commodities as and when the need arises, and takes them off the list once the situation improves.
- For instance, masks and hand sanitisers were declared as essential commodities on March 13, 2020.
- This is due to a shortage of these commodities in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. 2 ply and 3 ply surgical masks, N95 masks and hand sanitisers have also been included in the list of items under ECA till June 30, 2020.
- The State has also issued an advisory under the Legal Metrology Act to ensure these items are not sold for more than their MRP. The ECA gives consumers protection against irrational spikes in prices of essential commodities.
- Under ECA, the States and Union Territories can ask manufacturers to enhance their production capacity. This is to make these products more widely available to consumers.
- An offender under the Essential Commodities Act can be punished with imprisonment up to seven years, or a fine, or both.

## DPIIT NOTIFIES DECISION IN AIR INDIA

Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has notified a decision of the union cabinet to allow non-resident Indians (NRIs) to control up to 100 per cent stake in disinvestment-bound Air India. The FDI policy earlier permitted NRIs to take only 49 per cent stake in the airline. The DPIIT said: "Foreign investments in Air India including that of foreign airlines shall not exceed 49 per cent either directly or indirectly except in case of those NRIs, who are Indian Nationals, where foreign investment is permitted up to 100 per cent under automatic route". On March 4, the cabinet had taken a decision in this regard.

What

- The decision came at a time when the government has sought preliminary bids for 100 per cent stake sale in the national carrier.
- It also said that the condition that substantial ownership and effective control (SOEC) of Air India shall continue to be vested in Indian nationals.
- An official statement has earlier stated that in light of the proposed strategic

### Flashback

- FDI is a major driver of economic growth and a source of non-debt finance for the economic development of the country.
- The FDI policy is reviewed on an ongoing basis, with a view to attract larger volumes of foreign investment inflows into the country.
- The Government has put in place an investor friendly policy on FDI, under which FDI up to 100% is permitted on the automatic route in most sectors/activities.
- FDI policy provisions have been progressively liberalized across various sectors in the recent past to make India an attractive investment destination.



disinvestment of 100 per cent of Air India by the government, it has been decided that foreign investment in Air India be brought on a level-playing field with other scheduled airline operators.

4. The national carrier will have no residual government ownership and will be completely privately owned.
5. Under the SOEC framework, which is followed in the airline industry globally, a carrier that flies overseas from a particular country should be substantially owned by that country's government or its nationals.

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

### SARS-COV-2 A PRODUCT OF NATURAL EVOLUTION

A new study suggests that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) that emerged from China's Wuhan city is a product of natural evolution. The study was published in the journal - Nature Medicine. The analysis of public genome sequence data from SARS-CoV-2 and related viruses found no evidence that the virus was made in a laboratory or otherwise engineered. By comparing the available genome sequence data for known coronavirus strains, we can firmly determine that SARS-CoV-2 originated through natural processes, said the lead researcher Kristian Andersen.

What

1. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause illnesses ranging widely in severity.
2. The first known severe illness caused by a coronavirus emerged with the 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic in China. A second outbreak of severe illness began in 2012 in Saudi Arabia with the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS).
3. On December 31 last year, Chinese authorities alerted the World Health Organisation (WHO) of an outbreak of a novel strain of coronavirus causing severe illness, which was subsequently named SARS-CoV-2.
4. Shortly after the epidemic began, Chinese scientists sequenced the genome of SARS-CoV-2 and made the data available to researchers worldwide.
5. The resulting genomic sequence data has shown that Chinese authorities rapidly detected the epidemic and that the number of COVID-19 cases have been increasing because of human to human transmission after a single introduction into the human population.
6. Andersen and collaborators at several other research institutions used this sequencing data to explore the origins and evolution of SARS-CoV-2 by focusing in on several tell-tale features of the virus.
7. The scientists analysed the genetic template for spike proteins, armatures on the outside of the virus that it uses to grab and penetrate the outer walls of human and animal cells.

Features of Spike Protein

1. More specifically, they focused on two important features of the spike protein -- the receptor-binding domain (RBD), a kind of grappling hook that grips onto host cells, and the cleavage site, a molecular can opener that allows the virus to crack open and enter host cells.
2. The scientists found that the RBD portion of the SARS-CoV-2 spike proteins had evolved to effectively target a molecular feature on the outside of human cells called ACE2, a receptor involved in regulating blood pressure.
3. The SARS-CoV-2 spike protein was so effective at binding the human cells. In fact, the scientists concluded that it was the result of natural selection and not the product

of genetic engineering.

4. This evidence for natural evolution was supported by data on SARS-CoV-2's backbone - its overall molecular structure. If someone were seeking to engineer a new coronavirus as a pathogen, they would have constructed it from the backbone of a virus known to cause illness.
5. But the scientists found that the SARS-CoV-2 backbone differed substantially from those of already known coronaviruses and mostly resembled related viruses found in bats and pangolins.
6. These two features of the virus, the mutations in the RBD portion of the spike protein and its distinct backbone, rule out laboratory manipulation as a potential origin for SARS-CoV-2.

#### Genomic sequencing analysis

1. Based on their genomic sequencing analysis, Andersen and his collaborators concluded that the most likely origins for SARS-CoV-2 followed one of two possible scenarios.
2. In one scenario, the virus evolved to its current pathogenic state through natural selection in a non-human host and then jumped to humans.
3. This is how previous coronavirus outbreaks have emerged, with humans contracting the virus after direct exposure to civets (SARS) and camels (MERS).
4. The researchers proposed bats as the most likely reservoir for SARS-CoV-2 as it is very similar to a bat coronavirus. There are no documented cases of direct bat-human transmission, however, suggesting that an intermediate host was likely involved between bats and humans.
5. In this scenario, both of the distinctive features of SARS-CoV-2's spike protein - the RBD portion that binds to cells and the cleavage site that opens the virus up would have evolved to their current state prior to entering humans.
6. In this case, the current epidemic would probably have emerged rapidly as soon as humans were infected, as the virus would have already evolved the features that make it pathogenic and able to spread between people.
7. In the other proposed scenario, a non-pathogenic version of the virus jumped from an animal host into humans and then evolved to its current pathogenic state within the human population.
8. For instance, some coronaviruses from pangolins, armadillo-like mammals found in Asia and Africa, have an RBD structure very similar to that of SARS-CoV-2. A coronavirus from a pangolin could possibly have been transmitted to a human, either directly or through an intermediary host such as civets or ferrets.
9. Then the other distinct spike protein characteristic of SARS-CoV-2, the cleavage site, could have evolved within a human host, possibly via limited undetected circulation in the human population prior to the beginning of the epidemic.
10. The researchers found that the SARS-CoV-2 cleavage site appears similar to the cleavage sites of strains of bird flu that have been shown to transmit easily between people.
11. SARS-CoV-2 could have evolved such a virulent cleavage site in human cells and soon kicked off the current epidemic, as the coronavirus would possibly have become far more capable of spreading between people.
12. If the SARS-CoV-2 entered humans in its current pathogenic form from an animal source, it raises the probability of future outbreaks, as the illness-causing strain of the virus could still be circulating in the animal population and might once again jump into humans.
13. The chances are lower of a non-pathogenic coronavirus entering the human population and then evolving properties similar to SARS-CoV-2.

## INDIA TO GET NEW SUPERCOMPUTERS

Five years since launch, India is all set to experience the highest ever boost in its supercomputing capacities, with 14 new supercomputers set to be deployed this year. These systems would be installed at various national-level research laboratories and academic institutions by end of 2020, stated Department of Science and Technology (DST) in an official statement issued. Of these, three systems would be installed within a month. Once deployed, the total number of supercomputers under Rs 4,500 crore-National Supercomputing Mission (NSM) would grow to 17.

What

1. NSM is jointly led by DST and Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY). Commissioned in May 2015, the nodal agencies spearheading the mission are Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Pune, and Indian Institute of Sciences (IISc), Bengaluru.
2. The NSM envisaged setting up a network of 70 high-performance computing facilities across academia and research institutes, by 2022.
3. Since the mission was approved until September 2019, only three systems — PARAM Shivay, PARAM Shakti and PARAM Bhrahma were deployed at IIT-BHU, IIT-Kharagpur and Indian Institute of Science, Education and Research (IISER), Pune, respectively.
4. They are equipped with applications from domains like Weather and Climate, Computational Fluid Dynamics, Bioinformatics and Material science.
5. Three systems that are still gearing up for installation were originally to be deployed before March 2020. But DST has now deferred the deployment by a month and it is expected to be completed prior to April 2020.
6. These supercomputers will be made operational at IIT-Kanpur, Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research, Bengaluru, and IIT-Hyderabad.
7. The major boost to the computing facility, is however, likely to be achieved towards the end of 2020, when 11 new supercomputing systems will be made operational. Of these, eight systems, with collectively compute power of 16 PetaFlop, will be **deployed at institutions located in India's Northeastern region.**
8. Three of the new systems, each having a compute power of 3PetaFlop, will be commissioned at IIT-Mumbai, IIT-Chennai and Inter University Accelerator Centre, Delhi. These systems will form the backbone of the National Knowledge Network.
9. **C-DAC's Pune and Bengaluru centres** are set to further enhance their computing capacities, by adding a 20 Petaflop system and a 100 PetaFlop Artificial Intelligence supercomputing system, each.
10. Additionally, C-DAC will also have a 650 TeraFlop system, solely dedicated towards **country's StartUp and businesses under Medium and Small Scale Industries (MSMEs).**

## TASK FORCE FOR COVID-19

The spread of novel coronavirus infections showing no sign of abating, the National Task Force for Covid-19, set up by ICMR, on 23 March 2020 recommended the use of hydroxychloroquine for treatment of high-risk cases. Hydroxychloroquine is only for healthcare workers, and persons caring for COVID-19 patients in households, the Indian Council of Medical Research clarified. This procedure has been okayed by Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) for "restricted use in emergency situations". As per the advisory, the patients to be put under chemoprophylaxis with hydroxychloroquine include:

1. Asymptomatic healthcare workers involved the care of suspected patients;
2. Asymptomatic household contacts of confirmed cases

The task force also mandated a host of strict guidelines to be followed while using this procedure. These include:

1. Healthcare workers under chemoprophylaxis should not be complacent and should make it a point to adhere to all other cautionary measures such as washing hands, maintaining safe distance, etc.
2. They must keep tabs on their own health and report as soon as symptoms become present.
3. Contacts of positive cases under chemoprophylaxis must remain under home quarantine while on therapy.
4. Should be administered only under prescription of registered medical practitioner.
5. If the person in question develops any other symptoms than those of Covid-19, s/he should immediately seek treatment of the doctor who prescribed the procedure.
6. The point to note here is that this recommendation is only for high-risk cases, and not for general use and one must not self-administer.
7. Hydroxychloroquine is only for prevention, the ICMR chief clarified immediately after the task force's recommendation.

## NOW HANTAVIRUS IN CHINA

Even as the coronavirus outbreak takes the world by storm, a number of other diseases are also rearing their ugly heads. Cases of swine flu and bird flu have already been reported in India and other countries. Now, a man from China has tested positive for Hantavirus. The man from Yunnan Province died while on his way back to Shandong Province for work on a bus on 23 March 2020. The 32 other people on the bus were also tested for the virus.

What exactly is the Hantavirus?

1. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Hantaviruses are a family of viruses which are spread mainly by rodents and can cause various diseases in people.
2. It can cause Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) and haemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome (HFRS).
3. The disease is not airborne and can only spread to people if they come in contact with urine, feces, and saliva of rodents and less frequently by a bite from an infected host.

Symptoms of Hantavirus

1. Early symptoms of HPS include fatigue, fever, and muscle aches, along with headaches, dizziness, chills and abdominal problems.
2. If left untreated, it can lead to coughing and shortness of breath and can be fatal, with a mortality rate of 38 percent, according to CDC.
3. While the initial symptoms of HFRS too remain the same, it can cause low blood pressure, acute shock, vascular leakage, and acute kidney failure.
4. HPS can't be passed on from person to person, while HFRS transmission between people is extremely rare.
5. As per the CDC, rodent population control is the primary strategy for preventing hantavirus infections.

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS)

1. Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) is a severe, sometimes fatal, respiratory disease in humans caused by infection with Hantaviruses.

2. Anyone who comes into contact with rodents that carry Hantaviruses is at risk of HPS. Rodent infestation in and around the home remains the primary risk for Hantavirus exposure. Even healthy individuals are at risk for HPS infection if exposed to the virus.
3. To date, no cases of HPS have been reported in the United States in which the virus was transmitted from one person to another.
4. In fact, in a study of health care workers who were exposed to either patients or specimens infected with related types of hantaviruses (which cause a different disease in humans), none of the workers showed evidence of infection or illness.
5. In Chile and Argentina, rare cases of person-to-person transmission have occurred among close contacts of a person who was ill with a type of hantavirus called Andes virus.

## OZONE LAYER IS HEALING

In a rare but substantial global achievement, the efforts of all the countries to stop the damage to the Ozone layer seem to be paying off as the damage to the Ozone layer above Antarctica has recovered, Science Alert reported citing a study. The development has the potential to clog the wheel of much disastrous chain of events that was taking place in the atmosphere of the Southern Hemisphere.

What

1. A new study has highlighted the positive role played by the Montreal Protocol which was agreed to by major world powers in 1987.
2. Under the Montreal Protocol, developing as well as developed countries took substantial steps to stop the emission of Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS) that included refrigerators and Air Conditioners that relied heavily on Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).
3. According to the new study, depletion of the life-saving Ozone layer had altered the path of Jet streams further from the South Pole.
4. The development had led to magnanimous impact on the rainfall patterns of the planet along with ocean currents, Science Alert reported.
5. Jet Streams are ultra fast air currents that move towards the poles of our planet at high altitude. The study has highlighted that one decade after the Montreal Protocol came

### The Montreal Protocol

1. The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer is the landmark multilateral environmental agreement that regulates the production and consumption of nearly 100 man-made chemicals referred to as ozone depleting substances (ODS).
2. When released to the atmosphere, those chemicals damage the stratospheric ozone layer, **Earth's** protective shield that protects humans and the environment from harmful levels of ultraviolet radiation from the sun.
3. Adopted on 15 September 1987, the Protocol is to date the only UN treaty that has been ratified every country on Earth - all 197 UN Member States.
4. The treaty evolves over time in light of new scientific, technical and economic developments, and it continues to be amended and adjusted.
5. The Meeting of the Parties is the governance body for the treaty, with technical support provided by an Open-ended Working Group, both of which meet on an annual basis.
6. The Parties are assisted by the Ozone Secretariat, which is based at UN Environment Programme headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya.

- into being, the alteration in the Jet patterns stopped.
6. The researchers relied on a range of computer simulations and models to reach the conclusion. The changes in the rainfall pattern had been very worrying for coastal countries like Australia where large scale drought was feared due to the development.
  7. The weather bands that bring cold fronts have been narrowing towards the South Pole which led to less rainfall in Southern Australia, Ian Rae, Organic Chemist from the University of Melbourne told Science Alert.
  8. But all is not well on the Ozone front, scientists caution. Large scale release of Ozone depleting chemicals from countries like China can take the clock back and undo the efforts of the world at large.
  9. Increasing Carbon emissions is another problem that does not seem to have any easy solutions in sight.
  10. After the **exit of the world's biggest CO2** emitter United States from the Paris Climate Deal, it is unclear how far the deal will go in allaying the fears of Global Warming. Maximum number of instances of untimely rains and unusually high temperatures has been recorded in India in recent decades.

## MISCELLANEOUS

### SC DIRECTS TO SET UP PANEL FOR PRISONERS

The Supreme Court 23 March 2020 directed all states and Union Territories to set up high level committees to determine class of prisoners who could be released on parole for four to six weeks to avoid overcrowding in jails so as to safeguard against the spread of coronavirus pandemic. The apex court said the prisoners convicted of or charged with offences having jail term of up to seven years can be given parole to decongest jails. A Bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde said that the High-level committee will work in consultation with State Legal Service Authority for release of prisoners.

What

1. We therefore direct that each state shall constitute a high level committee comprising of home secretary and chairman, State Legal Service Authority to determine a class of prisoners, who can be released on parole for four to six weeks or on interim bail, said the bench.
2. The top court made it clear that prisoners are being released in an attempt to avoid overcrowding in jails due to the pandemic, also called COVID-19.
3. The bench was hearing the issue, of which it had taken suo motu note last week, on preparedness in the wake of coronavirus in overcrowded prisons.
4. The top court on March 16 had said that due to overcrowding, it is difficult for jail inmates to maintain social distancing to prevent the spread of coronavirus, which has been declared as pandemic by the World Health Organization. The top court had noted that if prompt measures are not taken, the situation might worsen in

#### Flashback

1. NCRB was set-up in 1986 to function as a repository of information on crime and criminals so as to assist the investigators in linking crime to the perpetrators based on the recommendations of the Tandon Committee to the National Police Commission (1977-1981) and the **MHA's Task force (1985)**.
2. Subsequently, NCRB was entrusted with the responsibility for monitoring, coordinating and implementing the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS) project in the year 2009.
3. The project connects 15000+ police stations and 6000 higher offices of police in the country.

India.

5. Expressing concern over the overcrowding of prisons, the top court had said that there are 1,339 prisons in the country housing approximately 4, 66,084 inmates.
6. Quoting a report of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), it had said the occupancy rate of Indian prisons is at 117.6 per cent, and in states such as Uttar Pradesh and Sikkim, the occupancy rate is as high as 176.5 per cent and 157.3 per cent respectively.
7. The apex court was of the view that like most other viral diseases, the susceptibility of COVID-19 is greater in overcrowded places, mass gatherings and studies indicate that contagious viruses such as COVID-19 proliferate in closed spaces such as prisons.
8. The top court had said that several prison staff enter the prisons regularly, and so do visitors and lawyers and therefore, there is a high risk of transmission of COVID-19 to prison inmates.

## INDIA'S FIRST DEDICATED CORONA VIRUS HOSPITAL

Mukesh Ambani led Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) has announced a slew of measures to fight the deadly coronavirus (COVID-19) including **setting up India's first** dedicated COVID-19 hospital, special quarantine facilities, importing additional test kits and enhancing its production capacities to produce 1,00,000 face-masks per day.

Within two weeks, Sir H.N. Reliance Foundation Hospital in collaboration with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), has set up a dedicated 100 bedded centre at Seven Hills Hospital, Mumbai, for patients who test positive for COVID-19.

What

1. This first-of-its-kind-in-India centre is fully funded by Reliance Foundation and includes a negative pressure room that helps in preventing cross contamination and helps control infection.
2. All beds are equipped with the required infrastructure, bio-medical equipment such as ventilators, pacemakers, dialysis machine and patient monitoring devices.
3. Sir H.N. Reliance Foundation Hospital has also offered to set up special medical facilities to quarantine travellers from notified countries and suspected cases identified through contact tracing.
4. The company is enhancing its production capacities to produce 1,00,000 face-masks per day and a large number of personal protective equipment (PPE), such as **suits and garments, for the nation's health-workers** to equip them further to fight the coronavirus challenge.
5. RIL has also built a fully-equipped isolation facility in Lodhivali, Maharashtra and handed it over to the district authorities.
6. RIL has assured that its retail shops will remain open and the company will provide free fuel from its petroleum retail outlets for all emergency service vehicles used to transport.
7. The company has moved most of its employees to its work-from-home platform except for those who are manning critical roles in maintaining the Jio network for nearly 40 crore customers and for providing uninterrupted supply of fuel, grocery and other essential items of daily consumption.

## WORLD TUBERCULOSIS DAY 2020

Every year on March 24, World Tuberculosis Day is marked to raise awareness about the disease which is the most infectious killer in the world, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). The public is made aware about the negative

consequences of TB with regard to health, society and economics. Moreover, leaders are called upon to step up the fight against tuberculosis.

What

- The day is marked as the anniversary of the discovery of the TB-causing bacterium which was discovered by Dr Robert Koch in 1882. The discovery helped in the diagnosis and cure of the disease.
- Significance of World Tuberculosis Day is to spread awareness regarding TB, which has been tagged by the WHO as the deadliest infection.
- The disease, according to a WHO report released in October 2019, kills over 4,000 people every day and infects nearly 30,000 others.
- This even though the disease is preventable and curable. According to the WHO, the awareness regarding TB has saved an estimated 58 million lives since the efforts were started in 2000.

#### Tuberculosis in India

- The WHO also categorises India among the top 30 critical countries burdened with the threat of TB, with as many as 21.55 lakh cases of infections having been reported in 2018.
- In the same year, the TB case fatality ratio in India was 17%, the report stated, adding that to tackle the menace of TB, the national budget in India was \$583 million (over Rs 4,440 crore).
- According to the WHO, the theme for World **Tuberculosis Day 2020 is the motto, "It's time to end TB"**.
- The global health agency said that the focus this year would remain on urgently fast tracking the response to the infection in order to save lives and end the suffering of millions of people around the world.

## FIRST EVER, ENTITIES GET APPROVAL AT GIFT SEZ VIRTUALLY

The Entire country is locked down due to coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak, a new approval process was created for the first time in the history of unit approval in special economic zone (SEZ). Around 11 entities bagged approval for setting up units in the Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City)'s SEZ virtually. Amid the current lockdown, the SEZ development commissioner, GIFT SEZ and GIFT SEZ authorities met up with all the members of unit approval committee via teleconference, with each entity getting connected turn by turn through the dial-in mechanism. All the application documents and the details were submitted online by the units, with the entire agenda prepared and circulated online to all the

#### Flashback

- GIFT City is an integrated development on 886 acres of land with 62 mn sq. ft. of Built Up area which includes Office spaces, Residential Apartments, Schools, Hospital, Hotels, Clubs, Retail and various Recreational facilities, which makes this **City a truly "Walk to Work" City**.
- GIFT City consists of a conducive Multi-Service SEZ (Special Economic Zone) and an exclusive Domestic Area.
- This City is a Vertical City which will optimize land area consumption for development.
- The City is located on the bank of river Sabarmati connecting the Business capital (Ahmedabad) and Political capital (Gandhinagar) of Gujarat State- The Growth Engine of India.
- GIFT City is a new Financial & Technology Gateway of India for the World.



committee members.

What

1. The most important job for the Ministry of Commerce at this important junction of Covid 19 situation is to provide all possible support to enable businesses to obtain all the approvals sitting at their own premises.
2. We are glad that today through teleconferencing we could approve 11 new units in GIFT SEZ and have innovated new processes for the approval of units in the country, said A K Choudhary, Development Commissioner, GIFT SEZ.
3. The approved 11 new units carry a potential of generating around 500 jobs. With this, the total number of units in the GIFT SEZ now stands at 210.
4. According to Tapan Ray, MD & Group CEO, GIFT City, amidst the current lockdown, GIFT City occupants are running several business continuity operations.
5. GIFT SEZ authorities are working to support entrepreneurs in these difficult times with restricted movement for businesses. We are very confident to achieve substantial growth in our business with the support of excellent infrastructure of GIFT City.

#### OPERATION NAMASTE

Operation Namaste is a campaign launched by the Indian Army to combat the spread of COVID-19 and help the government in its fight against the pandemic. The Indian Army has code-named its anti-COVID-19 operations as Operation Namaste and has, so far, established eight quarantine facilities across the country.

What

1. Army Chief General MM Naravane assured Army personnel to not worry about their near and dear ones and cancellation of leaves as a similar situation had been observed during Operation Parakram and the force had come out successfully from it. He said Army will execute Operation Namaste too successfully.
2. As part of the Operation Namaste campaign, the Army has established command wise helpline numbers. Further, the facility for families of Army to visit the nearest Army camp in case emergency has also been set-up.
3. Army can't maintain social distancing due to tactical and operational reasons and, therefore, to protect the country it is important for Army to keep themselves safe and fit.