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May (Week 4)

INDEX

Contents

Prelims	3
NATIONAL	3
Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups.....	3
Epidemic Disease Act.....	3
UNESCO & World Heritage Site tag.....	4
Supreme Court ruling on creditors invoking personal guarantees.....	5
E-way bill integration with FASTag, RFID.....	6
Bay of Bengal & Yaas cyclone.....	7
The Reclining Buddha and his various other depictions in art.....	8
Shahi Litchi.....	9
NCLT orders liquidation of Devas.....	10
New spider cricket discovered in Chhattisgarh.....	11
Lakshadweep Administration proposals and protests.....	12
INTERNATIONAL	14
China's 'father of hybrid rice' is dead.....	14
BioHub Facility of WHO.....	14
UAE's Golden Visa.....	15
Total lunar eclipse and supermoon.....	16
BRICS Astronomy Working Group moots networking of existing telescopes.....	17
How are tropical cyclones named?.....	17
Long Covid.....	19
Mains	20
GS I	20
Indian youth marrying later, but traditional attitudes remain.....	20
GS II	22
Identifying mutants.....	22
The many benefits of an eco tax.....	23
Expanding the scope of POCSO.....	25
One-state solution, the way forward in Palestine.....	26
Still grappling with online classes.....	29
The end of the road for India's GST.....	30
Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.....	32



GS III	33
Tackling rural economic distress	33
A jobs crisis in the second wave of COVID-19.....	34
GS IV	37
Covid And The Bureaucracy	37
Current Affairs Quiz	39





Prelims

NATIONAL

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Activists and writers have urged the Odisha government to take immediate steps to the prevent loss of lives among Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) like the Dongria Kondh and Bonda due to COVID-19.*

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)

- In India, tribal population makes up for 8.6% of the total population.
- PVTGs are more vulnerable among the tribal groups. Due to this factor, more developed and assertive tribal groups take a major chunk of the tribal development funds because of which PVTGs need more funds directed for their development.
- In 1973, the Dhebar Commission created Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) as a separate category, who are less developed among the tribal groups. In 2006, the Government of India renamed the PTGs as PVTGs.
- In this context, in 1975, the Government of India initiated to identify the most vulnerable tribal groups as a separate category called PVTGs and declared 52 such groups, while in 1993 an additional 23 groups were added to the category, making it a total of 75 PVTGs out of 705 Scheduled Tribes.
- PVTGs have some basic characteristics - they are mostly homogenous, with a small population, relatively physically isolated, absence of written language, relatively simple technology and a slower rate of change etc.
- Among the 75 listed PVTG's the highest number are found in Odisha.

Epidemic Disease Act

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Indian Medical Association (IMA) demanded that the Health Ministry take strong action against Ramdev for allegedly misleading the public through his statements. In a statement, the Association said Ramdev should be prosecuted under the **Epidemic Diseases Act** as “untutored” statements are “a threat to the literate society of the country as well as to the poor people falling prey to him”.*

Background

- The Epidemic Diseases Bill was tabled on January 28, 1897, during an outbreak of **bubonic plague** in Mumbai (then Bombay).
- The existing laws were deemed insufficient to deal with various matters such as “overcrowded houses, neglected latrines and huts, accumulations of filth, insanitary cowsheds and stables, and the disposal of house refuse.
- The Bill called for special powers for governments of Indian provinces and local bodies, including to check passengers off trains and sea routes.

Provisions of Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897

- The Epidemic Diseases Act aims to provide for the better prevention of the spread of dangerous epidemic diseases.
- Under the Act, temporary provisions or regulations can be made to be observed by the public to tackle or prevent the outbreak of a disease.
- The Act contains four sections.
 - **Section 1:** Describes the title and extent of the Act - It extends to the whole of India.
 - **Section 2:** Powers to take special measures
 - It empowers the state governments to tackle special measures and formulate regulations to contain the outbreak.
 - the State may prescribe regulations for the inspection of persons traveling by railway or otherwise, and the segregation, in hospital, temporary accommodation of persons suspected by the inspecting officers to be infected.
 - **Section 2A** of the Act empowers the central government to take steps to prevent the spread of an epidemic.
 - Health is a State subject, but by invoking Section 2 of the Epidemic Diseases Act, advisories and directions of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare will be enforceable.
 - It allows the government to inspect any ship arriving or leaving any port and the power to detain any person intending to sail or arriving in the country.
 - **Section 3:** Penalty for Disobedience
 - The penalties for disobeying any regulation or order made under the Act are according to **section 188 of the Indian Penal Code** (disobedience to order duly promulgated by a public servant).
 - **Section 4:** Legal Protection to Implementing Officers:
 - It gives legal protection to the implementing officers acting under the Act.

Amendment to the Act

- Recently, the Cabinet amended the Act through an ordinance stating that commission or abetment of acts of violence against healthcare service personnel shall be punished with imprisonment for a term of three months to five years, and with fine of Rs 50,000 to Rs 2 lakh.
- In case of causing grievous hurt, imprisonment shall be for a term of six months to seven years and a fine of Rs1 lakh to Rs 5 lakh.

UNESCO & World Heritage Site tag

(Source: Indian Express)

Context: The Maharashtra government has submitted a tentative “serial” nomination seeking the World Heritage Site tag for 14 forts from the era of 17th century Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj on the theme of Maratha Military Architecture in Maharashtra. The serial nomination was forwarded by the Archaeological Survey of India to UNESCO through the Ministry of Culture. UNESCO has accepted the nomination in Tentative Lists of its World Heritage Site.



How it gives the tag?

- According to the World Heritage Convention's operational guidelines, a tentative list is an "inventory" of properties a country believes deserves to be a World Heritage Site.
- After UNESCO includes a property in the Tentative List, that country has to prepare a nomination document that will be considered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.
- A World Heritage Site is a location with an "outstanding universal value".
- This signifies "cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity".

The 14 Forts in Maharashtra's proposal

- **Raigad Fort** - Originally called Rairi, it is built on a large wedge of a hill in the Sahyadris, separated from the main range by a ravine. The capital fort of the Maratha Empire, it was rebuilt for the coronation of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.
- **Rajgad Fort** - Hill fort in Pune district, capital of the Maratha Empire under Chhatrapati Shivaji for almost 26 years, before the capital moved to the Raigad Fort.
- **Shivneri Fort** - Near Junnar in Pune district. Shivaji's birthplace, it consists of 7 gates. It is an example of Bahamani/ Nizamshahi architecture providing a backdrop to narrative of guerrilla warfare.
- **Torna Fort** - Fort in Pune district, captured by Shivaji in 1646, when he was 16, and marked the beginning of the Maratha empire.
- **Lohagad** - Close to Lonavala, it overlooks one of the most picturesque valleys and is believed to have been built in the 14th century. It is an example of Maratha hill fort architecture until Peshwa period.
- **Salher Fort** - One of the highest forts in the Sahyadris, located in Dolhari range of Nashik. The fort witnessed a key battle in 1672 between Marathas and Mughals.
- **Mulher Fort** - In Nashik; one of three forts situated on a hill, flanked by Mora to the east and Hatgad to the west. The surrender of Mulher ended the third Maratha War.
- **Rangana Fort** - In Kolhapur, bordering Sindhudurg. Aurangzeb tried to conquer it along with Bhudargad and Samangad in his Deccan campaign, did not succeed.
- **Ankai Tankai Forts** - In Nashik district, Ankai and Tankai are separate forts on adjacent hills, with a common fortification wall.
- **Kasa Fort** - Popularly known as Padmadurg, built on a rocky island off coast of Murud, and provided a base for naval military operations.
- **Sindhudurg Fort** - Built by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in 1668, This sea fort is considered a masterpiece in military defence..
- **Alibag Fort** - Popularly known as Kulaba Fort, it was chosen as one of the forts to be modelled as a naval base by Chhatrapati Shivaji.
- **Suvarnadurg** - Built on an island, it was repaired and strengthened by Shivaji Maharaj in 1660.
- **Khanderi Fort** - Khanderi, officially named as Kanhoji Angre Island in 1998, is 20 km south of Mumbai. Built in 1679, Khanderi Fort was the site of many battles between Shivaji Maharaj's forces and the navy of the Siddhis.

Supreme Court ruling on creditors invoking personal guarantees

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: Six months after it transferred all the cases related to personal insolvency to itself, the Supreme Court has ruled that **creditors can proceed against promoters of defaulting companies to recover debt if such promoters have given personal guarantees to secure funds. The top court has also said that lenders can**

also proceed against the promoters of a defaulting company even when the corporate insolvency resolution process of the firm itself has not been completed.

What did the Supreme Court say about personal insolvency under IBC?

- One of the most important things that the SC has said is that mere approval of a resolution plan for a debt-laden company does not automatically discharge a promoter from their liability in lieu of the personal guarantee they had given to secure the funding for the company.
- Since personal guarantees from promoters are a kind of assurance to lenders that the monies being borrowed will be returned, the apex court has said that under the contract of guarantee, the liability of the promoter will be over and above the liabilities of the company.
- Since lenders are, in most cases, forced to take a haircut on their pending dues when a resolution plan is approved for a debt-laden company, the ruling by the Supreme Court allows them to pursue promoters for additional recovery of debt.

What is a personal guarantee? How do promoters use this route to get funds?

- A personal guarantee is most likely to be furnished by a promoter or promoter entity when the banks demand for collateral which equals the risk they are taking by lending to the firm, which may not be doing so well.
- It is different from the collateral that firms give to banks to take loans, as Indian corporate laws say that individuals such as promoters are different from businesses and the two are very separate entities.
- A personal guarantee, therefore, is an assurance from the promoters or promoter group that if the lender allows them the fund, they will be able to turn around the loss-making unit and repay the said loan on time.

Why does the government want promoters to be more liable for the funds they borrow?

- Bad loans have been a major problem for banks and financial creditors over the past decade. Add to that, promoters had been able to secure funds from banks without the due diligence in most cases because of their past transaction history.
- To put a stop to this, the government had in December 2019 introduced the provision which gave banks the power to move application for initiation of insolvency against personal guarantors to corporate debtors.
- Additionally, the finance ministry nudged banks to also pursue personal insolvency cases against promoters who had furnished personal guarantees for the loans taken by their firms, which later was not re-paid as per the agreed schedule.
- Both these steps were taken to make promoters more liable for their actions and to check the practice of securing monies for a particular project but then diverting it to other projects or works.

E-way bill integration with FASTag, RFID

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *In a move that is expected to help curb tax evasion, Goods and Services Tax (GST) authorities will now be able to track real-time data of commercial vehicle (CV) movement on highways by integration of the e-way bill (EWB) system with FASTag and RFID. The integration of e-way bill, RFID and FASTag will allow live vigilance for e-way bill compliances by businesses and help prevent revenue leakage by real-time identification of cases of recycling of e-way bills or non-generation of e-way bills.*

What is the new system?

- Tax officers can now access reports about vehicles that have passed the selected tolls without e-way bills in the past few minutes. They can also view details of vehicles carrying critical commodities specific to the state that have passed the selected toll.
- Further, tax authorities can view details of any suspicious vehicles and vehicles of e-way bills generated by suspicious taxpayer GST identification numbers (GSTINs) that have passed the selected toll on a near real-time basis.
- Officers can use these reports while conducting vigilance and make the vigilance activity more effective. Moreover, officers of the audit and enforcement wing can use these reports to identify fraudulent transactions like bill trading, recycling of e-way bills.
- From January 1, 2021, RFID/FASTag has been integrated with the e-way bill system and a transporter is required to have a radio-frequency identification (RFID) tag in his vehicle and details of the e-way bill generated for goods being carried by the vehicles are uploaded into the RFID system.
- When a vehicle passes the RFID tag reader on the highway, the details fed into the device get uploaded on the government portal.
- The information is later used by revenue authorities to validate the supplies made by a GST registered person.

What are e-way bills?

- Under the indirect tax regime, e-way bills have been made mandatory for inter-state transportation of goods valued over Rs 50,000 from April 2018, with exemption to precious item such as gold.
- On an average, 25 lakh goods vehicle movements from more than 800 tolls are reported on a daily basis to the e-way bill system.
- About 180 crore e-way bills were generated in three years till March 2021.
- Of this, only 7 crore bills were verified by tax officers. In the 2020-21 fiscal, 61.68 crore e-way bills were generated, of which 2.27 crore were picked up for verification.
- The top five states which generated the maximum number of e-way bills for inter-state movement of goods are Gujarat, Maharashtra, Haryana, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.
- The top five sectors where maximum e-way bills were generated in the past three years are textiles, electrical machinery, machinery and mechanical appliances, iron and steel, and automobiles.

Bay of Bengal & Yaas cyclone

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Climate scientists say the Bay of Bengal, where Cyclone ‘Yaas’ has formed, is at least two degrees warmer than what is normal for this time of the year.*

Details:

- Generally, cyclones in the Bay of Bengal are ferocious and cause significant devastation. Amphan was a super cyclone that ravaged West Bengal in March last year.
- It was the strongest storm that hit India’s eastern coast since the super cyclone of 1999, that struck Paradip, Odisha. Before Amphan, Fani in 2019 also hit Odisha, causing immense damage that lasted weeks.
- Cyclones in the Bay of Bengal are not unexpected in May and result from increased ocean surface temperatures.
- The formation of storms in this period are favourable for drawing in the monsoon into the Andamans and subsequently to the Kerala coast.
- Researchers have pointed to trends that suggest a relative decrease in the number of cyclones in the Bay of Bengal and a rise in the Arabian Sea.

- About 60% of the cyclones that form in these seas make landfall in India causing damage and devastation, according to data from the Earth Sciences Ministry.

The Reclining Buddha and his various other depictions in art

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: May 26 was Buddha Jayanti, Buddha Purnima, or Vesak — India's largest statue of the Reclining Buddha was to have been installed at the Buddha International Welfare Mission temple in Bodh Gaya. The ceremony has been put off due to Covid-19 restrictions, but the giant 100-foot fibreglass statue, built over three months by a team of 22 artisans in Kolkata, remains a fascinating work of art, as much for its size as for the way The Buddha has been depicted.

The Reclining Buddha

- A reclining Buddha statue or image represents The Buddha during his last illness, about to enter Parinirvana, the stage of great salvation after death that can only be attained by enlightened souls.
- The Buddha's death came when he was 80 years old, in a state of meditation, in Kushinagar in eastern Uttar Pradesh, close to the state's border with Bihar.
- Mahaparinirvana of the Buddha is supposed to be a very important event that happened in Kushinagar; it is not simply a demise, it is the great demise, after which there is no rebirth for him. So, it is his final going away.



Iconographic representation

- Statues and images of the Reclining Buddha show him lying on his right side, his head resting on a cushion or on his right elbow.
- It is a popular iconographic depiction in Buddhism, and is meant to show that all beings have the potential to be awakened and be released from the cycle of death and rebirth.
- The Reclining Buddha was first depicted in Gandhara art, which began in the period between 50 BC and 75 AD, and peaked during the Kushana period from the first to the fifth centuries AD.
- Since the Buddha was against idol worship, in the centuries immediately following his parinirvana (483 BC), his representation was through symbols. As the devotional aspect subsequently entered Buddhist practice, however, iconographic representations of The Buddha began.

Reclining Buddha outside India

- In Sri Lanka and India, the Buddha is mostly shown in sitting postures, while the reclining postures are more prevalent in Thailand and other parts of South East Asia.
- The largest Reclining Buddha in the world is the 600-foot Winsein Tawya Buddha built in 1992 in Mawlamyine, Myanmar.



The largest Reclining Buddha in the world, Winsein Tawya Buddha in Mawlamyine, Myanmar.

- In the late 15th century, a 70-metre statue of the Reclining Buddha was built at the Hindu temple site of Baphuon in Cambodia's Angkor.
- The Bhamala Buddha Parinirvana in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, which dates back to the 2nd century AD, is considered the oldest statue of its kind in the world.
- There are several statues of the Reclining Buddha in China, Thailand, Japan, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

Reclining Buddha in India

- Cave No. 26 of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Ajanta contains a 24-foot-long and nine-foot-tall sculpture of the Reclining Buddha, believed to have been carved in the 5th century AD.
- Kushinagar, where the Buddha actually attained parinirvana, has a 6-metre-long red sandstone monolith statue of the Reclining Buddha inside the Parinirvana Stupa.

Other depictions of the Buddha

- Elsewhere in India, Prof Panth said, there are a lot of Buddhas in sitting postures, mostly pertaining to his Enlightenment rather than to his demise.
- At the Mahabodhi temple, the Buddha is sitting in the bhoomi-sparsha mudra, where his hand is pointing towards the ground. It symbolises earth as being witness to his enlightenment.
- At Sarnath, where the Buddha gave his first sermon, the stone statue has a hand gesture called the dharma-chakra mudra, which signifies preaching. This is also the most popular depiction in India, along with the Bodhi tree depiction.
- Experts say the Buddha is depicted in over a hundred poses around the world. While the Sitting Buddha — most common depiction — is believed to be teaching or meditating, the Standing Buddha signifies rising to teach after reaching nirvana.
- The Walking Buddha is either beginning his journey toward enlightenment or returning after giving a sermon. This is the least common of the Buddha postures, and is seen mostly in Thailand.

Shahi Litchi

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *First consignment of GI certified Shahi Litchi from Bihar exported to the U.K.*

Shahi Litchi:

- Shahi litchi was the fourth agricultural product to get GI certification from Bihar in 2018, after Jardalu mango, Katarni rice and Magahi paan.



- GI registration for Shahi Litchi is held with the Muzaffarpur-based Litchi Growers Association of Bihar.
- Muzaffarpur, Vaishali, Samastipur, Champaran, Begusarai districts and adjoining areas of Bihar have favourable climate for growing Shahi Litchi.
- This variety of litchi is juicier and pulpier than the other varieties found in the rest of the country.
- In Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga and nearby areas, the conditions are ideal for litchi cultivation, because of humid conditions and alluvial soil.
- Litchi cultivation in India was initially introduced in Bengal after which it spread to other regions including Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab.
- India is the second-largest producer of litchi in the world and Bihar is the leading state for litchi production in the country.

NCLT orders liquidation of Devas

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has ordered the liquidation of Devas Multimedia Pvt. Ltd. while declaring that the company was not only incorporated in a fraudulent manner to carry out unlawful purposes but also its management continued to resort to fraudulent activities in relation to its 2005 controversial contract to get bandwidth from Antrix Corporation, the Indian Space Research Organisation's commercial arm.*

Details:

- The NCLT has directed the Official Liquidator (OL) to take expeditious steps to liquidate the company in order to prevent it from perpetuating its fraudulent activities and abusing the process of law in enforcing the award passed in 2015 by the arbitration tribunal of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), and submit a report by July 7.
- “The incorporation of Devas itself was with fraudulent motive and unlawful object to collude and connive with the then officials of Antrix and to misuse/abuse process of law, to bring money to India and divert it under dubious methods to foreign countries,” the Bengaluru Bench of the NCLT said in its verdict delivered on May 25.
- A Bench comprising Rajeshwara Rao Vittanala (Member-Judicial) and Ashutosh Chandra (Member-Technical) delivered the verdict while allowing a company petition filed by Antrix on January 19, 2021, after obtaining sanction from the Central government to liquidate Devas.
- The NCLT found that “Devas failed to show any cogent reason as why it should not be wound up and to keep its name on the Registrar of Companies

Game over | The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has ordered the liquidation of Devas Multimedia Pvt. Ltd. Following is a timeline of events that led to the order:

December 17, 2004: Devas incorporated

January 28, 2004: Devas and Antrix sign agreement

February 12, 2011: Antrix terminates agreement with Devas

June 29, 2011: Devas invokes arbitration against Antrix as per International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) rules

September 14, 2015: ICC arbitration awards \$1.2 billion in favour of Devas

2015-2017: Probe against

Devas by CBI and ED; Antrix questions arbitration award in Bengaluru court

November 4, 2020: Supreme Court keeps arbitral award in abeyance, transfers Antrix plea to Delhi HC from Bengaluru court

January 18-19, 2021: Centre grants sanction for Antrix to seek winding up of Devas; plea filed in NCLT; provisional liquidator appointed

May 25, 2021: NCLT, Bengaluru Bench, orders winding up of Devas



(RoC), Karnataka. The only reason apparent on record, by perusal of various pleading raised in the instant petition is that it wants to prosecute enforcement of award in question, in the name of the company in the courts.”

National Company Law Appellate Tribunal

- The NCLAT was constituted under Section 410 of the Companies Act, 2013 to hear appeals against the orders of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT).
 - NCLT is a quasi-judicial body that adjudicates issues relating to companies.
- It is also the appellate tribunal for orders passed by the NCLT(s) under Section 61 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016, and for orders passed by the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) under Sections 202 and 211 of the IBC.
- Any person aggrieved by any order of the NCLAT may file an appeal to the Supreme Court.

New spider cricket discovered in Chhattisgarh

(Source: [Indian Express](https://www.indianexpress.com))

Context: *Jayanti* has become the twelfth subgenus, or species, of cricket identified under the genus *Arachnomimus* Saussure, 1897. Found in the Kurra caves of Chhattisgarh in April 2021 by a team of zoologists.

What is Arachnomimus Saussure, 1897?

- Arachnomimus is the genus name given by Swiss Entomologist Henri Louis Frédéric de Saussure in 1878 to crickets that resembled spiders.
- The word Arachnomimus is derived from two Ancient Greek words — ἀράχνη (arákhnē, means “spider”) and μῖμος (mîmos, means “imitator, actor”).
- This is apt because crickets of this group are commonly called spider crickets because of their smaller body size and long legs.



How is the newly discovered subgenus different?

- The newly discovered subgenus, Indimimus, is different from the two subgenera, Arachnomimus and Euarachnomimus, because of the male genitalia structure.
- Insects have a lock-and-key model genitalia structure which is unique to each subgenus.
- Genus and subgenus are taxonomic levels created by taxonomists to classify organisms.
- A genus is represented by a set of diagnostic characters.
- Certain variations in characters compel taxonomists to divide the genus into subgenus and document the variation.

Why is the discovery significant?

- Crickets are noticeable for their loud calls, especially at night. Male crickets produce this sound by rubbing their wings against each other to attract females.



- The females listen to these calls using ears located on their legs and approach the males for mating and reproduction.
- Interestingly, males of the new Jayanti subgenus cannot produce sound and their females don't have ears.
- The crickets were found on the walls of the Kurra caves which don't have light inside. They may be communicating by beating their abdomen or any other body part on the cave walls.
- Vibrational communication is one of the softest but fastest modes of signal transmission. Further studies on their skills of vibrational communication may help in designing hearing aids for human which can capture quietest signals and amplify to an audible hearing range, the researchers explain.

Lakshadweep Administration proposals and protests

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: Over the last few weeks, public anger has been simmering in the Lakshadweep islands over a number of controversial proposals floated by the Union Territory Administrator, Praful K Patel. Also the Administrator of the UT of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, Patel was given additional charge of Lakshadweep following the death of Dineshwar Sharma last December. While the UT Administration has said Patel's proposals are aimed at ensuring safety and well-being of residents along with promoting the islands as a tourist destination on par with the Maldives, residents view them as ripping the social and cultural fabric of the islands.

The Proposals and Protests

Cow slaughter & beef

- **PROPOSAL:** An order from the Administration seeks to ban the slaughter of cow, calf, bull and buffalo without a certificate from a competent authority. It prohibits the sale, transport and storage of beef and beef products. Penalties include a jail term up to one year and a fine of Rs 10,000. The Administration has not provided an explanation on why the rule was brought in.
- **PROTEST:** Residents view the rule as a direct infringement on their culture and eating habits. They allege the rule was decided without consultation with local bodies.

Two-child policy

- **PROPOSAL:** Under the Draft Panchayat Regulation 2021, the Administration aims to bar people with more than two children from becoming a member of the gram panchayat. For those who already have more than two children, the regulation does not disqualify them provided they do not have further children after the date on which the rule comes into effect.
- **PROTEST:** Locals have questioned the motive. The NCP and the Congress too have opposed the move.

Serving liquor to tourists

- **PROPOSAL:** The Administration has decided to allow liquor to be served at resorts on inhabited islands. Currently, prohibition is in place on all inhabited islands, with liquor served only at resorts on the uninhabited Bangaram island. Collector S Asker Ali clarified that liquor permits would be given only to resorts for tourists, not for locals.
- **PROTEST:** Residents have alleged that the move will lead to a proliferation of liquor sales on the island, which had been observing near-prohibition until now.

Land acquisition powers

- **PROPOSAL:** The Administration brought in a draft Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation (LDAR) to oversee development of towns on the islands, with sweeping changes in the way land can be acquired and utilised. It talks of declaration of ‘planning areas’ and constitution of ‘planning and development authorities’ for preparing a land use map and register, ostensibly for large projects.
- **PROTEST:** Residents have protested against the way it was prepared and pushed through without consultation. They fear large infrastructure and tourism projects can destabilise the ecology, and that the notification gives powers to the Administration to remove small landholdings of ST residents.

Anti-Goonda regulation

- **PROPOSAL:** The draft Lakshadweep Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Regulation provides for powers to detain a person for up to one year to prevent him from “acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order”. It allows for detention for anti-social activities from six months to a year without legal representation. The Collector said while the island remains peaceful, there have been reports of drugs being found along with weapons and live ammunition. He said the regulation is required to keep the “youth from getting misguided by illegal businesses”.
- **PROTEST:** Residents are sceptical of the need for such a stringent law in a UT with one of the lowest crime rates in the country. They allege it has been brought in to arrest those opposed to the Administration.

Covid-19 SOPs

- **PROPOSAL:** For a year, Lakshadweep did not record any case of Covid-19, thanks to stringent quarantine protocols and testing of inbound travellers. Last December, Covid-19 SOPs were diluted by doing away with mandatory quarantine for travellers at Kochi and Kavaratti. Instead, anyone with a negative RT-PCR certificate issued in the previous 48 hours could travel to Lakshadweep. The Administration said the SOPs were changed in accordance with Home Ministry rules and to allow for reopening of the economy.
- **PROTEST:** The change led to the island losing its ‘green zone’ tag and a spurt in infections in subsequent months. As of May 28, the Union Territory has reported over 7,300 cases and 28 deaths. Islanders blame the Administration for mismanagement in handling of the pandemic.

Lakshadweep Islands

- **GEOGRAPHY:** 36 islands across 12 atolls, closest to Kerala, on which it depends for essential supplies. Only 10 of the islands are inhabited. Once a part of Malabar district of the Madras Presidency, Lakshadweep was given Union Territory status following Kerala state’s formation in 1956.
- **DEMOGRAPHY:** With a population of 65,000 (2011 Census), Lakshadweep is India’s smallest Union Territory. It has the highest population share of Muslims (96%) and Scheduled Tribes (94.8%) among the UTs. Residents speak Malayalam and Divehi.



INTERNATIONAL

China's 'father of hybrid rice' is dead

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Yuan Longping, a Chinese agricultural scientist whose breakthroughs in hybrid rice brought food security to China and transformed agriculture worldwide, died recently aged 91.*

Details:

- Mr. Yuan, who is celebrated in China as the “father of hybrid rice” for his contributions to agriculture and beloved for his simple demeanour that endured despite the many honours that came his way, was still conducting research at the Sanya Hybrid Rice Research Base until he suffered a fall in March this year.
- In 2004, he was honoured with the World Food Prize “for his breakthrough achievement in developing the genetic materials and technologies essential for breeding high-yielding hybrid rice varieties”.
- His “new hybrid rice technology not only benefited China, but was also enthusiastically adopted in other countries,” read the citation from the World Food Prize Foundation, noting that “he and his research associates traveled to India, Vietnam, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the United States to provide advice and consultation to rice research personnel” and trained over 3,000 scientists from more than 50 countries.
- His desire to experiment with rice was borne out of hardship. In 1960, when he was 30 years old, China was in the midst of a famine unleashed by Mao Zedong’s “Great Leap Forward” policy in 1958 that devastated the agriculture sector and led to mass starvation and the deaths of millions.
- His experiments with rice went against conventional wisdom, as the World Food Prize Foundation noted, at a time when “classical genetics concluded that heterosis — a phenomenon in which the progeny of two distinctly different parents grow faster, yield more, and resist stress better than either parent — was not possible in self-pollinated crops such as rice.”
- He believed it was possible with rice, and published his first findings in 1964. Nine years later, he developed “the first hybrid rice combination called Nan-you No. 2 which, due to heterosis, boasted yields 20 percent higher than previous varieties,” the foundation said.
- China’s rice production rose by 47.5% by the 1990s, even as some five million hectares of erstwhile paddy land was shifted to cash crops such as vegetables, fruits, cotton, and rapeseed.

BioHub Facility of WHO

(Source: [Down to Earth](#))

Context: *The World Health Organization (WHO) and Switzerland May 25, 2021 signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to launch a BioHub facility that will allow rapid sharing of pathogens between laboratories and partners to facilitate a better analysis and preparedness against them.*

Details:

- The move is significant in the view of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the need to underline the importance of sharing pathogen information to assess risks and launch countermeasures.
- The facility will help in safe reception, sequencing, storage and preparation of biological materials for distribution to other laboratories, so as to facilitate global preparedness against these pathogens.



- Pathogens are now shared bilaterally between countries: A process that can be sluggish and deny the benefits to some.
- The BioHub, according to the WHO press release, will enable member states to share biological materials with and via the BioHub under pre-agreed conditions, including biosafety, biosecurity, and other applicable regulations.
- This will ensure timeliness and predictability in response activities.

UAE's Golden Visa

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *In 2019, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) implemented a new system for long-term residence visas, thereby enabling foreigners to live, work and study in the UAE without the need of a national sponsor and with 100 per cent ownership of their business.*

What does the Golden Visa offer?

- The Golden Visa system essentially offers long-term residency (5 and 10 years) to people belonging to the following groups: investors, entrepreneurs, individuals with outstanding talents the likes of researchers, medical professionals and those within the scientific and knowledge fields, and remarkable students.
- The main benefit of the visa will be security as through the issuance of the Golden Visa, the UAE government has made it clear that they are committed to providing expatriates, investors and essentially everyone looking to make the UAE their home an extra reason to feel secure about their future.

How does one apply for the visa?

- Interested individuals, who would like to apply for the Golden Visa, may do so through the website of the Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship — ICA (the eChannel for residency and citizenship), or the General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs (GDRFA) which works under the ministry.
- While ICA offers only online channels, GDRFA offers both online and offline channels.
- The process is quite straightforward with candidates required to submit the necessary documents and be willing to relocate to the UAE in accordance with their business venture.

Who are eligible to apply?

- For the 10-year visa, investors having no less than AED 10 million worth of public investment, either in the form of an investment fund or a company, can apply.
- However, at least 60 per cent of the total investment must not be in the form of real estate and the invested amount must not be loaned, or in case of assets, investors must assume full ownership.
- The investor must be able to retain the investment for a minimum of three years as well. This 10-year long visa may be extended to include business partners, providing that each partner contributes AED 10 million.
- The long-term visa can also include the holder's spouse and children, as well as one executive director and one advisor.
- Besides entrepreneurs, individuals with specialised talent can also apply for the visa. They include doctors, researchers, scientists, investors and artists. These individuals may be granted a 10-year visa following accreditations granted by their respective departments and fields and the visa will also be extended to their spouses and children.
- For the 5-year visa, the norms are largely similar for investors with the only difference being the amount of investment required is set at AED 5 million.

- Exceptional high school and university students are eligible for a 5-year residency visa in the UAE. High school students who rank top in the country (a minimum grade of 95 per cent) and students from certain universities with a GPA of 3.75 or higher upon graduation.
- In addition to the aforementioned, foreign nationals who are looking to set up their business in the UAE may also apply for permanent residency (5 years) through the Golden Business Visa scheme.

Total lunar eclipse and supermoon

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The Moon had the nearest approach to Earth on May 26, and therefore will appear to be the closest and largest Full Moon or “supermoon” of 2021. This celestial event coincides with this year’s only total lunar eclipse, the first since January 2019. Significantly, a supermoon and a total lunar eclipse have not occurred together in nearly six years.*

What is a supermoon?

- NASA notes that a supermoon occurs when the Moon’s orbit is closest to the Earth at the same time that the Moon is full.
- As the Moon orbits the Earth, there is a point of time when the distance between the two is the least (called the perigee when the average distance is about 360,000 km from the Earth) and a point of time when the distance is the most (called the apogee when the distance is about 405,000 km from the Earth).
- Now, when a full Moon appears at the point when the distance between the Earth and the Moon is the least, not only does it appear to be brighter but it is also larger than a regular full moon.
- According to NASA, the term supermoon was coined by astrologer Richard Nolle in 1979. In a typical year, there may be two to four full supermoons and two to four new supermoons in a row. About a month ago on April 26, there was another full moon, but the supermoon that will be witnessed on May 26 will be closer to the Earth by a margin of 0.04 percent.



What happened on May 26?

- On May 26, two celestial events will take place at the same time.
- One is the supermoon and the other is a total lunar eclipse, which is when the Moon and Sun are on opposite sides of the Earth. Because of the total lunar eclipse, the moon will also appear to be red.
- This is because the Earth will block some of the light from the Sun from reaching the moon and as the Earth’s atmosphere filters the light, it will soften “the edge of our planet’s shadow” “giving the Moon a deep, rosy glow.”

BRICS Astronomy Working Group moots networking of existing telescopes

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The BRICS Astronomy Working Group has recommended networking of telescopes in member countries and creating a regional data network.*

Details:

- Under the science, technology and innovation track of the BRICS 2021 calendar, India hosted the seventh meeting of BRICS Astronomy Working Group (BAWG) on online mode from May 19 and 20.
- Also present were astronomers from these countries. In the BAWG meeting, the delegates agreed to develop a flagship project in this area.
- It witnessed participation from all five BRICS countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – with more than 50 participants, including researchers, academicians and government officials.

Future directions

- The members of the working group also indicated future directions of research in this area such as building a network of intelligent telescopes and data, study of transient astronomical phenomena in the universe, big data, artificial intelligence, machine learning applications to process the voluminous data generated by the enhanced multi-wavelength telescope observatory.
- The delegates deliberated on strategic and operational matters and recommended the networking of existing telescopes in BRICS countries and creating regional data network.
- They agreed to develop a flagship project in this area, according to a statement by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India.
- From the Indian side, the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), Pune, and the DST coordinated the meeting.

Enhance collaboration

- The BAWG, which provides a platform for BRICS member countries to collaborate in the field of astronomy, recommended that each country should present the scientific results of the work being carried out in their country.
- This will help seek funding support to realise the flagship project whenever funding opportunities were announced by BRICS funding agencies. The BAWG noted the importance of enhancing collaboration among astronomers from the BRICS countries.

How are tropical cyclones named?

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Whenever a cyclone hits a country, the first thing that strikes the minds of most is what these names mean. When Tauktae hit the western coast of India earlier this week, people were seen searching for the origin of the name. The cyclone, which was named by Myanmar, means “gecko” — a highly vocal lizard — in Burmese dialect. Similarly, Yaas, the cyclonic storm that had hit the coasts of Odisha and West Bengal, has been named by Oman. Yaas refers to a tree that has a good fragrance and in English, the word is similar to Jasmine.*

How are the cyclones named?

- In 2000, a group of nations called WMO/ESCAP (World Meteorological Organisation/United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific), which comprised Bangladesh, India, the

Maldives, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand, decided to start naming cyclones in the region.

- After each country sent in suggestions, the WMO/ESCAP Panel on Tropical Cyclones (PTC) finalised the list.
- The WMO/ESCAP expanded to include five more countries in 2018 — Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.
- The list of 169 cyclone names released by IMD in April 2020 were provided by these countries — 13 suggestions from each of the 13 countries.

Why is it important to name cyclones?

- Adopting names for cyclones makes it easier for people to remember, as opposed to numbers and technical terms.
- Apart from the general public, it also helps the scientific community, the media, disaster managers etc.
- With a name, it is easy to identify individual cyclones, create awareness of its development, rapidly disseminate warnings to increased community preparedness and remove confusion where there are multiple cyclonic systems over a region.

What are the guidelines to adopt names of cyclones?

- While picking names for cyclones, here are some of the rules that countries need to follow. If these guidelines are following, the name is accepted by the panel on tropical cyclones (PTC) that finalises the selection:
 - The proposed name should be neutral to (a) politics and political figures (b) religious believes, (c) cultures and (d) gender
 - Name should be chosen in such a way that it does not hurt the sentiments of any group of population over the globe
 - It should not be very rude and cruel in nature
 - It should be short, easy to pronounce and should not be offensive to any member
 - The maximum length of the name will be eight letters
 - The proposed name should be provided with its pronunciation and voice over
 - The names of tropical cyclones over the north Indian Ocean will not be repeated. Once used, it will cease to be used again. Thus, the name should be new.

What cyclone names has India suggested?

- The 13 names in the recent list that have been suggested by India include: Gati, Tej, Murasu, Aag, Vyom, Jhar (pronounced Jhor), Probaho, Neer, Prabhanjan, Ghurni, Ambud, Jaladhi and Vega.
- Some of the names picked by India were suggested by the general public. An IMD committee is formed to finalise the names before sending it to the PTC.
- Here is the complete list of 169 names. The first cyclone name which will be chosen will be the one in the first row of the first column — Nisarga by Bangladesh. Next, India's choice, Gati, will be chosen, and so on.
- Subsequent cyclones are being named sequentially, column-wise, with each cyclone given the name immediately below that of the previous cyclone. Once the bottom of the column is reached, the sequence moves to the top of the next column.

Bangladesh	Nisarga	Biparjoy	Arnab	Upakul	Barshon	Rajani	Nishith
India	Gati	Tej	Murasu	Aag	Vyom	Jhar	Probaho
Iran	Nivar	Hamoon	Akvan	Sepand	Booran	Anahita	Azar
Maldives	Burevi	Midhili	Kaani	Odi	Kenau	Endheri	Riyau
Myanmar	Tauktae	Michaung	Ngamann	Kyarhit	Sapakyee	Wetwun	Mwaihout
Oman	Yaas	Remal	Sail	Naseem	Muzn	Sadeem	Dima
Pakistan	Gulab	Asna	Sahab	Afshan	Manahil	Shujana	Parwaz



Qatar	Shaheen	Dana	Lulu	Mouj	Suhail	Sadaf	Reem
Saudi	Jawad	Fengal	Ghazeer	Asif	Sidrah	Hareed	Faid
Sri Lanka	Asani	Shakhti	Gigum	Gagana	Verambha	Garjana	Neeba
Thailand	Sitrang	Montha	Thianyt	Bulan	Phutala	Aiyara	Saming
UAE	Mandous	Senyar	Afoor	Nahhaam	Quffal	Daaman	Deem
Yemen	Mocha	Ditwah	Diksam	Sira	Bakhur	Ghwyzi	Hawf

- After Hawf, the list moves on to Urmi, Neer, Pooyan etc.

Bangladesh	Urmi	Meghala	Samiron	Pratikul	Sarobor	Mahanisha
India	Neer	Prabhanjan	Ghurni	Ambud	Jaladhi	Vega
Iran	Pooyan	Arsham	Hengame	Savas	Tahamtan	Toofan
Maldives	Guruva	Kurangi	Kuredhi	Horangu	Thundi	Faana
Myanmar	Kywe	Pinku	Yinkaung	Linyone	Kyeekan	Bautphat
Oman	Manjour	Rukam	Watad	Al-jarz	Rabab	Raad
Pakistan	Zannata	Sarsar	Badban	Sarrab	Gulnar	Waseq
Qatar	Rayhan	Anbar	Oud	Bahar	Seef	Fanar
Saudi	Kaseer	Nakheel	Haboob	Bareq	Alreem	Wabil
Sri Lanka	Ninnada	Viduli	Ogha	Salitha	Rivi	Rudu
Thailand	Kraison	Matcha	Mahingsa	Phraewa	Asuri	Thara
UAE	Gargoor	Khubb	Degl	Athmad	Boom	Saffar
Yemen	Balhaf	Brom	Shuqra	Fartak	Darsah	Samhah

Long Covid

(Source: [Indian Express](https://www.indianexpress.com))

Context: A LARGE number of Covid patients who did not require hospitalisation are complaining about lingering post-recovery health issues including Covid-like symptoms of mild to moderate fever, bodyache, breathlessness, coughing, heaviness in the chest, chronic fatigue, joint pains, headache, brain fog, insomnia etc. This may be referred to as Long Covid.

What leads to Long Covid?

- According to doctors, the coronavirus is not only causing respiratory problems but several others too.
- It can affect the functioning of several other parts of the body, including lungs, liver, heart, nervous system, kidneys etc. People with co-morbidities are more vulnerable.
- The effect on these organs is different from person to person, depending upon their lifestyles (sedentary or active), their immune system and functioning of their organs.
- Hence, several recovered persons are experiencing Long Covid which can last for three months or beyond.
- It takes time to repair these organs and till that time those who have recovered from Covid may experience the symptoms.

Mains

GS I

Indian youth marrying later, but traditional attitudes remain

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: As norms and values around marriage and family life change, the Indian youth too are being influenced by recent trends. Compared to a decade ago, youth are now marrying later in life. Lokniti-CSDS Youth Studies in 2016 and 2007 show the proportion of married youth decreased by eight percentage points from 55% in 2007 to 47% in 2016 .

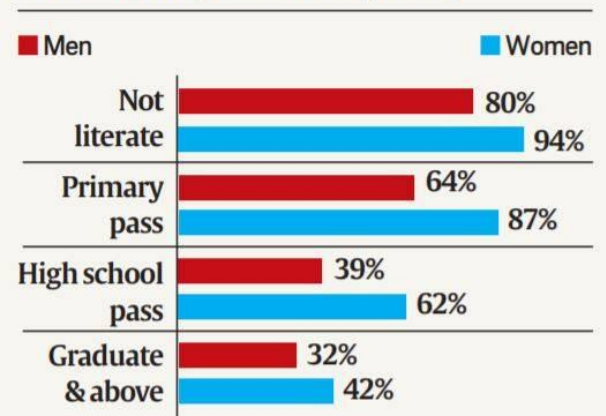
Details:

- As one would expect, the data highlight that a much higher share of young men were unmarried (61%) compared to women (41%) (Table 1).
- Educational attainment too is an important factor associated with marriage. One observes a decline in the proportion of married youth with successive levels of education (Figure 1).

Table 1: Proportion of married youth

	2007		2016	
	Married	Unmarried	Married	Unmarried
All	55%	45%	47%	53%
Men	49%	51%	39%	61%
Women	63%	37%	59%	41%

Figure 1: Proportion of married young men and women by education (2016)



Marital preferences

- In an age of online dating, growth of social networking and matrimonial sites, arranged marriages are still a preferred choice: 84% of the married youth in 2016 said their marriage was decided by families and only 6% reported self-choice (Figure 2).
- Unmarried youth too showed an inclination towards arranged marriages with 50% saying they would opt for this kind of marriage. Only 12% said they would opt for self-choice marriage. Surprisingly, the 2016 study indicates that a mere 3% of youth had placed a matrimonial advertisement.
- The study also showed that 31% of the youth said their parents will have or had a lot of influence on their marriage decision. This influence was greater for women (35%) than men (28%).
- Moreover, data from a recent study, 'Politics and Society between Election', show there is some change in attitudes — if not in practice — when it comes to decision-making for women in marriage: 72 % support women's

Figure 2: Marriage preferences (2016)

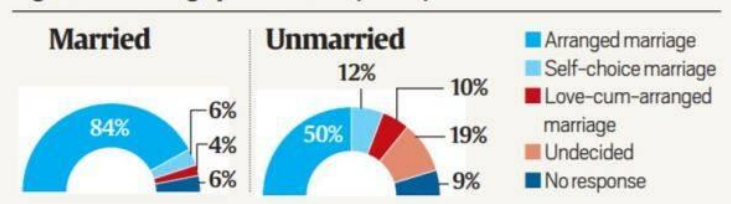


Figure 3: Changing perceptions (%)

(Rest gave no response)

	2007	2016
Not important to get married	12%	33%
Important to get married	81%	52%



say in when to get married and 74 % in whom to marry.

- There has been an attitude shift on the importance of marriage with an increase in acceptance of being single.
- Though close to 5 in 10 Indian youth said it is important to get married, this is much lower than 8 in 10 a decade ago (Figure 3, above). Barring non-literates, all other groups were found to be over twice more likely to express this sentiment than they were a decade ago.

Caste & religion

- The Youth Study 2016 shows that marriage across caste and religion is still not accepted in an arranged marriage set-up (Table 2).
- Among the married youth, very few had opted for inter-caste (4%) or marriage outside their religion (3%). These were more prominent among love marriages (inter-caste 34%; inter-religious 12 %).
- However, the study showed that its acceptance was much higher than what was in practice. One notices an upward trend in acceptance for inter-caste marriages, from 31% in 2007 to 56% in 2016.
- On the contrary, the acceptance of inter-religious marriage is much lower, with 47% approving of it and 45% considering it wrong. Youth who had an arranged marriage displayed more resistance towards the idea of inter-caste and inter-religious marriages than those whose marriage had been self-arranged.
- Less than a quarter of youth consider love affair between two boys or two girls as right (24% and 26% respectively). Over half 53%) in 2016 were opposed to dating before marriage, but this too has declined from 2007 (60%). However, 67% youth consider the idea of live-in before marriage wrong.

Table 2: Attitudes on inter-caste/-religious marriage

	Right	Somewhat right	Wrong
Inter-caste	33%	23%	36%
Inter-religious	28%	19%	45%

Note: Rest did not respond.

Source for all tables & graphs: Lokniti CSDS Youth Studies 2007 and 2016

Life partner consideration

- When it comes to characteristics one seeks in one's life partner, the youth seem rather vague. Close to half the respondents did not respond to the question.
- Among those who responded, 14% said their biggest consideration was that the person should have a good nature and simple personality; 8% gave priority to education and 5% each to being respectful and understanding and being traditional, cultured and having moral values.
- Another 5% said looks and skin colour were their biggest consideration. The spouse's profession and salary were important to about 4%.
- A higher proportion of men gave primacy to qualities such as education and looks, especially skin colour.
- Young women, on the other hand, were more likely to give importance to profession and salary compared to young men. On most other parameters, there was no striking difference between men and women.
- To sum up, the youth are marrying late; the institution of arranged marriage is still intact; marrying across caste or religion is still not much accepted; and overall, attitudes to marriage remain within the boundaries of traditional thinking.

GS II

Identifying mutants

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *In early March, members of the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortia (INSACOG), an advisory group to the Central government, warned of a new and contagious form of the novel coronavirus. Last week, Shahid Jameel, eminent virologist and head of INSACOG, resigned from his post unexpectedly. Though he did not cite the reasons for his exit, Dr. Jameel has been a critic of aspects of the government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly on data sharing, the emergence of new variants and their role in the second wave of infections.*

What is INSACOG?

- INSACOG is a consortium of 10 labs across the country tasked with scanning COVID-19 samples from swathes of patients and flagging the presence of variants that were known to have spiked transmission internationally.
- It has also been tasked with checking whether certain combinations of mutations were becoming more widespread in India.
- Some of these labs had begun scanning for mutations in April 2020 itself, but it was not a pan-India effort.
- The institutes involved were those with expertise in genome sequencing and included laboratories of the Department of Biotechnology, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW).
- The National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) under the MoHFW was tasked with coordinating collection of samples from the States as well correlating disease with the mutations.
- The work began in January by sequencing samples of people who had a history of travel from the United Kingdom and a proportion of positive samples in the community.

What are the findings?

- The “foreign” variants identified were primarily the B.1.1.7 (first identified in the United Kingdom) and the B.1.351 (first found in South Africa) and a small number of P2 variants (from Brazil).
- However, some labs flagged the growing presence of variants identified in India that were clubbed into a family of inter-related variants called B.1.617, also known as the ‘double mutant’ variant, primarily due to two mutations — E484Q and L452R — on the spike protein.
- These have been individually identified elsewhere but not together. However, there are many more mutations that contribute in different measures, in ways not fully understood, to the virus being able to adapt to human hosts.
- The B.1.617 family was marked as an international ‘variant of concern’ after it was linked to a recent spike in cases in the United Kingdom. In March, it was linked to a spurt in cases in Maharashtra.
- But there is no evidence yet to show that the variant is associated with increased disease severity.
- INSACOG labs also found that the B.1.1.7 variant, which is marked by increased infectivity, is distinctly more prevalent in several northern and central Indian States in comparison to southern States.

Beyond identifying patterns, why is genome sequencing useful?



- The purpose of genome sequencing is to understand the role of certain mutations in increasing the virus's infectivity.
- Some mutations have also been linked to immune escape, or the virus's ability to evade antibodies, and this has consequences for vaccines.
- Labs across the world, including many in India, have been studying if the vaccines developed so far are effective against such mutant strains of the virus. They do this by extracting the virus from COVID-19-positive samples and growing enough of it.
- Then, blood serum from people who are vaccinated, and thereby have antibodies, is drawn. Using different probes, scientists determine how much of the antibodies thus extracted are required to kill a portion of the cultured virus.
- In general, the antibodies generated after vaccination — and this was true of Covaxin, Covishield, Pfizer and Moderna jabs — were able to neutralise variants. However, there were fewer antibodies produced against the South African, Brazil and the 'double mutant' variant.
- Antibody levels are not the only markers of protection and there is a parallel network of cellular immunity that plays a critical role in how vaccines activate immunity.
- The current evidence for most COVID-19 vaccines is that they have almost 75% to 90% efficacy in protecting against disease but less so in preventing re-infection and transmission.

What are the challenges being faced by INSACOG?

- Given that the novel coronavirus is spreading, mutating and showing geographical variations, the aim of the group was to sequence at least 5% of the samples. For many reasons, this has so far been only around 1%, primarily due to a shortage of funds and insufficient reagents and tools necessary to scale up the process.
- While some of these issues can be explained as teething troubles, the INSACOG, in spite of being peopled by expert scientists, is ultimately an advisory group to the Central government and part of its communication structure.
- Warnings about emerging variants were not made public with sufficient urgency and the sharing of datasets, even within constituent groups of the INSACOG, was less than ideal.

The many benefits of an eco tax

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Indian government announced a pandemic-related stimulus package in FY 2020-21 though there was large decline in tax revenue. The fiscal deficit for FY 2020-21 (revised estimates) is projected to be 9.5% of the GDP; for 2021-22, it is pegged at 6.8%. The focus is on maintaining fiscal discipline. In this peculiar scenario, sustained health financing in India remains a challenge.*

Household spending on health

- The World Health Organization (WHO) provides data on the percentage of the total population where the household expenditure on health was greater than 10% and 25% of the total household expenditure or income in India in 2011.
- This provides a clear picture of the status of spending on health by the rural and urban populations. As far as health expenditure above 10% is concerned, 17.33% of the population in India made out-of-pocket payments on health. The percentage was higher in rural areas compared to urban areas.
- Globally, the average was 12.67%, which means that 12.67% of the population spent more than 10% of their income (out of their pocket) on health. In Southeast Asia, 16% spent more than 10% of their household income on health.



- The Western Pacific region came second in the list of regions that saw a rate higher than the global average. Similarly, 3.9% of the population in India made more than 25% of out-of-pocket payments on health, with 4.34% in the rural areas.
- The Economic Survey of India 2019-20 has outlined the fact that an increase in public spending from 1% to 2.5-3% of GDP, as envisaged in the National Health Policy of 2017, can decrease out-of-pocket expenditure from 65% to 30% of overall healthcare expenses. This is where the importance of alternate sources of health financing in India needs to be stressed.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has also forced countries all over the world to rethink climate change and the need for preservation of the environment. Fiscal reforms for managing the environment are important, and India has great potential for revenue generation in this aspect.

Fixing the eco tax rate

- Environment regulation, in turn, may take several forms: command and control; economic planning/urban planning; environmental tax (eco tax)/subsidies; and cap and trade. India currently focuses majorly on the command-and-control approach in tackling pollution.
- The success of an eco tax in India would depend on its architecture, that is, how well it is planned and designed. It should be credible, transparent and predictable. Ideally, the eco tax rate ought to be equal to the marginal social cost arising from the negative externalities associated with the production, consumption or disposal of goods and services.
- This requires an evaluation of the damage to the environment based on scientific assessments. This would include the adverse impacts on the health of people, climate change, etc. The eco tax rate may, thus, be fixed commensurate to the marginal social cost so evaluated. The Madras School of Economics had already undertaken extensive studies in this regard.
- Environmental tax reforms generally involve three complementary activities: (a) eliminating existing subsidies and taxes that have a harmful impact on the environment; (b) restructuring existing taxes in an environmentally supportive manner; and (c) initiating new environmental taxes.
- Taxes can be designed either as revenue neutral or revenue augmenting. In case of revenue augmenting, the additional revenue can either be targeted towards the provision of environmental public goods or directed towards the overall revenue pool.
- In developing countries like India, the revenue can be used to a greater extent for the provision of environmental public goods and addressing environmental health issues.
- In India, eco taxes can target three main areas: one, differential taxation on vehicles in the transport sector purely oriented towards fuel efficiency and GPS-based congestion charges; two, in the energy sector by taxing fuels which feed into energy generation; and three, waste generation and use of natural resources.
- Tax revenues can be generated through eco taxes. There is also a need to integrate environmental taxes in the Goods and Service Tax framework as highlighted by the Madras School of Economics in its studies.

Negligible impact on the GDP

- The implementation of an environmental tax in India will have three broad benefits: fiscal, environmental and poverty reduction.
- Environmental tax reforms can mobilise revenues to finance basic public services when raising revenue through other sources proves to be difficult or burdensome.
- Revenue from environmental tax reforms can also be used to reduce other distorting taxes such as fiscal dividend.
- Environmental tax reforms help internalise the externalities, and the said revenue can finance research and the development of new technologies.
- Environmental regulations may have significant costs on the private sector in the form of slow productivity growth and high cost of compliance, resulting in the possible increase in the prices of goods and services.



- However, the European experience shows that most of the taxes also generate substantial revenue and there is no evidence on green taxes with sustainable development goals leading to a 'no growth' economy.
- Most countries' experiences suggest negligible impact on the GDP, though such revenues have not necessarily been used for environmental considerations. Thus, the negligible impact on the GDP may be a temporary phenomenon.
- Hence, this is the right time for India to adopt environmental fiscal reforms as they will reduce environmental pollution and also generate resources for financing the health sector.

Expanding the scope of POCSO

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Over the last nine years, India has sought to “protect children from offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography” through the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO). But POCSO has not been without controversy or deficiency. Recently, the Supreme Court had to injunct an interpretation of ‘skin-to-skin contact’ given by the Bombay High Court. Another fundamental defect of POCSO is its inability to deal with historical cases. With growing international jurisprudence around these issues, and in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, India must revise its legal and procedural methods to deal with historical child sexual abuse.*

Historical child sexual abuse

- Historical child sexual abuse refers to incidents that are reported late. Historical abuse is not just confined to institutions but also includes intra-familial abuse where it is difficult for the child to report the offence or offender at the earliest point in time.
- It often takes time for the child to recognise and comprehend the gravity of what transpired and become confident to report the offence. At first glance, this may seem to run counter to the established principle of criminal law: that every act of crime must be reported at the earliest and any delay in filing the complaint dilutes the efficacy of the prosecution's case.
- Provisions in the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) prohibit judicial magistrates from taking cognisance of cases beyond a specific time period. Cases involving child sexual abuse not amounting to rape as defined under Section 376 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), and prior to the enactment of POCSO in 2012, would presumably be classified under the lesser, and somewhat frivolous, offence of outraging the modesty of a woman (Section 354 of the IPC).
- As such, any reporting of an offence, under Section 354 of the IPC, more than three years after the date of incident would be barred by the CrPC. Such a scenario renders historical reporting of child sexual offences which took place before 2012 legally implausible.
- This presents an insurmountable legal barrier against the registration of historical child sexual offences which took place before 2012.
- While the limitation provisions were incorporated into the CrPC to avert delayed prosecution, the circumstances around child sexual abuse cannot and must not be viewed in the same manner as other criminal offences.
- Therein lies a compelling case to allow delayed reporting and prosecution with regard to incidents of child sexual offences. It is also now understood that delays in reporting sexual abuse after a considerable passage of time from the date of offence may be due to factors such as threats from the perpetrator, fear of public humiliation, and absence of trustworthy confidant.
- Another theory, proposed by Roland C. Summit, Professor of Psychiatry, is the accommodation syndrome — where the child keeps the abuse as a secret because of the fear that no one will believe the abuse, which leads to accommodative behaviour.



- As such, with growing research and empirical evidence pointing to behaviour justifying delayed reporting, there is a need to amend the law to balance the rights of the victims and the accused.
- One of the major drawbacks of delayed reporting is the lack of evidence to advance prosecution. It is believed that there would be less than 5% chance for gathering direct physical and medical evidence in such cases.
- India, in particular, suffers from a lack of procedural guidance as to how to prosecute historical cases of child sexual abuse. In contrast, the U.K. has issued detailed Guidelines on Prosecuting Cases of Child Sexual Abuse under the Sexual Offences Act of 2003 to assist the police in such cases.

Need to review the law

- Also, in 2018, an online petition based on the plea of a child sexual abuse survivor gathered tremendous support. The survivor-petitioner, Purnima Govindarajulu, had unsuccessfully tried to register a complaint against her abuser after a delay of more than 40 years.
- After having failed to get traction with the police, she had launched an online campaign to raise awareness.
- Consequently, the Union Ministry of Law and Justice, at the request of the then Minister for Women and Child Development, clarified that no time limit shall apply for POCSO cases.
- Though this was a welcome clarification and would help strengthen the POCSO jurisprudence, it still fails to address the plight of children who were victims of sexual abuse before 2012.
- There is an urgent need to reform and revise our laws to account for various developments such as historical reporting of child sexual abuse.
- At the very least, the Union government must frame guidelines to direct effective and purposeful prosecution in cases which are not covered by the POCSO.

One-state solution, the way forward in Palestine

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *For more than 50 years, well-intentioned and more cynical, local and external actors involved in the attempts to bring peace and reconciliation to historical Palestine have religiously adhered to the two-state solution as the only way forward.*

Details:

- The idea of partitioning Palestine between the settler movement of Zionism, and later the state of Israel and the indigenous population of Palestine is not new.
- It was first offered by the British in 1937 and rejected by the Palestinians already then. The Zionist movement was hardly 50 years old and was already offered by the new British occupiers of Palestine, a chunk of the Palestinian homeland as a future state.
- This in the 1930s and 1940s would have been akin to an offer to decolonise India by partitioning it between a British India and local India or to propose the decolonisation of Algeria by dividing it between a French Algeria and a local Algeria.
- Neither the Indian anti-colonial movement nor the Algerian one would have ever consented to such a post-colonial arrangement; nor did the British and French dare to offer it when they reconciled with the fact that they will have to leave their colonial empires and go back to Europe.

Catastrophic event

- But even when decolonisation was achieved in India in 1947, not only the British but also the so-called civilised world through the United Nations insisted that the Palestinians should give half of their homeland to the settler movement of Zionism.



- The Palestinians attempted to convince the international community that the problem was not only about dispensing with half of their homeland but that the settler movement of Zionism would not be content with just half of the country and intended to take as much of it as possible and leave in it as few Palestinians as possible.
- This ominous prediction turned out to be chillingly accurate and true in less than a year after the UN insisted that partition was the only solution for Palestine.
- Under the guise of UN support, the new Jewish state took over nearly 80% of historical Palestine and ethnically cleansed almost a million Palestinians (more than half of Palestine's population), and in the way demolished half of Palestine's villages and most of its towns in nine months in 1948; an event known by the Palestinians as the Nakba, the catastrophe.

Incremental cleansing

- In 1967, Israel occupied the rest of historical Palestine, and in the process expelled another 300,000 Palestinians.
- Like all settler colonial projects, it had to navigate between a wish to take over indigenous territory while downsizing the number of native people living on it.
- It was impossible after 1948 to repeat a massive ethnic cleansing, so it was substituted by incremental ethnic cleansing (the last stage in this process was one of the root causes that ignited the cycle of violence last week — the proposed eviction of Palestinians from Shaykh [Sheikh] Jarrah, an East Jerusalem neighbourhood, as part of an overall attempt to Judaize East Jerusalem).
- Incremental ethnic cleansing is not the only way of achieving the old Zionist goal to turning historical Palestine into a Jewish state. Imposing military rule in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip after they were occupied was another means which enclaved the people there without basic human and civil rights.
- Imposing a version of an Apartheid regime on the Palestinian minority in Israel is another method and the constant refusal to allow the 1948 refugees to return completes the matrix of power that allows Israel to retain the land and disregard a demographic reality by which the Jews are not the majority in historical Palestine.

It is Israel that decides

- The two-state solution, offered for the first time by liberal Zionists and the United States in the 1980s, is seen by some Palestinians as the best way of ending of the occupation of the West Bank and at least the partial fulfilment of the Palestinian right for self-determination and independence.
- This is why the Palestine Liberation Organization was willing to give it a go in 1993, by signing the Oslo Accords.
- But the Palestinian position has no impact in the current balance of power. What mattered is how Israel interprets the idea and the fact that there is no one in the world that could challenge its interpretation.
- The Israeli interpretation, until the rise of Benjamin Netanyahu to power in 2009, was that the two-state solution is another means of having the territories, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, without incorporating most of the people living there.
- In order to ensure it, Israel partitioned the West Bank (which is 20% of historical Palestine) into a Jewish and an Arab part. This was in the second phase of the Oslo Accords, known as the Oslo II agreement of 1995.
- The Palestinians were forced to accept it under American and Egyptian pressure. One area, called area C, which consists of 60% of the West Bank) was directly ruled from 1995 until today by Israel. Under Mr. Netanyahu, Israel is in the process of officially annexing this area while at the same time ethnically cleansing the Palestinians living in it.
- The remaining 40% of the West Bank, areas A and B under Oslo II, were put under the Palestinian Authority, which optimistically calls itself the state of Palestine, but in essence has no power whatsoever, unless the one given to it, and withdrawn from it, by Israel.

A Bantustanisation

- The Gaza Strip was divided too. But the Jewish part was small and could not be defended from the local national movement's wrath.
- So, the settlers were taken out in 2005 and Israel hoped that another Bantustan, like the one in areas A and B, would be established there under the Palestinian Authority's rule and under the same conditions.
- But the people of Gaza opted to support a new player, Hamas, and its ally, the Islamic Jihad, which resisted this offer.
- They supported them not only because there was a return to religion in the face of the ongoing predicaments but also because there was big disappointment from the compliance of the PLO with the Oslo arrangements.
- Israel responded by imposing a callous siege and blockade on the Gaza Strip that, according to the UN, made it unliveable.
- To complete its strategy that included the partition of the West Bank, its Bantustanisation, and the siege of Gaza, Israel passed in 2018 a citizenship law, known as the nationality law, which made sure that the Palestinian citizens who live in Israel proper (which is Israel prior to the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) and who are supposedly equal citizens of the Jewish state, will in essence become the "Africans" of a new Israeli Jewish apartheid state: living in a permanent regime that discriminates against them in all aspects of life on the basis of their nationality.
- The endless negotiation on the two-state solution was based on the formula that once the two states become a reality, Israel will stop these severe violations of the Palestinian civil and human rights, wherever they are.
- But while the wait continued, more Palestinians were expelled and the Jewish settler community in the West Bank doubled and tripled and took over the fertile land, leaving no space for Palestinian expansion.
- The presence of more than 600,000 Jewish settlers, with a very high rate of natural growth, means that Israel will never consider moving them out; and without that, even a soft version of a two-state solution is impossible.

Decolonise, build a new state

- The whole premise of the two-state solution is wrong and that is why it did not materialise. It is based on the assumption of parity and of framing the conflict as one fought between two national movements. But this is not a "conflict" as such.
- This is a settler colonial reality which began in the late 19th century and continues until today. The late scholar, Patrick Wolfe, described settler colonial movements as motivated by a logic he called "the elimination of the native".
- Sometimes it led to genocide, as it happened in North America, sometimes it translated to an ongoing ethnic cleansing operation, which is what has unfolded in Palestine. The two-state solution is not going to stop the ethnic cleansing; instead, talking about it provides Israel international immunity to continue it.
- The only alternative is to decolonise historical Palestine. Which means that we should aspire to a state for all its citizens all over the country, based on the dismantlement of colonialist institutions, fair redistribution of the country's natural resources, compensation of the victims of the ethnic cleansing and allowing their repatriation.
- All this will be so that settlers and natives should together build a new state that is democratic, part of the Arab world and not against it, and an inspiration for the rest of the region which desperately needs such models to push it forward towards a better future.

Still grappling with online classes

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *A year since the outbreak of COVID-19, online education remains a chimera in India. Notwithstanding their preparedness, higher education institutions were directed by the government to shift from classroom education to online education. This was mandated even though the government spent merely 3.2% of its GDP on education in 2020-21. University administrations too released orders overnight in haste. They instructed teachers and students to move to online classes without taking cognisance of changes needed in infrastructure, training, etc.*

Differences within institutions

- The financial health of state universities in the country is an open secret. While centrally funded elite institutes such as the IITs, IIMs, NITs and Central universities launched video channels and uploaded e-content on institutional websites and digital platforms, a majority of the state universities still struggle without proper Internet connectivity and bandwidth in their campuses.
- State universities are only able to provide salaries on time. The move to online learning especially came as a surprise for overburdened teachers given that there are several vacant faculty positions in universities across India.
- This move also came as a shock for the students, many of whom are distressed by the COVID-19 situation. Many of them also lack the facilities to attend online classes. Teachers and students had a sense of déjà vu as they had a similar experience when the annual scheme of teaching and regular courses was replaced by the semester scheme of teaching and the choice-based credit system earlier.
- A transition from conventional classroom teaching and learning to online education needs to be done in a phased manner. State universities should first equip their infrastructure (both hard and soft) with wholehearted government support. A sledgehammer approach to adapt to a new setting won't serve anybody's interests. On the contrary, it may prove to be a counterproductive exercise.
- There are 993 universities, 39,931 colleges, 3.73 crore students and 14.16 lakh teachers in India, according to All India Survey on Higher Education (2018-19).
- If such a drastic decision was to be taken, there should have been wider consultation between the government and all the academic stakeholders to find a way forward.
- With Internet penetration still low in India, it is incumbent on the government to allow suitable financial aids to state universities to obtain appropriate IT tools, platforms, devices, provide training, etc. before initiating such an exercise.
- Else, given the difference in students' access to digital education, their performances are also bound to differ. This creates an asymmetrical society and leads to anxiety among the students. Most importantly, education is denied to the less privileged student community.

Study material

- Another predicament in online education is the preparation of appropriate study material. Policymakers need to acknowledge that merely uploading scanned lecture notes or power point presentations does not serve any meaningful purpose.
- There is no imaginative thinking and exploring, no application-based learning for students. For practical field and laboratory-based learning, the whole idea of online education could prove to be a disaster.
- Given that there is talk of more COVID-19 waves, it is imperative for the government to embrace a pragmatic approach by engaging all academic stakeholders and investing generously in online education as suggested by the Fifteenth Finance Commission in its report.
- Development of massive open online courses (MOOCs), direct-to-home (DTH) content development, digital classrooms and provision of devices (laptop/tablets) for 25 lakh students belonging to the socially and economically weaker sections of society, especially in state universities, would help.

The end of the road for India's GST

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The 43rd meeting of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council is to be held on May 28. Representatives of 31 States and Union Territories are expected to attend. They belong to 16 different political parties. Of the 31 representatives, 17 members are from the ruling BJP or its alliance partners. Ideally, this nugget about political affiliations should not matter in a Council set up to decide indirect taxes. But in today's India, 'the economic is political', to paraphrase the American saying.*

Details:

- States are dependent on GST collections for nearly half of their tax revenues.
- The GST Council was mandated to meet at least once every quarter, but it had not met for two quarters, ostensibly due to the pandemic.
- Several of the 14 members of the non-BJP group implored the Finance Minister to convene the GST meeting to help them manage their finances but none of the 17 members of the ruling group deemed it necessary.
- Even the need for a meeting to determine tax revenues for States is evidently a political decision.

Spirit of cooperative federalism

- The representative from West Bengal will attend the meeting against the backdrop of the Centre using investigative agencies to selectively target and incarcerate some of the State's ministers, soon after their election victory.
- The Kerala representative will attend the meeting in the knowledge that his predecessor complained bitterly about the Centre reneging on its promise to pay guaranteed GST compensation to the States.
- The Chhattisgarh representative will attend this meeting aware of how the Centre imposed sudden and stringent policy conditions to grant approval to States for extra borrowing in the middle of the pandemic last year.
- The Maharashtra minister will attend the meeting with a feeling of betrayal over how the States have been forced to pay a much higher price for COVID-19 vaccines than the Centre. The Punjab Finance Minister will be cognisant of how the Centre legislated new farm laws unilaterally that affected Punjab's farmers deeply.
- The Rajasthan representative will be aware of how a sudden lockdown imposed by the Centre with no consultations with the States threw millions of Rajasthani migrant workers in disarray.
- The Tamil Nadu representative will be wary of the Centre's duplicity in levying cesses that garner significant revenues for the Centre without sharing them with the States.
- The Delhi representative will be suspicious of the Centre's motives after it stealthily passed legislation to strip the elected Delhi government of its governance powers. The list is endless. These are not acts in the spirit of 'cooperative federalism'.
- The catchy phrase 'cooperative federalism' was introduced into India's political lexicon to justify the transition to GST in 2017. Sadly, like other catchy phrases such as 'Minimum government, maximum governance' and 'Make in India', this too has turned out to be hollow.
- Cooperative federalism has a larger meaning beyond just fiscal federalism. It also entails cooperative political, administrative and governance federalism between the States and the Centre.

The Trust Game

- The GST Council is not an inanimate economic body. It is a compact of trust between the States and the Centre, set in the larger context of India's polity.
- Behavioural economists, such as the Nobel Laureate, Daniel Kahneman, have articulated the critical role of the twin attributes of 'trust' and 'trustworthiness' among heterogeneous participants in an economy.

- Using a tool called ‘The Trust Game’, they have demonstrated that the motive of ‘altruism’ leads to the most optimal economic outcome for everyone in the group while a motive of ‘spite’ leads to the worst outcome for all.
- The tragedy of the GST Council is that it is afflicted with spite and forced to function under the prevailing cloud of vendetta politics.
- The 17 members of the ruling dispensation and the 14 members of the non-BJP dispensation in the GST Council represent exactly one half of India’s population each. However, the non-BJP group contributes a higher share of 60% of overall GST revenues and accounts for 63% of the country’s GDP.
- With elections to another seven States due next year, these numbers could change dramatically again. If the functioning of the GST Council is subject to the vagaries of elections and consequent vendetta politics, GST will continue to be just a caricature of its initial promise.
- The 15th Finance Commission report formally acknowledges that GST has been an economic failure that did not deliver on its early promises.
- GST, as postulated by technocrats, was supposed to be the panacea for India’s throttled economy to deliver enormous economic efficiency gains, improve tax buoyancy and collections, boost GDP growth and usher in greater formalisation of the economy.
- Three years after its launch and even before COVID-19, GST had failed on all those promises.

Problems underpinning GST

- Economists and commentators point to the multiple rates structure, high tax slabs and the complexity of tax filings as the problems underpinning India’s GST.
- These were indeed the initial problems in the way GST was implemented, leading to some of its current woes.
- But now, GST has a more fundamental problem — the erosion of ‘trust’ and ‘trustworthiness’ between the States and the Centre. Technical fixes such as simplification of GST rates and tax filing systems to restore GST to its initial promise is akin to applying a pain balm to an injury that needs surgery.
- The States paid a huge price for GST in terms of loss of fiscal autonomy. The promised economic gains are invisible, and India’s federalism has been ruptured. GST in today’s politically acerbic, hate-ridden and divided India is an unviable and unworkable proposition.
- GST has endured so far primarily because the States were guaranteed a 14% growth in their tax revenues every year, which minimised their risks of this new experiment and compensated for their loss of fiscal sovereignty. This revenue guarantee ends in July 2022. This can lead to a crumbling of the precarious edifice on which GST stands today.
- In a situation where the States have no taxation powers, their GST revenues are uncertain, the supposed economic benefits seem phantom, and the hypocrisy of ‘cooperative federalism’ looms large, what is the incentive for States to continue in a GST regime?
- When the Prime Minister can impose a draconian lockdown in a ham-fisted manner without consultation or play favourites with critical oxygen supplies during an emergency, there seems very little motivation for the States to cooperate in a chase for an elusive economic goal by sacrificing their significant economic powers of taxation.
- Technocratic cheerleaders of GST failed to factor in India’s unique political economy and its ramifications.
- Striking a balance among diverse interests of India’s numerous parties in a larger political climate of spite and suspicion to arrive at a uniform tax policy for the nation is a near impossibility.
- The tapestry of India’s GST was stitched on a fabric of implicit trust and painted with vibrant economic colours. The fabric is now torn and the colours have faded.
- The loose thread of guaranteed revenues that holds this together is about to snap. The end of India’s grand GST experiment seems inevitable unless there is a radical shift in the tone and tenor of India’s federal politics, backed by an extension of revenue guarantee for the States for another five years.

Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The life of Indian Law rather than being shaped along mathematical exactitudes finds itself at the receiving end of an experiential tussle. This tussle has aimed at every stage to bargain for a Fundamental Right in return for some negotiation, sometimes with the desire of the coloniser and at others with the dominant ideology at the Centre.*

There are ambiguities

- The subject of concern now is the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 (<https://bit.ly/3oR8ISk>) which threaten to deprive social media platforms of their safe harbour immunity in the event of non-compliance with the said rules.
- While there are positive aspects about the said guidelines, there are, equally, glaring ambiguities and stifling susceptibilities that should render these contrary to past Supreme Court of India precedents such as K.S. Puttaswamy.
- The Rules must be credited for they mandate duties such as removal of non-consensual intimate pictures within 24 hours, publication of compliance reports to increase transparency, setting up of a dispute resolution mechanism for content removal and adding a label to information for users to know whether content is advertised, owned, sponsored or exclusively controlled.

Gagging a right

- However, the Supreme Court, in the case of Life Insurance Corpn. Of India vs Prof. Manubhai D. Shah (1992) had elevated ‘the freedom to circulate one’s views as the lifeline of any democratic institution’.
- It went on to say that ‘any attempt to stifle, suffocate or gag this right would sound a death knell to democracy’ and would ‘help usher in autocracy or dictatorship’.
- And so, it becomes increasingly important to critically scrutinise the recent barriers being imposed via these Rules against our right to free speech and expression.
- The problem started when these Rules came to life. They were framed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeiTY).
- The Second Schedule of the Business Rules, 1961 does not empower MeiTY to frame regulations for ‘digital media.’
- This power belongs to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. In the given case although MeiTY has said that these rules shall be administered by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, however this action violates the legal principle of ‘colourable legislation’ where the legislature cannot do something indirectly if it is not possible to do so directly.
- To propound the problem at hand, the Information Technology Act, 2000, does not regulate digital media.
- Therefore, the new IT Rules which claim to be a piece of subordinate legislation of the IT Act, travel beyond the rule-making power conferred upon them by the IT Act. This makes the Rules ultra vires to the Act.

Fair recourse, privacy issues

- An intermediary is now supposed to take down content within 36 hours upon receiving orders from the Government. This deprives the intermediary of a fair recourse in the event that it disagrees with the Government’s order due to a strict timeline.
- Additionally, it places fetters upon free speech by fixing the Government as the ultimate adjudicator of objectionable speech online.

- The other infamous flaw is how these Rules undermine the right to privacy by imposing a traceability requirement. The immunity that users received from end-to-end encryption was that intermediaries did not have access to the contents of their messages.
- Imposing this mandatory requirement of traceability will break this immunity, thereby weakening the security of the privacy of these conversations.
- This will also render all the data from these conversations vulnerable to attack from ill-intentioned third parties. The threat here is not only one of privacy but to the extent of invasion and deprivation from a safe space.
- These regulations in the absence of a data protection law, coloured in the backdrop of recent data breach affecting a popular pizza delivery chain and also several airlines highlight a lesson left unlearned.

On fake news

- The problem here is that to eliminate fake news — rather than defining its ambit as a first step, the Rules proceed to hurriedly take down whatever an arbitrary, ill-decided, biased authority may deem as “fake news”.
- Lastly, the Rules create futile additional operational costs for intermediaries by requiring them to have Indian resident nodal officers, compliance officers and grievance officers. Intermediaries are also required to have offices located in India.
- This makes profit making a far-fetched goal for multinational corporations and start-up intermediary enterprises.
- Therefore, not only do these Rules place a barrier on the “marketplace of ideas” but also on the economic market of intermediaries in general by adding redundant financial burdens.
- Our concluding words on the rapidly diluting right to free speech are only those of caution — of a warning that democracy stands undermined in direct proportion to every attack made on the citizen’s right to have a private conversation, to engage in a transaction, to dissent, to have an opinion and to articulate the same without any fear of being imprisoned.

GS III

Tackling rural economic distress

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Several States are under lockdown again. This will have severe implications for the livelihoods of those in the informal sector. There is adequate evidence that migrant workers and the rural poor have been facing great distress over the past one year and the crisis for food and work is only going to intensify further.*

Hunger and distress

- A few months ago, the Right to Food campaign and the Centre for Equity Studies published a ‘Hunger Watch’ report which compared the pre-lockdown situation last year to the situation in October 2020 to assess the impact of the nationwide lockdown.
- The survey involving 4,000 respondents across 11 States exposed the life and livelihood uncertainties of people belonging to low-income categories in the informal sector.
- In October 2020, 27% of the respondents said that they had no income; 40% respondents said that the nutritional quality of food had become “much worse”; and 46% of the respondents said they had to skip one meal at least once in the day in October 2020.

- The migrants have again become vulnerable due to the lockdown in different cities. While many have once again headed to their villages, a large population has got stranded in different parts of the country without work.
- The Stranded Workers Action Network, a group of individuals helping distressed migrant workers since last year, has been reaching out to workers for providing essential help.
- According to them, 81% of the people whom they reached out to said that work had mostly stopped since April 15, 2021 and 76% of the workers said they are short of food and cash and require immediate support.
- In this context, there is an urgent need to strengthen the public distribution system (PDS) and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).
- The government announced 5 kg free foodgrains for individuals enlisted under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), for May and June 2021.
- The government should expand PDS coverage immediately and include all eligible households under the schemes. According to an independent study, about 100 million people are excluded from the ration distribution system owing to a dated database based on the 2011 Census.
- The Centre should also extend the free foodgrains programme to a year instead of limiting it to two months. The economic crisis is likely to last for a long time. It is being reported that India procured record amounts of rice and wheat last year through mandis.
- The total procurement is way more than the current requirement for PDS. It is thus quite possible to expand the safety net of the NFSA.

Inadequate provisions

- The Centre had allocated ₹73,000 crore for 2021-22 for MGNREGS and notified an annual increment of about 4% in wages.
- Both these provisions are inadequate to match the requirements on the ground. The central allocation for MGNREGS is about ₹38,500 crore less than last year's revised estimate.
- Of the 7.56 crore households which worked in MGNREGS in 2020-21, even if 1 crore households opt out of the scheme this year, the Centre should still budget for 75-80 days of employment in the year for 6.5 crore families given the current scale of economic distress.
- By this rationale, at the current rate of ₹268/day/person, at least ₹1.3 lakh crore will have to be budgeted. The government should also re-consider its decision of a mere 4% increase in MGNREGS wages and hike it by at least 10%.
- This will mean another ₹10,000 crore. Therefore, at least ₹1.4 lakh crore will be required to ensure uninterrupted implementation during the year.
- A large population is facing hunger and a cash crunch. The situation is only becoming more dire as the pandemic continues to rage on.
- Therefore, the Union government should prioritise food and work for all and start making policy reforms right away.

A jobs crisis in the second wave of COVID-19

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Hit by a relentless second wave of COVID-19 infections, India has seen localised lockdowns across several States. With activity restrained, job losses have climbed. This has dampened family incomes and consumer sentiment, setting the stage for lower-than-anticipated economic growth and belying the nation's hopes of racing back to activity this year on a low base last year.*



How have lockdowns affected jobs?

- Among the first effects felt from a region's lockdown is the loss of jobs. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), the unemployment rate was 6.5% in March but rose to around 8% in April, the month when several States began to prepare for or had already imposed lockdowns.
- With 73.5 lakh job losses in April, the number of employees (both salaried and non-salaried) fell from 39.81 crore in March to 39.08 crore in April for the third straight month.
- In April 2020, which was the first full month of the national lockdown last year, the unemployment rate had zoomed to 23.5%.

What do the data indicate about unemployment in rural and urban areas?

- At 7.13%, the rural unemployment rate for April 2021 is lower than the urban figure of 9.8%. The month of May has seen the rates rise further at the national level.
- As of May 21, the 30-day moving average for overall unemployment was 10.3%, with the relevant figures for urban and rural areas at 12.2% and 9.4%, respectively.
- The labour participation rate (LPR) for April 2021, at 40%, remained lower than the levels seen before last year's lockdown. Labour participation helps measure the section of the population that is willing to take on jobs.
- Unemployment is a subset, which helps in giving a measure of those who are willing to take on jobs but are not employed.
- Women tend to face a double challenge, with lower labour participation and a higher unemployment rate for females compared with males (for ages above 15).
- For the January-April 2021 period, urban female LPR was 7.2% compared with the urban male's 64.8%, while urban female unemployment was 18.4% against the urban male unemployment rate of 6.6%, CMIE data showed.

How has the agriculture sector fared?

- Agriculture was the saving grace during the first wave, but it is not so during the second one. April 2020 saw this sector being the only one to add jobs — the count of those employed in the agriculture sector had gone up by 6 million or 5% compared with the average count in FY20, according to CMIE data.
- In April 2021, agriculture shed 6 million jobs compared to a month earlier. This figure ties in with reports of the hinterland being far more affected by the pandemic this year compared with last year.
- Daily wage labourers and small traders saw a loss of employment in the order of 0.2 million in April. Some of these agricultural and daily wage labourers may have found work in the construction industry as the sector saw an increase of 2.7 million jobs during April.
- But, as the CMIE posits, most of the 6.2 million people released from agriculture and daily wages jobs could well have ended up remaining unemployed during the month. This is a clear indication that the jobs scenario is weakening even before recovering from last year's onslaught.
- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act data showed that April saw an uptick in the demand for jobs — 2.7 crore households signed up for work in April 2021, rising from 1.3 crore a year earlier — as reverse migration of labour picked up, resulting in availability of hands in the rural parts.

Did the salaried class escape unscathed?

- No. The cumulative loss of salaried jobs since the pandemic began is pegged at 12.6 million, according to CMIE data, and the trend continues with April 2021 seeing this coveted category drop 3.4 million jobs from the level in March 2021.

Which States have been hit the hardest?

- Haryana recorded the highest unemployment rate in April 2021 at 35%, as per CMIE data, followed by Rajasthan at 28%, Delhi at 27.3%, and Goa at 25.7%.
- Significantly, Gujarat, which, like the above States, also witnessed the ferocity of the pandemic's second wave, saw unemployment at an appreciably lower level of 1.8%.

What are the economic consequences of rising unemployment?

- Obviously, job losses have a telling effect on incomes. CMIE's managing director and CEO, Mahesh Vyas, said that 90% of Indian families have seen their incomes shrink over the course of the past 13 months. Loss of income naturally dampens consumer sentiment and lowers economic demand.
- The RBI's monthly bulletin published earlier this month acknowledged that the biggest toll of the pandemic's second wave was in terms of "a demand shock — loss of mobility, discretionary spending and employment, besides inventory accumulation".
- In an article titled 'State of the Economy' in the bulletin, RBI officials pointed out that aggregate demand conditions had been impacted, "albeit not on the scale of the first wave". They highlighted the fact that e-way bills, an indicator of domestic trade, recorded double-digit contraction at 17.5% month-on-month in April 2021, with intrastate and inter-state e-way bills declining by 16.5% and 19%, respectively.
- This is an ominous sign for the Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections in the coming months. Collections in April 2021 were the highest-ever at ₹1.41 lakh crore since the new tax regime was introduced.
- The authors of the RBI bulletin article said the contraction in e-way bills could point "to a moderation in GST collections in coming months".
- However, despite the decline over March 2021, total e-way bills remained above the pre-pandemic baseline of February 2020, "indicating that domestic trade has remained resilient on the back of digitisation of sales platforms".
- The RBI officials asserted that the second wave has so far had only a limited impact on industrial activity, citing the 8.1% growth in electricity generation in April over the pre-pandemic base of April 2019.

Would the situation improve if the current lockdowns were to end today?

- Food insecurity is a key welfare issue in the months following an economic shock. A report from Azim Premji University's Centre for Sustainable Employment, titled 'State of Working India 2021, One year of COVID-19', showed that on average, households lost about 22% of their cumulative income over eight months ended October 2020.
- Also, poorer households lost a larger proportion of their already low incomes. This not only led to increased poverty levels, the researchers said, but also that the ways in which households coped with this shock was by borrowing, largely from informal sources, selling assets, and cutting back on food consumption.
- This means that even after a lockdown is lifted and employment begins returning close to the earlier levels, consumer spending, the lifeblood of any economy, may remain muted.
- The report cited a couple of surveys — the University's own 'COVID Livelihoods Phone Survey' (CLIPS) and Hunger Watch — to highlight the problem of the low-income population cutting back on food intake. The Hunger Watch survey showed that 66% of surveyed households had less to eat even five months after last year's lockdown.
- The researchers argued that incomes lost during the months when economic activity is more severely affected "leave a long-term impact either as depleted savings or as incurred debt, which must be built back or paid back, by curtailing future consumption and investment". The CLIPS survey showed that the poorest households took the largest loans relative to their earnings.

How are governments addressing these issues?

- The Central government has announced that it will distribute 5 kg of rice and wheat for free to ration card holders across the country.
- Individual States have added to this. Bihar, for example, has announced that it would add an equal measure to the Centre's distribution from the State's resources for free distribution via the Public Distribution System.



- Tamil Nadu has announced a ₹4,000 handout per ration card and has begun distributing the first tranche of half that amount. Kerala has promised that no family would go hungry in the State.
- Last September, the Kerala government announced free food kits for 88 lakh families for four months; this May, it decided to continue with the distribution in view of the second wave.
- Karnataka has announced a ₹1,250-crore relief package, through which farmers, auto, taxi and maxi cab drivers, construction workers and other informal sector workers will receive varying amounts in the form of a one-time dole.

GS IV

Covid And The Bureaucracy

(Source: [Times of India](https://www.timesofindia.com))

Context: *The events of the past month have been so tragic, so unspeakably ugly that the only rational response was to pretend it wasn't happening. The raging second wave of the virus revealed not only governmental ineptitude but also exposed India's soft underbelly – our heavy bureaucratic system, which wasn't nimble enough to cope with the crisis.*

Details:

- Even more damning was the reminder of how this system fails us daily to deliver basic public goods – justice, health, education, water, electricity etc – which is why India is sometimes called a 'flailing state'.
- Covid will be gone one day. But the citizen's day-to-day misery, coping with rotten institutions, will remain. If BJP wants to redeem some of its lost shine before 2024, it must focus on reforming some of our shoddiest institutions.
- Before Covid 2 struck, the FM had proposed an inspiring Union Budget that focussed on job-creating growth via infrastructure spending. Joe Biden, the US president, followed suit with a similar strategy in his stimulus package.
- Both recognised the best road to recovery from the Covid crisis was infrastructure investment, which is a multiplier, stimulating the private sector to invest, creating jobs, boosting consumption.
- Unfortunately, infrastructure spending in India doesn't deliver the full bang because it is executed via leaky government departments that focus on hardware – where kickbacks are available.
- Thus we get more roads, pipes, wires, buses. But water pipes don't ensure 24x7 water supply; electric wires don't mean reliable electricity; buses don't create an effective transport system.
- India needs modern, effective utilities that are autonomous, accountable, and creditworthy. Successful countries have created such institutions. We too have excellent examples at home to emulate. There is Delhi's Metro in city transport; Concor in moving freight containers; Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) in driving the nation's switch to LED lighting; electricity companies in Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai; and Shimla Jal Prabandhan Nigam Limited (SJPNL) for water and sanitation.
- Shimla's story is astonishing. The popular hill station was no different from most Indian cities in its water woes. You were in the shower and the tap would go dry; or washing dirty dishes, it always chose the worst moment.
- You scrambled to get a tanker. When the tanker got delayed, there was another scramble, sometimes even a riot. In the summer of 2018, Shimla's woes hit a peak: You got water only once a week. A



jaundice epidemic broke out, tourists ran away, hotels closed, business down on its knees. It felt like a ghost town.

- Up against a wall, the municipal corporation acted with staggering wisdom. It set up an autonomous utility company to manage both water and sewerage, accountable to citizens for service and to outside lenders for financing. It replaced leaky pipes; upgraded old pumps that lifted water thousands of feet from river valleys; established higher pay-for-what-you-use tariffs, monitored by meters; subsidised the poor via a 'lifeline slab' of cheap water; brainwashed consumers on how to save water and water bills. It made the same dramatic turnaround in sewerage. Soon, Shimla achieved the unbelievable: 24x7 continuous water in all three test wards and much enhanced water supply, clean sanitation throughout the city.
- Tourists and businesses came running back. Shimla topped the most liveable small city index. The secret of Shimla's success was a dramatic change in governance. Instead of managing water and sanitation via myriad government departments, the town created a modern utility with an autonomous CEO; he didn't allow water to be stolen (as much as a third had been stolen earlier) because he was insulated from political pressure and had to remain creditworthy for future financing.
- India needs such institutions to manage its infrastructure – its electricity, ports, highways, even healthcare. Whether these institutions are publicly or privately owned or public-private partnerships doesn't matter. The key is that they should be autonomous, with a firewall against meddling by politicians and bureaucrats.
- The FM's mantra should be 'Don't fix the pipes; fix the institutions that will fix the pipes.' She should make her infrastructure largesse conditional to such institutional reform. She should not fund specific projects but fund effective, accountable utilities like SJPNL to execute the projects.
- Her reward will be the absence of government departments standing at her door with a begging bowl. Being creditworthy, the utilities will leverage domestic and global financial markets; they will float bonds, tapping long-term finance. Thus, India will deepen its bond market.
- Who will be losers in this reform? Bureaucrats, politicians, and unions – a formidable interest group! Politicians won't be able to give away free electricity to farmers.
- Bureaucracy, in any case, is allergic to reform – it's a cunning survivor and will do anything to preserve its power. Since employees of the modern utilities will have to adopt a new work ethic, it will send the unions into the trenches. All three vested interests will be ready to do battle. It won't be easy.
- Luckily, people will be on the reformer's side: the prospect of 24x7 water and 24x7 electricity is nirvana in India. The lesson from recent agricultural reforms is that you must carry the people in a democracy.
- So, the smart reformer must sell the reforms before doing them, get the people on his side. Finally, it may seem odd to be reforming in this horrific Covid crisis, but reforms generally happen in a crisis. So, don't waste this crisis, prime minister!

Current Affairs Quiz

1) Mount Nyiragongo is located in-

- a. Italy
- b. Japan
- c. Congo
- d. Indonesia

Answer : c

2) Which of the following statements is/are incorrect with respect to Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay National Welfare Fund for the Sportspersons?

- 1. The fund was set up in 1982 with a view to assist outstanding Sportspersons of yesteryear, living in indigent circumstances who had brought glory to the Country in sports.
- 2. The Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports shall be the Chairperson of the general committee which is responsible for the management and administration of the Fund.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : d

Both statements are correct

3) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP)?

- 1. It is the second most commonly used fertiliser in India after urea.
- 2. It is high in phosphorus that stimulates root development.
- 3. The farmers normally apply this fertiliser just before or at the beginning of sowing.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 1 and 3 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Answer : d

4) Protected Planet Report is published by-

- a. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- b. World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)
- c. The Nature Conservancy
- d. Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)

Answer : a

5) Maldhari tribe belongs to-

- a. Phumdis of Manipur
- b. Banni Grasslands of Gujarat
- c. Chauris of Himalayan foothills
- d. Shola grasslands of Western Ghats

Answer : b

6) Consider the following statements with respect to Lunar Eclipse:

1. Lunar eclipse occurs on a full moon day when the Earth comes in between the Sun and the Moon and when all the three objects are aligned.
2. A total lunar eclipse will occur when the whole Moon comes under the umbral shadow of the Earth
3. The partial lunar eclipse occurs when only a part of the Moon comes under the umbral shadow of the Earth.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1, 2 and 3
- d. None of the above

Answer : c

7) Consider the following statement with respect to White Fungus:

1. It can be caused by the unsterile use of oxygen cylinders or the overuse of steroids.
2. It predominantly attacks body parts such as lungs, skin, nail, brain, kidney, mouth etc.
3. It is treated with antifungals and white fungal infections may eventually require surgery.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 1 and 3 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Answer : a

8) Which of the following statements is correct about the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)?

- a. It is a statutory body established by the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946
- b. The CBI comes under the administrative control of the Department of Internal Security of Ministry of Home Affairs
- c. The Director of CBI will be appointed on the recommendation of a three-member committee, headed by the President of India
- d. The CBI acts as the National Central Bureau of Interpol in India

Answer : d

9) Which of the following statements is/are incorrect with respect to BioHub Initiative?

1. It is an initiative of World Health Organization (WHO) to enhance the rapid sharing of viruses and other pathogens between laboratories and partners globally.
2. The first WHO BioHub Facility will be established in Spiez, Switzerland.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : d

10) Nilesh Shah Committee was in news regarding-

- a. To suggest ways for promoting Investment Funds
- b. To study about the Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARC)
- c. To review the regulations of the central bank for streamlining them
- d. None of the above

Answer : a

11) Which of the following statements is/are incorrect with respect to Tropical Cyclones?

1. Storms rotate counter clockwise in the northern hemisphere and clockwise in the southern hemisphere.
2. Large sea surface with temperature higher than 27° C and Upper divergence above the sea level system are favourable conditions for formation of tropical cyclones.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : d

Both statements are correct

12) Bimal Jalan Committee recommended which of the following to the RBI?

- a. Disinvestment Policy
- b. Monetary Policy Committee
- c. Surplus Distribution Policy
- d. Capital Account Convertibility

Answer : c

13) Consider the following statements with respect to Plague:

1. It is a disease caused by the bacteria *Yersinia pestis*, which is found in animals, particularly rodents.
2. Bubonic plague is the 'most virulent form of plague' and can be fatal within 24 to 72 hours.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : a

According to WHO, pneumonic plague is the 'most virulent form of plague' and can be fatal within 24 to 72 hours.

14) Consider the following statement with respect to Monoclonal Antibodies:

1. They are artificially created antibodies that aim to aid the body's natural immune system.
2. They target a specific antigen a protein from the pathogen that induces immune response.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : c

15) Which of the statements given below is/are correct with respect to National Green Tribunal (NGT)?

1. The NGT is not bound by the procedure laid down under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908.
2. The Tribunal's orders are binding and it has power to grant relief in the form of compensation and damages to affected persons.
3. The Chairperson of NGT shall be appointed by the Central Government in consultation with the Chief Justice of India (CJI).

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 2 only

- b. 1 and 2 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Answer : d

16) Katkari Tribes are found in -

- a. Maharashtra
- b. Karnataka
- c. Chhattisgarh
- d. Jharkhand

Answer : a

17) Mark correct statement with respect to Fungus.

- a. The study of fungi is called Autecology
- b. Lichens and Oomycetes belongs to the Fungi Kingdom
- c. Fungus is not a part of animal and plant kingdom and has been classified as a kingdom on their own
- d. Fungi are prokaryotic organisms in which cells does not contain membrane-bound organelles and an undefined nuclei

Answer : c

18) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Lakshadweep Development Authority?

- 1. It empowers the government to constitute Planning and Development Authorities for any identified area.
- 2. It can carry out zonation for all types of land use within the island.
- 3. It stipulates that islanders must pay a processing fee for zone changes.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 1 and 3 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Answer : b

These authorities are to prepare land use maps, carry out zonation for type of land use and indicate areas for proposed national highways, arterial roads, ring roads, major streets, railways, tramways, airports, theatres, museums etc. Only cantonment areas are exempted from this.

19) Which of the statements given below is incorrect regarding GST Council is?

- a. One-half of the total number of members of GSTC form quorum in meetings of GSTC
- b. Decision in GSTC are taken by a majority of not less than three-fourth of weighted votes cast
- c. Centre has one-third weightage of the total votes cast and all the states taken together have two-third of weightage of the total votes cast
- d. None of the above

Answer : d

20) The organization which is not a part of Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genome Sequencing Consortia (INSACOG) is-

- a. Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)
- b. World Health Organization (WHO)
- c. Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
- d. Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR)

Answer : b