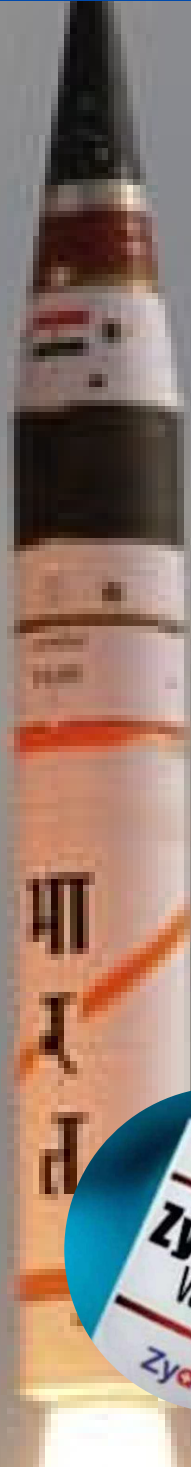


PRAYAS4IAS

AN INITIATIVE BY THE PRAYAS INDIA

JULY WEEK 1



July (Week 1)

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Prelims

NATIONAL

Multi-drug resistance

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: During evolution, the fitness costs experienced by bacteria under constant and fluctuating environments pose an unsolved problem. One way of seeing this is through the example of multi-drug resistance. It is not clear why some bacteria evolve multi-drug resistance while others do not. New research from the Population Biology Lab at IISER Pune could hold a key to this and a similar class of puzzles.

Public health menace

- Multi-drug resistance is a menace in public health, however it is a fascinating problem to an evolutionary biologist who sees it from this angle: possessing multi-drug resistance implies that the bacteria is adept at handling multiple antibiotics simultaneously.
- This would increase its fitness appreciably. Given that antibiotics exert a very strong selection pressure, it would appear that every bacteria in nature can become multi-drug resistant, which is not the case.
- When bacteria become fit in one environment, they either lose fitness or fail to increase fitness in other environments.
- Small populations acquire a certain set of mutations which allow them to survive in one environment while paying a cost in others.
- Large populations also develop these mutations but, in addition, have certain compensatory mutations that together give them fitness to survive in different environments.
- Thus, population size determines the kind of mutations available to the bacteria, which in turn, leads to the type of fitness costs they evolve.

Gujarat's prohibition law

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: The Gujarat Prohibition Act, 1949 is being **challenged before the Gujarat High Court**, more than seven decades after it came into effect as the Bombay Prohibition Act. The court is to give its verdict soon on the maintainability of the petitions.

What is the origin of the prohibition law in western India and what was the rationale?

- The first hint at the prohibition of liquor was through the Bombay Abkari Act, 1878.
- This Act dealt with levying of duties on intoxicants, among other things and aspects of prohibition via amendments made in 1939 and 1947.
- As per the 'Statement of Objects and Reasons' published in the Bombay Government Gazette on December 28, 1948, the policy of prohibition was initiated in 1939 and soon after its initiation "the



popular government went out of office and for various reasons the enforcement of the policy remained dormant”.

- Then in 1940, the government reconsidered the question of prohibition and it was decided to undertake and enforce a policy of “total prohibition” in the whole of the Province of Bombay on the basis of a four-year plan.
- As per this document, it was stated that there were “many lacuna” in the Bombay Abkari Act, 1878, from the point of view of the government’s decision to enforce prohibition.
- The government deemed it fit to “remove the defects and bring within the orbit of the Act many offences which went unpunished under the law,” and in order to enforce the policy of total prohibition “effectually,” it was considered to “overhaul the law relating to intoxicating drugs and narcotics and to embody the same into one legislative enactment,” leading to the birth of Bombay Prohibition Act, 1949.
- However, the statement does not explain why such a prohibition law was deemed to be necessary in the first place.
- Advocate General Kamal Trivedi over the course of hearings on maintainability had submitted that the “that law did not intend to create complete prohibition” and had referred to constitutional debates emphasising on prohibition so as to raise standards of health.
- The petitioners however highlighted that while there were discussions, the debates were inconclusive and various members of the Constituent Assembly had taken a view that prohibition should not be there and thus the law “has no constitutional prehistory to it.”
- While following the reorganisation of Bombay province into the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat in 1960 there was continued amendment and liberalisation in the state of Maharashtra, especially in 1963, on the ground that liberalisation of the law was necessary to check the business of illicit liquor, Gujarat adopted the prohibition policy since 1960 and subsequently chose to enforce it with greater rigidity, but also made processes easier for foreign tourists and visitors to get liquor permits.
- In 2011, it renamed the Act as Gujarat Prohibition Act. By the state’s own admission in affidavits before the Gujarat HC, the government found that the policy was not working effectively and thus amendments were made through an ordinance in 2016.
- In the statement of objects and reasons of this amendment, it was stated that the state government was “committed to the ideals and principles of Mahatma Gandhi and firmly intends to eradicate the menace of drinking liquor.”

Nuclear-capable Agni-P missile

(Source: [The Hindu](http://www.thehindu.com))

Context: A new-generation nuclear-capable ballistic missile, Agni-P (Prime) was successfully test-fired by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

Details:

- Agni-P is a new generation **advanced variant of the Agni class** (under IGMDP - Integrated Guided Missile Development Program).
- It is a **canisterised missile** with range capability between 1,000 and 2,000 km.
 - Canisterisation of missiles reduces the time required to launch the missile while improving its storage and mobility.
- Many **advanced technologies** including composites, propulsion systems, innovative guidance and control mechanisms and state-of-the-art navigation systems have been introduced. The Agni-P missile **would further strengthen India's credible deterrence capabilities.**
- In comparison to other Agni class missiles, Agni-P has improved parameters including manoeuvring and accuracy.



Agni Class of Missiles:

- They are the mainstay of India's nuclear launch capability.
- Range of other Agni Missiles:
 - **Agni I:** Range of 700-800 km.
 - **Agni II:** Range more than 2000 km.
 - **Agni III:** Range of more than 2,500 Km
 - **Agni IV:** Range is more than 3,500 km and can fire from a road mobile launcher.
 - **Agni-V:** The longest of the Agni series, an **Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM)** with a range of over 5,000 km.

Pew Research on religious attitudes in India

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Most Indians, cutting across religions, feel they enjoy religious freedom, value religious tolerance, and regard respect for all religions as central to what India is as a nation. At the same time the majority in each of the major religious groups show a marked preference for religious segregation and “want to live separately”, according to a nation-wide survey on religious attitudes, behaviours and beliefs conducted by Pew Research Center, a non-profit based in Washington DC.*

Details:

- The report found that 91% of Hindus felt they have religious freedom, while 85% of them believed that respecting all religions was very important ‘to being truly Indian’.
- Also, for most Hindus, religious tolerance was not just a civic virtue but also a religious value, with 80% of them stating that respecting other religions was an integral aspect of ‘being Hindu’.
- Other religions showed similar numbers for freedom of religion and religious tolerance. While 89% of Muslims and Christians said they felt free to practice their religion, the comparative figures for Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains were 82%, 93%, and 85% respectively.
- And yet, paradoxically the majority in all the faiths scored poorly on the metrics for religious segregation: composition of friends circle, views on stopping inter-religious marriage, and willingness to accept people of other religions as neighbours.
- The survey found that nationally, three-in-ten Hindus took both these positions: linking being Hindu and speaking Hindi to being Indian, and voting for BJP. But there was a clear geographical skew in their distribution: while roughly half of the Hindu voters in northern and central India fell into this category, only 5% of Hindu voters in the South did so.
- Also, Hindu nationalist sentiments were less prevalent in the South.
- Among Hindus, those in the South (42%) were far less likely to say that being Hindu was very important to being truly Indian.

One Nation One Ration Card

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The Supreme Court directed all states and Union Territories to implement the One Nation, One Ration Card (ONORC) system, which allows for inter- and intra-state portability, by July 31.*

What is One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC)?

- The ONORC scheme is aimed at enabling migrant workers and their family members to buy subsidised ration from any fair price shop anywhere in the country under the National Food Security Act, 2013.
- For instance, a migrant worker from, say, Basti district of Uttar Pradesh will be able to access PDS benefits in Mumbai, where he or she may have gone in search of work.
- While the person can buy foodgrains as per his or her entitlement under the NFSA at the place where he or she is based, members of his or her family can still go to their ration dealer back home.
- To promote this reform in the archaic Public Distribution System (PDS), the government has provided incentives to states.
- The Centre had even set the implementation of ONORC as a precondition for additional borrowing by states during the Covid-19 pandemic last year. At least 17 states, which implemented the ONORC reform, were allowed to borrow an additional Rs 37,600 crores in 2020-21.

How does ONORC work?

- ONORC is based on technology that involves details of beneficiaries' ration card, Aadhaar number, and electronic Points of Sale (ePoS). The system identifies a beneficiary through biometric authentication on ePoS devices at fair price shops.
- The system runs with the support of two portals — Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IM-PDS) (impds.nic.in) and Annavitran (annavitran.nic.in), which host all the relevant data.
- When a ration card holder goes to a fair price shop, he or she identifies himself or herself through biometric authentication on ePoS, which is matched real time with details on the Annavitran portal. Once the ration card details are verified, the dealer hands out the beneficiary's entitlements.
- While the Annavitran portal maintains a record of intra-state transactions — inter-district and intra-district — the IM-PDS portal records the inter-state transactions.
- Under the National Food Security Act, 2013, about 81 crore people are entitled to buy subsidised foodgrains — rice at Rs 3/kg, wheat at Rs 2/kg, and coarse grains at Re 1/kg – from designated fair price shops.

Leteku

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *APEDA facilitated exports of Burmese grapes 'Leteku' to Dubai.*

About Leteku:

- Burmese Grapes are also known as 'Leteku' in the Assamese language.
- They are grown in the Darrang district of Assam.
- They are found in abundance in the north eastern region of India.
- Burmese grapes grows in evergreen forests on a wide range of soils.
- The fruit is harvested and used locally, eaten as a fruit, stewed or made into wine.
- It is also used medicinally to treat skin diseases. The bark, roots and wood are harvested for medicinal uses.
- The fruit is oval, coloured yellowish, pinkish to bright red or purple, 2.5–3.5 cm in diameter, glabrous, with 2–4 large purple-red seed, with white aril.

Protection Officers

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: ‘Training Programme of Protection Officers in addressing Domestic Violence’ launched by the National Commission for Women.

About Protection Officers:

- Protection Officers act as facilitators between the aggrieved woman and the court in cases of domestic violence.
- They help the aggrieved woman in filing complaints and application before the Magistrate to obtain the necessary relief and also assist to obtain medical aid, legal aid, counselling, safe shelter and other required assistance.
- Under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, the duties of the Protection Officers are:
 - to assist the Magistrate in the discharge of his functions under this Act;
 - to make a domestic incident report to the Magistrate, in such form and in such manner as may be prescribed, upon receipt of a complaint of domestic violence and forward copies thereof to the police officer in charge of the police station within the local limits of whose jurisdiction domestic violence is alleged to have been committed and to the service providers in that area;
 - to make an application in such form and in such manner as may be prescribed to the Magistrate, if the aggrieved person so desires, claiming relief for issuance of a protection order;
 - to ensure that the aggrieved person is provided legal aid under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 and make available free of cost the prescribed form in which a complaint is to be made;
 - to maintain a list of all service providers providing legal aid or counselling, shelter homes and medical facilities in a local area within the jurisdiction of the Magistrate;
 - to make available a safe shelter home, if the aggrieved person so requires and forward a copy of his report of having lodged the aggrieved person in a shelter home to the police station and the Magistrate having jurisdiction in the area where the shelter home is situated;
 - to get the aggrieved person medically examined, if she has sustained bodily injuries and forward a copy of the medical report to the police station and the Magistrate having jurisdiction in the area where the domestic violence is alleged to have been taken place;
 - to ensure that the order for monetary relief under section 20 is complied with and executed, in accordance with the procedure prescribed under the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973.
- The Protection Officers are appointed by the state government in each district and they shall be women as far as possible.

Saral Sanchar Portal

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *Department of Telecommunications (DoT) expanded the Saral Sanchar Portal.*

About Saral Sanchar Portal:

- ‘SARAL SANCHAR’ (Simplified Application For Registration and Licenses) is a web-based portal for Issuing various types of licenses and registration certificates.
- It is a part of the various digital initiatives being undertaken by the Dept of Telecommunications, Ministry of Communications, GOI.
- The portal ensures transparency and more efficiency in the process of issuance of licenses and registration certificates.



- Applicants can apply by filling up the prescribed application form online and uploading the documents and application form with digital signature.
- The portal envisages that applicants get prompts and alerts at various stages of application submission so that all necessary requirements are complied with before submitting the application.
- On this portal, application for Access Services, Internet Services and other licenses are being received.
- The following types of licenses/authorizations shall be issued from this portal:
 - Unified License
 - Unified License-Virtual Network Operator
 - WPC Licenses (Wireless Planning and Coordination)

Enforcing Contracts Portal

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: Justice Department launched the “Enforcing Contracts Portal”.

About the portal:

- The website (<https://doj.gov.in/eodb/>) is envisioned to be a comprehensive source of information pertaining to the legislative and policy reforms being undertaken on the “Enforcing Contracts” parameters.
- It includes the latest data related to the functioning and disposal of commercial cases in the Dedicated Commercial Courts of Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru and Kolkata.
- The portal also hosts online reporting by all high courts regarding the mediation and arbitration centres annexed to the Commercial Courts in order to monitor and promote institutional mediation and arbitration by way of Pre-institutional Mediation and Settlement (PIMS) of commercial cases.

The performance of any country in “Enforcing Contracts” indicator is measured on the basis of the following parameters:



Time Estimates For Commercial Cases

This includes time taken during filing and service phase, trial and judgment phase, and enforcement of judgment phase.



Cost Estimates For Commercial Cases

This includes attorney fees, court fees (up to judgment only) and expert fees, and enforcement fees.



Quality of Judicial Process Index Resolution

This includes court structure and proceedings, case management, court automation, and alternative dispute resolution.

AIM-iLEAP Program

Context: AIM-iLEAP, the first fintech cohort of the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) concluded.

About AIM iLEAP:

- This is a program under the Atal Innovation Mission to provide AIM-backed start-ups with the much needed access to industry, markets and investors.
- The fintech cohort was done through a series of thematic virtual demo days organised by AIM in partnership with Startup Réseau and Visa as part of AIM-iLEAP (Innovative leadership for entrepreneurial agility and profitability) initiative.
- The objective of the AIM-iLEAP program is to invite technology start-ups across a broad range of functions and have them present their solutions to the corporate leadership and innovation team for enabling market access and industry partnerships.

ZyCoV-D

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Zydus Cadila said it has applied to the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) seeking Emergency Use Authorisation (EUA) for ZyCoV-D, its plasmid DNA vaccine to counter COVID-19. It will be the world's first plasmid DNA vaccine for COVID-19.*

Details:

- The company had conducted clinical trials at over 50 centres in India, it said. Phase III clinical trials had been conducted on over 28,000 volunteers.
- This was the first time that any COVID-19 vaccine had been tested in the adolescent population in the age group of 12-18 years in India.
- As the first ever plasmid DNA vaccine for human use, ZyCoV-D has proven its safety and efficacy profile in our fight against COVID-19. The vaccine, when approved, will help not only adults but also adolescents in the 12 to 18 years age group.
- The vaccine will come with PharmaJet, a needle-free applicator that will ensure painless intradermal vaccine delivery. This would cost extra.
- The company has not revealed the price of the vaccine or the applicator.

INTERNATIONAL

Gender self-identification

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The Spanish government approved the first draft of a bill that would allow anyone over the age of 14 to legally change gender without a medical diagnosis or hormone therapy, its Equality Ministry said. The bill will now go to a public hearing, and will then come for a second reading in the national cabinet. To become law, it then has to be approved by the lower house of the Spanish parliament. Currently, for someone to change their gender in official records, the law first requires two years of hormone therapy and a psychological evaluation. The proposed law will remove these requirements for everyone above 14 years of age. Those between 14 and 16, however, would require parental approval.*

What is gender self-identification?

- Self-identification, or ‘self-id’, is the concept that a person should be allowed to legally identify with the gender of their choice by simply declaring so, and without facing any medical tests.
- This has been a long held demand of trans-right groups around the world, including in India, as prejudice against trans people remains rampant.
- In Europe, this issue has remained divisive not only on liberal-conservative lines, but also within the LGBT community, reports The Economist.
- While some believe that the current processes for declaring one’s desired gender are lengthy, expensive and degrading, some feminist and gay-rights groups insist that such a law could endanger women and cause more gay teenagers to be told that they might be trans and thus encouraged towards hormones and surgery.
- Feminist forums that believe that sex is not something which can be chosen have insisted that allowing self-identification could put at risk all laws that specifically prevent discrimination against women, and have instead asked lawmakers to look at concerns that they say are more pressing, such as the gender pay gap.
- Even in Spain, where feminist groups are protesting against the proposed law, President Pedro Sánchez has maintained the need to “safeguard the balance of women’s rights and of a group as punished as the trans people,” El Pais reported.

Where is self-ID legal?

- As per the advocacy group ILGA (the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association), 15 countries around the world recognise self-ID, including Denmark, Portugal, Norway, Malta, Argentina, Ireland, Luxembourg, Greece, Costa Rica, Mexico (only in Mexico City), Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Uruguay.
- In Denmark, the law requires a six-month reflection period for formalising gender change. In Portugal, changing one’s gender for the second time requires going to court.
- Italy does not allow self-ID, and neither does Germany, where last month a bill was voted down that would have legalised gender-reassignment surgery from the age of 14 regardless of opposition from parents, as well as introduced a fine of 2,500 euros for referring to a trans person based on their natal sex.
- In Hungary, a newly adopted law effectively bans all content about homosexuality and gender change from school curriculum and television shows for children under the age of 18.

What is the process for declaring one’s desired sex in India?



- In India, the rights of transgender persons are governed by the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules, 2020.
- Under the Rules, an application to declare gender is to be made to the District Magistrate. Parents can also make an application on behalf of their child.
- A much-criticised previous draft of regulations required transgender persons to go through a medical examination for declaring their desired sex.
- This requirement was omitted in the final Rules, which state that the District Magistrate will “subject to the correctness of the applicant’s particulars, get the application processed based on the affidavit submitted declaring the gender identity of any person, without any medical or physical examination, and thereafter, issue an identification number to the applicant, which may be quoted as proof of application.”
- As per the Rules, state governments have also been directed to constitute welfare boards for transgender persons to protect their rights and interests, and facilitate access to schemes and welfare measures framed by the Centre.

Sea Breeze Drills

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Ukraine and the United States launched joint naval exercises in the Black Sea in a show of Western cooperation with Kiev as it faces off with Russia.*

Details:

- The drills come just days after the British Royal Navy’s HMS Defender passed near Russian-annexed Crimea in the Black Sea, with Moscow saying it fired warning shots at the destroyer to ward it off.
- The Sea Breeze drills — which have taken place 21 times since 1997 — will involve some 5,000 military personnel from more than 30 countries.
- The exercises will last two weeks and involve around 30 ships, including the missile destroyer USS Ross.
- Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 and claims the waters around the peninsula as part of its territory. Most countries do not recognise the takeover and stand behind Ukraine’s claims to the waters.
- Washington is a key ally of Kiev in its conflict with Moscow over Crimea and pro-Moscow separatist regions in eastern Ukraine.
- In 2018 Russian forces boarded and took control of three Ukrainian Naval ships off the Black Sea peninsula.

EU’s new ‘vaccine passport’ programme

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Covishield manufactured by Serum Institute of India is not among the vaccines which have been approved by the European Medicines Agency’s (EMA) for the “vaccine passport” programme that allows free movement of people in and out of Europe.*

What is the “green pass” which will ease travel restrictions across EU?

- The EU Digital Covid Certificate, which has been created to ensure that restrictions currently in place can be lifted in a coordinated manner, is a digital proof that a person has either been vaccinated against

Covid-19, or received a negative test result, or recovered from the viral infection. The document is valid across all EU countries.

- The certificate includes information such as name, date of birth, date of issuance, the name of the vaccine or the details of the negative test result or recovery from Covid-19.
- National authorities are in charge of the programme and the document can be issued by test centres or health authorities, or directly via an eHealth portal. The certificate has a QR code which can be scanned and it is available in both digital and paper formats.
- The certificate contains a digital signature which is verified when the QR code is scanned. Each issuing body has its own digital signature key, all of which are stored in a secure database in each country.
- The European Commission has designed a gateway through which all the signatures can be verified across the EU.
- The “green pass” is expected to ease travel restrictions for people travelling to EU countries.
- According to the official EU website, the certificate holder should “in principle be exempted from free movement restrictions” and “Member States should refrain from imposing additional travel restrictions on the holders of an EU Digital COVID Certificate, unless they are necessary and proportionate to safeguard public health”.

The ‘heat dome’

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: In Portland city in Oregon, US, temperatures as high as 46 degree Celsius were recently registered – just three degrees short of the internal core temperature of a cooked shrimp and a few degrees hotter than summer temperatures recorded in New Delhi – a record for the city. In Salem, barely 72 km away from Portland, the temperatures were highest at about 47 degree Celsius on June 28. These temperatures being reported from the Pacific northwest and some parts of Canada are part of a “historic” heat wave that lasted over a week, a result of a phenomenon referred to as a “heat dome”.

What is a heat dome?

- The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) says that to understand what causes a heat dome, one should liken the Pacific ocean to a large swimming pool in which the heater is turned on.
- Once the heater is on, the portions of the pool close to the heating jets will warm up faster and therefore, the temperature in that area will be higher.
- In the same way, the western Pacific ocean’s temperatures have increased in the past few decades and are relatively more than the temperature in the eastern Pacific.
- This strong change in ocean temperature from the west to the east is what a team of scientists believe is the reason for the heat dome, which is when the atmosphere traps heat at the surface, which encourages the formation of a heat wave.
- To compare, the reason that the planet Venus is the hottest in the Solar System is because its thick, dense cloud cover traps the heat at the surface, leading to temperatures as high as 471 degree Celsius.
- A heat wave is a period of unusually hot weather that lasts for more than two days. NWS notes that heat waves can occur with or without high humidity and have the potential to cover a large area, “exposing a high number of people to hazardous heat.”

Mains

GS II

COVID-19 and the changing face of child labour

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

Context: *Child labour robs children of their childhood, potential and dignity. As many as 152 million (1 in 10) children work as labourers across the world, according to the International Labour Organization. Among these, 64 million are girls. Almost half of the 72 million children are engaged in hazardous work; 6.3 million are pushed into forced work and human slavery.*

Details:

- Children are driven into this work for multiple reasons: When families fall into poverty, experience income insecurity, emergencies, or are affected by unemployment, human trafficking, conflict and extreme weather events.
- Child labour is prevalent not only in the agriculture sector, but today other sectors such as export-oriented agriculture, mining, manufacturing, industries, tourism and construction.
- It is a global phenomenon and exists in different forms and intensities in almost every part of the globe. Yet, half the world's child labourers (72.1 million) are in Africa; 62.1 million are in Asia and the Pacific.
- Over the last two decades, the number of children working as child labourers came down by a 100 million. But the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has dealt a heavy blow on human lives and endangered the economic activities of the poor and disadvantaged people.
- According to United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, the COVID-19 pandemic will cause more than a quarter of billion people suffering from acute hunger by the end of 2021.
- The pandemic has hit the mental, physical and nutritional health of children. Schools have been shut for the longest time due to the crisis, denying children access to healthy school meals.
- According to UNICEF, more than 1.5 billion children missed out their schooling due to COVID-19 restrictions. This has compelled children to work to support their families.
- Aide et Action's study in India on the impact of COVID-19 on migrant children revealed a two-fold increase in the number of children who accompanied their working parents to the brick-making industry after the first wave COVID-19 pandemic.
- Those who work at brick kilns have been compelled to drag their children along. In South Asia, tens and thousands of brick kilns provide seasonal wage employment to the poor and debt-ridden rural families.
- Migrant families are recruited by labour contractors and ferried to the urban location to work in brick kilns. The traditional brick kiln industries that operate on manual labourers often utilise child labour for work.
- Aide et Action has been working with children living in brick kilns in India to provide education and care to them. It has assisted thousands of migrant workers and their families to travel safely to their native villages and reintegrated them up with a government health support and social protection schemes.
- The pandemic-induced lockdowns shattered the labour market across the world. During the first COVID-19 wave, the lockdown forced millions of migrant labourers to move back to their villages in India.
- The soaring demand for food, health supplies, basic services need a huge workforce to wheel and support the national and global supply chain.

- A recent global report indicated that the link between child labour and the global supply chain was often indirect and happened in the lower tier of supply chain like raw material extraction and agriculture operations. The unprecedented economic crisis has, however, pulled children into the national and global supply chain and other informal sectors.
- The United Nations declared 2021 as the international year for the elimination of child labour. The Sustainable Development Goals 8 & 7 challenge the world to eradicate forced labour, modern slavery by 2025.
- It can be a herculean task for policy makers and planners to devise effective strategy to contain the child labour. Elimination of child labour needs several approaches.
- The one-size-fits-all approach will fail to address the issues of poor and excluded communities. Every government and non-government action for the elimination of child labour should be effectively reinforced with national child rights policies, stricter law enforcement, quality social protection and strengthening of school ecosystem.

Reimagining examination

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The online pattern of examination should not only judge intellectual development, as is prevalent in the present-day examination system, but it must also test the holistic development of students. It is the responsibility of every academician and authority to find the ways and means to conduct online examinations with reliable standards amid the COVID-19 pandemic. To successfully complete examinations during this period, constructive strategies, particularly in the online mode, should be employed, rather than calling for the cancellation of exams.*

Details:

- The Supreme Court had stated last year that students in higher education cannot be promoted without writing the final-year or terminal semester examinations, and a directive to the University Grants Commission (UGC) had said the States cannot promote students based on internal assessment or past performance.
- The court made it clear that the States could, under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, postpone final-year or final-semester exams, but they did not have the power to direct universities to promote students based on prior performance, as students' assessment was the prerogative of the UGC.
- The UGC rules clearly stated that a degree cannot be granted without examinations.

Inclusive ways

- It is now mandatory that final-year semester examinations should be conducted either online, offline, or a combination of both methods.
- Therefore, a new examination pattern should be crafted. It must include the assessment of educational objectives of understanding, critical and independent thinking, problem-solving ability, reflective thinking, skill development, and application of knowledge.
- In other words, a revised system should assess analytical and application skills, rather than mere knowledge in a given time slot. This would enhance the quality and competence of students.
- To restrict copying, answer scripts may be assessed using plagiarism software. With technological tools, monitoring and supervision of students during online examinations is not a difficult task. Many of the world's leading universities, some premier Indian institutes, and a few State universities conduct examinations online efficiently and fairly through suitable tools.

Looking for alternatives

- An alternative approach may be open-book examinations — it allows students to refer to textbooks or other source material while answering questions.
- Students are provided with questions before sitting for the exam, and they can even complete the test at home.
- This will help counter rote learning, which pervades the current examination system, while also sensitising students to real learning and analytical and application skills. Open-book examination is a well-accepted concept in many countries around the world.
- Last week, the Supreme Court directed States that have cancelled Class 12 examinations of their respective Boards to spell out their assessment plans. It has also cleared the evaluation criteria proposed by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) for their Class 12 examinations.
- Testing the knowledge gained and the presentation of that is the essence of education. As Jiddu Krishnamurti said, “It is not that you read a book, pass an examination, and finish with education.”
- Criticism should be accepted constructively in order to frame an innovative examination system. It is the foremost responsibility of policymakers and educationists to tackle the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The law of sedition is unconstitutional

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *In Vinod Dua's case (2021), the Supreme Court of India has reaffirmed the law of sedition laid down in Kedar Nath Singh (1962) and directed governments to adhere to it. This reaffirmation seems to be a little problematic. The Kedar Nath judgment upheld the constitutional validity of sedition as defined in Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code. And the Court read down the provision by holding that only writings or speeches which incite people to violence against the Government will come within the mischief of sedition. So, as per this judgment, unless speeches or writings tend to cause violence or disorder, there is no sedition.*

Issue of 'disaffection'

- Section 124A of the IPC, which contains the law of sedition, categorises four sources of seditious acts. They are, spoken words, written words, signs or visible representations.
- The gist of the offence is: bringing or attempting to bring the government into contempt or hatred, or exciting or attempting to excite disaffection towards the government.
- There are three explanations attached to this section.
 - The first explanation says that 'disaffection' includes disloyalty and all feelings of enmity.
 - The second and third explanations say that one can comment on the measures of the government or other actions of the government without bringing or attempting to bring it into contempt or hatred or exciting or attempting to excite disaffection towards the government.
 - These explanations do not convey anything different from what the defining section says.
- Here is an illustration. If a person writes that the Government is very good but the vaccine policy is bad, perhaps he may not attract the charge of sedition as per the explanations. But he should invariably state that the government is very good.
- If he only says that the policies and actions of the government are consistently bad and does not say that the government is very good, he is liable to be charged with sedition. The recent examples of sedition cases amply prove this point.
- The Supreme Court's assertion in Kedar Nath that there is sedition only when writing or speech can lead to violence or disorder has consistently been ignored by governments all these years, and citizens of all



ages have been charged with sedition for merely criticising the authorities. The Lakshadweep case is the latest example.

- The problem actually lies in the fact that the law of sedition was not struck down by the Supreme Court in 1962 as unconstitutional.
- There was every justification for doing that because sedition, as defined in Section 124A of the IPC, clearly violates Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution which confers the Fundamental Right of freedom of speech and expression, the most valuable right of free citizens of a free country.

Not a reasonable restriction

- Further, this section does not get protection under Article 19(2) on the ground of reasonable restriction. It may be mentioned in this context that sedition as a reasonable restriction, though included in the draft Article 19 was deleted when that Article was finally adopted by the Constituent Assembly.
- It clearly shows that the Constitution makers did not consider sedition as a reasonable restriction.
- However, the Supreme Court was not swayed by the decision of the Constituent Assembly. It took advantage of the words 'in the interest ... of public order' used in Article 19(2) and held that the offence of sedition arises when seditious utterances can lead to disorder or violence.
- This act of reading down Section 124A brought it clearly under Article 19(2) and saved the law of sedition.
- Otherwise, sedition would have had to be struck down as unconstitutional. Thus, it continues to remain on the statute book and citizens continue to go to jail not because their writings led to any disorder but because they made critical comments against the authorities.

A few ironies

- A great irony here is that the law of sedition, which should have gone out of the Statute Book when the Constitution of India came into force, was softened through interpretation and made constitutionally valid by the Supreme Court.
- This law was enacted by the British colonial government in 1870 with the sole object of suppressing all voices of Indians critical of the government. James Stephen, the author of the Bill, had clarified then that not only critical comments but even a seditious disposition of a person will attract this penal law. It was the policeman who would decide whether a person's disposition was seditious.
- The history of this most draconian law during colonial rule would reveal that the basic propositions laid down by Stephen have been followed by courts in all cases on sedition before Independence.
- In the Bangobasi case in 1891, Bal Gangadhar Tilak's case in 1897 and 1908 and Mahatma Gandhi's case in 1922, the High Courts, and ultimately the judicial committee of the Privy Council, consistently held that incitement to violence or rebellion is not a necessary part of sedition under Section 124A of the IPC and a mere comment which the authorities think has the potential to cause disaffection towards the government is seditious and the person can be arrested and put on trial.
- Justice Arthur Strachey, while stating the law of sedition before the jury in Tilak's case, had made it absolutely clear that even attempts to cause disaffection would attract the provision, meaning thereby that rebellion, disorder or violence are not an ingredient of sedition. This statement of law by Justice Strachey was approved by the Privy Council.
- The Supreme Court, while dealing with Kedar Nath, faced a tricky situation. On the one hand, there was the overwhelming judicial opinion saying that in order to attract sedition, a critical comment which causes disaffection towards the government or bring the government into hatred or contempt, is all that is necessary.
- If this opinion were followed by the Supreme Court, sedition in the IPC would have become unconstitutional. But the top court, for some unexplained reason, did not want to hold it unconstitutional.
- So, it adopted the reasoning given by the Federal Court in Niharendu Dutta Majumdar vs Emperor in 1942 in which it was held that the gist of the offence of sedition is public disorder or a reasonable apprehension of public disorder. In fact the Privy Council's statement of law of sedition had clearly held that public disorder was not an ingredient of sedition.



- The Supreme Court itself admits that the Federal Court did not have the advantage of seeing the Privy Council's statement of law, otherwise it would have affirmed the Privy Council's view.
- Here we cannot miss the irony that the Supreme Court's attempt to read down Section 124A, to soften it and make its application conditional on public disorder, has made this colonial law constitutionally valid which otherwise it is not.
- On the other hand, if the judicial opinion on sedition given during the colonial period had been accepted, it would have been held unconstitutional and free India's citizens would not have been thrown into jails for criticising the governments.

Impacting rights

- In the ultimate analysis, the judgment in Kedar Nath which read down Section 124A and held that without incitement to violence or rebellion there is no sedition, has not closed the door on misuse of this law.
- It says that 'only when the words written or spoken etc. which have the pernicious tendency or intention of creating public disorder' the law steps in. So if a policeman thinks that a cartoon has the pernicious tendency to create public disorder, he will arrest that cartoonist.
- It is the personal opinion of the policeman that counts. The Kedar Nath judgment makes it possible for the law enforcement machinery to easily take away the fundamental right of citizens.
- In a democracy, people have the inalienable right to change the government they do not like. People will display disaffection towards a government which has failed them.
- The law of sedition which penalises them for hating a government which does not serve them cannot exist because it violates Article 19(1)(a) and is not protected by Article 19(2). Therefore, an urgent review of the Kedar Nath judgement by a larger Bench has become necessary.

The power of an apology

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: In May, Germany officially apologised to Namibia for the massacre of the Herero and Nama people in 1904-1908 and called it a genocide for the first time. Around the same time, French President Emmanuel Macron said in Rwanda that he recognised his country's role in the Rwandan genocide and hoped for forgiveness.

Positive effects

- The importance of these gestures cannot be overestimated. They can generate multiple positive effects. Apart from strengthening the relations between the countries involved, apologies by leaders help people reconcile with the past and countries and communities take lessons from history and avoid similar tragedies.
- Most importantly, they provide some solace to the victims' descendants; they give them a sense of justice and rectitude.
- There were many public debates following the apology from Germany regarding reparations. Herero activists insist that the development aid offered by the German authorities is not enough and is generic in nature.
- According to them, the descendants of the genocide's victims should receive a tangible compensation, primarily in the form of land property that had been taken away by the German colonisers. This is a complex issue, whereby it is difficult to find a mutually acceptable compromise. 'What is the right price to pay for genocide?' is a rhetorical question.

- Unlike Germany and France, Turkey has been in constant denial of the Armenian genocide during World War I. In April 2021, the Turkish President went as far as condemning the recognition of the genocide by the newly elected American President, Joe Biden.
- This strained bilateral relations between Turkey and the U.S. even further. Apparently, the overarching image of Mr. Erdogan as a ‘strongman’ does not go well with any kind of apology on the international stage.
- There is enough evidence that the killing of 1.5 million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire during World War 1 was indeed genocide. Leaders like Mr. Erdogan seem to believe that asking for forgiveness can be interpreted as a sign of weakness. In fact, it is quite the opposite.
- The Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, has a propensity for apologies. According to him, “apologies for things in the past are important to make sure that we actually understand and know and share and do not repeat those mistakes”.
- In 2016, Mr. Trudeau apologised before the descendants of passengers of the Komagata Maru ship. In 1914, the Canadian government of the day had decided to turn away the ship carrying South Asian migrants, mostly Sikhs. The ship was forced to return to India. Back home, the British suspected the passengers to be revolutionaries and an altercation began. Many passengers were shot dead.
- In 2018, Mr. Trudeau apologised for his country’s role in turning away a ship carrying over 900 Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution.
- Such apologies require courage, good will, compassion, and humility. It is not an easy task to apologise, given that one has to do so for events that took place decades or even a century ago.

In search of a moral compass

- Arguably, a sense of humility is a rare phenomenon in contemporary geopolitics. We are witnessing a re-emergence of political leaders, from Nicaragua to Myanmar, who are ready to resort to any means in order to remain in power.
- In this environment, apologetic voices become even more precious as they help us reconcile with tragic events of the past and remove the stains of history. Besides, they add a moral dimension to international relations.
- In this sense, to be a pillar of the multipolar world is not to be a military power, manufacturing and/or financial hub, and/or a global investor alone.
- Countries that strive for global leadership should be able to provide moral leadership as well. This includes critical self-reflection, humility, compassion, and care not only towards their own people, but also towards the most vulnerable communities around the world.

Full equality still out of reach for LGBTQ+

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *This year, the world woke up to June, pride month, gazing at the Google Doodle of Dr. Frank Kameny (1925-2011), an American astronomer, veteran, and gay rights activist. Kameny, in the early 1970s, ‘successfully challenged the American Psychiatric Association’s classification of homosexuality as a mental disorder’. The global LGBTQ+ community marched ahead after the 1970s. But in India, the queer community is still a stigmatised and invisible minority, a fact that is alarmingly incompatible with the country’s living, liberal and inclusive Constitution.*

Launch pad for jurisprudence

- The Constitution was conceived by India’s founding fathers as a beacon of fundamental rights, leading once enslaved Indians to the promised land of life and freedom. Despite such a liberating Constitution,



the Indian state and the law have been abusing and given many marginalised segments of the citizenry such as the queer community of India the cold shoulder.

- The Constitutional courtroom in post-colonial India became a space where the individual and the state could converse with each other. The meagre gains that the queer community won have been granted by the judiciary; not by legislatures.
- The Supreme Court of India's ruling in *Navtej Singh Johar & Ors. vs Union of India* (2018), that the application of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) to consensual homosexual behaviour between adults was "unconstitutional, irrational, indefensible and manifestly arbitrary", has been a great victory to the Indian individual in his quest for identity and dignity. This judgment has provided a launch pad for the LGBTQ+ jurisprudence and queer liberation movement in India.
- The Delhi High Court's verdict in *Naz Foundation vs Government of NCT of Delhi* (2009) was a 38th parallel in the law of sexuality and equality jurisprudence in India. The court held that Section 377 offended the guarantee of equality enshrined in Article 14 of the Constitution, because it creates an unreasonable classification and targets homosexuals as a class.
- Earlier, in a retrograde step, the Supreme Court, in *Suresh Kumar Koushal vs Naz Foundation* (2013), reinstated Section 377 to the IPC. But India witnessed the anastasis of Naz Foundation through the top court's judgment in *Navtej Singh Johar & Ors.* with an embedded firewall of the doctrine of progressive realisation of rights.
- Despite the judgments of the Supreme Court, full equality is still a pie in the sky for the queer community in India. In matters of employment, health and personal relationship, there is still a lot of discrimination against sexual minorities. It is only when these problems are adequately addressed that the LGBTQ+ community will be able to enjoy full autonomy and agency.

Legal sanction opposed

- The Union of India has recently opposed any move to accord legal sanction to same-sex marriages in India stating that the decriminalisation of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code does not automatically translate into a fundamental right for same sex couples to marry.
- This was stated in response to the Delhi High Court notice to a plea by LGBTQ+ activists and couples who sought recognition of same-sex marriages. Justice Anthony Kennedy of the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Obergefell vs Hodges* (2015) underscored the emotional and social value of the institution of marriage and asserted that the universal human right of marriage should not be denied to a same-sex couple.
- As of 2021, same-sex marriage is legally performed and recognised in 29 countries. Indian society and the state should synchronise themselves with changing trends.

Amend Article 15

- Article 15 secures the citizens from every sort of discrimination by the state, on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth or any of them.
- This Article is the cornerstone of the concept that equality is the antithesis of discrimination. Imbibing the zeitgeist, the grounds of non-discrimination should be expanded by including gender and sexual orientation.
- In May 1996, South Africa became the first country to constitutionally prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. Section 9(3) of its Constitution dictates that state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth. Let Gandhiji's nation learn from Mandela's nation!
- The United Kingdom passed the "Alan Turing law" in 2017 which 'granted amnesty and pardon to the men who were cautioned or convicted under historical legislation that outlawed homosexual acts'.
- The law, named after Alan Turing, a World War II code-breaker and computing genius, who was convicted of gross indecency in 1952, provided a 'posthumous pardon, also an automatic formal pardon for living people who had had such offences removed from their record'.
- To expiate the excesses committed against the LGBTQ+ community in the past and present, the Indian state should also enact a law on these lines to do justice to the 'prisoners of sexual conscience'.



- Justice Rohinton F. Nariman had directed in Navtej Singh Johar & Ors., the Government to sensitise the general public and officials, including police officials, to reduce and finally eliminate the stigma associated with LGBTQ+ community through the mass media and the official channels.
- But the Government has simply disregarded this obligation. School and university students too should be sensitised about the diversity of sexuality to deconstruct the myth of heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is the root cause of hetero-sexism and homophobia.
- Hence, it is time for change; but the burden should not be left to the powers that be. The onus remains with the civil society, the citizenry concerned and the LGBTQ+ community itself.

Tackling vaccine hesitancy challenge in rural India

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *In rural India concerns about COVID-19 vaccines are now increasingly commonplace. People voice their concern about what will happen to them if they get vaccinated and have doubts that the government is sending inferior quality vaccines to them. Vaccination sessions in local health centres often see very few or no takers.*

Vaccine hesitancy

- Vaccine hesitancy is not a recent phenomenon. It is neither limited to a particular community or country, nor have we seen it only in the context of COVID-19.
- Various studies have shown that the acceptance of vaccines among African-American communities is relatively low in the U.S. Polls have also shown significant hesitancy among Hispanics and people in rural areas.
- We have also seen vaccine hesitancy among the urban and the more educated or 'aware' populations, with pockets of populations of socio-economically well-off communities refusing to get their kids vaccinated.
- While vaccine hesitancy can lead to a firm rejection of vaccines, there's also a possibility of people changing their perceptions over time.

Socio-cultural context

- Most of our fears and apprehensions stem from a deep impact of something adverse or unfavourable that we have personally experienced or our social circles have experienced.
- Over time these become our beliefs, our innate guards. In the context of the concerns described at the beginning of this article, we must look at vaccine hesitancy from a distinct lens of fear and not necessarily scepticism for new vaccines.
- These individuals, and the communities they belong to, are probably not really challenging medical science, or questioning vaccine trial results, adequacy or inadequacy of evidence. Rather, they seem to indicate deep-seated fears and belief in conspiracies, the fear of perhaps being discriminated and deceived and of being omitted (from societal benefits).
- Parts of rural Rajasthan, where we have seen high vaccine refusal rates, are also often poorly resourced, and often tribal.
- Communities in this region here have believed that the widespread poverty and the general backwardness that they had been pushed into is a result of historically institutionalised discrimination imposed on them by those in power.
- They believe that they have been systematically alienated of their land rights, forest rights and kept deprived of basic education and health care. All of this has led to a state of despondency and, more than that, a very strong feeling of distrust and resentment against government institutions and those in power.

- Such contexts cannot be ignored while we try to understand what might be fuelling the extreme fear and resistance around COVID-19 vaccine. .

Building trust

- Communities might not see the impact of a vaccine instantly, as it's usually preventive in nature rather than curative. People are used to taking medications when they are unwell or in pain, and they may feel better almost immediately, but that's not the case with vaccines.
- On the contrary, vaccines administered to a healthy person may lead to occasional side-effects like fever, body aches, etc. Add to that rumours about deaths post-vaccination, and it may not be so easy for people to get convinced about the vaccines.
- Responses to vaccines must also be discussed and analysed in conjunction with and in comparison to uptake of other health care services by a particular population. Addressing vaccine hesitancy in rural India would first of all require health systems to be honest and transparent.
- Create awareness, let people know how vaccines work, how they help prevent a disease, what are the probable side effects and how they can be managed. Health authorities need to be comfortable about people raising questions, while providing them answers as best as possible. Moreover, it's important to be patient with them.
- In most cases, it would take time before they change their minds, if at all. Being cognisant of local cultural sensitivities and working with trusted intermediaries is important in this effort.
- Sustained and meaningful efforts need to be made to build trust, gain confidence of communities and meet their expectations. This would also require seeing them as equals, treating them with dignity and acknowledging their fears.
- To do this, governments and the health functionaries will need to break out of their conventional notions and beliefs around people's healthcare-seeking behaviours and understand and address their fears and apprehensions.
- They will also need to rethink and alter their communication strategies and move beyond ceremonial awareness drives and campaigns to interventions that are truly engaging and which make the communities feel important and valued.
- Even more crucial is to engage communities in planning, execution and monitoring of health care services at all levels. Create fora where they can freely convey what they want and how they want it to be delivered, where they can share how they feel about government policies, programmes or services and where they can hold people and systems accountable for gaps without the fear of being subjugated.
- Also, governments at both Union and State level must commit to investing more on health care and prioritising primary health care services.
- Quality health services in all aspects, and not just in sporadic efforts such as pandemic vaccination campaigns, should be delivered. Once we establish these, we might start seeing communities respond favourably and supportively to public health efforts.

GS III

Current challenges and the future threats facing the Indian economy

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The end of any quarter typically throws up a lot of economic analysis. Last week, the Reserve Bank of India released its June bulletin, which provided the RBI's assessment of how the Indian economy is placed.*

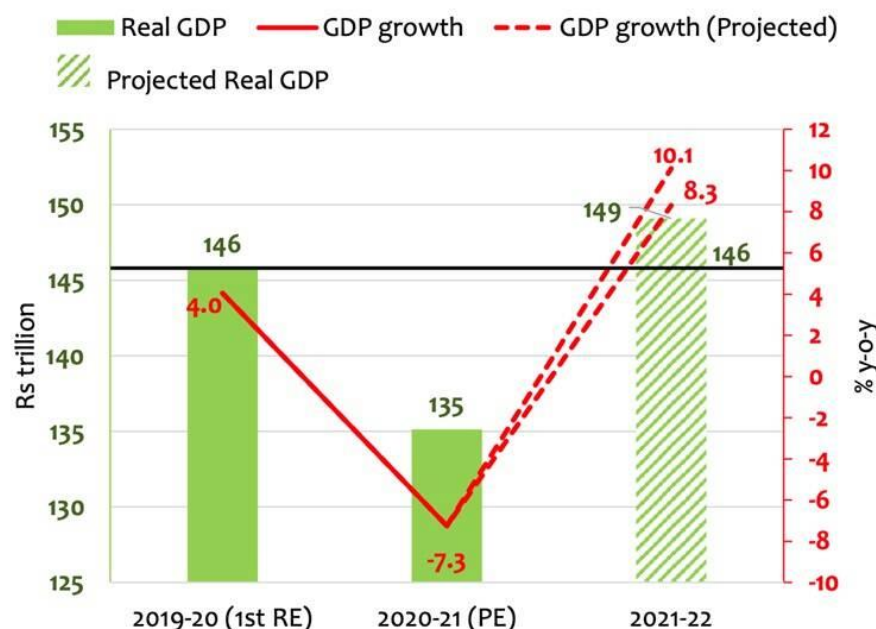
Details:

- Even though hardly any entity knows as much about the Indian economy as the RBI, the more instructive analysis was carried out by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (or NCAER) as it released its Quarterly Economic Review.
- The NCAER distinguished itself in finding innovative ways to map the state of the Indian economy during the pandemic.
- At a time when official sources of data suffered large gaps and inadequacies, researchers at NCAER found their own ways to assess the extent of economic disruption due to Covid.
- As early as December 2020, they had correctly forecast (to the first digit after the decimal) that the full-year GDP growth will be minus 7.3% — a number that the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) arrived at only by May 31 this year! As such, it makes sense to listen to NCAER's forecast in the wake of the second Covid wave.

Current Challenges

1: Two years worth of GDP growth has been lost

- The chart below provides an understanding of how the Indian economy has been hit. First of all, look at the green bars. They show the total amount of India's GDP as measured in trillions of rupees — the left-hand side scale.
- In 2019-20, India's GDP was Rs 146 trillion. In other words, India had produced goods and services worth Rs 146 trillion that year. Then, in the last financial year — that is, in 2020-21 — it fell to Rs 135 trillion. That's the fall of minus 7.3% we were talking about earlier.



Notes: RE stands for revised estimates, PE stands for Provisional Estimates.

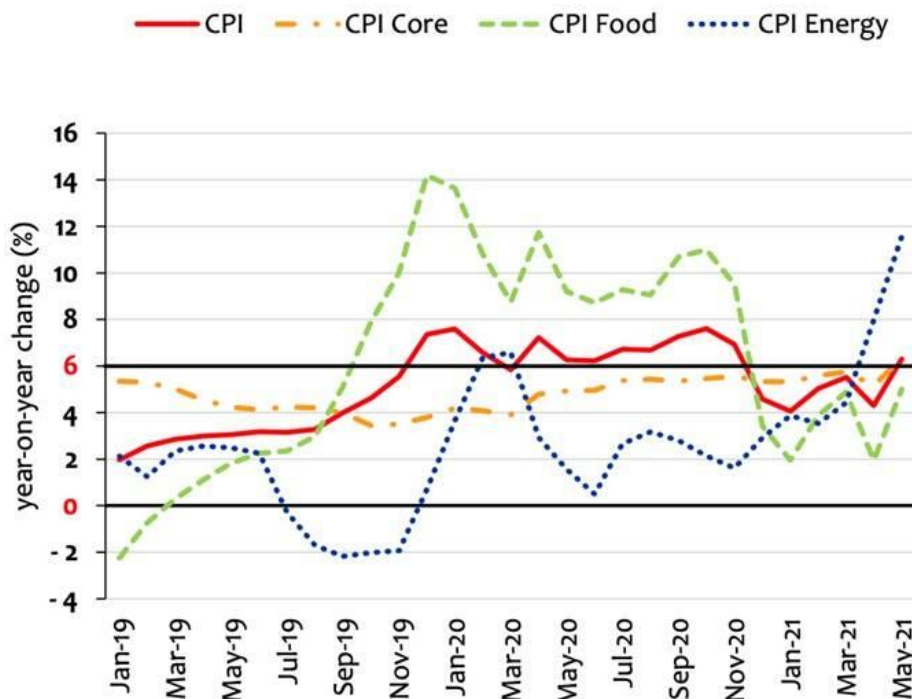
Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.



- In the current financial year — that is, in 2021-22 — the GDP is expected to grow back to Rs 146 trillion after registering a growth of 8.3%. This would mean that, in terms of overall economic production, India would have lost two full years of growth.
- For instance, if there was no Covid disruption and India grew by even 6% in both these years, the total GDP would have reached the level of Rs 164 trillion — that is, Rs 18 trillion more than where India is likely to end up now.
- There is a chance that India may grow by 10.1% this year, instead of 8.3%, and in that case, India's GDP would go up to Rs 149 trillion but even so, India would be far off from where it could have been without Covid.
- The red line, which maps the growth rate of GDP in percentage terms (and corresponds to the scale on the right-hand side of the Chart) gives an impression of a “V-shaped” recovery. But, in terms of actual production, the economy will only manage to recover the ground it lost last year.

2: Both retail and wholesale inflation is trending up

- At a time when economic growth has taken a hit and recovery is muted due to the second Covid wave, India is also facing ever-increasing prices. CHARTS 2 and 3 provide a break up of how retail and wholesale inflation has behaved over the past couple of years.
- Headline retail inflation, the red line in CHART 2, is the rate at which prices increase for retail consumers like you.
- This inflation rate stayed above the RBI's comfort zone (2% to 6%) between November 2019 and November 2020. But, after a brief period of martial relief, it has again crossed the 6%-mark in May this year.

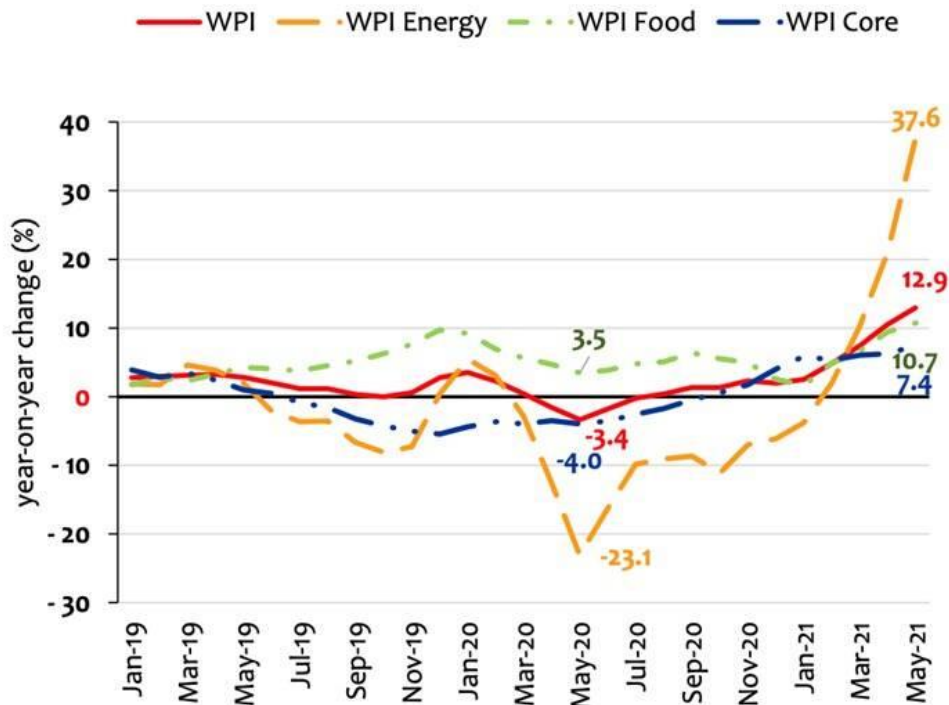


Sources: Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation and Office of Economic Advisor.

- The other crucial line to look at is the orange dotted line. It shows the core inflation — it is calculated by taking away the price rise in fuel and food items.
- The fact that even this inflation rate has remained consistently close to RBI's upper limit, shows that it is not just a matter of petrol and diesel prices being very high or vegetables and fruit prices rising too fast.



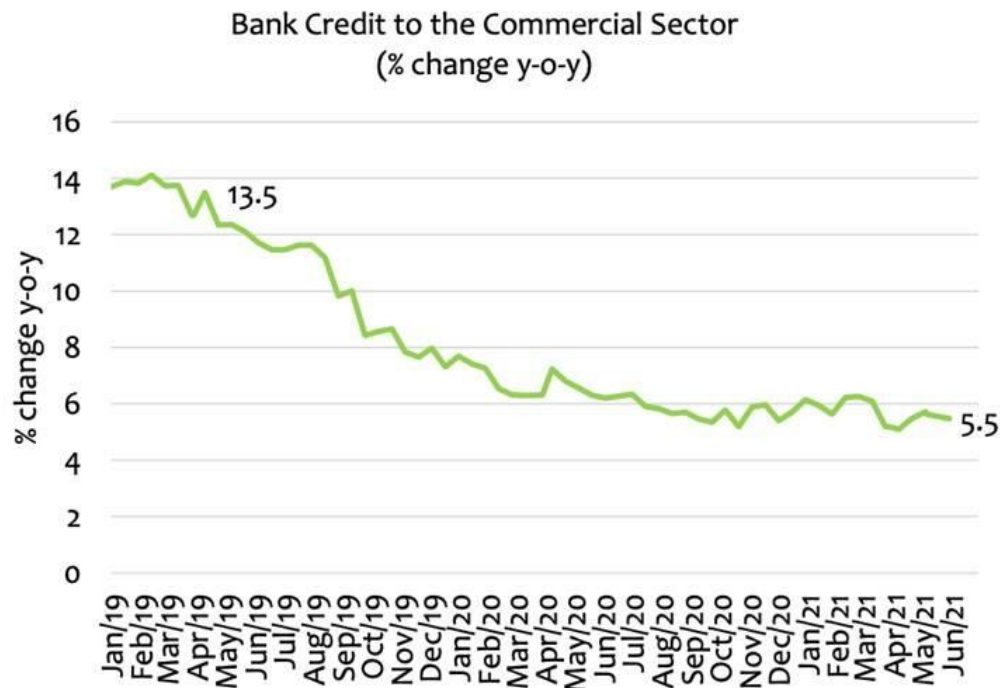
- The common Indian is witnessing a fast rise in prices across the board.
- What about wholesale prices? CHART 3 provides the answer.
- For a long time, the wholesale prices were not increasing too fast. But starting from January onwards, that trend, too, has worsened. In May, WPI inflation was nearly 13%. In other words, wholesale prices were rising at the rate of 13%.



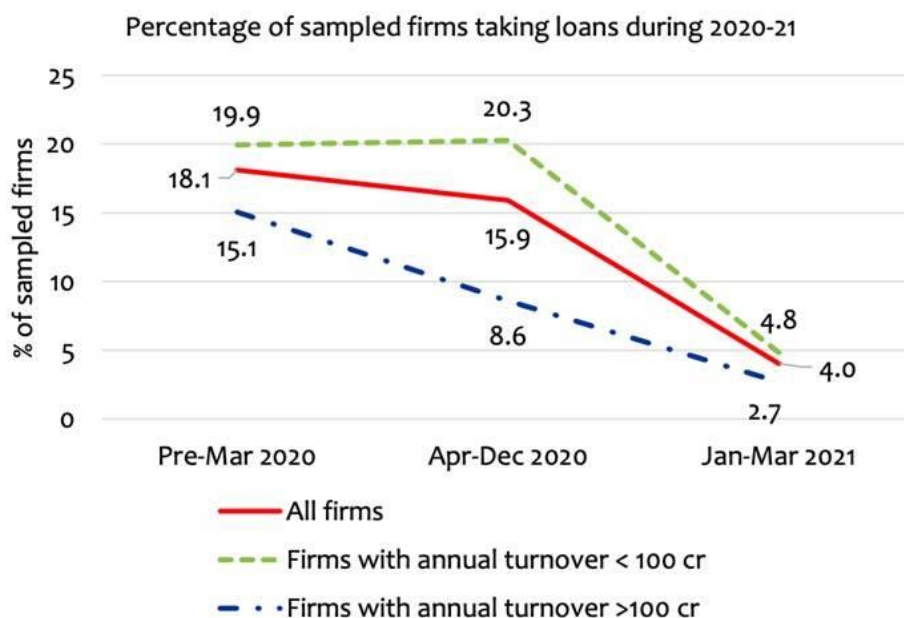
Sources: Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation and Office of Economic Advisor.

3: Poor credit offtake in the commercial sector

- The biggest engine of GDP in the Indian economy is the expenditure that Indians undertake in their private capacity. This demand for goods and services — be it in the form of a new car or a haircut or a new laptop or a family vacation — is what accounts for more than 55% of all GDP in a year.
- Even before Covid, the Indian economy had reached a stage where the common man was holding back this expenditure.
 - The first Covid wave made that trend worse with people either losing jobs or salaries being reduced.
 - The second Covid wave has compounded the problem further because now everyone is bothered about the high health expenses.
- In the absence of consumer spending, the country's businessmen — both big and small — are holding back new investments and refusing to seek new loans.
- CHARTS 4 shows how bank credit to the commercial sector has plummeted in just the last two years.
- CHART 5 shows how the percentage of sampled firms seeking loans has just collapsed.



- These essentially imply that businesses are not very hopeful of increased demand in the near term.

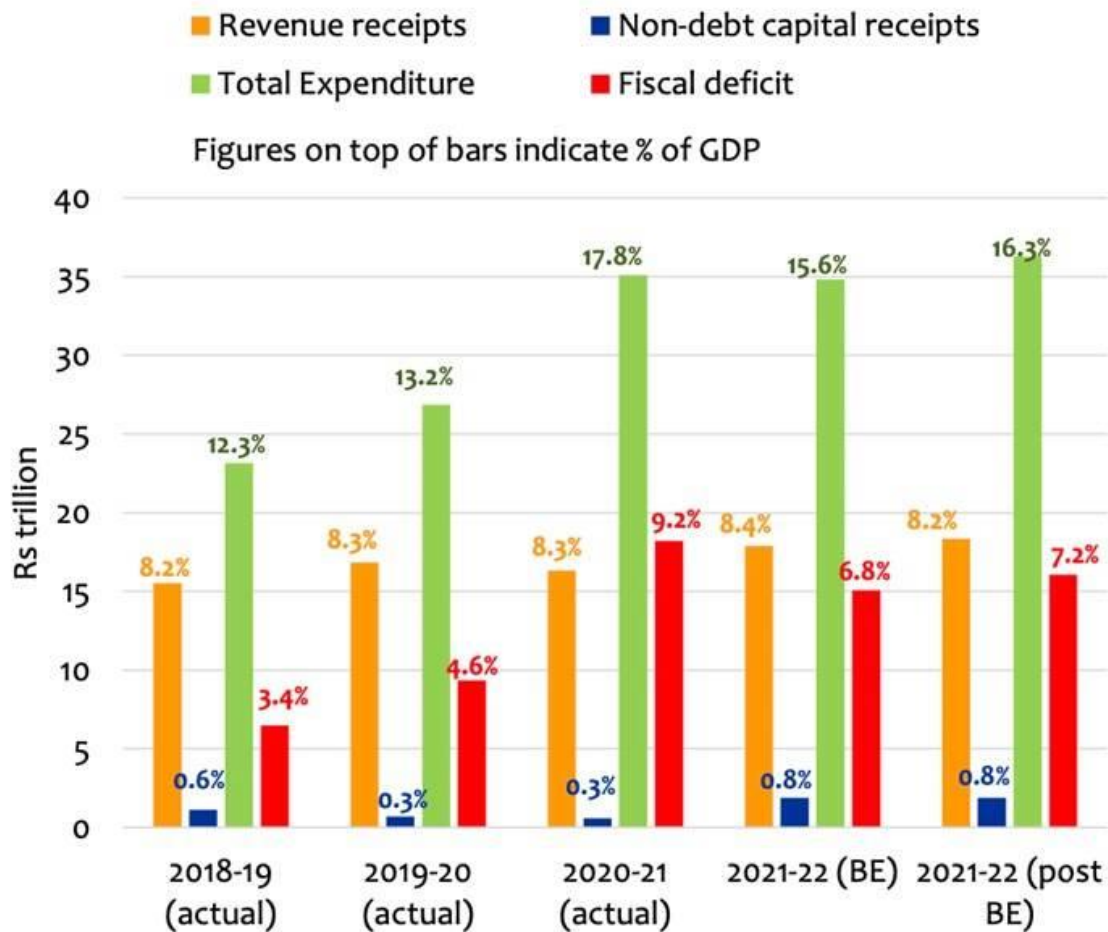


4: Inadequate spending by the government

- Given that domestic consumers are holding back consumption and domestic businesses are holding back investments (the second-biggest engine of GDP growth), it was incumbent on the third-biggest engine of India's GDP growth — that is, the government — to spend more and pull the economy out of the current rut.
- But as the green bars in CHART 6 show, the Indian government has been stingy about spending more.
- The green bars show the total expenditure (in terms of a per cent of GDP).



- After being forced to spend more in 2020-21, the government has actually pulled back (as a proportion of GDP) in 2021-22. It is for this reason that its deficit will fall in FY22 as against FY21.



- But this move is proving to be counterproductive for India's economic revival. The NCAER review makes the following remark: "Unfortunately, an inexplicably contractionary fiscal policy in 2021-22, sharply reducing the deficit, will delay recovery."

What about the future threats?

1: The slow pace of vaccination and a possible third Covid wave

- By now it is clear that there is no economic recovery unless India gets a significant majority of its population vaccinated. If the pace of vaccination continues to lag, there is the possibility of a third wave, which may bring with it another round of disruption.
- It is also very important to understand that even the possibility of a third wave is quite dangerous for economic recovery.
- That's because the increased uncertainty further worsens the trends of consumers holding back consumption and businesses holding back new investments.
- This is more so because the people's resilience and ability to deal with the adverse effects of Covid has also been coming down.

2: Monetary policy hitting a barrier

- Between fiscal policy (which has to do with government's spending) and monetary policy (the ease with which one can take a loan and the interest rate one has to pay on new loans), most of the heavy lifting towards achieving economic revival has been done by the RBI.



- As mentioned earlier, the government has not been expanding its fiscal policy by as much as many expected it to. Indeed, it was largely left for the RBI to pump in loads of cheap money in the form of new loans in a bid to jump-start the economy.
- But there are several reasons why RBI may not be able to help out for much longer.
 - For one, as shown earlier, inflation rates are spiking. The RBI, which is legally required to control inflation, will have to do whatever it takes to keep inflation within bounds. Typically, this would require the RBI to raise interest rates.
 - There is another reason why RBI might have to raise the domestic interest rate. Thanks to the sharp spurt in economic growth and inflation in the US, its central bank — the Federal Reserve — could soon raise US interest rates. If India has to remain an attractive destination for global investors, RBI would have to give up on the regime of low-interest rates.

3: The long-term adverse effects of short-term shocks

- Beyond the above-mentioned threats, and, in fact, regardless of them, NCAER economists such as Sudipto Mundle and Bornali Bhandari point to another key challenge: Hysteresis. In other words, the long term effects of the short term shocks.
- Starting from a 2020–21 baseline which is 7.3 per cent lower than in 2019– 20, GDP has to grow well above the recent pre-pandemic trend rate (5.8 per cent) for India to catch up with its pre-pandemic growth path.
- This will require deep and wide-ranging structural reforms in the financial sector, power & foreign trade. Reforms in cooperation with the states are also urgent in health, education, labour and land, which are all primarily state subjects.
- While clarifying on this point during the latest quarterly review, Mundle stated: “In fact, the main burden of our song is that the impacts of this [Covid shock] are more long term than one might imagine and by then India would have gone beyond its sweet spot of so-called demographic dividend... so the long term impacts are very very frightening.”

Reining in the Big Four

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Recently, the U.S. House of Representatives Judiciary Committee voted to advance six Bills outlawing business practices that sit at the core of tech companies such as Google, Facebook, Amazon and Apple. The package of Bills, which would stop the Big Tech from competing on the platforms they run, will become law once they are passed in the House and in the Senate. These Bills constitute the biggest action to come out of the anti-trust scrutiny these companies have been facing in the U.S. over the last few years. While many nations have taken legal or legislative routes to limit the influence of the Big Four, this is the first major move on their home turf.*

What is ‘anti-trust’?

- Anti-trust is an American term for laws meant to prevent unfair business practices such as monopolisation, which leads to fewer choices for consumers and higher prices.
- A prime example of anti-trust law in action is when Microsoft was sued in 1998 for giving away the Internet Explorer web browser for free with its Windows operating system, which led to the collapse of browser-maker Netscape. Microsoft was found guilty of using its market dominance in operating systems to build a monopoly in browsers and was forced to open up Windows to other developers.
- The major anti-trust laws in the U.S. are the Sherman Act of 1890 and the Clayton Act of 1914, and the Federal Trade Commission is charged with upholding them. The evolution of technology has, however, taken the edge off these anti-trust laws.

- A report submitted in October last year after a 16-month probe by the U.S. Congress stated that since rise in consumer prices is the currently accepted indicator of unfair practices, it is difficult to gauge the actions of companies like Google and Facebook that make money off advertising and give many products away for free.
- The new package of six Bills that is now in Congress is an attempt to add more teeth to anti-trust proceedings against new-age tech firms.

What's in the Bills?

- The Platform Competition and Opportunity Act would prevent big tech companies from nipping competition in the bud by buying up smaller rivals, like what Facebook had done by buying up Instagram for \$1 billion.
- The Ending Platform Monopolies Act would prevent companies from becoming players on their own platforms, like how Amazon sells its own brands, competing with smaller retailers that use its e-commerce platform; Apple's chokehold over developers on App Store is another example.
- The Augmenting Compatibility and Competition by Enabling Service Switching (ACCESS) Act promotes interoperability, forcing platforms to let users take data such as contacts lists and profile information with them while migrating to other platforms.
- The Merger Filing Fee Modernization Act increases the government fee on large corporate mergers to help fund anti-trust law enforcement.
- The American Choice and Innovation Online Act would prevent companies from giving preferences to their own products in the marketplaces they run, such as Google search results prioritising YouTube videos or Amazon highlighting its own brands.
- The State Antitrust Enforcement Venue Act would prevent companies from shifting anti-trust cases to courts that could be favourable to them.

Will they become law?

- Over the last few years, the Big Tech has lost favour with both political parties in the U.S. While Republicans perceive an anti-conservative bias in these companies on issues such as free speech, Democrats have been up in arms over weak data privacy and fake news proliferation.
- These Bills enjoy support primarily from the Democrats, with some Republicans thrown in. However, legislative procedures such as a filibuster may force the Bills' supporters to get more Republicans on board. The 50-50 split in the Senate, which is the Upper House, will be another obstacle to surmount.
- The tech companies also have their supporters in both camps. According to news reports, some Republican legislators see these laws as excessive government control on private enterprises, which is anathema to the conservatives.
- On the other hand, for some Democratic legislators from California, on whose turf these companies sit, any loss to these companies translates to a loss in incomes and employment in their domains.

How will the move affect India?

- Any behavioural change that these companies may be forced to adopt in the U.S, which is their largest market, would likely be adopted in all their global markets as well.
- India already has versions of some of these laws, such as the one that prevents Amazon from selling brands that it owns on its platform. If implemented globally, a level playing field for brand

Current Affairs Quiz

1) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay?

1. His most famous novel was Anand Math from which, the Bande Mataram, was later adopted as Indian National Song.
2. He started a monthly literary magazine named Durgeshnandini in 1897.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : a

He started a monthly literary magazine named Bangadarshan in April 1872.

Durgeshnandini, his first Bengali romance, was published in 1865.

2) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Micro Finance Institutions?

1. It is a form of financial service which provides small loans and other financial services to poor and low-income households.
2. In India microcredit is delivered only through Non-banking financial companies (NBFCs)

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : a

Microcredit is delivered through a variety of institutional channels viz.,

1. Scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) (including small finance banks (SFBs) and regional rural banks (RRBs))
2. Cooperative banks,
3. Non-banking financial companies (NBFCs)

3) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Pinaka Rocket?

1. The navigation system of the missile is linked with the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System.
2. The enhanced range version of Pinaka Rocket System can destroy targets at distances up to 45 kms.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

4) Which of the following statements is/are incorrect with respect to Protection Officers?

- a. It is a provision under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005
- b. A Protection Officer will bridge the gap between administration and justice for aggrieved women
- c. No men can be appointed as a Protection Officer
- d. They are appointed by the State Government and works under the control and supervision of Magistrate

Answer : c

5) Consider the following statements with respect to Virus Mutations:

1. Virus by its very nature mutates and it is a part of its evolution.
2. Mutations can have positive, negative or neutral effects on human health.

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

6) Which state is associated with the following products?

1. Leteku
2. KajiNemu
3. Bao-Dhaan

Select the correct answer code:

- a. Assam
- b. Odisha
- c. Jharkhand
- d. Madhya Pradesh

Answer : a

7) Songhua River originates from -

- a. Myanmar
- b. China
- c. South Korea
- d. Thailand

Answer : b

8) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Agni Prime Missile?

1. It is a surface-to-surface ballistic missile, a nuclear-capable weapon made fully of a composite material.
2. It has been designed and developed by Bharat Dynamics Limited.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : a

It is designed and developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

9) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Attorney General (AG) of India?

1. His duty is to appear on behalf of the GoI in all cases in the Supreme Court.
2. AG is the highest law officer in the country, appointed by the President on the advice of the government.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

10) Consider the following statements with respect to Article 371



1. The Articles 371 to 371-J in Part XXI of the constitution contain special provisions for twelve states.
2. It falls under PART XXI titled 'Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions' of the Indian Constitution.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

11) Consider the following statements with respect to Agri Stack Program:

1. It will create a unified platform for farmers to provide them end to end services across the agriculture food value chain.
2. It is implemented by Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : a

It is implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture.

12) Barnadi Wildlife Sanctuary is located in -

- a. Sikkim
- b. Arunachal Pradesh
- c. Mizoram
- d. Assam

Answer : d

13) Bhotia and Anwal tribes can be found in -

- a. Himachal Pradesh
- b. Arunachal Pradesh
- c. Uttarakhand
- d. Sikkim

Answer : c

14) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Black carbon (BC)?

1. It is a form of particulate matter that results from carbon emissions.
2. The Indo-Gangetic plain has a high burden of black carbon with serious implications for regional climate and human health.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

15) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to ZyCov-D Vaccine?

1. It is a vaccine that uses a genetically engineered, non-replicating version of a type of DNA molecule known as a 'plasmid'.

2. It is jointly developed by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and Bharat Biotech
Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : a

It is developed by Zydus Cadila with the support of the central government's Department of Biotechnology and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

16) Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) is released by -

- a. Universal Postal Union (UPU)
- b. International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
- c. World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)
- d. Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE)

Answer : b

17) Consider the following statements with respect to Gender Samvaad:

- 1. It aims to generate greater awareness on gender related interventions under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) across the country.
- 2. It was organised by the Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE) and Ministry of Rural Development's DAY-NRLM.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

18) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Asian elephants?

- 1. Adult male Asian elephants are less social than females.
- 2. Old males were found mostly in the company of their age peers and less frequently with young males.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

19) Global Peace Index Report is published by -

- a. Economist Intelligence Unit
- b. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
- c. UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute
- d. The Institute for Economics and Peace

Answer : d

20) Consider the following statements with respect to Heat Dome:

1. It is essentially a mountain of warm air built into a very wavy jet stream, with extreme undulations.
2. It develops when there is a large poleward shift in the jet stream.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

