

PRAYAS4IAS

AN INITIATIVE BY THE PRAYAS INDIA

JULY WEEK 2



July (Week 2)

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Prelims

NATIONAL

Himalayan yaks

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The high-altitude yak, feeling the climate change heat across the Himalayan belt, will now be insured.*

Details:

- The National Research Centre on Yak (NRCY) at Dirang in West Kameng district, Arunachal Pradesh, has tied up with the National Insurance Company Ltd. for insuring their livestock.
- The countrywide population trend shows that yak population has been decreasing at an alarming rate.
- Further, climate change and inexplicable changes in the weather pattern have been reported from the yak rearing areas throughout the country.
- The insurance policy would shield the yak owners against the risks posed by weather calamities, diseases, in-transit mishaps, surgical operations and strikes or riots.
- A four-year-old report said the number of yaks across the country declined by almost 24.7% between 2012 and 2019.
- The total yak population in India is about 58,000. The Union Territories of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir have some 26,000, followed by 24,000 in Arunachal Pradesh, 5,000 in Sikkim, 2,000 in Himachal Pradesh and about 1,000 in West Bengal and Uttarakhand.
- According to the policy, the owners would have to get their yaks ear-tagged and provide a proper description in order to get their animals insured.

Himalayan Yak

- The Yak is endemic to the Tibetan Plateau and the adjacent high-altitude regions.
- Yaks belong to the Bovini tribe, which also includes bisons, buffaloes, and cattle.
- It can tolerate temperatures as low as -40 degrees Celsius
- IUCN Red list status: Vulnerable
- Listed under Appendix I of CITES
- Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972: Schedule II
- The most serious threat to the Wild Yak's survival is casual and market hunting. The Yak is hunted for its meat, horns, and other materials.

Bhalia wheat

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *Exports of Geographical Indications certified Bhalia wheat from Gujarat began.*

Bhalia Wheat:

- This wheat variety has high protein content and is sweet in taste.
- The crop is grown mostly across the Bhal region of Gujarat which includes Ahmadabad, Anand, Kheda, Bhavnagar, Surendranagar, Bharuch districts.
- It is grown in rainfed conditions without irrigation and cultivated in around two lakh hectares of agricultural land in Gujarat.
- The Bhalia variety of wheat received GI certification in 2011.

INS Tabar

(Source: The Times of India)

Context: *INS Tabar exercises with the Italian Navy off Naples, Italy.*

About INS Tabar:

- INS Tabar is a Talwar-class stealth Frigate built for Indian Navy in Russia.
- The ship is equipped with a versatile range of weapons and sensors and is among the earliest stealth frigates of the Indian Navy.
- The ship is part of the Indian Navy's Western Fleet which is based at Mumbai under Western Naval Command.

Zika Virus

(Source: Indian Express)

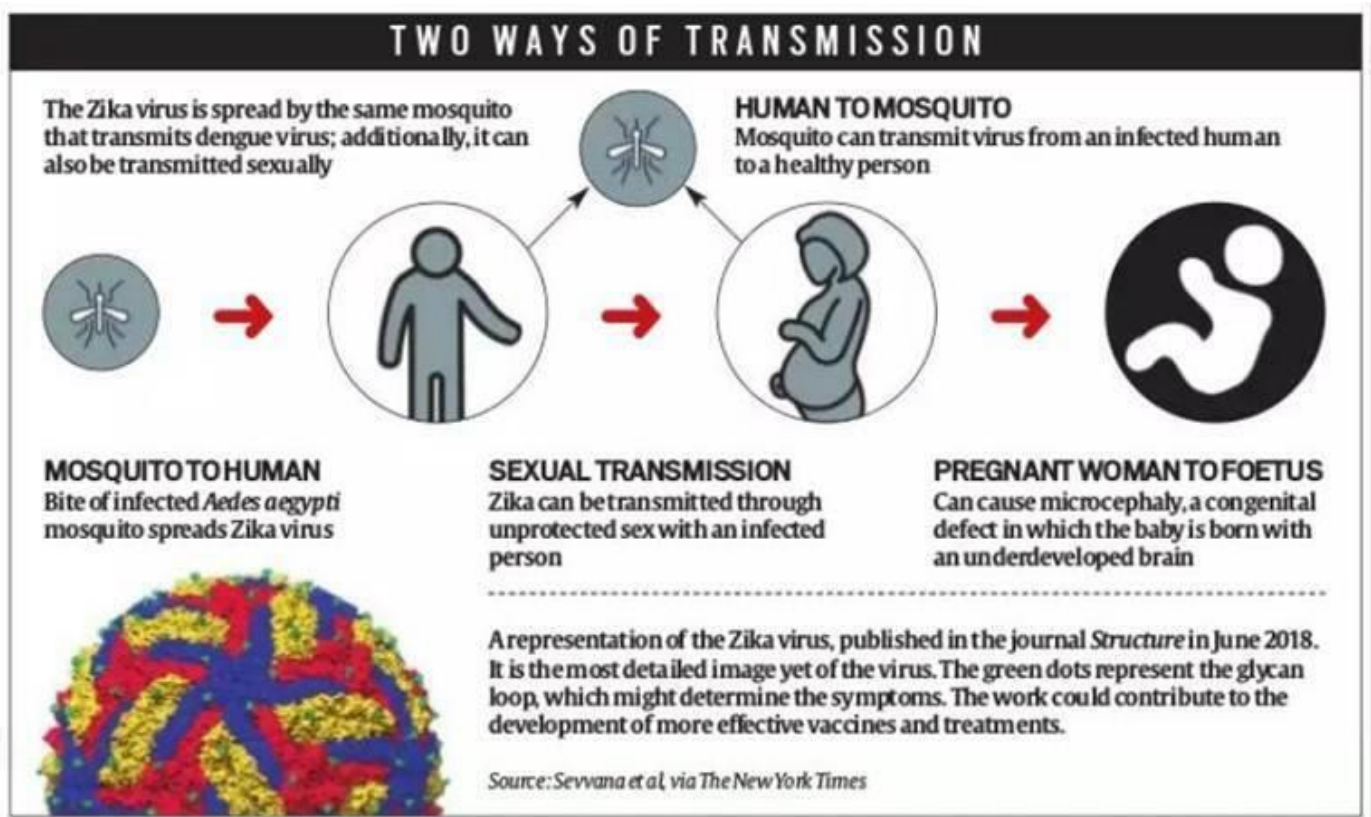
Context: *Kerala is on alert after detecting at least 15 cases of the Zika virus.*

What is Zika virus?

- Zika is a viral infection, spread by mosquitoes. The vector is the Aedes aegypti mosquito, which also spreads dengue and chikungunya.
- Additionally, infected people can transmit Zika sexually. First identified in Uganda in 1947 in monkeys, Zika was detected in humans five years later.
- Sporadic cases have been reported throughout the world since the 1960s, but the first outbreak happened only in 2007 in the Island of Yap in the Pacific.
- In 2015, a major outbreak in Brazil led to the revelation that Zika can be associated with microcephaly, a condition in which babies are born with small and underdeveloped brains.

How dangerous is Zika?

- Fears around Zika primarily involve microcephaly, especially when pregnant women are infected. Generally, the virus is not considered dangerous to anyone other than pregnant women.
- Some countries that have had a Zika outbreak, including Brazil, reported a steep increase in Guillain-Barré syndrome — a neurological disorder that could lead to paralysis and death, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).
- In 2017, following a study on Brazil's confirmed cases, the US National Institutes of Health study estimated the fatality rate at 8.3 per cent.



- Zika has no treatment or vaccine. The symptoms of Zika virus are mild and usually require rest, consumption of plenty of fluids, and common pain and fever medicines, the WHO says.

Mishri variety of cherries

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: First commercial shipment of Mishri variety of cherries from Kashmir exported to Dubai.

Mishri Cherries:

- Mishri variety of Cherries are not only delicious but also contain vitamins, minerals and plant compound with health benefits.
- Jammu and Kashmir produces more than 95% of the country's total production of commercial varieties of cherries.
- It produces four varieties of cherry — Double, Makhmali, Mishri and Italy.
- The commencement of commercial shipment of cherries would provide huge opportunities for exports of several temperate fruits like plums, pears, apricot and apples from Kashmir to especially middle east countries in the forthcoming seasons.



dbGENVOC

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *The world's first database of genomic variants of oral cancer named dbGENVOC created.*

About dbGENVOC:

- dbGENVOC is a browsable online database of GENomic Variants of Oral Cancer.
- It is a free resource and has been made publicly accessible.
- It is created by the DBT-National Institute of Biomedical Genomics (NIBMG), Kalyani an autonomous institute funded by the Department of Biotechnology, GOI.
- dbGENVOC is not just a catalogue of genomic variants, it has a built-in powerful search engine.
 - It also allows a reasonable extent of statistical and bioinformatic analysis to be carried out online, including identifying variants in associated altered pathways in oral cancer.
- The repository, which will be updated annually with variation data from new oral cancer patients from different regions of India and southeast Asia, has the potential to support advances in oral cancer research and will be a major step in moving forward from simply cataloguing variants to gain insight into their significance.

Section 43D(5)

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Just two days before his death, Stan Swamy had moved the Bombay High Court challenging Section 43D(5) of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) — a provision Swamy termed “illusory”.*

The provision

- The UAPA, enacted in 1967, was strengthened by the Congress-led UPA government in 2008 and 2012. The test for denying bail under the UAPA is that the court must be satisfied that a “prima facie” case exists against the accused.
- In 2019, the SC defined prima facie narrowly to mean that the courts must not analyse evidence or circumstances but look at the “totality of the case” presented by the state.
- Section 43D(5) reads: “Notwithstanding anything contained in the Code, no person accused of an offence punishable under Chapters IV and VI of this Act shall, if in custody, be released on bail or on his own bond unless the Public Prosecutor has been given an opportunity of being heard on the application for such release.
- Provided that such accused person shall not be released on bail or on his own bond if the Court, on a perusal of the case diary or the report made under section 173 of the Code is of the opinion that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accusation against such person is prima facie true.

Madurai Malli

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *GI certified Madurai Malli and other flowers exported to USA & Dubai from Tamil Nadu.*

Madurai Malli:



- The Madurai Malli or Jasmine plays a key role in Tamil Nadu culture and economy.
- The sacred flower has a link to Madurai dating back to 300 BCE.
- Flowers hold a special place in Indian culture as they are intrinsic to many rituals and customs.
- Madurai Malli is famed for its fragrance and it has a huge demand among the Indian diaspora in Malaysia, Singapore, Dubai and also Western Europe, especially France.
- To meet this demand, jasmine is cultivated across 1200 hectares of land in Madurai district alone.
- Moist, well-drained, sandy loam soil in Madurai is ideal for jasmine cultivation.
- Madurai jasmine is widely used in weaving garlands and its extract is used in making perfumes, soaps and lotions.
- It is also used as a flavouring agent for rice known as malli rice.

Ministry of Co-operation

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *Modi Government creates a new Ministry of Co-operation.*

Details:

- A separate 'Ministry of Co-operation' has been created by the government for realizing the vision of 'Sahkar se Samriddhi'.
- This ministry will provide a separate administrative, legal and policy framework for strengthening the **cooperative movement** in the country.
- The Ministry will work to streamline processes for 'Ease of doing business' for co-operatives and enable the development of Multi-State Co-operatives (MSCS).

The Indian Army Memorial in Italy

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *During his four-day visit to the UK and Italy, Indian Army Chief Manoj Naravane will inaugurate the Indian Army Memorial at Cassino in Italy, about 140 km away from Rome. The memorial commemorates over 3,100 Commonwealth servicemen who took part in the effort to liberate Italy in World War II. Apart from this, 900 Indian soldiers were also commemorated on this memorial.*

What was happening in Italy in WWII?

- Under Benito Mussolini, Italy had joined Nazi Germany in 1936 and in 1940 it entered WWII (1939-1945) against the Allies.
- But in 1943, Mussolini was overthrown and instead, Italy declared war on Germany. The invasion of Italy by the Allies coincided with an armistice that was made with the Italians.
- Even so, the UK's National Army Museum notes that for two years during WWII, Italy became one of the war's most "exhausting campaigns" because they were facing a skilled and resolute enemy.

What was India's involvement in World War II?

- In the first half of the 1940s, India was still under the British rule and the Indian Army fought in both the world wars. It comprised both Indian and European soldiers.



- Apart from this, there was the East India Company Army that also recruited both Indian and European soldiers and the British Army, which was also present in India.
- The Indian Army was the largest volunteer force during WWII, with over 2.5 million (more than 20 lakh) Indians participating.
- These troops fought the Axis powers (Germany, Italy and Japan) as part of the Allies. By 1945, the Allies had won, Italy had been liberated, Adolf Hitler was dead and India was barely a couple years short of independence.
- However, while millions of Indians participated, their efforts are not always recognised.
- The website called “British Military History” notes that three infantry divisions of the Indian Army took part in the Italian campaign.
- These were the 4th, 8th and 10th Indian Divisions.
- The first one to land in the country was the 8 Indian Infantry Division that saw action in Iraq and Iran when the British invaded these countries in 1941.
- The second one arrived was the 4 Indian Division that came to Italy from North Africa in December 1943. In 1944, it was deployed in Cassino.
- The third, which is the 10 Indian Division, was formed in 1941 in Ahmednagar and moved to Italy in 1944.

Section 66 A of IT Act

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Supreme Court on Monday found it “distressing”, “shocking” and “terrible” that people were still booked and tried under Section 66A of the Information Technology (IT) Act even six years after it struck down the provision as unconstitutional and a violation of free speech. Section 66A had prescribed three years’ imprisonment if a social media message caused “annoyance” or was found “grossly offensive”.*

IT Act, 2000

- The Information Technology Act, 2000 was enacted by the Indian Parliament in 2000. It is the primary law in India for matters related to cybercrime and e-commerce.
 - The act was enacted to give legal sanction to electronic commerce and electronic transactions, to enable e-governance, and also to prevent cybercrime.
 - Under this law, for any crime involving a computer or a network located in India, foreign nationals can also be charged.
 - The law prescribes penalties for various cybercrimes and fraud through digital/electronic format.
 - It also gives legal recognition to digital signatures.
 - The IT Act also amended certain provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Banker’s Book Evidence Act, 1891, the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 and the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934 to modify these laws to make them compliant with new digital technologies.
 - In the wake of the recent Indo-China border clash, the Government of India banned various Chinese apps under the Information Technology Act. Read more about this in an RSTV titled, ‘TikTok, Other Chinese Apps Banned’.

Section 66A

- Section 66A gave authorities the power to arrest anyone accused of posting content on social media that could be deemed ‘offensive’.
- This amendment was passed in the Parliament without any debate.
- As per the said section, a person could be convicted if proved on the charges of sending any ‘information that is grossly offensive or has menacing character’.



- It also made it an offence to send any information that the sender knows to be false, but for the purpose of annoyance, inconvenience, danger, obstruction, insult, injury, criminal intimidation, enmity, hatred or ill-will, through a computer or electronic device.
- The penalty prescribed for the above was up to three years' imprisonment with fine.

Why SC struck down section 66A?

- The SC had noted that Section 66A arbitrarily, excessively and disproportionately invades the right of free speech, under **article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution**, and upsets the balance between such right and the reasonable restrictions that may be imposed on such right and the definition of offences under the provision was open-ended and undefined.
 - The court also said that the provision used expressions “completely open-ended and undefined” and every expression used was “nebulous” in meaning.
 - What may be offensive to one may not be offensive to another.
 - What may cause annoyance or inconvenience to one may not cause annoyance or inconvenience to another.
 - Even the expression ‘persistently’ is completely imprecise.

Bamboo Oasis on Lands in Drought (BOLD)

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: KVIC launched Project BOLD.

Project BOLD:

- It is a KVIC project launched with the objectives of reducing desertification and providing livelihood and multi-disciplinary rural industry support.
- It has been launched in the tribal village Nichla Mandwa in Udaipur, Rajasthan.
- 5000 saplings of special bamboo species – *Bambusa Tulda* and *Bambusa Polymorpha* specially brought from Assam – have been planted over 25 bighas (16 acres approx.) of vacant arid Gram Panchayat land.
- Project BOLD seeks to create bamboo-based green patches in arid and semi-arid land zones.
- KVIC is set to replicate the Project at Village Dholera in Ahmedabad district in Gujarat and Leh-Ladakh region by August this year.

The Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Care and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2021

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *The Ministry of Women and Child Development invites comments/suggestions on the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Care and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2021.*

Details:

- The objective of the bill is to prevent and counter trafficking in persons, especially women and children, to provide for care, protection, and rehabilitation to the victims, while respecting their rights, and creating a supportive legal, economic and social environment for them and also to ensure prosecution of offenders.
- The bill proposes stringent punishments for offenders, including hefty fines and seizing of their properties.

- The draft bill has proposed severe punishment for offences classified as aggravated forms of human trafficking.

Provisions of the bill:

- A person found guilty of trafficking can be imprisoned for a minimum term of seven years, which can be extended to 10 years.
- The provisions will apply to every offence of trafficking in persons with cross-border implications.
- Those convicted shall also be liable to a fine of ₹1 lakh to five lakh.
- It will also allow the properties of the convicts, bought using money from trafficking, to be forfeited.

Five portals on the AYUSH sector launched

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: Five portals of importance were launched and four publications were released by the Union Minister of Ayush.

The 5 portals:

- **Ayurveda Dataset on Clinical Trial Registry of India (CTRI):** CTRI is a primary Register of Clinical Trials under the WHO's International Clinical Trials Registry Platform. The creation of an Ayurveda Dataset in CTRI facilitates the usage of Ayurveda terminologies to record clinical study based on Ayurveda interventions. This will enhance worldwide visibility for Ayurveda-based clinical trials.
- **CCRAS-Research Management Information System (RMIS):** RMIS is a one-stop solution for Research and Development in Ayurveda-based studies. The portal offers free reference material, research tools, and guidance by scientists and clinicians. It was developed jointly by the Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS) and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).
- **E-Medha (electronic Medical Heritage Accession) Portal:** Online public access catalogue for more than 12000 Indian medical heritage books through NIC's e-granthalaya platform.
- **AMAR (Ayush Manuscripts Advanced Repository) Portal:** It has digitized information on rare and hard to find manuscripts and catalogues of Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, Sowa Rigpa in libraries or in individual collections across India or in other parts of the world.
- **SHAI (Showcase of Ayurveda Historical Imprints) Portal:** It showcases inscriptions, archaeo-botanical information, sculptures, philological sources and advanced archaeo-genetic studies.

REIT (Real Estate Investment Trust)

(Source: [The Hindu Businessline](#))

Context: Since the launch of the first REIT (Real Estate Investment Trust) two years ago, SEBI, the market regulator, has made quite a few tweaks to REIT regulations to encourage investor participation. To improve liquidity in REITs and bring in more listings, SEBI recently announced that the minimum investment amount in a REIT be brought down to ₹10,000-15,000, with the revised trading lot at one unit; the earlier investment amount was ₹50,000, and the trading lot 200 units in the secondary market.

What is it?

- REITs are investment vehicles that pool investor money like mutual funds and use it to buy a portfolio of real estate assets.

- They manage these assets to generate a regular income and capital appreciation. In order to ensure that the REIT is able to generate income, 80 per cent of the portfolio of a REIT should be invested in completed and rent-generating properties.
- While REITs can invest in all kinds of income-generating properties — residences, offices, hotels, malls, warehouses *et al*, in India the listed REITs are focussed mainly on office space. Investors' awareness and participation had been slowly improving since the listing of the first REIT in the country (Embassy REIT).
- The structure of a REIT is similar to a mutual fund. It has three-tier structure — a sponsor, who is responsible for promoting the REIT with his own capital; a fund management company which is responsible for selecting and operating the properties; and the trustee, who ensures that the money is managed in the interest of unit-holders.
- For now, there are three office REITs listed in the country. More are likely to hit the market soon, with SEBI's move to bring down the minimum investment for investors.

NIPUN Bharat Programme

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *NIPUN Bharat Programme has been launched recently by Ministry of Education.*

About NIPUN Bharat Programme:

- NIPUN is an acronym for **N**ational **I**nitiative for **P**roficiency In Reading With **U**nderstanding and **N**
- Vision is to create an enabling environment to ensure universal acquisition of foundational literacy and numeracy, so that by 2026-27 every child achieves the desired learning competencies in reading, writing and numeracy at the end of Grade III and not later than Grade V.
- The mission will focus on:
 - Providing access and retaining children in foundational years of schooling;
 - Teacher capacity building;
 - Development of high quality and diversified Student and Teacher Resources/Learning Materials; and
 - Tracking the progress of each child in achieving learning outcomes.
- It has been launched under the aegis of the centrally sponsored Samagra Shiksha Scheme.
- NIPUN Bharat aims to cover the learning needs of children in the age group of 3 to 9 years.
- The program envisages making the experience of learning at the foundational stage Holistic, Integrated, Inclusive, Enjoyable, and Engaging.
- The goals of the Mission are set in the form of Lakshya Soochi or Targets for Foundational Literacy and Numeracy.
 - Lakshyas have been developed from Balvatika to Grade 3.
 - The Laskhyas are based on the learning outcomes developed by the NCERT and international research and ORF studies.



Albino palm civet

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

Context: *The common palm civet (Paradoxurus hermaphrodites) has made a comeback in Odisha after 129 years: Wildlife researchers have stumbled across one in Satkosia Tiger Reserve (STR) in the state's Angul district.*

Details:

- A partial albino common palm civet, Saliapatani, was last sighted in 1891 by a noted wildlife researcher in the forests of Kandhamal district.
- The common palm civet is a small mammal belonging to the family Viverridae. It can be found in southern and southeastern Asia.
- Their long, stocky body is covered with coarse, shaggy hair that is usually grey in colour. It is thought to lead a solitary lifestyle, except for brief periods during mating.
- It is both terrestrial and arboreal, and shows a nocturnal activity pattern with peaks between late evening until after midnight. It is usually active between dawn and four in the morning, but less active during nights when the moon is the brightest.
- The vegetation of Satkosia largely conforms to north Indian moist deciduous forest, northern tropical dry deciduous forest, and moist peninsular low-level Sal. The terrain is undulating.
- Albinism is a hypo-pigmentary disorder with a total lack of both melanins in hair, eyes and skin due to the heritable absence of functional tyrosinase enzyme in pigment cells affecting skin and hair.
- This resulting in a total white plumage / fur with red eyes.
- Albinism is controlled via inheritance by an autosomal recessive gene in all animal species.
- The coat colour variation in common palm civet in Satkosia calls for the need to revisit taxonomic and distribution status. Aberrant colouration has been reported widely in pelage of mammals and can vary due to environmental and geographical variations.
- While it is known that the aberration is due to genetic mutations affecting the melanin metabolic pathway, the exact mutation responsible cannot be confirmed by limited visual observations of phenotype in wild individuals.



Matsya Setu App

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *Matsya Setu Mobile App launched by the Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying Ministry.*

About the Matsya Setu App:

- It is an online course mobile app developed by the ICAR-Central Institute of Freshwater Aquaculture (ICAR-CIFA), Bhubaneswar, with the funding support of the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB), Hyderabad.



- The app aims to disseminate the latest freshwater aquaculture technologies to the aqua farmers of the country.
- Matsya Setu app has species-wise/subject-wise self-learning online course modules, where renowned aquaculture experts explain the basic concepts and practical demonstrations on breeding, seed production and grow-out culture of commercially important fishes like carp, catfish, scampi, murrel, ornamental fish, pearl farming etc.
- Better Management Practices to be followed in maintaining the soil & water quality, feeding and health management in aquaculture operations are also provided in the course platform.
- The modules are divided into small video chapters for the convenience of the learners, along with additional learning materials.
- It also features quizzes and tests for self-assessment.
- Upon successful completion of each course module, an e-Certificate can be auto-generated.
- Farmers can also ask their doubts through the app and get specific advisories from experts.



INTERNATIONAL

OPEC

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The latest round of meetings among the OPEC+ group of oil-exporting countries has stalled as the UAE has pushed back proposals making an increase in crude oil supply conditional on an extension to an output agreement. Another round of discussions between OPEC+ countries scheduled for Monday was reportedly called off as key players failed to make any progress in resolving key issues.*

What is the background?

- The OPEC+ group of countries had, in April 2020, entered into a two-year agreement, which entailed steep cuts in crude production to deal with a sharp fall in the price of oil as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The price of Brent crude hit an 18-year low of under \$20 per barrel in April 2020 as economic activity around the world crashed as countries dealt with the pandemic. The initial production cut by OPEC+ was about 10 million barrels per day or about 22 per cent of the reference production of OPEC+ nations.
- In November 2020, however, the price of Brent crude started climbing consistently and has, now, risen to \$76.5 per barrel — up from about \$40 per barrel at the end of October — buoyed by the steady rollout of vaccination programmes around the world.
- OPEC+, however, maintained lower levels of production despite crude oil prices reaching pre-Covid levels, with Saudi Arabia, notably, announcing a further cut in production of 1 million barrels per day for the February-to-April period, which helped boost rising prices even further.
- The OPEC+ group ran into sharp criticism from developing economies, including India, for deliberately maintaining low supply levels to raise prices.
- Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan had even said the high price of crude oil was slowing down the economic recovery of developing economies post the pandemic.
- In April, OPEC+ agreed to gradually increase crude production as prices reached \$64.5 per barrel including a phased end to Saudi Arabia's 1 million barrel per day cut in production by July.

Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)

- The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is a **permanent, intergovernmental organization**, created at the **Baghdad Conference in 1960**, by **Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela**.
- It aims **to manage the supply of oil in an effort to set the price of oil in the world market**, in order to avoid fluctuations that might affect the economies of both producing and purchasing countries.
- It is headquartered **in Vienna, Austria**.
- **OPEC membership is open to any country** that is a **substantial exporter of oil** and which shares the **ideals of the organization**.
- Gabon terminated its membership in January 1995. However, it rejoined the Organization in July 2016.
- As of 2019, OPEC has a total of 14 Member Countries viz. Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates(UAE), Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Libya, Nigeria, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Republic of Congo, Angola, Ecuador and Venezuela are members of OPEC.



The white flag campaign in Malaysia

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: In Malaysia, some residents of low-income families have started waving white flags as part of the so-called “White Flag Campaign”, or the #benderaputi (white flag) movement. They are doing this to convey distress about the financial crunch they have had to deal with amid the lockdowns due to Covid-19. Malaysia enforced another lockdown on June 1 in order to control another surge of Covid infections.

What is this movement?

- As part of the movement that was initiated last week, families that are facing hunger or need any other kind of assistance are encouraged to wave a white flag or put a piece of white cloth outside their homes to signal that they need help.
- The idea is that by spotting the white flag, neighbours and good samaritans can reach them.
- On the Sambal SOS app, which was initially called the Bendera Putih app, people can see the map of Malaysia where active food banks are marked.
- This is to help people easily track down food banks. Some fishermen from Penang are also helping out the community by handing over fresh fish to families in need.
- Alongside the white flag movement, there is the black flag movement as well, in order to express dissatisfaction with the Malaysian government. Specifically, this movement is demanding that Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin resign.



UAE's Hope orbiter & discrete auroras on Mars

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: The *UAE's Hope spacecraft*, which is orbiting Mars since February this year, has captured images of glowing atmospheric lights in the Red Planet's night sky, known as discrete auroras.

Details:

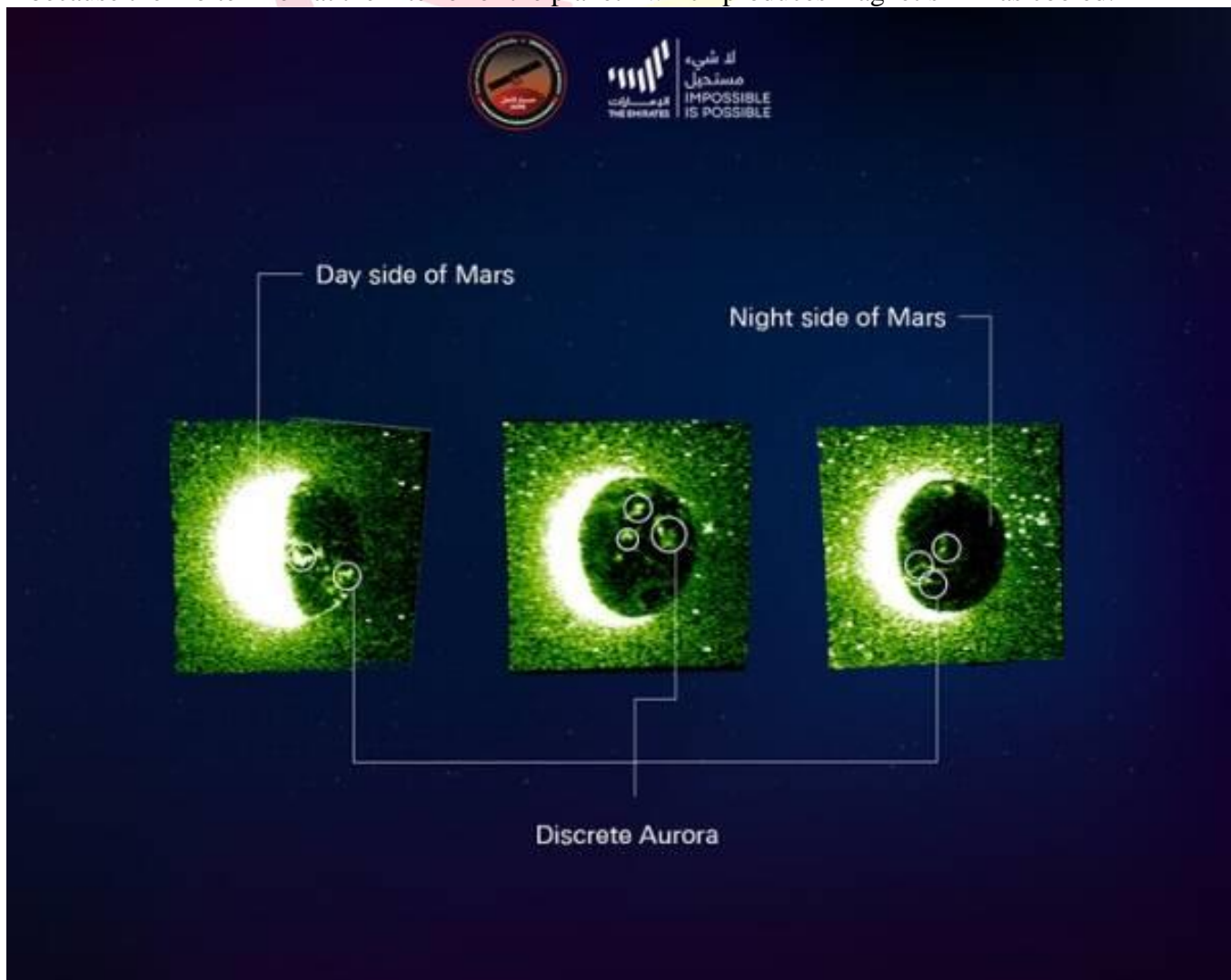
- The UAE Space Agency said on its website that the data gathered by the orbiter “include far and extreme ultraviolet auroral emissions which have never been imaged before at Mars.”
- The beacons of light that stand out against the dark nightside disk are highly structured discrete aurora, which traces out where energetic particles excite the atmosphere after being funneled down by a patchy network of crustal magnetic fields that originate from minerals on the surface of Mars.
- Unlike auroras on Earth, which are seen only near the north and south poles, discrete auroras on Mars are seen all around the planet at night time.

What causes an aurora on Earth?

- Auroras are caused when charged particles ejected from the Sun's surface — called the solar wind — enter the Earth's atmosphere. These particles are harmful, and our planet is protected by the geomagnetic field, which preserves life by shielding us from the solar wind.
- However, at the north and south poles, some of these solar wind particles are able to continuously stream down, and interact with different gases in the atmosphere to cause a display of light in the night sky.
- This display, known as an aurora, is seen from the Earth's high latitude regions (called the auroral oval), and is active all year round.
- In the northern part of our globe, the polar lights are called aurora borealis or Northern Lights, and are seen from the US (Alaska), Canada, Iceland, Greenland, Norway, Sweden and Finland.
- In the south, they are called aurora australis or southern lights, and are visible from high latitudes in Antarctica, Chile, Argentina, New Zealand and Australia.

How are Martian auroras different?

- Unlike Earth, which has a strong magnetic field, the Martian magnetic field has largely died out. This is because the molten iron at the interior of the planet— which produces magnetism— has cooled.



- However, the Martian crust, which hardened billions of years ago when the magnetic field still existed, retains some magnetism.
- So, in contrast with Earth, which acts like one single bar magnet, magnetism on Mars is unevenly distributed, with fields strewn across the planet and differing in direction and strength.

- These disjointed fields channel the solar wind to different parts of the Martian atmosphere, creating “discrete” auroras over the entire surface of the planet as charged particles interact with atoms and molecules in the sky– as they do on Earth.
- Studying Martian auroras is important for scientists, for it can offer clues as to why the Red Planet lost its magnetic field and thick atmosphere– among the essential requirements for sustaining life.

The Hope orbiter

- The Hope Probe, the Arab world’s first mission to Mars, took off from Earth in July last year, and has been orbiting the Red Planet since February.
- The primary objective of the mission is to study Martian weather dynamics. By correlating the lower atmosphere and upper atmosphere conditions, the probe will look into how weather changes the escape of hydrogen and oxygen into space.
- By measuring how much hydrogen and oxygen is spilling into space, scientists will be able to look into why Mars lost so much of its early atmosphere and liquid water.
- It is expected to create the first complete portrait of the planet’s atmosphere. With the information gathered during the mission, scientists will have a better understanding of the climate dynamics of different layers of Mars’ atmosphere.

Child Soldier Recruiter List

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The United States of America has added Pakistan and 14 other countries to a Child Soldier Recruiter List that identifies foreign governments having government-supported armed groups that recruit or use child soldiers, a designation that could result in restrictions on certain security assistance and commercial licensing of military equipment.*

Details:

- The US Child Soldiers Prevention Act (CSPA) requires the publication in the annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report a list of foreign governments that have recruited or used child soldiers during the previous year (April 1, 2020, to March 31, 2021).
- The countries which have been added to the annual TIP list of the US State Department this year are: Pakistan, Turkey, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Venezuela and Yemen.
- The United Nations, too, has identified the recruitment and use of child soldiers as among six “grave violations” affecting children in war and has established numerous monitoring and reporting mechanisms and initiatives to combat this practice.
- The UN verified that over 7,000 children had been recruited and used as soldiers in 2019 alone.

Who is a child soldier?

- The recruitment or use of children below the age of 15 as soldiers is prohibited by both the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the additional protocols to the Geneva Conventions, and is considered a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. In addition, the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict further prohibits kids under the age 18 from being compulsorily recruited into state or non-state armed forces or directly engaging in hostilities.
- The United States is a party to the Optional Protocol.

What are prohibited for countries in the list?

- The following types of security assistance are prohibited for countries that are in the list:
 - Licenses for direct commercial sales of military equipment
 - Foreign military financing for the purchase of defense articles and services, as well as design and construction services
 - International military education and training
 - Excess defense articles
 - Peacekeeping operations
- The countries will also not be eligible for the US Department of Defence's "train and equip" authority for building the capacity of foreign defense forces.

The Arctic's 'Last Ice Area'

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: A part of the Arctic's ice called "Last Ice Area", located north of Greenland, has melted before expected. Scientists had believed this area was strong enough to withstand global warming. But now, in a paper published in the journal "Communications Earth & Environment", researchers note that in August 2020 the area where the Last Ice Area (LIA) is located, experienced a record low concentration of sea ice. Significantly, they point out that sea-ice has been thinning for years, a trend they think has been prevalent because of climate change.

What is the Last Ice Area?

- In an article published in 2015, the National Geographic noted that while climate projections forecast the total disappearance of summer ice in the Arctic by the year 2040, the only place that would be able to withstand a warming climate would be this area of ice called the "Last Ice Area".
- The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) notes that climate change is shrinking the extent of Arctic summer sea ice, which is not only important for animals but also the local Inuit communities.
- But while this piece of ice above northern Canada and Greenland was expected to last the longest time, it is now showing signs of melting. WWF claims that WWF-Canada was the first to call this area 'Last Ice Area'.



Why is the area important?

- The area is important because it was thought to be able to help ice-dependent species as ice in the surrounding areas melted away.
- The area is used by polar bears to hunt for seals who use ice to build dens for their offspring. Walrus too, use the surface of the ice for foraging.
- In the paper for which research was led by the University of Washington, researchers note that the first sign of change in LIA was observed in 2018. Further, in August last year, sea ice showed its "vulnerability" to the long-term effects of climate change.



- The ice in LIA has been thinning gradually over the years much like other parts of the Arctic Ocean.

Plumes on Enceladus

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

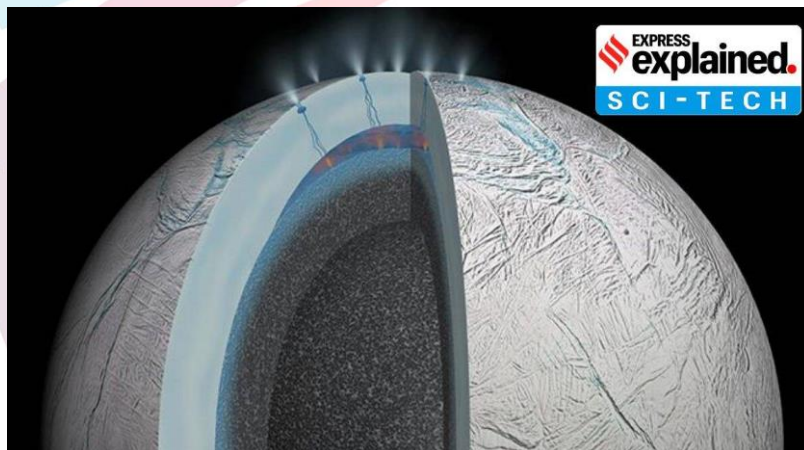
Context: NASA's Cassini spacecraft has detected an unusually high concentration of methane, along with carbon dioxide and dihydrogen, in the moons of Saturn by flying through their plumes. The spacecraft has found that Titan has methane in its atmosphere and Enceladus has a liquid ocean with erupting plumes of gas and water.

Are there methane-producing organisms on Earth?

- Most of the methane on Earth has a biological origin.
- Microorganisms called methanogens are capable of generating methane as a metabolic byproduct. They do not require oxygen to live and are widely distributed in nature.
- They are found in swamps, dead organic matter, and even in the human gut.
- They are known to survive in high temperatures and simulation studies have shown that they can live in Martian conditions.
- Methanogens have been widely studied to understand if they can be a contributor to global warming.

Could there be methanogens on Enceladus?

- Using the newly developed model, the team gave a set of conditions, including dihydrogen concentration and different temperatures to understand if microbes would grow.
- They also looked at what amount of methane would be emitted if there was a hypothetical microbe population on Enceladus.
- In summary, not only could we evaluate whether Cassini's observations are compatible with an environment habitable for life, but we could also make quantitative predictions about observations to be expected, should methanogenesis actually occur at Enceladus' seafloor.



What other processes could have produced the methane?

- The team writes that methane could be formed by the chemical breakdown of organic matter present in Enceladus' core.
- Hydrothermal processes could help the formation of carbon dioxide and methane.
- On Earth, hydrothermal vents on seafloors are known to release methane, but this happens at a very slow rate.
- The results suggest that methane production from hydrothermal vents is not sufficient to explain the high methane concentration detected by Cassini in the plumes.
- An additional amount of methane produced via biological methanogenesis could match Cassini's observations.



Mains

GS I

Challenging negative social norms

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Half of India's population is under 29 years of age, which means that in this period, a greater proportion of young people will drive India's economic growth and social progress. So, they must not only be healthy, knowledgeable and skilled but must also be provided with the rights and choices to develop to their fullest potential, including, and especially, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). The Guttmacher–Lancet Commission (Starrs et al, 2018) in looking at how to improve SRHR in populations formulated a comprehensive definition of SRHR that encompasses a broader range of issues. These include SRHR and issues such as violence, stigma and respect for bodily autonomy, which greatly impact the psychological, emotional and social well-being of individuals.*

Developmental goals

- India's population growth is now stabilising. The decline in overall fertility notwithstanding, the population will continue to grow because of the effect of 'population momentum'. It is like a Jumbo Jet that has started to descend but will take some distance to stop.
- The Total Fertility Rate (TFR), presently at 2.2 children, will soon reach replacement level (2.1).
- However, the TFR remains higher than the national average of 2.2 children among women who live in rural areas, have little formal education and are in the lowest income quintile — a majority of them live in the poorer States.
- Changing social norms is one of the biggest challenges for India to address the needs of the next generation.
- For example, India's population stabilisation strategy must be adjusted keeping in mind the rights of women and girls. Women must have a greater say in choosing their family size. Prescriptive or coercive methods, such as one- or two-child norms, have rarely worked well anywhere for long.
- It goes without saying that for women and girls, the empowerment to make choices leads to better health outcomes, such as knowing how to prevent unintended pregnancy or giving birth with the help of a skilled birth attendant.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed weaknesses in healthcare systems and has led to serious gaps and challenges in the provision of information and services on sexual and reproductive health (SRH).
- Even before the pandemic, pervasive negative social norms, health system barriers and gender inequality hindered universal access to SRHR as envisioned under the
- Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). On World Population Day this year, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) India recognises that even if health systems are understandably strained, the provision of these services cannot wait. Any further delays will curtail the health and well-being of women and girls, the consequences of which can last a lifetime.
- In the last two decades, India has made substantial gains with SRH indicators. Progressive policies for maternal health have resulted in improved rates of institutional delivery and a decline in maternal mortality ratio (MMR) from 327 in 1999-2001 to 113 per 100,000 live births in 2016-18, as per Sample Registration System (SRS) data.
- There have also been significant shifts in family planning in the past decade, and data from the National Health Family Survey 5 for the year 2019-20 (NFHS-5) show how contraceptive prevalence has

improved in most States. We ought to celebrate India's success, as it significantly contributes to global progress.

- The current government, with programmes such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP), has made some efforts to challenge existing social norms and has underlined that investments in social causes must go alongside economic progress.
- All sections of society must embrace this call for positive change, each doing their part, from the individual to the institution level. The UNFPA is keen to take India's success models and strengthen the South-South Collaboration further.

Poor indicators

- But success is hard-earned and never assured. There are many challenges on the path to 2030, the goalpost for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Two million adolescent girls (15-19 years) each year had a pregnancy, and of these, nearly 63% were unwanted or unintended (Guttmacher Institute, 2021). This points to inadequate information and access to SRH services for this age group. In girls aged 15-19 years, 22.2% had an unmet need for contraception, according to NFHS-4.
- Girls are still marrying too young — 26.8% of women aged 20-24 years are married before they turn 18, often having their first child within the first year of marriage. Far too many girls and women face gender-based violence and harmful practices that are socially sanctioned. All of these practices are rooted in social norms, beliefs and practices that deny women their bodily autonomy.
- India has slipped 28 places to rank 140th among 156 countries, becoming the third-worst performer in South Asia in The World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report (2021). Time to achieve the ambitious targets of the SDGs is running out. India must hence choose its priorities carefully.
- Our analysis seems to suggest that placing youth, women and girls at the centre of policymaking and services could trigger a positive ripple effect.
- If young people, and adolescent girls in particular, have access to education, relevant skills, information and services to make healthy choices, including related to SRH, are empowered to exercise their rights, and have access to opportunities for employment, then India will be on a clear path to achieve its goals.
- What research and practical experience show is that when women can make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health, and when they have access to services to support their choices, societies are healthier and more productive.
- A woman who has control over her body gains not only in terms of autonomy but also through advances in health, education, income and safety. She is more likely to thrive, and so is her family. The UNFPA calls upon stakeholders to help build a new set of social norms to drive this mission.

Religions in India, 'living together separately'

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *A recent survey of nearly 30,000 individuals by the Pew Research Center ('Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation') suggests that most Indians respect religious diversity, and yet draw clear lines between communities when it comes to marriage.*

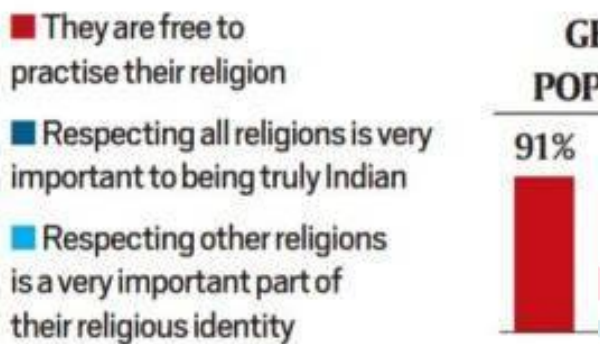
Segregated spheres

- More Indians see diversity as a benefit (53%) than view it as a liability (24%) for their country; the rest do not take a clear position.
- Again, 84% of Indians believe that respecting all religions is very important to being truly Indian, and 80% believe respecting other religions is a very important part of their religious identity (Chart 1).

- And yet, about two in every three Indians put a high priority on stopping interfaith and inter-caste marriages (Chart 2, Table 1).

CHART 1

INDIANS FEEL THEY HAVE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM RELIGIONS AS A CORE VALUE



- Indians do simultaneously express commitment to religious tolerance and a consistent preference for keeping their religious communities in segregated spheres — they live together separately.
- While people in some countries may aspire to create a ‘melting pot’ of different religious identities, our data suggest that many Indians prefer a country more like a patchwork fabric or thali, with clear lines between groups.
- For all the new laws aimed at stopping inter-community marriages, the survey found very little change caused by conversion to the size of various religious groups among the respondents (Table 2).
- When it comes to neighbours, large sections among the minority communities say they would be willing to live near a Hindu. Most Hindus, too, say they would be willing to live near a Muslim, a Christian or a Jain. But many Hindus also have reservations: for example, 36% would not be willing to live near a Muslim.

CHART 2

STOPPING RELIGIOUS INTERMARRIAGE IS A HIGH PRIORITY FOR HINDUS, MUSLIMS AND OTHERS

% of Indian adults who say it is very important to stop women/men in their community from marrying outside their religion

	STOPPING WOMEN	STOPPING MEN
Hindus	67%	65%
Muslims	80%	76%
Christians	37%	35%
Sikhs	59%	58%
Buddhists	48%	44%
Jains	66%	59%
General population	67%	65%

TABLE 1

MOST INDIANS SAY IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO STOP PEOPLE FROM MARRYING OUTSIDE THEIR CASTE

% of Indian adults who say it is very important to stop ____ in their community from marrying into another caste

	MEN	WOMEN
General population	62%	64%
General population	59%	61%
SC	59%	60%
ST	66%	68%
OBC/MBC	67%	69%
Hindus	63%	64%
Muslims	70%	74%
Christians	36%	37%
Sikhs	59%	58%
Buddhists	44%	44%
Jains	57%	61%

TABLE 2

RELIGIOUS GROUPS SHOW LITTLE CHANGE IN SIZE DUE TO CONVERSION

% of Indian adults who were/are...

	RAISED	CURRENTLY
Hindu	81.6%	81.7%
Muslim	11.2%	11.2%
Christian	2.3%	2.6%
Sikh	2.3%	2.3%
Buddhist	1.7%	1.7%
Jain	0.3%	0.2%
Other	0.5%	0.2%
No religion	0.1%	0.0%

Note: Small differences between the religious composition of the survey and the census may occur due to the exclusion of the Kashmir Valley and certain other regions in the survey.

CHART 3

VAST MAJORITY OF INDIA'S MUSLIMS SAY INDIAN CULTURE IS SUPERIOR

% of Indian Muslims who agree/disagree with the statement "Indian people are not perfect, but Indian culture is superior to others"



Note: Don't know/Refused responses not shown. Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

TABLE 3

OVERALL, 1 IN 5 MUSLIMS SAY THEY HAVE PERSONALLY FACED RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION RECENTLY

% of Muslims who say they have personally faced religious discrimination in the past 12 months

Overall		21%
North	40%	East 17%
West	15%	Northeast 36%
Central	18%	South 19%

Note: Fieldwork could not be conducted in the Kashmir Valley, Manipur and Sikkim. No locations in Chandigarh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu, or Ladakh were included in the survey. Fieldwork was not conducted in Andaman and Nicobar Islands or Lakshadweep.

Triple talaq

- A majority of Muslims say they are against triple talaq, with women more opposed to it than men.
- The survey also found three-quarters of Muslims in favour of having access to their own religious courts for family disputes (Charts 4 & 5).

Being Hindu or Muslim

- For most Hindus and Muslims, avoiding beef and pork respectively is central to their idea of who is truly Hindu or Muslim.
- 72% of Hindus say a person who eats beef cannot be Hindu; 77% of Muslims say a person cannot be Muslim if he or she eats pork (Tables 5 & 6).
- A majority of both groups also says a person cannot be Hindu or Muslim, respectively, if they celebrate each other's festivals.
- The two groups diverge to an extent on religiosity as a marker on identity. The shares of Muslims who say namaz and visiting mosques are essential to being Muslim (67% and 61% respectively) are higher than the shares of Hindus who say a person cannot be Hindu if they don't say their prayers or don't visit temples (48% each).

CHART 4

MUSLIMS IN INDIA SUPPORT HAVING ACCESS TO THEIR OWN COURTS

% of Indian adults who support allowing Muslims to go to their own religious courts to solve family disputes

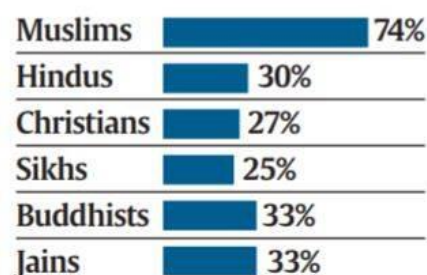




CHART 5

MOST INDIAN MUSLIMS OPPOSE TRIPLE TALAQ

% of Indian adults who say Muslim men should be able to divorce their wives by saying 'talaq' three times

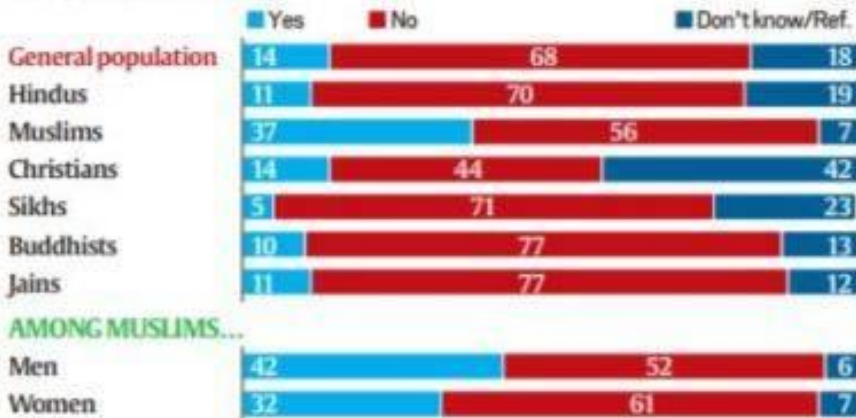


TABLE 4

RELATIVELY SMALL SHARES ACROSS VARIOUS GROUPS SAY THERE IS A LOT OF RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION IN INDIA

% of Indian adults who say there is a lot of discrimination against ____ in India

	Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Sikhs	Buddhists	Jains
General population	20%	18%	10%	7%	7%	7%
Hindus	21%	17%	10%	7%	7%	7%
Muslims	16%	24%	8%	6%	6%	6%
Christians	14%	16%	18%	6%	6%	5%
Sikhs	17%	21%	16%	14%	12%	11%
Buddhists	21%	20%	11%	10%	18%	8%
Jains	21%	18%	13%	8%	3%	12%

TABLE 5

INDIA'S HINDUS MOSTLY SAY A PERSON CANNOT BE HINDU IF THEY EAT BEEF, CELEBRATE EID

% of Indian Hindus who say a person cannot be Hindu if they...

Eat beef	72%
Celebrate Eid	63%
Do not celebrate Hindu festivals	56%
Celebrate Christmas	52%
Do not believe in God	49%
Never go to temples	48%
Never perform prayers	48%

TABLE 6

INDIAN MUSLIMS MORE LIKELY TO SAY EATING PORK IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH ISLAM THAN NOT BELIEVING IN GOD

% of Indian Muslims who say a person cannot be Muslim if they...

Eat pork	77%
Never offer namaz	67%
Do not celebrate Muslim festivals	64%
Never attend mosque	61%
Do not believe in God	60%
Celebrate Christmas	59%
Celebrate Diwali	58%

GS II

Nearly 4,000 Odisha villages free of child marriage now

(Source: [Down to Earth](https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/odisha-4000-villages-free-of-child-marriage-103424))

Context: As many as 3,970 villages in Odisha were declared child marriage-free between January and the first week of July 2021. The development has coincided with second wave of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic; the state had registered a surge in child marriages during the first wave. In 2020, only 62 villages were declared child marriage-free in the state.

Efforts on the ground

- Measures taken by the state government in response to a spike in child marriages after the first wave of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown in March 2020 helped achieve this feat, claimed officials and social activists.
- The district child marriage verification teams covered the villages on the orders of the state women and child development (W&CD) department and submitted their reports after verifying documents submitted by child development project officers (CDPO). Meeting were held with the villagers concerned as well.
- The verification teams comprised district social welfare officer, district child protection officer and members of voluntary organisations.
- Each district formed its task force headed by the collector and devised own criteria to identify such villages. The parameters, however, remained more or less the same for all districts.
- They included
 - Forwarding letters for making child marriage-free villages by child-marriage prohibition officer
 - Undertakings submitted by village-level child-marriage prohibition committee (VLCMPC) on behalf of the villages
 - Formation and involvement of VLCMPC
 - Involvement of panchayati raj institution members on prohibition of child marriage activities among others and awareness / meetings / involvement of self-help groups / PRI members in preventing child marriages.

Jolted by pandemic

- India had more than 15 lakh child brides in the world, according to a UNICEF 2017 report. Several reports suggested that only four states — including Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and West Bengal — contributed to around half such marriages.
- Odisha has, however, been far behind the top four states in this regard. But data showed that the percentage of child marriages in eight of its 30 districts almost matched those of the top states.
- West Bengal and Bihar had child marriage rates of 40.7 per cent and 39.1 per cent, according to the fourth round of National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) conducted in 2015-16.
- In the same survey, Malkangiri district of Odisha was found to have a child marriage percentage of 39.9. The district was closely followed by Nabarangpur (37.9 per cent); Mayurbhanj (35 per cent), Koraput (34.7 per cent); Rayagada (34.4 per cent); Nayagarh (31.3 per cent); Ganjam (29.8 per cent) and Keonjhar (28.1 per cent).
- These eight districts, where the majority or a sizable population belong to the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, have been at the centre of Odisha's child marriage prevention drive.
- The state government in 2017 brought another seven districts — including Subarnapur, Boudh, Kandhamal, Gajapati, Dhenkanal and Balasore — under the drive because the child marriage rate in these districts were found to be higher than the national average.
- Sustained awareness campaign against child marriage by the administration, in collaboration with Childline, UNICEF, Action Aid and other voluntary groups, helped bring down child marriages considerably in the 15 districts.
- A few gram panchayats also started declaring villages under them free of child marriages.
- The outbreak of COVID-19 and subsequent month-long country-wide lockdown in March 2020 brought a halt to the drive as the frontline service providers — Anganwadi and Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) worker and panchayati raj representatives — got engaged in COVID-19 works.
- Sudden spikes in child marriages — attributed mainly to the adverse impact of the pandemic, multiple lockdowns on the livelihood of poor people and also loneliness of the adolescents following the closure of schools — became a cause of concern.

Corrective measures

- The W&CD department in September 2020 asked the district collectors concerned to form task forces at the district level and block committees comprising officials, people's representatives, civil society members and local prominent personalities.



- Training and digital meetings were organised to sensitise people on the subject.
- The task force and block committee members held regular meetings to create awareness about the ill-effects of child marriages on the mental and physical health of the children. “The best part of the drive was that after some time, the community owned it up and took the initiative forward,” he said.
- VLCMPs were formed with women self-help groups and Panchayati Raj Institution members to monitor anti-child marriage activities.
- Weekly meetings were organised at Anganwadi centres for adolescent girls as an alternative to closed school and isolation.
- They were encouraged to share their experiences on issues concerning education, vocation, foods and nutrition and child health.

A National Judiciary

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Union government appears to be steadfast in its resolve to implement reforms in recruitment and appointment to the subordinate judicial services. In 2019, it spearheaded a consultative process for the creation of the All India Judicial Service (AIJS). Initially, only four States and two High Courts supported the proposal. Eight States rejected it, five suggested changes, and 11 are yet to respond. Recently, the Centre took the ordinance route to effect changes in the appointment of members to various tribunals. In a single stroke, it abolished several tribunals. The manner of appointment of members to the remaining tribunals underwent a sea change. It is likely that the ordinance may not pass judicial scrutiny in light of the Supreme Court’s judgment in Rojer Mathew v. South Indian Bank (2019).*

Constitutional perspective

- Article 233(1) of the Constitution lays down that “appointments of persons to be, and the posting and promotion of, district judges in any State shall be made by the Governor of the State in consultation with the High Court exercising jurisdiction in relation to such State”.
- The 42nd Constitutional amendment in 1976 amended Article 312 (1) empowering Parliament to make laws for the creation of one or more All-India Services, including an AIJS, common to the Union and the States.
- However, Clause 3 of Article 312 places a restriction that such a service shall not include a post inferior to that of a district judge. The amendment also brought about a significant change in the Seventh Schedule — Entry 3 of List II in its entirety was placed as Entry 11A in List III.
- This paves the way for Parliament to enact laws with regard to ‘Administration of Justice; constitution and organisation of all courts, except the Supreme Court and the High Courts’. Post-Emergency, amendment to Article 312 (1) has escaped parliamentary scrutiny.
- A dichotomy exists with regard to Articles 233 and 312. What was essentially intended to be the prerogative of the State will now be the prerogative of the Union. If the fundamental power of the States to make such rules and govern the appointment of district judges is taken away, it may be against the principle of federalism and the basic structure doctrine.
- The First Law Commission deliberated upon this, but it was only in 1972 that the issue gained momentum. The views of the Chief Justice of India and the Law Commission reports perhaps paved the way to bring in the 42nd constitutional amendment.
- It was only in 1986 that the Law Commission resurrected the issue and deliberated upon the objections. The primary fear was that promotional avenues of the subordinate judiciary would be severely curtailed. Fifty per cent of the posts of district judges are to be filled by promotion from the subordinate judicial



service, thus leaving open the remaining for direct recruitment. Another fundamental concern was the language barrier.

- The Union Law Minister has extolled AIJS to be an ideal solution for equal representation of the marginalised and deprived sections of society. Most States already have a reservation policy in force.
- Tamil Nadu provides for a roster-based reservation of 69%, of which 30% is for women. Uttar Pradesh merely provides 20% reservation for women and the AIJS may therefore benefit States like U.P.
- Arguments that the AIJS will reduce judicial delays do not hold water as the subordinate courts are the crucial point of delays owing to the existence of large vacancies.
- In the early 1960s, the issue was debated during the Chief Justices Conference and was favoured by the eminent body, but many States and High Courts opposed it.
- The First National Judicial Pay Commission found that it would be in the interest and the health of the judiciary to form an AIJS. The report supported and reiterated the recommendations of the 14th Law Commission.
- In the All-India Judges case in 1992 the apex court had opined that the recommendations of the Law Commission should be examined and implemented.
- The issue was again discussed in All India Judges Association Vs. Union of India (2002). The court accepted most recommendations of the Shetty Commission and directed the government to implement the judgment.
- Any groundbreaking reform is bound to receive criticism. The National Commission constituted for review of the Constitution headed by luminaries including Justice H.R. Khanna, Justice B.P. Jeevan Reddy and K. Parasaran, the then Attorney General, had suggested a paradigm shift in the approach of the Union.
- The feasibility of the AIJS in the current context requires to be studied, especially when reliance is placed upon archaic reports of the Law Commission. It is for the Union to dispel doubts and at the same time give wings to the aspirations of all stakeholders when implementing the proposal. It, however, remains to be seen if the AIJS would be like the proverbial curate's egg.

Indo-Africa Relations

Context: *As an importer of fruits, nuts, grains and pulses from the continent, Indian congruence with African countries in the agriculture sector is expanding. With 65% of the world's uncultivated arable land, employing over 60% of the workforce, and accounting for almost 20% of Sub-Saharan Africa's GDP, agriculture is critical to Africa's economy. The African Continental Free Trade Area agreement is expected to improve cost competitiveness by removing tariffs. As this relationship enters the post-pandemic world, it is vital to prioritise and channel resources into augmenting partnership in agriculture. This is crucial given its unexplored potential, centrality to global food security, business prospects and to provide credible alternatives to the increasing involvement of Chinese stakeholders in the sector.*

Analysing Chinese engagement

- Over the past few years, I have led and worked with different teams of experts from various African countries, conducting evidence-based studies at the grassroots level to demystify Chinese engagement in the region. Evaluating the approaches that Chinese corporations, small and medium-sized enterprises and entrepreneurs adopt has provided a layered perspective of the sociopolitical, economic and environmental impact of Chinese engagement.
- Today, China is among Africa's largest trading partners. It is also Africa's single biggest creditor. Its corporations dominate the region's infrastructure market and are now entering the agri-infra sector. Increasingly critical to China's global aspirations, its engagement in African agriculture is taking on a strategic quality.



- Therefore, dismissing Beijing's engagement in African agriculture as inconsequential for New Delhi would be unwise.
- While access to Africa's natural resources, its untapped markets and support for 'One China Policy' are primary drivers of Chinese engagement with the region, there are other factors at play. Chinese-built industrial parks and economic zones in Africa are attracting low-cost, labour-intensive manufacturing units that are relocating from China.
- Chinese engineers interviewed spoke of how their operations in Africa are important to accumulate global experience in management, risk and capital investments. Not only are they willing to overlook short-term profits in order to build 'brand China', but they want to dominate the market in the long term, which includes pushing Chinese standards in host countries.
- Chinese tech companies are laying critical telecommunications infrastructure, venture capital funds are investing in African fintech firms, while other smaller enterprises are expanding across the region.
- While many Chinese entities have been active in Africa's agricultural landscape for decades now, the nature, form and actors involved have undergone substantial change. In Zambia, Chinese firms are introducing agri-tech to combat traditional challenges, such as using drone technology to control the fall armyworm infestation.
- They have set up over 20 Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centers (ATDCS) in the continent where Chinese agronomists work on developing new crop varieties and increasing crop yields. These ATDCs partner with local universities, conduct workshops and classes for officials and provide training and lease equipment to small holder farmers.
- Chinese companies with no prior experience in agriculture are setting out to build futuristic ecological parks while others are purchasing large-scale commercial farms. Furthermore, African agriculture experts, officials and farmers are provided opportunities to augment skills and be trained in China.
- The exponential growth in the China-Africa economic ties and the emergence of Beijing as an alternate to traditional western powers has motivated change in perceptions across groups.
- Governments and heads of state are recalibrating approaches, media houses are investing more resources for on-the-ground-reporting and artists like Michael Soi in Kenya are using satirical paintings to start a dialogue.
- Simultaneously, Africa-China relations are becoming complex with a growing, insular diaspora, lopsided trade, looming debt, competition with local businesses and a negative perception accompanied by greater political and socioeconomic interlinkages.
- Examining Chinese interactions also provides cues on what not to do. The Chinese and African experts working in ATDCs seemingly operate in silos. On occasion, there seems to be a gap between skills transferred in China and the ground realities in Africa.
- In some cases, the technology taught in China is not available locally and in others, there is inability to implement lessons learnt due to the absence of supporting resources. Larger commercial farms run by Mandarin-speaking managers and the presence of small-scale Chinese farmers in local markets aggravates socio-cultural stresses.

Takeaways for India

- India-Africa agricultural cooperation currently includes institutional and individual capacity-building initiatives such as the India-Africa Institute of Agriculture and Rural development in Malawi, extension of soft loans, supply of machinery, acquisition of farmlands and the presence of Indian entrepreneurs in the African agricultural ecosystem.
- Indian farmers have purchased over 6,00,000 hectares of land for commercial farming in Africa. Sub-national actors are providing another model of cooperation in agriculture. Consider the case of the Kerala government trying to meet its steep requirement for raw cashew nuts amounting to 8 lakh tonnes a year with imports from countries in Africa to complement its production capacity currently limited to 0.83 lakh tonnes.
- There are also proposals to create a jointly-owned brand of Africa-Kollam cashews. Similar ideas could encourage State governments and civil society organisations to identify opportunities and invest directly.



- There is also promise in incentivising Indian industries to tap into African agri-business value chains and connecting Indian technology firms and startups with partners in Africa.
- The transformative power of innovative and disruptive technology has been evident in the African agri-tech sector as the startup ecosystem in the continent enjoyed a 110% growth between 2016 and 2018. In the past year, despite the pandemic, the sector witnessed a record increase in investments.
- A thorough impact assessment needs to be conducted of the existing capacity-building initiatives in agriculture for India to stand in good stead. This could include detailed surveys of participants who have returned to their home countries. Country-specific and localised curriculum can be drawn up, making skill development demand-led.
- While India's Africa strategy exists independently, it is important to be cognisant of China's increasing footprint in the region. Beijing's model, if successful here, could be heralded as a replica for the larger global south.
- It is important to note, however, that prominent African voices have emphasised that their own agency is often overlooked in global discourse on the subject. In that sense India has consistently chosen well to underline the development partnership to be in line with African priorities. It is pertinent, therefore, that we collectively craft a unique modern partnership with Africa.

What lies ahead for Afghanistan after U.S. exit?

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: On July 2, U.S. troops departed from the Bagram Air Base that coordinated the 20-year-long war in Afghanistan, effectively ending their military operations in the country. The exit is part of President Joe Biden's plan to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan by September 11. Ever since the remaining U.S. troops began pulling out on May 1, the Taliban have made rapid territorial advances. If the Taliban had controlled 73 of Afghanistan's 407 districts before May 1, the number of districts went up to 168 in two months, according to the Long War Journal.

Why did the U.S. invade Afghanistan?

- Weeks after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, U.S. President George W. Bush declared war on Afghanistan.
- Mr. Bush said the Taliban regime had turned down his demand to hand over al-Qaeda leaders, including Osama bin Laden, who plotted the attacks. Inside Afghanistan, the NATO coalition troops led by the U.S. quickly dislodged the Taliban regime and established a transitional government.
- Al-Qaeda's leaders and key operatives fled to safe havens in Pakistan. In May 2003, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld announced that major military operations in the country were over.
- The U.S. focus shifted to the Iraq invasion, while in Afghanistan, western powers helped build a centralised democratic system and institutions. But that neither ended the war nor stabilised the country.

Why is the U.S. pulling back?

- The U.S. had reached the conclusion long ago that the war was unwinnable. Presidents, starting with Barack Obama, had promised to bring American troops back home from Afghanistan.
- In July 2015, the Obama administration had sent a representative to the first-ever meeting between the Taliban and the Afghan government that was hosted by Pakistan in Murree. The Murree talks did not progress as the Afghan government disclosed after the first round that Taliban leader Mullah Omar had died two years earlier.
- Later, President Donald Trump appointed a special envoy for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, with a mandate to directly negotiate with the Taliban. Mr. Khalilzad and his team held talks with Taliban representatives in Doha that led to the February 2020 agreement between the U.S. and the insurgents.

- In the agreement, the Trump administration promised that it would withdraw all American troops from Afghanistan by May 1, 2021. President Joe Biden endorsed the Trump-Taliban deal, but pushed the deadline for withdrawal to September 11.

What are the terms of the Trump-Taliban deal?

- The February deal dealt with four aspects of the conflict — violence, foreign troops, intra-Afghan peace talks and the use of Afghan soil by terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.
- According to the agreement, the Taliban promised to reduce violence, join intra-Afghan peace talks and cut all ties with foreign terrorist groups, while the U.S. pledged to withdraw all its troops, roughly 12,000 at the time of the signing of the agreement in February 2020, by May 1, 2021.
- After the agreement was signed, the U.S. put pressure on the Afghan government to release thousands of Taliban prisoners — a key Taliban precondition for starting intra-Afghan talks. Talks between Taliban representatives and the Afghan government began in Doha in September 2020 but did not reach any breakthrough. At present, the peace process is frozen.
- The Taliban reduced hostilities against foreign troops but continued to attack Afghan forces even after the agreement was signed.
- Afghanistan also saw a series of targeted killings of journalists, activists and other civil society figures over the past many months, which the Afghan government says is a Taliban act.
- Kabul maintains that the Pakistan support for the Taliban is allowing the insurgents to overcome military pressure and carry forward with their agenda.

What does Pakistan want?

- Pakistan was one of the three countries that had recognised the Taliban regime in the 1990s. The Taliban captured much of the country with help from Pakistan's ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence.)
- After the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan's military dictator Pervez Musharraf, under pressure from the Bush administration, cut formal ties with the Taliban and joined America's war on terror. But Pakistan played a double game.
- It provided shelter to the Taliban's Rahbari Shura, a group composed of their top leaders. In Pakistan, the Taliban regrouped, raised money and recruits, planned military strategy and staged a comeback in Afghanistan.
- The fractious Kabul government, faced with corruption allegations, incompetence, and the excesses of the invading forces, made matters easier for the Taliban.
- Now, when the U.S. is leaving and the Taliban are advancing, Pakistan is again in the spotlight. A violent military takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban may not serve Pakistan's core interests. Pakistan wants to check India's influence in Afghanistan and bring the Taliban to Kabul.
- But a violent takeover, like in the 1990s, would lack international acceptability, leaving Afghanistan unstable for a foreseeable future. In such a scenario, Pakistan could face another influx of refugees from Afghanistan and a strengthening of anti-Pakistan terror groups, such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban.
- From a strategic point of view, Pakistan would prefer the Taliban being accommodated in power through negotiations and a peaceful settlement, which would also allow Rawalpindi to stabilise its conflict-ridden western border. But it's not clear whether Pakistan has the capacity to shape the post-American outcome in Afghanistan.



THE HINDU

Insurmountable losses

The U.S.'s 20-year-war in Afghanistan has claimed over 70,000 civilian lives and has cost the country more than \$2 trillion. Even as all U.S. combat troops will withdraw by September 11, a large share of the country remains under the control of Taliban. A look at the impact of the war:

Loss of life

Nearly 2,41,000 lives have been lost in the two-decade-long war that ensued after the U.S. invaded Afghanistan. According to recent estimates by Brown University's Cost of War, at least 71,344 civilians died in the conflict while the Afghan national military police lost 78,314 personnel. An estimated 6,384 U.S. soldiers and 1,144 soldiers of Allied troops were also killed during the war

SOURCE : HUMAN AND BUDGETARY COSTS OF AFGHAN WAR, 2001-2021, BROWN UNIVERSITY



Impact of war on women and children

As many as 8,099 children and 3,352 women were killed between 2009 and 2020, according to data by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

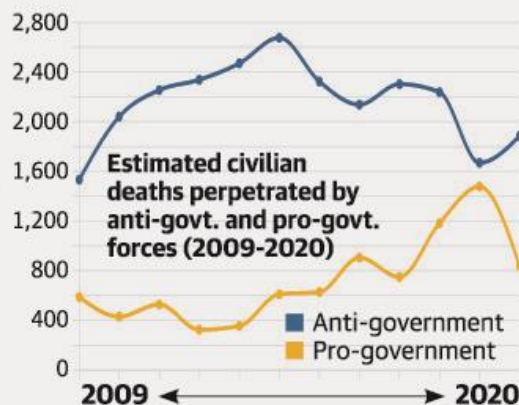


SOURCE: UNAMA

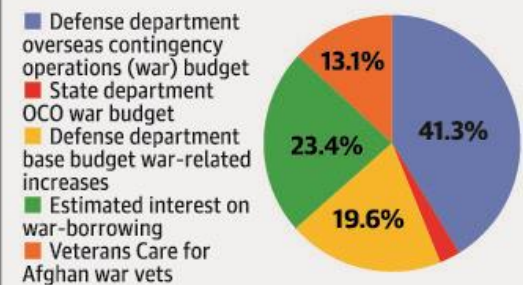
The humanitarian cost of war

Over 25,889 civilian casualties were inflicted by anti-government parties such as the Taliban and ISKP between 2009 and 2011, according to the United Nations. Since 2018, more than 3,500 civilians have been killed by pro-government forces

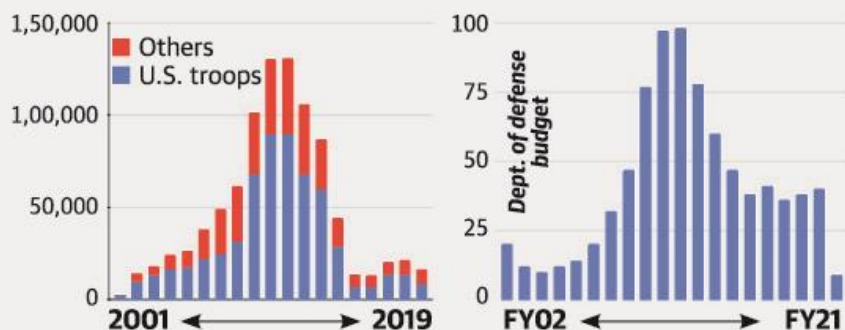
SOURCE: UNAMA



Financial drain | Chart shows % split of the \$2.2 trillion spent by various U.S. departments according to Brown University

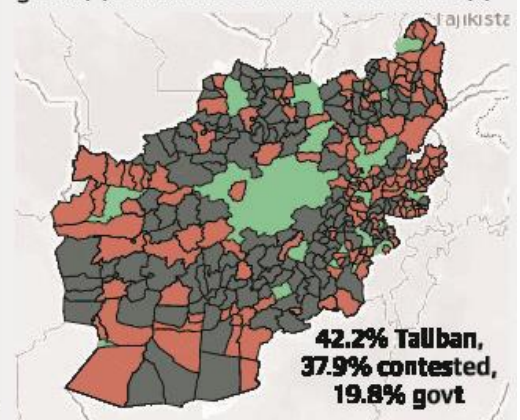


America's longest war | The first chart shows the number of U.S. troops and others (including those part of NATO) stationed in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2019. The second chart shows the yearly budget of the U.S. Department of Defense (in \$ billion) for the war from FY02 to FY21



SOURCE: BROOKINGS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Under control | Map shows districts under the control of Taliban (●), the Afghan govt. (●) and those which are contested (●)



Why is India reaching out to the Taliban?

- The Hindu reported in June, quoting a Qatari official, that India made contacts with the Taliban in Doha. New Delhi has not denied reports of its outreach to the Taliban.
- This signals a late but realist acknowledgement from the Indian side that the Taliban would play a critical role in Afghanistan in the coming years. India has three critical areas in dealing with the Taliban.



- One, protecting its investments, which run into billions of rupees, in Afghanistan; two, preventing a future Taliban regime from being a pawn of Rawalpindi; three, making sure that the Pakistan-backed anti-India terrorist groups do not get support from the Taliban.
- In the past, India chose not to engage the Taliban and the costs were dear when the Taliban was in power. This time, New Delhi seems to be testing another policy.

Is the Afghanistan government doomed?

- The American intelligence community has concluded, according to TheWall Street Journal, that Kabul could fall within six months. None of the U.S. military and political leaders, from General Austin Miller to President Biden, is certain about the survival of the Afghan government.
- When Mr. Biden was asked this question on Friday, he didn't say that the government would survive, but said, "They have the capacity to sustain the government".
- One thing is certain — the American withdrawal has turned the balance of power in the battleground in favour of the Taliban. They are already making rapid advances.
- So, there could be three scenarios, according to experts.
 - One, there could be a political settlement in which the Taliban and the government agree to some power-sharing mechanism and jointly shape the future of Afghanistan. As of now, this looks like a remote possibility.
 - Two, an all-out civil war may be possible, in which the government, economically backed and militarily trained by the West, holds on to its positions in key cities and the Taliban expand its reach in the countryside, while other ethnic militias fight for their fiefs. This is already unfolding.
 - A third scenario would be of the Taliban taking over the country. Any nation planning to deal with Afghanistan should be prepared for all three scenarios.

EU's 'Green Passport'

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: Recently, the European Union implemented the EU Digital COVID Certificate (EUDCC) or the "Green Passport", which allows ease of intra-European travel for passengers who have taken one of four vaccines 'recognised' by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) that excludes Indian-made Covishield and Covaxin, among others. The move led to a sharp protest from India, as well as the African Union, as concerns grow over vaccine passports that discriminate against travellers from developing countries with limited access to vaccines. Some European countries have since relented, with a third of the 27-nation EU agreeing to include Covishield in the list of approved vaccines.

What does the EUDCC entitle passengers to?

- The EUDCC, or the Green Passport, which is in the form of a digital QR code, attests that a person has been vaccinated against COVID-19, and also if they have had a recent negative test and/or are considered immune having previously contracted the illness.
- It is recognised by all 27 EU countries, as well as Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Iceland and Norway for passengers within Europe, who are bound not to need separate documentation for intra-EU travel.

How will it impact Indian travellers?

- The EUDCC will impact Indians notionally at present, as only essential travel is allowed into EU countries and special permission has to be taken for those travelling from India.
- With global concerns over the Delta variant, which was first detected in India, more restrictions are in place for Indians travelling abroad.



- The European Union has pointed out that the EUDCC is only meant for passengers within the EU, and that most, if not all, residents would have received one of the four vaccines that have been cleared by the EMA — Comirnaty (Pfizer/BioNTech), Vaccine Janssen (Johnson & Johnson), Spikevax (Moderna) and Vaxzevria (AstraZeneca Europe).
- According to the EU, the Serum Institute of India's (SII) Covishield was a “biologically” different product and it hence needs to apply separately for EMA clearance. Both SII and AstraZeneca have since clarified that they are in the process of seeking clearances.
- Meanwhile, the road seems harder for Bharat Biotech's Covaxin, as unlike Covishield, it has not received recognition from even the World Health Organization (WHO) and is in the process of completing its application there.

How did India register its protests?

- During his visit to Italy for the G20 ministerial conference last week, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar registered a strong protest in his meetings with European counterparts as well as EU High Representative Josep Borrell Fontelles, as government sources indicated that India was prepared to initiate reciprocal harsh quarantine measures against countries that discriminated against Indians.
- India's concerns are three-fold. It feels vaccine passports will restrict passengers from countries that don't have the same access to vaccines and will increase vaccine inequality.
- It also argues that the EU should recognise Covishield as it is no different from other AstraZeneca-licensed vaccines, and more broadly that all Indian-approved vaccines should be given recognition worldwide, and that passengers can be certified via the Co-WIN website.
- Furthermore, officials point out that Covishield was distributed to 95 countries, mainly low- and middle-income countries of the global South, and the EU action discriminates against all of them.
- There is a hint of racism, they claim, in the fact that all vaccines cleared by the EMA are those that have been taken by residents in Europe and North America, whereas the ones excluded are those made and distributed far and wide in the rest of the world by Russia, India and China.
- Backing India's stand, the African Union and Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention issued a statement raising concerns over the Green Passport, pointing out that the Covishield vaccine was the “backbone” of the EU-supported international COVAX alliance's programme in Africa, along with the AstraZeneca-SkBio vaccine produced in South Korea.

What is the WHO's stand?

- In its interim guidance released on July 2, a day after the EUDCC was launched and implemented, the WHO published its ‘Policy considerations for implementing a risk-based approach to travel in the context of COVID-19’.
- In it, the WHO held categorically that vaccine passports should not be made mandatory for travel and should be optional, stating that proof of COVID-19 vaccination should not be required as a condition of entry and exit from a country.

Will the EU relent?

- By bringing in the EUDCC, the European Union has made it clear that it intends to use these vaccine passports in some measure to differentiate between those who are vaccinated and those who aren't or have taken ‘unrecognised’ vaccines.
- However, with at least nine countries, including Austria, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland, agreeing to independently make exemptions for Covishield, and Estonia accepting both Covishield and Covaxin, there is hope that enough pressure will build on the EMA to include exemptions for Indian vaccines as well.

Federalism as a new politics

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Emboldened by victories in the recent State Assembly elections, the idea of a third 'federal' front is once again gaining political cache as was evident in the Sharad Pawar organised Opposition meet. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, since taking office, has begun to craft an ideological narrative on State rights, by re-introducing the term Union into the public discourse and pushing back against increased fiscal centralisation. Is this renewed emphasis on federalism, a genuine opportunity for forging a new politics?*

Details:

- Federalism in India has always had political relevance, but except for the States Reorganisation Act, federalism has rarely been an axis of political mobilisation.
- This was true even in the days of coalition politics when State politics mattered to national electoral outcomes.
- Fiscal and administrative centralisation persisted despite nearly two decades of coalition governments. Ironically, rather than deepen federalism, the contingencies of electoral politics have created significant impediments to creating a political consensus for genuine federalism.
- When confronted with entrenched centralisation of the present regime, the challenge is, ironically, even greater.

Nationalism on strong wicket

- First, the rhetoric of nationalism has greater political purchase. Ideologically, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has had relatively little patience with federalism as a device to accommodate India's multiple linguistic, religious, and ethnic identities.
 - Post-2014, the BJP has couched its discomfiture with federalism in the grammar of development and nationalism, which has mass electoral appeal.
 - To accelerate progress, India must become 'one nation, one market', 'one nation, one ration card', 'one nation, one grid'.
 - In this framing, federalism as a principle necessary for negotiating diverse political contexts and identity claims risks being equated with regionalism and a narrow parochialism that is anti-development and anti-national.
 - Thus, a politics for deepening federalism will need to overcome a nationalist rhetoric that pits federalism against nationalism and development. This is a hard ask, especially because most regional parties have failed to uphold principles of decentralisation in their own backyard.
- Second, and relatedly, despite a rhetorical commitment to federalism, the politics of federalism has remained contingent rather than principled.
 - As Pratap Bhanu Mehta has pointed out over the decades, federal principles have been bent in all kinds of ways to co-produce a political culture of flexible federalism — "federalism for me, but not for thee".
 - Federalism in this rendition is reduced to a game of political upmanship and remains restricted to a partisan tussle rather than a regions' genuine demand for accommodation. Especially, when claimants of greater federalism often maintain silence on unilateral decisions that affect other States.
 - Take for instance, the downgrading of a full-fledged State in Jammu and Kashmir into a Union Territory in 2019, or more recently, the notification of the NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Act, 2021.
 - This blatant undermining of State's rights hardly witnessed protest by parties that were not directly affected by these. Upholding federalism requires political maturity and a commitment to the federal principle. This is lacking in our politics.

Divide among States

- Third, the increased economic and governance divergence between States. Economic growth trajectories since liberalisation have been characterised by growing spatial divergence.
- Across all key indicators, southern (and western) States have outperformed much of northern and eastern India resulting in a greater divergence rather than expected convergence with growth. This has created a context where collective action amongst States becomes difficult as poorer regions of India contribute far less to the economy but require greater fiscal resources to overcome their economic fragilities.
- Glimpses of these emerging tensions were visible in the debates around the 15th Finance Commission (FC) when the Government of India mandated the commission to use the 2011 Census rather than the established practice of using the 1971 Census to determine revenue share across States.
- This, Southern states feared, risked penalising States that had successfully controlled population growth by reducing their share in the overall resource pool.
- The 15th Finance Commission, through its recommendations, deftly avoided a political crisis but the growing divergence between richer and poorer States, remains an important source of tension in inter-State relations that can become a real impediment to collective action amongst States. With the impending delimitation exercise due in 2026, these tensions will only increase.
- These challenges notwithstanding, the BJP's impatience with federalism affords an opportunity for regional parties to craft a new federal bargain. At one level, the BJP's homogenising ideological project risks creating new forms of cultural alienation and associated regional tensions as occurred during the Citizenship (Amendment) Act protests in Assam.
- There is a very real possibility of the emergence of new forms of regional sub-nationalism, glimpses of which were visible during the recent Assembly elections particularly in West Bengal.

Fiscal management

- Moreover, the realities of India's macro-fiscal position risk increasing the fragility of State finances. Weak fiscal management has brought the Union government on the brink of what economist Rathin Roy has called a silent fiscal crisis.
- The Union's response has been to squeeze revenue from States by increasing cesses. Its insistence on giving GST compensation to States as loans (after long delays) and increasing State shares in central schemes. The pandemic-induced economic crisis has only exaggerated this.
- Against this backdrop, if harnessed well, both sub-nationalist sentiments and the need to reclaim fiscal federalism create a political moment for a principled politics of federalism. However, there are risks along the way. As Suhas Palshikar has argued, the politics of regional identity is isolationist by its very nature.
- An effort at collective political action for federalism based on identity concerns will have to overcome this risk. On the fiscal side, richer States must find a way of sharing the burden with the poorer States. States will have to show political maturity to make necessary compromises if they are to negotiate existing tensions and win the collective battle with the Union.
- An inter-State platform that brings States together in a routine dialogue on matters of fiscal federalism could be the starting point for building trust and a common agenda. The seeds of this were planted in the debates over the 15th Finance Commission and the GST.
- Finally, beyond principles, a renewed politics of federalism is also an electoral necessity.
- No coalition has succeeded, in the long term, without a glue that binds it. Forging a political consensus on federalism can be that glue. But this would require immense patience and maturity from regional parties. Are they up to the task?

Seeking a paradigm shift in mental health care

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Recently, a High Court suggested that homeless persons with health conditions be branded with a permanent tattoo, when vaccinated against COVID-19, since tracking a 'floating population' may be cumbersome. Earlier judgments have also suggested 'round ups' of such persons to facilitate pathways into care. These are possibly well-intentioned directives, but what follows is that bewildered persons are huddled in a vehicle and admitted into shelters or mental hospitals that are usually crowded, yet lonely. What does this tell us about the way homelessness and mental illness are regarded in 'polite' society?*

A responsive care system

- Persons with mental health conditions need a responsive care system that inspires hope and participation without which their lives are empty.
- In many countries, persons with severe mental health conditions live in shackles in their homes, in overcrowded hospitals, and even in prison. On the other hand, many persons with mental health issues live and even die alone on the streets.
- Three losses dominate the mental health systems narrative: dignity, agency and personhood. Far-sighted changes in policy and laws have often not taken root and many laws fail to meet international human rights standards. Many also do not account for cultural, social and political contexts resulting in moral rhetoric that doesn't change the scenario of inadequate care.
- Society's responses are often based on conditioning and perceptions, often verging on visceral forms of prejudice.
- This results in an "othering" of persons who seem different from dominant groups. Hence, even well-intentioned judgments could set off unintended negative, even grave, consequences. There is also the social legacy of the asylum, and of psychiatry and mental illness itself, that guides our imagination in how care is organised.
- Historian Sarah Ann Pinto, in her account of the lunatic asylums in colonial Bombay, wrote that "doctors interpreted a patient's refusal to wear clothing as a sign of morbidity, and clothing became a way of civilising the savage — the violent Indian man and the promiscuous Indian woman".
- Individual preference and indigenous culture were substituted with what the coloniser thought was appropriate. Similarly, medieval London boasted of a hospital for the care of persons with mental illness, St. Mary of Bethlehem, which soon turned into a 'bedlam', a poorhouse and a site of shocking atrocities.
- We must understand mental health conditions for what they are and for how they are associated with disadvantage. These situations are linked, but not always so. Therefore, not all distress can be medicalised.
- It is against this complex background of distress arising out of medical conditions and from inequitable social systems, of good intentions and calamitous consequences, that we welcome the Guidance on Community Mental Health Services recently launched by the World Health Organization.
- The Guidance, which includes three models from India, addresses the issue from 'the same side' as the mental health service user and focuses on the co-production of knowledge and on good practices built around the key themes of crisis services, peer support, supported living, community outreach, hospital-based services and comprehensive mental health service networks. Drawn from 22 countries, these models balance care and support with rights and participation.
- Afiya House in the U.S. is driven by peers and offers respite to persons who have significant emotional or mental distress. People can stay for up to seven nights when they are connected to networks that support recovery. Services are non-coercive and persons can opt to stay or leave based on discussions with peer supporters.



- Tupu Ake, a New Zealand-based recovery house service, welcomes ‘guests’ from various ethnicities. Atmiyata in Gujarat employs a stepped-care approach using community-based volunteers who identify persons in distress, offer counselling support and enable access to social care benefits.
- Evaluation of the service indicates better general health, better quality of life and social functioning. Naya Daur in West Bengal works with local networks and volunteers who support homeless persons through their outreach programme and enable access to food, clothing, counselling, shelter and housing. Home Again, a programme of The Banyan in Tamil Nadu, facilitates residence options in regular neighbourhoods while also offering graded levels of supportive services for persons with severe disabilities.
- It emphasises socio-cultural participation, ‘neurodiversity’ and normalisation of mental health conditions. Peer leaders provide wisdom from their lived experience to support others in distress.
- The practice of open dialogue, a therapeutic practice that originated in Finland, runs through many programmes in the Guidance.
- This practice, conducted in homes or in service settings, combines individual and systemic family therapy with a focus on the centrality of relationships and promotion of connectedness through family and support networks. This approach trains the therapist in de-escalation of distress and breaks power differentials that allow for free expression.
- Aimed at providing newer perspectives to governments and policymakers, approaches in the new WHO Guidance are designed to make community inclusion and dialogic practice a way of life. With emphasis on social care components such as work force participation, pensions and housing, increased investments in health and social care seem imperative.

A network of services

- Recently, the Supreme Court and the Madras High Court have advised vaccinations for those in mental health care homes and for those homeless and living with a mental illness. While those in institutions should access this support at the earliest, for those homeless and who opt not to enter mental health establishments en masse from where exit pathways may be laborious, there are two paths.
- In the first, drives will be conducted and persons with mental illness will be housed in overcrowded institutions, with scant regard for agency or for social determinants of ill health.
- The other would aim to provide a network of services ranging from soup kitchens at vantage points to mobile mental health and social care clinics, non-intimidating guest homes at village panchayats with access to toilets and the comfort of a welcoming team, and well-being kiosks that offer a basic income and/or facilitate livelihoods.
- Small emergency care and recovery centres for those who need crisis support instead of larger hospitals, and long-term inclusive living options in an environment that values diversity and celebrates social mixing, will reframe the archaic narrative of how mental health care is to be provided.
- With a strong health system, Tamil Nadu is well placed to demonstrate through pilots, and an exclusive policy for homeless persons with mental illness, that political intent, good governance and creative thinking can solve complex problems and cater to the needs of the ultra-vulnerable.
- Meanwhile, a mental health service user whom we met interpreted her tattoo as ‘we are all one’. If we can learn to ‘be on the same side’ as the mental health service user, it seems possible that we can learn to respect human diversity.

GS III

Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework

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

Context: *The fifth and the final session of the third ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Conference on Biodiversity focused on theme ‘Towards 2050: Living in Harmony with Nature.’ Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework aims to galvanise transformative action by governments, including indigenous peoples and local communities, civil society and businesses, to achieve the outcomes that contribute to the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity and other biodiversity-related multilateral agreements.*

Details:

- The ASEAN region include 10 countries: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.
- Four sessions of the third ASEAN Conference on Biodiversity in 2020 were earlier conducted virtually from September to December 2020.
- The annual biodiversity financing gap amounts to \$316 billion, according to Conservation Finance Alliance Executive Director David Meyers. He stated this at a webinar organised by the ASEAN Centre on Biodiversity (ACB) in April, 2021.
- Insufficient finances for managing and conserving the region’s protected areas, especially the Asean Heritage Parks (AHP), was recently acknowledged by the ACB as well. The region has 44 AHPs.
- AHPs have been identified as the best protected areas in the ASEAN region in terms of ecological completeness, biodiversity richness and conservation.

Importance of recommendations

- These recommendations are likely to be adopted at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP 15) scheduled to take place in Kunming, China, from October 11-24, 2021.
- The post 2020 global biodiversity framework is important because the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity 2011-2020 has ended. This is a stepping stone towards the 2050 Vision of “Living in harmony with nature”, according to the United Nations CBD.
- The recommendations are also important because the region occupies only three per cent of the Earth’s land, but covers four biodiversity hotspots and contains three of the world’s 17 mega-diverse countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines).
- All 10 ASEAN countries have been facing major significant challenges in achieving the two sustainable development goals (SDG) on biodiversity mandated by the United Nations: SDG 14 (life below water) and SDG 15 (life on land), revealed the Sustainable Development Report 2021.

ASEAN countries must be bold in raising their biodiversity concerns

- While the ministers and senior officials of ASEAN countries shared their aspirations for biodiversity over the next five years, Basile van Havre, co-chair of the open-ended working group (OEWG) on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework called upon the countries to raise their own concerns and be “blunt and open” about them.
- Conserving biodiversity is a global responsibility as well.
- There are credible scientific evidences to indicate the linkages between climate change and loss of biodiversity, which are interlinked and cannot be addressed in silos, he said.
- The concern was raised by experts at the 8th Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES-8).
- Protecting biodiversity was economically beneficial, and that the 30 x 30 target was a global one, which did not signify identical obligations for every country but rather for the Earth as a whole.
- This is crucial since ecosystems are under threat. More discussions would be needed to conclude text regarding marine and coastal biodiversity, invasive alien species and biodiversity and health.

How did COVID-19 geographic shift affect MGNREGA implementation?

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

Context: *Rural Unemployment was widespread during the second wave. while in april, spread of the pandemic was not severe enough to dampen the demand for mgnrega works, the situation changed drastically by May*

Details:

- In 2020, during the first wave of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, when the country watched millions of informal workers trudging back to their villages due to lockdown-induced job losses, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) emerged as a safety net for the distressed rural households.
- Between May and July 2020, the scheme generated the highest number of employment recorded since its launch in 2005. There was, undoubtedly, a surge in the demand for unskilled manual works under MGNREGA as few other employment opportunities were available in rural areas.
- But at the same time, people were less fearful of venturing out to seek work as rural India had remained largely unscathed by COVID-19. Administrative apparatus at the panchayat level was also not fully engaged in the management of the pandemic and could implement the livelihood support scheme.
- All this changed during the second wave, when the virulence of the pandemic shifted from urban to rural areas.
- In April and May 2021, rural districts — where at least 60 per cent of the population resides in rural areas — accounted for 45 per cent and 53 per cent, respectively, of the new cases detected.
- In May alone, rural districts accounted for more than 50 per cent of the new cases and deaths in all large states except Gujarat, Kerala and Karnataka.
- How has this ‘geographic shift’ of the pandemic impacted the implementation of MGNREGA, and thereby people’s livelihoods?
- Understanding this is crucial at a time when studies indicate deepening poverty levels and soaring unemployment across rural areas. A recent report, State of Working India 2021, by the Azim Premji University, Bengaluru, estimated that during March-October 2020, rural poverty increased by 15 per cent as compared to the seven months preceding the study period and pushed 150 million more people into impoverishment.
- Rural unemployment has spiked to 10.63 per cent from 6.15 per cent between March and May 2021, stated the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy.

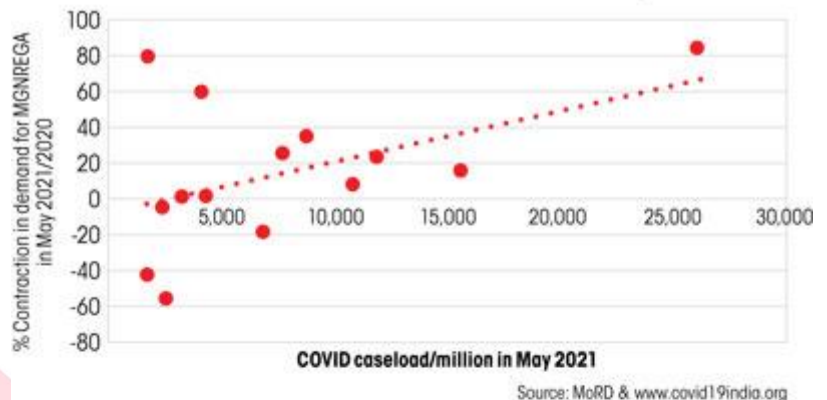


Second wave's double blow

- To assess the impact of the second wave of the pandemic on rural livelihoods, we compared the demand for MGNREGA works during April and May 2021 with that of the corresponding months the previous year, both at the state and the district levels.
- Our findings showed that the demand pattern not only offers an insight into what it takes to survive when caught between a contagious infection and the prospect of income loss, it also offers clues as to how the safety net can be utilised to ensure livelihood security for rural households during such times of crises.
- First, let's analyse the demand for MGNREGA works in April 2021. A simple comparison of data available on the MGNREGA portal would show that it surged 104 per cent more than the demand recorded during the same month in 2020.
- But this is misleading as the recorded demand in April 2020 was only for one-third of the month; it may be recalled that between March 25 and April 20, 2020, almost every economic activity, including MGNREGA works, remained suspended because of the stringent country-wide lockdown.
- So, we compared the figures with that of April 2019, and found that the demand for MGNREGA works during April 2021 registered an increase of 30 per cent.
- This increased demand suggested that unemployment was widespread in rural areas during the second wave. It also indicated that spread of the pandemic in April was not severe enough to dampen demand for MGNREGA works.
- The situation, however, changed drastically by the next month, when the rural spread of COVID-19 intensified further. At the macro level, the demand for MGNREGA works contracted by 26 per cent as compared to May 2020. A state-level analysis, however, showed a varied trend.

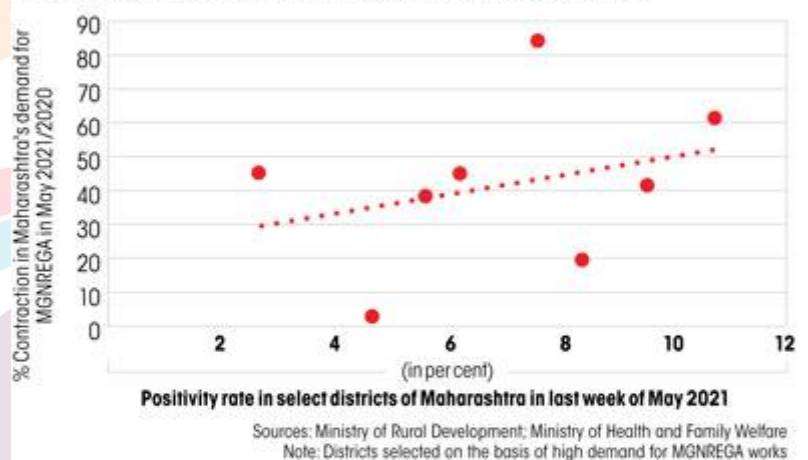
HOW SECOND WAVE HITS RURAL LIVELIHOOD

Demand for MGNREGA works contracted in states battered by COVID-19



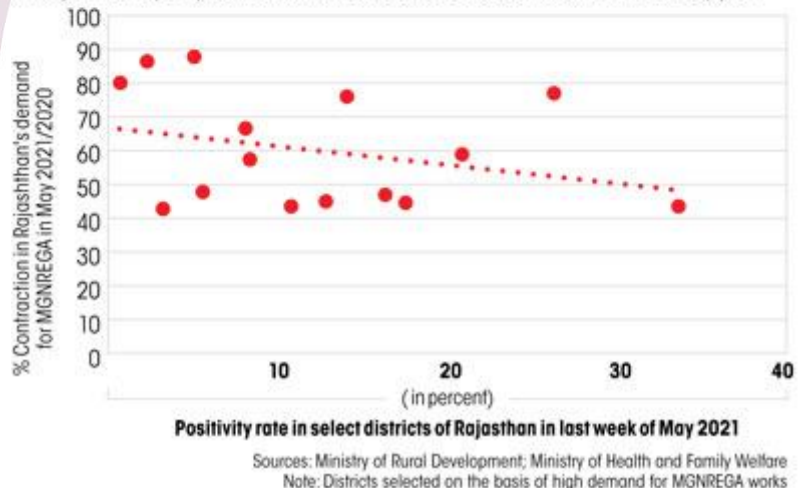
AT PLACES, PULL FACTOR DAMPENED DEMAND

In Maharashtra, fear of infection reduced MGNREGA demand



AT OTHERS, PUSH FACTOR NULLIFIED PULL FACTOR

In Rajasthan, people risked life to secure subsistence livelihood support





- The demand for MGNREGA works had increased in Madhya Pradesh (5 per cent), Odisha (19.5 per cent), Assam (42 per cent), Jharkhand (57 per cent) and Gujarat (a humongous 722 per cent).
- It remained more or less unchanged in Bihar and Telangana, which reported less than 1 per cent of demand contraction. In remaining states, demand contraction ranged from 8 per cent in Andhra Pradesh to 82 per cent in Kerala.
- Since the spread of COVID-19 too is not uniform across the country, we further compared the demand contraction in states with the caseload for that month, and found a positive correlation between the two.
- In states like Assam, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha, where the spread of the pandemic was less severe in May 2021, rural households could benefit from MGNREGA works.
- But in states where the caseload was high, people did not venture out for MGNREGA works, resulting in a demand contraction. The wide variation in demand contraction prompted us to probe further and explore to what extent the severity of the pandemic influenced people's decision to seek livelihood support schemes.
- While Rajasthan showed a 59 per cent demand contraction in May 2021, for Maharashtra it was 35 per cent.
- The districts were selected on the basis of high demand for MGNREGA works. By comparing the districts' positivity rates (a proxy for severity of the spread of infection) in the last week of May 2021 with the year-over-year change in work demand for the month, we observed a contrasting pattern.
- In the selected Maharashtra districts, the severity of the pandemic's spread when compared with the demand contraction for MGNREGA works showed a positive trend. This suggested a steep demand contraction at places where the infection was severe.
- Contrary to expectation, the correlation was negative for Rajasthan districts, with the trend suggesting a moderate demand contraction at places with high spread of infection. What could be the reason for this anomaly?

It's life vs livelihood

- The demand for MGNREGA works by rural households in a pandemic situation is primarily determined by two factors.
 - One, the compulsion to secure subsistence livelihood support notwithstanding the risk of infection (a push factor).
 - Two, the apprehension among MGNREGA job-card holders to expose themselves to the risk of infection while seeking work, particularly in areas of high positivity rates (a pull factor).
- The analysis of Maharashtra and Rajasthan districts showed that both the push as well as the pull factors were at play in all districts. And the overall effect on the demand for MGNREGA works depended on which of the two factors was dominant in a region.
- In the selected districts where we observed an increase in demand in May 2021 compared to May 2020, the push factor appeared to have neutralised the pull factor; whereas in the districts with significant contraction, the pull factor possibly dominated and dampened the demand for work.

Widen safety net, now

- This understanding should be part of India's contingency plan to support rural livelihoods in the event of a third wave of the pandemic, which experts warn could hit the country during the second half of the year. Though the ongoing kharif season is expected to generate sizeable opportunities for work, these will taper off around September.
- By then, due to substantial coverage of COVID-19 vaccination, the pull factor among MGNREGA job-card holders would be less severe.
- But the push factor that drives households to demand MGNREGA works will remain, as the period between November and March is also the lean season for labour demand in agriculture.
- So there is an urgent need for the government to widen the safety net for rural households by enhancing, among other measures, the guarantee limit of MGNREGA from 100 to 150 days.



- In the past, such a dispensation has been allowed in regions affected by natural calamities, such as droughts, floods and cyclones.
- Since COVID-19 has been treated as a disaster under provisions of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, the Union government would be well advised to follow the past precedent and increase household entitlement limit of work days under MGNREGA to 150 days for the financial year 2021-22 for the entire country, as the pandemic has not spared any geographical region.
- Going by the past records, the highest number of households that have availed 100 days of work in a year has been around 7.2 million, recorded in the financial year 2020-21.
- Now, let's assume that the same number of households would seek work during the entire entitled limit of MGNREGA this year also — in the current financial year, only 0.15 million households have completed 100 days of work under MGNREGA up to June 17, 2021.
- Providing these 7.2 million households the extra 50 days of employment may require supplementary provision of around Rs 10,000 crore (at the current cost of providing a person day of work).
- During a pandemic, this order of additional financial support to the most deprived and vulnerable rural households need not be seen as a breach of reasonable norm of fiscal prudence.

Current Affairs Quiz

1) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Bamboo Oasis on Lands in Drought (BOLD)?

1. The project serves the combined national objectives of reducing desertification and providing livelihood and multi-disciplinary rural industry support.
2. It is a unique scientific exercise initiated by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : a

Project BOLD (Bamboo Oasis on Lands in Drought) has been recently launched by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC).

2) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to NIPUN Bharat?

1. It creates an enabling environment to accomplish that every child achieves the desired learning competencies in reading, writing and numeracy by the end of Grade 3, by 2026-27.
2. It will be implemented by the Department of School Education and Literacy under the aegis of the centrally sponsored Samagra Shiksha Scheme.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

3) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Fly Ash?

1. It is collected from the exhaust gases by electrostatic precipitators or bag filters.
2. Its chemical composition includes calcium silicates, calcium aluminate and calcium aluminoferrite.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

4) Valmiki Tiger Reserve (VTR) is located in which of the following states?

- a. Uttar Pradesh
- b. West Bengal
- c. Himachal Pradesh
- d. Bihar

Answer : d

5) Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. Appointments and promotions of district judges in any State shall be made by the Governor of the State in consultation with the High Court.



2. Parliament is empowered to make laws for the creation of one or more All-India Services, including an All India Judicial Service (AIJS).
3. All India Judicial Service (AIJS) shall not include any post inferior to that of a district judge.

Codes:

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

Answer : d

6) Consider the following statements :

1. Green Passport is in the form of a digital QR code which attests that a person has been vaccinated against COVID-19.
2. It is an initiative of United States of America (USA) to ban the unvaccinated people of any country.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : a

The European Union has recently implemented the EU Digital COVID Certificate (EUDCC) or the “Green Passport”.

7) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Auroras?

1. Auroras are caused when charged particles ejected from the Sun's surface called the solar wind enter the Earth's atmosphere.
2. In the northern part of our globe, the polar lights are called aurora borealis and in the south, they are called aurora australis.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

8) Consider the following statements with respect to Arctic's Last Ice Area:

1. It expands from Greenland's northern coast to the western part of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago.
2. Penguins are dependent of this area to build dens for their offspring.

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

The area is used by polar bears to hunt for seals who use ice to build dens for their offspring.

Penguins live almost exclusively in the Southern Hemisphere, with only one species, the Galápagos penguin, found north of the Equator.

9) Consider the following statements:

1. Common Palm Civets are native to regions within and around Asia, ranging as far east as the Philippines and as far west as Kashmir.
2. It is listed as Critically Endangered under IUCN Red list.

Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

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

Answer : b

According to the IUCN, Asian palm civets are of little concern because they have a wide distribution, large populations, are highly adaptable, and have a stable population trend.

10) Which of the following countries are members of Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries Plus (OPEC+)?

1. India
2. Russia
3. Malaysia
4. Australia
5. South Sudan

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- a. All except 1
- b. 1 and 4 only
- c. 1, 3 and 4 only
- d. 2, 3 and 5 only

Answer : d

11) Consider the following statements with respect to Matsya Setu App:

1. It is an application software that ensures seamless and effective dissemination of alerts and other important disaster-related information to the fishermen who venture out deeper into the seas.
2. It has been developed by the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) and Airport Authority of India (AAI).

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : d

It is an online course app that aims to disseminate the latest freshwater aquaculture technologies to the aqua farmers of the country.

The app was developed by the ICAR-Central Institute of Freshwater Aquaculture (ICAR-CIFA), Bhubaneswar, with the funding support of the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB), Hyderabad.

12) Which of the following statements is/are incorrect with respect to Bhalia wheat?

1. The unique characteristic of the wheat variety is that, it is being grown in the rainfed condition without irrigation.
2. The Bhalia variety of wheat from the State of Gujarat received GI certification in 2011.

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

13) Navegaon Nagzira Tiger Reserve is located in -

- a. Madhya Pradesh
- b. Maharashtra
- c. West Bengal
- d. Bihar

Answer : b

14) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Zika Virus Disease?

- 1. It is a mosquito-borne flavivirus caused primarily by Aedes mosquitoes, which bite during the day.
- 2. Symptoms are generally mild and include fever, rash, and conjunctivitis.
- 3. Zika virus infection during pregnancy can cause infants to be born with microcephaly and other congenital malformations, known as congenital Zika syndrome.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : d

15) Which of the following pairs is/are correctly matched?

- | Products | – | Origin |
|--------------------|---|-------------------|
| 1. Madurai Malli | – | Kerala |
| 2. Mishri Cherries | – | Arunachal Pradesh |

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : d

Madurai Malli – Tamil Nadu

Mishri Cherry – Jammu & Kashmir

16) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Albinism?

- 1. Albinism is caused due to the heritable absence of functional tyrosinase enzyme in pigment cells affecting skin and hair.
- 2. Albinism in plants interferes with photosynthesis, which can reduce survivability.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

17) Buxwaha Protected Forest Region is located in -



- a. West Bengal
- b. Chhattisgarh
- c. Jharkhand
- d. Madhya Pradesh

Answer : d

18) Consider the following statement with respect to Methanogens:

- 1. Microorganisms called methanogens are capable of generating methane as a metabolic by product.
- 2. Methanogens do not require oxygen to live and are widely distributed in nature.

Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

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

Answer : d

Both statements are correct

19) Consider the following statements with respect to dbGENVOC:

- 1. It is the world's first of its kind database of genomic variations in oral cancer.
- 2. It was created by the National Institute of Biomedical Genomics (NIBMG) which has been funded by the Department of Biotechnology.

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

20) Which of the following planets have a moon named Enceladus?

- a. Venus
- b. Saturn
- c. Jupiter
- d. Mercury

Answer : b