

9pm

Compilation

May, 2021 (First Week)

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General Studies Paper - 1

General Studies - 1

1. Recent Communal Riots in Northern Ireland have Lessons For India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs1: Social Empowerment, Communalism, Regionalism & Secularism.

Synopsis: Recently, communal riots broke out in Ireland. India can take a few lessons from that. A committed political leadership should take responsibility for peoples' social and economic problems and should make efforts to alleviate their miseries.

Background

- Recently, communal clashes broke out in Ireland between the Protestant pro-British loyalist unionists and the Catholic pro-Irish nationalists.
- The Protestant pro-British loyalist unionists wanted that Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom forever.
- Whereas, the Catholic pro-Irish nationalists, wanted that Northern Ireland to become part of the Republic of Ireland.

What are the reasons for the riot?

The riot is a result of many problems such as ideology towards change, resistance to change, and sustained political and social inertia towards the misery of vulnerable sections.

- **First**, political leadership's apathy towards addressing social issues.
 - Even after the signing of the **Anglo-Irish Good Friday Agreement** in 1998, both religious communities experienced little or no peace.
 - Poverty, deprivation, lack of social and economic opportunities and persistent high unemployment affects both nationalist and loyalist similarly in Northern Ireland.
 - It has also resulted in an abnormal number of suicides between 1998 and 2014.
 - The localities most deprived during the pre-agreement communal riots remain the most deprived areas within Northern Ireland today.
- **Second**, differences in ideologies towards change (**Brexit**). While the Catholic pro-Irish nationalists wanted to stay with European Union, the Protestant pro-British loyalist unionists campaigned for Brexit.
 - However, 56% of electorates in Northern Ireland voted to remain in the European Union. This has resulted in a special protocol for Northern Ireland.
 - It provided for the territory to remain in the customs union and single market of the European Union while protecting its status as part of the United Kingdom. Much of the present anger relates to this specific protocol.

What lessons can India learn from this?

- **First**, a functioning democracy must ensure a daily commitment to address communal issues with vigilance, tolerance, and compromise.
- **Second**, Political leadership should take responsibility for peoples' social and economic problems and work towards eliminating prejudices within communities.
- **Third**, Political parties should be aware that, creating religious tensions between communities will severely damage every section of society as well as political and national institutions.

General Studies Paper - 2

General Studies - 2

1. CBSE's New Assessment System for Class 10 Students

Source: [Indian Express](#)

GS-2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Synopsis: CBSE has canceled the board examinations for 10th class students. CBSE's new assessment system will be the new system based on objective criteria to assess their academic performance.

How marks are awarded for students as per CBSE's new assessment system?

The basic break-up of marks provided by the board is as follows;

- I. **Internal Assessment – 20 marks**
- II. **Periodic/Unit Test – 10 marks**
- III. **Half Yearly/Mid-Term Examination – 30 marks**
- IV. **Pre-Board Examinations – 40 marks**

However, there is no uniformity between schools regarding the number of tests conducted and the mode of examination. For instance,

- One or more schools have not conducted the above three categories of tests/exams.
- Also, some schools have resorted to Online exams while others have conducted exams Offline.
- Further, there are possibilities that some students might have not appeared in some of the examinations conducted by schools.

How are these irregularities bridged by the assessment process?

- The board proposes the formation of '**Result Committees**' in every school. They are required to prepare a criterion of 80 marks through a 'rationale document'.
- It will be used to assess students belonging to schools where all tests have not been conducted or where students have not appeared for the assessment.
- The committees will consist of the principal, five teachers from mathematics, social sciences, science, and two languages, and two teachers from neighboring schools as external members.

How objectivity is ensured in the assessment process?

- To achieve objectivity, the board prescribes a system of **internal moderation** by all schools based on the historical performance of a school.
 1. One, the best performance of a school in the last three years' board examinations is taken as the 'reference year'
 2. Two, **subject-wise marks** assessed by the school for 2021 should be within a range of 2 marks obtained by the school in the reference year.
 3. Three, the overall **average marks for the school** assessed in 2021, for all 5 main subjects, should not exceed the overall average marks obtained by the school in the reference year.
- This system of assessment will provide a reliable, unbiased, and fair reference standard based on the school's own past performance.

Options available for students who do not achieve the qualifying marks?

1. The board proposes the **policy of awarding grace marks** to those who do not meet the qualifying criteria.
2. Students who are not able to meet the criterion after grace marks will be placed in the "**Essential Repeat**" or "**Compartment**" category.

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3. Students placed in the "Compartment" category are required to write the compartment exam held by the school.
4. It will be an objective type online or offline exam based on sample question papers provided by the CBSE.
5. Students will be allowed to continue in class XI till the compartment results are released.

2. US forces in Afghanistan Starts their Final Phase of Withdrawal

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus Topic – GS- 2, Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Synopsis: The US President has formally started the final phase of withdrawal of US forces in Afghanistan. The President has also set September 11 as the deadline for withdrawal.

Why are US forces in Afghanistan?

- On 11 September 2001, attacks in the United States killed nearly 3,000 people.
- Osama bin Laden, the head of al-Qaeda was identified as the man responsible.
- The Taliban ran Afghanistan at that time. They protected Bin Laden and refused to hand him over. So, a month after 9/11, the US launched airstrikes against Afghanistan.
- As other countries joined the war, the Taliban was removed from power. But the Taliban didn't disappear and its influence regrew after some time.
- Since then, the US and its allies have struggled to stop Afghanistan's government from collapsing. Further, they also [fail to end the deadly attacks by the Taliban](#).
- Also, it is estimated that the US has spent more than \$2 trillion in Afghanistan in the past two decades.

U.S. troops Withdrawal from Afghanistan:

- In February 2020, the United States and the Taliban had signed a peace agreement titled the [Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan](#). The main provisions of this agreement are,
 - **Troops Withdrawal:** The US will withdraw its troops from Afghanistan. Further, the NATO or coalition troop numbers will also be brought down simultaneously. At last, all the troops will be out of Afghanistan within 14 months.
 - **Taliban:** Taliban will not allow any of its members, other individuals or groups including al-Qaeda to use the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies.
 - **Sanctions Removal:** In turn, the US and UN sanctions on the Taliban leaders will be removed.
- The 2021 withdrawal of U.S. troops is scheduled. By 11 September 2021, all the US troops will be removed from Afghanistan.
- However, the Taliban has accused the US of breaching the deal. In the peace agreement, the US had said it would have all troops out by May 1, 2021.

Way Forward:

- The withdrawal of US troops has started against a backdrop of fierce clashes between the Taliban and government forces.
- There is no interim peace agreement is reached between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

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- Hence, it is expected that Afghanistan's security forces will come under increasing pressure from the Taliban after the withdrawal.

3. Managing Vaccine Shortage by Proper Gap Between Vaccinations

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: **GS-2:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education, Health, etc

Synopsis: To achieve universal vaccination, India needs to work on a few out-of-the-box solutions for vaccine shortage. For example, increasing the gap between vaccination effectively.

Introduction:

The [New Vaccine Policy](#) aims to [vaccinate people above 18 years](#). The Policy came into force on May 1. But a few states have postponed the vaccination program citing a shortage of the vaccine.

Vaccine shortage:

- According to the [Co-WIN portal](#), India is producing roughly 2 million vaccines a day. And the number of vaccines administered daily is roughly 2.3 million to 2.5 million. So, technically the production capacity falls below even the daily requirement.
- As of April 29, India's 9.1 % of the population received one dose of vaccine. Similarly, only 1.9 % of the population received both doses.
- Since India announced the new vaccination policy, the demand for vaccines has increased three times, but the supply of vaccines remains the same.

How India expected to tackle the vaccine shortage?

- At present, India is expecting a few million doses of Russian vaccine Sputnik.
- Similarly, [Covishield](#) vaccine maker Serum Institute of India also going to improve their scale-up production to 100 million doses per month soon.
- Also, the Covaxin manufacturer Bharat Biotech is expecting to scale up the production to 50-60 million doses a month.
- Despite these developments, the next few month's production is unlikely to go beyond 150 million doses a month.

Interval between two doses:

- **Covishield:** [Phase 3 trials](#) of the Covishield vaccine found out that the second dose offered after 12 weeks of the first dose will provide the best result and protection. So the best option to take the second dose of vaccine is 12 weeks for Covishield.
 - However, due to urgency, second doses administered after six to eight weeks also improved efficacy over time.
- **Covaxin:** The second dose of Covaxin can be taken four to six weeks after the first.

Present condition of vaccination in India:

At present India's routine immunisation programmes for children are administered at a four-week gap in India. But globally they follow an eight-week gap. The reason for the lower gap between vaccination in India is due to,

- **Operational reasons:** India's distribution of vaccines in two phases with a long gap might create a delay in vaccination.
- **Low coverage:** If the gap between vaccination is increased then people might not vaccinate at the correct time.
- **Suggestions to avoid vaccine shortage:**

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- India should **increase the gap for Covishield to 12 weeks**. This is because India needs to control the progress of the pandemic. The Covishield trials have shown that the higher the gap, the greater the proven efficacy. Furthermore, it has other advantages as well. Such as,
 - Increasing the gap between vaccination will **give some time to manufacturers** to produce the vaccine.
 - It allows more people to take at least one shot of the vaccine. Immunologically, it is understood that even one dose can activate the immune system. Here, the vaccine will make the natural infection a sort of booster infection and protect people for a longer time than the non-vaccinated individual.
- Like the US, India also needs to ensure **evolving guidelines on vaccination**. This will ensure more vaccination of single dose.
 - The United States's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention(CDC) initially came up with a vaccination gap of three-month. Later the CDC reduced this gap to one month.

4. Opportunities in India-UK relations

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs2: Bilateral, Regional, and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Synopsis: Through this article, we will discuss the contentious issue hampering India-U. K relation as well as possible opportunities of convergence for mutual development.

Background

India- Britain summit is set to take place digitally. The two leaders are expected to announce a 10-year roadmap to transform the bilateral relationship that will cover a range of areas.

What are the contentious issues hampering India-U. K relation?

While India's relations with western countries such as the US and France have dramatically improved in recent years. However, ties with Britain have lagged because of the following reasons,

- **First**, mistrust between the two countries owing to the **colonial legacy**. The bitter experience of the Partition and Britain's perceived tilt to Pakistan have hampered India-U. K relation.
- **Second**, the British Labour Party's growing political negativity towards India. For instance,
 - Supporting for **self-determination** for Kashmiris.
 - Criticism of government over recent **farmers' agitation**.

What are the possible areas of convergence for mutual development?

India and Britain need each other to achieve their larger goals.

- **First, Cooperation in the health sector. Bilateral strategic cooperation in the health sector** can help India to benefit from the enormous potential of U.K in public health sector.
 - Further, both nations should work towards building a resilient medical supply chain to control the global Pandemic.
 - Britain along with the G-7 countries can help transform India's internal capabilities in the Health sector.

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- **Second, building new global economic partnerships.** Since both the countries have moved away from their regional blocs (**India-RCEP, Britain-EU**) a new economic partnership will benefit both the nations immensely.
- **Third, cooperation in geopolitical issues. For instance,** Britain is tilting to the Indo-Pacific, where India is a natural ally. Whereas, India needs a wider coalition as possible to balance aggressive China.
- **Fourth, Cooperation in mitigation of Climate change.** The U.K Can support India for the adoption of a Clean mechanism and e-mobility in the transport sector.
- **Fifth, cooperation in labour movement.** Agreement on “migration and mobility” to facilitate the legal movement of Indians into Britain can benefit India’s skilled workforce.

5. One Health Approach – Significance and Steps Taken by India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Synopsis:

Covid-19 has once again shown the degree of chaos that can be spread by zoonotic diseases. This gives India an opportunity to work on the One Health approach.

Background

- In 1856, the father of modern pathology (Rudolf Virchow) observed that there are no dividing lines between animal and human medicine.
- The Covid-19 pandemic once again highlighted the interconnectedness of the systems.
- The havoc caused by the pandemic induced the experts to sensitize countries towards the ‘One Health’ approach on the occasion of World Veterinary Day (April 24th).

What is the One Health Approach?

- It is a collaborative, multisectoral, coordinated, and transdisciplinary approach. It recognizes the interconnection between **people, animals, and the environment**.
- It calls for working at the **local, regional, national, and global levels** with the goal of achieving optimal health outcomes.

Need for focusing on ‘One Health’:

- **High Prevalence of Zoonotic Diseases:** More than two-thirds of existing and emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic. Experts believe that there are more than 1.7 million viruses circulating in wildlife, and many of them are likely to be zoonotic.
 - It is an infectious disease that jumps from animal to humans.
 - Anthroozoonotic infections get transferred from humans to animals.
- **Transboundary impact:** The transboundary impact of viral outbreaks such as the Nipah virus, Ebola, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), etc. were alarming for the world. It has made it imperative for the world to focus on one health.
- **Huge Economic Cost:** Zoonotic diseases place a heavy burden on the economy of countries.
 - For instance, the WHO estimates that rabies (also a zoonotic disease) costs the global economy approximately \$6 billion annually.
- **India and one health approach:**
- India’s ‘One Health’ vision derives its blueprint from the agreement between the tripartite-plus alliance towards ‘One World, One Health’.
- The alliance includes:
 - the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO),

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- the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE),
- the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP).

Steps taken by India towards 'One Health':

- The country established a **National Standing Committee on Zoonoses** in the 1980s.
- The Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD) has launched several schemes to mitigate the prevalence of animal diseases since 2015.
- For instance, under the **National Animal Disease Control Program**, 13,343 crore rupees have been sanctioned for Foot and Mouth disease and Brucellosis control.
- DAHD has partnered with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in the National Action Plan for Eliminating Dog-Mediated Rabies.
- Further DAHD will soon establish a 'One Health' unit within the Ministry.
- A **Center for One Health** will soon be established at Nagpur.
- Efforts are being made to revamp programs that focus on **capacity building for veterinarians**.
- The government is also upgrading the animal health diagnostic system such as Assistance to States for Control of Animal Diseases (ASCAD).

Challenges hindering the success of one health approach:

- Veterinary manpower shortages make the early detection of zoonotic diseases difficult.
- Lack of information sharing between human and animal health institutions
- Inadequate coordination on food safety at slaughter, distribution, and retail facilities

Way Forward:

- The focus should be on **increasing investments and augmenting awareness generation** towards the 'One Health' approach.
- There must be the **integration of existing animal health and disease surveillance** systems.
 - For instance, the Information Network for Animal Productivity and Health, and the National Animal Disease Reporting System can be integrated.
- The government needs to **formulate best-practice guidelines** for informal market and slaughterhouse operations. This would improve inspections, disease prevalence assessments, etc.
- Further, it must create **mechanisms to operationalize** 'One Health' at every stage from top to grassroots level.

6. Government's Apathy towards Migrant communities

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Synopsis: The government is not showing any Apathy towards Migrant communities to address the challenges faced by them. It is despite their increased vulnerability to the shocks in the economy.

Background

- The second wave of the Pandemic has once again led to the enforcement of Strict to moderate lockdowns in states.

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- This has resulted in a loss of jobs for Informal workers employed in many industries. Majority of the migrants work in the informal sector.
- Despite their increased vulnerability in the informal sector, government efforts to support them through policymaking have been inadequate.

About Migrants

- Migrants are 'mobile by default', They are a product of growing **rural distress** and inadequate official policies failing to support the ailing rural economy.
- They benefit the urban economy by providing cheap labor to manufacturing units and cheap services to households.

What are the challenges faced by the migrant population?

- Unemployment in urban areas due to Pandemic induced Economic distress.
- Lack of access to accommodation.
- A lack of sustainable income and savings to ensure food due to near insolvency.
- **Reverse migration** by paying exorbitant costs for travel.
- Falling victim to COVID-19.
- Lack of livelihood opportunities in their hometowns in the rural economies.
- Lack of new job opportunities, due to shrinking **National Rural Employment Guarantee Act** allotments by the government.
- Lastly, Lack of legal status as a working population.

What needs to be done?

The recent official announcement of a free ration of 5 kg cereals to 80 crore families is the only benefit visible so far. However, it is not sufficient;

- Government should strive to calculate the official estimate of migrant workers, either incoming or reverse. This will help in objective policy planning.
- Need to alleviate rural distress by providing support to the ailing agriculture economy.
- There is a need to provide some short-term relief for migrant workers and their families to support their livelihood during the Pandemic.
- Migrant workers should be provided with legal backing.
- Modifications in the **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020** are required to strengthen the health and safety conditions of workers in establishments

7. Impact of the Pandemic on India's foreign Policy

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Synopsis: The consequences of the Covid 19 pandemic second wave have far-reaching strategic implications on India's Foreign policy.

What are the likely impacts on India's foreign policy?

- **First**, India's Supremacy at the regional level (in South Asia) will decline in the future.
 - India's traditional primacy in the region was built on a mix of material aid, political influence, and historical ties.
 - The Pandemic has reduced India's ability to materially help its immediate neighborhood for development assistance and political autonomy.

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- As a result, South Asian states are likely to shift towards China for financial support.
- **Second**, India's geopolitical ambitions to become a leading power will be impacted.
 - The pandemic could adversely impact India's ability to contribute to the **Indo-Pacific** and **the Quad**
 - **For instance**, COVID-19 will prevent any ambitious military spending or modernization plan.
 - It further limits the country's attention on global diplomacy and regional geopolitics.
 - With reduced military spending and lesser diplomatic attention to regional geopolitics, India's ability to project power and contribute to the growth of the Quad will be uncertain.
 - India's inability to take a lead role and China attracting smaller states away from the Indo-Pacific with aid and threats can change the balance of power in favor of China.
- **Third**, the shift in focus on domestic politics in the coming years by the ruling government will reduce India's willingness for new foreign policy innovation or initiatives.
 - **For instance**, Economic distress, a fall in foreign direct investment and industrial production, and a rise in unemployment will compel the center to focus on COVID-19 recovery. This will limit India's strategic ambitions in global space.
- **Fourth**, India might become more appeasing towards China. The mismanagement of the second wave has limited India's ability to stand up against China.
- **Fifth**, India's foreign policy may also become more accommodative, reconciliatory, and cooperative in the neighborhood. (**SAARC nations**).
 - The Pandemic has forced India to reimagine, the friend-enemy equations in global geopolitics. While the US was hesitant to assist India during the pandemic Pakistan and China offered aid to India.
- **Sixth**, India's freedom to pursue Strategic autonomy might be reduced. For instance, a post-COVID-19 India might find it harder to resist demands of a closer military relationship with the U.S.
- **Seventh**, as every crisis opens up the possibility for change, one good outcome will be the opening up of new regional opportunities for cooperation under the **SAARC framework**.
 - SAARC nations should collectively focus on 'regional health multilateralism' to promote mutual assistance and joint action on health emergencies.
 - Further, geopolitics should be brought in par with health diplomacy, environmental concerns, and regional connectivity in South Asia.

8. West Bengal Housing Industry Regulation Act (WB HIRA) is Unconstitutional: SC

Source: [The Times of India](#)

Syllabus: **GS-2:** Separation of Powers between various organs Dispute Redressal Mechanisms and Institutions.

Synopsis: The court struck down the West Bengal Housing Industry Regulation Act (WB HIRA), 2017 as unconstitutional. The court also clarified that the legislations by the Parliament and state government are on the concurrent list.

Introduction:

The central government enacted the [Real Estate \(Regulation and Development\) Act](#) to regulate the Real Estate sector in India. West Bengal government also enacted a parallel Act

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known as the West Bengal Housing Industry Regulation Act (WB HIRA), 2017. Recently the Supreme Court held the West Bengal legislation Unconstitutional.

Background of both legislations:

Contracts and the transfer of property falls under the **Concurrent List** of the Seventh Schedule.

- In 1993 West Bengal government has enacted the West Bengal Housing Industry Regulation Act on the above two subjects.
- But, to bring transparency and safety in the market for consumers of residential and commercial projects the Central government enacted RERA in 2016. With the enactment of RERA, the 1993 Act was repealed.
- In the same year, West Bengal notified the draft Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Rules, 2016.
- Instead of finalizing the rules the state government went ahead and enacted West Bengal Housing Industry Regulation Act (WBHIRA) in 2017.
- Forum for Peoples Collective Efforts filed a case against the State of West Bengal regarding the WB HIRA

Recent Supreme Court Judgement on West Bengal Housing Industry Regulation Act:

The Supreme Court held in Forum for Peoples Collective Efforts v. State of West Bengal case held that the WB HIRA was unconstitutional. Further, the court also mentioned the following things.

- Both the statutes refer to the same subjects (**contracts and the transfer of property**) in the concurrent list.
- **Article 254 (2)** allows for a conflicting State law on a concurrent list subject to prevail over a central law if it receives the assent of the President. But the WB HIRA neither reserved for the consideration of the President nor the Presidential assent was obtained.
- The court also held that If any areas have been left out in the central legislation, the state legislatures can provide cognate(related) legislation. Such State legislation can incidentally deal with the provisions of Central legislation. But, The HIRA encroaches upon the authority of the Parliament.
- But in the case of clause-by-clause comparison between the two laws, the court observed that 95 to 98%, the WB HIRA is a complete copy-paste of the RERA. This is an attempt to establish a parallel regime by the State government.
- Furthermore, the court also observed that in a few critical aspects, WB HIRA is in direct conflict with RERA.
- The court also observed that there was a “doctrine of repugnancy” between WB-HIRA and RERA. (Repugnancy – inconsistency or contradiction between two or more parts of a legal instrument.) Such as,
 1. WB HIRA has failed to incorporate valuable institutional safeguards
 2. The WB HIRA does not have provisions intended to [protect the interest of homebuyers](#)
 3. The court observed these repugnancies of the state legislature as against the public interest.
- The court also elaborated on the **tests of repugnancy**. The three tests of Repugnancy as stated by the court are
 1. Where the provision of State legislation is directly in conflict with a law enacted by Parliament. In such cases, **compliance with one is impossible along with obedience to the other**.
 2. The second test of repugnancy is based on the **intent of Parliament to occupy the whole field**(contracts and the transfer of property) covered by the legislation.

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3. The subject of the legislation enacted by the State is identical to Parliament, then does the State law enacted prior or later to the central law.
- Since the State law is completely repugnant to the Central law, it was constitutionally impermissible

Conclusion:

The court based on the above explanations struck down the West Bengal Housing Industry Regulation Act (WB HIRA), 2017, as unconstitutional. Further, the court also held that striking down the present law will not result in the revival of the 1993 WB HIRA. This is because the 1993 Act was repealed after the enactment of RERA.

The Court also clarified that the striking down of WBHIRA will not affect the sanctions permissions granted prior to the delivery of the judgement.

9. The Case of EC's Demand for Restriction on Media

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: The Election Commission had asked the court to not let the media cover its verbal hearing. It should withdraw its request to recover some of its moral high ground.

Introduction

The Election Commission of India is a constitutional body that draws its mandate to conduct free and fair elections from Article 324. It has built a desirable reputation for impartiality and public trust. However, the EC has appeared too weak to political pressures amid a pandemic.

- The election commission approached the Supreme Court against the sharply critical observations by the Madras High Court about its management of elections.
- The HC said that possibly EC should face murder charges. EC complained in the apex court by stating that these comments are blatantly critical and derogatory. It further suggested that a line should be drawn so that such remarks are not reported by the media.
 - The complaint shows disregard for an open and democratic public sphere.
- The Supreme Court in its response rightly said that it is essential for constitutional bodies to take criticism from other constitutional bodies in the right spirit.
 - The people have a right to be informed. The media has a duty to cover the unfolding of debate in the court of law not just its final verdict.

Where did the election commission go wrong?

The EC should take a moment to pause and do an honest introspection. It has invited serious questions from the start of the poll exercise.

- **Firstly, the eight-phase schedule for the West Bengal polls was overstretched** especially during a pandemic. **The EC ignored requests by opposition parties** to shorten the election duration by clubbing together the last few phases.
- Moreover, the segregation of phases and geographies seemed to favor a specific political party.
- **Secondly, the EC made only casual attempts to make sure that COVID protocols** were followed by candidates and parties. The COVID curve rose up in West Bengal and the rest of India.
 - India crossed daily cases of 1 lakh on April 4. The daily cases to over 3 lakhs by registering 3,32,730 on April 22.

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- **Thirdly**, the EC only banned roadshows and public meetings of over 500 **after the Prime Minister's announcement of the cancellation** of his election meetings scheduled for the next day.

What should the election commission do?

- The EC had gained the trust of people over the years. **It should focus on maintaining** it. This will require constant awareness and work. The EC must know that the impression is growing of late that it has let itself go.
 - The EC needs to act to regain and restore its hard-earned credibility. It should begin by **withdrawing its self-indulgent and ill-conceived petition from the Supreme Court**.
- In a time when a stout executive does not hesitate to weaponize its mandate, the independence of monitorial institutions is especially precious and needed.

10. Use of CT scan for testing Covid is not Correct

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Synopsis: The available data and the risk factors suggest that the widespread use of CT scans in diagnosing infectious diseases needs to be sidelined.

Background

- There are mainly three reasons why tests in clinical medicine are performed.
 - **Diagnosis:** To identify the disease
 - **Etiognosis:** To identify the causative factor of the disease.
 - **Prognosis:** To find out the future development of a particular disease.
- In this context, the use of **computerised tomography (CT)** scans for COVID does not satisfy all the above criteria, for an accurate diagnostic test.

Validation on the effectiveness of CT scan test for Covid

- **First**, CT scans are not accurate enough to diagnose COVID-19. **For instance**, according to a study by The Cochrane, CT scan can accurately diagnose COVID-19 in about 88% of individuals with a positive RT-PCR.
 - Since an RT-PCR itself misses 30% of people who have COVID-19, a chest CT is likely to diagnose only 62% of all individuals having COVID-19. It makes it a relatively inaccurate test for diagnosis.
- **Second**, CT scans are also not accurate enough to identify the causing factor of the disease (**Etiognosis**). **For instance**, according to a study by The Cochrane, radiologists have mislabelled 20% of those who did not have the disease as having COVID-19.
 - This has serious consequences on an individual's health.
 - One, the real causative factor for the disease is left undetected.
 - Two, individuals are subjected to unwanted psychological stress.
- **Third**, using a CT scan to identify the future course of the Covid disease is also unlikely. For instance,
 - A CT scan can only show the infection in the lungs at that particular point in time.
 - This suggests that a CT is unlikely to give a physician more information than a simple tool such as an oximeter.
- **Finally**, the risks involved in getting a CT of the chest done are high.

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- According to a study published by The New England Journal of Medicine, in 2007, 4% of all cancers in the United States may be attributed to the **radiation from CT studies**.
- Also, apart from the risk caused to individuals, there are risks to radiology technicians, staff, and doctors.
- Further, Since CT scans are needed to be kept in closed air-conditioned spaces, there is a high risk of transmission of the virus at such centers.

Way forward

- For diagnosis of Covid, RT-PCR tests, which have higher accuracy compared to CT scans, can be done.
- Individuals should make an informed decision by evaluating the potential risks involved in getting the CT done.
- Further, patients with two negative RT-PCR swabs tests need to be evaluated for the possibility of other lung diseases

11. Reason behind Covid Vaccine Shortage Crisis

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Synopsis: Lack of firefight and planning are the main reasons responsible for the current Covid vaccine shortage crisis. Some extra efforts are required from center to address the challenges.

What are the reasons for the current Covid crisis?

- **First, the** delayed decision to make the vaccine available in the open market. Though now the government has allowed recently, the withdrawal of the price cap on vaccines can lead to a disparity among states to ensure **universal vaccination** for its citizens.
 - The Indian-made Covaxin, which was being distributed free, will now cost Rs 400 to the states and Rs 1,200 to private hospitals.
 - The financial position of many states is so weak that they can hardly buy two doses for every person at the rate of Rs 400 per vaccine.
 - Further, removal of price cap may lead to Exorbitant profiteering at the cost of people's lives.
- **Second, inadequate availability of vaccines** across the country due to lack of planning. This has delayed our fight against Covid pandemic. For example, Maharashtra has announced a stop to vaccinations for three days.
 - Further, no steps were taken to increase their availability. While other countries such as the US and EU advanced funding to companies researching the vaccine, India did nothing.
 - The US and the EU also booked 40 crore doses and 80 crore doses respectively in advance. While India placed its first order of vaccine in January 2021 and that too only for 1.60 crore doses. (less than 1 percent of its population).
- **Third,** lack of vision from our authorities to ensure ample availability of oxygen by anticipating the possibility of the second wave.
- **Fourth,** Lack of access to live-saving drugs due to profiteering by companies and middlemen.

What can be done?

- **One**, to provide universal vaccination, the Centre should bear the cost of vaccination. Also, a one-time tax can also be levied to mobilize funds.
- **Two, a zero-tolerance policy** should be adopted towards the black marketing of medicine. Further, Remdesivir should be procured and disbursed directly based on the assessment of the **Disaster Management Group**.
- **Three**, micro-planning at the local level should be carried out and a website for every district to dispense complete information from beds to oxygen, medicines, and ventilators should be enabled.

12. Poor State of Delhi Prisons Demand Urgent Attention

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections

Synopsis:

The condition of Delhi prisons has become immensely poor amidst the second wave of Covid 19. They have exceeded their sanctioned capacity and are on the verge of becoming hotspots for mass infections. Considering this, the government should take effective measures for decongesting prisons.

Background:

- Delhi is currently observing over 25000 new Covid 19 cases and 300 deaths every day.
- The virus has spread enormously across the state and the situation in Delhi prisons is even worse.

Poor state of Delhi Prisons:

- In April 2021, around 115 positive cases were reported among jail staff and 284 among inmates.
- Further, they have the highest occupancy rate in the country thereby possessing a high probability of virus spread and greater deaths.
 - As of April 2021, the prison population has crossed 20,500. This is twice the sanctioned capacity.

Steps taken for Decongest prisons:

- The Supreme Court directed the states to set up High-Powered Committees (**HPC**) in March 2020. The objective of HPC was to determine which inmates could be temporarily released.
- Around 3,499 under-trial prisoners in Delhi had been granted interim bail, and 1,184 convicts had been released on emergency parole till February 2021.
- However, the HPCs refused to extend the relaxation after this as the number of cases had come down. This again created a burden on Delhi prisons.
- The government now again wants to decongest the prisons however some issues would make the process more difficult.

Challenges in decongesting prisons:

- **Unwillingness of Prisoners:** Some prisoners feel more safe and secure in prisons. They are unwilling to leave the premises at a time of critical shortages in hospital infrastructure and greater difficulties in finding work.
- **Reluctance of Criminal Justice system:** The system failed to adjust as per the circumstances of pandemic-

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- There were a high number of arrests by police during lockdown months.
- Similarly, reduced functioning of courts delayed trials and enhanced pressure on prisons.
- Further, bails were granted based on regular bail jurisprudence. This focuses on individual prisoners and not overall prison conditions.
- **Inadequate Data:** There is a dearth of data on the current prevalence of infection in jails. Effective decongesting is possible only when the government knows the degree of infection spread in jails.
- **Lack of Priority:** The authorities have shown very less concern towards the health and safety of prisoners-
 - **For instance**, HPC did not reconvene till May 4, and the minutes from this meeting are not yet public.
 - The last assessment of oxygen concentrators and other medical equipment within jails was done in January 2021.
 - The higher courts have not acted on petitions demanding the safety of prisoners in jails.

Way Forward:

- The government must **take robust steps for decongestion**. This includes setting up temporary prisons, relaxing criteria for releasing prisoners, etc.
 - The government should **restrict the interaction of inmates with jail staff**. As it is believed that asymptomatic jail officials may have contributed to the spread of the virus.
 - Further, the government must **release data on the prevalence** of testing, infection, and vaccination in jails periodically. This will improve public monitoring.
- To conclude, we can say that the above steps will help in safeguarding the fundamental right to life of prisoners.

13. [SC struck down the Maharashtra State Reservation for SEBC Act, 2018](#)

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Mechanisms, Laws, Institutions, and Bodies constituted for the Protection and Betterment of these Vulnerable Sections.

Synopsis:

The SC has struck down the Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act, 2018. The judgment would prevent realization of unjust benefits by the reservation. It would also encourage states to work on core supply-side issues in education and public employment which would curtail unnecessary demand for reservation.

Background:

- The five-judge bench of SC has struck down the Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act, 2018.
- The act provided reservations for the Maratha community in public education and employment.

About the SEBC Act 2018:

- It provides 16 percent reservation to the Maratha community in jobs and admissions.
- The law views the Maratha community as a socially and educationally backward class (SEBC).

Genesis of SEBC Act 2018:

- It was an outcome of a prolonged political campaign by the dominant Maratha community and significant support by the political parties. The community possesses a strong foothold in state politics, the running of cooperatives and educational institutions, and ownership of land.
- The issue of reservation was rejected by at least three national commissions and three state commissions in the past.
- However, in 2018, the Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission (headed by Justice M.G. Gaikwad) recommended reservation for the Marathas. The Commission believed that extraordinary circumstances existed for a Maratha quota.

Judgment of SC:

- The court held that the 2018 act goes against Articles 14 and 15 (right to equality and protection against discrimination) of the Indian Constitution. It **exceeds the ceiling of 50% reservation** set by the 1992 Indra Sawhney judgment.
- Further, the act **fails to prove the existence of 'extraordinary circumstances'** under which the 50% limit can be breached. The data collected and presented by the (Justice Gaikwad) Commission proves that the Marathas are not socially and educationally backward.
- The court held that the **102nd Constitution Amendment has taken away the power of states** to identify Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBCs). It means that the Centre alone is empowered to identify SEBC.
 - The States could only make suggestions to the President or the statutory commissions for inclusion, exclusion, or modification in the SEBC List.

Way Forward:

- The judgment should act as an eye-opener for other dominant communities that are demanding reservation. Eg – Patidars in Gujarat.
- The Maharashtra Government can undertake a fresh study to support the Maratha claim for backward status and affirmative action. However, a more prudent approach would be to solve supply-side issues in education and employment. This would curtail unnecessary demand for reservation.
- A review of inclusion/exclusion power in the SEBC list can be held as some experts believe that participation of states ensures better recognition.

14. What is Social Murder and How to Ensure Accountability in Patrimonial state?

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS2: Important Aspects of Governance, Transparency and Accountability

Synopsis: The lack of political attention to social determinants and inequities that exacerbate the pandemic in India is a classic case of '**Social Murder**'.

What is Social Murder?

- **Friedrich Engels**, used this phrase to describe the death of the worker population in England during the Industrial revolution era.
- Lack of access to basic necessities of life along with poor working and living conditions for the workers resulted in ill health and early deaths. Engels calls this social murder.
- It is the same as murder by an individual, but the only difference is that death appears to be a "natural one".
- Similarly, according to the author, the inability to make the state accountable for the loss of lives in the Pandemic is social murder.

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- A classic case of social murder is the reverse migration of millions of inter-State migrant labor walking thousands of kilometers.

What fosters the conditions for social murder?

The state's neglect of its responsibility towards its citizens will perpetuate conditions for social murder. For instance,

- Holding elections in Bengal by the Election Commission of India,
- The Uttarakhand Chief Minister justifying **the Kumbh mela**.
- The inability of the State to Provide oxygen supply for Covid-19 Patients.
- Prohibition on media to telecast Cremation grounds.

What is the relation between Patrimonial state, accountability, Social murder?

1. **A patrimonial state** according to **Max Weber**, is a state in which the ruler exercises a traditional form of authority in contrast to a rule-based authority.
2. Here, the **centralised rule** is based on an ideology of religious majoritarianism as well as nationalism. It is further legitimized by the election wins.
3. The **patrimonial State** is benevolent towards its subjects. The author views India currently as a Patrimonial state.
4. But, the fundamental problem in patrimonialism is **ensuring accountability** of the government.
 1. For instance, recently, the Swedish Prime Minister was subjected to questioning by a constitutional committee on COVID-19 handling.
 2. Whereas, in India, there is **no mechanism for ensuring critical scrutiny** on the government decisions that led to the current crisis.
5. Also, there is **no accountability mechanism** when the state moves away from its benevolence posture. For instance, shifting the responsibility of procuring oxygen cylinders or arranging ambulances on citizens. Also, The Uttar Pradesh government charging people with First Information Reports (FIRs) for requesting oxygen.
6. All these acts of the state that are undemocratic cannot be made accountable in a Patrimonial state as the Citizens are seen as a subject of the state.
7. Further, the prejudice, preconceived opinions cultivated by the ruling class to hold power is sanctioning social murder by turning the citizen blind to social realities. Unless people become citizens and not subjects under patrimonial rule, the pandemic will pose a threat to Indian democracy as well.

15. Significance of Rent Waiver in tackling Reverse Migration

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Synopsis: State support for food and income along with rent waiver during the pandemic to workers and migrants can stop reverse migration.

Why rent should be waived for Migrants during the Pandemic crisis?

- **One**, According to the findings by the RMKU and the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS) in Jaipur, on a survey of 500 domestic workers, rent formed the majority component of debt post lockdowns.
- **Two**, it is one of the leading causes of mass **reverse migration**, according to the reports by the Stranded Workers Action Network.

Why the steps taken by the government to waive rent for migrants failed during the first covid wave?

Last year, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs in an order stated that the landlords should not demand rent from the workers, including the migrants for a period of 1 month. However, this measure was largely a failure due to the following reasons.

- **One, lack of clarity.** The order did not state clearly whether the rent to be waived or just deferred.
- **Two, no incentives for Landlords.** Many landlords, especially the **old-aged population** rely on rent for their sustenance. Thus, lack of incentives from the government for the needy resulted in noncompliance.
- **Three, lack of enforceable mechanism.** There was no regulation body created to monitor the enforcement of this order.

Solutions to address this issue?

- First, a moratorium should be announced with a clearer enforcement mechanism, with a clear distinction between deferment and rent waivers.
- Second, the state should provide compensation to Landlords for lost rent, at least a partial amount.
- Third, direct cash transfer for rent support based on rental market conditions can be a part of the solution.
- Fourth, limited waivers on utility expenses of workers. For example, partial waiver on electricity bills and penalties charged on non-payment.

Returning to their villages is not a willful choice for migrants, as villages are lacking employment, no skills for agricultural employment, and the absence of social ties. Yet, they are forced to take this painful journey due to a lack of livelihood options in urban areas. State support for basic food (PDS), shelter (Rent waiver), and direct cash transfer for basic sustenance can halt the reverse migration of migrants.

16. Critical Analysis of U.S Support to temporary Patent Waiver for Covid Vaccines

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Important International Institutions, agencies and fora – their Structure, Mandate.

Synopsis: Arguments, provided by MNC's against Patent waiver on Covid technologies, are baseless. WTO should make efforts to bring consensus among nations for a temporary waiver.

Background

- Last year, India and South Africa proposed in WTO for a waiver on patent protection for technologies needed to combat COVID-19.
- While many low- and middle-income countries supported it, resistance came from the high-income countries (U.S., U.K, E U etc.) and the Pharmaceuticals industry.
- Currently, the United States president, Joe Biden, has decided to support the India-South Africa proposal.
- However, the process may get delayed, despite U.S. intervention. Because, the WTO works on a **consensus-based approach**. i.e., The World Trade Organization resolves debates by consensus and not by voting.

Why the reasons, given for not accepting the Patent waiver proposal, are baseless?

Many arguments against providing a Patent waiver were put forward. However, all such reasons are found to be baseless.

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- **First**, critics argue that, the capacity for producing vaccines of assured quality and safety is limited to some laboratories. Further, it may be hazardous to permit manufacturers in low- and middle-income countries to work with technologies that they cannot handle.
 - This argument is not valid, for many years multinational firms have subcontracted their patented pharmaceutical products to industries with low production costs in developing countries.
- **Second**, Critics argue that there is no evidence that extra capacity exists for producing vaccines outside of firms undertaking them now.
 - But even this argument is not valid. For example, The World Health Organization's **mRNA vaccine technology transfer hub** has already drawn interest from over 50 firms to produce the approved vaccines.
- **Third**, critics argue that the time taken for their utilization by new firms will be too long to help combat the present pandemic.
 - Even this argument is baseless as nobody knows when the Pandemic will come to end. Further, combined with low vaccination rates and emerging Mutant variation in Covid virus makes it much more difficult to predict the end of the Pandemic.
- **Fourth**, multinational pharmaceutical firms argue that Patent waiver will allow China to steal their technologies, now and in the future.
 - However, MNC's forget to remember that the original genomic sequence openly shared by China, gave these firms a head starts in developing vaccines.
- **Fifth**, the most common argument by all MNC's is that innovation and investment by industry will have to be financially rewarded to incentivise them to develop new products.
 - But, even through **compulsory licensing** industry will be financially rewarded. Because royalties are paid to the original innovators and patent holders even if compulsory issues are issued bypassing patent restrictions.
 - Further, much of the foundational science that built the path for vaccine production came from public-funded universities and research institutes.

What are the other alternatives proposed for Patent waiver?

- **One**, giving license to manufacturers in developing countries, while retaining patent rights. However, it will not guarantee equity in access to the products at affordable prices.
- **Two**, supplying vaccines to developing countries through the **COVAX facility**. However, this mechanism has failed to deliver on its promise. For example, U.S. States have received more vaccines than the entire Africa has from COVAX.

What is the way forward?

- **First**, considering the positive development from the U.S, developing countries must start issuing compulsory licences. Even, **The Doha declaration on TRIPS** permits their use in a public health emergency.
- **Second**, High-income countries and multilateral agencies should provide financial and technical support to enable expansion of global production capacity.
- **Third**, Efficacy and safety of their products can be assessed by credible regulatory agencies and the World Health Organization.

17. How India's Diaspora in US helped India in COVID Crisis

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- GS 2- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Synopsis – The Indian diaspora contributed to the US's decision to allow raw materials for COVID-19 vaccines for India.

Introduction-

- The US in a decision had denied India the raw material for vaccine preparation. It justified this decision with its America First policy.
- The US was criticized for not doing enough to aid India, which had helped the US, when COVID was raging there.
- However, after the collective outrage of the Indian diaspora or prominent members of the US political and corporate elite, the US government allowed India with raw material supply.

Other assistance announced by US

The diaspora has played an important role in ensuring that the US administration prioritizes India's COVID crisis, and the following are the results of the diaspora outrage-

- **First, the US Defence Production Act's provisions are being reconsidered** – By approving the supply of filters required for the Covishield vaccine's production.
- **Second, excess doses will be released to other countries**– the US is likely to give away 60 million surplus doses of AstraZeneca vaccine by June to other countries [subject to FDA clearance].
- **Third, a comprehensive plan has been prepared**- The US government has prepared a detailed plan for supply of oxygen and associated equipment, besides setting up field hospitals with oxygen beds.
- **Four, The US government has also ramped up supplies of medicine** [Commercial supplies of therapeutics] especially remdesivir.
- **Five, the US Development Corporation will fund the BioE** [Indian vaccine firm] to expand its manufacturing potential. By the end of 2022, India and the other three QUAD partners will have generated and distributed at least one crore doses.

Way forward-

- The reason behind the US response went from radio silence to rapid-fire in quick succession was the outrage from the Indian Diaspora.
- In health-related cooperation, the US must recognize that assisting India helps the whole world. India-made vaccines would benefit people in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.
- Influential figures in the US should back **India and South Africa's IPR waiver proposal** under the TRIPS agreement.

General Studies Paper - 3

General Studies - 3

1. Guidelines of National Building Code to Ensure Fire Safety in Public buildings

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Disaster and Disaster Management (Fire accidents)

Synopsis: Effective regulations to manage fire risks in public buildings like Guidelines of National Building Code are available. However, lack of enforcement by states has led to fire disasters in India.

Background:

- Fire accident in Public building has been a recurrent event in India. **For instance**,
 - Fire accidents in hospitals at Bharuch in Gujarat, Virar (Mumbai), and Mumbra near Thane, have killed at least 37 people.
- According to **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)**, 330 people have died in commercial building fires in 2019.
- When fire accidents in residential or dwelling buildings are included, the fatality rate is very high at 6,329.
- Some common causes are:
 1. Electrical failures
 2. failure of the state to ensure adherence to safety laws
 3. Lack of modern tech to ensure safety in public buildings.

What are the legal provisions available to ensure fire safety compliance in public buildings?

- **First, the National Building Code of India** deals with Fire and life safety. It is published by the **Bureau of Indian Standards** as a recommendatory document. However, the Home Ministry asked States to incorporate it into their local building bylaws. It makes the recommendations a “mandatory requirement”.
- **Guidelines under NBC**
 1. One, it provides specifications and guidelines for **design and materials** that reduce the threat of destructive fires. **For example**,
 - It specifies fire resistance materials to be used in exterior walls, interior bearing walls, floor, roof, fire check doors, fire enclosure exits, etc.,
 2. Two, The Code, classifies all the existing and new buildings by nature of use. For example; residential, educational, institutional, assembly (like cinemas and auditoria), Industrial, etc.,
 3. It recommends the location of buildings by type of use in specific zones. This is to ensure that industrial and hazardous structures do not coexist with residential, institutional, office, and business buildings.
 4. Three, the code prescribes the Technologies to be incorporated into buildings to alert in case of a fire and also to fight. Examples are, automatic fire detection and alarm system, automatic sprinklers and water sprays, fireman’s lift, fire barriers, etc.,
 5. Four, It provides exemptions for various buildings in case of practical difficulty. A local head, fire services may consider exemptions from the Code.
 6. Despite, the existence of fire safety rules in every state, the provisions of the Code are ignored in practice.
- **Second, Fire Safety Committees** were constituted. They conduct periodical audits on fire installation, heating, ventilation and air-conditioning, and other electrical equipment in the Union government’s hospitals.

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- **Third**, Health Ministry has also imposed a **third-party accreditation** for fire safety. It has also formed strict guidelines for a mandatory fire response plan in every hospital.
- **Fourth, The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** has also provided mandatory requirements for fire safety in public buildings, including hospitals.
 - Such as, maintaining minimum open safety space, protected exit mechanisms, dedicated staircases, and crucial drills to carry out evacuations.
- **Fifth**, the Supreme Court has directed all States to carry out fire safety audits of dedicated COVID-19 hospitals.
- **How far National Building Code is adequately implemented by the estates?**
- Evidence shows that States lack the manpower to inspect and ensure compliance with safety codes, including NBC. For instance,
 - According to **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report** (2010 to 2015), in Maharashtra, a joint physical inspection by an audit of 53 government buildings revealed that only fire extinguishers were installed in 11 of 53 buildings, and the remaining 42 buildings were not equipped with any of the fire-fighting installations.
- Further, Tamil Nadu and Kerala though have broader regulations, no reference is found for compliance with the National Building code.

Way forward

Making heavy fire liability insurance compulsory for all public buildings, will ensure protection to occupants and visitors and bring about external inspection of safety.

2. [Natural Gas Can be India's Alternative Road to Clean Energy](#)

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3

Synopsis: India should not solely focus on the end goal of decarbonisation. First it must try to 'green' its fossil fuel energy bag by increasing the share of natural gas.

Introduction

- Policymakers, climate diplomats, academicians, corporates, and NGOs are currently focussed on the concept of **net-zero carbon emissions**. Also, they are looking for the suitable target year for achieving it.
- However, the book **"The Next Stop: Natural Gas and India's journey towards a Clean Energy Future"** suggests that India must first green its fossil fuel energy bag. This can be done by increasing the share of natural gas.
- This is a practical view because increasing natural gas will avoid negative impacts that shutting down coal mines might produce.
- Also, It allows the government to meet its aim of giving affordable energy to everyone without harming the environment. It can be done through executive order.

What policy changes in the natural gas supply chain are required to green its fossil fuel energy bag?

To explain the scale of the answers, here are four key policy suggestions:

- **Firstly, the experts must highlight the significance of natural gas.** They must identify its usefulness. It is a competitive fuel and is amply available in and within the Asian/ME subcontinent. It has multiple uses, and it is the greenest of all fossil fuels.
- **Secondly, the authorities must correct the present deterrent policy biases.** The taxation system is regressive. The tax rates increase as the gas flows from one zone

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to another. This means that consumers situated at a distance from the source of gas pay a higher price than those closer to the source. Gas is not under GST.

- The price of natural gas is complex as there are multiple price formulae.
 - One for gas produced from domestic fields by the public sector companies.
 - One for gas produced by private companies.
 - Furthermore, one for production from deep waters offshore under high temperature etc.
- **Thirdly, the authorities should refurbish the arrangement of the industry.** The Gas Authority of India Ltd (GAIL) is engaged in the production, transportation, and marketing of gas. This allows GAIL to influence its rights of the gas pipelines.
 - They deny their competitors access to the market. Assured and common access to all marketers is required.
 - Most countries have separated the production/import and marketing interests from transportation. GAIL's business activities should be limited to pipeline construction and transportation.
- **Lastly, an institutional apparatus should be created** to allow better coordination between the central and state governments. The Center and state have clashed over issues like land attainment, pipeline routing; and royalty payments. This is why India has not yet made a national pipeline grid.
 - Center-state alterations have also delayed the construction of import facilities and the creation of gas markets. The Centre and state should resolve these issues through an integrated decision-making process.

Conclusion

- Every participant will come to COP26 later this year with hard evidence to back their longer-term commitments. Participants must also focus on other important alternatives to net-zero.

3. Climate Change is Shifting Earth's Axis of Rotation

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

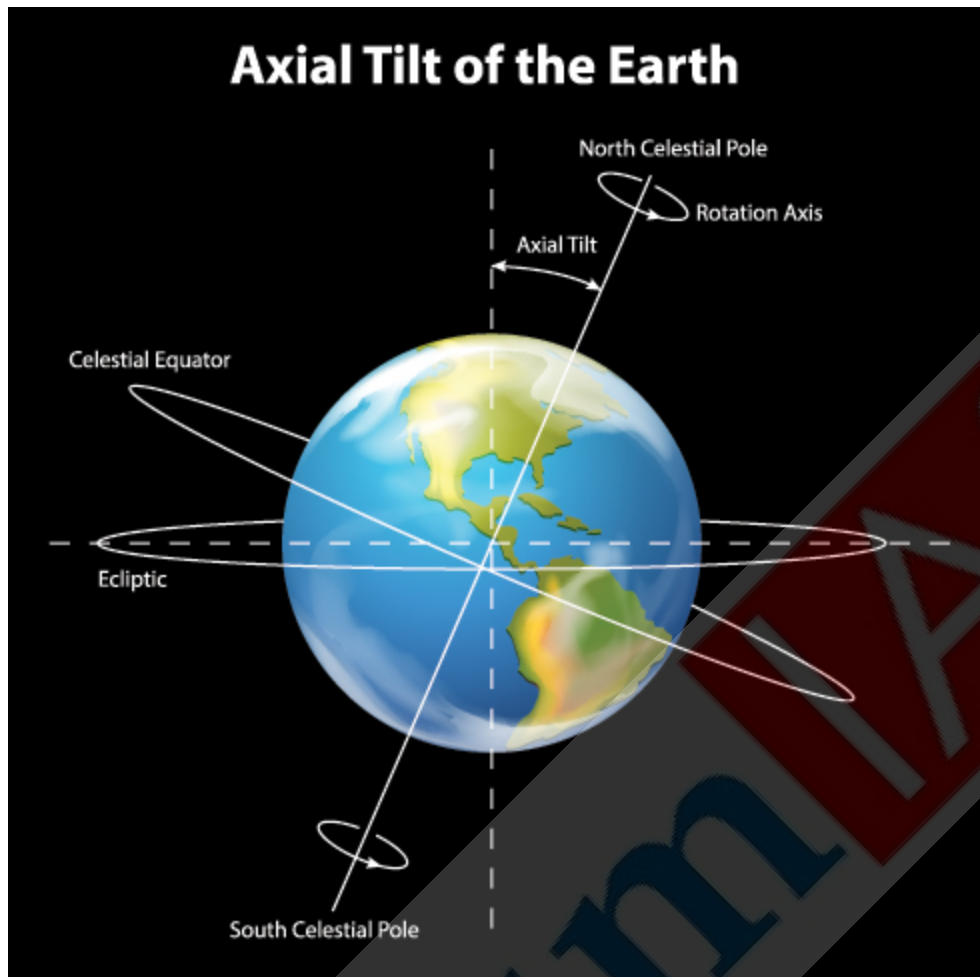
Syllabus- **GS 3 – Climate Change.**

Synopsis-According to a new study, loss of water on land is shifting the earth's axis of rotation. The reasons behind loss of water are ice melting and human-induced factors [such as excessive groundwater pumping].

Introduction-

- According to a study published in the Journal Geophysical Research letters, Earth's axis of rotation has been rotating faster than normal since the 1990s due to the significant melting of glaciers caused by global warming.
- According to NASA, the spin axis drifted around 10 cm every year in the 20th century. It means, in a year, polar motion exceeds 10 metres.

Concept of earth's axis of rotation and polar motion



Source: NASA website

- **Earth's axis of rotation** – It is the line along which Earth spins around itself as it revolves around the Sun.
 - The points on which the axis intersects the planet's surface are the geographical north and south poles
- **Polar motion**- Changes in the distribution of Earth's mass around the globe also change the earth's axis of rotation and as the axis moves, the poles move as well, which is known as polar motion.
- Earth's rotation will decrease if its mass is moved away from the rotation axis (From poles towards equators) and vice versa.

Key finding of the study-

- In the mid-1990s, melting glaciers redistributed a large amount of water. It changed the direction of the routine **polar wander** to turn eastward and also accelerate it.
- The average drift speed rose by around 17 times between 1995 and 2020.
- The primary cause of polar drift is water loss from the Polar Regions, with contributions from water loss in nonpolar regions, which describes the eastward shift of polar drift.

What are the major factors causing the shift in Earth's axis of rotation?

The rotation of the earth is affected by mass redistribution on and within the planet, such as shifts in soil, ice sheets, seas, and mantle movement. The following are the main forces that contribute to the mass redistribution-

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- **Melting of glaciers** -Climate change has caused billions of tonnes of glacial ice to melt into oceans. This has caused the Earth's poles to move in new directions.
- **Groundwater pumping** – The excessive use of groundwater has caused changes in groundwater storage in non-glacial areas. Further, it led to polar wander as most of it eventually joins the sea, thus redistributing the planet's mass.
 - **For example-** The changes in groundwater mass in areas like California, northern Texas, Beijing and northern India, areas that have been pumping large amounts of groundwater for agricultural use.

Way forward-

The shifting of the Earth's axis as a result of climate change demonstrates how much active human action can affect changes in the mass of water on land.

4. New Malaria Vaccine Can be a Game Changer in Curtailing Malaria

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Science and Tech and its effect on everyday life

Synopsis:

Phase 2b clinical trials of R21/Matrix M (a new malaria vaccine) have shown the efficacy of 77%. It is a new version of RTS, S — another candidate against malaria. Experts believe that this new version could be a game-changer in curtailing the spread of malaria across the globe, especially during pandemic times.

Background:

- The results of phase 2b clinical trials of R21/Matrix M were published recently in the Lancet Journal.
- The new malaria vaccine showed an efficacy of 77%, much higher than its previous version named RTS,S.

About Malaria:

It is caused by the bite of the female Anopheles mosquito if the mosquito itself is infected with a malarial parasite.

There are **five kinds of malarial parasites** — Plasmodium falciparum, Plasmodium vivax (the commonest ones), Plasmodium malariae, Plasmodium ovale, and Plasmodium knowlesi. According to the World Malaria Report 2020, cases of Malaria in **India** dropped from about 20 million in 2000 to about **5.6 million in 2019**.

Globally 39 countries have declared themselves Malaria free.

As per WHO, a country can be declared malaria-free when it reports zero indigenous cases of malaria for 3 or more years.

About the Previous Version:

- RTS, S has been in development for more than 30 years. It is a joint work of Walter Reed Institute of Research, GlaxoSmithKline, and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation with the PATH Malaria Vaccine Initiative.
- It targets the liver stage protein of the Plasmodium falciparum life cycle.
- Thus, it stops the Plasmodium falciparum malaria parasite from entering the liver thereby preventing the subsequent deadly blood stages.

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- To date, it is the only vaccine to reduce malaria in children. However, it doesn't have high efficacy.

About the new version:

- R21/Matrix M is a modified version of RTS, S.
- Scientists at the University of Oxford have been developing it for the last 6-7 years. Serum Institute of India is manufacturing it.
- The vaccine trial began in 2014-15 on 450 children in Burkina Faso.
- The result of the phase 2b trial showed a 77% efficacy, making it the first vaccine to reach WHO's goal of at least 75% efficacy.

Need of New Malaria Vaccine:

- **High Incidence of Malaria:** In 2019, there were an estimated 229 million cases of malaria and 409 000 malaria-related deaths in 87 countries. In the same year, India witnessed 5.6 million cases.
 - Under 5 children in sub-saharan Africa accounted for approximately two-thirds of global deaths.
- **Greater Hardships posed by Pandemic:** As per a WHO survey, approximately one-third of countries around the world reported disruptions in malaria prevention, diagnosis and treatment services during the first quarter of 2021.
 - Disruptions occurred as people were unable or unwilling to seek care in health facilities.
 - Further lockdowns and restrictions on the movement led to delays in the delivery of insecticide-treated mosquito nets.

What's next?

- Serum Institute of India and US vaccine maker Novavax have begun the process of phase 3 trials in 4 African countries.
 - This would assess large-scale safety and efficacy in 4,800 children aged five to 36 months.
- The success of the trial would enable bulk production of the vaccine that would help curtail malaria across the globe.

5. Frequent Hospital Fires during COVID Time in India- Cause and Way forward

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- **GS 3** – Disaster and disaster management

Synopsis – The hospital system in India has been overwhelmed by the heavy patient load and arrangement for the pandemic. It has increased their vulnerability to fire.

Introduction–

- Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and mismanagement, the hospital system is becoming over stressed, resulting in frequent fire incidents.
- Since last August, more than 93 people have died in 24 hospital fire incidents in India, the majority of whom were Covid-19 patients.

Major reason behind frequent hospital fire in India despite fire checks and audits-

- **Electrical faults are cited as the leading cause of fires –**
 - **Overheated ICU's and ACs-** In most hospitals, to meet the current COVID-19 situation, medical equipment or wires are in use beyond their capacity. It is overheating the electrical wiring system, causing the fire.
 - **Short circuit or overloading** due to continuous running ACs in hospitals.

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- **Mismanagement in hospital** – Placing more ICU beds in limited space also makes it more vulnerable to fire spread.
- **Lack of cross-ventilation** – Hospital ICUs (for COVID-19) are at significant fire risk because they are sealed for the purpose of keeping them sterile.
- **Highly inflammable material in Hospitals**- sanitizer spills and vapor, higher oxygen content in the air, and PPE kits made of synthetic materials all contribute to the rapid spread of fire.

What needs to be done to reduce fire accidents in hospitals?

- All states need to carry out proper **fire and electrical audits of dedicated COVID-19 hospitals** in order to reduce the frequent cases.
- As the health sector expands to accommodate pandemic arrangements, it is essential that all new facilities and plans meet safety standards such as-
 - **Cross-ventilation in ICUs** –Proper ventilation passage in ICUs is required to allow fumes, an outlet.
 - Keeping electrical equipment for ACs away from **oxygen-saturated areas** will reduce the risk.
 - **Fire safety drills**- Hospitals should mandatorily hold regular fire safety and evacuation drills.
 - **Hospitals must install sprinklers**, which start dispensing water [35 liters per minute] as the temperature increases above 78 °C.
 - **Fire extinguishers** should be installed in temporary hospitals, and a fire truck should be stationed outside hospitals in the event of a major disaster.

6. IPR Waiver For Covid 19 Vaccines

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Issues relating to Intellectual Property Rights.

Synopsis:

The US is now supporting the plea of developing countries for granting an IPR waiver to Covid-19 vaccines. The waiver would allow the countries to speed up the production process without the permission of manufacturing company. However, significant roadblocks exist that may prevent the grant of waiver.

Background:

- The US has shown its willingness to an IPR waiver for Covid-19 vaccines. It would be pursuing text-based negotiations on the waiver at the World Trade Organization (WTO).
 - Under text-based negotiations, negotiators exchange their preferred texts and then try to develop a consensus over them.
- Experts believe that US support is based on an October 2020 proposal given by India and South Africa in the WTO.
 - However, the October proposal called for a waiver on all Covid-19 interventions. This includes testing, diagnostics, and novel therapeutics.

About Patents and Intellectual Property:

A patent is a type of intellectual property right. It is an exclusive right granted by a government to an inventor for a limited, pre-specified time.

It provides an enforceable legal right to prevent others from copying the invention.

Types of Patents:

Product Patent: No person can manufacture the patented product without the consent of the patent holder even if he/she uses an alternative process.

Process Patent: Under this only the process is protected. A person can manufacture the patented product using an alternate process.

Type of regime in India:

India moved from product patenting to process patenting in the 1970s. This enabled it to become a significant producer of generic drugs on a global scale.

It allowed companies like Cipla to provide Africa with anti-HIV drugs in the 1990s.

However, due to obligations arising out of the TRIPS Agreement, it had to amend the Patents Act in 2005. This made a switch to a product patents regime across the pharma, chemicals, and biotech sectors.

The October 2020 proposal:

- India and South Africa had asked the WTO to waive certain conditions of the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement.
- The countries **wanted a waiver over sections 1, 4, 5, and 7** that could impede timely access to affordable medical products to combat Covid-19.
 - The sections relate to copyright and related rights, industrial designs, patents, and the protection of undisclosed information.

Need of IPR waiver:

- **Boost Production:** Currently, most production is concentrated in high-income countries. With a waiver, the middle-income countries would be able to manufacture covid vaccines with emergency use authorisations (EUA). This includes vaccines developed by Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Novavax, Bharat Biotech, etc.
- **Reducing Cost of Production:** The manufacturing in middle-income companies is currently happening through licensing or technology transfer agreements. The companies which grant the license, charge a hefty price for it. The companies would not need a license after an IPR waiver.
- **Avert legal Difficulties:** The developing countries may face institutional and legal difficulties when using flexibilities available in the TRIPS Agreement. The waiver would help in averting this problem.

Roadblocks in granting IPR waiver:

- **Procedure Complexities:** The nature of text-based negotiations can delay the process. Further, even one country can veto the waiver as granting requires consensus among all 164 members of WTO.
- **Disincentivization of Companies:** Waiver may reduce the earning potential of companies. They may be disincentivized to do more research on tackling new variants. This may undermine the global response to the pandemic.
- **Erosion of Public Trust:** People may not trust the quality and efficacy of vaccines manufactured in a middle-income country.
- **Production barriers:** Ramping up production capacities will be a lengthy process. The developing countries that are currently producing Covid 19 vaccines are able to do so with the extensive support and grant of developed countries.

Other Challenges concerning the production and distribution of Covid vaccines in developing countries:

- **Scarcity of Raw Material:** It has been a growing issue for ramping up production. Several manufacturers have been relying on specific suppliers, and alternatives are limited.
- **Trade Barriers:** US has blocked exports of critical raw materials used in the Covid-19 vaccines using regulations like the American Defence Production Act. This led to a delay in the production of Covid vaccines by some companies in India.
- **Acquisition Capability of Developed World:** They have a higher propensity to purchase the vaccine. This has enabled them to acquire most of the supplies.

Way Forward:

- The developed countries should understand the plight of developing countries under the current extraordinary circumstances. The recent intention of the EU to support the U.S proposal should be materialised in reality.
- Further, other covid related interventions including testing, diagnostics, and novel therapeutics should be made part of IPR waiver proposal.
- The developing world should be given an opportunity to develop cheap and efficacious vaccines. They have already shown their manufacturing capabilities by developing good quality generic medicines in the past.

7. Indian Offshore Model will Dominate Global IT Sector

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS:3 – Industries and employment

Synopsis:

The Indian IT industry will dominate the global landscape due to various advantages associated with the offshore model

Introduction:

According to analysts, India is increasingly becoming an attractive market for tech companies from all over the world.

What is the offshore model or the Work from home model?

In simple terms, it is the **relocation of a company's business process to a country that is not in the same geographical region**. For example, a company in the US might have the majority of its employees working in India or China due to various benefits.

Why is India becoming an attractive market for tech companies?

India is becoming an attractive IT market because:

- Increase in Critical shortage of skilled manpower in countries such as the US and Europe
- Pandemic-induced work-from-home has raised the openness of global tech buyers. They are allowing to work away from onshore (or the client's location).
- Markets are witnessing a 50% reduction in the onshore model and about 15% increase in the offshore model.

Advantages of Work from Home Model or Offshore Model:

- **Zero Commutation:** When working remotely, a person doesn't have to step out of their home. So it will reduce the time and fuel spent to and from the office commute.
- **Flexible Schedule:** A person can choose to schedule tasks that would otherwise be left out. For example, when in office and build their working hours around their priorities, either for home or for learning something new.

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- **Larger Skill Pool:** Employers can extend their reach to **hire a better skill pool across the globe**, rather than just relying on persons available locally.
- **Saving on Office Space:** Having a majority of all the workforce working remotely will help to cut costs significantly on office space and maintenance.
- **Limitations of Work from Home Model or Offshore Model:**
- **Increased isolation:** A person can become quite isolated if he/she spend the majority of the time by him/herself working independently.
- **Loss of Focus:** Homes are comfortable, but they present their own challenges. Even with a strict schedule, it is difficult to not get involved with family work or responsibilities.
- **Lack of Accountability and Fall in Productivity:** Work from Home makes it difficult for an organisation to chart the strengths and weaknesses of every individual while working remotely.

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