

CURRENT EVENTS  
AND  
ANALYSIS  
**(April 2020)**  
**Part-2**

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## APRIL 2020 CURRENT AFFAIRS – PART 2

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# NATIONAL POLITY

## EXECUTIVE:

### Salaries of President, Vice President, MPs, and Ministers Reduced by 30 Per cent

- On April 6, 2020, the Union Cabinet approved ordinance amending the 'Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament Act, 1954'.
- Through this amendment salary, allowances and pension of MP's was reduced by 30 per cent in view of the country's fight against the coronavirus pandemic.
- This reduction in salaries and allowances will be effective from April 1, 2020 for a year.
- President Ram Nath Kovind, Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu and many state governors and lieutenant-governors have also **voluntarily** decided to take a pay cut as a social responsibility.
- All this money will be credited to the Consolidated Fund of India.

#### **Current Salaries of Members of Parliament:**

- Salary : Rs 1, 00,000 per month
- Constituency Allowance : Rs. 70,000 per month
- Office Expense Allowance : Rs. 60,000 per month
- Allowance for Attending Parliament: Rs. 2,000 for each day
- Pension : Rs.25, 000 per month. Additional Rs.2, 000 for every month for every year served in excess of five years as MP.
- Prime Minister and Minister also get same salary and allowances as Members of Parliament.

#### **Sumptuary Allowances:**

- In addition to the above salaries and allowances, the Prime Minister and Ministers get sumptuary allowances (expenditure incurred on entertaining visitors) as follows.
- Prime Minister: Rs. 6,000 per month
- Cabinet Minister: Rs.2,000 per month
- Minister of State (Independent Charge): Rs.1,000 per month
- Deputy Minister: Rs.600 per month.

## LEGISLATURE:

### MPLADS Suspended for Two Years

- On April 6, 2020, the Union Government decided to not operate Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) for two years (2020-21 and 2021-22).
- These funds will be used to strengthen Government's efforts in tackling the challenges of COVID19 in the country.
- A total of ₹7,900 crore of MPLADS money would be transferred to the Consolidated Fund of India to augment resources for Covid-19 management.

#### **About MPLADS Scheme:**

- Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) was started in 1993 when PV Narasimha Rao was Prime Minister.
- This Scheme was launched to enable Members of Parliament aid developmental work in their respective constituencies and create durable community assets based on local needs.
- The scheme is fully funded by Government of India.

- At present, each MP is entitled to recommend works worth ₹5 crore annually.
- **Eligible works under MPLADS:** Supply of drinking water, primary education, public health, sanitation, electricity supply, roads, bridges and railways, non-conventional energy, cluster development for handloom workers, etc.
- 15 per cent of MPLADS funds should be spent in areas inhabited by Scheduled Castes (SC) population and 7.5 per cent of the funds should be spent in areas inhabited by Scheduled Tribes (ST) population
- An MP can only recommend eligible development works.
- Sanction of the eligible works and implementation of the sanctioned works in the field are undertaken by the District Authorities.
- MPLADS funds are non-lapsable.
- The unspent amount is kept in a non-lapsable account with the district authority in the constituency for use in subsequent years.
- As of March 4, 2020, there was Rs. 5,275 crore of unspent balance of MPLADS money with district authorities.

#### **Criticism on Suspension of MPLADS:**

- The suspension of the scheme to mobilise resources to fight coronavirus has come under criticism from political parties and states.
- The move has been criticised for centralising financial resources and depriving funds for locally felt needs of various state governments.
- Kerala CM P.Vijayan termed the suspension as anti-federal as the Centre is centralising financial powers through suspension of the scheme.

#### **PANCHAYAT RAJ:**

### **SVAMITVA Scheme and e-GramSwaraj Portal Launched**

On the occasion of National Panchayati Raj Day on April 24, 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacted with Sarpanches of Gram Panchayats throughout the country today through Video Conferencing. He also launched e-GramSwaraj Portal and Svamitva Scheme.

#### **e-GramSwaraj Portal:**

- It is a major initiative towards promoting e-Governance of Gram Panchayats.
- It facilitates decentralised planning, progress reporting, and accounting of activities.
- An electronic profile of all panchayats will be maintained consisting of election details of the panchayat, elected members, committees, etc.
- Records of all physical and financial progress of all activities in the panchayat will be available in the portal.
- All assets created in the panchayat will be geo-tagged to prevent duplicity of works.
- A mobile App e-GramSwaraj which contains above information was also launched.

#### **Svamitva Scheme:**

Under SVAMITVA (Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improvised Technology in Village Areas) scheme

- all the inhabited properties in rural areas will be identified and validated using latest Drone Surveying technology, and
- Property cards would be issued to the property owners.

#### **Advantages:**

- a) It reduces property litigation.

- b) Owners can get credit from banks by using the property as collateral.
- c) Gram Panchayats can collect property taxes.

#### **Mapping Community Assets:**

- Other gram panchayat and community assets like village roads, ponds, canals, open spaces, school, anganwadi, health sub-centres, etc. will also be surveyed and geographic information system (GIS) maps will be created under SVAMITVA Scheme.
- These maps can be used to prepare better quality gram panchayat development plan.

#### **Other Details:**

- The survey will be done across the country in a phase-wise manner over a period of four years - from 2020 to 2024.
- It is a collaborative effort of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, State Panchayati Raj Departments, State Revenue Departments and Survey of India,
- In the first phase, the program will be implemented in six states - Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.
- About 6.62 lakh villages in the country will be eventually covered in the SVAMITVA scheme.

#### **About Panchayat Raj Day:**

- Constitution (73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment) Act, 1992 which led to institutionalisation of Panchayat Raj institutions in India came into force on April 24, 1993.
- Since then, April 24<sup>th</sup> of every year is celebrated as Panchayat Raj Day.

### **SOCIAL SECTOR**

#### **Health**

### **Rs. 15,000 Crore 'COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness Fund'**

On April 22, 2020, the Union Government approved Rs. 15,000 crore 'India COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness Package'.

The fund would be utilised for

- development of diagnostics laboratories network for COVID,
- setting up dedicated treatment facilities for COVID patients,
- centralised procurement of essential medical equipment (Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), N95 masks and ventilators, testing kits) and drugs required for treatment of infected patients,
- strengthening National and State health systems,
- setting up of laboratories and bolster surveillance activities, and
- research on COVID pandemic.

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare would spend the funds under the above package.

### **Ordinance Issued to Enhance Protection Against Violence on Healthcare Personnel**

On April 22, 2020, the Union Government approved promulgation of an Ordinance to amend the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897.

#### **Major Provisions:**

- Violence on medical service personnel would attract a maximum seven years imprisonment and a maximum fine of Rs.5 lakhs.

- Violence would include harassment and physical injury and damage to property.
- Both living and working premises of medical service personnel are covered under the ordinance.
- If **property is damaged** during violence, offender is liable to pay twice the market value of the damaged property.
- Offender would also be liable to **pay compensation to the victim** for causing injury.
- Investigation will be completed within 30 days and the final decision would be arrived at within one year.

#### **Need for Ordinance:**

- During the current COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare personnel (as doctors, nurses, paramedical workers, community health workers, etc.) were attacked in some places like Uttar Pradesh. COVID infected patients were non cooperative and also abused doctors and nurses on duty.
- There were also instances of stigmatization and social ostracization as they have been perceived by some as carriers of the virus. These led to harassment and acts of unwarranted violence on healthcare personnel. Some of the doctors and nurses staying in rented accommodation (housing) were harassed to vacate the premises immediately.
- Such instances lower the morale of healthcare personnel who perform their duties relentlessly round the clock and save human lives.
- Several States have enacted special laws to offer protection to doctors and other medical personnel in the past. However, Covid-19 outbreak has posed a unique situation where harassment of the healthcare workforce and others working to contain the spread of the disease has been taking place at all fronts, in various places including even cremation grounds.
- Such incidents of violence have demoralized the medical fraternity.
- The existing state laws do not have such a **wide sweep and ambit**. They **generally do not cover harassment at home and workplace** and are **focused more on physical violence only**. The penal provisions contained in these laws are **not stringent enough to deter mischief mongering**.
- Hence, the Union Government felt that separate and most stringent provisions for emergent times are needed to act as effective deterrents to any such incidents of violence.
- Accordingly, the Union Government approved promulgation of an Ordinance to amend the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 to **protect healthcare service personnel and property** including their **living/working premises** against **violence during epidemics**.

#### **Provisions of Ordinance:**

- **Definition of Violence:** Violence as defined in the Ordinance will include harassment and physical injury and damage to property.
- **Definition of Healthcare service personnel:** It includes public and clinical healthcare service providers such as doctors, nurses, paramedical workers and community health workers; any other persons empowered under the Act to take measures to prevent the outbreak of the disease or spread thereof; and any persons declared as such by the State Government, by notification in the Official Gazette.
- Instances of damage to property including a clinical establishment, any facility identified for quarantine and isolation of patients, mobile medical units and any other property in which the healthcare service personnel have direct interest in relation to the epidemic will also attract penal provisions.
- Violence against healthcare personnel would be cognizable and non-bailable offence.
- Commission or abetment of acts of violence shall be punished with imprisonment for a term of three months to five years, and with fine of Rs.50,000/- to Rs.2,00,000/-.
- In case of causing grievous hurt, imprisonment shall be for a term six months to **seven years** and with fine of Rs.1,00,000/- to Rs.5,00,000/-.

- In addition, the offender shall also be liable to pay **compensation to the victim and twice the fair market value for damage of property.**
- Offences shall be investigated by an officer of the rank of Inspector within a period of 30 days.
- Trial has to be completed in one year, unless extended by the court for reasons to be recorded in writing.

#### **Significance of the Ordinance:**

- The new provisions would act as deterrence against violence on medical service personnel.
- These would also boost the morale of healthcare service personnel which is crucial in this hour of national health crisis

#### **Efforts to Change the Perception of People:**

- The government also took measures to change the perception of people on medical service personnel.
- Indian military was involved in thanking the medical service personnel who are rendering their services for COVID patients.
- Indian Army helicopters showered flowers on hospitals treating coronavirus patients across the country.
- Medical service personnel involved in treatment of COVID patients are being called COVID warriors.

#### **Education:**

### **NEET Applies to Minority Medical Colleges: Supreme Court**

On April 29, 2020, a three judge Bench of the Supreme Court ruled that National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) is mandatory for admission to minority private unaided medical colleges also.

#### **Background:**

- National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) is mandatory uniform qualifying test for admission into MBBS and BDS programmes as well as post graduate programmes in Indian medical and dental colleges.
- Prior to introduction of NEET, entrance tests for medical programmes separately by Union Government, State Governments, deemed university medical colleges and minority private medical colleges.

#### **Why was NEET Introduced?**

1. **To reduce the burden of multiple examinations** for students (students were applying to examinations conducted by Union Government for all India medical colleges, State Government for medical colleges under its control, deemed university medical colleges and minority private medical colleges entrance exams).
2. **To standardise the quality of** entrance examination to medical programmes
3. **To check malpractices of private medical colleges** which were exploiting students by selling seats at exorbitant prices due to mismatch between demand and supply of seats in medical programmes.

#### **Objections of Private Minority Colleges:**

- Private unaided minority colleges filed a petition in the Supreme Court against making National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) mandatory for them on the ground that it violates their Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Constitution of India namely
  - a) **Article 19 (1) (g):** Right carry on any occupation, trade or business.
  - b) **Article 30:** Right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.

## **Verdict of the Supreme Court:**

### **Article 19 (1) (g):**

- The right to freedom of trade or business is **not absolute** and is **subject to reasonable limitations**.
- In this case NEET is a “reasonable restriction in the interest of the students’ community to promote merit, recognition of excellence, and to curb the malpractices.
- A uniform entrance test in the form of NEET qualifies the **test of proportionality and is reasonable**.

**Concept of proportionality:** The law imposing restrictions will be treated as proportional if it is meant to achieve a proper purpose and strikes a proper balance between the two facets viz. the rights and limitations imposed upon it by a statute.

### **Article 30:**

- To ensure that the standard of education is maintained in the country, reasonable regulatory measures can be imposed by the Government without violating such rights available under Article 30 of the Constitution to administer an institution.
- The regulatory measures imposed by the Union Government by making NEET mandatory are intended to check several maladies which crept into medical education such as preventing admission of students who are lower in merit and preventing profiteering through commercialisation of education.

## **SOCIAL ISSUES**

### **Culture & Heritage:**

## **National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of India Launched**

The National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of India was launched by Mr. Prahlad Singh Patel, Union Minister for Culture, on April 8, 2020.

### **What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?**

- Tangible Cultural heritage includes monuments, archaeological sites, paintings, sculptures, manuscripts, etc.
- Intangible Cultural Heritage includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, etc.

### **UNESCO Classification:**

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) has classified intangible cultural heritage into five broad domains.

1. Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
2. Performing arts;
3. Social practices, rituals and festive events;
4. Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
5. Traditional craftsmanship.

### **About National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of India:**

- The National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of India aims to recognise and raise awareness about the various intangible cultural heritage elements from different states of India and ensure their protection.

- The present items in the list have been collated from the projects sanctioned under the scheme for 'Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India' formulated by the Ministry of Culture in 2013.
- As of now the list has more than 100 elements.
- It includes 13 elements of India that have already been inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.
- The preparation of national list is a work in progress. It will be updated regularly to make a complete Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) inventory of India,

**Intangible Cultural Heritage(ICH) traditions Recognised by UNESCO:**

- 13 **Intangible Cultural Heritage(ICH) traditions** have been recognised by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The list is as given below.

<u>S.No.</u>	<u>ICH Element</u>	<u>Year of Inscription</u>
1.	Tradition of Vedic chanting	2008
2.	Ramlila, the traditional performance of the Ramayana	2008
3.	Kutiyattam, Sanskrit theatre	2008
4.	Ramman, religious festival and ritual theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas, India	2009
5.	Mudiyettu, ritual theatre and dance drama of Kerala	2010
6.	Kalbelia folk songs and dances of Rajasthan	2010
7.	Chhau dance	2010
8.	Buddhist chanting of Ladakh: recitation of sacred Buddhist texts in the trans-Himalayan Ladakh region, Jammu and Kashmir, India	2012
9.	Sankirtana, ritual singing, drumming and dancing of Manipur	2013
10.	Traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab, India	2014
11.	Yoga	2016
12.	Nowrouz (Persian New Year)	2016
13.	Kumbh Mela	2017

**STATES**

**Jammu & Kashmir:**

**Domicile Policy for Reservation of Jobs in Jammu and Kashmir  
Announced**

On March 31, 2020, the Union Home Ministry announced domicile rules for reservation in government jobs to locals in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

### **Need for New Domicile Rule:**

- In August 2019, Parliament of India approved a resolution abrogating the special status of the Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 and Article 35 A of the Constitution of India.
- The State of Jammu and Kashmir also lost statehood as it was bifurcated into two Union Territories through Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act, 2019: Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and Union Territory of Ladakh.
- Under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, Jammu and Kashmir had its own Constitution, State Flag.
- Under Article 35 A, Jammu and Kashmir Legislature had powers to define permanent residents of the State.
- Only Permanent Residents had rights over land and Government jobs.
- Permanent settlement in Jammu and Kashmir State and state-sponsored scholarship schemes were also restricted only Permanent Residents.
- Accordingly J&K Constitution, adopted by the Jammu and Kashmir legislature in 1956, defined a permanent resident as someone who was a state subject on May 14, 1954, or who has been a resident of the state for 10 years prior to 1954 and has lawfully acquired immovable property.

### **Why did the Union Home Ministry issue new domicile rules:**

- With the abrogation of provisions of Article 370 and Article 35A, citizens of Jammu and Kashmir lost the special safeguards regarding land and jobs. Since then, there has been demanding for restoration of special safeguards over land and jobs.
- The Jammu and Kashmir Civil Services (Decentralisation and Recruitment Act, 2010) was also amended by substituting the term “permanent residents” with “domiciles of J&K.” But, the rules were not defined.
- Hence, the Union Home Ministry, which controls the administration in Union Territories, issued domicile rules reserving some jobs at entry level in the Government only to domiciles of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.
- In law, domicile is the status or attribution of being a lawful permanent resident in a particular jurisdiction.

### **Domicile Rules for Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir:**

- Anyone
  - a) who has resided for a period of 15 years in the UT of J&K  
(or)
  - b) has studied for a period of seven years and appeared in Class 10th /12th examination in an educational institution located in the Jammu and Kashmir U.T will be deemed to be domicile of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir  
(or)
  - c) who is registered as a migrant by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commissioner (Migrants)
- Children of Central Government officials, All India Services, Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs), autonomous body of Centre, Public Sector Banks, officials of statutory bodies, Central Universities, recognised research institutes of Centre who have served in J&K for a total period of 10 years will be domiciles.
- The power to issue domicile certificates has been given to “tahsildar”.

### **Reservation in Jobs:**

- Level 4 jobs (Group 4 jobs which are subordinate posts) would be reserved only for domiciles of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

- Level 4 post comprise positions such as gardeners, barbers, office peons and waterman and the highest rank in the category is that of a junior assistant.
- **Reservation for domiciles would not apply to Group A and Group B posts.**
- Like other UTs, recruitment would be done by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).

#### **Protests Against Not Applying Domicile Policy for Group A and Group B posts:**

- However, political parties in Kashmir and Jammu opposed the domicile policy as higher level posts i.e. Group A and Group B posts were kept outside reservation for domiciles. Non-domiciles also could apply to these posts.
- They demanded that all jobs should be reserved only to Jammu and Kashmir Residents.

#### **Reasons:**

- a) Youth in both the Jammu and Kashmir regions could lose out on employment avenues if Group A and Group B posts are opened to outsiders.
  - b) There is already large scale unemployment problem in Jammu and Kashmir. Opening up Group A and Group B posts to outsiders would lead to unrest among the youth.
  - c) Private jobs opportunities are also limited due to lack of vibrant private sector+6+.
  - d) This policy would also deal a big blow to efforts of political parties to help people to look beyond Article 370.
- Even the BJP unit of the Jammu opposed the exclusion of Group A and Group B posts and demanded that all jobs should be reserved for J&K residents.

#### **All Posts Brought Under Domicile Reservation:**

- The Union Government acceded to the demands of political parties and brought all posts in Jammu and Kashmir Union Territory under the domicile rule. But rules for eligibility of domicile status will remain the same.

#### **Vacancies in Jammu and Kashmir:**

There are over **84,000 vacancies** in J&K of which

- 22078 vacancies pertain to Class IV employees,
- 54375 to non-gazetted, and
- 7552 vacancies at Gazetted level.

#### **Andhra Pradesh:**

### **100 Per cent Reservation for Local Tribals in Scheduled Areas of Undivided Andhra Pradesh Unconstitutional: Supreme Court**

- In the year 2000, the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh Government provided 100 per cent reservation to the local Scheduled Tribe candidates for the post of teachers in schools in Scheduled areas.
- Scheduled Areas are areas with preponderance of tribal population. These are notified by the President of India in consultation with the Governor of the State.
- 100 per cent reservation was provided using the powers of the Governor of Andhra Pradesh under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution.
- Fifth Schedule of the Constitution deals with administration in Scheduled Areas other than Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.
- Scheduled Areas under Fifth Schedule: At present, Scheduled Areas have been declared in the States of Andhra Pradesh (including Telangana), Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Rajasthan.
- The administration of Scheduled areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram is dealt under Sixth Schedule.

### **100 Per cent Reservation Challenged:**

- This 100 per cent reservation in Andhra Pradesh for local Scheduled Tribes in the posts of teachers was challenged on the grounds that merit has been completely ignored.
- 100 per cent reservation was set aside by the Andhra Pradesh Administrative Tribunal, but later was upheld by the Andhra Pradesh High Court. The Supreme Court was now hearing appeals against this order.

### **Why was 100 Per cent Reservation Given by Andhra Pradesh?**

- to protect the interests of local tribals,
- promote educational developments of tribals, and
- solve the problem of high absenteeism of teachers in the schools situated in Scheduled Areas.

### **Supreme Court Verdict:**

On April 22, 2020, a 5-judge Constitution bench of the Supreme Court held that 100 per cent quota provided to the local Scheduled Tribes Candidates as unconstitutional for the following reasons.

#### **1. Discriminatory and Impermissible:**

100% reservation is discriminatory and impermissible and violates Article 14 (equality before law) of the Constitution of India. Merit cannot be denied in toto by providing reservation. Total exclusion of others by creating an opportunity for one class is not contemplated by the founding fathers of the Constitution of India.

#### **2. Breaches 50 Per cent Cap:**

100 per cent reservation exceeds the 50 per cent cap set by the Supreme Court. In the Indra Sawhney v. Union of India (1992) judgment, the Supreme Court capped reservations at 50 per cent, except in extraordinary cases. There were no such extraordinary circumstances to provide a 100 percent reservation in Scheduled Areas.

#### **3. Deprives BC and SCs of their Reservation:**

The opportunity of public employment is not the prerogative of a few. 100% reservation to the Scheduled Tribes has deprived Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes also of their due representation as Scheduled Areas have only preponderance of tribal population but not 100 per cent tribal population. Population belonging to other castes also live in these Scheduled Areas.

## **FOREIGN RELATIONS**

### **Indo-USA:**

### **US State Department Clears Sale of Lightweight Torpedoes, and Harpoon Missiles to India**

- On April 13, 2020, the US State Department cleared sale of 16 lightweight Torpedoes, and 10 Harpoon Missiles to India.
- The total estimated cost of above purchases is US \$ 155 million.
- Harpoon missiles and torpedoes will be integrated into the P-8I aircraft to conduct anti-surface warfare missions in defence of critical sea lanes.

### **P-8I aircraft: (Poseidon Eight India aircraft)**

- It is advanced maritime patrol and anti-submarine warfare (ASW) aircraft manufactured by Boeing company, USA.
- India initially signed a US \$ 2.1 billion contract in 2009 for purchase of 8 P-8I aircrafts. In 2016, contract for purchasing 4 more aircraft was signed for US \$ 1.1 billion. In 2019, the Defence Ministry approved procurement of 10 more P-8I aircraft for an estimated US \$ 3 billion.
- These aircraft are fitted with radar which can provide high-resolution radar images in maritime, littoral and overland environments.

- These are also fitted with anti-ship missiles and torpedoes.
- A torpedo is a self-propelled guided missile. It is designed to detonate either on contact with its target or in proximity to it. It flies underwater.
- These aircraft track and hunt down enemy submarines.

## **U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Downgrades India in 2020 List**

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), in its 2020 report released in April 2020, designated India as “country of particular concern” (CPC) for engaging in and tolerating religious freedom violations.

### **About U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF):**

- It is an independent and bipartisan U.S. federal government advisory group.
- It was created under the **International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), 1998.**

### **Function:**

- USCIRF monitors religious freedom violations abroad and makes policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress.
- The Report classifies countries into two types based on severity of violation of religious freedom in countries.

### **1. Countries of Particular Concern**

are countries where the government engages in or tolerates “particularly severe” violations of religious freedom

### **2. Special Watch List Countries**

are countries where the government engages in or tolerates “severe” violations of religious freedom are put under Special Watch List Countries

### **Report on Violation of Religious Freedom India:**

- India took a sharp downward turn in 2019 in protecting religious freedom. The following actions were highlighted.
- National government used its strengthened parliamentary majority to institute national-level policies violating religious freedom across India, especially of Muslims.
- India enacted the **Citizenship (Amendment) Act**, which provides a fast track to Indian citizenship for non-Muslim migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan already residing in India.
- A nationwide National Register of Citizens along with Citizenship Amendment Act would result in detention, deportation, and potential statelessness of Muslim migrants.
- The national and various state governments also allowed nationwide campaigns of harassment and violence against religious minorities to continue with impunity. They tolerated hate speech and incitement to violence against them.
- Mob lynchings of persons suspected of cow slaughter or consuming beef continued, with most attacks occurring within BJP-ruled states.
- Based on the above developments, USCIRF report recommended “countries of particular concern” (CPC) designation for India.

### **Recommendations:**

- Targeted sanctions should be imposed on Indian government agencies and officials responsible for severe violations of religious freedom by freezing those individuals’ assets and/ or barring their entry into the United States.

- U.S. Embassy's and consulates' engagement with religious communities, local officials, and police, especially in regions impacted by religiously motivated violence should be strengthened.
- Funding should be allocated by US Government to support civil society to create a monitoring and early warning system in partnership with police to challenge hate speech and incitement to violence.
- The U.S. Congress should continue to hold hearings highlighting religious freedom conditions in India and U.S. policy toward India.

#### **Effectiveness of these recommendations:**

- USCIRF's recommendations are non-binding on the US State Department. (It is the agency responsible for carrying out U.S. foreign policy and international relations.)
- However, the U.S. Secretary of State, who makes the final recommendation on whether to designate a country as a CPC, "takes into account" the recommendation made by the USCIRF.
- In 2005, Prime Minister Narendra Modi who was at the time the Chief Minister of Gujarat was censured by the USCIRF. The commission had recommended sanctions against Mr. Modi for the 2002 riots and the U.S. government had subsequently cancelled his visa.
- The USCIRF 2020 report makes a specific mention of Home Minister Amit Shah, for not taking what it deemed as sufficient action to stop cases of mob lynching in the country, and for referring to migrants from Bangladesh as "termites".

#### **Additional Information:**

- **Countries of Particular Concern as per the 2020 Report:**  
China, Eritrea, India, Iran, Myanmar, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Vietnam.
- **Special Watch List Countries:**  
Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Central African Republic, Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Sudan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan.

## **INTERNATIONAL ISSUES**

### **Saudi Arabia:**

#### **Saudi Arabia Abolishes Flogging as Punishment**

- In April 2020, Saudi Arabia abolished flogging as a form of punishment.
- Saudi Arabia is one of the world's few absolute monarchies, and administers justice based on Shariah law. Flogging is a form of punishment used under Islamic Sharia law.
- Flogging means beating with a whip or cane as a form of punishment.
- Courts had powers to order the flogging of convicts found guilty of offences like extramarital sex, breach of the peace, murder, etc.
- Court-ordered floggings in Saudi Arabia - sometimes extending to hundreds of lashes - have long drawn condemnation from human rights groups.
- In future, judges will have to choose between fines and/or jail sentences, or non-custodial alternatives like community service.

#### **Flogging of Blogger:**

- The most high-profile instance of flogging in recent years was the case of Saudi blogger Raif Badawi who was sentenced to 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes in 2014 on charges of "insulting" Islam.
- He was awarded the European Parliament's Sakharov human rights prize the following year (2015).

### Global Military Expenditure:

## **Global Military Expenditure Rose to \$1917 Billion in 2019, India and China among Top Three Military Spenders**

India and China are among top three global military spenders according to the annual report 'Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2019' released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in April 2020.

### **Highlights of the Report:**

- Total global military expenditure rose to \$1917 billion in 2019.
- Global military spending was 2.2% of the global GDP.
- United States is the world's largest military spender in 2019.
- United States spent US \$ 732 billion on military expenditure. This is 38 per cent of global military expenditure in 2019.

### **Top Five Military Spenders - 2019:**

<u>Country</u>	<u>Expenditure (US \$ Billion)</u>	<u>Expenditure as a share of GDP</u>	<u>World Share in per cent (2019)</u>
1. United States	732	3.4	38
2. China	261	1.9	14
3. India	71.1	2.7	3.7
4. Russia	65.1	3.9	3.4
5. Saudi Arabia	61.9	8.0	3.2

Five largest spenders accounted for 62 per cent of expenditure (US \$ 1191 billion).

### **Countries with high military expenditure as a percentage of GDP in 2019:**

<u>Country</u>	<u>Military Expenditure as a per centage of GDP</u>
1. Oman	8.8
2. Saudi Arabia	8.0
3. Algeria	6.0
4. Kuwait	5.6
5. Israel	5.3

### **India's Military Expenditure:**

- India's expenditure in 2019 was 6.8% more than that in 2018.
- India's military expenditure has risen significantly over the past few decades.
- It grew by 259% over the 30-year period of 1990–2019, and by 37% over the decade of 2010–19.
- However, as a per centage of GDP, India's military expenditure fell from 2.7% of GDP in 2010 to 2.4% in 2019.

### **Reasons for High Military Spending by India:**

- India's border tensions with China and Pakistan are the major drivers for its increased military spending.
- Pakistan's military expenditure rose by 70 per cent over the decade 2010-19, to reach \$10.3 billion. Its military expenditure increased from 3.4 per cent of GDP in 2010 to 4.0 per cent in 2019.

### **About Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI):**

- It is an international organisation based in Sweden.
- It was set up in 1966. The idea of such organisation was first put forward in 1964 by the then Swedish Prime Minister, Tage Erlander to commemorate Sweden's 150 years of unbroken peace.

### **Functions:**

- It is dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control, and disarmament.
- It strives for peaceful solution of international conflicts and global peace.

### **Funding:**

- It receives a substantial part of its funding in the form of an annual grant from the Swedish Government. The Institute also seeks financial support from other organisations in order to carry out its research.

### **Food Crises:**

## **Global Report on Food Crises**

- 'Global Report on Food Crises, 2020' flagship publication of the 'Global Network against Food Crises' involving 16 international humanitarian and development partners, was released on April 20, 2020.
- Some of the partners in the Global Network are Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), European Union (EU), and International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).
- **Objective of the Global Network Against Food Crises is** to better link, integrate and guide existing initiatives, partnerships, programmes and policy processes to sustainably address the root causes of food crises.

### **Key findings of the Report:**

At the close of 2019,

- 135 million people across 55 countries and territories experienced **acute food insecurity**.
- **75 million children were stunted, and**
- **17 million suffered from wasting.**
- Ten countries - Yemen, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Ethiopia, South Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, the Sudan, Nigeria and Haiti - accounted for 65 percent of the total population in Food Crisis.

### **Worst Affected Countries by Food Crisis:**

<b>Country</b>	<b>People facing Food Crisis</b>
1. Yemen	: 15.9 Million
2. Democratic Republic of Congo	: 15.6 Million
3. Afghanistan	: 11.3 Million
4. Venezuela	: 9.3 Million

### **Regional Data:**

- More than half (73 million) of the 135 million people covered by the report live in Africa;
- 43 million live in the Middle East and Asia; and
- 18.5 million live in Latin America and the Caribbean.

## Key drivers of Global Food Crises:

1. **Conflicts** pushed 77 million people into acute food insecurity.
2. **Weather extremes** (droughts, and floods) pushed 34 million people into food insecurity.
3. **Economic Shocks** pushed 24 million into food insecurity.

Economic shocks are characterised by rising food prices, lack of income sources, and consequent reduction in purchasing power, which directly affect households' food security.

**Reasons for economic shocks** include hyperinflation, significant currency depreciation, worsening terms of trade, high unemployment rates and loss of income, a significant contraction in exports and a critical decrease in investments and other capital inflows.

Countries with weak governance and institutions, or facing armed conflict, civil unrest or instability, are particularly vulnerable to the impact of economic shocks.

## Definitions:

### Acute Food Security:

- Food insecurity refers to the lack of secure access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food for normal human growth and development and an active and healthy life.

### Wasting:

- A child being too thin for his or her height (low weight for height) is called wasting. Wasting is also called **acute malnutrition**.
- It is treatable. But, it can lead to illness, disability or death if neglected.

### Stunting:

- A child being too short for his or her age is called stunting. Stunting is also called **chronic malnutrition**.
- The **physical and cognitive damage caused by stunting** can be irreversible and has far-reaching consequences such as  
diminished learning and school performance,  
lower future earnings, and  
effect on the next generation.

## Press Freedom:

### India Ranked 142<sup>nd</sup> out of 180 Countries in the 2020 World Press Freedom Index

- India was ranked 142 out of 180 countries in the 2020 World Press Freedom Index released by Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF) (Reporters Without Borders), a Paris-based non-profit organisation, on April 22, 2020.
- India's ranking has been declining continuously.
- In 2018, India was ranked 138 and in 2019 India's rank was 140.

### More about the Index:

- It is being published every year since 2002.
- The Index **ranks 180 countries**.

### Criteria:

Through **Qualitative and Quantitative** analysis.

- **Qualitative analysis** is determined by pooling the responses of experts to a questionnaire on
- pluralism in the country ( degree to which opinions are represented in the media),

- independence of media (degree to which the media are able to function independently of sources of political, governmental, business and religious power and influence),
- legislative framework governing media, etc.
- In total 87 questions are asked to experts in every country. Based on the responses scores are given.
- This qualitative analysis is combined with quantitative data on abuses and acts of violence against journalists during the period evaluated.

**Top 5 Countries in the World Press Freedom Index (Countries with high media freedom):**

**Rank Country**

1	Norway
2	Finland
3	Denmark
4	Sweden
5	Netherlands

**Countries at the Bottom of the index (Countries with low Press Freedom)**

**Rank Country**

176	Djibouti
177	China
178	Eritrea
179	Turkmenistan
180	North Korea

**Government Sets Up Panel:**

The Union Government appointed a panel to look at potential ways to improve India's ranking in the World Press Freedom Index.

The panel consists of the director-general of the Press Information Bureau, officials from the Registrar of newspapers of India, apart from the secretary of the Press Council of India and Niti Aayog. The Press Council of India was asked to suggest names of journalists for the panel.

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**HEALTH (COVID-19):**

**Rapid Anti-body Tests Vs RT-PCR Tests:**

**Differences between Rapid Antibody tests and RT-PCR tests (Reverse Transcription - Polymerase Chain Reaction)**

The Union Health Ministry said on April 18, 2020 that RT-PCR test is the 'gold standard' for frontline testing as it is a more accurate confirmatory test and that Rapid Antibody tests cannot replace it.

**Rapid Antibody test**

**What is an antibody?**

Antibody also known as immunoglobulin is a Y-shaped protein produced by plasma cells in the blood which fight against pathogens such as bacteria and virus through immune system of living organisms.

### **What is Rapid Antibody Test?**

1. Antibody test also known as serological test is a blood sample test that detects the presence of antibodies produced by the body's immune system to fight a particular virus or bacteria which indirectly shows that the person encountered the virus or bacteria.
2. This method is an indirect way of testing as it does not directly detect the presence of the virus or bacteria but detects the presence of antibodies immunoglobulin M and G in the blood sample.
3. Fast, inexpensive and portable (can be administered on site).
4. Antibodies show up between 9 to 28 days after a person is infected with a pathogen (bacteria or virus). Therefore, there is a chance of spreading the virus if the person is not isolated.

### **RT-PCR(Reverse Transcription-Polymerase Chain Reaction) Test**

#### **What is RT-PCR ( Reverse Transcription - Polymerase Chain Reaction )test?**

1. Reverse Transcription - Polymerase Chain Reaction test is a nasal or throat swab test which involves the detection and extraction of Ribonucleic acid (RNA) which then is compared with SARS-CoV2 virus's genetic sequence.
2. This method directly detects the presence of the virus.
3. It is expensive at 4500 INR per test as it requires labs, trained technicians and laboratory RNA extraction machines. It takes a minimum of 4 hours to get the results.
4. ICMR has called RT-PCR test as the 'gold standard' for frontline COVID19 testing as the results are more accurate compared to Rapid Antibody tests.
5. ICMR also stated that a combination of RT-PCR and Rapid Antibody tests should be used where Rapid Antibody Tests can be used to detect the extent of infection in a community to determine lockdown relaxations in areas.

#### **Convalescent Plasma Therapy:**

### **Approval for Clinical Trial of Convalescent Plasma Therapy on COVID Patients**

- In April 2020, the Drug Controller General of India accepted to the proposal by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) for the clinical trial of convalescent plasma in COVID-19 patients.
- Convalescent means person who has recovered from an illness. Plasma is one the four components of blood (Four components of Human blood: Plasma, Red blood Cells, White blood cells and Platelets).
- Plasma contains antibodies which fight viruses and bacteria when they enter into the body.

#### **What is Convalescent Plasma Therapy?**

- People who have recovered from COVID-19 have antibodies to fight COVID disease in their blood in future.
- In convalescent plasma therapy, antibodies from the blood of patients who have recovered from COVID-19 are used to treat severely infected patients.
- By giving COVID patients plasma from patients who have developed antibodies to COVID virus, an infected patient is given a massive boost to their adaptive immune system.
- This confers passive immunity to the COVID patient i.e. anti bodies infused through by transfer of plasma from recovered patient fights against the corona virus in the patient who is infected with corona virus.
- In the clinical trials, convalescent plasma therapy would be permitted only to treat severely infected patients.

### **Why was Clinical Trial of Convalescent Plasma Therapy Allowed?**

- Currently, there are no approved treatments for COVID-19.
- The treatment management plan is supportive care to address the symptoms like cough, high fever. Ventilators are used for tackling severe symptoms like difficulty in breathing which occurs when the virus infects lungs.
- The clinical trial plasma therapy is aimed at determining the efficacy of convalescent plasma therapy in the recovery for people with COVID19.
- If this clinical trial shows positive results, this would be a boon to COVID infected patients who are at high risk i.e. those with pre-existing medical conditions like heart problems, kidney problems, etc. Mortality rate due to COVID is high in this high risk population.

### **History of Convalescent Plasma Therapy:**

- This is not the first instance where Convalescent Plasma Therapy has been allowed.
- Historically it has been allowed to check the spread of a virus or bacteria when there is no vaccine.
- The first trial was in 1892 for diphtheria (swollen glands in the neck due to bacterial infection).
- Other instances of Convalescent Plasma usage.
  - 1918: Spanish influenza.
  - 1920's: Scarlet fever
  - Until 1970: Pertussis (whooping cough which was highly contagious disease. Now there is vaccine)
  - 2009: Swine Flu (H1N1 virus)
  - 2014: Ebola virus
- Each case of virus is different and the adverse side effects of Convalescent Plasma for every new virus have to be studied separately through clinical trials.
- But, a majority of the adverse side effects associated with plasma transfusion are non-lethal.

### **How safe is Convalescent Plasma Therapy?**

- Earlier, there was risk of transfer of blood-borne pathogens (infectious agents).
- With modern blood banking techniques screening of blood-borne pathogens is robust.
- Donor undergoes tests for Hepatitis, HIV, Malaria, etc. to ensure that they do not pass on a different pathogen to the receiver.
- Therefore the risks of inadvertently transferring known infectious agents or triggering transfusion reactions are low.

### **ICMR Allows 35 Medical colleges and hospitals to conduct clinical trials:**

- More than 100 medical colleges and hospitals sought approval from Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) to conduct clinical trials using convalescent plasma therapy.
- In the initial phase, ICMR gave approval for 35 medical colleges to conduct clinical trials.

### **US Food and Drugs Authority Approves Convalescent Plasma Clinical Trials:**

- Due to lack of efficacious treatments for COVID 19 and the epidemic situation with high mortality rate, the US FDA also approved convalescent plasma clinical trials for the treatment of severe or life-threatening COVID-19 infections.
- The US FDA (Food and Drugs Administration) is a federal agency responsible for protecting the public health in USA.

## Herd Immunity:

# Role of 'Herd Immunity' in Controlling Contagious Infectious Diseases

United Kingdom did not initially follow 'lockdown strategy' adopted by other European nations like Italy, Spain, France, Germany, etc. to control the spread of corona virus disease (COVID). UK's Chief Scientific Advisor Mr. Patrick Vallance advocated 'herd immunity' to prevent the disease coming back in the future.

## **What is Herd Immunity?**

- When there is no resistance, the virus spreads quickly across communities. Stopping it will require a significant percentage of people to be immune.
- Immunity refers to the ability of the human body to fight infections by activating the immune system. The immune system releases antibodies (Y-shaped proteins produced by specialised white blood cells called B lymphocytes) when a new infection enters the body through virus or bacteria.
- Herd Immunity refers to a situation where a sufficient number of population in a community develops immunity to a infectious disease.
- When sufficient population is immune to an infectious disease, this provides indirect protection (herd protection) - to those who are not immune to the disease.
- For example, if 80% of a population is immune to a virus, four out of every five people who encounter someone with the disease would not get sick and would not spread the disease any further.
- People who have developed immunity act as a buffer between those infected and those who have not developed immunity to fight the infectious disease. In this way, the spread of infectious diseases is kept under control.
- Thus, once herd immunity has been established for a while, and the ability of the disease to spread is hindered, and the disease can eventually be eliminated.

## **What is the number of population with immunity needed for achieving herd immunity?**

- It depends on how contagious the infection is. In scientific terms, this is called  $R_0$  (or  $R$  naught) i.e. to how many people the infection spreads from the person carrying the infection.
- The more infectious a disease, the higher the population immunity needed to ensure herd immunity.
- For example, measles is highly contagious and one person with measles can infect upto 18 other people. This means that around 95% of people need to be immune to ensure that the wider group develops herd immunity.
- The new coronavirus has a lower infection rate than measles, with each infected person passing it on to two or three new people, on average. This means that herd immunity would be achieved when around 60% of the population becomes immune to COVID-19.

## **Types of Herd Immunity:**

Herd immunity is of two types:

1. Herd immunity can be developed in individuals who get infected and survive from the infection. This is called natural herd immunity.
2. It can be acquired through vaccinations.

What was advocated in UK initially was natural herd immunity since COVID was a new infection and there is no vaccine yet for COVID.

## **Limitations of Natural Herd Immunity:**

- Allowing the virus to go unchecked may lead to large number of casualties especially among people with low or weak immunity levels. Example: old people and children.
- It also puts a lot of pressure on healthcare systems due to uncontrolled infections.
- This is why herd immunity is generally pursued through vaccination programmes.
- Mass vaccination has been highly successful in inducing herd immunity for many diseases like Measles, mumps, polio and small pox.

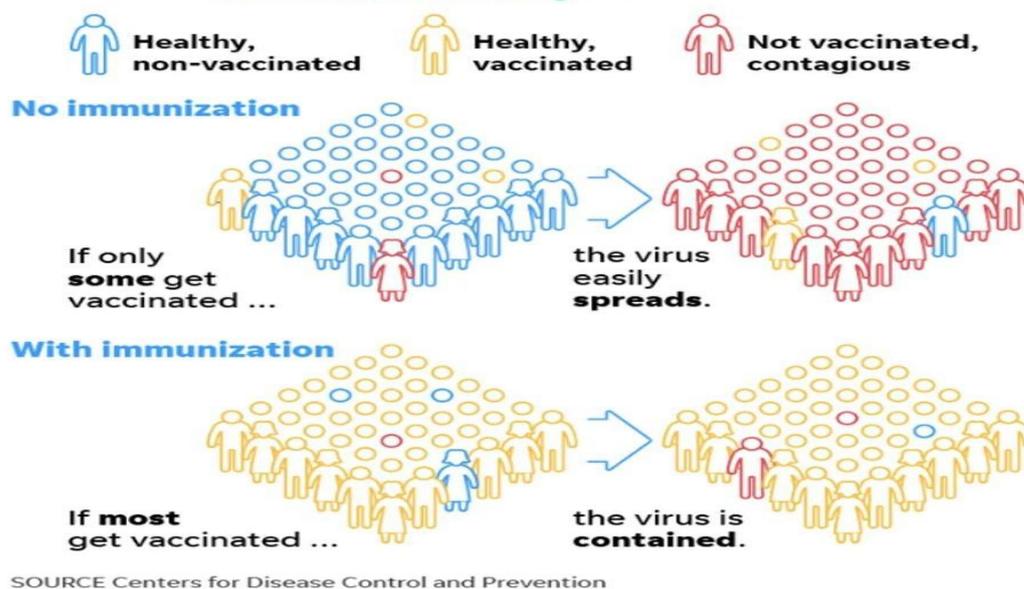
### UK Adopts Lockdown Strategy:

- With COVID cases increasing at an alarming rate, UK also finally adopted lockdown strategy to control the spread of COVID.
- Lockdown slows the spread of COVID as it ensures social distancing which controls transmission of virus.
- It also reduces pressure on healthcare system.

### Additional information:

#### Thematic Representation of Herd immunity

### What is herd immunity? how it works



### Flattening the Curve:

### Significance of 'Flattening the Curve' During Pandemics

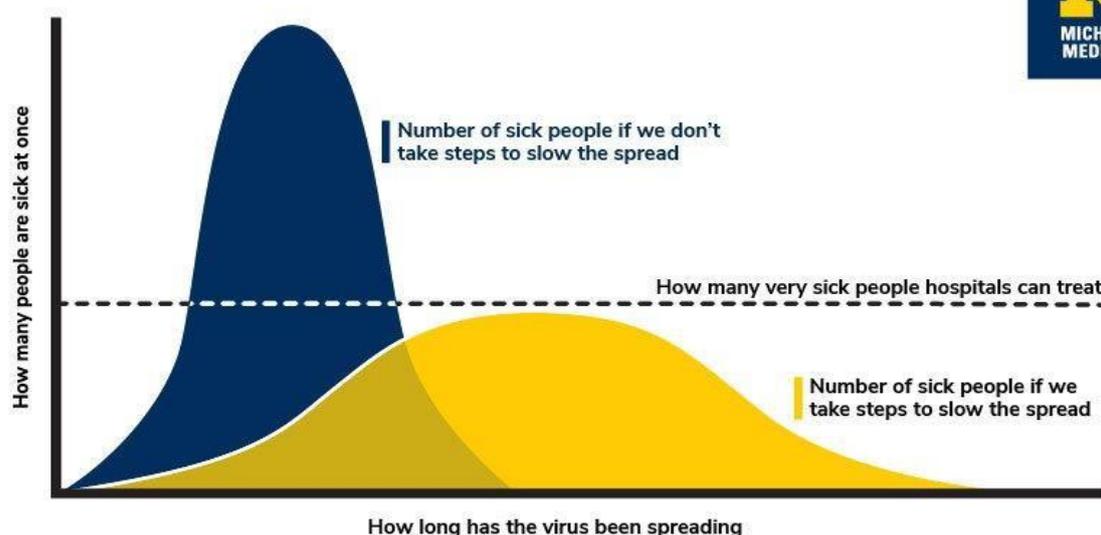
- Pandemics like COVID pose serious challenges to the healthcare systems for countries.
- As there are no treatments for new viruses like COVID-19, the infection spreads rapidly among people.
- When the number of infected patients rises rapidly in a short time, even countries with advanced healthcare systems can become overwhelmed by the sheer number of cases.

### Case Study of Italy:

- Italy was hit hard by the COVID-19 with thousands of cases reported in a short period.
- This overwhelmed the healthcare system in Italy.
- Doctors and nurses had to work for long hours. Ambulance services were hard to find.
- With COVID cases rising massively and inadequate capacity to treat patients in terms of doctors, nurses, beds, ventilators, hospitals began to admit patients who had better chance of survival.

## Concept of 'Flattening the Curve':

- To tackle public health challenges during pandemics, epidemiologists advocate 'flattening the curve'.  
(Epidemiologists are scientists who analyse disease outbreaks in order to treat existing diseases and prevent future outbreaks.)
- Flattening the curve means slowing the spread of infection among the people.
- In epidemiology, the curve refers to the projected number of new cases over a period of time.
- In contrast to a steep rise of coronavirus infections, a more gradual uptick of cases will see the same number of people get infected, but without overburdening the health-care system at any one time.
- The idea of flattening the curve is to stagger the number of new cases over a longer period, so that people have better access to care.
- By flattening the curve, more people would have access to health care system and deaths due to the virus can be reduced.



- The above chart shows two curves with two very different virus reproduction rates.

### Steepest Curve (Blue curve)

- In the steepest curve, the virus reproduces quickly in a short period of time. In this scenario, emergency rooms, intensive care units and other parts of the health care system are overwhelmed. In an overwhelmed system, mortality rates can be high and those infected may not get the treatment they need.

### Flatter Curve (Yellow curve)

- In the second, flatter curve, controls like lockouts help slow the spread of the virus. Infections occur, but over a longer period of time. Since health care workers and facilities are not overwhelmed, those infected receive better treatment and fewer deaths occur.

### How can the Curve be flattened?

The curve can be flattened by adopting following measures.

#### Personal level measures are

- Personal hygiene (washing hands with soap frequently),

- Wearing a mask,
- social distancing, and
- avoiding large crowds and gatherings.

#### **Government level measures are**

- aggressive testing and isolating infected persons,
- quarantine (restricting the movement of people who may have been in contact with the infected person),
- encouraging working from home,
- closing schools and other educational institutions,
- placing limits on the size of crowds at events, and
- lockdown of the country (shutting down schools, colleges, entertainment centres, and economic activities excepting emergency and essential services like health services, police, administration services, dairying, banking services, etc.).

#### **Arogya Setu App:**

### **Arogya Setu, a Mobile App, Launched to Combat COVID**

- In April 2020, the Union Government released the Arogya Setu App as a preventive tool in combating the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID19).
- The Union Ministry of Home Affairs issued directions under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 making the usage of Arogya Setu App **mandatory for**
  1. Government employees,
  2. private sector employees who are working in essential services during the lockdown period,
  3. COVID patients with mild symptoms who are under home isolation, and
  4. people in the containment zones.

Containment zones are areas with COVID positive cases. An area of 3 km radius from the epicentre (the residence of COVID positive case) is treated as containment zone. The objective of containment zone is to intensify efforts for COVID control. District Collector is will be the nodal officer of containment zones. Health workers will visit every house in the containment zone to search for clinically suspect COVID cases, identify contacts of confirmed cases and inform the medical officers, and create awareness in the community of the containment about disease prevention, home quarantine, common signs and symptoms, and need for reporting suspect cases.

#### **Voluntary for other Citizens:**

- Arogya Setu App download is **voluntary for other citizens.**

#### **Other Conditions:**

- After downloading the Arogya Setu App, users should always keep on the phone's GPS location and Bluetooth.
- GPS location and Bluetooth will alert the users when they are in proximity with the COVID patients.

#### **About Arogya Setu App:**

- The App has been developed for
  1. contact tracing of COVID patients,
  2. alerting the users who are nearby the COVID infected patients, and
  3. spreading awareness to stay safe.
- The app takes basic information from users such as phone number, name, gender, age, profession, countries visited during the last 30 days and whether he/she would like to volunteer in the time of need.

- Users have to take a self-assessment test to assess whether they are at risk of COVID.
- The app also contains recommendations on how to stay safe and also gives you a timely update of all COVID-19 cases state-wise. It also lets users to donate to the PMCARES fund using UPI.
- The app uses Bluetooth and GPS tracking to provide information.
- Users have to keep Bluetooth and Location sharing on at all times.
- If any user tests positive, such information will be uploaded to the servers of the App. The information of positive cases will be used to alert other Arogya Setu app users when they are in proximity to such COVID positive patients. However, the identity of the COVID positive patients will not be disclosed. The alert just cautions that they are near the COVID positive case.
- The App is available for download for smart phones using Android software and Apple software (iOS).
- National Informatics Centre (NIC), under the control of Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), developed the App.
- The App available in 12 languages.
- Around 9.8 crore people have downloaded the App in India.

### **Criticism against Arogya Setu App:**

#### **1. No Legal Backing:**

The Arogya Setu App collects personal information (data) of users.

Privacy of personal information is a fundamental right as per the Supreme Court judgement. So information should not be collected without the backing of a law. A law which regulates the use of such data and provides adequate safeguards against its misuse is necessary. The Government of India is yet to enact Data Protection Legislation in India.

#### **2. Surveillance Tool:**

In the absence of a sunset clause or a rule limiting the purpose for which the data can be used or spelling out the entities authorised to use them, Government could use the Arogya Setu App as a mass surveillance tool.

### **SDRF Funds:**

## **Rs 11,092 Crores Released under State Disaster Risk Management Fund (SDRF) to All States**

- On April 3, 2020, Government of India released Rs. 11,092 crores under the State Disaster Risk Management Fund (SDRMF) to all States.

#### **Background:**

- On March 14, 2020, Central Government declared COVID-19 as a 'notified disaster', by way of a special onetime dispensation, under the State Disaster Risk Management Fund (SDRMF) with a view to augment funds available with the State Governments for tackling COVID-19.
- Such notification allows states to use funds under the SDRMF for tackling COVID-19.
- Accordingly, the Central Government, on April 3, 2020, released in advance its share of first instalment of State Disaster Risk Management Fund for the year 2020-21, amounting to Rs. 11,092 crores.

### **Utilisation of Funds for COVID-19 under SDRF:**

State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) funds can be used for following COVID-19 related activities.

1. setting up quarantine facilities,
2. sample collection and screening;
3. setting up additional testing laboratories,

4. purchase of personal protection equipments for healthcare, municipal, police and fire authorities;
5. purchase of thermal scanners, ventilators, air purifiers, and consumables for Government hospitals; and
6. providing food and shelter to homeless people including migrant labourers who are stranded due to lockdown measures.

#### **About State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF):** State Disaster Response Fund

- The State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) was constituted under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
- It is the primary fund available with State Governments for responses to notified disasters.
- The Central Government contributes 75% of SDRF allocation for general category States/UTs and 90% for special category States/UTs (NE States, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir).
- The annual Central contribution is released in two equal instalments in June and December of every financial year.
- SDRF shall be used **only for meeting the expenditure for providing immediate relief to the victims.**
- Total Funds Allocated under SDRF for 2020-21: **Rs. 28, 893 crores.**

#### **Disasters Notified under SDRF:**

- Cyclone, drought, earthquake, fire, flood, tsunami, hailstorm, landslide, avalanche, cloudburst, pest attack, frost and cold waves.
- On March 14, 2020, COVID-19 was added to the above list as a onetime special dispensation.

#### **Local Disasters:**

- In addition to the above notified disasters, funding is also allowed to 'disasters' within the local context in the State under SDRF.
- A State Government may use upto 10 percent of the funds available under the SDRF for providing immediate relief to the victims of natural disasters that they consider to be 'disasters' within the local context in the State and which are not included in the notified list of disasters.
- State Governments have to list such state specific natural disasters, and clear and transparent norms and guidelines for such disasters should be notified with the approval of the State Authority, i.e., the State Executive Authority (SEC) for spending funds.

#### **National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF):** Disaster Response Fund

- The National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) was constituted under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
- It supplements SDRF of a State, in case of disasters of severe nature.
- Funds under NDRF would be provided only when **adequate funds are not available in SDRF of requesting state.**
- NDRF funds are given as Grants-in-Aid. Ministry of Finance gives this aid.
- Like SDRF funds, NDRF funds also should be used to only for providing immediate relief.
- Expenditure on disaster preparedness, restoration, reconstruction, and mitigation should be part of SDRF or NDRF. These should be funded through normal budget allocations.

## Hydroxychloroquine Exports:

### **India Revokes Ban on Export of Hydroxychloroquine**

On April 7, 2020, India revoked ban on the export of malaria drug hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), which is being used in countries such as the U.S. as a possible line of treatment for COVID-19.

#### **What is hydroxychloroquine ?**

- Hydroxychloroquine is used as preventive medicine for malaria as well as treating certain types of malaria.
- This medication is also used to treat certain auto-immune diseases such as lupus and rheumatoid arthritis.
- As a preventive medicine for malaria, its usage is recommended to people (such as tourists) who visit areas where malaria transmission is prevalent.
- Both adults and children should take one dose of hydroxychloroquine per week starting at least 1 week before traveling to the area where malaria transmission occurs. They should take one dose per week while they are there, and for 4 consecutive weeks after leaving.

#### **Why was the ban imposed?**

- There is no known or approved treatment for the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID 19) which has become a pandemic.
- In March 2020, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) recommended using of hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) for two purposes on an experimental basis.
  1. for treating severely sick COVID-19 patients, and
  2. as a preventive medicine.
- ICMR recommended using hydroxychloroquine in combination with antibiotic azithromycin for severely sick COVID-19 patients. A study in France found that hydroxychloroquine in combination with antibiotic azithromycin reduced the virus levels quickly in the COVID patients.
- Alone as preventive medicine, ICMR recommended hydroxychloroquine for healthcare workers treating coronavirus patients and high risk contacts of confirmed cases.
- As coronavirus was spreading past in India, Government of India banned export of hydroxychloroquine to ensure adequate stocks within the country.

#### **Why was the ban revoked?**

- India is a leading producer and exporter of hydroxychloroquine.
- 70% of the world's supply of hydroxychloroquine is met through India's exports.
- Ipca laboratories, Zydus Cadila, Wallace Pharmaceuticals and Cipla are the top pharma companies in India manufacturing hydroxychloroquine.
- India exports hydroxychloroquine to many parts of the world particularly USA, European countries, Brazil as well as neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka and Nepal.
- As the above countries are dependent on imports and have been severely affected by COVID pandemic, they requested India to lift the ban on export of hydroxychloroquine.
- As the USA was severely affected by COVID 19, US President Donald Trump requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to release Hydroxychloroquine ordered by the United States. US also warned India of retaliatory measures if exports are not allowed.
- In view of the humanitarian aspects of the COVID pandemic and also the dependence of these countries on India for supplies, India lifted the ban on Hydroxychloroquine.
- India also asked the Indian pharmaceutical companies to increase production of Hydroxychloroquine significantly to meet the global demand.

#### **How hydroxychloroquine works on severely sick COVID-19 patients?**

- Hydroxychloroquine is an interferon blocker.

- Interferons are a group of proteins released by infected cell in the body in response to the presence of virus. Interferons released by the infected cell enter the neighbouring healthy cell to enhance their anti-viral defences.
- Hydroxychloroquine diminishes the immune system's response to a viral infection and thereby protects the person from pneumonia.
- A hyperactive response of the immune system in the body is said to be primarily responsible for pneumonia occurring in severe COVID infected patients.

**Other drugs being used on experimental basis for COVID19:**

- Remdesivir and Favipiravir, anti viral drugs, are also undergoing clinical studies to test their efficacy and safety in the treatment of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

**Drugs:**

**Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification 2006 Amended to Ramp up Production of Drugs**

- On March 27, 2020, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change made an amendment to EIA Notification 2006.
- All projects in respect of bulk drugs and intermediates have been shifted from Category 'A' to Category 'B2'.
- Projects falling under 'Category B2' are exempted from requirements of both Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and public consultation.
- The decision to re-categorise bulk drugs projects from the existing Category 'A' to 'B2' category has been taken to
  - a) fast track the approval process, and
  - b) increase the production of drugs in the country.
- This amendment is applicable to all proposals received up to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020. States have also been issued advisories to expeditiously process such proposals through video conference as appraisal of proposals may not be possible through physical meetings due to COVID-19.

**Response to the Amendment:**

- Within a period of about two weeks after the amendment, more than 100 proposals have been received by regulatory authorities in the states.

**About Categorisation of Projects for Environmental Clearance:**

- The Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2006, regulates the environment clearance for projects such as dams, mining, thermal power plants, infrastructure projects like highways, ports, airport and big construction projects.
- It broadly divides all projects into two categories - Category A and Category B
- Projects are categorised based on
  - a) spatial extent of potential impacts, and
  - b) potential impacts on human health and natural and man made resources.

**Category A Projects:**

- All Category A projects are those with potentially significant impacts.
- These projects require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and have to undertake a public hearing before an Environmental Clearance (EC) is granted by the Union environment ministry.

### **Category B Projects:**

- Category B projects are those with potentially less significant impacts. These require prior environmental clearance from the State/Union territory Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA).
- Category B projects are further divided into B1 and B2.
- B1 Category Projects require an Impact Assessment (EIA) and public consultation at the State level.
- B2 Category Projects are exempted from requirements of both Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and public consultation.
- State level Expert Appraisal Committee (SEAC) will scrutiny the application of the project and gives approval for B2 projects.

### **SPACE:**

#### **ISRO Invites Proposals to Develop Indigenous Technologies for Human Space Programme**

- In April 2020, the Directorate of Human Space Programme of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) invited proposals from national research/academic institutions to develop indigenous technologies for its human space programme (Gaganyaan) and future space exploration.

The **objectives** are

- a) promotion of indigenisation of technologies, and
  - b) making them affordable.
- National research/academic institutions can use this opportunity to harness their expertise and capabilities for the development of technologies for space exploration.
  - In the long term, the country's emerging human space programme will need to establish research facilities and develop human resources.

#### **Proposals invited by ISRO:**

- Proposals have been invited on 18 technology areas.
- Some of the technologies on which proposals are invited are radiation hazards characterisation and mitigation techniques, space food and related technologies, human robotic interfaces, environmental control and life support systems, human psychology for long term missions and simulated gravity technologies.

#### **Gaganyaan:**

- In August 2018, ISRO announced its first human space mission 'Gaganyaan' slated for around 2022.
- Rs.10,000 crore has been allocated for Gaganyaan.
- Through Gaganyaan, ISRO plans to send three astronauts to a distance of 400 km in space in a special spacecraft. They will circle earth over three to seven days.
- Four pilots of the Indian Air Force are currently undergoing training in Moscow to be the first set of potential candidates for Gaganyaan.

## **ENVIRONMENT:**

### **Great Barrier Reef:**

#### **Australia's Great Barrier Reef Suffers Third Major Bleaching Event**

- The Great Barrier Reef, the **world's largest coral reef ecosystem** located in **Australia**, recently (March 2020) experienced its third major bleaching event in the last five years. Earlier bleaching was in 2016 and 2018.
- Reason for Bleaching is warmer than normal ocean temperatures due to global warming.

#### **Significance of the Great Barrier Reef:**

- The Great Barrier Reef is spread over 2,300 km (1,400 miles) along Australia's north-eastern coastline.
- It contains the world's largest collection of coral reefs, with 400 types of corals, 1,500 species of fish and 4,000 types of mollusc (invertebrate marine animals).
- UNESCO recognised it as a 'World Heritage site' for its "enormous scientific and intrinsic importance" in 1981.

#### **What are corals?**

- Corals are marine invertebrate animals.
- They belong to a large group of colourful and fascinating animals called 'Cnidaria'.
- They exhibit a wide variety of colours, shapes and sizes.
- Each individual coral animal is called a polyp because of its structure.

The polyp can open at just one end like a tin: the open end has a mouth surrounded by a ring of tentacles. The tentacles have stinging cells, called nematocysts, that allow the coral polyp to capture small organisms that swim too close to it.

- Most corals live in groups of hundreds to thousands of genetically identical polyps that form a 'colony'.
- Corals are generally classified as either "hard coral" or "soft coral".

#### **What is a coral reef?**

- Hard corals extract abundant calcium from surrounding seawater and use this to create a hardened structure for protection and growth.
- Coral reefs are created by millions of tiny polyps (corals) forming large carbonate structures.
- There are around 800 known species of hard corals, also known as the 'reef building' corals.
- The most unique feature of corals is the highly symbiotic relationship with plants.
- Tiny single-celled plants, known as zooxanthellae live inside the tissues of each coral.
- This symbiosis between plant and animal also contributes to the brilliant colours of a coral.

#### **Where are corals found?**

- Corals can be found throughout the oceans, from deep, cold waters to shallow tropical waters.
- But reef building corals (coral reefs) are found mostly in shallow waters of oceans at depths shallower than 70 metres (230 ft) as the algae (zooxanthellae) found in tissues of corals need light for photosynthesis.
- Ideal Temperature for the growth of coral reefs is 21 to 29° Celsius.
- Corals also need salt water to survive. So they grow poorly near river openings with fresh water runoff.

#### **How do corals survive?**

- Corals survive through one of the following two ways.

- Some species catch small marine life, like fish and plankton, by using the stinging tentacles on the outer edges of their bodies.
- Most corals, however, depend on algae called zooxanthellae to provide energy through photosynthesis.

### How do corals reproduce?

Corals are unique as they can reproduce asexually and sexually.

#### Asexual Reproduction:

- In asexual reproduction, new clonal polyps bud off from parent polyps to expand or begin new colonies. This occurs when the parent polyp reaches a certain size and divides. This process continues throughout the animal's life.

#### Sexual reproduction:

- Sexual reproduction is the more common method and can be performed in two ways: broadcast spawning and brooding.
- Broadcast spawning consists of both male and female coral expelling massive amounts of gametes (eggs and sperm) into the water column during synchronised events.
- Brooding is similar to broadcast spawning, except only the male gametes are released into the water column. Coral sperm once released is carried by ocean currents to female coral where they will fertilise the egg cells of the female coral.

### What is a coral reef bleaching?

- Coral bleaching is a process whereby the coral colonies lose their colour and become white.
- Whitening of coral is due to loss of a coral's symbiotic algae (zooxanthellae) or the degradation of the algae's photosynthetic pigment.

#### Reasons for Coral Bleaching:

1. Increased ocean temperature caused by global warming.
2. Changes in sea water chemistry due to ocean acidification or pollution.
3. Overexposure to sunlight.
4. Exposure to the air during extreme low tides.

### Do the Corals Die Due to Bleaching?

- When a coral bleaches, it is not dead. Corals can survive a bleaching event. If the stress-caused bleaching is not severe, corals do recover.
- If the algae loss is prolonged and the stress continues, coral eventually dies.

### What is the significance of coral reefs?

Healthy coral reefs are among the most biologically diverse and economically valuable ecosystems on earth, providing valuable and vital ecosystem services.

1. **Biodiversity:** Coral reefs occupy less than one per cent of oceans but are home to more than a quarter of all marine species. Coral reefs support more than 800 coral species and more than 4,000 species of fish.
2. **Coastal Protection:** They act as buffers and protect coastlines from storms and erosion.
3. **Fisheries:** Many commercially important fish species like grouper, snapper, and lobster, depend on coral reefs for food and shelter. The fish that grow and live on coral reefs are a significant food source for over a billion people worldwide
4. **Medicine:** Organisms found in coral ecosystems are important sources of new medicines being developed for cancer, arthritis, human bacterial infections, viruses, and other diseases.

5. **Tourism and recreation:** Millions of tourists visit coral reefs to enjoy abundant sea life. Lot of employment opportunities are created for local communities through diving tours, recreational fishing trips, hotels and restaurants.

### Corals in Great barrier Reef



Link to Video on Great Barrier Reef of Australia:

<https://www.france24.com/en/video/20190830-great-barrier-reef-unesco-status-under-threat>

### Anthurium:

### Anthurium Gets Support from National Innovation Foundation

National Innovation Foundation-India has facilitated mass multiplication and large scale production of four varieties of *Anthurium* in high demand, a domestic flowering plant with good market, at the Indian Institute of Horticultural Research (IIHR), Bangalore.

#### **More About *Anthurium*:**

- The anthurium is a plant genus of around 1,000 species of plants.
- Anthurium is one of the **best domestic flowering plants in the world.**
- The plants have high market value due to its
  1. use as indoor decorative plants,
  2. availability in wide range of colours.
  3. ability to purify the surrounding air and remove harmful airborne chemicals like formaldehyde, ammonia, toluene, xylene, and allergens.
- Due to its importance of removing toxic substances from the air, NASA has placed it in the list of air purifier plants.

#### **Support from National Innovation Foundation - India:**

- Vasini Bai, a women innovator from Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, has developed ten varieties of *Anthurium* by cross-pollination.

Cross pollination is when one plant pollinates a plant of another variety. The two plants' genetic material combines and the resulting seeds from that **pollination** will have characteristics of both varieties and is a new variety. Cross pollinating is used to create new varieties.

- The National Innovation Foundation-India has facilitated mass multiplication and large scale production of four highly demanded varieties -Dora, George, JV Pink and JV Red which have significant market value through tissue culture technique at the Indian Institute of Horticultural Research (IIHR), Bangalore for diffusion of the varieties in similar agroclimatic zones of the country.

Tissue culture technique enables mass production of plants in short time in artificial environment. Plants can be grown throughout the year irrespective of weather or season. Thousands of plantlets can be produced in a few weeks time from a small amount of plant tissue.

#### **About National Innovation Foundation (NIF):**

- The National Innovation Foundation (NIF) - India was set up in March 2000 with the assistance of Department of Science and Technology.
- It is India's national initiative to strengthen the grassroots technological innovations and outstanding traditional knowledge.

### **MISCELLANEOUS**

#### **INTERNATIONAL PERSONS**

**Denis Goldberg (87)**, veteran South African anti-apartheid activist who was a close associate of Nelson Mandela and spent 22 years in prison, died in Cape Town on April 30, 2020.

Mr. Goldberg was a prominent member of the now-ruling African National Congress and stood trial alongside Nelson Mandela. He spent 22 years in prison for his involvement with the ANC's fight against apartheid. Apartheid is the policy of racial segregation followed by the ruling white minority in South Africa. It institutionalised political and economic discrimination of non-whites by the Government led by white minorities.

Mr. Goldberg was born in Cape Town into a leftwing Jewish family who had emigrated from the UK. He faced discrimination as a young man for his Jewish ancestry and his parents' communist views. This increased his political awareness and believed that what was happening in South Africa with its racism was like the racism in Nazi Germany in Europe. Hence, he participated in Anti-apartheid movement.

**Tony Lewis (78)**, one of the men behind the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern (DLS) method used in weather-affected limited-overs matches, passed away April 1, 2020.

Tony, alongside fellow mathematician Frank Duckworth, devised the Duckworth-Lewis method which was introduced in 1997 and adopted officially by the ICC (International Cricket Council) in 1999. Renamed the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern Method in 2014, the mathematical formula continues to be used in rain reduced limited overs cricket games across the globe.

**John Prine (73)**, legend and revered singer-songwriter from USA, died due to Corona Virus Diseases (COVID) on April 7, 2020 in Tennessee, USA. Prine won two Grammy awards from 11 nominations, and was also given a lifetime achievement award at the 2020 ceremony. Grammy awards are given by the Recording Academy, a society of music professionals in the United States, to recognize achievements in the music industry.

**Bill Withers (81)**, the legendary US singer behind 1970s hits like 'Lean on Me', 'Lovely Day' and 'Ain't No Sunshine', died on March 30, 2020. He was three-time Grammy award winner.

#### **NATIONAL PERSONS**

**Sanjay Kothari**, a 1978 Haryana cadre retired IAS officer, assumed office as Central Vigilance Commissioner (CVC), anti-corruption watchdog, on April 25, 2020.

The Central Vigilance Commissioner is appointed by the President on the recommendation of the selection committee consisting of the Prime minister as its Chairperson, and the Home Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, as its members.

The tenure of CVC chief is of four years or till the incumbent attains the age of 65 years. Kothari (63) will have tenure till late June, 2021 when he completes 65 years of age.

The CVC is a statutory body and derives its powers from Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003. The CVC can have a Central Vigilance Commissioner and two Vigilance Commissioners. At present, Vigilance Commissioner Sharad Kumar is working as the interim Central Vigilance Commissioner. After Kothari's appointment, there is still a vacancy of a Vigilance Commissioner in the commission.

**T.S. Tirumurti**, 1985 batch Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer currently serving as secretary (economic relations) in the Ministry of External Affairs, was appointed as the next Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations on April 29, 2020. He took over from Syed Akbaruddin who retired.

**Rishi Kapoor (67)**, veteran Hindi actor who had a glorious career in Hindi cinema spanning over four decades, passed away at a Mumbai hospital on April 30, 2020. He was part of the Kapoor acting dynasty which has long dominated Bollywood, the Hindi film industry.

A third generation actor, Rishi Kapoor, was son of actor Raj Kapoor and a grandson of Prithviraj Kapoor. He began his career as a child artiste in Mera Naam Joker (1970), for which he received the National Award. As an adult protagonist, his first film was Bobby in 1973. Kapoor went on to act in over 90 films in the next four decades.

Rishi Kapoor was last seen in the film '102 Not Out' co-starring Amitabh Bachchan, where the latter played Kapoor's centenarian father.

**Irrfan Khan (53)**, one of Indian cinema's leading actors and its most recognised face internationally, passed away in Mumbai on April 29, 2020. Mr. Khan was detected with neuroendocrine tumour in March 2018 and took treatment in London for several months.

In a career spanning over three decades, Irrfan Khan acted in over 50 Indian films and even won a National award and four Filmfare awards.

Irrfan made his screen debut in the 1988 Mira Nair directorial 'Salaam Bombay'. After struggling for many years, success finally came to him after he starred in Asif Kapadia's 'The Warrior' (2001). The actor went on to star in several acclaimed films such as Haasil, Maqbool, Life in a Metro, Paan Singh Tomar, The Lunchbox, Haider, Piku and Talvar. Irrfan was also known for his work in international projects like The Namesake, The Darjeeling Limited, Slumdog Millionaire, Life of Pi and Jurassic World among more.

Paan Singh Tomar (2012), in which he played an athlete- turned-dacoit, got him the National Award for Best Actor. He was honoured with the Padma Shri in 2011 for his significant contribution to arts and cinema.

The actor's last film was Homi Adajania's comedy 'Angrezi Medium'.

## **SPORTS PERSONS**

**Subimal "Chuni" Goswami (82)**, former Indian football player who captained the 1962 Asian Games gold-winning team, died on April 30, 2020.

Goswami was among the rare sportsmen who played more than one sport at the highest levels; not only was he among India's greatest ever footballers, he played first-class cricket for Bengal and captained them to the final of the Ranji Trophy in 1971-72. Goswami played 50 matches for India as a footballer from 1956-64 and represented Bengal in 46 first-class cricket games between 1962-73.