

RAJ MALHOTRA'S IAS ACADEMY, CHANDIGARH

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POLITY/GOVERNANCE

Committee on Business Responsibility Reporting

Union Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) has released the 'Report of the Committee on Business Responsibility Reporting (BRR)'.

What is 'Business Responsibility Reporting'?

- As a first step towards mainstreaming the concept of business responsibility, the '**Voluntary Guidelines on Corporate Social Responsibility**' were issued in 2009. These guidelines were subsequently revised as '**National Voluntary Guidelines on Social, Environmental and Economic Responsibilities of Business, 2011 (NVGS)**'.
- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) through its '**Listing Regulations**' in 2012 mandated the **top 100 listed entities by market capitalisation** to file **Business Responsibility Reports (BRRs) from an environmental, social and governance perspective**.
- These BRRs enabled business to demonstrate the **adoption of the NVG principles and the attendant core elements with the intent of engaging businesses more meaningfully** with their stakeholders going beyond regulatory financial compliance.
- This was extended to top 500 companies in FY 2015-16 and further extended to top 1000 companies in December, 2019.

Background -

- Taking into account the national and international developments in the arena of business and human rights since 2011, the **NVGs have been updated and released as NGRBC (National Guidelines on Responsible Business Conduct)** in March 2019 to reveal alignments with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Paris Agreement on Climate change etc.
- In furtherance to updation and formulation of the NGRBCs, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs had constituted a '**Committee on Business Responsibility Reporting**' to develop new BRR formats for listed and unlisted companies.
- The Committee comprised of **representatives from MCA, SEBI, three professional institutes, and two eminent professionals** who had worked on developing the NGRBCs.

Recommendations -

- In its Report, the Committee recommended a new reporting framework called as the '**Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR)**' to better reflect the intent and scope of reporting on non-financial parameters.
- The Committee recommended two formats for disclosures: **one 'comprehensive format' and the second a 'Lite version'**.
- The Committee further recommended that the implementation of the reporting requirements should be done in a gradual and phased manner.
- The Committee also recommended that the **BRSR be integrated with the MCA21 portal**. As a long-term measure, the Committee envisions that the **information captured through BRSR filings be used to develop a Business Responsibility-Sustainability Index for companies**.

What is 'Corporate Social Responsibility'?

- The term "**Corporate Social Responsibility**" in general can be referred to as corporate initiative to assess and take responsibility for the company's effects on the environment and impact on social welfare.
- In India, the concept of CSR is governed by **clause 135 of the Companies Act, 2013**.
- India is the **first country in the world to mandate CSR spending** along with a framework to identify potential CSR activities.
- The CSR provisions within the Act is applicable to companies with an annual turnover of 1,000 crore and more, or a net worth of Rs. 500 crore and more, or a net profit of Rs. 5 crore and more.

- The Act requires companies to setup a **CSR committee** which shall **recommend a Corporate Social Responsibility Policy to the Board of Directors** and also monitor the same from time to time.
- The Act encourages **companies to spend 2% of their average net profit** in the **previous three years** on CSR activities.

Transparent Taxation - Honouring the Honest

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has recently launched a platform for “**Transparent Taxation - Honouring the Honest**”.

What is it?

- The platform is made to **honour India’s taxpayers** who have been sincere with taxes.
- It is aimed at **bringing transparency in income tax systems** and empowering taxpayers.
- The main features of the platform are **faceless assessment, faceless appeal and taxpayer charter**. The **faceless assessment and taxpayer charter** will come into place immediately from the launch, while the **faceless appeal** is going to be applicable from 25th **September 2020**.
 - **Faceless Assessment** - It aims to **eliminate the interface** between the taxpayer and the income tax department. There will be no need for the taxpayer to visit the income tax office or the officer. The selection of a taxpayer is possible through systems using **analytics and Artificial Intelligence**.
 - **Faceless Appeal**: Under the system, appeals will be randomly allotted to any officer in the country. The **identity of the officer** deciding the appeal will remain **unknown**.
 - **Taxpayer Charter**: This outlines the rights and responsibilities of both tax officers and taxpayers.

National Recruitment Agency

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for creation of **National Recruitment Agency (NRA)**, paving the way for a transformational reform in the recruitment process for central government jobs.

Background -

- At present, candidates seeking government jobs have to **appear for separate examinations conducted by multiple recruiting agencies** for various posts, for which similar eligibility conditions have prescribed.
- Candidates have to pay **fee to multiple recruiting agencies** and also have to travel long distances for appearing in various exams.

What is ‘National Recruitment Agency’?

- A multi-agency body called the National Recruitment Agency (NRA) will conduct a **Common Eligibility Test (CET)** to screen/shortlist candidates for the **Group B and C (non-technical) posts**.
- NRA will have representatives of **Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Finance/Department of Financial Services, the SSC, RRB & IBPS**.
- The hiring of **Group-B (non-gazetted), Group-C (non-technical) and clerical posts** in the government along with various equivalent recruitment in public sector banks will be done through CET. NRA will conduct **preliminary examinations** for all these recruitment.
- **CET Score** - The CET score of the candidate shall be valid for a period of three years from the date of declaration of the result. The best of the valid scores shall be deemed to be the current score of the candidate. There shall be no restriction on the number of attempts to be taken by a candidate to appear in the CET subject to the upper age limit. Relaxation in the upper age limit shall be given to candidates of SC/ST/OBC and other categories as per the extant policy of the Government.

Significance -

- On an average, 2.5 crore to 3 crore candidates appear in each of these examinations. A common eligibility Test would enable these candidates to appear once and apply to any or all of these recruitment agencies for the higher level of examination. This would indeed be a boon to all the candidates.
- **Access to examination centres** - Examination Centres in every District of the country would greatly enhance access to the candidates located in far-flung areas. Special focus on creating examination infrastructure in the 117 Aspirational Districts would go a long way in affording access to candidates at a place nearer to where they reside.
- **Relief to poor candidates** - Presently, the candidates have to appear in multiple examinations conducted by multiple agencies. Apart from the examination fees, candidates have to incur additional expenses for travel, boarding, lodging and other such. A single examination would reduce the financial burden on candidates to a large extent.
- **Benefit to women candidates** - Women candidates especially from rural areas face constraints in appearing in multiple examinations as they have to arrange for transportation and places to stay in places that are far away. The location of test centres in every District would greatly benefit candidates from rural areas in general and women candidates in particular.
- **Access to scores** - Initially the scores would be used by the three major recruitment agencies. However, over a period of time it is expected that other recruitment agencies in the Central Government would adopt the same. Further, it would be open for other agencies in the public as well as private domain to adopt it if they so choose. Thus, in the long run, the CET score could be shared with other recruiting agencies in the Central Government, State Governments/Union Territories, Public Sector Undertaking and Private Sector. This would help such organizations in saving costs and time spent on recruitment.
- **Shortening the recruitment cycle** - A single eligibility test would significantly reduce the recruitment cycle. Some Departments have indicated their intention to do away with any second level test and go ahead with recruitment on the basis of CET scores, Physical Tests and Medical examination. This would greatly reduce the cycle and benefit a large section of youth.
- **Medium of examination** - Initially, the CET exam will be conducted in 12 languages that are in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

ARIIA 2020

The Vice President of India Shri M Venkaiah Naidu has announced the Atal Ranking of Institutions of Innovation Achievements (ARIIA) 2020.

Details -

- This year, a **special category for higher educational institutions for women** has been introduced to encourage women and bringing gender parity in the areas of innovation and entrepreneurship, top place for which was secured by Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women under this category.
- This year, ARIIA announcement included **classification of the institutes into two broad categories and six sub categories**. Among these, **IIT Madras** bagged the top position under the category of Institutes of National Importance, Central Universities, and Centrally Funded Technical Institutes; **Institute of Chemical Technology, Mumbai** got the top position under Government and Government Aided Universities; **College of Engineering, Pune** under Government and Government Aided Colleges; **Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology, Bhubaneswar** under Private or Self-Financed Universities and **S R Engineering College, Warangal** under Private or Self-Financed Colleges were declared on top positions respectively.

What is ARIIA?

- Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievements (ARIIA) is **an initiative of Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) (now Ministry of Education)** to systematically **rank all major higher educational institutions and universities in India** on indicators related to "Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development" amongst students and faculties.
- Major Indicators for consideration
 - Budget & Funding Support.
 - Infrastructure & Facilities.

- Awareness, Promotions & support for Idea Generation & Innovation.
- Promotion & Support for Entrepreneurship Development.
- Innovative Learning Methods & Courses.
- Intellectual Property Generation, Technology Transfer & Commercialisation.
- Innovation in Governance of the Institution.

Significance -

- ARIIA ranking will certainly **inspire Indian institutions to reorient their mind-set and build ecosystems** to encourage **high quality research, innovation and entrepreneurship**.
- More than quantity, ARIIA will **focus on quality of innovations** and will try to measure the real impact created by these innovations nationally and internationally.
- Moreover, ARIIA will set tone and direction for institutions for future development for making them **globally competitive and in forefront of innovation**.

Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration

Government of India has instituted a scheme in 2006 namely, "**The Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Administration**" - to acknowledge, recognise and reward the extraordinary and innovative work done **by Districts/ Organisations of the Central and State Governments**.

Restructuring of the scheme -

- The Scheme was restructured in 2014 for recognising the **performance of District Collectors in Priority Programs, Innovations and Aspirational Districts**.
- The Scheme has been restructured again in 2020, **to recognise the performance of District Collectors towards economic development of the District**.

Awards for 2020 -

- For the year 2020, the scheme for Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Administration has been comprehensively restructured to **recognise the contribution of civil servants in strengthening of -**
 - Inclusive Development through Credit Flow to the Priority Sector
 - Promoting people's movements " -Jan Bhagidari" through Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban and Gramin) in the District
 - Improving Service Delivery and Redressal of Public Grievances
- The scope of the awards has been **expanded to identify areas of overall outcome-oriented performance** in the districts across sectors. The contribution of District Collectors would be recognised for implementation of Inclusive Credit Flow to the Priority Sector, promoting people's movements through Jan Bhagidari and Improving Service Delivery and Redressal of Public Grievances.
- Further the Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Administration seek to **recognise the efforts of District level officials in Namami Gange Program**.
- The award for the **Aspirational Districts Program** has been revamped to **reward the District having the best overall progress under the Scheme** following 2 years of implementation.
- The **Innovations category** has traditionally received the highest number of nominations. The scheme has been broad based to **recognise Innovations at National/ State / District level in 3 separate categories**.

DigiLocker

Department of Pension and Pensioner's Welfare (DoPPW) has decided to integrate the **electronic Pension Payment Order (e-PPO)** generated through **PFMS application of CGA (Controller General of Accounts), with DigiLocker**, in order to enhance ease of living of central government civil pensioners.

Details -

- This system will **enable any Pensioner to obtain an instant print-out of the latest copy of their PPO**, from their Digi Locker account.

- This initiative will **create a permanent record of their respective PPO in their Digi Locker** and at the same time **eliminate delays in reaching the PPO to new Pensioners**, as well as the necessity of handing over a physical copy.
- This was a target set to be accomplished for Civil Ministries by 2021-22, which the Department completed ahead of time in view of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- This facility has been created with '**Bhavishya**' software, which is a single window platform for Pensioners, right from the start of their Pension processing, till the end of the process. "Bhavishya" shall now provide an option to retiring employee, to link their Digi-locker account with their "*Bhavishya*" account and obtain their e-PPO in a seamless manner.

What is DigiLocker?

- DigiLocker is a **platform for issuance and verification of documents & certificates** in a digital way, thus **eliminating the use of physical documents**.
- Indian citizens who sign up for a DigiLocker account get a **dedicated cloud storage space** that is linked to their **Aadhaar (UIDAI) number**.
- Organisations that are registered with Digital Locker can push electronic copies of documents and certificates (e.g. driving license, Voter ID, School certificates) directly into citizens lockers.
- Citizens can also **upload scanned copies of their legacy documents** in their accounts. These legacy documents can be electronically signed using the eSign facility.

Benefits of 'DigiLocker' -

The platform has the following benefits:

- Citizens can access their digital documents anytime, anywhere and share it online. This is convenient and time saving.
- It reduces the administrative overhead of Government departments by minimising the use of paper.
- Digital Locker makes it easier to validate the authenticity of documents as they are issued directly by the registered issuers.
- Self-uploaded documents can be digitally signed using the eSign facility (which is similar to the process of self-attestation).

Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar

Ministry of Women and Child Development has invited nominations for the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar - 2021 from children, individuals and institutions.

About 'Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar' -

- The Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar was instituted to felicitate meritorious children, individuals and institutions of the country. These awards are given under two categories - **Bal Shakti Puraskar and Bal Kalyan Puraskar**.
- While the **Bal Shakti Puraskar** aims to give **recognition to children** who have achieved extraordinarily in various fields including innovation, scholastic, sports, art & culture, social service and bravery, the **Bal Kalyan Puraskar** is given as recognition to **Individuals and Institutions**, who have made an outstanding contribution towards service for children in the field of child development, child protection and child welfare.
- The Awards are given by the **Hon'ble President of India** in Darbar Hall, Rashtrapati Bhavan in the week preceding Republic Day every year. **Hon'ble Prime Minister of India** also felicitates the Awardees. The Awardees of Bal Shakti Puraskar **also take part in Republic Day Parade** on the 26th of January on Rajpath, New Delhi.

Export Preparedness Index - 2020

NITI Aayog in partnership with the **Institute of Competitiveness** have released the Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2020.

What is EPI 2020?

- It is the first report to **examine export preparedness and performance of Indian states**, EPI intends to identify challenges and opportunities; enhance the effectiveness of government policies; and encourage a facilitative regulatory framework.
- The structure of the **EPI includes 4 pillars – Policy; Business Ecosystem; Export Ecosystem; Export Performance** – and **11 sub-pillars** – Export Promotion Policy; Institutional Framework; Business Environment; Infrastructure; Transport Connectivity; Access to Finance; Export Infrastructure; Trade Support; R&D Infrastructure; Export Diversification; and Growth Orientation.

Observations in the report -

- What this edition of the EPI has shown is that **most Indian states performed well on average across the sub-pillars of Exports Diversification, Transport Connectivity, and Infrastructure**. The average score of Indian states in these three sub-pillars was above 50%. However, Indian states should also focus on other key components in order to improve export competitiveness.
- Overall, **most of the Coastal States are the best performers. Gujarat, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu** occupy the top three ranks, respectively. Six of eight coastal states feature in the top ten rankings, indicating the presence of strong enabling and facilitating factors to promote exports. In the landlocked states, **Rajasthan** has performed the best, followed by Telangana and Haryana. Among the Himalayan states, **Uttarakhand** is the highest, followed by Tripura and Himachal Pradesh. Across the **Union Territories, Delhi** has performed the best, followed by Goa and Chandigarh.
- The report also highlights that **export orientation and preparedness are not just restricted to prosperous states**. Even emerging states can undertake dynamic export policy measures, have functioning promotional councils, and synchronise with national logistical plans to grow their exports. **Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand** are two landlocked states that had initiated several measures to promote exports.
- **Many northeastern states** under the Growth Orientation sub-pillar **were able to export more by focusing on their indigenous product baskets**. This shows that **a focused development of such baskets (like spices)** can drive exports on one hand and also improve farmer incomes on the other in these states.

Challenges to export promotion in India -

Based on the findings of the report, export promotion in India faces three fundamental challenges: **intra-and inter-regional disparities in export infrastructure; poor trade support and growth orientation among states; and poor R&D infrastructure** to promote complex and unique exports.

Way forward -

- There is a need to emphasise on key strategies to address these challenges: **a joint development of export infrastructure; strengthening industry-academia linkages; and creating state-level engagements for economic diplomacy**. These strategies could be supported by revamped designs and standards for local products and by harnessing the innovating tendencies to provide new use cases for such products, with adequate support from the Centre.
- To achieve the target of making India a developed economy by focusing on **'Atmanirbhar Bharat'**, there is a need to **increase exports from all the states and union territories**. The EPI provides invaluable insights on how states can attain this goal.

SOCIAL ISSUES

Rashtriya Swachhata Kendra

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has inaugurated the **Rashtriya Swachhata Kendra** - an interactive experience centre on the Swachh Bharat Mission.

A tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, the Rashtriya Swachhata Kendra (RSK) was first announced by the Prime Minister on 10th April 2017, on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of Gandhiji's Champaran Satyagraha.

What is 'Rashtriya Swachhata Kendra'?

- The RSK has a balanced **mix of digital and outdoor installations** tracking India's transformation from having over 50 crore people defecating in the open in 2014 to becoming open defecation free in 2019.
- The facility is a **tribute to Gandhi's efforts for a swachh (clean) India**. It will **mostly cater to tourists and schoolchildren, to educate them about the Swachh Bharat Mission**.
- From portrayals showing Gandhi with students, to women or 'ranimistris' building toilets and PM Modi's 2014 address from the ramparts of the Red Fort, outdoor art installations in the facility educate visitors about the mission's journey.
- The Rashtriya Swachhata Kendra has been **built in the last five months at a cost of around Rs 5 crore**. It will be a part of schoolchildren's guided tours to the Rajghat. Entry will be free for children.
- On this occasion, the Prime Minister launched '**Gandagi Mukh Bharat**', a special week long campaign for swachhata in the run up to Independence Day, during which each day till 15th August will have special swachhata initiatives in urban and rural India to re-enforce the jan andolan for swachhata.

Important statistics -

According to the UNICEF, 36 states and union territories, 706 districts and over 603,175 villages have been declared open defecation free as of January 2020. The UNICEF website also says, "500 million people have stopped defecating in the open since 2014, down from 550 million to less than 50 million today."

National Health ID

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement of a national health ID for every Indian finds its roots in a 2018 Niti Aayog proposal to create a centralised mechanism to uniquely identify every participating user in the National Health Stack.

What is the national health ID system?

- The national health ID will be a **repository of all health-related information of a person**.
- According to the National Health Authority (NHA), every patient who wishes to have their health records available digitally must start by creating a Health ID. Each Health ID will be linked to a health data consent manager — **such as National Digital Health Mission (NDHM)** — which will be used to seek the patient's consent and allow for seamless flow of health information from the Personal Health Records module.
- The Health ID is **created by using a person's basic details and mobile number or Aadhaar number**. This will make it unique to the person, who will have the option to link all of their health records to this ID.

Background - Health ID -

- The **National Health Policy 2017** had envisaged **creation of a digital health technology ecosystem** aiming at developing an integrated health information system that serves the needs of all stakeholders and improves *efficiency, transparency and citizens' experience with linkage across public and private healthcare*.
- In the context of this, central government's think-tank **Niti Aayog**, in June 2018, floated a consultation of a digital backbone for India's health system — **National Health Stack**.
- As part of its consultation, Niti Aayog proposed a **Digital Health ID** to "**greatly reduce the risk of preventable medical errors and significantly increase quality of care**". This, in addition to the system enabling users "**to obtain a longitudinal view of their healthcare records**".
- This proposal was then further taken up by the Central government with the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the NHA, and the Ministry of Electronics and IT** preparing a strategy

overview document last month for “Making India a Digital Health Nation Enabling Digital Healthcare for all”.

Which systems does the national health ID interact with?

As envisaged, various healthcare providers — such as **hospitals, laboratories, insurance companies, online pharmacies, telemedicine firms** — will be expected to participate in the health ID system. The strategy overview document points out that while option of digital Health ID will be there, **in case a person does not want Health ID, then also treatment should be allowed.**

Have there been global instances of such a centralised health record system?

- In 2005, the **UK’s National Health Service (NHS)** started deployment of **an electronic health record systems** with a goal to have all patients with a centralised electronic health record by 2010.
- While several hospitals acquired electronic patient records systems as part of this process, there was **no national healthcare information exchange**. The program was ultimately dismantled after a cost to the UK taxpayer was more than £12 billion, and is considered one of the most expensive healthcare IT failures.

National Council for Transgender Persons

In exercise of the powers conferred by **section 16 of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019**, the Central Government has constituted a National Council for Transgender Persons.

Structure -

- The **Union Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment** will be **Chairperson** (ex-officio) and **Union Minister of State for Social Justice & Empowerment** will be **Vice-Chairperson** (ex-officio).
- The other members of the Council include representatives of various Ministries/Departments, five representatives of transgender community, representatives of NHRC and NCW, representatives of State Governments and UTs and experts representing NGOs.
- A Member of National Council, other than ex officio member, shall hold office for **a term of three years** from the date of his nomination.

Functions -

The National Council shall perform the following functions, namely—

- to advise the Central Government on the formulation of policies, programmes, legislation and projects with respect to transgender persons;
- to monitor and evaluate the impact of policies and programmes designed for achieving equality and full participation of transgender persons;
- to review and coordinate the activities of all the departments of Government and other Governmental and non-Governmental Organisations which are dealing with matters relating to transgender persons;
- to redress the grievances of transgender persons; and
- to perform such other functions as may be prescribed by the Central Government.

ENVIRONMENT

E-Vehicles

Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has allowed registration of electric vehicles without pre-fitted batteries.

Details -

- The vehicles without batteries can now be sold and registered based on the type of approval certificate issued by the Test Agency.

- Further, there is no need to specify the Make/Type or any other details of the Battery for the purpose of Registration.
- However, the prototype of the electrical vehicle, and the battery (regular battery or the swappable battery) is required to be type approved by the test Agencies specified under Rule 126 of the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989.

Also read - Delhi's Electric Vehicle Policy, 2020 -

- Delhi government has notified the Electric Vehicles (EV) Policy 2020. It lays the **maximum emphasis on replacement of two-wheelers, public transport and shared vehicles and goods-carriers** instead of private four-wheelers, with Electric Vehicles (EVs).
- It envisions the **replacement of the existing auto rickshaws and State-run buses with e-autos and e-buses** respectively. It will also ensure that delivery-based services operating in the city are powered by e-mobility.
- It talks about **increasing road tax for fuel-based vehicles**, at least in the luxury segment and imposing in certain parts of the city a congestion fee that EVs will be exempt from.
- It has a '**scrapping incentive**' for those people who want to make the switch, allowing them to exchange an old fuel-based vehicle while purchasing a new EV, further reducing its cost.
- The government will also **offer low-interest rate loans** to people interested in buying commercial EVs.
- The policy also offers **subsidies and road tax and registration fee waivers**, for EVs bought in the capital.
- A **State EV** fund will be set up, encompassing all the expenditure of the EV Policy. A **State Electric Vehicle Board** will be constituted for effective implementation of the policy and managing the fund. Besides, a **dedicated EV Cell** will also be constituted.
- **Incentives** - In addition to registration fee and road tax waivers, a subsidy of Rs. 5,000 per kWh of the battery capacity up to Rs. 30,000 will be given on the purchase of each EV. For the first 1,000 e-cars or electric four-wheelers, a subsidy of Rs. 10,000 per kWh will be given, capped at Rs. 1,50,000 per vehicle.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Genome Sequencing of SARS-CoV-2

Union Minister of Science and Technology has announced the successful completion of PAN-India 1000 Genome sequencing of SARS-CoV-2.

Details -

- Given the importance of this information for public health response initiatives requiring investigation into the transmission of COVID-19, the sequence data will soon be released in Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID) for use by researchers across the Globe.
- The information in the database will improve our understanding on how the virus is spreading, ultimately helping to interrupt the transmission chains, prevent new cases of infection, and provide impetus to research on intervention measures.

What does the data suggest?

- Initial results indicate that multiple lineages of SARS-CoV-2 are circulating in India, probably introduced by travel from Europe, USA and East Asia.
- In particular, there is a **predominance of the A2a haplotype (20A/B/C) with D614G mutation**, which is found to be emerging in almost all regions of the country. This particular haplotype is globally reported to be **associated with enhanced transmission efficiency**.
- Additionally, **mutations** in important regions of the viral genome **with significant geographical clustering have also been observed**.
- Detailed mutational analysis to understand the gradual emergence of mutants at different regions of the country and its possible impact on the disease management is in progress.

About GISAID -

- **GISAID** is a public platform started by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2008 for countries to share genome sequences.
- The GISAID Initiative promotes the **international sharing of all influenza virus sequences, related clinical and epidemiological data associated with human viruses**, and geographical as well as species-specific data associated with avian and other animal viruses
- This helps researchers understand how the viruses evolve, spread and potentially become pandemics.
- It actively promotes the development of novel research tools for the analysis of influenza data by helping developers to facilitate the integration or connection of their tools to analyse GISAID data.

What is 'Genome Sequencing'?

- A genome is a **person's complete set of deoxyribonucleic acids or DNA**, including all genes with more than 3 billion DNA base pairs.
- Genome sequencing (in the case of virus) is figuring out the order of Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) nucleotides, or bases, in a genome—the order of Adenine, Cytosine, Guanine, and Thymine that make up an organism's DNA.
- Genomics is an interdisciplinary field of science **focusing on the structure, function, evolution, mapping, and editing of genomes**.
- By sequencing the genome, researchers can discover the functions of genes and identify mutations responsible for cancer and rare genetic diseases.
- Genome sequencing also leads to precision medication, instead of clinicians giving drugs based on collective knowledge.

Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN)

The Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN) is **an innovative technological solution** aimed at **strengthening immunisation supply chain systems** across the country. This is being implemented under **National Health Mission (NHM)** by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

What is it?

- eVIN aims to **provide real-time information on vaccine stocks and flows, and storage temperatures across all cold chain points** in the country.
- eVIN combines **state-of-the-art technology, a strong IT infrastructure and trained human resource** to enable real time monitoring of stock and storage temperature of the vaccines kept in multiple locations across the country.
- eVIN has reached 32 States and Union Territories (UTs) and will soon be rolled-out in the remaining States and UTs of Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Ladakh and Sikkim.

Significance -

- The Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network has **helped create a big data architecture that generates actionable analytics** encouraging data-driven decision-making and consumption based planning that helps in maintaining optimum stocks of vaccines leading to cost savings.
- **An activity rate of more than 99%** reflects **high adoption of the technology** across all health centres where eVIN is currently operational. While instances of stock-outs have reduced by 80%, the time taken to replenish stocks has also decreased by more than half, on an average. This has ensured that every child who reaches the immunisation session site is immunised, and not turned back due to unavailability of vaccines.
- To support the Government of India's efforts to combat COVID-19, **eVIN India is helping the State/UT governments monitor the supply chain of COVID response material**. Since April 2020, eight States (Tripura, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab and Maharashtra) are using the eVIN application with 100% adherence rate to track State specific COVID-19 material supplies, ensure availability and raise alerts in case of shortage of 81 essential drugs and equipment.
- This strong platform has the **potential to be leveraged for any new vaccine** including COVID-19 vaccine, as and when available.

ART AND CULTURE

National Handloom Day

Recently, the 6th National Handloom Day on 07th August 2020 was celebrated by the Ministry of Textiles.

About National Handloom Day -

- 7th August was chosen as the National Handloom Day to commemorate the Swadeshi Movement which was launched on the same date in the year 1905.
- The objective is to generate awareness about Handloom Industry amongst public at large and its contribution to the socio-economic development.
- The first National Handloom Day was held on 7th August 2015 by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in Chennai.
- On this day, the handloom weaving community is honoured and the contribution of this sector in the socio-economic development of this country is highlighted.

About Swadeshi movement -

- The swadeshi movement was started as a response to the partition of Bengal decision taken by **Lord Curzon**. The reason given was administrative but the truth was actual reason was political. The British wanted to crush the national movement at its nerve centre "Calcutta". The partition would have divided Bengal and turned it into a minority and prop up Muslim communalists as an alternative to the congress.
- The formal proclamation of Swadeshi Movement was made on 7th August 1905 in a meeting held at the Calcutta Town Hall. In the meeting, the famous Boycott Resolution was passed.
- The Congress Session of 1905- The session took place at Banaras. Gopal Krishna Gokhale took up Swadeshi call.
- The Congress Session of 1906 - The session took place at Calcutta under the presidentship of Dadabhai Naoroji. In this session, four resolutions on the Swadeshi, Boycott, National Education and Self-Government demands were passed.
- It is to be noted that the two terms- Swadeshi and Boycott are complimentary. By the term Swadeshi, we mean adopting indigenous products. And by the term Boycott, we mean rejecting foreign made products.
- The people were urged to boycott foreign cloth and the shops selling foreign goods were picketed. The Ganpati and Shivaji festivals popularised by Tilak became a medium of Swadeshi propaganda. People tied rakhis on each other's hand as a symbol of unity of two halves of Bengal. Women came out of their homes for the first time and joined processions and picketing.

Quit India Movement

On August 8, 78 years ago, Mahatma Gandhi gave the call for British colonisers to "**Quit India**" and for the Indians to "**do or die**" to make this happen. Soon after, Gandhi and almost the entire top Congress leadership was arrested, and thus began a truly people-led movement in our freedom struggle, eventually quelled violently by the British, but leaving behind a clear message – **the British would have to leave India, and no other solution would be acceptable to its masses.**

What led to the events of August 1942?

- While factors leading to such a movement had been building up, matters came to a head with **the failure of the Cripps Mission**.
- In March 1942, a mission led by Sir Stafford Cripps arrived in India to meet leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League. The idea was **to secure India's whole-hearted support in the war**, in return for self-governance.
- However, despite the promise of "the earliest possible realisation of self-government in India", **the offer Cripps made was of dominion status, and not freedom**. Also, there was a **provision of the partition of India**, which was not acceptable to the Congress.

- The failure of the Cripps Mission made Mahatma Gandhi realise that freedom would be had only by fighting tooth and nail for it. The Congress decided to launch a mass civil disobedience. At the **Working Committee meeting in Wardha in July 1942**, it was decided the time had come for the movement to move into an active phase.

Gowalia Tank Address -

- On August 8, Bapu addressed the people from Mumbai's Gowalia Tank maidan. "Here is a mantra, a short one, that I give you. Imprint it on your hearts, so that in every breath you give expression to it. The mantra is: '**Do or Die**'. We shall either free India or die trying; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery," Gandhi said. Aruna Asaf Ali hoisted the Tricolour on the ground, and the Quit India movement had been officially announced.
- By August 9, Gandhi and all other senior Congress leaders had been jailed. Bapu was kept at the Aga Khan Palace in Pune, and later in the Yerawada jail. It was during this time that Kasturba Gandhi died at the Aga Khan Palace.

Quit India slogan -

While Gandhi gave the clarion call of Quit India, **the slogan was coined by Yusuf Meherally**, a socialist and trade unionist who also served as Mayor of Mumbai. A few years ago, in 1928, **it was Meherally who had coined the slogan "Simon Go Back"**.

ECONOMICS

Draft Defence Production and Export Promotion Policy 2020

In order to provide impetus to self-reliance in defence manufacturing, a framework under 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Package' and to position India amongst the leading countries of the world in defence and aerospace sectors, Ministry of Defence (MoD) has formulated a draft Defence Production and Export Promotion Policy 2020 (DPEPP 2020).

The DPEPP 2020 is envisaged as overarching guiding document of MoD to **provide a focused, structured and significant thrust to defence production capabilities** of the country for self-reliance and exports.

Objectives -

The policy has laid out following goals and objectives -

- To achieve **a turnover of Rs 1,75,000 Crores (US\$ 25Bn) including export of Rs 35,000 Crore (US\$ 5 Billion)** in Aerospace and Defence goods and services by 2025.
- To develop **a dynamic, robust and competitive Defence industry**, including Aerospace and Naval Shipbuilding industry to cater to the needs of Armed forces with quality products.
- To **reduce dependence on imports** and take forward "Make in India" initiatives through domestic design and development.
- To **promote export of defence products** and become part of the global defence value chains.
- To **create an environment that encourages R&D, rewards innovation, creates Indian IP ownership** and promotes a robust and self-reliant defence industry.

Areas covered -

The draft policy has outlined multiple strategies in focus areas which include: Indigenisation & Support to MSMEs/Startups; Procurement Reforms; Optimise Resource Allocation; Innovation and R&D; DPSUs and OFB; Investment Promotion, FDI & Ease of Doing Business; Quality Assurance & Testing Infrastructure and finally Export Promotion.

Background -

- Currently, the size of the domestic defence industry is of the order of USD 12 billion. Out of which, 80 per cent is the share of the defence public sector units (DPSUs) and 20 per cent is of the private sector.
- It is expected that the turnover of the domestic defence industry could go up to USD 25 billion by 2025.

What needs to be done?

In order to substitute defence imports, we must do the following things -

1. First and foremost step we need to take is **develop technical specifications in collaboration with research institutions and labs**, followed by the development of manufacturing processes. In case of certain identified materials, we should plan to adopt a mission mode approach led by the DRDO.
2. Secondly, we should **make one procedure under Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP)** to develop these identified materials with the support of the government.
3. Thirdly, we should **develop testing and certification facilities**. So, we will like to set up a task force under the Directorate of Standardisation for developing these testing and certification facilities in the country.
4. Last, but not the least, India should try for **import of technology under 'transfer of technology' route or through inter-governmental agreements to FDI route**, especially in those cases where we have got domestic manufacturing capability but the technology is not available at this point of time.

Import embargo to boost defence production

Taking cue from the evocation of Atmanirbhar Bharat, the Department of Military Affairs (DMA), Ministry of Defence (MoD) has prepared a list of 101 items for which there would be an embargo on the import beyond the timeline indicated against them.

Details -

- The list of 101 embargoed items comprises of not just simple parts but also some high technology weapon systems like **artillery guns, assault rifles, corvettes, sonar systems, transport aircrafts, light combat helicopters (LCHs), radars** and many other items to fulfil the needs of our Defence Services.
- The list also includes, **wheeled armoured fighting vehicles (AFVs)** with indicative import embargo date of December 2021, of which the Army is expected to contract almost 200 at an approximate cost of over Rs 5,000 crore.
- Similarly, the Navy is likely to place demands for **submarines** with indicative import embargo date of December 2021, of which it expects to contract about six at an approximate cost of almost Rs 42,000 crore.
- For the Air Force, it is decided to enlist the **light combat aircraft LCA MK 1A** with an indicative embargo date of December 2020. Of these, 123 are anticipated at an approximate cost of over Rs 85,000 crore.
- In another relevant step, **the MoD has bifurcated the capital procurement budget for 2020-21 between domestic and foreign capital procurement routes**. A separate budget head has been created with an outlay of nearly Rs 52,000 crore for domestic capital procurement in the current financial year.

Significance -

- It offers **a great opportunity to the Indian defence industry** to rise to the occasion to **manufacture the items in the negative list** by using their own design and development capabilities or adopting the technologies designed and developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) to meet the requirements of the Armed Forces in the coming years.
- With latest embargo on import of 101 items, it is estimated that **contracts worth almost Rs 4 lakh crore** will be placed upon the domestic industry within the next five to seven years. Of these, items worth almost **Rs 1,30,000 crore each are anticipated for the Army and the Air Force while items worth almost Rs 1,40,000 crore are anticipated by the Navy** over the same period.
- The embargo on imports is planned **to be progressively implemented between 2020 to 2024**. The aim behind promulgation of the list is to **apprise the Indian defence industry about the anticipated requirements of the Armed Forces** so that they are better prepared to realise the goal of indigenisation.

National Strategy for Financial Education

The National Strategy for Financial Education (NSFE): 2020-2025 document released by the Reserve Bank of India has recommended a '5C' approach for dissemination of financial education in the country.

5C's -

These include emphasis on development of relevant content in **curriculum** in schools, colleges and training establishments, developing **capacity** among intermediaries involved in providing financial services, leveraging the positive effect of **community-led** model for financial literacy through appropriate **communication** strategy, and, enhancing **collaboration** among various stakeholders.

What is NSFE?

NSFE for the period 2020-2025, the second one after the 2013-18 NSFE, has been **prepared by the National Centre for Financial Education (NCFE)** in consultation with all the Financial Sector Regulators (RBI, SEBI, IRDAI and PFRDA), DFS and other Ministries of Govt. of India and other stakeholders (DFIs, SROs, IBA, NPCI) under the aegis of the **Technical Group on Financial Inclusion and Financial Literacy** under the Chairmanship of Deputy Governor, RBI.

Objective of NSFE -

- The NSFE: 2020-2025 **intends to support the vision of the Government of India and the Financial Sector Regulators** by empowering various sections of the population to **develop adequate knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour** which are needed to manage their money better and to plan for the future. The strategy recommends **adoption of a multi-stakeholder approach** to achieve financial well-being of Indians.
- To achieve the vision of creating a financially aware and empowered India, **certain strategic objectives have been laid down** including inculcating **financial literacy** concepts among various sections of the population through financial education to make it an important life skill, encouraging active savings behaviour and developing credit discipline.
- **Improving usage of digital financial services** in a safe and secure manner, and **bringing awareness** about rights, duties and avenues for grievance redressal are also objectives.

Dedicated Freight Corporation of India Limited

It is expected that Western Corridor of the Dedicated Freight Corridor - connecting **Dadri in Uttar Pradesh to Jawaharlal Nehru Port (JNPT) in Mumbai** and **Eastern Corridor starting from Sahnewal near Ludhiana (Punjab) to terminate at Dankuni in West Bengal** shall be completed by December, 2021.

Details -

- Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFC) is **one of the largest rail infrastructure projects** undertaken by the Government of India. The overall cost is pegged at Rs 81,459 crores.
- DFCCIL has been set up as **a special purpose vehicle to undertake planning, development, mobilisation of financial resources, construction, maintenance and operation** of Dedicated Freight Corridors.
- In the first phase the organisation is constructing the Western DFC (1504 Route km) and Eastern DFC (1856 route km) spanning a total length of 3360 route km.

About Dedicated Freight Corridor -

- The Dedicated Freight Corridor, touted as one of the biggest infrastructure projects in the country, is a **3,360 km stretch consisting of the Eastern and Western corridors**.
- The **Eastern corridor**, which is being **funded by the World Bank**, will **run from Ludhiana in Punjab to Dankuni near Kolkata, traversing Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand**.
- The centre, built at Prayagraj, will be the 'nerve-centre' of the over 1,800 km-long eastern (DFR) and will be used as a one-stop shop for controlling and monitoring rail systems, including train operations and the power supply system.

- The project **will eventually be linked to the Western DFC to form four hubs** known as India's **Golden Quadrilateral** including **Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata**.
- The Western Corridor of the Dedicated Freight Corridor - connects **Dadri in Uttar Pradesh to Jawaharlal Nehru Port (JNPT) in Mumbai**

Newly approved freight corridors -

- **East-West Dedicated Freight Corridor**, 2,000 km-long from Kolkata to Mumbai
- **North-South Dedicated Freight Corridor**, 2,173 km long from Delhi to Chennai
- **East Coast Dedicated Freight Corridor**, 1,100 km long from Kharagpur to Vijayawada
- **South-West Dedicated Freight Corridor**, 890 km-long from Chennai to Goa, this DFC goes through Bangalore-Chennai Industrial Corridor promoted by Japan & India and as a part of Bangalore-Mumbai Economic corridor promoted by UK & India.

About Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India -

- The DFCCIL is **a corporation run by the Ministry of Railways (India)** to undertake planning & development, mobilisation of financial resources and construction, maintenance and operation of the Dedicated Freight Corridors.
- DFCC has been registered as **a company under the Companies Act 1956** in the year 2006.

SECURITY

INS Viraat

Decommissioned aircraft carrier Viraat, which has been lying at the Naval dockyard in Mumbai will be scrapped at Alang in Gujarat soon.

About INS Viraat -

- INS Viraat, a **Centaur class aircraft carrier** weighing 27,800 tonnes, **served in the British Navy as HMS Hermes** for 25 years from November 1959 to April 1984.
- It was **commissioned into the Indian Navy in May 1987** after refurbishment and had operated Harrier fighter jets.
- It was **decommissioned from in March 2017**, and the the Navy had been incurring expenditure since then on its upkeep, such as the provision of electricity and water, and repairs. It was also taking up space in the crowded Naval dockyard.
- This is the second aircraft carrier to be broken in India in the past six years. In 2014, **INS Vikrant**, which played a role in the historic 1971 war with Pakistan was broken down in Mumbai.