

**COVID- 19 NEWS****Cobas 6800**

Union Health Minister dedicated the COBAS 6800 testing machine to the nation.

**About:**

- COBAS 6800 is for performing real time PCR testing COVID-19. COBAS 6800 can also detect other pathogens like Viral Hepatitis B & C, HIV, MTb (both rifampicin and isoniazide resistance), Papilloma, CMV, Chlamydia, Neisseria etc.
- COBAS 6800 will provide quality, high-volume testing with a high throughput of test around 1200 samples in 24 hours. It will largely increase the testing capacity with reduction in pendency.
- This is the first such testing machine that has been procured by the Government for testing of COVID-19 cases and is installed at the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Delhi. As the machine requires a minimum BSL2+ containment level for testing, it cannot be placed at just any facility.

**GEOGRAPHY- PHYSICAL AND ECONOMIC****West Bengal Major Irrigation And Flood Management Project**

The Government of India, the Government of West Bengal and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank(AIIB) signed a loan agreement for a US\$145 million project to improve irrigation services and flood management in the Damodar Valley Command Area (DVCA) in West Bengal.

**About:**

- The Project will benefit about 2.7 million farmers from five districts of West Bengal with better irrigation services and improved protection against annual flooding to mitigate the impact of climate change.
- The total value of the project is \$413.8 million, co-financed between the AIIB (\$145 million), IBRD (\$145 million) and the Government of West Bengal (\$123.8 million). The \$145 million loan from the AIIB has a 6-year grace period, and a maturity of 24 years.

**Damodar River**

- Damodar River is a river flowing across the Indian states of Jharkhand and West Bengal.
- It was known as the Sorrow of Bengal because of its ravaging floods in the plains of West Bengal.
- It has a number of tributaries and sub-tributaries, such as Barakar, Konar, Bokaro, Haharo, Jamunia, Ghari, Guaia, Khadia and Bhera.

**Diamer-Bhasha Dam**

The Ministry of External Affairs of India reminded China about India's claims over Gilgit-Baltistan where China has teamed up with Pakistan to build the Diamer-Bhasha dam.

**About:**

- Diamer-Bhasha Dam is a concretion-filled gravity dam, in the preliminary stages of construction, on the River Indus between Kohistan district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Diamer district in Gilgit Baltistan. The dam site is situated near a place called "Bhasha", hence the name.
- Its foundation stone was laid by the then Prime Minister of Pakistan on 1998.

**Recent development:**

- The assertion by India is important as it was made a day after Power China, one of the biggest Chinese power companies, received a contract to build the Diamer-Bhasha

dam which once completed will allow Pakistan to use the waters of the Indus for irrigation.

- Islamabad claims that the dam will help reduce downstream flood by the Indus.

### **Anakkampoyil-Kalladi-Meppadi Road Tunnel**

The government has cleared the construction of a ₹658 crore two-lane tunnel road in the Anakkampoyil-Kalladi-Meppadi corridor that would run parallel to the landslip-prone Thamarassery pass that links Kozhikode to Wayanad.

#### **About:**

- The proposed tunnel road would be shorter only to the two tunnels in Jammu & Kashmir. The Chenani-Nashri tunnel road on National Highway 44 is 9.2 km long, while the Banihal-Qazigund tunnel in the Pir Panjal range is 8.5 km long.
- Kerala's longest road tunnel is at Kuthiran between Thrissur and Palakkad at 962 metres.
- The Konkan Railway Corporation will execute the project on a turnkey basis.

## **GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.**

### **Goal (Going Online As Leaders)**

Union Minister for Tribal Affairs launched the “GOAL (Going Online As Leaders)” programme of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) in partnership with Facebook.

#### **About:**

- GOAL (Going Online As Leaders) is a Joint initiative of Facebook India with Ministry of Tribal affairs to provide mentorship to tribal youth through digital mode.
- Target: Under this, 5,000 young tribal entrepreneurs, professionals, artisans and artists (to be called as ‘Mentees’) will be trained by experts (to be called as ‘Mentors’) from different disciplines on digital skills under digital entrepreneurship program.
- Significance: It will develop Tribal Entrepreneurship and connect Tribal Youth to Domestic and International Markets through Digital Platforms.
- Deadline: Aspiring candidates are invited to apply at online portal “goal.tribal.gov.in.” Application will be open from May 4, 2020 till midnight of July 3, 2020. Leaders from the industry and academia are invited to register as mentors on “goal.tribal.gov.in”
- Background: The Facebook had on its own run the project on pilot basis from February 2019 to October 2019 in 5 states with 100 mentees and 25 mentors; which received enthusiastic response. Based on its success, Facebook approached MoTA for a joint initiative.

### **Samarth**

NIT Kurukshetra has implemented Enterprises Resource Planning (ERP), SAMARTH to enhance productivity through better information management and automating the process in the institute.

#### **About:**

- SAMARTH, an e-Governance platform, is an Open Standard Open Source Architecture Automation Engine for Universities and Higher Educational Institutions. It caters to faculty, students and staff at a University/Higher Educational Institutions.
- It has been developed under National Mission of Education in Information and Communication Technology Scheme (NMEICT) of Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD).

- This initiative will enhance the productivity through better information management in the institutes by seamless access to information, and its utilization for various purposes.

### **Interest Subvention On Working Capital Loans For Dairy Sector**

Union Government has introduced a new scheme of Interest Subvention on Working Capital Loans for Dairy sector for supporting Dairy Cooperatives and Farmer Producer Organizations engaged in dairy activities for implementation during 2020-21.

#### **About:**

- Interest subvention will be given to Cooperatives and Farmer owned milk producer companies on working capital loan taken from banks and financial institutions between 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021 for conversion of milk into conserved commodities and other milk products.
- The scheme has made provisions for providing interest subvention of 2% per annum, with an additional incentive of 2% per annum interest subvention to be given in case of prompt and timely repayment/interest servicing.
- The modified scheme envisages a budgetary provision of 100 crore rupees earmarked for the component Interest Subvention on Working Capital Loans for Dairy sector during 2020-21.
- The scheme will be implemented by this Department of Animal Husbandry through National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), Anand.
- Benefits: The scheme will help in providing stable market access to milk producers. This will help to ease out the working capital crisis for handling surplus milk and enable timely payment to the farmers.

## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

### **Measures Under Aatmanirbhar Abhiyan**

Union Finance Minister announced short-term and long-term measures under Aatmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India Movement) for supporting the poor, including migrants, farmers, tiny businesses and street vendors.

#### **Measures announced:**

- Free food grains will be supplied to all Migrant labourers for 2 months i.e. May and June, 2020.
- Technology system to be used enable Migrants to access PDS (Ration) from any Fair Price Shops in India so as to achieve 100% National portability by March, 2021 under One Nation one Ration Card scheme.
- Central Government will launch a scheme for migrant workers and urban poor to provide ease of living at affordable rent.
- Government of India will provide Interest subvention of 2% for prompt payees for a period of 12 months to MUDRA Shishu loanes, who have loans below Rs 50,000. The current portfolio of MUDRA Shishu loans is around Rs 1.62 Lakh crore.
- A special scheme will be launched within a month to facilitate easy access to credit to Street vendors. 50 lakh street vendors will be benefitted under this scheme and credit of Rs. 5,000 crore would flow to them.
- Rs 70,000 crore boost is given to housing sector and middle income group (MIG) through extension of Credit Linked Subsidy Scheme for MIG under PMAY(Urban) up to March 2021.
- 6,000 crore of funds under Compensatory Afforestation Management & Planning Authority (CAMPA) will be used for Afforestation and Plantation works, including in urban areas. This will create job opportunities.

- NABARD will extend additional re-finance support of Rs 30,000 crore for meeting crop loan requirement of Rural Cooperative Banks and RRBs. This refinance will be front-loaded and available on tap.
- A special drive to be conducted to provide concessional credit to PM-KISAN beneficiaries through Kisan Credit Cards. Fisherman and Animal Husbandry Farmers will also be included. This will inject additional liquidity of Rs 2 lakh crore in the farm sector.

## **DEFENCE AND SECURITY**

### **ICGS Sachet**

Defence minister commissioned Indian Coast Guard Ship (ICGS) 'Sachet' in Goa.

About:

- The ICGS Sachet, the first in the series of five offshore patrol vessels (OPVs) has been designed & built indigenously by Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL).
- The 105 metre long ship 'Sachet' meaning alert displaces approximately 2,350 tons and is propelled by two 9,100 KW diesel engines designed to attain a maximum speed of 26 knots, with an endurance of 6,000 nautical miles.
- The ship is designed to carry a twin-engine helicopter and four high speed boats and one inflatable boat for swift boarding and search & rescue operations. The ship is also capable of carrying limited pollution response equipment to undertake oil spill pollution response at sea.

### **Interceptor Boats (IBs) C-450 and C-451**

- Defence minister also commissioned two interceptor boats (IBs) C-450 and C-451 in Goa.
- The IBs C-450 and C-451 are indigenously designed & built by Larsen & Toubro Shipyard Hazira.
- The two 30 metre long boats are capable of achieving speeds in excess of 45 knots and designed for high speed interception, close coast patrol and low intensity maritime operations.

### **Defence Testing Infrastructure Scheme (DTIS)**

To give a boost to domestic defence and aerospace manufacturing, Defence minister of India has approved the launch of Defence Testing Infrastructure Scheme (DTIS) with an outlay of Rs 400 crore for creating state of the art testing infrastructure for this sector.

About:

- It envisages to setup six to eight new test facilities in partnership with private industry. This will facilitate indigenous defence production, consequently reduce imports of military equipment and help make the country self-reliant.
- The projects under the Scheme will be provided with up to 75% government funding in the form of 'Grant-in-Aid'.
- The remaining 25% of the project cost will have to be borne by the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) whose constituents will be Indian private entities and State Governments. The SPVs under the Scheme will be registered under Companies Act 2013 and shall also operate and maintain all assets under the Scheme, in a self-sustainable manner by collecting user charges.
- While majority of test facilities are expected to come up in the two Defence Industrial Corridors (DICs), the Scheme is not limited to setting up Test Facilities in the DICs only.

### **Intellectual Property Facilitation Cell (IPFC)**

In a major step towards rapid mass production of the Medical Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) developed by the Indian Navy, a patent has been successfully filed by the Intellectual Property Facilitation Cell (IPFC) of Ministry of Defence, in association with National Research Development Corporation (NRDC), of Ministry of Science & Technology.

About:

- The low cost PPE has been developed by a Doctor of Indian Navy, posted at the recently created Innovation Cell at Institute of Naval Medicine (INM), Mumbai.
- The PPE developed by the Navy is made of a special fabric which affords high level of protection along with high 'breathability' as against other PPEs.
- The team of Innovators from Navy is working in close coordination with IPFC which was set up under Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti (which was launched in 2018).

### **PRELIMS SPECIFIC FACTS- INDICES, DAYS, EVENTS, AWARDS ETC**

#### **International Day Of Living Together In Peace**

The International Day of Living Together in Peace is being observed on 16 May.

About:

- The International Day of Living Together in Peace was officially recognised by the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 2017 and was celebrated for the first time on 16 May, 2018.
- The Day aims to uphold the desire to live and act together, united in differences and diversity, in order to build a sustainable world of peace, solidarity and harmony. The Day invites countries to further promote reconciliation to help to ensure peace and sustainable development.

Background:

- In 1997, the General-Assembly proclaimed the year 2000 as the "International Year for a Culture of Peace".
- In 1998, it proclaimed the period 2001-2010 as the "International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for Children of the World."

#### **International Day of Light 2020**

UNESCO is celebrating the International Day of Light on 16 May.

About:

- The International Day of Light is celebrated on 16 May each year, the anniversary of the first successful operation of the laser in 1960 by physicist and engineer, Theodore Maiman.
- This day celebrates the role light plays in science, culture and art, education, and sustainable development, and in fields as diverse as medicine, communications, and energy.
- The International Day of Light is administered from the International Basic Science Programme (IBSP) of UNESCO.

### **DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE**

**Qns. Examine the federal issues accentuated during the Pandemic. How the pandemic can improve cooperative federalism?**

**Ans:**

India's success in defeating Covid-19 actively rests upon Centre-State collaboration. However, some recent developments have revealed fissures in Centre-State cooperation. As it is the States which act as first responders to the pandemic, supplying them with adequate funds and autonomy becomes a prerequisite in effectively tackling the crisis. This requires



the Centre to view the States as equals, and strengthen their capabilities, instead of increasing their dependence upon itself. In this context, Covid-19 poses a litmus test for the federal structure of India, whose nature is already a matter of debate amongst constitutional experts.

- Due to the Covid-19 induced lockdown, the sources of states' revenue have collapsed.
  - Majority of states' revenue comes from liquor sales, stamp duty from property transactions and the sales tax on petroleum products.
  - However, their expenditure such as on interest payments, social sector schemes and staff salaries remain unchanged.
  - Moreover, states are now called upon to spend more on beefing up their health infrastructure and on Covid-19 measures, including testing, treatment and quarantining.
- States' GST collections have also been severely affected with their dues still not disbursed by the Centre.
- According to the FRBM Act, states cannot borrow from the market over a certain limit.
- Further, the PM-CARES relief fund has been put under the ambit of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) contributions. However, contributions to the 'Chief Minister's Relief Fund' or 'State Relief Fund for Covid-19' do not qualify as admissible CSR expenditure.
  - This directly disincentivises donations to any Chief Minister's Relief Fund; diverts crores in potential State revenues to PM-CARES; and makes the States largely dependent upon the Centre.
- Furthermore, the suspension of MPLADS and diversion of the funds to the Consolidated Fund of India may not be in concurrence of cooperative federalism, as it discourages locally tailored solutions by the MPs.
- In this scenario, states in India have fully become dependent on the Union government for finances.

#### Managing Covid-19 Disaster

- For instance, the zone classifications into 'red', 'orange' and 'green' have evoked sharp criticisms from several States.
- The States have demanded more autonomy in making such classifications.
- This is despite the fact that state consultation is a legislative mandate cast upon the centre under the Disaster Management Act of 2005 (under which binding COVID-19 guidelines are being issued by the Centre to the States).

#### Migrant Crisis

- The influx of migrant workers into their home states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, which already face severe financial and medical deficits, would worsen matters for the states.
- The sustenance of agricultural, industrial and construction activities would be difficult in the absence of a majority of the workforce in the backdrop of the lifting of restrictions, given these workers are going back to their hometowns.
- In this case, both Centre and states failed to devise a coherent and holistic plan of action to avert the migrant crisis.

#### Steps To be Taken

##### Short-Term Measures

- The limit imposed by the FRBM Act must be relaxed so that states who are falling short of funds can borrow money to combat the pandemic and revive the economy.
- These borrowing can be backed by sovereign guarantee by the Union Government.
- The Union government can provide money to states so that they can take necessary action to deal with the crisis at state level.
- The Union government should direct FCI to move the grains from the godowns to states.
- A successful approach to tackle the crisis would still need Centre's intervention and guidance in a facilitative manner, where the Centre would communicate extensively the best practices across states, address the financial needs effectively, and leverage national expertise for scalable solutions.

#### Long-Term Measures

- The recent meeting by Indian Prime Minister with the chief ministers of states is a testimony of cooperative federalism. In this context, the government should consider making the Inter-State Council a permanent body.
- Management of disasters and emergencies (both natural and manmade) should be included in the List III (Concurrent List) of the Seventh Schedule.
- An Inter-State Trade and Commerce Commission should be established, which will help realise the idea of 'One India One Market'.
- Arbitrary control of union over states through the institution of the governor and Article 356, must be checked.

#### Conclusion

- The constituent assembly in India studied various democratic federal models in the world and formulated a system suited uniquely to India's needs. Further, it is argued that a "strong centre" does not necessarily presuppose weak states.
- As a result, India adopted 'cooperative federalism' — essentially defined by administrative cooperation between the centre & states and among states. Therefore, both union and states should work together to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic and strengthen the spirit of cooperative federalism.