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COVID-19 Economic Relief Package

Why in News

The Union Finance Minister has announced Rs **1.70 lakh crore relief package** under the **newly framed Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana** for the poor to help them fight the battle against **CoronaVirus (COVID-19).**

- As part of the **lockdown** to stem the spread of the deadly virus, the government has stopped public transport, airlines and construction work, bringing to a halt most economic activities and **leaving millions of workers in the informal economy without a livelihood.**
- The central government's package **comes a week after Kerala first announced a Rs 20,000-crore support** for its people. Many states including Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Telangana and Rajasthan followed suit.

Key Components

Booster dose

Main features of the economic relief package announced by the Finance Minister on Thursday

Insurance cover of ₹50 lakh per person for doctors and medical workers fighting COVID-19

80 crore poor people will receive 5 kg wheat or rice and 1 kg of preferred pulses for free every month for the next three months. Free grains can be availed of in two installments

- Increase in MGNREGA wage to ₹202 a day from ₹182 for **13.62 crore** families

- **20.4 crore** Jan Dhan women account holders to get ₹**500** per month for next three months

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announcing the measures in New Delhi on Thursday. ▪ PTI

Ex-gratia of ₹**1,000** to 3 crore senior citizens, disabled and widows among the poor

Government to front-load ₹**2,000** to **8.7 crore** farmers in the first week of April under the existing PM Kisan Yojana

8.3 crore below the poverty line families to receive free cylinders for the next three months

Wage-earners below ₹15,000 per month in businesses having less than 100 workers to receive **24%** of their monthly wages into their **PF accounts** for the next three months

The Centre has directed the State governments to use the Construction Workers Welfare Fund to give relief to **3.5 crore** registered workers

- **Insurance Scheme for Health Workers**
  - The Centre would provide **Rs. 50 lakh medical insurance cover** for the next **three months** for about 22 lakh health workers in government hospitals fighting the spread of the virus at personal risk.
  - The health workers include **ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers**, medical sanitary workers in government hospitals, paramedics, nurses and doctors.
- **Food Security for the Next Three Months (PM Gareeb Kalyan Ann Yojana)**
  - Each person who is covered under the **National Food Security Act** would get an additional five kg wheat or rice for free, in addition to the 5 kg of subsidised foodgrain already provided through the Public Distribution System (PDS).
  - One kg of pulse a household would also be provided for free, according to regional preferences. This is expected to benefit about 80 crore people.

- **Cash Transfers and Other Benefits over Next Three Months**
  - About 3 crore poor pensioners above 60 years, widows and disabled people would be given ₹1000 in two instalments.
  - The 20 crore women holding **Jan Dhan Yojana** accounts would get ₹500 a month.
  - The 8.3 crore poor households, which received cooking gas connections under the **Ujjwala scheme**, would get free gas cylinders.
- **For Workers**
  - Wages are being hiked under the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act** scheme, from **₹182 to ₹202 a day.**
  - The Centre is directing the States to use the ₹31,000 crore held by **Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Boards** to provide support to the 3.5 crore registered workers.
  - The States can also use the money available under **District Mineral Funds** for medical screening, testing and treatment.
- **For Land-owning Farmers**
    The first instalment of ₹2000 due to them under the **PM-KISAN** income support scheme will be paid promptly in April, the first month of the financial year.
- **For Companies & SHGs**
  - For small companies with **100 employees or less,** of whom 90% earn less than ₹15,000 a month, the **Centre will bear the cost of both employer and employee contribution (a total of 24%) to the Employees Provident Fund (EPF)** for the next three months. This will benefit 80 lakh employees, and incentivise 4 lakh establishments.
  - Collateral free loans provided for women **self-help groups** under the **National Rural Livelihood Mission** are being doubled to ₹20 lakh, potentially benefiting seven crore households.

Immediate Impact of the Announcement on the Market

- Sentiments in the **market improved** leading to gains in **BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty**. Earlier, Sensex and Nifty have crashed badly during the pandemic.
- The **rupee appreciated 57 paise** to 75.37 against the US Dollar in intraday trade. Rupee has weakened against the US Dollar during the pandemic.
- The other news that is positive for India's fiscal health is the fall in crude oil prices.

Analysis of the Package

- **Positive Points**
  - **It covers various sections of the vulnerable,** ranging from farmers to healthcare workers.
  - It is appreciable on the part of the government that it has **made the use of existing schemes** like PM Kisan in the package. The efforts appear to keep the **funding within the budget** as much as possible and **retain control over the deficit.**
  - Application of PM Gareeb Kalyan Yojana will **help in the disposal of excess stocks with the Food Corporation of India (FCI).**
    - The Food Corporation of India (FCI) and the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India are now holding some 77.6 mt of cereals (3.5 times more than required) and 2.2 mt of pulses respectively.
  - The offer to pay both employer and employee contributions to the Provident Fund for very small business enterprises will offer **relief to those businesses that have been forced to shut down operations.**
- **Negative Points**
  - The **effectiveness of PM Gareeb Kalyan will be more in states with well-functioning PDS.** That is, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh and Odisha — but not Uttar Pradesh or Bihar.
  - When daily wage earners are supposed to remain at their homes (lockdown), **the only way to compensate them under MNREGA is through unemployment allowance.**
  - **Farmers** are facing both lower crop prices due to a coronavirus-induced market collapse, and higher harvesting costs on account of labour shortages from the lockdown, **no new benefit** has been announced for them in the package.
  - Another challenge for **the government will be to locate and deliver support to the migrant workers,** many of whom are trekking hundreds of kilometres to their homes or lining up at shelters for a meal.
  - **Corporate sector and middle class people not being beneficiaries.**

Way Forward

- Globally, many countries had announced stimulus packages involving 10-12% fiscal expansions. In comparison, this package is only **about 0.75% of India's GDP,** which is marginal.
- The **Government should now turn its focus towards businesses** that are running out of cash and may soon default on even salaries and statutory commitments if relief is not given.
- **Part II of the economic relief package** should not be delayed beyond the next couple of days.

Digital Initiatives to Fight Coronavirus

Why in News

Recently, the Government has developed a platform which will host webinars by **All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (AIIMS)** doctors for healthcare workers across the country.

It has also developed an app that will trace the paths of **COVID-19** positive patients, serving as a warning to possible contacts.

Key Points

- **Chat Boxes on Facebook and WhatsApp** have been set up by the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** for providing information about COVID-19.
- **A portal to map the requirements of hospitals,** and cross-referencing them with those who have offered to help with equipment is also being set up by the government.
- **A webinar platform** has been developed in tandem with the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.**
  - The webinars are for the **frontline health workers** (nurses, paramedics, ASHA-Accredited Social Health Activist workers, anganwadi workers), who are more prone to COVID-19.
  - The state governments would also be involved so as to make the content available in **regional languages.**
- The government has also worked on a **contact path tracing app,** tentatively called **'Corona Kavach'.**
  - The app would store location data and would enter the credentials of the person if he/she tests positive. This information would be sent to the cloud.
  - A signal would come to the app which would convert it from green to red.
  - The server would then find out people who were in close proximity with the infected person in the last 14 days.
  - Their apps would turn yellow and they would get an alert that they should quarantine themselves.

All India Institutes of Medical Sciences

- The AIIMS was **created in 1956,** as an **autonomous institution** of national importance through an Act of Parliament.

- **Objectives**
  - To develop a **pattern of teaching in undergraduate and postgraduate medical education in all its branches** so as to demonstrate high standard of medical education to all medical colleges and other allied institutions in India.
  - To bring together in one place educational facilities of the highest order for the **training of the personnel** in all important branches of the health activity.
  - To attain **self sufficiency** in postgraduate in medical education.
- Recently, the central government has decided to set up 22 new establishments of AIIMS. These AIIMS would be set up under the **Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana.**

Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana

- PMSSY is a **Central Sector Scheme.**
- The primary objective of PMSSY is to correct the **regional imbalances in availability of affordable/reliable tertiary level healthcare** in the country in general, and, to augment facilities for quality medical education in under-served or backward States, in particular.
- In addition to **setting up of AIIMS,** PMSSY also envisages **up-gradation of several existing Government Medical Colleges/Institutions** in different states in the country

Source: IE

Antibody Kits for COVID-19

Why in News

Recently, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has invited manufacturers to supply **5 lakh antibody kits** for diagnosis of COVID-19 infection.

The antibody test will help in screening suspected patients.

Key Points

- **The Antibody Test**
  - The antibody test for **COVID-19** will act as a **screening process** that will give quick results in a few hours.
  - The antibody test detects the body's response to the virus. It gives an indication that a person has been exposed to the virus.
  - If the test is positive, the swab is collected and an Ribonucleic Acid (RNA) test is done using the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) kit. Therefore, this is a **two-stage process.**
  - However, the antibody test **does not not definitely indicate that a person is infected with COVID-19 infection.** It is **only for screening.**
- Currently, India is **only conducting the conventional RT-PCR test (Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction).**
- **Antibody Kits vs RT-PCR Test**
  - RT-PCR test detects the **virus genetic material, which is the RNA.**
  - The antibody test detects the body's response to the virus.
  - RT-PCR provides direct evidence whereas antibody kits provide the indirect evidence.
- **Need for Antibody Kits**
  - **Shortage of the PCR kits** and thus the test is complicated, expensive and time-consuming.
    > The antibody test will be where a large number of people are being quarantined and where everybody cannot undergo an RNA test.
  - **Results of Testing in South Korea**
    - The antibody test was done in South Korea, one of the few countries which has been able to flatten the pandemic curve.
    - In South Korea, people with a history of travel and contact are screened using the antibody kit.
    - Then, a large number of suspected patients were being quarantined in the country through contact tracing of just a single patient.

Ribonucleic Acid

- RNA is an important **biological macromolecule** that is present in all biological cells.
- It is principally involved in the **synthesis of proteins, carrying the messenger instructions** from Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), which itself contains the genetic instructions required for the development and maintenance of life.
- In some **viruses, RNA, rather than DNA, carries genetic information.**

Contract Tracing

Contact tracing is the process of identifying, assessing, and managing people who have been exposed to a disease to prevent transmission.

Indian Council of Medical Research

- Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is the **apex body in India for the formulation, coordination and promotion of biomedical research.**
- Its mandate is to **conduct, coordinate and implement medical research** for the benefit of the Society; translating medical innovations into products/processes and introducing them into the public health system.
- It is funded by the Government of India through the **Department of Health Research, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.**

Source: IE

DRDO Develops Ventilators

Why in News

Recently, the **Defence Research and Development Organisation** (DRDO) has developed a ventilator and plans to produce 5,000 of them per month to treat **COVID-19** patients.

Key Points

- DRDO had developed a ventilator along with the **Society for Biomedical Technology** (SBMT) and now the technology has been transferred to an industry in Mysuru.
    - The industry is producing the secondary version of a ventilator initially developed by DRDO.
    - Currently, it has a capacity to manufacture 5,000 ventilators per month and this could be scaled up to 10,000 per month.
- **Other contributions by DRDO:**
    - DRDO laboratories have **manufactured 20,000 litres of sanitiser** and supplied to various organisations like Delhi police.
    - It has **developed N-99 and 3-layered masks** and **supplied** 10,000 masks to Delhi police personnel.
    - It is **tying up with some private companies** to make **personal protection equipment** such as body suits and also ventilators.
    - It is working on **providing ready-to-eat meals** for the government and health workers through the Defence Food Research Laboratory, Mysore which already supplies them to the armed forces.
    - The **Ordnance Factory Board** (OFB) has also increased the production of sanitisers, masks and bodysuits.

Defence Research and Development Organisation

- It works under the **administrative control** of the **Ministry of Defence.**
- It's **objective** is to establish a world class science and technology base for India and provide Indian Defence Services decisive edge by equipping them with internationally competitive systems and solutions.
- It was **established in 1958** after **combining** Technical Development Establishment (TDEs) of the Indian Army and the Directorate of Technical Development & Production (DTDP) with the Defence Science Organisation (DSO).
- **Mission:**
    - Design, develop and lead to production state-of-the-art sensors, weapon systems, platforms and allied equipment for Indian Defence Services.
    - Provide technological solutions to the services to optimise combat effectiveness and to promote well-being of the troops.
    - Develop infrastructure and committed quality manpower and build strong indigenous technology base.

Society for Biomedical Technology

- It is an **inter-ministerial initiative of the Government of India** established to **promote healthcare** by providing indigenous solutions in the field of medical equipment and devices.
- It was established under the **Department of Defence Research and Development** (DRDO) in collaboration with the Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.

Ordnance Factory Board

- The OFB which includes 41 Ordnance Factories is headquartered at **Kolkata.**
- Indian Ordnance Factories is the **oldest and largest industrial setup** which functions under the **Department of Defence Production of the Ministry of Defence.**
- The ordnance factories form an **integrated base for indigenous production of defence hardware and equipment**, with the **primary objective of self reliance** in equipping the armed forces with state of the art battlefield equipment.

Source: TH

Virtual G20 Leaders' Summit

Why in News

Recently, an **extraordinary Virtual <u>G20</u> Leaders' Summit** has been convened to discuss the challenges posed by the outbreak of the **<u>COVID-19 pandemic</u>** and to forge a global coordinated response.

The **video-conference of leaders** of the world's top twenty economies was **hosted by Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.**

Key Points

- **Major Takeaways:**
  - The G20 countries have voluntarily committed to inject **more than $5 trillion** into the global economy and contribute to the **World Health Organisation** (WHO) led **COVID-19 solidarity response fund.**
  - A **joint statement** has been issued which calls for a transparent, robust, coordinated, large-scale and science-based global response in the spirit of solidarity to come over the interconnectedness and vulnerabilities of the countries highlighted by the pandemic.
  - The member countries have **agreed to share** timely and transparent information, exchange epidemiological and clinical data, share materials necessary for research and development and strengthen health systems globally by supporting the full implementation of the WHO International Health Regulations.
  - The leaders agreed to have more interactions before the **Riyadh Summit** which will take place in **November 2020.**
- **Criticisms:**
  - **WHO was criticised** for failing to alert the world quickly enough of the potential threat from the pandemic, even after it had been informed of its spread in Wuhan by China in December 2019.
  - The **US has criticised China** for not having been transparent and sharing information about the virus.
- **Difference of opinion on lockdown:**
  - There have been differences among G-20 countries on lockdowns in order to control the pandemic spread through social distancing.
  - The **US wants to lift the lockdown** as it is impacting the economy.
  - The **President of Brazil** has called state-imposed lockdowns a **crime.**
  - **India** has imposed a **stringent 21-day lockdown** across the country.
- **Suggestions:**
  - In the effort to control the pandemic, most countries have acted individually but the **need for a more coordinated effort** was stressed upon by the members.
  - India emphasised on the **need to redefine conversations on globalisation** to **include social and humanitarian issues** like terrorism, climate change and pandemics along with financial and economic discussions.

G20

- It is an **informal group of 19 countries** and the **European Union (EU),** with representatives of the **International Monetary Fund** and the **World Bank.**
- The membership comprises a mix of the world's largest advanced and emerging economies, representing about two-thirds of the world's population, 85% of global gross domestic product, 80% of global investment and over 75% of global trade.
- The **work of G20 is divided into two tracks:**
  - The **Finance track** comprises all meetings with G20 finance ministers and central bank governors and their deputies. Meeting several times throughout the year they focus on monetary and fiscal issues, financial regulations, etc.
  - The **Sherpa track** focuses on broader issues such as political engagement, anti-corruption, development, energy, etc.
- **G20 Members**
  - The members of the G20 are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union.
  - **Spain** as a **permanent, non-member invitee,** also attends leader summits.
- **Structure and Functioning of G20**
  - The G20 **Presidency rotates annually** according to a system that ensures a regional balance over time.
    - For the selection of presidency, the 19 countries are divided into 5 groups, each having no more than 4 countries. The presidency rotates between each group.
    - Every year the G20 selects a country from another group to be president.
    - **India is in Group 2** which also has **Russia, South Africa and Turkey.**
  - The G20 **does not have a permanent secretariat or Headquarters..**
- **Issues Addressed by G20:**
    The G20 focuses on a broad agenda of issues of global importance, although, issues pertaining to the global economy dominate the agenda, additional items have become more important in recent years, like:
    - Financial markets
    - Fight against corruption
    - Advancement of women in job market
    - 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development
    - Climate Change
    - Global Health
    - Anti-terrorism
    - Inclusive entrepreneurship

Source: TH

Eklavya Model Residential and Day Boarding Schools

Why in News

In view of prevailing sensitive health conditions affecting community health due to **Covid-19**, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has asked State Governments for rescheduling of holidays in **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)** and **Eklavya Model Day Boarding Schools (EMDBS).**

Eklavya Model Residential Schools

- **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)** started in the year 1997-98 to impart quality education to ST children in remote areas.
- The schools focus not only on academic education but on the all-round development of the students.
- The objective of EMRS is **to provide quality middle and high level education** to Scheduled Tribe (ST) students in remote areas, not only to enable them to avail of reservation in high and professional educational courses and as jobs in government and public and private sectors but also to have access to the best opportunities in education at par with the non ST population.
- Each school has a capacity of **480 students, catering to students from Class VI to XII.**
- These are being set up by grants provided **under Article 275(1) of the Constitution.**
- Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRSs) are funded by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.
- In order to give further impetus to EMRS, it has been decided that by the **year 2022, every block** with **more than 50% ST population** and **at least 20,000 tribal persons,** will have an EMRS.
- Eklavya schools are on par with Navodaya Vidyalaya and have special facilities for preserving local art and culture besides providing training in sports and skill development.

Eklavya Model Day Boarding Schools (EMDBS)

Wherever **density of ST population is higher** in identified Sub-Districts (90% or more), it is proposed to set up Eklavya Model Day Boarding School (EMDBS) on an experimental basis for providing additional scope for ST Students seeking to avail school education without residential facility.

Background

- STs, constitute 8.6% of the country's total population and 11.3% of the total rural population.
- Despite the increase in literacy rates among STs from 8.53% in 1961 to 58.96% in 2011, and the fact that the Right to Education Act, 2009 makes it mandatory that all children between the ages of 6 and 14 be provided free and compulsory education, significant disparities exist in enrolment rates, drop-outs, across states, districts and blocks.
- In the case of tribals, **dropout rates are still very high –** 35.6% in Classes I to V; 55% in Classes I to VIII; and 70.9% in Classes I to X in 2010-11, according to the Statistics Of School Education 2010-2011.
- According to a 2014 UNICEF-sponsored South Asia regional study, **economic and socio-cultural factors** are reasons behind the education deprivation for certain groups in India, especially SCs, STs and Muslims.
- The India Human Development Survey shows the incidence of poverty is highest among the STs (49.6%), followed by the SCs (32.3%), and then the Muslims (30.6%).

Laser Surface Micro-Texturing

Why in News

The International Advanced Centre for Powder Metallurgy & New Materials (ARCI) has developed ultrafast laser surface texturing technology, which can improve the fuel efficiency of internal combustion engines.

> The technology helps to **control friction and wear.**

Key Points

- Laser surface micro-texturing offers precise control of the size, shape and density of micro-surface texture features.
- In this technology, a pulsating laser beam **creates micro-dimples or grooves** on the surface of materials in a very controlled manner.
- Such textures can **trap wear debris** when operating under dry sliding conditions and sometimes provide effects like **enhancing oil supply (lubricant reservoir)** which can lower friction coefficients and may enable reduced wear rate.

International Advanced Research Centre for Powder Metallurgy and New Materials (ARCI)

- It was established in the year 1997.
- It is an autonomous research and development centre of the Department of Science and Technology (DST).

- Its main campus is located at Hyderabad with operations in Chennai and Gurgaon.
- ARCI's mandate is-
    - Development of high-performance materials and processes for niche markets
    - Demonstration of technologies at prototype/pilot scale
    - Transfer of technology to Indian industry
- Surface engineering, ceramics, powder metallurgy and laser processing of materials constitute the four major thrust areas at ARCI.

Source- PIB