



News Analysis (09 Apr, 2020)

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SC Orders on Covid-19

Why in News

Recently, the **Supreme Court** of India has passed an order asking people to behave responsibly with the medical teams fighting the **Covid-19** pandemic. The order has also made the testing for **Coronavirus** free in all hospitals.

Key Highlights of Order

Responsible Behaviour Towards Medical Teams

- The order comes in the **backdrop of several petitions** highlighting the need to provide sufficient protective gear to the medical professionals. A few of them also **highlighted the violence against the doctors**.
- The SC has called Covid-19 a '**National Calamity**' and termed doctors and health workers as '**Corona Warriors**'.
- All citizens of the country have been urged to act in a **responsible manner and be helpful** to the government and medical staff who are trying to contain and combat the pandemic.
- **Medical teams will be provided protection** while visiting the screening sites or places where new positive people are found or quarantined.
- The police have been ordered to **take action against people who obstruct and commit any offence against doctors**, medical staff and other medical officials performing their duty.
- The government has been directed to **explore alternatives, including enabling and augmenting domestic production** of protective clothing and gear for medical professionals.
 - This includes alternative modes of production of such clothing (masks, suits, caps, gloves, etc.) and **permitting movement of raw material**.
 - The government may also **restrict export of such materials** to augment inventory and domestic stock.

- It is the responsibility of the Centre and the States to ensure availability of appropriate **Personal Protective Equipments** (PPEs) to doctors, nurses, ward boys and other medical and paramedical professionals.

Free Testing for Covid-19

- The order comes in response to a **petition asking for implementation of free testing** by private labs.
An earlier SC notice also **challenged the legality of the advisory price cap of ₹4,500 in private labs and hospitals** saying that it may not be within the reach of a large population of the country.
- The order states that the tests relating to Covid-19, whether done in **approved government or private laboratories, shall be free of cost.**
- The government has been **asked to issue the necessary directions** immediately.
- These tests must be **carried out only** in the **National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories** (NABL) accredited laboratories or any agencies approved by the **World Health Organisation** (WHO) or the **Indian Council of Medical Research** (ICMR).
- Recently, the government has also decided to **provide free testing and treatment** to the **existing beneficiaries** of the **Ayushman Bharat Scheme or the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana** (PMJAY).

Source:TH

WHO Funding and Advisories

Why in News

The President of the United States has threatened to freeze US funding to the **World Health Organization (WHO)** for not taking necessary steps to combat Covid-19.

Key Points

- The President of the United States has raised allegations that the WHO has **praised China for its transparency** on the virus even though there has been reason to believe that more people died of Covid19 than the country's official tally.
- The United States is currently the **WHO's biggest contributor, making up 14.67% of total funding by providing \$553.1 million.**
- **The World Health Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations** responsible for international public health. It was founded in 1948 and is headquartered at Geneva, Switzerland.

- **There are four kinds of contributions** that make up funding for the WHO.
 - **Assessed contributions:** These are the dues countries pay in order to be a member of the Organization. The amount each Member State must pay is calculated relative to the country's wealth and population.
 - **Specified voluntary contributions:** They come from Member States (in addition to their assessed contribution) or from other partners.
 - **Core voluntary contributions:** They allow less well-funded activities to benefit from a better flow of resources and ease implementation bottlenecks that arise when immediate financing is lacking.
 - **Pandemic Influenza Preparedness (PIP) contributions:** They were started in 2011 to improve and strengthen the sharing of influenza viruses with human pandemic potential, and to increase the access of developing countries to vaccines and other pandemic related supplies.
- In recent years, assessed contributions to the WHO have declined, and now account for less than one-fourth of its funding. These funds are important for the WHO, because they provide a level of predictability and minimise dependence on a narrow donor base.

India and the WHO

- WHO has been working closely with the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and various state governments** on preparedness and response measures for Covid-19, including
 - Surveillance and contact tracing.
 - Laboratory and research protocols.
 - Risk communications.
 - Hospital preparedness.
 - Training on infection prevention
 - Control and cluster containment plan.
- However, on March 26, 2020 addressing the **virtual G-20 summit to deal with Covid-19**, the Prime Minister of India underscored the need to strengthen and reform intergovernmental organisations like WHO.
- The government of India has also been seen sidestepping the periodic advisories from the WHO in key aspects of COVID-19 management.
- It has leaned on the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** and the experience of several state governments — from Kerala and Uttar Pradesh to Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

- **Instances where India varied with WHO advisory**
 - **Travel restrictions to China:**
 - On January 30, 2020, WHO did not recommend travel restrictions to China despite the **WHO's International Health Regulations Emergency Committee** raising a global alert on the need for containment, surveillance, detection, isolation, and even contact tracing.
 - But, India's first advisory on avoiding non-essential travel to China dated January 25, 2020, was already in place.
 - **Indiscriminate Testing:**
 - On March 16, 2020 WHO's key message was "test test test"(indiscriminate testing).
 - But on March 22, ICMR said that there would be **no indiscriminate testing and only isolation.**
 - Hours later, India went into **lockdown**, starting with 75 districts and then, from midnight of March 24, the whole country.
 - The decision was based on a **paper by ICMR that quarantine is a more effective way of containing the virus than even airport screening.**
 - **Treatment :**
 - WHO's clinical care guidelines clearly say that there is **no current evidence to recommend any specific anti-COVID-19 treatment** for patients.
 - India, nevertheless, first included **two of its undertrial antivirals — lopinavir and ritonavir** — in its clinical care guidelines for patients of the novel coronavirus disease.
 - It then revised the management guidelines to replace the antivirals with a combination of **hydroxychloroquine and the antibiotic azithromycin.**
 - It has, however, recently announced its decision to be a part of a **global drug trial** anchored by the WHO.

Source: IE

Talks for Dollar Swap Agreement

Why in News

India is working with the United States to secure a dollar (currency) swap line that would help in providing an additional comfort in an event of any abrupt outflow of funds.

India **already has a currency swap facility with other central banks** like Japan, UAE etc.

Key Points

- As concerns on the economic effects of COVID-19 hit investor sentiment, Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) have been **large sellers of Indian equity and debt markets** in March and April so far. This has led to outflow of funds from the country.
- To stabilise the rupee which recently fell below the 76 level against the dollar, India liquidated (converted into cash) its forex assets.

Forex reserves/assets (also called foreign exchange assets) are **assets held on reserve by a central bank in foreign currencies**. These may **include foreign currencies**, bonds, treasury bills and other government securities. These are held **to ensure that a central bank has enough funds if its national currency weakens/ devalues rapidly**.

- India's foreign currency assets had declined by around \$7.50 billion in two weeks to \$ 439.66 billion as on March 27.
According to Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data, 63.7 per cent of India's foreign currency assets — or \$256.17 billion — is invested in overseas securities, mainly in the US treasury.
- While India is expected to comfortably tide over any challenge posed by continued outflows of funds from the markets, given the adequacy of foreign exchange reserves, a swap line with the US Fed provides an additional comfort to the forex markets.

Dollar Swap

- Dollar swap is a kind of currency swap. The word swap means exchange.
- A currency swap between the two countries is an **agreement to exchange currencies with predetermined terms and conditions**.
- In a dollar swap arrangement, the US Federal Reserve will provide dollars to a foreign central bank. At the same time, the foreign central bank provides the equivalent amount of funds in its currency to the Fed, based on the market exchange rate at the time of the transaction.
- The parties agree to swap back these quantities of their two currencies at a specified date in the future, which is the next day or as far ahead as three months, using the same exchange rate as in the first transaction.
- These swap operations carry no exchange rate or other market risks as transaction terms are set in advance.
- **Central banks** and **Governments** engage in currency swaps with foreign counterparts **to meet short term foreign exchange liquidity requirements** or to ensure adequate foreign currency **to avoid Balance of Payments (BOP) crisis** till longer arrangements can be made.

Source: IE

Wildlife Panel Holds Virtual Conference

Why in News

Recently, the Standing Committee of the **National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)** had its first ever video-conferencing meet. In the meet the **NBWL cleared infrastructure projects in 11 States.**

Key Points

- According to experts associated with the conference **most of the projects were given “in-principal approval”.**
 - In a virtual conference, it is difficult to scrutinise maps that show the location of the proposed projects.
 - It is because only the formal minutes of the meeting would reveal the conditions which projects would have to adhere to.
- Projects that encroach into forests or protected reserves **require NBWL approval** as part of the government’s **environmental clearance process.**

Environment Clearance (EC) Process

- An **Environment Impact Assessment (EIA)** report is prepared to get Environment Clearance (EC) for a project.
- A process of **‘Public Hearing’** is conducted before the issue of **‘Consent to Establish (NOC)’ by state regulators.** Concerns of people living in the proposed project area are heard.
- An application form with EIA report, details of public hearing and **NOC is submitted for environmental clearance with the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) if the project falls under A category or the state government if the project falls under B category.**
- The documents submitted for A and B category are then analyzed by an **Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC)** under the Union Environment Ministry or the concerned **State Environmental Impact Assessment Authorities (SEIAAs)** respectively.
- The recommendations of the Committee gets processed in the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change for final approval or rejection.

National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)

- National Board for Wildlife is a **statutory Board** constituted officially in 2003 under the **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.**
- The NBWL is **chaired by the Prime Minister** and is **responsible for promotion of conservation and development of wildlife and forests.**
- The **board is ‘advisory’ in nature** and can only advise the Government on policy making for conservation of wildlife.
- It is an important body because it serves as an apex body for the review of all wildlife-related matters and for the approval of projects in and around national parks and sanctuaries.

- The **standing committee** of NBWL is chaired by the Minister of Environment Forest and Climate Change.
The standing committee approves all the projects falling within protected wildlife areas or within 10 km of them.

Source: TH

Safety of Women During Lockdown

Why in News

Recently, the Union Minister of **Women and Child Development** had a **video-conference** with personnel associated with the Ministry. The purpose was to consider measures to protect women in distress during the lockdown.

Nearly **1,000 people** joined the video conference live, including the staff members of

- One Stop Centres.
- Shelter homes for women in distress (such as Swadhar Greh, Ujjwala homes).
- Working Women Hostels.

Key Points

- **Reasons Behind Holding the Conference**
 - **Rise in Crimes Against Women:** The **National Commission of Women** has recorded
 - A more than **two-fold rise in domestic violence and sexual assaults and**
 - A three-fold increase in cases of **police apathy** in the first week of lockdown since March 24, 2020.
 - **Call Taken by Various Organisations:** The **gender rights activists and the United Nations (UN)** have called for the need to boost helplines, psycho-social support and online counselling to support women in distress.
- **Instructions by the Ministry:** Officials of the ministry were asked to ensure that **One Stop Centre** are linked with local medical teams, police, NIMHANS, **National Legal Services Authority (NALSA)** to ensure that their **services are not impacted due to restrictions** on movement.
NIMHANS (National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences), Bangalore is a multidisciplinary institute for patient care and academic pursuit in the field of mental health and neurosciences.

- **Suggestions**
 - To **equip counsellors** across the country to deal with the unique problems faced by women.
 - Use of **digital governance** to ensure safety of women which must be replicated at the State-level and with Non-Government Organisation (NGOs) so that there is no deficit of either information or help.
 - Urged NGOs to try to ensure that every individual calls at least 10 women every day so that “women know that they are not alone”

One Stop Centre

- One stop centre is a **centrally sponsored scheme of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD)**. It is a subscheme of the National **Mission for Empowerment of Women**.
- One Stop Centres have been established **across the country to provide integrated support** and assistance under one roof to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces.
- **Funding:** The scheme is funded through **Nirbhaya Fund and the central government provides 100% financial assistance** to the state governments /Union Territories administrations.
- **Auditing:** Audit is done as per **Comptroller & Auditor General of India** norms and social audit is also undertaken by civil society groups.
- **Services Provided by the One Stop Centres**
 - Emergency response and rescue services.
 - Medical assistance.
 - Assistance to women in lodging the FIR.
 - Psycho- social support and counselling.
 - Legal aid and counselling.
 - Shelter
 - Video conferencing facility.

Working Women Hostels scheme

- The Working Women Hostels scheme is implemented by **the Ministry of Women and Child Development**.
- It aims to ensure safe accommodation for women working away from their place of residence.
- **Provisions :**
 - To provide **safety for working women**, a provision has been made to keep security guards and to install CCTV Cameras in Working Women Hostels.
 - To provide **quality of stay for working women**, provision has been made to provide safe and affordable accommodation with clean and well-ventilated day care centres for the children of inmates, medical first-aid and providing washing machines and geysers/solar water heating systems.

Swadhar

A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances was launched by the Department of Women and Child Development in 2001-02. The scheme through the provisions of shelter, food, clothing, counseling, training, clinical and legal aid aims to rehabilitate women in difficult circumstances.

Ujjawala Home

A comprehensive scheme for prevention of trafficking and rescue, rehabilitation and re-integration of victims of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation.

Source: TH

Phased Easing of Lockdown

Why in News

An **expert committee headed by former Chief Secretary K.M. Abraham** has **recommended a phased relaxation of the lockdown** to contain **COVID-19** for areas outside the seven hotspot districts in the **State of Kerala** from April 15, 2020.

Key Points

- The committee said that the **phased withdrawal (in three phases) is sustainable only** if there is a **steady recovery and decline in the number of cases** leading to initial flattening of the infection curve and then gradual tapering of the curve to zero infection cases.
- It has asked the government to advise the people that in the event of a resurgence, they should be **ready and willing to undergo the rigours of a complete lockdown once again.**
- The committee has also come up with **health-related and non-health-related objectives** for the withdrawal strategy and steps for management of hotspots and vulnerable populations.
- The Committee has also set **criteria for moving into three phases of lockdown withdrawal.**
 - For example,** for qualifying for Phase I relaxation,
 - there has to be not more than one new case in the district for the entire week prior to the date of review on April 14.
 - No increase of more than 10% of the number of persons under home surveillance in the district and no hotspots of COVID-19 anywhere in the district.

Restrictions during 3 phases



PHASE I	PHASE II	PHASE III
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Face mask compulsory for stepping outBan on those above 65 with history of comorbidity from stepping outGovt. offices, banks may reopen with 50% attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Autos, taxis may be allowed, but only one and three passengers respectivelyBus travel for short distance within city or town with one person per seatAttendance at marriages and funerals to be 20People may be permitted to walk for 30 minutes before 7.30 a.m.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Domestic flights for essential passengers, doctors, health workers, patientsInter-district bus transport with two-thirds capacityIT companies to open partiallyUniversities, schools, colleges open for exams
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Identity card must, travel purpose to be explainedTotal clampdown on vehicle movement on SundayOne person per house can go outside for 3 hoursNo entry of any person from outside the State	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Activities under MGNREGS, micro, small and medium enterprises beginWorkers at worksite 20 or 25% of staff strength, whichever is higher	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Hostels, residential facilities may be openedBevco may start online sale of liquorNo religious congregations, large marriages, political meetings, conferencesEntry into the State, should undergo 14-day quarantine
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Odd-even scheme for private vehiclesNo flights, train servicesSuper markets, malls, cinemas, bars to remain closed		

Source: TH

Armyworm Attack

Why in News

The **Directorate of Agriculture** has reported an **armyworm attack** on the standing crops in the northeastern **Dhemaji district of Assam**.

The pest attack has added to sorrows of the already worried farmers, due to the **Covid-19 pandemic**.

Key Points

- The **armyworm caterpillar** is the **larval stage** of several species of **moths**.

- It has a **huge appetite** and can **feed on more than 80 species of plants** according to the **entomologists**.

Entomology is a branch of **zoology** which involves the **scientific study of insects**.

- **Challenges:**

- The **weather is a factor** because there are **no pre-monsoon rains** in Assam yet and the **temperature is very high now**. The armyworm can cause more damage in the absence of rain.
- Another major issue is **reaching out to farmers**. All the roads and gaps have been blocked due to the fear of contracting coronavirus.

- **Other Concerns:**

- Officials are **afraid of the winter crop cycle getting affected** if the lockdown continues beyond 14th April, 2020.

April-May is the time when paddy farmers in Assam clear weeds and manure the fields for transplanting the seedlings of the **winter crop** from the nursery. The process takes 35-40 days.

- According to the farm experts, if the cycle is pushed back by more than a month it **could impact yield** because the sowing and maintenance phase of the crops would be very close to the **flood timings of Assam**.



Armyworm

- Its scientific name is **Spodoptera frugiperda** and also commonly referred as **Fall Armyworm (FAW)**.
- It is a **dangerous transboundary insect** with a high potential to spread rapidly due to its **natural distribution capacity** and opportunities presented by **international trade**.
- FAW represents a **real threat to food security and livelihoods** of millions of smallholder farmers by spreading across all of **sub-Saharan Africa, the Near East and Asia**.
- **Control and Elimination:**
 - Farmers need significant support to manage FAW sustainably in their cropping systems through **Integrated Pest Management (IPM)** activities.
 - FAW **cannot be eliminated**.
- The **Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)** has launched a **Global Action for FAW Control** as a response to the international threat posed by the armyworms.

Source: TH

70 Years of Indian Council for Cultural Relations

Why in News

- **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) observed its 70th foundation day on 9th April 2020.**
- However, owing to the **Covid-19 pandemic** it has decided **not to hold any celebrations to mark the occasion.**

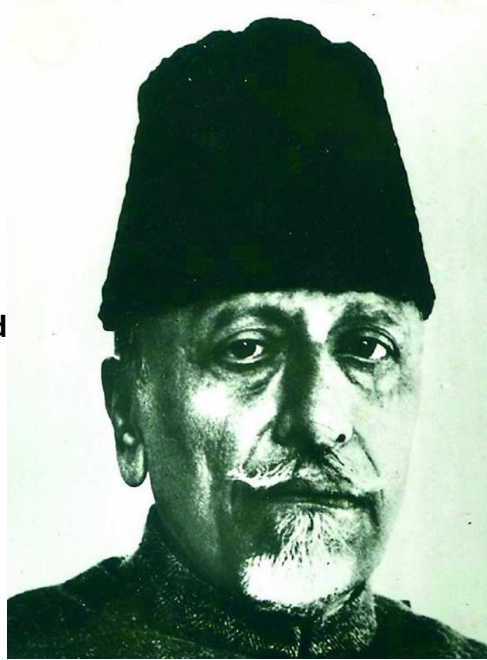
Key Points

- The ICCR runs **36 cultural centres** across the globe and its emphasis is on making **India a hub of higher education.**
- Classical dance, music or Hindi and Sanskrit language classes are continuing at most of ICCR centres via skype and other applications without hindrance
- ICCR, which is the only soft power institution of the country which plans to focus more on areas that have so far largely remained “neglected” like Indian literature, Indian artisans and also Ayurveda.

Indian Council for Cultural Relations

- The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), is an **autonomous organisation** of the **Government of India**, involved in **India's external cultural relations (cultural diplomacy)**, through cultural exchange with other countries and their peoples.
- It was **founded in 1950 by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad**, independent India's first Education Minister.
- ICCR has been assigned the responsibility of facilitating the celebration of the **International Day of Yoga** by Indian Missions/Posts abroad since 2015.
- ICCR has instituted **several awards**, which are conferred upon the foreign nationals for their contributions in different fields, under its mandate of **promoting India's cultural relations. Such awards include-**
 - **Distinguished Indologist Award-** The annual “ICCR Distinguished Indologist Award” was instituted in 2015 during the First World Indology Conference hosted in India. Award is conferred upon a foreign scholar for his contribution in study, teaching and research in any of the fields of Indian Studies.
 - **World Sanskrit Award-** The institution of annual “World Sanskrit Award” was announced during the 16th World Sanskrit Conference held in Bangkok in June 2015 recognizing the contribution of foreign scholars in promoting Sanskrit studies.
 - **Distinguished Alumni Award – Citation and Plaque:** Recognizing the achievements of foreign students who studied in India. It was instituted in 2015.
 - **Gisela Bonn Award -** Annual Gisela Bonn Award was instituted by ICCR in 1996 in the name of famous German journalist, writer, environmental activist and Indologist, Gisela Bonn, to honour her services to bolster Indo-German relations.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad



- Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, originally named Muhiyuddin Ahmad, was born on 11th November 1888 in Mecca, Saudi-Arabia.
- Maulana Azad was a brilliant debater, as indicated by his name — **“Abul Kalam”** which literally means **“Lord of Dialogues”**.
- He was a proponent of **Hindu Muslim unity, opposed to Partition**. In 1912, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad started a **weekly journal in Urdu called Al-Hilal** which played an important role in **forging Hindu-Muslim unity** after the bad blood created between the two communities in the aftermath of **Morley-Minto reforms**.
The government regarded Al- Hilal as propagator of secessionist views and **banned it in 1914**.
- Maulana Abul Kalam Azad supported the **Non-Cooperation Movement** started by Gandhiji and **entered Indian National Congress in 1920**.
In 1923, he was elected as the **president of Indian National Congress**. He again became the president of Congress in **1940 and remained in the post till 1946**.
- In the field of education, Maulana Azad had been an uncompromising exponent of **universalism, a truly liberal and humanitarian educational system**.
- Azad’s ideal was a **fusion of the Eastern and Western concepts of man**, to create a fully integrated personality. Whereas the **Eastern concept dwelt on spiritual excellence and individual salvation**, the **Western concept laid stress on worldly achievements and social progress**.
- **His Works:** Basic Concept of Quran, Ghubar-eKhatir, Dars-e-Wafa, India Wins Freedom, etc.

- In 1947, he became the **first education minister of free India and remained at this post till his death in 1958**. In his tenure, he did tremendous work for the upliftment of the country. Following are some of them:
 - For the progress and development in science education, following institutions were established:
 - **Scientific Research Institute (Council of Scientific and Industrial Research)**,
 - A separate institute for atomic development,
 - Indian Council for Agriculture and Scientific Research,
 - Indian Council for Medical Research,
 - Indian Council for Historical Research, and
 - Indian Council for Social Science Research.
 - Indian Council for Cultural Relations, for introduction of Indian culture to other nations.
 - Following three academics were formed:
 - Sahitya Academy for development of literature;
 - Sangeet Natak Academy for the development of Indian music and dance;
 - **Lalit Kala Academy** for the development of painting;
- Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was posthumously awarded India's highest civilian honour, **Bharat Ratna in 1992**.

Source : TH

Madhuban Gajar: Biofortified Variety

Why in News

Madhuban Gajar, a **biofortified carrot variety**, is benefitting more than 150 local farmers in Junagadh, Gujarat.

- It is being planted in an area of over 200 hectares in Junagadh, and the average yield, which is 40-50 tonne/hectare (t/ha), has become the main source of income to the local farmers.
- It is used for various value-added products like carrot chips, juices, and pickles.

Key Points

- **Biofortified Variety:** The Madhuban Gajar is a highly nutritious carrot variety developed through the selection method with higher **β -carotene content** (277.75 mg/kg, source of Vitamin A) and **iron content** (276.7 mg/kg).
- **Developed By: Shri Vallabhai Vasrambhai Marvaniya**, a farmer scientist from Junagadh district, Gujarat.
 - He was conferred with a **National Award by the President of India** at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi during **Festival of Innovation (FOIN)-2017**.
 - He was also conferred with **Padma Shri** in the year 2019 for his extraordinary work.

- **Tested By: National Innovation Foundation (NIF) – India**, an autonomous institute under the Department of Science and Technology during 2016-17. It was found that the Madhuban Gajar carrot variety possesses a significantly **higher root yield** (74.2 t/ha) and **plant biomass** (275 gm per plant).
- **Areas of Cultivation:** The variety is being cultivated in more than 1000 hectares of land in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh.

Biofortification

- **Fortification** is the practice of **deliberately increasing the content of an essential micronutrient**, i.e. vitamins and minerals in a food, so as to improve the nutritional quality of the food supply and provide a public health benefit with minimal risk to health.
- **Biofortification** is the process by which the nutritional quality of food crops is improved through agronomic practices, conventional plant breeding, or modern biotechnology.
- **Biofortification differs from conventional fortification** in that biofortification aims to increase **nutrient levels in crops during plant growth rather than through manual means during processing of the crops**.
- Increased nutritional quantity through biofortification will further support India's **National Nutrition Mission**.
 - Indian government launched the **National Nutrition Mission (renamed as Poshan Abhiyaan)** in March 2018.
 - The National Nutrition Mission is backed by a **National Nutrition Strategy** prepared by the NITI Aayog with the goal of attaining **"Kuposhan Mukh Bharat"** or malnutrition-free India, by 2022.

Festival of Innovation

- The **Festival of Innovation & Entrepreneurship (FINE)** {previously known as Festival of Innovation FOIN)} is a unique initiative of the **Office of the President of India** to recognise, respect and reward **grassroots innovations and foster a supportive ecosystem**.
- Hosted in the month of March at the President's House, the FINE has become a national celebration of **creativity and innovation at and for the grassroots**.

Source: PIB

Syrian Air Force Behind Chemical Attacks

Why in News

Recently, the **Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)** has said that the Syrian air force carried out three chemical attacks on a village in **Syria's western Hama region** in 2017.

Key Points

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- The **OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT)** was established by OPCW in 2018 to identify the perpetrators of illegal attacks.
It concluded that the Syrian air force helicopter dropped bombs containing **poisonous chlorine and sarin nerve gas**
 - The Syrian government has denied using chemical weapons.

Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)

- It is an international organization established by the **Chemical Weapons Convention, 1997 to implement and enforce the terms of the non-proliferation treaty**, which prohibits the use, stockpiling, or transfer of chemical weapons by signatory states.
- The OPCW is **authorized to perform inspections** to verify that signatory states are complying with the convention.
This includes a commitment to grant inspectors full access to chemical weapons sites.
- The OPCW also **performs testing of sites and victims of suspected chemical weapons attacks**.
- By the **2001 Relationship Agreement** between the OPCW and the United Nations, the OPCW reports on its inspections and other activities to the UN through the office of the Secretary General.
- The OPCW was awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize in 2013**. Its headquarters are located in **the Hague, Netherlands**.

Chlorine gas

Chlorine is a choking agent. Its greenish-yellow clouds of gas cause shortness of breath, wheezing, respiratory failure, irritation in the eyes, vomiting, and sometimes death.

Sarin gas

- Sarin is a chemical warfare agent classified as a **nerve agent**.
They are similar to certain kinds of insecticides (insect killers) called organophosphates in terms of how they work and what kind of harmful effects they cause.
- It was **originally developed in 1938 in Germany** as a pesticide.
- Sarin is a clear, colorless, and tasteless liquid that has no odor in its pure form. However, sarin can evaporate into a vapor (gas) and spread into the environment. It is **also known as GB**.

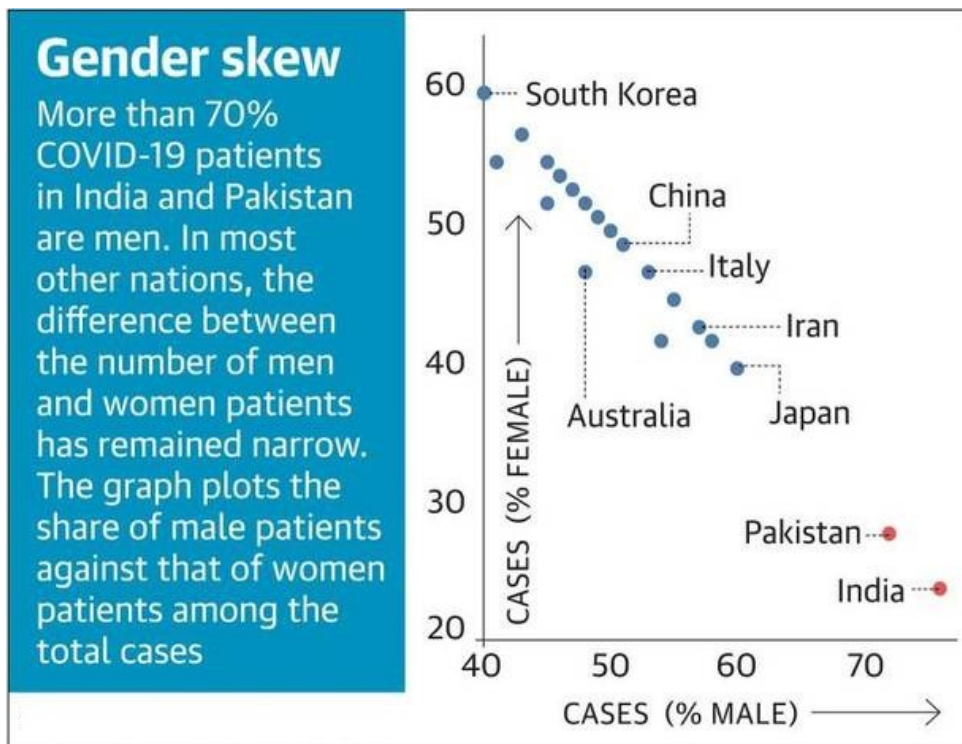
Source: IE

Gender Disparity and Covid-19

Why in News

Recently, **GlobalHealth50/50** suggested that the **gender-split** of **Covid-19** cases in all countries is roughly 50-50, barring **two exceptions**: India and Pakistan.

- Men in India more than women likely to test positive for **COVID-19**.
- Another unusual exception was South Korea — the country that has conducted the maximum number of tests as a proportion of population — in that more women tested positive than men.
- GlobalHealth50/50 is an **independent research initiative** that tracks **gender and health**. It compiled data from almost 40 countries on Covid-19 cases.
- **Many countries**, including the United Kingdom and the United States, **do not have sex-segregated national data** while publicising data on cases and death rates.



Key Points

- **Data Analysis (% of men out of total cases):**
 - Greece- 55%
 - Italy- 53%
 - China- almost 51%(February data).
 - India- 76%
 - Pakistan- 72%
 - Germany- 50%
 - South Korea- 40% (more women positive)
- India has not shared national figures on Covid-19 mortality rates in men and women yet. However, on April 6, 2020, the Health Ministry said 76% of the confirmed cases in India were men.

- **Reasons:**
 - **Epidemiologists** have highlighted that in most countries men and women equally travelled **internationally**.
 - Indian case is **reflective of employment trends** also. There are **less working women** and very less are likely to travel internationally for work.
 - India's wide disparity is more likely due to **sociological factors**.
 - **Global research on coronavirus** so far has shown that **men are more likely to be harbouring additional ailments** like cardiovascular disease, diabetes and more likely to **smoke**.

These conditions make men even more vulnerable to the severe infection.
- The figure seems to be a statistical reflection of relatively low testing for the disease. With more testing and more infections detected, the male-female gap would likely narrow.

Source: TH

Kendriya Bhandar

Why In News

Kendriya Bhandar prepared **2200 essential kits for distribution to needy families** in Delhi **in the wake of COVID-19**.

- Each such Kit consisting of 9 items is meant to assist one needy family for some time.
- 9 items in the kit are Rice, Wheat Flour, Dal, Cooking Oil, Chiwda/Poha, Salt, Bathing Soap bar, Detergent Soap bar, and Biscuits.

Key Points

- Kendriya Bhandar is the **Central Government Employees Consumer Cooperative Society Ltd, established in 1963**.
- The society endeavors to serve the Central Government Employees and general public at large by
 - providing quality goods of daily needs at reasonable prices and
 - playing an effective role in the Public Distribution System through its retail outlets.
- It functions under the **Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions**.
- It is the **largest Consumer Cooperative Society in the country**. It is a **Multi State Consumer Cooperative Society**, i.e. functioning in more than one state.
- In general, a **cooperative society** is a voluntary association of individuals having common needs who join hands for the achievement of common economic interest. Its aim is to serve the interest of the poorer sections of society through the principle of self-help and mutual help. The main objective is to provide support to the members.

