



News Analysis (19 Jun, 2020)



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Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan

Why in News

The Government of India has decided to launch a **rural public works scheme ‘Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan’** through video-conferencing from village **Telihar in Khagaria district of Bihar** on 20th June 2020.

Key Points

- **Beneficiaries:** The scheme will empower and provide livelihood opportunities to the **returnee migrant workers and rural citizens** who have returned to their home states due to the **Covid-19 induced lockdown**.
- **Duration and Outlay:** This campaign will work in **mission mode for 125 days** with an outlay of **Rs. 50,000 crore**.
- **Coverage:** A total of **116 districts** across **six states**, namely **Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand** and **Odisha** (where maximum migrant workers have returned) have been chosen for the campaign.
 - These districts are estimated to **cover about 2/3 of such migrant workers**.
 - The chosen districts **include 27 Aspirational Districts**.
 - **Aspirational Districts** are those districts in India which are **affected by poor socio-economic indicators**. These are aspirational in the context, that improvement in these districts can lead to the overall improvement in human development in India. It is a **NITI Aayog’s Programme**.

- **Implementation:** It will involve **intensified and focused implementation of 25 different types of works** to **provide employment** to the migrant workers on one hand and **create infrastructure in the rural regions** of the country on the other hand.

The workers will help build gram panchayat bhawans and **anganwadi centres**, national highway works, railway works and water conservation projects, among others across six states.

- **Participants: 12 different Ministries/Departments**, namely, Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, Road Transport and Highways, Mines, Drinking Water and Sanitation, Environment, Railways, etc. will be coordinating for the implementation of the scheme.
- **Connectivity:** The villages will join this programme through the **Common Service Centres** (CSCs) and **Krishi Vigyan Kendras** (KVKs) maintaining the norms of **social distancing** in the wake of the **pandemic**.

Common Service Centres

- Common Services Centres are a strategic cornerstone of the **National e-Governance Plan** (NeGP).
- It was approved in **May 2006** to introduce e-governance on a massive scale under the **National Common Minimum Programme**.
- **Objective:** To provide high quality and cost-effective video, voice and data content and services, in the areas of e-governance, education, health, telemedicine, entertainment as well as other private services.
- A **highlight** of the CSCs is that it **offers web-enabled e-governance services in rural areas**, including application forms, certificates and utility payments such as electricity, telephone and water bills.

Krishi Vigyan Kendras

- It is an integral part of the **National Agricultural Research System** (NARS).
 - India has **one of the largest** national agricultural research systems in the world. It consists of **scientists, technical staff, administration support staff** and auxiliary staff.
 - Such a large number of research and other personnel are required because India is blessed with a **variety of agro-climatic conditions** and it **conducts research on all aspects of agriculture** to suit these diversified conditions.
- The first KVK was established in **1974 at Puducherry**.
- **Aim:** Assessment of location specific technology modules in agriculture and allied enterprises, through technology assessment, refinement and demonstrations.

- KVKs also produce quality technological products (seed, planting material, bio-agents, livestock) and make it available to farmers.
- The KVK scheme is **100% financed by the Government of India and funds are sanctioned** to Agricultural Universities, **Indian Council of Agricultural Research** (ICAR) institutes, related Government Departments and **Non-Government Organizations** (NGOs) working in Agriculture.
- These are crucial to fulfilling the target of **doubling farmers' income by 2022**.

Source: PIB

4% Contraction in Growth: ADB

Why in News

According to the **Asian Development Outlook (ADO)** released by the **Asian Development Bank (ADB)**, the Indian economy is expected to contract by 4% during the current financial year (2020-21).

- Earlier, in April 2020, ADB had projected India's economy to grow at 4% in 2020-21.
- The ADO analyzes economic and development issues in developing countries in Asia. This includes forecasting the inflation and growth rates of countries throughout the region, including China and India.

THE PROJECTIONS

for India's economy
during 2020-21 (%),
unless specified

Key Points

OECD	-3.7 to -7.3
Bernstein	-7.0
Goldman Sachs (for '20)	-5.0
Nomura	-5.0
Fitch Ratings	-5.0
ICRA	-5.0
CRISIL	-5.0
India Ratings	-2.1 to 1
CII	-0.9 to 1
Moody's Investors Service	-4.0
World Bank	-3.2
IMF	1.9
Asian Development Bank	-4.0

- **Reasons for Contraction:**

- Global health emergency created by the **Covid-19 pandemic**.
 - After the introduction of lockdowns in late March 2020, economic activity in South Asia came to standstill.
 - The lockdown also disrupted the supply chain.
- The **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** slowed to 3.1% in the last quarter (Jan-March) of the financial year 2019-20. It is the slowest since early 2003.
- The overall economic growth slowed to 4.2% in 2019-20 as both exports and investment started to contract.
- The **Purchasing Managers' Index** fell to all-time lows in April 2020.
- Migrant workers have gone home to their villages after losing their jobs in the cities and will be slow to return to cities to work again.

- **Growth Projections for Developing Asia:**

Developing Asia refers to a group of over 40 countries, including India, that are members of the ADB. Growth of 0.1% is expected.

- This is down from the 2.2% forecast in April 2020 and would be the slowest growth for the region since 1961.
- However, China is expected to record a positive growth of 1.8% in 2020-21.

- **No V-shaped Recovery:**

- Even as lockdowns are slowly eased and select economic activities restart, economies in Asia and the Pacific will continue to feel the blow of the Covid-19 pandemic this year.
- Despite a higher growth outlook for the region in 2020-21, there will not be a **V-shaped recovery**.

- **Issues Involved:**

- The Covid-19 pandemic may see multiple waves of outbreaks in the coming period. This may lead to an increase in sovereign debt and worse to a financial crisis.
- There is also the risk of renewed escalation in **trade tensions** between the United States and China.

Asian Development Bank

- ADB is a **regional development bank** established on **19th December 1966**.
- It has **68 members. India is a founding member**.
- **Japan holds the largest proportion** of shares in ADB followed by the USA.
- It aims to promote social and economic development in **Asia and the Pacific**.
- It is **headquartered in Manila, Philippines**.

Way Forward

- India should undertake policy measures to reduce the negative impact of Covid-19 and ensure that no further waves of the outbreak occur.
- As India has opened its economy, it needs to improve the supply chain which was disrupted due to lockdown.
- A labour market recovery will be a key to the economy running again.

Source: TH

Global Trends Report: UNHCR

Why in News

The **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** has released its annual **Global Trends report** before the **World Refugee Day (20th June)**.

Global Trends is published every year to count and track the numbers of refugees, internally displaced people, people who have returned to their countries or areas of origin, asylum-seekers, stateless people and other populations of concern to UNHCR.

Key Points

- **Displacement in 2019:**

- **Nearly 80 million people were forcibly displaced** by the end of 2019 — which is nearly 1% of the global population.

Half of those displaced were children.

- Of the 80 million people, 26 million were **cross-border refugees**, 45.7 million were **internally displaced people**, 4.2 million were **asylum seekers** and 3.6 million were Venezuelans displaced abroad.
- More than **eight of every 10 refugees (85%) are in developing countries**, generally a country neighbouring the one they fled.
- **Five countries account for two-thirds of people displaced across borders:** Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar.

Syria has been the top country of origin for refugees since 2014.

- **Reason of Displacement:**

- Persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order were the main reasons behind the forced displacement.
- 80% of the world's displaced people are in countries or territories **affected by acute food insecurity and malnutrition** – many of them facing climate and other disaster risk.

- **Comparison of Displacement in Past Decade (2010-19):**

- The number of refugees, under the UNHCR mandate, has doubled from about 10 million in 2010 to 20.4 million at the end of 2019. Close to 53% were newly displaced.

1 in every 97 people were affected by **forced displacement** in 2019, compared to 1 in every 159 people in 2010 and 1 in every 174 in 2005.

- Nearly to 40% of those displaced (or 30-34 million) forcibly between 2010-2019 **include children below 18 years of age.**
- Very few people who have been displaced were able to return to their homes. In the 1990s, on average 1.5 million refugees were able to return home each year. That number has fallen to around 3,85,000 in the past decade (2010-2019).

World Refugee Day

- It is an **international day designated by the United Nations** to honour refugees around the globe.
- It falls each year on **20th June** and celebrates the strength and courage of people who have been forced to flee their home country to escape conflict or persecution.
- It is an occasion to build empathy and understanding for the refugee's plight and to recognize their resilience in rebuilding their lives.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is a **UN Refugee Agency** and a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting the rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people.
- It was **created in 1950** to help millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes.
- It is headquartered at **Geneva, Switzerland**.

Way Forward

- The report underlines that forced displacement nowadays is not only vastly more widespread but is simply no longer a short-term and temporary phenomenon. People cannot be expected to live in a state of upheaval for years on end, without a chance of going home, nor a hope of building a future where they are.
- The refugees should be provided asylum, since it is a human right. Countries should not deny asylum based on race, religion, geography etc. In the aftermath of World War II, most countries agreed to protect refugees through the **1951 Refugee Convention**.
- There is a need for a fundamentally new and more accepting attitude towards all who flee, coupled with a much more determined drive to end conflicts that go on for years and that are at the root of such immense suffering.

Source: DTE

Russia-India-China Grouping: RIC

Why in News

Recently, the Ministry of External Affairs has announced that it will participate in the virtual meeting of the **Russia-India-China (RIC) grouping** scheduled to be held on 23rd June, 2020.

It can be noted that the RIC was also a platform for the first meeting between India and China in New Delhi after the end of Doklam standoff.

Key Points

- **Special Session:** This special session of the RIC has been called by the current Chair- Russia to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the victory in the second world war over Nazism and creation of the United Nations (24th October, 2020).
It will also discuss the current situation of the **global pandemic** and the challenges of global security, financial stability and RIC cooperation in that context.
- **India's Stand:** The Indian decision to go ahead with the ministerial level exchange has created an opening for de-escalation of tension along the Line of Actual Control.
- **China's Stand:** While confirming the participation in the meeting, China has also agreed to control the situation in the border areas.
- **Russia's Stand:** Russia indicated that it would support “**constructive dialogue**” over the tension in eastern Ladakh as Russia is trusted by both India and China
- **Regional Connectivity:**
Regional connectivity projects such as the International North South Transport Corridor involving India, Russia and Iran are expected to figure in the agenda.
 - International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), is **multi-modal transportation** established in 2000 in St. Petersburg, by Iran, Russia and India for the purpose of promoting transportation cooperation among the Member States.
 - This corridor **connects India Ocean and the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea via the Islamic Republic of Iran** and then is connected to St. Petersburg and North Europe via the Russian Federation.
- **No Bilateral Issues:** However, the focus of the meeting will be on global coronavirus pandemic and no bilateral issues will be discussed.

RIC

- RIC is a strategic grouping that first took shape in the late 1990s under the leadership of Yevgeny Primakov, a Russian politician as “**a counterbalance to the Western alliance.**”
- The group was founded on the basis of **ending its subservient foreign policy guided by the USA and renewing old ties with India and fostering the newly discovered friendship with China.**

- Together, the RIC countries occupy over 19% of the global landmass and contribute to over **33% of global GDP**.

Relevance of RIC for India

- **Strategic Balance:** Along with JAI, India would do well to give RIC the same importance. The groupings like the Quad and the JAI essentially revolve around the Indo Pacific and will confine India to being only a maritime power when it is actually both a maritime and continental power.
- **Forum for Cooperation:** Even though India, China and Russia may disagree on a number of security issues in Eurasia, there are areas where their interests converge, like, for instance, on Afghanistan. RIC can ensure stable peace in Afghanistan and by extension, in Central Asia.

Regular RIC interactions could also help the three countries **identify other issues** where they have congruent views like the volatile situation in West Asia.
- **Creation of New Order:** Contribute to creating a new economic structure for the world. The US apparently wants to break down the current economic and political order. While the existing structure is not satisfactory, the RIC could offer some suggestions which could be acceptable to the US.
- **Governance over Arctic:** With the Northern Sea Route opening up due to climate change, the RIC has a common interest in ensuring that it is not left to the West and Russia alone and that India and China also have major say in rules governing the Arctic route.
- **Other Aspects:** They could work together on disaster relief and humanitarian assistance.

Concerns

- India has traditionally avoided taking sides in international politics, especially between the great powers, preferring its traditional nonalignment. However, **China's hostile attitude towards India** in recent years is increasingly forcing India to confront.
- This makes it difficult to see how engagements through platforms such as RIC, are going to alter the **basic conflictual nature of relations** between India and China.
- Even though **Russia** has remained an old friend for India, it is increasingly under **stress to follow China's dictates**. E.g. earlier, it openly opposed the **Indo-Pacific concept at the Raisina Dialogue**.
- On issues such as Jammu and Kashmir, which China raised at the UN Security Council, Russia preferred taking a middle position, not supporting India's stand entirely.

Way Forward

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- India is committed to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity in the border areas and RIC would give the platform for resolution of differences (along the Indo-China Border) through dialogue.
 - Moreover, the RIC forms the core of both the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** and the BRICS as greater cooperation between China, India and Russia would lead to strengthening of both SCO and BRICS.
 - The RIC is a significant multilateral grouping, because it brings together the three largest Eurasian countries which are also incidentally geographically contiguous. RIC, hence provides a worthwhile platform to discuss issues like West Asia, Afghanistan, climate change, terrorism, regional connectivity, tensions on Korean Peninsula, etc.

Source: TH

Micius: A Quantum-Enabled Satellite

Why in News

Recently, **satellite Micius** has sent **light particles to Earth** to establish the world's most secure communication link.

Key Points

- **Micius:**
 - It is the **world's first quantum communications satellite**, launched by **China in 2016**.
 - The satellite serves as the **source of pairs of entangled photons**.
 - Entangled photons are **twinned light particles** whose **properties remain intertwined** no matter how far apart they are.
 - If one of the photons is manipulated, the other will be similarly affected at the very same moment.
 - It is this **property that lies in the heart of the most secure forms of quantum cryptography** (the study of concepts like encryption and decryption).
 - If one of the entangled particles is used to create a key for encoding messages, only the person with the other particle can decode them.

- **Recent Developments:**

- Micius has **successfully brought entanglement-based quantum cryptography to its original ground stations 1,200 km apart** by sending simultaneous streams of entangled photons to the ground stations to establish a direct link between the two of them.
- The satellite provided entangled photons as a convenient resource for the quantum cryptography and the two ground stations then used them according to their agreed protocol.
- **None of the communication went through Micius** (i.e behaved like a blind transmitter) providing the ground stations a **robust and unbreakable cryptographic protection** without the need to trust the satellite.
- Until now, this had never been done via satellite or at such great distances.
- It has not been specified how the messages were transmitted in this instance but in theory it could be done by optical fibre, another communications satellite, radio or any other agreed method.
- Scientists have started using quantum encryption for **securing long-range communication** and Micius has been at the **forefront of quantum encryption** for several years.

- **Quantum Race:**

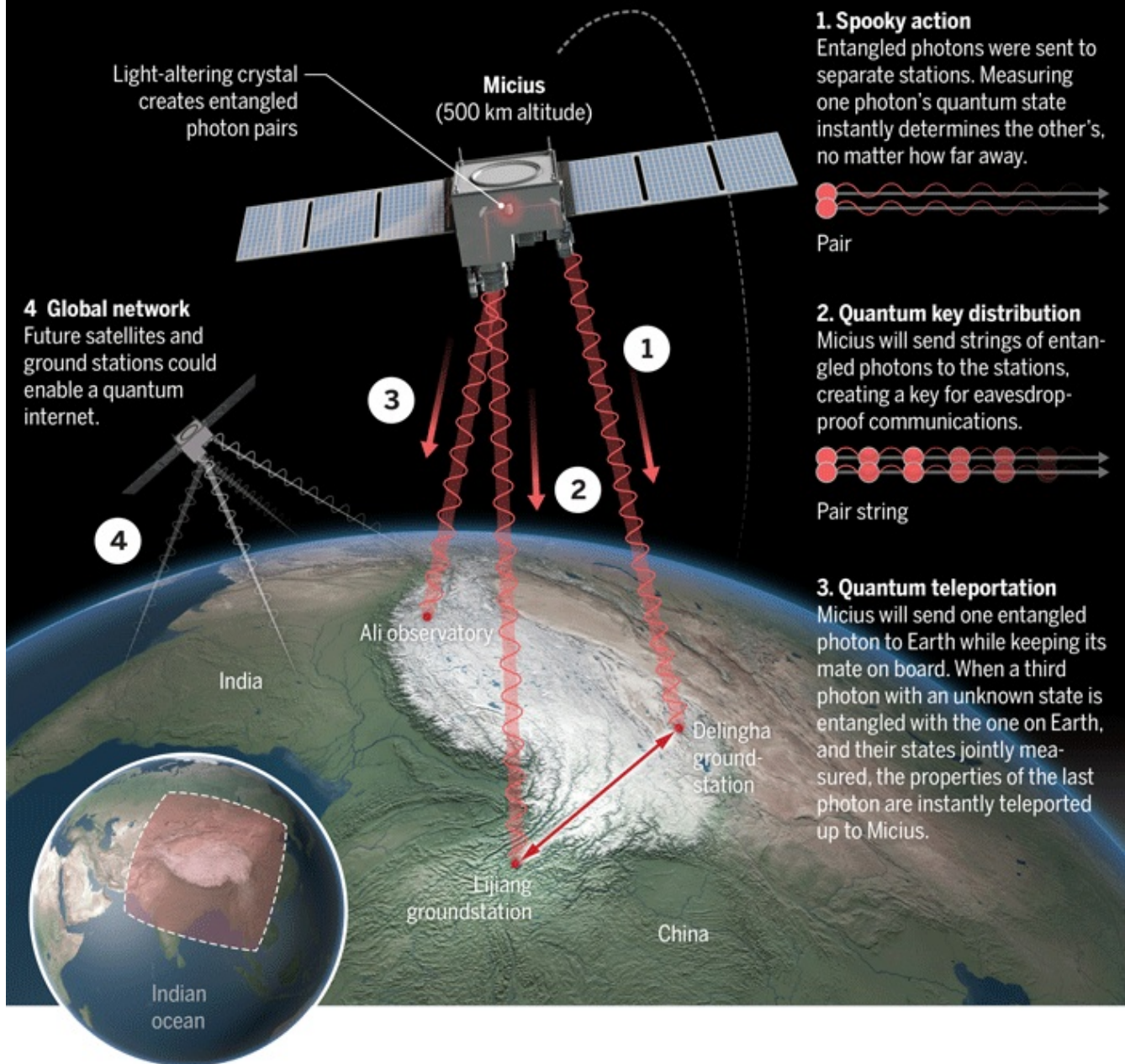
- The **disclosure of internet surveillance by western governments prompted China** to boost quantum cryptography research in order to create more secure means of communication.
- The launch of Micius and quantum communication systems with its help have been **compared to the effect Sputnik had on the space race** in the 20th century.

Sputnik was the **first artificial Earth satellite** launched by the **Soviet Union** into an **elliptical low Earth orbit** on **4th October 1957**.

- Any country could **theoretically trust Micius** to provide entangled photons to secure its communications but the **satellite is a strategic resource** that other countries would **want to replicate** giving further boost to the quantum race which **has political and military implications** that are hard to ignore.

Quantum leaps

China's Micius satellite, launched in August 2016, has now validated across a record 1200 kilometers the "spooky action" that Albert Einstein abhorred (1). The team is planning other quantum tricks (2–4).



Source: DTE

Kodumanal Excavation

Why in News

Recently, the State Department of Archaeology, Chennai has identified **250 cairn-circles** from the **Kodumanal excavation** site in Erode district of Tamilnadu.

- **Cairn-circles** are the **prehistoric stone row** which is a linear arrangement of parallel megalithic standing stones.
- A **megalith** is a **large prehistoric stone** that has been used to construct a structure or monument, either alone or together with other stones.



Key Points

- This is for the first time that **10 pots and bowls** were discovered from the site, instead of the usual three or four pots, placed outside three-chambered burial cists and inside the cairn-circle.
 - More numbers and bigger size of boulders suggests that the grave could be of a village head or the head of the community.
 - It also suggests **burial rituals** and the **concept of afterlife** in **megalithic culture**. Believing that the deceased person will get **a new life after death**, **pots and bowls** filled with grains were placed outside the chambers.
- The rectangular chambered cists (a small stone-built coffin-like box) are made of stone slabs, and the entire grave is surrounded by boulders that form a circle.
- Findings from the site also include an animal skull, beads, copper smelting units, the mud walls of a workshop, potteries, and Tamil Brahmi script.

- **Previous Excavations:**

- The earlier excavations of Kodumanal revealed that **multi-ethnic groups lived in the village.**
- It also revealed that the site served as a **trade-cum-industrial centre** from 5th century Before Common Era (BCE) to 1st century BCE.

Megaliths Culture

- Megaliths refer to large stone structures that were **constructed either as burial sites or as commemorative sites.**
- The burial sites are the sites with actual burial remains, such as **dolmenoid cists (box-shaped stone burial chambers), cairn circles (stone circles with defined peripheries), and capstones (distinctive mushroom-shaped burial chambers found mainly in Kerala).**
- The megalithic culture lasted from the Neolithic Stone Age to the early Historical Period (2500 BCE to CE 200) across the world.
- In India, the majority of the megaliths are of the Iron Age (1500 BC to 500 BC),
- Megaliths are spread across **peninsular India**, concentrated in the states of **Maharashtra (mainly in Vidarbha), Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.**
- The chambers containing the mortal remains were usually made of terracotta.

Kodumanal

- It is a village located in the Erode district in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.
- The place is an **important archaeological site.**
- It is located on the northern banks of **Noyyal River**, a tributary of the Cauvery.

Source: TH

I-Lab: Mobile Testing Facility

Why in News

Recently, the government has launched the **country's first mobile I-Lab (Infectious disease diagnostic Lab)** for **last mile Covid-19 testing access.**

It has been created by a team from the **Andhra Pradesh MedTech Zone Limited (AMTZ)** under the **National Biopharma Mission.**

Key Points

- The **Department of Biotechnology** (DBT - Ministry of Science & Technology) under the **Covid-Command strategy** has supported building of mobile testing labs (I-Labs) through AMTZ.
- The Lab belongs to the **BioSafety Level (BSL-II)** category.
 - BSLs are ranked from **one to four** and are categorised on the basis of the organisms that the researchers are dealing with. The organisms include viruses, bacteria, fungi, parasites, etc.
 - BSL-I is considered to be the least hazardous, while BSL-IV poses the maximum safety risk. Each level builds on the previous category, adding more layers of constraints and barriers.
- It will be deployed in interior, inaccessible parts of the country and has the capability to perform **25 RT-PCR tests** a day, **300 ELISA tests** a day and additional **tests for TB, HIV** as per **CGHS (Central Government Health Scheme)** rates.
 - **RT-PCR and ELISA tests** have been approved by the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** for Covid-19.
 - **CGHS** provides comprehensive medical care to central government employees and pensioners enrolled under the scheme. Rates of different procedures are decided under the Scheme.

Andhra Pradesh MedTech Zone Limited

- Incorporated in **2016**, it is Asia's first **medical equipment manufacturing ecosystem**, uniquely dedicated for Medtech and supported by various Ministries.
- It aims to put India on the global map of high-end medical equipment production and make healthcare products affordable and accessible not only in the country, but also the world at large.
- It also has set a target for reducing the cost of manufacturing up to 40% and also minimising the import dependency for the country, which is currently pegged at around 75%.
- The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) along with the AMTZ has initiated the **DBT-AMTZ COMManD (Covid Medtech Manufacturing Development) Consortia** to address the shortage of critical healthcare technologies in India and move progressively towards a stage of self-sufficiency.

National Biopharma Mission

- The National Biopharma Mission (NBM) is an **industry-academia collaborative mission** for accelerating biopharmaceutical development in the country.
- It was **launched in 2017** at a total cost of Rs.1500 crore and is 50% co-funded by World Bank loan.

- It is being **implemented by the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC)**.
BIRAC is a Public Sector Enterprise, set up by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT).
- Under this Mission, the Government has launched **Innovate in India (i3) programme** to create an enabling ecosystem to promote entrepreneurship and indigenous manufacturing in the biopharma sector.
- It has a focus on following **four verticals**:
 - **Development:** Development of product leads for Vaccines , **Biosimilars** and Medical Devices that are relevant to the public health need by focussing on managed partnerships.
 - **Upgrade:** Upgradation of shared infrastructure facilities and establishing them as centres of product discovery/discovery validations and manufacturing.
 - **Capacity Building:** Developing human capital by providing specific training.
 - **Industry-Academy Linkages:** Developing technology transfer offices to help enhance industry academia inter-linkages.

Source: PIB

Antiviral Drug Umifenovir

Why in News

The **Central Drug Research Institute (CDRI), Lucknow**, a constituent lab of the **Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)**, has received permission for carrying out **Phase III trials** for the use of **Umifenovir** against **Covid-19**.

These trials will be **randomised, double-blind, placebo-controlled** that will test the **efficacy, safety and tolerability of the drug**.

Key Points

- **Safe:** Umifenovir has already been used for the treatment of influenza in China and Russia and therefore is safe. It recently came into prominence due to its potential use for Covid-19 patients. The clinical trial is to evaluate its efficacy in Indian patients.
- **Strengthens Immune System:** It acts by preventing entry of the virus into human cells and also by priming the immune system.
- **Indigenously Developed:** All the raw materials for the drug are indigenously available and if the clinical trial is successful, Umifenovir can be a safe, efficacious, affordable drug against Covid-19.

- **Potential Prophylactic Use:** It has the potential for prophylactic use. A prophylactic is a medication or a treatment designed and used to prevent a disease from occurring.
- **CSIR's Efforts Against Covid-19:**
 - The CSIR is evaluating Mycobacterium W (Mw) for faster recovery of hospitalised Covid-19 infected patients.
 - The clinical trial of the **Favipiravir drug** has also been allowed by the **Drug Controller General of India** (DCGI).

Randomised, Double-blind, Placebo-controlled Trials

- **Randomized trials** mean that subjects are randomly assigned to placebo and intervention groups. Placebo is anything which looks like real treatment but it is actually not. **For example-** sugar pills and saline injections.
- **Double-blind** means that neither the patients nor the researchers know who is getting a placebo and who is getting the treatment. This ensures that the result of trials are not affected by the biases of researchers and patients.
- **Placebo-controlled** refers to a control group receiving a placebo. This sets it apart from studies that simply give participants treatment and record the results.
Here, a control group is given a placebo while another group is given the drug (or other treatment) being studied. That way, researchers can compare the drug's effectiveness against the placebo's effectiveness.

Source: TH
