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## News Analysis (06 Aug, 2020)

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### Beirut Explosion

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#### Why in News

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Recently, a **massive explosion** took place in **Beirut, capital of Lebanon**, which left more than hundred people dead and more than 4,000 injured, according to the reports until now.

#### Key Points

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- There were two explosions in the central port area of Beirut which occurred barely within minutes of each other within nearby buildings.
- The blast affected residents living as far as 10 kilometres away from the site and was felt upto 250 Km.
- The blast created **seismic waves** equivalent to a magnitude 3.3 earthquake.
- The blasts were likely triggered by over **2,700 tonnes of ammonium nitrate** that had been **confiscated and stored** by authorities near the port for over six years.
- A **two-week state emergency** has been imposed in Beirut following the blast.

#### Impact of the Blast

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- **Economic:** Lebanon is an **import-dependent country**. The **badly damaged port** facility is Lebanon's largest maritime gateway and it will make **essential items expensive** and **threaten food security** in the country.
  - Lebanon has already been struggling with a huge **economic meltdown**, with the **rapid devaluation of the local currency** and a **volatile exchange rate on the black market** fueling **inflation, shuttering businesses, unemployment** and **poverty**.
  - It had also **defaulted on a Eurobond repayment** in March 2020.
  - It is in talks with the **International Monetary Fund** for a \$10 billion loan program.
  - The blast will pose an additional **financial burden of rebuilding the city**.
- **Political:** Lebanon faced **nationwide protests** against **corruption, economic mismanagement** and **sectarian politics** in October 2019, which forced the **resignation of then-Prime Minister Saad Hariri**.
 

This blast along with the growing economic crisis can **again cause social unrest**.
- **Health:** The country's health system is **already burdened** with the patients of **Covid-19 pandemic** and the victims of blast will add to this.

## International Response

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- Lebanon has been offered help by various countries like the **USA, Germany, France, Iran, EU, Turkey etc.**
- Along with giving aid, the President of **France**, Emmanuel Macron has decided to visit Lebanon.
  - This move is seen as a message of fraternity and solidarity from France.
  - Earlier, France's top diplomat had scolded Lebanon's political elite for being too "passive" in the face of an economic crisis and the pandemic.
- Lebanon has also been offered humanitarian aid by its neighbour **Israel**, whom it has bitter relations with.
  - Israel sees **Hezbollah, the militant group of Lebanon as a threat to its northern borders.**
  - **Hezbollah** is one of the Middle East's **most powerful and successful guerrilla organizations**. It is the strongest member of Lebanon's pro-Syrian opposition bloc who pitted **against the pro-Western government** led by Saad Hariri.

## Ammonium Nitrate

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- **Ammonium Nitrate (NH<sub>4</sub>NO<sub>3</sub>)** is a **nitrogen-rich white, crystalline chemical** which is **soluble in water**.

- **Uses:**
  - It is a common chemical ingredient of **agricultural fertilisers**.
  - It is used as an ingredient for the production of **anaesthetic gases** and **cold packs**.
  - It is also the main ingredient in the manufacture of **commercial explosives** used in mining and construction.
- **As Explosive:**
  - It is the main component of the explosive composition known as **ANFO-ammonium nitrate fuel oil**.
  - **Pure** ammonium nitrate is **not an explosive** on its own. For Ammonium nitrate to be explosive a **primary explosive or detonator** like **RDX or TNT** is required.
  - Many **Improvised Explosive Devices** (IEDs) used by terrorists around the world have ANFO as the main explosive.
  - Stored ammonium nitrate is a fire hazard and can explode in two ways.
    - 1. It may come in contact with some explosive mixture.
    - 2. Due to the **oxidation process** at large scale, heat may be generated starting a fire and then explosion. This seems to be the **primary likely cause of the incident at Beirut port**.
- **Explosions in Past:**
  - In the majority of terror attacks in India, including those in **Pulwama**, **Varanasi**, Malegaon, Pune, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Mumbai, ammonium nitrate has been used along with initiator explosives like RDX.
  - There have been **accidental explosions of ammonium nitrate** causing large numbers of fatalities. Eg. China in 2015 and in Texas in 1947.

- **Regulations:**

- **Global:** It is classified as an **oxidising content** (Grade 5.1) under the **United Nations classification of dangerous goods**.

**The United Nations Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods** categorizes the types of dangerous goods, under **nine classes** like Explosive Materials, Inflammable liquids, Easily oxidising contents etc.

- **India:** In India, the manufacture, conversion, bagging, import, export, transport, possession for sale or use of ammonium nitrate is covered under **The Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012**.
  - **The Explosives Act, 1884**, define ammonium nitrate as the “compound with formula  $\text{NH}_4\text{NO}_3$  including **any mixture or compound having more than 45% ammonium nitrate by weight** including emulsions, suspensions, melts or gels but excluding emulsion or slurry explosives and non explosives emulsion matrix and fertilizers from which the ammonium nitrate cannot be separated”.
  - **Storage of ammonium nitrate in large quantities in populated areas is illegal** in India.
  - For the manufacture of ammonium nitrate, an Industrial licence is required under the **Industrial Development and Regulation Act, 1951**.
  - A license under the Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012 is also required for any activity related to ammonium nitrate.



- It is a country in **Western Asia**, bordered by Syria to the north and east and Israel to the south, while Cyprus lies west across the Mediterranean Sea.
- Lebanon was conquered by the **Ottomans** in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and remained under their rule for the next 400 years.
- Following the empire's collapse after World War I, it came under **the control of French**, from which it gained independence in **1943**.
- Lebanon witnessed **Civil war** from **1975-1990** that was a result of conflict between various factions like the **Christians**, the left-wing **Druze** and the **Muslims** and was interspersed with **Israeli invasions targeting the palestinian** militants in Lebanon.
- The present government in Lebanon is **confessionalist parliamentary democracy**.

**Confessionalism** is a system of government which apportions seats in its legislature to different groups of people strictly based on demographic composition.

## Way Forward

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- This tragedy piles yet another layer of hardship on a country already reeling from its worst financial crisis in decades along with an exasperating political turbulence and struggling to contain a burgeoning coronavirus outbreak.
- Lebanon cannot do without containing politically extremist groups functioning in the country and maintaining healthy relationships with the international community.

- It is time that international solidarity comes into action and extends a helping hand towards the country.

**Source: IE**

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## **Constitution Bench for EWS Quota**

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### **Why in News**

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Recently, the **Supreme Court of India** referred the petitions challenging the **103<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 2019** to a five-judge **constitution bench**, saying it involves ‘**substantial questions of law**’.

- According to **Article 145 (3) of the Constitution**, at least five judges need to hear cases that involve ‘**a substantial question of law as to the interpretation**’ of the Constitution, or any **reference under Article 143**, which deals with the power of the President of India to consult the Supreme Court.
- The Supreme Court bench consisting of at least five judges is called the **Constitution bench**.

### **Key Points**

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- **103<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act:**
  - It introduced an **economic reservation** (10% quota) in jobs and admissions in education institutes for **Economically Weaker Sections (EWS)** by amending **Articles 15 and 16**.  
It inserted **Article 15 (6) and Article 16 (6)**.
  - It was enacted to promote the welfare of the poor not covered by the 50% reservation policy for SCs, STs and Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC).
  - It enables both Centre and the states to provide reservation to the EWS of society.

- **Petitioners' Argument:**

- The amendments **run contrary to the constitutional scheme**, where no segment of available seats/posts can be reserved, only on the basis of economic criterion.
- The amendments also run contrary to the judgment pronounced in the ***Indra Sawhney V. Union of India 1992 case***, that **a backward class cannot be determined only and exclusively with reference to economic criterion.**
- The amendments **alter the 50% quota limit** set up in ***Indra Sawhney V. Union of India* 1992 case**, which according to the petitioner is a part **Basic Structure of the Constitution.**
- Reservation in unaided institutions violates the fundamental right under **Article 19(1)(g)** of the Constitution.

Article 19 (1)(g) allows every citizen to practise any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business.

- **Central Government's Stand:**

- The amendment **was necessitated to benefit EWS who are not covered under existing schemes of reservation**, which as per statistics, constitute a considerably large segment of the country's population.
- The 50% limit in the **Indira Sawhney** ruling cannot be applied in the present petitions as the Sawhney case dealt with memoranda issued by the government while what is under challenge now is a constitutional amendment.

- **Substantial Question of Law Involved:**

- **Whether the challenged 103<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act violates Basic Structure of the Constitution**, with reference to equality provisions of the Constitution.
- The case of the Union of India that though ordinarily 50% is the rule but same will not prevent the amendment of the Constitution itself in view of the existing special circumstances to uplift the members of the society belonging to economically weaker sections.

**Source: IE**

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## **J&K Issue Raised at UNSC**

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### **Why in News**

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Recently, **China** has called India's move in **Jammu and Kashmir (J&K)** "illegal and invalid" and **raised the issue at the United Nations Security Council** (UNSC) in New York (USA).

- On 5<sup>th</sup> August 2019, the President of India promulgated the **Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 2019** effectively abrogating the **special status accorded to J&K** under the provision of **Article 370**.
- **5<sup>th</sup> August 2020** marks the **one year anniversary** of that move. On its eve, **Pakistan released a new political map** that includes all of J&K, Ladakh, Sir Creek and Junagadh.

## Key Points

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- **China's Stand on Kashmir:**
  - The Kashmir issue is a **dispute left over from history** between Pakistan and India, which is an objective fact established by the UN Charter, relevant Security Council resolutions and bilateral agreements between Pakistan and India.
  - **Any unilateral change** to the status quo in the Kashmir region is **illegal and invalid**.
  - Kashmir region issue should be **properly and peacefully resolved through dialogue and consultation** between the parties concerned.
- **India's Reaction:**

India has noted the Chinese comments and held that **Beijing has “no locus standi” on the matter** and is advised not to comment on the internal affairs of other nations.

**India and China** are holding talks over the disengagement along the **Line of Actual Control** (LAC).
- **UN's Response:**
  - The J&K issue has been raised at the UNSC three times in the last one year but there has been no concrete solution to it yet.
  - UN human rights experts have called on India to **take urgent action to address the alarming human rights situation** in the region.
  - **If India fails** to take any genuine and immediate steps to resolve the situation, meet the obligations to investigate historic and recent cases of human rights violations and prevent future violations, then the **international community should step up**.



- **Amnesty International India Report:**
  - **Amnesty International** in its report has urged the **National Human Rights Commission** (NHRC) and the **National Commission for Women** (NCW) to set up offices in J&K to facilitate easy access to the complaint filing process for the local people.
    - NHRC has been asked to appoint a special monitor for the region and to take up cases pending with the erstwhile State Commission.
    - NCW has been recommended to set up a J&K cell for addressing problems faced by women.
    - The report held that people in J&K do not have any way of redressal of the violations of their rights after the closure of the State Commission in 2019.
  - It also **called on the government** to release all political leaders, journalists and activists from detention; restore 4G mobile Internet; decongest prisons and start an independent investigation into attacks on journalists.
  - The report **acknowledged that there may be security concerns** that merit restrictions on the right to freedom of expression.
  - It suggested that **curbs should be for a limited timeframe and as per the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)**, to which India is a state party.

## Amnesty International

- It is an **international Non-Governmental Organization** (NGO) founded in London on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1961.
- It seeks to publicise violations by governments and other entities of rights recognized in the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (1948), especially freedom of speech and of conscience and the right against torture.
- It also **works with intergovernmental human rights bodies** to expand and enforce human rights protections in international law.
- In 1977, it was awarded the **Nobel Prize for Peace**.

## Source: IE

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## Sahakar Cooptube NCDC Channel

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### Why in News

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Recently, the Union Minister of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare launched the two initiatives of the **National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC)** - **Sahakar Cooptube NCDC Channel** and **Guidance Videos on 'Formation and Registration of A Cooperative'**.

## Key Points

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- **Sahakar Cooptube NCDC Channel:**

- The Channel **aims** to facilitate involvement of the youth in the cooperative movement.

Cooperatives lend strength to farmers to minimize risks in agriculture and allied sectors and act as a shield against exploitation.

- The channel will give a boost to **Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan** under which the government has announced a series of transformative measures and sector specific financial packages to help agriculture.

The initiatives are steps towards **One Nation One Market** with the objective for India to become a food factory of the world.

- **Guidance Videos:**

- These have been produced by the NCDC on '**Formation and Registration of A Cooperative**' for eighteen different states in Hindi and regional languages.

- These would help strengthen and deepen the major initiatives of the government to promote and form 10,000 **Farmer-Producer Organisations (FPOs)**.

One such initiative is the formation of FPOs under the "**One-Product One-District**" approach.

## National Cooperative Development Corporation

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- **Formation:** NCDC was established by an Act of Parliament in 1963 **as a statutory Corporation** under the **Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare**.

- **Office:** NCDC functions through its **Head Office at New Delhi** and multiple Regional Offices.

- **Functioning:**

- The objectives of NCDC are **planning and promoting programmes for agricultural produce, foodstuffs, industrial goods, livestock** and certain other notified commodities and services on cooperative principles.

- The NCDC has the **unique distinction of being the sole statutory organisation** functioning as an **apex financial and developmental institution** exclusively devoted to the **cooperative sector**.

- **Recent Initiatives:**

- **Mission Sahakar 22**, which aims to **double farmers' income by 2022**.
- **Scheme on Internship Programme (SIP)** named **Sahakar Mitra**.

## Cooperatives

- According to the **International Labour Organisation (ILO)**, a **cooperative** is an **autonomous association of persons united voluntarily** to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise. E.g. FPOs as cooperatives.
- **An FPO, formed by a group of farm producers, is a registered body with producers** as shareholders in the organisation.
  - It deals with **business activities related to the farm produce** and it works for the benefit of the member producers.
- **Cooperatives in India (Agriculture):**
  - They largely **function as an association of small and marginal farmers and rural poor**. They have a huge network of over 8.50 lakh organizations and 290 million members.
  - According to the government, cooperatives in India have proven their success in improving the condition of farmers and economic development.
- **Provisions of Indian Constitution related to Cooperatives:**
  - The **Constitution (97<sup>th</sup> Amendment) Act, 2011** added a new **Part IXB** right after Part IXA (Municipals) regarding the cooperatives working in India.
  - The word “cooperatives” was added after “unions and associations” in **Article 19(1)(c) under Part III of the Constitution**. This enables all the **citizens to form cooperatives by giving it the status of fundamental right of citizens**.
  - A new **Article 43B** was added in the **Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV)** regarding the “**promotion of cooperative societies**”.

**Source: PIB**

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## **Bru Resettlement Issue**

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### **Why in News**

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Recently, three organisations representing the Bru community have **rejected the sites proposed for their resettlement by the Joint Movement Committee (JMC)**.

- **Joint Movement Committee (JMC)** is an umbrella group of **non-Bru community in Tripura**. The JMC comprises the Bengali, Mizo, Buddhist Barua and some other communities.
- The three organisations included Mizoram Bru Displaced Peoples’ Forum, Mizoram Bru Displaced Peoples’ Coordination Committee and Bru Displaced Welfare Committee

### **Key Points**

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- **JMC's Actions:** On 21<sup>st</sup> July 2020, the JMC had submitted a memorandum to the Tripura government specifying six places in Kanchanpur and Panisagar subdivisions of North Tripura district for resettlement of Brus.
  - **Limiting the number of families:** Proposal of limiting the number to 500 families at most be settled in these places.
  - **Limited Resources:** They maintain that the State (Tripura) does not have enough space and resources to accommodate them (Bru).
- **Arguments by Bru Community Representatives:**
  - This action of site selection by the JMC is completely unjustified as they were not a part of the **quadrilateral agreement**. Also the sites proposed by the JMC are unconnected by road and electricity and too far from hospitals, schools and other facilities.
 

The **quadrilateral agreement** was signed among the **Central government, State governments of Mizoram and Tripura and the Bru groups** in New Delhi in **January 2020**.
  - They have insisted on resettling some 6,500 families in clusters of at least 500 families at each of the **sites of their choice** —seven in North Tripura district and five in the adjoining Dhalai district.
  - They have also **rejected the demand for inclusion of four JMC members** in the monitoring team for the resettlement of the Bru, as they are having no connection or involvement in the issue of either repatriation to Mizoram or resettlement in Tripura during the last 23 years.

## Background

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- **Bru or Reang** is a community indigenous to Northeast India, living mostly in **Tripura, Mizoram and Assam**. In **Tripura**, they are recognised as a **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group**.
- In **Mizoram**, they have been targeted by groups that do not consider them indigenous to the state. In 1997, following **ethnic clashes**, nearly 37,000 Brus fled Mamit, Kolasib and Lunglei districts of Mizoram and were **accommodated in relief camps in Tripura**.
- Since then, 5,000 have returned to Mizoram in eight phases of repatriation, while 32,000 still live in six relief camps in North Tripura.
  - In June 2018, community leaders from the Bru camps signed an agreement with the Centre and the two state governments, providing for repatriation in Mizoram. But most camp residents rejected the terms of the agreement.
  - According to them, the agreement doesn't guarantee their safety in Mizoram.

- **The Centre, the governments of Mizoram and Tripura and leaders of Bru organisations signed a quadripartite agreement in January (2020) to let the remaining 35,000 refugees who have stayed back to be resettled in Tripura.**  
The rehabilitation package offered included financial assistance of ₹4 lakh and land for constructing a house for each family.

## Way Forward

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The state government must ensure that the quadrilateral agreement is enforced in letter and spirit. However, the same agreement which provides for resettlement of Bru refugees in Tripura must also be implemented keeping in mind the interests of non-Brus, so that no conflict emerges between the Bru and non-Bru communities.

**Source: TH**

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## USA Bars Federal Agencies from Hiring H-1B Visa Holders

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### Why in News

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Recently, the **President of the USA** has signed an **executive order barring federal agencies from hiring H-1B visa holders** and other foreign workers in place of USA citizens or green card holders.

### Key Points

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- **H-1B Visas:**
  - The H-1B visa is a **non-immigrant visa** that **allows USA companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations** that require **theoretical or technical expertise.**
  - The **technology companies depend on it** to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like **India and China to keep costs in check.**  
Such jobs in developed countries **pay minimum wages**, which are not lucrative enough for employable individuals of these countries.

- **Executive Order:**

- The executive order has asked the federal agencies to **stop replacing USA workers and green card holders with H-1B visa holders or other foreign workers.**

A green card holder (**permanent resident**) is someone who has been **granted authorization to live and work** in the USA on a permanent basis.

- The order has also directed all agencies under the federal government to **review the contracts they gave out in the two previous financial years and the performance** of such contracts or subcontracts.

The heads of departments will undertake an **audit and check whether the jobs could have been performed by the USA workers** and whether opportunities for domestic workers were impacted by such hiring.

- The Department of Labour will also **finalise guidelines to prevent H-1B employers from moving H-1B workers to other employers' job sites** to displace American workers.
- The order seems to be an extension of an earlier order in which the **entry of non-immigrant visa workers had been banned until the end of 2020.**

- **Background:**

- The USA government under Trump leadership is moving towards a **more conservative work visa regime** under the **America First policy.**
- It has **alleged Indian and Chinese IT companies of sending workers at very low cost**, which hurt the prospects of skilled workers in the USA.
- The immediate trigger was an announcement by the federally-owned **Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)** that it would **outsource 20% of its technology jobs** to foreign countries.

This action could result in **loss of jobs for up to 200 highly-skilled American tech workers** in Tennessee and could also lead to possible **leaking of sensitive user data and theft of intellectual property**, detrimental to national security.

- The USA government has held that **outsourcing of jobs should be avoided** as far as possible because it is especially detrimental in the middle of a **pandemic**, which has already cost millions of Americans their jobs.

- **Impact on Indian Workers in the USA:**

- The H-1B visa is the most sought-after among Indian IT professionals.
- Apart from workers hired by federal agencies, the order will also **impact workers of Indian companies that are on contract** with federal agencies.

Bigger federal agencies such as state-run banks give the contract for supply and maintenance of their databases and other services to bigger Indian companies such as Infosys, TCS or Wipro.

- **Impact on the USA:**

- The order comes at a time when there is a **huge shortage of STEM** (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) **skills in the USA** that workers on short-term non-immigrant visas like **H-1B and L-1 help bridge**.
- Such a measure **could slow down the recovery phase of the USA** as countries start unlocking.

## Way Forward

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- Suspending the visas and barring federal agencies from hiring H-1B visa holders will only weaken the USA's economy in the long run.
- Immigrants have played a crucial role in making the USA a global leader in cutting edge technology and there is a need for the USA to recognise it and stop taking such drastic steps.
- Politics should not be placed above smart policy and inclusivity and there is a need to strengthen both. The ingenuity of migrant workers should be harnessed to revive an economy in dire straits especially in pandemic struck times like this.

## Source: IE

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## Issues With Home-based Learning Programme in MP

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### Why in News

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Only 30% students in government schools of Madhya Pradesh (MP) have been regularly reached through the **Hamara Ghar, Humara Vidyalaya programme**.

### Key Points

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- **Hamara Ghar, Hamara Vidyalaya Programme:**
  - It is a **home-based learning programme** launched by the **Department of School Education, MP**.
  - It **aimed to reach 22 lakh students** after shutting down of schools due to **Covid-19 pandemic**.
  - The idea behind the programme is to ensure that students **study regularly at home and also learn life skills from their elders**.
  - Under it, the **modular programme airs on Doordarshan Madhya Pradesh** on fixed time slots. It has **three parts** to it which are **recap, delivery of a new concept** and **practice** of the concept.
  - Various concepts in the form of videos, practise sheets and quizzes are delivered in sync with TV programmes through **WhatsApp-led Digital Learning Enhancement Program (DigiLEP)**.

- **Issues Highlighted:**

- The programme was able to **reach only around 30%** of the total students from 18<sup>th</sup> July to 25<sup>th</sup> July.  
20% of students were reached through TV and 10% through WhatsApp.
- Families of 30% of the students **do not have TVs or smartphones having an internet connection** to avail of the study material.  
In families where smartphones with internet connections are available, **parents often take them to work with them.**
- The remaining students were **not able to avail the study modules on a regular basis breaking the learning flow.**
- **Reaching to students in the 89 tribal dominated blocks** in districts such as Alirajpur, Barwani and Jhabua is a **task in itself.**

- **Suggestions:**

- Students need to be **divided into various groups according to the availability of TVs and phones** with the working connection, in sync with **PRAGYATA guidelines.**
- If a family has a phone, it **should be used by all of its children** for their studies.
- Those who have a TV, they **must watch the telecast during fixed time slots** on Doordarshan.

## Way Forward

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- The new **National Education Policy** (NEP) has a section on digital education to ensure “**equitable use of technology**”. Private players can make e-resources accessible and available to students under the **Corporate Social Responsibility** (CSR).
  - The definition of the **right to education** needs to expand and promote **online education** so that it addresses the importance of connectivity and access to knowledge and information.
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## Pokkali Rice: Kerala

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### Why in News

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**Farmers in West Bengal are experimenting with the pokkali variety of rice** to tide over a crisis-like situation created by **severe seawater incursion into paddy fields** in the **Sundarbans** (owing to **Cyclone Amphan**).

**Vyttila-11 varieties of pokkali seedlings** were brought from **Kerala**.

### Key Points



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- The pokkali variety of rice is **known for its saltwater resistance** and flourishes in the rice paddies of coastal **Alappuzha, Ernakulam and Thrissur districts of Kerala.**

The **single-season paddy** is raised in saltwater fields between June and November followed by a season of fish-farming.

- The uniqueness of the rice has brought it the **Geographical Indication (GI) tag** and is the subject of continuing research.

Several foreign research institutes, including the **International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines**, have been studying pokkali's gene pools and have identified a portion of DNA on one of its chromosomes that is crucial for salt tolerance.

- Given its ability to thrive under harsh climatic conditions and produce high yield, it can help in promoting **climate-resilient agriculture.**
- Pokkali has **medicinal properties** and its **higher value of antioxidants** and **low carbohydrate content** makes it preferable to those on a low sugar diet.
- **Vyttila-11** is the latest variety of pokkali developed by the **Kerala Agricultural University.**
  - It yields about **5 tonnes per hectare.**
  - The crop duration is about **110 days.**
- **Other GI Tag Registered Varieties from Kerala:** Kaipad, Wayanad Jeerakasala, Wayanad Gandhakasala, Palakkadan Matta and Navara.
- Further, the **Kuttanad below-sea level farming system** has been recognised by the **Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO)** as a **Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS).**

It is unique as it practices **rice cultivation below sea level.**

## **Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems**

- Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) was started by the FAO to safeguard and support the world's agricultural heritage systems.
- GIAHS are outstanding landscapes of aesthetic beauty that combine agricultural biodiversity, resilient ecosystems and a valuable cultural heritage.
- **Three recognised GIAHS sites in India:**
  - **Pampore Saffron** Heritage of **Kashmir.**
  - **Koraput Traditional Agriculture** of **Odisha.**
  - **Kuttanad Below Sea Level Farming System** of **Kerala.**

**Source: TH**

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## **IMD Forecasts Surplus Rains**

## Why in News

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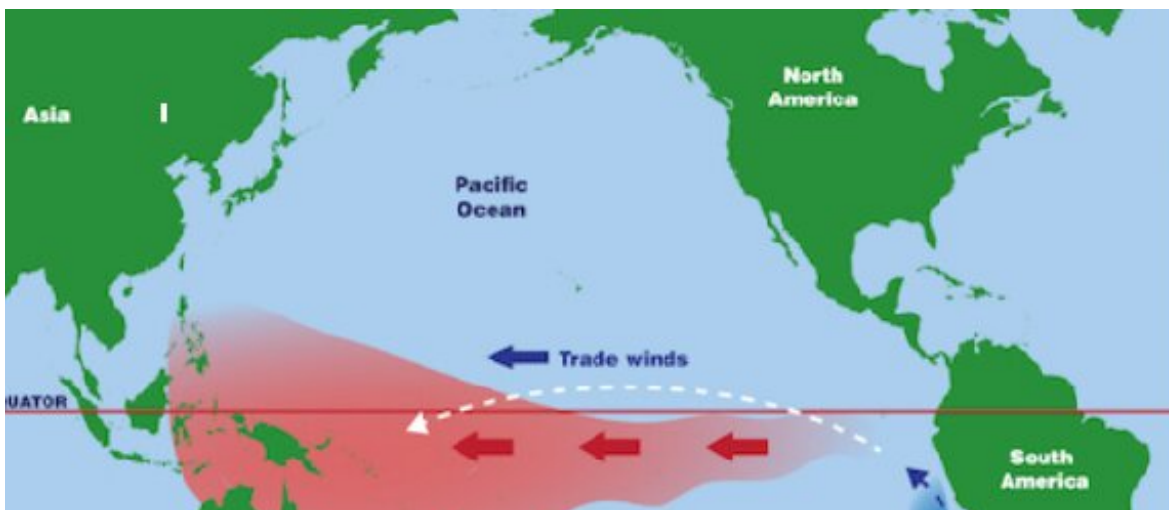
According to the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** rainfall in the “second half of the **monsoon**” is likely to be 104% of the **Long Period Average (LPA)**.

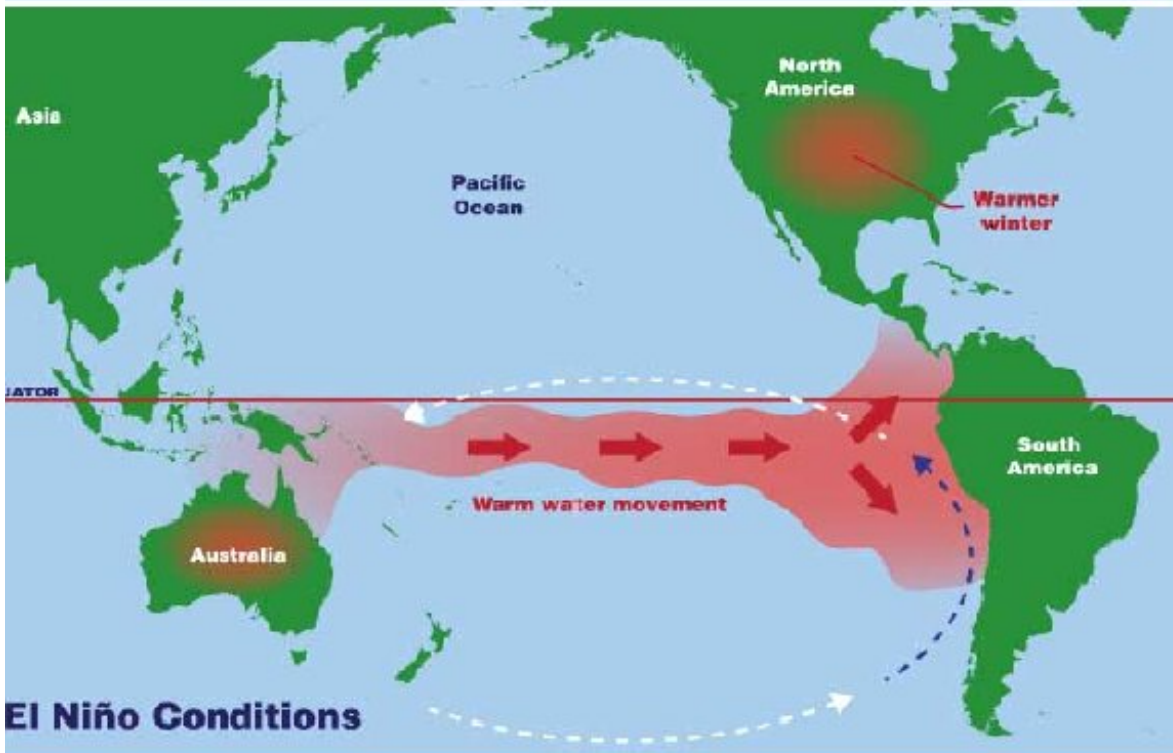
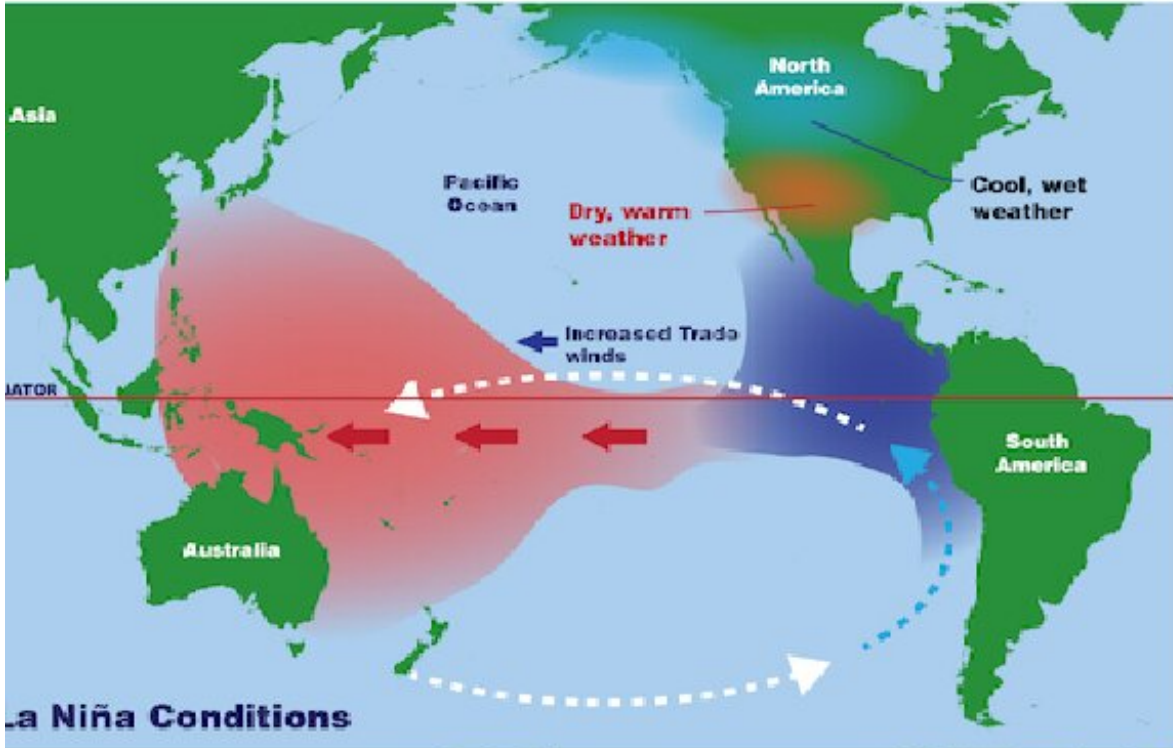
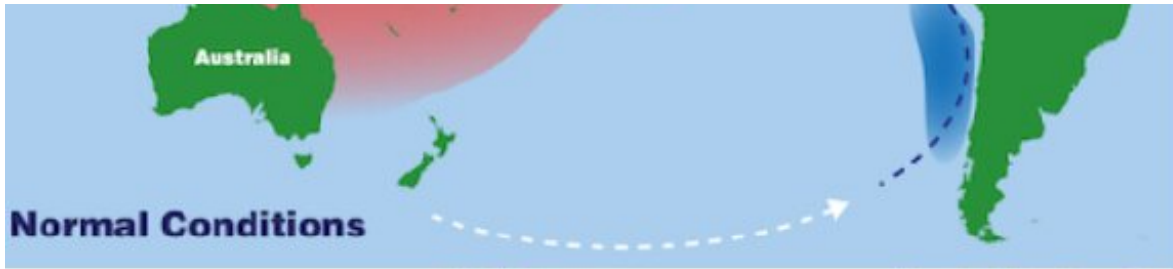
This falls within the “normal” range of rainfall.

## Key Points

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- **Long Period Average (LPA):** It is the **average rainfall recorded during the months from June to September, calculated during the 50-year period**, and is kept as a **benchmark** while forecasting the quantitative rainfall for the monsoon season every year.
  - IMD maintains an independent LPA for **every homogeneous region** of the country, which ranges from 71.6 cm to 143.83 cm.
- IMD maintains five rainfall distribution categories on an all-India scale. These are:
  - **Normal or Near Normal:** When per cent departure of actual rainfall is +/- 10% of LPA, that is, between 96-104% of LPA.
  - **Below Normal:** When departure of actual rainfall is less than 10% of LPA, that is 90-96% of LPA.
  - **Above Normal:** When actual rainfall is 104-110% of LPA.
  - **Deficient:** When departure of actual rainfall is less than 90% of LPA.
  - **Excess:** When departure of actual rainfall is more than 110% of LPA.
- This year increased rainfall is attributed to the commencement of **La Nina** like conditions by the second half of the monsoon season.
  - La Nina is a climate pattern that describes periods of **below-average sea surface temperatures** across the **east-central Equatorial Pacific**.
  - La Nina is considered to be the counterpart to **El Nino**, and its impacts tend to be **opposite those of El Niño**.
  - Together, they form the "**cold**" (**La Nina**) and "**warm**" (**El Nino**) phases of the **El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO)**.





- IMD was established in **1875**.
  - It is an agency of the **Ministry of Earth Sciences** of the Government of India.
  - It is the principal agency responsible for meteorological observations, weather forecasting and seismology
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