



## Agricultural Sector Reforms

### Why in News

Recently, the Cabinet has approved a proposal to promulgate three separate ordinances **to push agriculture marketing and commodities trade reforms** in the country.

- These reforms are part of the [third tranche of the economic package](#) announced under [Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan](#) to counter [Covid-19 pandemic](#).
- These ordinances are expected to give effect to the **amendments proposed to the Essential Commodities Act** and bring in two new Central laws on inter-state trading and engagement of the farmers with processors, exports, etc.

### Amendments to Essential Commodities Act (1955)

#### ▪ Background:

- India has become surplus in most agri-commodities but farmers have been **unable to get better prices due to lack of investment** in cold storage, processing and export.
- The **imposition of the curbs on stocking** of farm produce and **regulation of the prices of commodities**, etc. under [Essential Commodities Act \(ECA\)](#) are some of factors responsible for **less entrepreneurial spirit** and thus **less investment** in the farm sector.

#### ▪ Benefits of Amendments:

- The amendment would **deregulate the commodities** such as cereals, edible oils, oilseeds, pulses, onions and potatoes. It will help to **lessen the fears of private investors** of **excessive regulatory interference** in their business operations.
  - Any **limits under ECA** over these commodities will be **imposed only in exceptional circumstances** such as war, famine, extraordinary price rise and natural calamity.
- The **freedom to produce, hold, move, distribute and supply** will lead to harnessing economies of scale and attract private sector/foreign direct investment into the agriculture sector.
  - It will help drive up investment in cold storages and modernization of the food supply chain.

#### ▪ Significance:

- The announced amendment is expected to help both farmers and consumers while bringing in **price stability**.
- It will also create a **competitive market environment** and also prevent wastage of agri-produce that happens due to lack of storage facilities.
- It is considered as a **step towards transformation of agriculture and raising farmers' income**.

### Farming Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020

#### ▪ **Background:**

- Currently, there are **restrictions for farmers in selling agri-produce** outside the notified [Agricultural Produce Market Committee \(APMC\)](#).
- The farmers are also restricted to sell the produce **only to registered licensees of the State Governments.**
- Further, **barriers exist in free flow of agriculture** produce between various States owing to the prevalence of **various APMC legislations** enacted by the **State Governments.**

#### ▪ **Benefits of Ordinance:**

- It will create an ecosystem where the farmers and traders would **enjoy freedom of choice of sale and purchase of agri-produce.**
- It will also promote **barrier-free inter-state and intra-state trade and commerce** outside the physical premises of markets notified under State agricultural produce marketing legislations.
- The ordinance also proposes an **electronic trading in transaction platform** for ensuring a seamless trade electronically.
- It also proposes to set up a **separate dispute resolution mechanism** for the farmers.

#### ▪ **Significance:**

- It will open **more choices for the farmer, reduce marketing** costs for the farmers and help them in getting **better prices.**
- It will supplement the existing [Minimum Support Price \(MSP\)](#) procurement system and both will help to provide **stable income to farmers.**
- It will also help farmers of regions with surplus produce to get better prices and consumers of regions with shortages, lower prices.
- It is expected to pave the way for creating **One India, One Agriculture Market** in the country.

### **Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance, 2020**

#### ▪ **Background:**

- Indian Agriculture is characterized by **fragmentation due to small holding sizes** and has certain weaknesses such as weather dependence, production uncertainties and market unpredictability.
- It makes agriculture **risky and inefficient** in respect of both **input & output management.**

#### ▪ **Benefits of Ordinance:**

- It empowers **farmers for engaging** with processors, wholesalers, aggregators,wholesalers, large retailers, exporters etc.and thus **eliminating intermediaries** resulting in full realization of price.
  - Farmers have been provided adequate protection. Sale, lease or mortgage of farmers' land is totally prohibited and farmers' land is also protected against any recovery.
  - It also provides an **effective dispute resolution mechanism** for with clear timelines for redressal
- It contains mechanisms which would **transfer the risk of market unpredictability** from the farmer to the sponsor.

#### ▪ **Significance:**

- It also enables the farmer to **access modern technology and better inputs.** It will **reduce the cost of marketing** and improve income of farmers
- It will help to **attract private sector investment** for building supply chains for supply of

## Way Forward

- These ordinances are expected **to build necessary agrarian infrastructure** in the country which are expected to resolve a number of issues of the agricultural sector.
- It is considered as a visionary step towards **transformation of agriculture and raising farmers' income.**

[Source: IE](#)

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## Pan-India Real Time Market for Electricity

### Why in News

Recently, the government has launched a **pan-India real-time market of electricity** to enable the buyers and sellers pan-India to **meet their energy requirement closer to real time** of operation.

- It is expected that **shorter bidding time, faster scheduling, and defined processes** will enable the participants to access resources throughout the all India grid, promoting competition.

### Key Points

#### ▪ Description:

- The real time market of electricity is an **organized market platform** which will bring required flexibility to provide real time balance while ensuring optimal utilization of the available surplus capacity in the system.
- The real-time market would **open for 30 minutes in a day**, and buyers and sellers would have the option of placing **buy or sell bids for each 15-minute** time block.
- It will also help **manage diversity in the demand pattern in the country** with a market at national level.

#### ▪ Benefits:

##### ◦ Penetration of Renewable Energy:

- The Government of **India's target of 175 GW RE Capacity by 2022** is driving accelerated renewable penetration pan-India.
- The real time market would help to mitigate challenges of grid management and help to integrate higher amounts of renewable energy resources into the grid.

##### ◦ Discoms:

- It would provide an alternate mechanism for Discoms **to access larger markets at competitive prices.**
- These are also expected to manage their power purchase portfolio more optimally with this market and likely to result in **cost optimisation of power purchase.**

##### ◦ Consumers:

- It would lead to **cost optimization of power purchase** and serving the consumers with **reliable supply** as any last minute requirement of power can easily be bought from the Real Time market.
- Earlier regime of managing the grid by load shedding due last minute changes will be avoided.

## Way Forward

- The real time market is the **win-win for all stakeholders** which includes generators having opportunity to sell their surpluses, better management of variability of RE generation, better utilization of transmission systems, opportunity for discoms to buy or sell power and finally consumers getting reliable power supply.
- The launch of a real-time electricity market has marked the **second reform in the power sector** after the announcement of the plans for privatisation of the all electricity distribution companies (discoms) in the union territories.

[Source:PIB](#)

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## Inner Line Permit and Citizenship Amendment Act

### Why in News

Recently, the Supreme Court refused to stay the **Adaptation of Laws (Amendment) Order, 2019**, issued by the **President** to amend the **Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR), 1873**.

- The court said it will have to hear what the government has to say on the matter.

### Key Points

- The Presidential order was challenged in the Supreme Court by Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) and All Tai Ahom Students' Union (ATASU).
- The petitioners claimed that the Presidential Order moved some of the districts of Assam away from the purview of BEFR just before the grant of assent to [Citizenship \(Amendment\) Act \(CAA\), 2019](#).
  - The districts included Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur and Cachar.
  - BEFR empowers some of the states to bring districts under the inner line area.
- Once the districts had come under 'the inner line' area, **the CAA could not be implemented to the extent of granting citizenship to illegal immigrants** in Assam in view of Section 6B (4) of the CAA.
  - Section 6B (4) of the CAA restricts the implementation of CAA to the tribal areas as included in the **Sixth Schedule** of the Constitution and the area covered under the **"Inner Line"** notified under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873".
- The **CAA relaxes eligibility criteria for certain categories of migrants** from three countries (Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan) seeking Indian citizenship and **exempts certain categories of areas**, including those protected by the **Inner Line system**.
- The **State government claims that ILP cannot be implemented in Assam since Assam is the gateway to northeast India**.
  - Implementation of ILP will **increase the unemployment** level. It will affect the tea sector and oil sector.
- According to the petitioner, **BEFR could have been the answer** to tackle **the problems of illegal immigrants** which Assam and its citizens are facing today.

### Inner Line Permit

- It is a concept based on the **policy of exclusion** drawn by colonial rulers in the form of **Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act (BEFR), 1873**.

- The BEFR prohibits an outsider's — **"British subject or foreign citizen"** — entry into the area beyond the Inner Line without a pass and his purchase of land there.
  - It protected the commercial interests of the British from the tribal communities.
- BEFR **came as a response to the reckless expansion** of British entrepreneurs into new lands which **threatened British political relations with the hill tribes**.
- After Independence, the Indian government replaced "British subjects" with "Citizen of India".
- The Inner Line separates the tribal-populated hill areas in the Northeast from the plains. To enter and stay for any period in these areas, Indian citizens from other areas need an Inner Line Permit (ILP).
- The main aim of ILP system is to prevent settlement of other Indian nationals in the States where ILP regime is prevalent, in order **to protect the indigenous/tribal population**.
- The Adaptation of Laws (Amendment) Order, 2019 **extended the ILP regime to Manipur** - after **Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram** where the ILP regime is applicable.

[Source: IE](#)

## MoU between India and Bhutan

### Why in News

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with **Bhutan** for **cooperation in the field of environment protection and management of natural resources**.

- The MoU will enable **establishment and promotion** of closer and long-term cooperation in **environment protection and management of natural resources** on the basis of **equity, reciprocity and mutual benefits**, taking into account the laws and legal provisions in each country.

### Key Points

- **Background:**
  - A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** of India and the **National Environment Commission (NEC)** of the Government of Bhutan in 2013.
  - This MoU expired in 2016.
  - Noting the benefits of the earlier MoU, both sides have decided to continue cooperation and collaboration in the field of environment to strengthen the **Indo-Bhutan relationship**.
- **Details of the New MoU:**
  - **Time Period:** The MoU shall enter into force on the date of signature and shall continue to remain in force for a period of ten years.
  - **Areas of Cooperation: Air, Waste, Chemical Management, Climate Change and Any other areas jointly decided upon.**
  - **Exchange of Best Practices:**
    - The MoU shall facilitate **exchange of experiences, best practices and technical knowledge** through both **public and private sectors** and **research institutions** for sustainable development.
  - **Joint Working Group:**

- It provides for joint projects in areas of mutual interest.
- It provides for **holding of Joint Working Group / bilateral meetings** to review and **analyze the progress of activities** and keeping their respective ministries/agencies, duly informed of progress and achievements.

## Indo-Bhutan Relationship //



### ▪ Indo-Bhutan Treaty of Peace and Friendship, 1949

- The Treaty provides for, among other things, perpetual peace and friendship, free trade and commerce and equal justice to each other's citizens.
- In 2007 the treaty was re-negotiated, and provisions were included to encourage Bhutan's sovereignty, abolishing the need to take India's guidance on foreign policy.

### ▪ Multilateral Partnership:

- Both of them share multilateral forums such as [South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation \(SAARC\)](#), [BBIN \(Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal\)](#), [BIMSTEC \(Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation\)](#) etc.

### ▪ Hydropower Cooperation:

- This hydropower cooperation comes **under the 2006 Agreement on Cooperation in Hydropower**. Under a protocol to this agreement, India has agreed to assist Bhutan in the development of a minimum of 10,000 MW of hydropower and import of surplus electricity from the same by 2020.

### ▪ Trade:

- The trade between the two countries is governed by the **India Bhutan Trade and Transit Agreement 1972** which was last renewed in November 2016.
- The agreement **establishes a free-trade regime between the two countries** and also provides for duty-free transit of Bhutanese exports to third countries.

### ▪ Economic Assistance:

- India is Bhutan's leading development partner. Since the launch of the First Five Year Plan of Bhutan in 1961, India has been extending financial support to Bhutan's FYPs. India has allotted Rs 4500 crore to Bhutan's 12<sup>th</sup> FYP (2018-23).

### ▪ Educational and Cultural Cooperation:

- A large number of college going Bhutanese students study in India. The Government of India provides a number of scholarships to Bhutanese students.

## Way Forward

- Environment and natural resources are the vital areas to bring sustainable development for both the countries. Being neighbours, it is necessary that both nations continuously recognise the value of their rich resources and must work towards bringing environmental sustainability through mutual collaborations. This would further facilitate the Indo-Bhutan relationship towards peace and development.

[Source: PIB](#)

## Tropical Cyclone: Cristobal

### Why in News

- Recently, a **tropical Cyclone named Cristobal** has formed in the southern **Gulf of Mexico**.

### Key Points



#### ▪ Atlantic Hurricane Season:

- Tropical cyclones in the **North Atlantic** are called **hurricanes, tropical storms, or tropical depressions**.
- The Atlantic hurricane season is the period in a year when hurricanes usually form in the Atlantic Ocean.
- In the **Northern Atlantic Ocean**, a distinct hurricane season occurs from June 1 to November 30, sharply peaking from late August through September.
- Worldwide, **tropical cyclone activity peaks in late summer**, when the difference **between temperatures is large** and **sea surface temperatures** is the **greatest**.

#### ▪ Favourable Conditions in Gulf Of Mexico:

- **Sea surface temperature** is generally very high in **southwestern Gulf of Mexico**,

which is to allow the system to strengthen.

- **Wind shear** i.e. the increase in wind speed with height in the atmosphere, or a sharp change in wind direction, **is low as the storm emerges** over open water and begins its northward
  - The **low wind shear** favors strengthening of the system even if interaction with Mexico first weakens the storm.

## Gulf of Mexico

- The Gulf of Mexico is an **ocean basin and a marginal sea of the Atlantic Ocean**, largely surrounded by the **North American continent**.
- It is bounded on the northeast, north and northwest by the **Gulf Coast of the United States**, on the southwest and **south by Mexico**, and on the **southeast by Cuba**.

## Tropical Cyclone

- **Tropical cyclones** are violent storms that originate over **oceans in tropical areas** and move over to the **coastal areas bringing about large scale destruction** due to violent winds, very heavy rainfall (torrential rainfall) and storm surge.
- They are irregular wind movements involving **closed circulation of air around a low pressure center**.
- **Conditions Favourable for Tropical Cyclone Formation:**
  - **Large sea surface with temperature higher than 27°C:** Ocean waters having temperatures of 27° C or more is the source of moisture which feeds the storm. The condensation of moisture releases enough latent heat of condensation to drive the storm.
  - **Presence of the Coriolis force:** The Coriolis force is zero at the equator (no cyclones at equator because of zero Coriolis Force) but it increases with latitude.
    - Coriolis force at 5° latitude is significant enough to create a storm.
    - About 65% of cyclonic activity occurs between 10° and 20° latitude.
    - The rotation of the earth about its axis affects the direction of the wind. This force is called the [Coriolis force](#).
  - **Weak low-pressure area:** Small local differences in the temperature of water and of air produce various low pressure centers of small size.
    - A weak cyclonic circulation develops around these areas.
  - **High humidity:** Such conditions exist over the equatorial doldrums, especially in western margins of oceans (this is because of east to west movement of ocean currents), which have great moisture carrying capacity because the trade winds continuously replace the saturated air.
    - **Doldrums:** Known to sailors around the world as the doldrums, the [Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone, \(ITCZ\)](#) is a **belt around the Earth extending approximately five degrees north and south of the equator**. Here, the prevailing trade winds of the northern hemisphere blow to the southwest and collide with the southern hemisphere's driving northeast trade winds.

[Source: TH](#)

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# Australia to be Included in Malabar Exercise

## Why in News

India is prepared to expand the [Malabar exercise](#) to also include Australia.

- **India and Australia** are soon to be holding a **virtual summit** for better cooperation and strengthening bilateral ties.

## Malabar Exercise

- It is an **annual trilateral naval exercise** between the navies of **India, Japan, and the USA** which is held **alternately in the Indian and Pacific Oceans**.
- It began as a bilateral [naval exercise](#) between **India and the USA in 1992** and was expanded into a trilateral format with the **inclusion of Japan in 2015**.
- Other exercises between India and Australia are [Pitch Black](#) and [AUSINDEX](#).

## Key Points

- Despite regular requests from Australia, **India resisted** issuing the invitation due to its concerns that the move would give the **appearance of a 'quadrilateral military alliance' aimed at China**.
  - However, the recent [India-China tensions](#) over the situation at the [Line of Actual Control](#) (LAC) may have brought more flexibility to the decision making process.
  - India is already a member of the [Quad](#) and attended the [Quadrilateral Security Dialogue](#) held in November 2019.
    - Quad is the **informal strategic dialogue between India, the USA, Japan and Australia** with a shared objective to ensure and support a free, open and prosperous" Indo-Pacific region.
- **Focus of the Virtual Summit:**
  - **Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.**
    - Both countries have a shared approach to a free, open, inclusive and prosperous [Indo-Pacific](#) which leads to a convergence of mutual interest in many areas.
  - **Strengthening of defence ties.**
    - A broader **maritime cooperation agreement** with a focus on **Maritime Domain Awareness** (MDA) is also in the works.
    - Australia has agreed to post a **Liaison Officer** at the Indian Navy's [Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region](#) (IFC-IOR) at Gurugram.
  - Expected conclusion on **Mutual Logistics Support Agreement** (MLSA) to elevate the strategic partnership between [India and Australia](#).
    - MLSA would allow reciprocal use of each other's military bases for exchange of fuel and provisions to simplify logistical support and improve operational turnaround.
    - India has **similar logistics support agreement with the USA** named [Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement](#) (LEMOA).
- **Background:**
  - Australia was the first country to submit a draft MLSA after **India signed the first such agreement with the USA in 2016**.
  - Initially, it was to be signed in 2019 and then in January 2020.

- The events got postponed due to the [Australian forest fires](#) and then [Covid-19 pandemic](#).

## Way Forward

- The two nations are at **very different levels of development** so there can be converging and diverging interests. Therefore, the future must be woven around the three pillars, which are **economic relationship, geostrategic congruence** and **people-to-people ties** and the glue that can bind this is a sustained momentum.
- India and Australia are wary of **China's assault** on maritime security and freedom of navigation **in the Indo-Pacific region**. Inclusion of Australia in Malabar exercise along with strengthening the idea of 'Quad' can therefore promote rule-based, open, free and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

[Source: TH](#)

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## Expansion of the Amery Ice Shelf

### Why in News

The [National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research \(NCPOR\)](#) has predicted an increase **in the expansion of Amery Ice Shelf (AIS) boundaries** from its 2016 positions.

- The AIS is **one of the largest glacier drainage basins** in the world, located on the **east coast of Antarctica**.
  - The AIS dynamics and mass balance help in understanding the **changes in the global climate scenario**.
- The prediction made by NCPOR is expected to help to understand the **ongoing changes in the ocean and atmospheric forces better**.

### Ice Shelves

- The floating sheets of ice are called '**ice shelves**'. It plays a multi-faceted role in maintaining the **stability of a glacier**.
- The ice sheet mass balance, sea stratification, and bottom water formation are important parameters for the balancing of a glacier. Ice shelves **connect a glacier to the landmass**.
  - The **ice sheet mass balance** of a glacier is the net balance between the mass gained by snow deposition, and the loss of mass by melting.
  - **Sea stratification** takes place when water masses with different properties - salinity, oxygenation, density, temperature - form layers that act as barriers to water mixing.
  - The **deep-ocean bottom water** is formed by the cooling and sinking of surface water at high latitudes.

### Key Points

- **Description:**
  - The predictions are based on a **16-year-long satellite-based observation** that covered an area of 60,000 sq. km across the AIS.

- The study intends to analyze **AIS extension and the influence of ocean atmospheric forcing in East Antarctica.**
- **Expansion of AIS:**
  - It has been predicted that there would be a **24% increase** in the expansion of AIS boundaries by **2021** and another **24% expansion by 2026** from its 2016 positions.
  - The study has also observed a **spatio-temporal change** in the ice shelf as reflected by the **extension of the Prydz, Mackenzie and the Sandefjord Bays** which forms a part of the AIS.
- **Significance:**
  - In the background of the global warming scenario, the study reveals about the **advancement in the predicted ice shelf extent**, the future dynamism of ocean heat fluctuation and Antarctic Amery ice shelf mass shifting-extent.
  - The study has also observed that the **critical cooling of the Sea Surface Temperature (SST)** is resulting in an **advancement of the ice shelf by 88%** in the past 15 years. These changes would contribute in a major way to **climate variability.**

[Source:PIB](#)

## USTR's Probe into Digital Services Taxes

### Why in News

Recently, the office of the [United States Trade Representative \(USTR\)](#) has initiated investigations into **taxes adopted or under consideration by 10 nations, including India**, on revenues of **American digital service companies** like **Netflix, Airbnb** etc.

- Such taxes are known as **Digital Service Taxes.**

### Key Points

- **The Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR):**
  - It is responsible for developing and coordinating US international trade.
  - [The Section 301](#) gives the USTR **broad authority to investigate and respond to a foreign country's** action which may be unfair or discriminatory as well as negatively affect US commerce.
    - Adopted through the 1974 Trade act, the Section allows the US President to impose tariffs or other curbs on foreign nations.
  - However, the law mandates consultations with trading partners.
- **Digital Services Taxes (DSTs):**
  - These are the adopted taxes on revenues that certain companies generate from providing certain digital services. E.g. digital multinationals like Google, Amazon and Apple etc.
  - The [Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development \(OECD\)](#) is currently hosting negotiations with over 130 countries that aim to adapt the international tax system. One goal is to address the tax challenges of the digitalization of the economy.
    - Some experts argue that a tax policy designed to target a single sector or activity is likely to be unfair and have complex consequences. The digital economy cannot be easily separated out from the rest of the global economy.

## ▪ India's Tax on Digital Companies:

- The US is probing the **2% Digital Services Tax (DST)** that India adopted in March and which went into effect on April 1, 2020.
- The tax applies only to **non-resident companies** with annual revenues over \$267,000, and covers online sales of goods & services to persons in India.
- Further, equalisation levy at 6% has been in force since 2016 on payment exceeding Rs. 1 lakh a year to a non-resident service provider for online advertisements.
  - This is **applicable for e-commerce companies** that are sourcing revenue from Indian customers without having tangible presence in the particular country.

## ▪ The US Stand:

- The US is concerned that many of its trading partners are adopting tax schemes designed to unfairly target US companies.
  - Several countries in the world are adopting unilateral measures in the absence of a multilateral consensus spearheaded by OECD. US tech companies which have been phenomenally successful globally are facing the brunt of these unilateral measures and therefore this investigation.
- It argued that **India's equalisation levy is complex and ambiguous** which includes the **possibility of double taxation of income** in absence of access to foreign tax credit as per tax treaties.

## ▪ India's Chance to Respond:

- India will be given an opportunity to negotiate with the US and prevent the imposition of tariffs by reaching a comprehensive outcome, on the line of similar negotiations that are currently underway with France.
- India is expected to argue that the levy is in compliance with India's commitments under the 1995 General Agreement on Trade in Services (Treaty under the World Trade Organization) and is applicable on all global companies, not just American ones.
- In case when the goods and services are supplied to the resident, typically the **non-residents have been able to pass on the burden to the Indian consumers** and therefore indirectly the tax has been borne by the **Indian consumers**.

## ▪ Concerns:

- In the backdrop of an improper functioning of the [World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#), the move could signal the start of more **unilateral action** by the US especially on the digital services front.
- In India's case, the probe could potentially affect the **outcome of a bilateral trade deal** that India has been looking to forge with the US.
- Further, [India continues to be on the 'Priority Watch List' of the United States Trade Representative \(USTR\)](#) for lack of adequate Intellectual Property (IP) rights protection and enforcement.

## Way Forward

As India is racing towards becoming a digital giant, the 2% DST should be negotiated to avoid any hurdles in its implementation. Further, there needs to be international consensus on taxation on a digital economy.

[Source: IE](#)

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# Poaching Increased During Lockdown

## Why in News

According to a report released by the [TRAFFIC](#), there has been a significant increase in reported poaching of wild animals during the lockdown.

- The report was named as **'Indian wildlife amidst Covid-19 crisis: An analysis of poaching and illegal wildlife trade trends'**.
- The analysis was carried out by comparing media-reported instances of poaching during a six-week pre-lockdown period (February 10 to March 22) with those from six weeks during the lockdown (March 23 to May 3).

## Key Points

- **Incidences of poaching increased to more than double** during the lockdown period. The increase in poaching incidents was for **consumption and local trade**.
  - Poaching of **ungulates** (a group of large mammals with hooves), hunted mainly for their meat, **saw the highest increase** during the lockdown period.
  - Poaching of **small mammals such as hares, porcupines, pangolins, giant squirrels, civets, monkeys and smaller wild cats** also showed a marked increase.
  - Among big cats, **nine leopards were reported to have been killed**, against four in the pre-lockdown period.
- Several **protected Chinkaras** (*Gazella bennettii*), were reported to have been poached in Rajasthan.
  - Chinkara is a protected species under the **Schedule 1** of the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**.
  - IUCN Status: **Least Concern**.
- Despite being linked to the [Covid-19](#) crisis, [Pangolins](#) were targeted by poachers in various parts of the country.
- However, some species, like **tortoises and big cats, which need transportation of trafficked parts have not been poached** because there was no transportation available.
  - **Seizures of wild pet-birds also reduced** due to lack of transportation and market.
- **Issues Involved:**
  - If poaching of ungulates and small animals remains unchecked **it will lead to depletion of prey base** for big cats like tigers and leopards.
  - This in turn will lead to higher incidences of **human-wildlife conflicts**.
  - It will lead to **depletion of the ecosystems** and undermine the significant successes that India has achieved in the field of wildlife conservation.

## TRAFFIC

- TRAFFIC is a leading **Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network** and **non-governmental organisation** working globally on trade in wild animals and plants in the context of both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.
- It is a joint program of the **World Wildlife Fund (WWF)** and the [International Union for Conservation of Nature \(IUCN\)](#), created in 1976.
- TRAFFIC focuses on leveraging resources, expertise and awareness of the latest globally urgent species trade issues such as tiger parts, elephant ivory and rhino horn.

## World Wildlife Fund

- It is the world's **leading conservation organization** and works in more than 100 countries.
- It was established in 1961 and is headquartered at Gland, Switzerland.

- Its **mission is to conserve nature** and reduce the most pressing threats to the diversity of life on Earth.
- WWF collaborates at every level with people around the world to develop and deliver innovative solutions that protect communities, wildlife, and the places in which they live.

[Source: IE](#)

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## Re-establishment of PCIM&H

### Why in News

Recently, the Union Cabinet has given its approval to re-establish **Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine and Homoeopathy** (PCIM&H) as a **subordinate office** under the [Ministry of AYUSH](#).

- **Pharmacopoeia Laboratory for Indian Medicine** (PLIM) and **Homoeopathic Pharmacopoeia Laboratory** (HPL), central laboratories established at **Ghaziabad** (Uttar Pradesh) since **1975**, will be merged into the PCIM&H.

### Key Points

- Presently, PCIM&H is an **autonomous body** under the aegis of Ministry of AYUSH, established since **2010**.
- **Pharmacopoeia** is an **officially recognized book of standards** as per the [Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940](#) and **Rules 1945** thereunder.
  - As per the **Second Schedule of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act**, it is designated as the official book of standards for drugs imported and/or manufactured for sale, stock or exhibition for sale or distribution in India.
  - It specifies the **standards of drugs manufactured and marketed in India** in terms of their **identity, purity and strength**.
- The merger intends to accord legal status to the merged structure of PCIM&H and its laboratory by making the necessary amendments and enabling provisions in the **Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945**.
  - Consultations have been done with the Director General Health Services, Drugs Controller General and the **Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani Drugs Technical Advisory Board** (ASUDTAB).
- **Benefits of the Merger:**
  - Optimum use of infrastructural facilities, technical manpower and financial resources of the three organizations for enhancing their standardised outcomes.
  - Focused and cohesive development of standards of AYUSH drugs and publication of pharmacopoeias and formularies.

### Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani Drugs Technical Advisory Board

- ASUDTAB is a **statutory body** under the provisions of **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940**.
- It **advises the central and state governments** in regulatory matters of **Accelerated Shelf Life Testing (ASLT) drugs**.

## Accelerated Shelf Life Testing

- It is an indirect method of measuring and estimating the stability of a product by storing the product under controlled conditions that increase the rate of degradation occurring in the product under normal storage conditions.
- ASLT is **useful for a number of purposes like:**
  - To predict product stability including colour.
  - To determine product safety under abuse conditions.
  - To troubleshoot in the initial stages of product development.
  - To assess the packaging performance of a product.

[Source: PIB](#)

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## SWADES: Skill Mapping Exercise for Returning Citizens

### Why in News

Recently, the Government has launched an initiative '**SWADES - Skilled Workers Arrival Database for Employment Support**'.

### Key Points

- The initiative, undertaken as part of the Vande Bharat Mission, aims at empowering the returning citizens with relevant employment opportunities.
  - Vande Bharat Mission is an evacuation exercise to bring back Indian citizens stranded abroad amidst the coronavirus-induced travel restrictions.
- It is a **joint initiative** of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, the Ministry of Civil Aviation and the Ministry of External Affairs.
  - The **National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)** is supporting the implementation of the project.
- It aims to create a database of qualified citizens based on their skill sets and experience to tap into and fulfil demand of Indian and foreign companies.
  - The collected information will be shared with the companies for suitable placement opportunities in the country.
- The returning citizens are required to fill up an online **SWADES Skills Card**.
  - It will facilitate a strategic framework to provide the returning citizens with suitable employment opportunities through discussions with key stakeholders including State Governments, Industry Associations and Employers.

### National Skill Development Corporation

- NSDC is a not-for-profit public limited company incorporated under section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956 (corresponding to section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013).
- It was set up by the Ministry of Finance as a Public Private Partnership (PPP) model.
- The Government of India through the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) holds 49% of the share capital of NSDC, while the private sector has the balance 51% of the share

capital.

- It aims to promote skill development by catalyzing creation of large, quality and for-profit vocational institutions.

[Source:PIB](#)

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## Central Employment Guarantee Council

### Why in News

Recently, the 21<sup>st</sup> meeting of the **Central Employment Guarantee Council** was held through video-conferencing.

### Key Points

- The government highlighted the work done under [Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act \(MGNREGA\), 2005](#), by providing employment to rural people.
  - The government has allocated Rs. 61,500 crore for MGNREGA for the Financial Year 2020-21, which is an all-time high.
  - Additional provision of Rs. 40,000 crore has been made for this programme under [Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan](#) to provide employment to the needy workers during the difficult period due to Covid-19.
- The government has also stressed on the irrigation and water conservation activities under the MGNREGA.
- **Central Employment Guarantee Council:**
  - The Central Council has been **constituted under Section 10 of the MGNREGA.**
  - It is chaired by the **Minister of Rural development.**
  - It is **responsible for advising the Central Government on MGNREGA related matters**, and for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Act.
  - It prepares Annual Reports on the **implementation of MGNREGA for submission to Parliament.**

[Source: PIB](#)

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## Rajasthan Tops in Covid-19 Management Index

### Why in News

Rajasthan has topped the list of [Covid-19 Management Index](#) which was analysed for **10 states** by the Central government, including parameters such as **active cases, recovered cases** and **mortality rate.**

### Key Points



- The positive cases in the state are heading towards the 10,000-mark but the **graph of active cases has been constantly declining.**
- There were **only 2,699 active cases** in the state as of now. The **mortality rate was 2.16%**, which was quite **less than the national average** and the **recovery rate was 67.59%.**
- While the **doubling time** of Covid-19 infection in **India is 12 days**, it stands at **18 days in Rajasthan.**
- **Despite the return of migrants** in huge numbers, the infection had not spread widely in the rural areas because of **micro-planning at the village and subdivision levels.**
  - Healthcare initiatives such as **immunisation, family welfare, maternal and child health** and **national health programmes**, ensured that the people's needs are met, health infrastructure remains intact and the State's health index is not adversely impacted.
- To raise awareness about the Covid-19, '**Swasthya Mitras**' will be appointed in each revenue village.
  - *Swasthya Mitra* is a **native of the area** and is **trained to create awareness** amongst the community for helping and guiding them by identifying the nature of the disease, the signs and symptoms and accordingly guiding them to seek proper medical treatment without much delay.

[Source: TH](#)

## Renaming of Kolkata Port Trust

### Why in News

The Union Cabinet has given its approval to **rename Kolkata Port as Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port.**

- Earlier, the announcement was made on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the trust.

### Key Points

- The Kolkata Port is the **oldest operating port in India**, and was constructed by the **British East India Company.**
- It is the **only riverine Major Port.** Its navigational channel is **one of the longest** in the world.
- **Gateway to Eastern India:**
  - It is the guiding factor to trade and commerce of vast hinterland comprising the entire Eastern India including **Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh** and the **two land-locked Himalayan Kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan.**
- **Governance:** The Kolkata Port Trust is an **autonomous body** under the Ministry of Shipping, administered through the **Major Port Trusts Act, 1963.**

### Shyama Prasad Mookerjee (1901-1953)

- Born in a Bengali Family
- Leader of Hindu Mahasabha.
- Served as a minister in the Bengal government in 1937.
- Member of Constituent Assembly and later, the first Lok Sabha.
- Minister in Nehru's first cabinet after independence; resigned in 1950 due to differences over relations with Pakistan.
- Founder of Bharatiya Jana Sangh (The Bharatiya Janata Party -BJP is the successor of BJS).
- Was opposed to India's policy of autonomy to Jammu & Kashmir; arrested during Jana Sangh's

agitation against Kashmir policy; died during detention.

**Source:PIB**

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