

**COVID- 19 NEWS****Coronavirus Global Response International Pledging Conference**

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson opened a virtual global conference on COVID-19 by calling on all countries to step up their efforts and work together on fighting the coronavirus pandemic.

**About:**

- The Coronavirus Global Response International Pledging Conference was co-hosted by the UK and eight other countries and organisations including Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, Saudi Arabia, and the European Commission.
- At the conference, Johnson confirmed the UK's pledge of 388 million pounds aid funding for research into vaccines, tests and treatments – part of a larger 744 million pounds existing UK aid commitment to help end the pandemic and support the global economy.
- This includes 250 million pounds for the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations to develop vaccines against coronavirus – the biggest such donation to the fund by any country.

**Swine Flu**

Data from the Health Ministry's National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), show that the five States/UTs namely Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Delhi, Tamil Nadu consistently accounted for the bulk of swine flu cases, or seasonal influenza (H1N1) since 2015.

**About:**

- H1N1 Flu Virus (Swine Flu) is an infection caused by type A influenza viruses.
- Who are infected? It's named for a virus that pigs can get. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. In 2009 a strain of swine flu called H1N1 infected many people around the world. The virus is contagious and can spread from human to human.
- Symptoms: Symptoms of swine flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue.
- Spread in India: February-March are typical months for influenza in India. Most influenza activity in northern India was seen during the summer months, but in southern and western India, cases occurred mostly during winter months.

**Swine flu vs COVID-19**

- While both H1N1 and COVID-19 are due to pathogens that trace their origins to viruses from non-human hosts, they belong to different families.
- While both infiltrate the lungs and cause characteristic pulmonary infections, they have varying lethality.
- Swine flu infections have a higher case fatality rates (deaths per confirmed cases) and can cause significant deaths in children as well as those less than 60.
- COVID-19 on the other hand is relatively more dangerous to those above 60 and almost harmless in children.

**Llama**

Researchers have developed a treatment that links two nanobodies isolated from a 'Llama' named winter to create an antibody that binds to the spike protein on the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. That bond prevented the virus from invading cells. Winter, the llama, is 4 years old, female, and living on a farm in the Belgian countryside.

**About:**

- Family: Llamas are a member of the camelid family, which includes camels, alpacas, vicunas, and guanacos.
- Description: Llamas have a typical camel-like body shape, but they lack the humps of the Bactrian and dromedary camel.
- Distribution: Llamas are no longer found in the wild. They are now distributed throughout North America, Europe, Australia, Argentina, Ecuador, Chile, Bolivia, and Peru. Currently, nearly 70% of llamas are found in Bolivia.

### **INDIAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE, HISTORY**

#### **Bishnu Sendra Parva**

For the first time in living memory, not a single animal was killed in Jharkhand on Bishnu Sendra Parva.

#### **About:**

- Bishnu Sendra Parva is an annual hunting festival observed by tribals of Jharkhand and the neighbouring Odisha and West Bengal.
- This year, Adivasis observed the centuries-old festival without leaving their houses as Jharkhand continued with a complete lockdown across the state. With the lockdown continuing, many tribal hunters could not reach the forests to observe the festival.

### **GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.**

#### **Saras Collection**

Union Rural Development Minister launched the Saras collection on Government e Marketplace (GeM) portal in New Delhi.

#### **About:**

- It is a unique initiative of GeM and the Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), Ministry of Rural Development.
- The Saras collection showcases daily utility products made by rural self-help groups. It aims to provide market in rural areas with access to Central and State Government buyers.
- Under the initiative, sellers from Self Help Group will be able to list their products in 5 product categories, namely (i) handicrafts, (ii) handloom and textiles, (iii) office accessories, (iv) grocery and pantry, and (v) personal care and hygiene.

#### **Related Info :**

- Government e Marketplace (GeM): It is a 100 percent Government owned Section 8 Company set up as the National Public Procurement Portal for procurement of goods and services required by Central and State Government organizations.
- DAY-NRLM: DAY-NLRM aims to reduce poverty through promotion of diversified and gainful self-employment while creating skilled wage employment opportunities.

### **SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Excise Duty On Alcohol**

The Delhi government announced a 70% hike in the price of liquor across categories in the capital. Delhi's "special corona fee" on alcohol underlines the importance of liquor to the economy of the states.

#### **About:**

- Liquor contributes a considerable amount to the exchequers of all states and Union Territories except Gujarat and Bihar, both of which have enforced prohibition.
- Generally, states levy excise duty on manufacture and sale of liquor. Some states, for example Tamil Nadu, also impose VAT (value added tax). States also charge special fees on imported foreign liquor; transport fee; and label & brand registration charges.

- A few states, such as Uttar Pradesh, have imposed a “special duty on liquor” to collect funds for special purposes, such as maintenance of stray cattle.
- According to a report published by the RBI in September 2019, state excise duty on alcohol accounts for around 10-15 per cent of Own Tax Revenue of a majority of states. In fact, state excise duties on liquor is the second or third largest contributor to the category State’s Own Tax revenue; sales tax (now GST) is the largest.
- During 2018-19, the five states that collected the highest revenue from excise duty on liquor were Uttar Pradesh (Rs 25,100 crore), followed by Karnataka, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Telangana.

## **SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- EVERYDAY SCIENCE, SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE ETC**

### **Arktika-M**

Russia announced that it will launch first Arktika-M satellite for monitoring Arctic climate by the end of the year.

#### **About:**

- As of now first satellite is developed and the launch is planned for 2020.
- The satellite will be launched by Soyuz -2,1b carrier rocket with frigate booster. The remote sensing Artika-M will monitor the meteorological conditions in the polar region

### **Long March 5B’ Rocket by China**

Recently, China has successfully launched the Long March 5B’ rocket and prototype spacecraft. It is being considered as China’s successful step to operate a permanent space station and send astronauts to the Moon. India is also planning to launch its own space station.

#### **Long March 5B’ Rocket:**

- It was launched from the Wenchang launch site in the southern island of Hainan.
- It weighs 849 tonnes.
- It is expected to transport astronauts to a space station that China plans to complete by 2022 — and eventually to the Moon. It will have capacity for a crew of six.

#### **Future Missions by China:**

- The assembly of the Tiangong space station is expected to begin in 2020 and finish in 2022.
- China plans to send an astronaut to the Moon in about a decade and then build a base there.
- The United States is so far the only country to have successfully sent humans to the Moon.

## **PRELIMS SPECIFIC FACTS- INDICES, DAYS, EVENTS, AWARDS ETC**

### **Indian Photojournalists Won Pulitzer Prize**

Recently, five Indian photojournalists won the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for feature photography.

#### **Key Points**

- Pulitzer Prize is awarded for outstanding public service and achievement in American journalism, letters, and music.
- It is awarded in the name of Joseph Pulitzer, a newspaper publisher who gave money in his will to Columbia University to launch a journalism school and establish the Prize.
- It was established in 1917 and is administered by Columbia University and Pulitzer Prize Board.
- Each winner receives a certificate and a US\$15,000 cash award. The winner in the public service category is awarded a gold medal.

**DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE**

**Qns Examine how the COVID-19 Pandemic aggravated the problems in the MSME Sector in India.**

**Answer**

The Covid-19 pandemic has left its impact on all sectors of the economy including the Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises (MSMEs) sector. Earlier the government had declared the relief package namely, the PM Garib Kalyan Yojana for the poor to help them fight the battle against Coronavirus (Covid-19), the second package is expected to primarily focus on the MSME sector.

**Problems Faced by MSMEs in India**

- **Too Small to get Registered:** Being out of the formal network, these MSMEs do not have to maintain accounts, pay taxes or adhere to regulatory norms etc., which brings down their costs. But in a time of crisis, it also constrains a government's ability to help them.
- **Lack of Financing:** Most of the MSME funding comes from informal sources and it explains why the Reserve Bank of India's efforts to push more liquidity towards the MSMEs have had a limited impact. Also, the government has launched schemes in this regard. Further, banks dither from extending loans to MSMEs due to the high ratio of bad loans. According to a 2018 report by the International Finance Corporation (part of the World Bank), the formal banking system supplies less than one-third (or about Rs 11 lakh crore) of the MSME credit need that it can potentially fund.
- **Delays in Payments to MSMEs:** It is one of the biggest reasons for financial turmoil in the MSME sector.
- **MSMEs face delays in payment from their buyers** which also includes the government. It also faces delays in GST refunds.

**Problem Aggravated due to Covid-19**

- **Declining Revenues:** MSMEs are already struggling — in terms of declining revenues and capacity utilisation — in the lead-up to the Covid-19 crisis.
- **Unavailability of Cash:** The total lockdown has raised an issue of the existence of MSMEs primarily due to unavailability of cash which subsequently will result in the job losses.
- **Lack of Labour Availability:** The return of migrant labourers will create an issue of lack of labour availability.
- **Loan Against Collateral :** Loans to MSMEs are mostly given against property (as collateral) but in times of crisis, property values fall and that inhibits the extension of new loans.
- **Steps Taken:** To ease the firms' financial distress during this period, the Reserve bank of India has announced several measures such as a moratorium on term loans, and easier working capital financing. Some public sector banks have also opened up emergency credit lines for businesses.

**Way Forward**

- The government can provide tax relief (GST and corporate tax), give swifter refunds, and provide liquidity to rural India (may be through PM-Kisan) to boost demand for MSME products.

A credit guarantee by the government can help as it assures the bank that its loan will be repaid by the government in case the MSME falters. If such defaults happen, credit guarantees are shown as a departmental expense in the Budget.