



PRECURE COMPILATION FOR 2020

**4th week of April
(27th April to 2nd May)**

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GEOGRAPHY

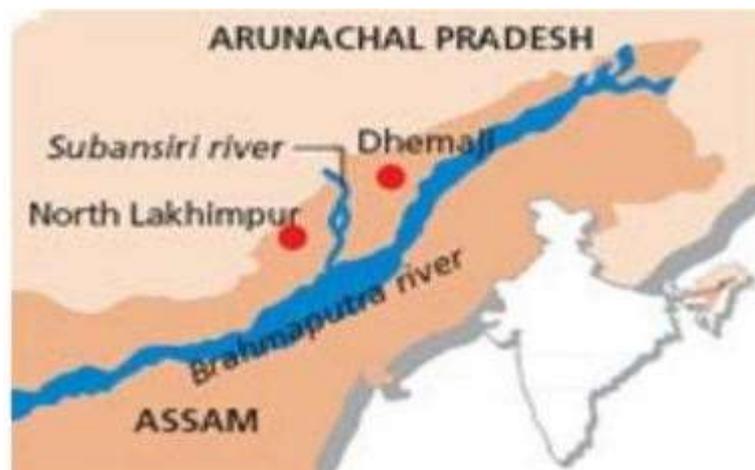
<https://youtu.be/9rnvOKA4tkc>

1. Sujalam Sufalam Jal Sanchay Abhiyan

- The Sujalam Sufalam Jal Sanchay Abhiyan is a **water conservation scheme launched by the Gujarat state government in 2018 after experiencing a weak monsoon.**
- It looks to **increase the water storage capacity in the state by preparing water bodies and other infrastructure before the monsoon.**
- **Cleaning and desilting of riverfronts, irrigation canals, deepening of reservoirs, lakes and tanks.**
- It works on a **PPP model with the government contributing 60% of the expenditure while the remaining 40% is provided by the people.**
- The **Gujarat state government has launched the 3rd edition of the Sujalam Sufalam Jal Sanchay Abhiyan to prepare the water bodies before the monsoon.**
- The scheme, which will continue till June 10, will see the deepening of lakes, check dams and rivers by removing silt, and it will be done with people's participation as well as under MNREGA.

2. Daporijo Bridge

The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has constructed the **Daporijo Bridge over Subansiri River in Arunachal Pradesh in a record span of just 27 days.**



It links roads leading upto the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China.

Subansiri River

- Subansiri River **originates in the Tibet Plateau and enters India through Miri hills in Arunachal Pradesh.**
- It is the **largest tributary of Brahmaputra River.**

3. Kisan Rath Mobile App

- **Agriculture Ministry has launched Kisan Rath Mobile App to facilitate transportation of food grains and perishables during the lockdown.**
- The app is **developed by the National Informatics Centre to facilitate farmers and traders in searching transport vehicles for movement of Agriculture and Horticulture produce.**
- The App will also **facilitate traders in transportation of perishable commodities by Refrigerated vehicles.**

4. MSP for MFP (Minor Forest Produce)

- The scheme, **launched by the Centre in August 2013, provides fair price for MFP collected by tribals through MSP.**
- It is **designed as a social safety net for improvement of livelihood of MFP gatherers by providing them fair**

price for the MFPs they collect.

- MFP comprises all non-timber forest produce of plant origin such as bamboo, brush wood, stumps, cane, tussar, cocoons, honey, wax, lac, tendu or kendu leaves, medicinal plants and herbs, roots, tubers, etc, according to the Forest Rights Act, 2006.
- The Scheme was been implemented in eight States having Schedule areas as listed in the Fifth Schedule of the constitution of India. From November 2016, the scheme is applicable in all States.

5. Saiyam

- It is a mobile application developed by the Pune Municipal Corporation under Smart Cities Mission to effectively track the home-quarantined citizens and ensure that they are staying in the home.
- The Mobile Application has GPS tracking so that whenever quarantined citizens leave their homes, City Administration gets alerted and the local ward or the local police station gets informed, who then visit the family.

6. Matterhorn

- Matterhorn is a mountain of the Alps.
- Indian Tricolour of more than 1,000 meters in size was projected on Matterhorn Mountain, Zermatt, Switzerland to express solidarity to all Indians in the fight against COVID-19.



7. Yanomami Tribe

- The Yanomami are the largest relatively isolated tribe in South America.
- The Yanomami people live in large circular and communal houses called Yanos or Shabonos.
- They live in the rainforests and mountainous regions of Northern Brazil and Southern Venezuela.
- They practice hunting and slash-and-burn agriculture.

8. World Food Programme

- The WFP is the food-assistance branch of the United Nations.
- It is the world's largest humanitarian organization addressing hunger and promoting food security.
- It works to help people who cannot produce or obtain enough food for themselves and their families.
- It was established in 1961 after the 1960 Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) Conference.
- Its headquarter is in Rome (Italy) and has more than 80 country offices around the world.
- It is a member of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and part of its Executive Committee.

9. Kasowal Bridge

The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has constructed a permanent bridge on the Ravi river to connect Kasowal enclave in Punjab along the India - Pakistan border to the rest of the country.

10. Noor Satellite

It is a military satellite launched recently by Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps which is a branch of the country's armed forces.

POLITY

<https://youtu.be/ax3rOWQ4i3A>

1. Supreme Court on NEET and Minority Rights

- The Supreme Court on April 29th 2020 declared that the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) does not violate the rights of minorities under the Constitution. NEET is the common entrance exam for admission to graduate and postgraduate medical and dental courses in unaided or aided institutes, rules the apex court.
- “The rights to administer an institution under Article 30 of the Constitution are not above the law and other Constitutional provisions. Reasonable regulatory measures can be provided without violating such rights available under Article 30,” the SC ruled.
- A petition was filed in 2012 that questioned the constitutional validity of NEET. Every year, about 15 lakh students appear for the exam across the country for admission to undergraduate courses. NEET is conducted separately for postgraduate admissions. The counselling and admissions through NEET are administered by the Medical Council of India (MCI), under the Ministry of Health.

2. Supreme Court guidelines on lynching

- The Palghar lynching incident has underlined the issue of mob violence and lynching in the country. In the absence of a uniform, central law, the Supreme Court while hearing the case of Tehseen Poonawalla vs the Union of India on 17 July 2018, gave a detailed order addressing the issue of mob lynching. The court observed, “Mob vigilantism and mob violence have to be prevented by the governments by taking strict action.”
- So far, three states have given legislative backing to the guidelines issued by the Supreme Court. Manipur was the first state to do so followed by Rajasthan and West Bengal. The Manipur government initially promulgated an ordinance in November 2018 and a few days later the state’s legislature passed the Manipur Protection from Mob Violence Act. Rajasthan and West Bengal have used the Manipur law as a template.
- The court formulated a three-pronged approach to putting an end to mob lynching. The first step requires states to take preventive steps to ensure that lynching does not occur. The court’s guidelines mandate the states to identify regions where lynching could occur. The guidelines also prescribe that in every district a senior police officer should be designated as the nodal officer to take measures to prevent lynching. They specify that the nodal officer should take steps to prevent the creation of a hostile environment against any community or caste. The officer is also required to prevent the spread of messages or videos that could incite mobs. The guidelines categorically state that every police officer shall be duty-bound to disperse a mob which may cause lynching.
- In case the preventive measures fail, the court’s guidelines prescribe remedial measures which include protection to witnesses, legal aid to victims or next of kin and time-bound completion of judicial proceedings. The guidelines also direct the states to create a scheme to provide compensation to victims of lynching/mob violence. The final step in the court’s approach to curbing lynching is to hold the police or district administration officers accountable for their negligence in preventing incidents of lynching.

3. 47 years of Keshvananda Bharati judgment

- 47 years ago in 1973, the Supreme Court passed its landmark judgment in Kesavananda Bharati vs State of Kerala, considered among the most significant constitutional cases in India’s judicial history.
- By a 7-6 verdict, a 13-judge Constitution Bench ruled that the ‘basic structure’ of the Constitution is inviolable, and could not be amended by Parliament. The basic structure doctrine has since been regarded as a tenet of Indian constitutional law.
- In the early years of Independence, the Supreme Court conceded absolute power to Parliament in amending the Constitution, as was seen in the verdicts in Shankari Prasad (1951) and Sajjan Singh (1965). In subsequent years, as the Constitution kept being amended at will to suit the interests of the ruling dispensation, the Supreme Court in Golaknath (1967) held that Parliament’s amending power could not touch Fundamental Rights, and this power would be only with a Constituent Assembly.
- In the early 1970s, the government of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had enacted major amendments to the Constitution (the 24th, 25th, 26th and 29th) to get over the judgments of the Supreme Court in RC Cooper

(1970), Madhavrao Scindia (1970) and the earlier mentioned Golaknath.

- In RC Cooper, the court had struck down Indira Gandhi's bank nationalisation policy, and in Madhavrao Scindia it had annulled the abolition of privy purses of former rulers.
- All the four amendments, as well as the Golaknath judgment, came under challenge in the Kesavananda Bharati case— where relief was sought by the religious figure Swami Kesavananda Bharati against the Kerala government vis-à-vis two state land reform laws.
- The Constitutional Bench, whose members shared serious ideological differences, ruled by a 7-6 verdict that Parliament should be restrained from altering the 'basic structure' of the Constitution.
- The court held that under Article 368, which provides Parliament amending powers, something must remain of the original Constitution that the new amendment would change.
- The court did not define the 'basic structure', and only listed a few principles — federalism, secularism, democracy — as being its part. Since then, the court has been adding new features to this concept.

Basic Structure

The doctrine has been seen as an ever evolving one. The 'basic structure' doctrine has since been interpreted to include the supremacy of the Constitution, the rule of law, Independence of the judiciary, doctrine of separation of powers, federalism, secularism, sovereign democratic republic, the parliamentary system of government, the principle of free and fair elections, welfare state, etc.

4. Nomination to Legislative Council of State

- The Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyar is yet to decide whether Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray should be nominated to one of the seats reserved for the Governor's nominee in the state Legislative Council even after the same was recommended by the Cabinet.
- Thackeray took oath on November 28, 2019 — and in accordance with Article 164(4), “a Minister who for any period of six consecutive months is not a member of the Legislature of the State shall at the expiration of that period cease to be a Minister”.
- The six month period ends on May 27th. Given the coronavirus pandemic, a by-election cannot be held. The only way to fulfil the requirement, therefore, is for Thackeray to be nominated to the Upper House by the Governor.
- In S R Chaudhuri vs State of Punjab and Ors (2001), the Supreme Court had ruled that “it would be subverting the Constitution to permit an individual, who is not a member of the Legislature, to be appointed a Minister repeatedly for a term of 'six consecutive months', without him getting himself elected in the meanwhile. The practice would be clearly derogatory to the constitutional scheme, improper, undemocratic and invalid”.
- Article 163(1) of the Constitution makes it clear that the Governor must follow the recommendations of the Council of Ministers in all situations “except in so far as he is by or under this Constitution required to exercise his functions or any of them in his discretion”. Furthermore, the Constitution specifically mentions the situations in which the Governor can act in his discretion, e.g., Article 239 (Administration of Union Territories), Article 371 (Special provision with respect to the States of Maharashtra and Gujarat), Article 371A (Nagaland), Article 371H (Arunachal Pradesh), and in the Sixth Schedule (Provisions as to the Administration of Tribal Areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram), etc.
- Under Article 171(5), the Governor can nominate “persons having special knowledge or practical experience in respect of. Literature, science, art, co-operative movement and social service”. As per the Allahabad High Court in Har Sharan Varma vs Chandra Bhan Gupta and Ors (February 15, 1961), even politics can be seen as 'social service'.
- Two Legislative Council seats in the Governor's quota are currently vacant; however, the terms of these vacancies end on June 6, and a fresh appointment can be made only for the remainder of the term. It has been argued that Section 151A of The Representation of the People Act, 1951, prohibits the filling of a vacancy if “the remainder of the term of a member in relation to a vacancy is less than one year”. However, this cannot be a reason for the Governor to refuse nomination — because the bar is in respect of by-election to fill a vacancy, not nomination.

5. Vigilance Commissioner appointed

- Eminent banker Suresh N. Patel on April 29, 2020 took oath as the Vigilance Commissioner in the anti-corruption watchdog CVC which had been lying vacant since June 2019. Mr. Patel's name to the post was recommended by a high-powered committee headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in February 2020.
- Mr. Patel, aged 62, was a member of the advisory board for banking and financial frauds of the Central Vigilance Commission. He resigned from the board after his selection as the vigilance commissioner.
- He will have a tenure of over two years, till late December, 2022, in the CVC. The tenure of a vigilance commissioner is of four years or till the incumbent attains the age of 65 years. The CVC can have a central vigilance commissioner and two vigilance commissioners. Sharad Kumar is working as the other vigilance commissioner.
- The CVC is appointed by the president on the recommendation of the committee consisting of the prime minister as its chairperson, and the home minister and the leader of opposition in Lok Sabha as its members.

6. National Infrastructure Pipeline

- The Task Force on National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) submitted its Final Report on NIP for FY 2019-25 to the Union Minister for Finance & Corporate Affairs Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman on April 29, 2020. The Summary Report of the Task Force on National Infrastructure Pipeline for 2019-2025 has already been released by the Finance Minister on December 31st, 2019.
- NIP is a first-of-its-kind, whole-of-government exercise to provide world-class infrastructure across the country, and improve the quality of life for all citizens. It aims to improve project preparation, attract investments (both domestic and foreign) into infrastructure, and will be crucial for target of becoming a \$5 trillion economy by FY 2025.
- The NIP has been made on a best effort basis by aggregating the information provided by various stakeholders including line ministries, departments, state governments and private sector across infrastructure sub-sectors identified in the Harmonised Master List of Infrastructure. To draw up the NIP, a bottom-up approach was adopted wherein all projects (Greenfield or Brownfield, Under Implementation or under conceptualisation) costing greater than Rs 100 crore per project were sought to be captured.

7. Kisan Rath App

- The Agriculture Ministry has introduced a new mobile app for the farmers in India amidst nationwide lockdown. The app will assist Indian farmers and traders transport produced goods during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The Kisan Rath app has been developed by the National Informatics Centre (NIC) and is available to all Android users.
- The Kisan Rath mobile app will help facilitate transportation by onboarding 5 lakh trucks and 20,000 tractors on the online service. These networks will be easily accessible to farmers and traders who are looking for vehicles to transport the produced goods from one place to another.
- The new mobile platform will also offer different types of transport services including primary transport and secondary transport. The primary service will help farmers or traders to move the goods within the locality; from their farm to the local mandis, warehouses or the collection centres of farmer producer organisations.
- The secondary transport will enable them to transport goods from the mandis or warehouses to intra-and inter-State mandis, railway stations, processing units, warehouses or wholesalers. In addition, the app also offers transport services with refrigerators.
- Apart from the above features, the app also offers support for Hindi language so it can be easily accessed by farmers and traders.

8. Jal Shakti Abhiyan

- Jal Shakti Abhiyan (JSA) is a time-bound, mission-mode water conservation campaign. The JSA will run in two Phases: Phase 1 from 1st July to 15th September 2019 for all States and Union Territories; and Phase 2 from 1st October to 30th November 2019 for States and UTs receiving the retreating monsoon (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Puducherry and Tamil Nadu).
- During the campaign, officers, groundwater experts and scientists from the Government of India will work together with state and district officials in India's most water-stressed districts for water conservation and water resource management by focusing on accelerated implementation of five target intervention. The JSA

aims at making water conservation a Jan Andolan through asset creation and extensive communication.

- Water-stressed districts are districts with critical or over-exploited groundwater levels as per the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) 2017. For states without critical and over-exploited groundwater levels, districts with the least availability of groundwater in comparison to the rest of the districts in the state have been selected.
- This ‘Abhiyan ’is a mass movement to bring all the stakeholders under one ambit of water conservation drive, and last year it had a nationwide impact. In 2020 ‘Jal Shakti Abhiyan’ —is all set to combat the Covid 19 health crisis and give a boost to the rural economy through its various components. Ministry of Home Affairs have allowed to take up MNGREGS works/ drinking water & sanitation works during lockdown with priority to be given to irrigation and water conservation works.
- Central and State sector schemes in irrigation and water conservation sectors have also been allowed to be implemented with suitable dovetailing with MNREGS works. It will be further ensured that all works are undertaken with strict implementation of social distancing, use of face covers/ masks and other necessary precautions. Rejuvenation of traditional water bodies, removal of encroachments in the water bodies, desilting of lakes & ponds, construction/ strengthening of inlets/outlets, catchment area treatment can be taken up on priority.
- Similarly, rejuvenation of small rivers through community driven River Basin Management practices may also be initiated. Such activities would ensure water source sustainability in rural areas and would strengthen the ongoing Jal Jeevan Mission being implemented by Ministry of Jal Shakti.

ECONOMY

<https://youtu.be/T7Cwc7TrdAo>

1. Franklin Templeton

News

Franklin Templeton Asset Management Company (FT AMC) has announced the winding up six popular debt schemes with immediate effect.

Why was it required

- Redemption pressure on its funds after Covid depleted their holdings of better-rated paper.
- FT said that honouring any further redemption would force it to resort to fire sales; it is deciding to wind up its funds to protect residual value.

Concerns

- FT accounted for well over half of the industry's credit risk assets and was particularly popular with retail investors.
- Investors in these schemes have no specific communication on the Net Asset Values (NAVs) or timelines at which they can expect their money.
- This incident could well trigger a systemic crisis of confidence for other debt funds.

Is only COVID to be blamed?

- It stocked up on lower-rated bonds in a 'credit risk' fund.
- These papers have known illiquidity risks.
- There has been active mis-selling of debt funds with credit by packaging them as 'accrual' or 'high yield' funds.
- SEBI has played a somewhat passive role in regulating the positioning of this category, despite multiple accidents involving retail investors in debt funds in the last three years.
- SEBI categorises, debt funds on duration risks. It does little to warn investors off credit risks that may lurk in innocuous-sounding debt funds.

What could be done

- Revisiting SEBI categorization rules.
- Cracking down on mis-labelling and mis-selling
- Segregating debt funds run for institutional and retail investors
- Paying attention to the systemic problems arising from vanishing liquidity for corporate bonds (remember TLTROs are done for the same)
- The RBI can open a special liquidity window for corporate/NBFC bonds, to provide some relief to a frozen bond market.

2. Food Subsidy

What is the News

- Worries over the rising Food Subsidy Bill.
- It will be about ₹2 lakh crore plus food subsidy bill which is the difference between the procurement, transport and storage cost on the one hand and the issue price on the other.

Why this Concern

- Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana: Four million tonnes of foodgrains have been lifted by 36 States.
- National Food Security Act & Mid-day meals: For the entire year, about 50-60 million tonnes are estimated to be distributed through them.

Immediate Concern

- To now reach out to the millions of migrants who do not have a ration card
- To reach out to those who are outside the NFSA ambit

Way Out

- The Centre should release more foodgrains to the States (over and above transfers under the Garib Kalyan scheme) free of cost rather than at the issue price, relieving the States' fiscal burden.
- States and NGOs have stepped up community kitchens and other forms of emergency food distribution.
- Distributing grain free amounts to a saving on storage costs.
- Godowns also need to be cleared to make way for the new, bumper wheat crop.
- Decentralised procurement and storage can reduce distribution costs and hassles.
- States receiving migrants such as Bihar must step up efforts to create kitchens and begin MGNREGA works that are consistent with social distancing.

3. Private Businesses & Social Security

News

- The Labour Ministry has reportedly started collating data on job losses and pay-cuts from the EPFO and ESIC.
- It is said that this will be shared regularly with the Prime Minister's Office.

Some States are also issuing directives

- The Karnataka government has directed private sector employers to abstain from lay-offs and to grant workers paid leave.
- Maharashtra has mandated that business owners must pay 100 per cent of their workers' wages during the lockdown.
- These directives are now being contested at Supreme Court by small business owners for being both illegal and un-constitutional.

Some Reports

- SBI analysis: 37.3 crore, mainly informal or self-employed workers, will likely suffer a ₹4 lakh crore income loss.
- There is unprecedented working capital stress.
- Major PSU, SAIL, has reported a liquidity crunch because of un-recovered fixed costs and rising inventories.
- All India Manufacturers Association has said that around 70 per cent of MSMEs have no means to pay even utility bills leave alone full wages.
- Around 90 per cent of Indian businesses are own-account enterprises with little access to bank facilities even in the best of times.

Way Ahead

- A concrete package needs to be announced for workers and businesses debilitated by the lockdown.
- Expediting pending vendor payments and tax refunds.
- Allowing an interest-free moratorium on MSME loans.
- Wage subsidies to industry to keep workers on the rolls, deferred retirement contributions, waived utility bills and offered special credit lines and guarantees.

4. MCX Crude Futures Crisis

News

- The decline in WTI crude contracts on the NYMEX resulted in the settlement price of MCX April crude contracts being pegged at negative ₹2,884 per barrel.
- It resulted in losses to those who had 'buy' positions.

Various Concerns related with the same

- SEBI had revised the closing time for commodity futures trading to 5 pm from the earlier 11.30 pm. This reflects the system's inability to act quickly to square the loss-making positions.
- Indian commodity derivative markets and the exchange software do not have any provision for Negative prices.

Some Actionable Points to keep in mind in future

- CME has issued advisory in mid-April, warning that crude oil contracts could move to zero or negative values due to lack of storage space.
- MCX can warn its members asking them to close their positions in advance.
- The exchange also needs to issue a circular about how it plans to deal with negative pricing in crude contracts

in future and modify its trading platform to accept negative valued bids.

- The brokers and traders who actively transact in these contracts should keep abreast of the developments overseas, which were critical to the pricing of the Indian contract.

5. RBI Special Liquidity Facility for Mutual Funds

News

Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) special liquidity facility for mutual funds, intended as a rescue package to help debt funds tackle redemptions pressures after the Franklin Templeton fiasco.

What is the Scheme

- The special repo window will be available to all LAF (liquidity adjustment facility) eligible banks against eligible collateral and can be availed of only for on-lending to mutual funds (MFs).
- Under the SLF-MF, the RBI will conduct repo operations of 90-day tenor at the fixed repo rate.
- The SLF-MF is on tap and open-ended, and banks can submit their bids to avail themselves of funding on any day — Monday to Friday.
- Funds availed of under the SLF-MF shall be used by banks exclusively for meeting the liquidity requirements of MFs by extending loans, and undertaking outright purchase of and/or repos against the collateral of investment-grade corporate bonds, commercial papers, debentures and certificates of deposit held by MFs.

What has been the response

It has been low. It is said on the first day that bids for just ₹2,000 crore have been received out of the ₹50,000 crore offered.

Why such low response

- RBI has extended this facility via banks. Indian banks are currently in an extremely risk-averse mood. Bankers don't want to prefer making credit decisions that can be questioned later.
- Credit risk funds, which are illiquid, don't have a large enough stockpile of investment-grade bonds to trade in for this bailout.
- Any mutual fund availing of this facility will be seen as facing redemptions, AMCs are probably wary of sending out distress signals by tapping it.

Way Ahead

- Developing a deeper corporate bond market.
- Various committees have recommended merging depositories for bonds and equities, dis-intermediating the market and allowing direct retail access.

ENVIRONMENT

[https://youtu.be/ gZAYouNhp0](https://youtu.be/gZAYouNhp0)

1. Petersberg Climate Dialogue

- The eleventh session of Petersberg Climate Dialogue witnessed India along with 30 other countries deliberating over ways and means to tackle the challenge of reinvigorating economies and societies after COVID-19, while enhancing collective resilience and catalysing climate action while also supporting in particular those most vulnerable.
- The first virtual Climate Dialogue was the eleventh session of Petersberg Climate Dialogue which has been hosted by Germany since 2010 to provide a forum for informal high-level political discussions, focusing both on international climate negotiations and the advancement of climate action.
- The virtual XI Petersberg Climate Dialogue was co-chaired by Germany and United Kingdom, the incoming Presidency of 26th Conference of Parties (COP 26) to United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- The dialogue saw participation from Ministers and representatives of about 30 countries.
- India expressed solidarity with the world as it combats the Covid-19 pandemic and emphasised on adopting more sustainable consumption patterns in line with the requirement of sustainable lifestyles.
- India suggested having climate technology as an open source available to all countries at affordable prices.
- India stressed on climate finance and urged to plan for 1 trillion USD in grants to the developing world immediately.
- India highlighted its Nationally Determined Contributions spanning a ten-year time frame and in compliance with the temperature goal of the Paris Agreement.
- India focused on the opportunity to accelerate renewable energy deployment and create new green jobs in the renewable energy and energy efficiency sector.

2. Ozone Layer Over Arctic

- Recently, the European Union's Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service (CAMS) announced that a hole in the Arctic ozone layer, believed to be the biggest reported, has closed.
- The ozone hole's closing was because of a phenomenon called the polar vortex, and not because of reduced pollution levels due to Covid-19 lockdowns around the world, reports said.
- A polar vortex is a large area of low pressure and cold air that surrounds both of Earth's poles.
- Polar vortices always exist, but they typically weaken during the summer and strengthen in the winter.
- The polar vortex in the Arctic is typically weaker due to the presence of nearby land as well as mountain ranges that disturb the weather more so than its counterpart to the south.

3. Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve

- Amid the countrywide lockdown, the National Board for Wild Life (NBWL) has recommended coal mining in a part of an elephant reserve in Assam.
- The NBWL's Standing Committee had on April 7 discussed a proposal for use of 98.59 hectares of land from the Saleki proposed reserve forest land for a coal mining project by North-Easter Coal Field (NECF), a unit of Coal India Limited.
- Saleki is a part of the Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve that includes the Dehing Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary covering 111.19 sq km of rainforest and several reserve forests in Sivasagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts.



- Dehing is the name of the river that flows through this forest and Patkai is the hill at the foot of which the sanctuary lies.
- The Dehing Patkai forms the largest stretch of tropical lowland rainforests in India.
- The forest is often referred to as "The Amazon of the east" owing to its large area and thick forests.
- Rare fauna found in the region include Chinese pangolin, flying fox, wild pig, sambar, barking deer, gaur, serow and Malayan giant squirrels.
- All seven cats were photographed in the Jeypore-Dehing lowland forests that stretch over 500 sq.km in the state of Assam in northeast India and include the Dehing-Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary.
- The seven species caught on camera are the rare and elusive clouded leopard (*Neofelis nebulosa*), marbled cat (*Pardofelis marmorata*), and golden cat (*Catopuma temminckii*), and four relatively widely distributed species — tiger (*Panthera tigris*), leopard (*Panthera pardus*), leopard cat (*Prionailurus bengalensis*), and jungle cat (*Felis chaus*).
- The different trees of this four-layered rainforest are laden with many exotic species of orchids and bromeliads.
- The towering Hollong tree which is also the state tree of Assam dominates the emergent layer of this rainforest.



National Board for Wildlife

- National Board for Wild Life is a "Statutory Organization" constituted under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- Theoretically, the board is "advisory" in nature and advises the Central Government on framing policies and measures for conservation of wildlife in the country.
- However, it is a very important body because it serves as apex body to review all wildlife-related matters and

approve projects in and around national parks and sanctuaries.
The NBWL is chaired by the Prime Minister.

4. Ganga Water Quality

- The lockdown in the wake of coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak may have dramatically reduced air pollution across the country but it hasn't significantly reduced pollution in the Ganga, according to a report by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).
- The dissolved oxygen (DO) concentration, a measure of the amount of free oxygen available in river systems, "rose marginally" from March 22-April 15.
- A high DO value is considered a good indicator of river health.
- However, two other measures, BOD (Biological Oxygen Demand) and COD (Chemical Oxygen Demand) both indicators of the amount of oxygen necessary to break down organic and inorganic pollution showed "insignificant reductions", the CPCB report notes.
- The lower these numbers are the better they indicate river health.
- The pollution in Ganga is highest in Uttar Pradesh.
- Domestic wastewater from 97 towns situated near river Ganga, and industrial effluents, are the main sources of water pollution in the river.
- There was notable improvement in water quality in the Yamuna.

5. Aerosol Levels

- The aerosol levels over northern India has plummeted to a 20-year-low for this time of the year, according to satellite data published by US space agency National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).
- The US space agency's satellite sensors observed aerosol levels at a 20-year low post the countrywide lockdown, implemented to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus.
- The data published with maps show aerosol optical depth (AOD) in 2020 compared to the average for 2016-2019.
- Aerosol optical depth is a measure of how light is absorbed or reflected by airborne particles as it travels through the atmosphere.
- If aerosols are concentrated near the surface, an optical depth of 1 or above indicates very hazy conditions.
- An optical depth, or thickness, of less than 0.1 over the entire atmospheric vertical column is considered "clean."
- The data were retrieved by the Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) on NASA's Terra satellite.
- The findings are in line with the analysis of the government's air monitoring service, System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR), which also found significant reduction in PM10, PM2.5 and nitrogen oxides levels in major cities, including the national capital, after the lockdown was imposed.
- In southern India though, the story is a little hazier.
- Satellite data show aerosol levels have not yet decreased to the same extent.
- In fact, levels seem to be slightly higher than in the past four years.
- The reasons are unclear but could be related to recent weather patterns, agricultural fires, winds or other factors.

South Asia Seasonal Climate Outlook Forum

- The rainfall during the upcoming Southwest monsoon season over whole of South Asia is expected to be normal, stated South Asian Seasonal Climate Outlook Forum (SASCOF).
- The South Asian experts, after reviewing key ocean parameters like El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO), La Nina and Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) that influence the rainfall over the region, stated they would remain in favourable conditions for realising a normal monsoon season.
- The present warm phase of ENSO, which has been prevailing since October last year, will weaken to neutral phase during the monsoon season.
- SASCOF is a consortium of meteorologists and hydrological experts from South Asian countries, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Myanmar.
- They work collectively to issue regional forecasts and the team releases forecasts for the Southwest and

Northeast monsoon seasons, every year.

- The experts usually meet ahead of preparing the forecasts, but it was called off this year in the wake of coronavirus pandemic.
- Expertise of officials from World Meteorological Organisation, Japan Meteorological Agency, UK Met Office, Regional Multi-Hazard Early Warning System was also sought in preparing this forecast.

1. Global Terrorism Index (GTI)

- NITI Aayog has questioned the methodology adopted by an Australia-based institute to rank India as the seventh worst terrorism affected country ahead of conflict-ridden countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Sudan, Burkina Faso, Palestine and Lebanon
- It also questioned the opaque funding of the Institute for Economics and Peace

Global Terrorism Index

- India has moved to the seventh position in 2019 from 8th position in 2018
- Countries ahead of India are Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Syria, Pakistan and Somalia
- It analyses the impact of terrorism for 163 countries and which covers 99.7 per cent of the world's population
- It is based on the Global Terrorism Database
- It scores each country on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 represents no impact from terrorism and 10 the highest

Impact

- Positioning in the global indices impacted investments and other opportunities
- GTI scores are directly used in the Global Peace Index, the Global Slavery Report published by the Walk Free Foundation
- It is indirectly used in computing country scores in WEF's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness and Global Competitiveness indices and compilation of Safe Cities Index by the Economist Intelligence Unit

2. H1B Visas

- US lawmaker has urged President D. Trump to suspend foreign workers programmes, including H-1B, as more than 26 million Americans have lost their job because of coronavirus pandemic
- The letter sought additional suspension of H-1B, H4, L1, B1, B2, Optional Practical Training Program and further guest worker admissions
- US is one of the most favoured destinations of Indian students for higher education
 - About 9.8 lakh Indian received US visas across various categories in 2019

H-1B Visa Programme

- It is designed to allow immigrants with speciality skills to work in the United States
- Of the H1B visa holders, Indian are one of the biggest beneficiaries
 - Indians were granted 71.7 per cent of the 3,88,403 H1B visas granted in 2019

3. PRACRITI

- PRACRITI stands for Prediction and Assessment of Corona Infections and Transmission in India
- It is a web-based dashboard developed by researchers at IIT-Delhi. It gives details of state and district wise predictions of COVID-19 spread in India. Specifically, it gives the transmission rate of each of the districts in India, and that enables the authorities and the public to know how to control and mitigate Coronavirus transmission in India
- It gives a three-week prediction of COVID-19 spread of each district in the country
- According to the PRACRITI portal, a key parameter of interest on COVID-19 is the basic reproduction number R_0 (R nought) and its countrywide variability. R_0 refers to the number of people to whom the disease spreads from a single infected person
- The predictions of PRACRITI are based on a newly developed mathematical model called Adaptive, Interacting Cluster-based SEIR model. The model divides the population into four classes, susceptible, exposed, infected, removed

4. Asian Development Bank

- Asian Development Bank unveiled a \$1.5 billion COVID-19 package for India to support immediate priorities such as disease containment and prevention as well as social protection for the poor and economically

vulnerable sections

- It has even begun consultations with India on providing support for micro, small and medium enterprises

About ADB

- ADB envisions a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty in the region
- ADB assists its members, and partners, by providing loans, technical assistance, grants, and equity investments to promote social and economic development
- From 31 members at its establishment in 1966, ADB has grown to encompass 68 members—of which 49 are from within Asia and the Pacific and 19 outside.
- India is ADB’s fourth-largest shareholder and its largest borrower with disbursements nearing \$30 billion

Lending, Grant, and Technical Assistance Commitments
Cumulative as of 31 December 2018

