



Current Affairs of the Day

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'Jal Jeevan adds 1 lakh water connections daily'

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Highlights:

1. Since its launch in August 2019, the Centre's ambitious flagship scheme Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), which in partnership with the States seeks to ensure that every rural household of the country gets assured drinking water supply by 2024, has achieved 32.3% coverage of tap connections in rural India, emerging as a key scheme in the Narendra Modi government's second term.
2. The Modi government is almost replicating the implementation of its flagship scheme of building toilets in the first term in providing tap water connections to every rural household in the country in its second term. In its first term from 2014 to 2019, the Centre reportedly built over 11 crore toilets in the country.

Drop by drop

The Jal Jeevan Mission, which aims to provide assured tap water supply to every rural household by 2024, has reached 32.3% coverage

Total number of households (rural):

19.06 cr.

■ Households with tap connections as on Aug. 15, 2019: **3.24 cr. (16.98%)**

■ Households with tap connections as on Dec. 25, 2020: **6.16 cr. (32.3%)**

Top five States with high coverage

Goa: 100%

Telangana: 98.48%

Puducherry: 87.31%

Haryana: 81.75%

Gujarat: 80.88%



SOURCE: JAL JEEVAN MISSION

■ PTI

Challenges in Implementation There are many challenges in implementing the scheme nationally. Out of a total of 731 districts, 256 districts and 1,592 blocks have been classified as water-stressed or drought-prone.

3. The State government and local bodies (panchayats) will also have to protect the source of water to be supplied to the households. The government has emphasized protecting local water bodies to be used as a source for supply.



India and its neighbours

The story so far: This year, India faced a trifecta of challenges in its neighborhood from China: the COVID-19 pandemic, the growing competition for influence in South Asia and Indo-Pacific, and aggressive actions at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) by China's People's Liberation Army (PLA).

The regional COVID-19 challenge

1. The COVID-19 pandemic that originated in China has led to one of the biggest health challenges, causing heavy economic damage in South Asia. India is the worst-hit economy among G20 nations.
2. But India is also one of the best-poised nations to aid recovery efforts in the region, given its status as one of the world's leading producers of pharmaceutical drugs and vaccines.
3. In March, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a special virtual summit of eight SAARC nations and proposed a COVID-19 package, for which India provided about half of the \$20 million funding for relief.
4. India's military ran a series of missions to SAARC countries and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) with supplies of food and medicines.

Chinese in Competition

India was not the only country in the region providing help. China, too, stepped up efforts to extend its influence in the South Asian region through COVID-19 relief. China promised vaccines and also shipped relief to South Asia, sending out PPE suits and other medical equipment.

Military standoff and its impact on regional ties

1. China doubled down on territorial claims and its transgressions along its borders with South Asia: from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh, PLA soldiers amassed along with various sectors of the LAC, leading to violent clashes.
2. China also laid claim to Bhutan's Sakteng natural reserves and pushed along the boundary lines with Nepal, all of which changed India's strategic calculations along its Himalayan frontiers.



3. That India and Nepal saw their worst tensions in decades over the construction of a road to Lipulekh, leading to Nepal amending its constitution and map to claim Indian territory, added to the already fraught situation.
4. Meanwhile, a new defence pact this year between China and Pakistan vis-à-vis a sharp rise in ceasefire violations along the Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan to the highest levels since 2003, has made it clear that India must factor in among its military challenges at the LAC the possibility of a two-front war.

Dealing with a three-pronged challenge

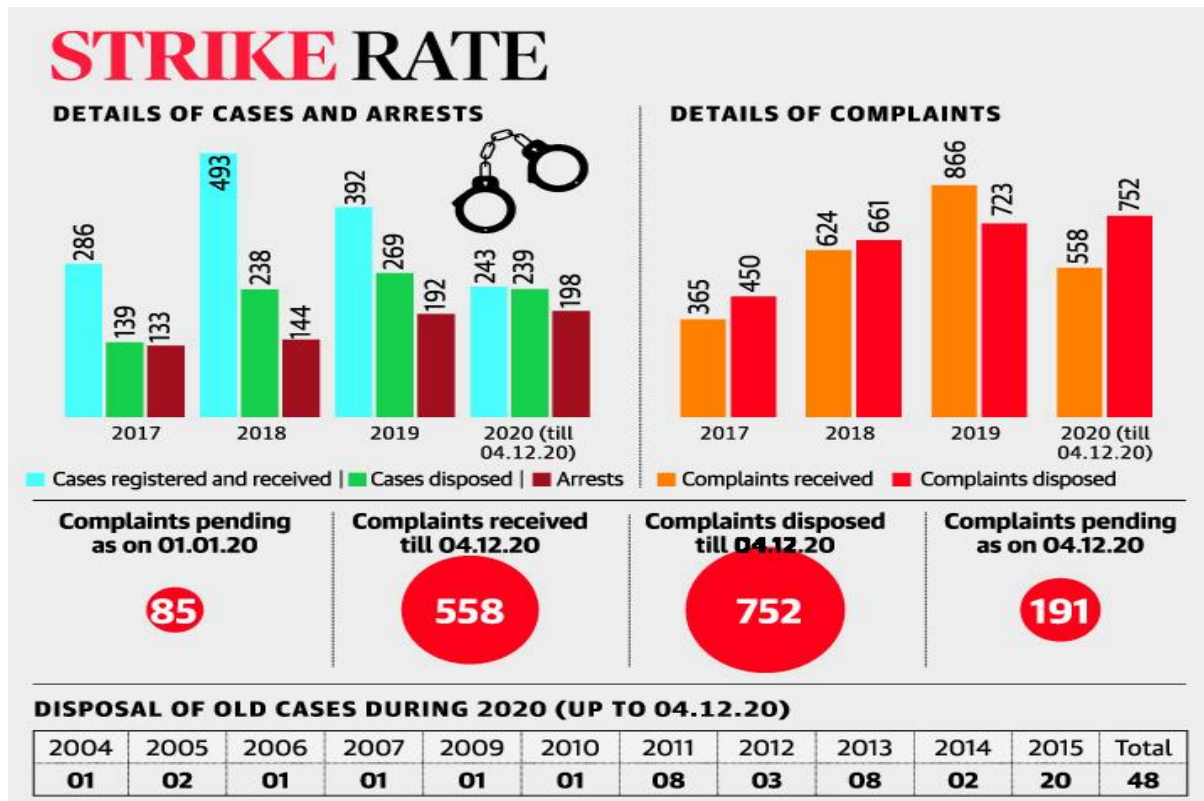
1. The government's response to the challenges has been to assert its Neighbourhood First and SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) strategies as foreign policy priorities.
2. Apart from the COVID-19 relief and neighbourhood visits, India has also upped its game on infrastructure delivery, particularly for regional connectivity in the past year, including completing railway lines to Bangladesh and Nepal, riverine projects, ferry service to the Maldives, identifying other services to Sri Lanka and IOR islands, while also considering debt waiver requests from its neighbours.
3. Unlike in the past, India has also become more flexible about the entry of other powers to help counter China's influence in the region — it recently welcomed the U.S.'s new military dialogue with the Maldives.
4. America's Millennium Challenge Corporation's (MCC) projects in Afghanistan, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh are also finding more space.
5. Furthermore, as part of its Indo-Pacific policy, New Delhi is also encouraging its Quad partners — the U.S., Japan and Australia — to collaborate on security and infrastructure initiatives in the neighbourhood, along with promoting forays by other partners like the U.K. France and Germany in the region.

Mains:

What are the major challenges to India's Neighbourhood First Policy? How can India overcome them?



Tightening the noose on white-collar frauds



Highlights:

1. The Delhi police's Economic Offences Wing (EOW) has been successful in solving 98.3% of white-collar crime cases this year. Lesser numbers of such crimes were reported in 2020 compared to previous years. The EOW takes up cases involving fraud of ₹2 crore and above.
2. The police said there are three categories of frauds — real estate, Ponzi schemes and cybercrime.

Understanding the new COVID-19 variant

The story so far: A year after the novel coronavirus announced itself in China, there was yet another critical update in December this year — the emergence of a new strain of the virus, caused by mutations, that seemed to be 70% more



transmissible. Mutations were reported from different parts of the world, including Denmark, Australia, England and South Africa, but the rapid domination of the new strain — lineage B 1.1.7 — in the south of England set off a chain of events, including curbs on travel and Christmas celebrations in the country, and several nations temporarily suspending flights originating from the United Kingdom.

Viruses mutation

The mutation is part of the life cycle of a virus. Once the virus latches on to a host, it begins to replicate and make copies of itself. During the process of virus replication, random errors arise, one or two protein molecules change, possibly induced by the immune response mounted within infected people. These changes in the genomic structure of the virus can be considered mutations. Not all mutations are significant, but those that affect the virus's ability to survive or replicate are important.

Mutation and its impact

As a result of this on-going process, many thousands of mutations have already arisen in the SARS-CoV-2 genome since the virus emerged in 2019. The vast majority of the mutations observed in SARS-CoV-2 have no apparent effect on the virus and only a very small minority are likely to be important and change the virus in any appreciable way, for example, a change in the ability to infect people; cause disease of different severity, or become insensitive to the effect of the human immune response including the response generated by a vaccine.

Is it known how a vaccine will react?

1. We need to know about the new variant's implication for the vaccine, but at this point in time, it is unknown. The hope is that the efficacy of the vaccine won't be significantly hampered by the mutation.
2. Vaccines will reduce the number of people who get infected, reduce the number of people spreading the infections, lower the number of hosts, lower the chances of further mutations, and allow us to get things under control.
3. Vaccines will offer protection even from a mutant virus. By their very nature, they will make a variety of different antibodies and memory cells that will help fight off the infection.



‘Pandemic revived demand for nanotech protection’

Highlights:

1. Nanotechnology-based products can be used for long-term protection in the health and hygiene space
2. Nanotechnology, wherein molecular structures are conducted at nanoscale metres. Extremely small particles bind together to create a layer of impregnation on any surface protecting it from bacteria, viruses and dust particles.
3. Nanotechnology can be used for COVID-19 virus management by the development of nano-based materials, such as disinfectants, personal protective equipment, diagnostic systems and nanocarrier systems, for treatments and vaccine development, as well as the challenges and drawbacks that need addressing.

Learn Through Graphics: Possible usage of Nanotech in fighting SARS-CoV-2

