



Current Affairs of the Day

GS Paper II

- Support for orphans sees varying progress
- Govt. portal for children orphaned by COVID-19

GS Paper III

- Analysis by NGO reveals microplastics in Ganga
- Dalai Lama's close aides figure on spyware list
- Israel appoints commission to review NSO
- RBI plans digital currency pilots soon



Support for orphans sees varying progress

1. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced that the government would launch a slew of welfare measures for children who had lost their parents to COVID-19.
2. The elaborate plan had components of the setting up of a corpus, ensuring their education requirements, and other health and social support. This was followed by similar announcements by different State governments.
3. Nearly two months down the line, the project is in varying levels of implementation in the States, with respect to enumerating the children and sanctioning the funds for their upkeep.
4. The benefits would accrue both for children who lost both parents or one parent due to COVID-19 and the other due to some other reason, the State government said.

Govt. portal for children orphaned by COVID-19

1. If you know a child who was orphaned by COVID-19, you can now share his or her details with the Union government on a web portal and help the child claim benefits under the PM CARES scheme announced earlier.
2. The government introduced the portal to all the States and Union Territories.
3. In May, the Prime Minister approved a scheme under the PM CARES fund for children who have lost both parents or the lone surviving parent or a legal guardian or an adoptive parent due to COVID-19.
4. The scheme provides a corpus of ₹10 lakh to each child when he or she turns 18. This corpus will be used to give a monthly stipend from the age of 18 for the next five years to help with higher education. At the age of 23, the beneficiary will get the entire corpus in lumpsum.
5. The government will also help with school education and extend a health insurance cover of ₹5 lakh under the Ayushman Bharat Scheme.



Analysis by NGO reveals microplastics in Ganga

An analysis of the stretches of the river Ganga by a Delhi-based environment NGO, Toxics Link, has revealed pollution by microplastics, defined as synthetic solid particles sized ranging from 1 micrometre to 5 millimetres (mm), which are insoluble in water.

Highlights:

1. The Ganga flows across five States and has been at the centre of a massive multi-crore undertaking by the Union government, in the form of the National Mission for Clean Ganga, to rid off contamination.
2. Microplastics are recognised as a major source of marine pollution. Untreated sewage from many cities along the river's course, industrial waste and religious offerings wrapped in non-degradable plastics pile pollutants into the river as it flows through several densely populated cities.
3. The plastic products and waste materials released or dumped in the river break down and are eventually broken down into microparticles. The river finally transports significantly large quantities downstream into the ocean, which is the ultimate sink of all plastics being used by humans.
4. Essentially, all along microplastics are flowing into the river system. It does reflect or suggest a direct linkage between the poor state of both solid and liquid waste management; hence it is critically important to initiate steps to remediate it.
5. We need to address the threat of plastic on aquatic life more realistically and with a futuristic eye. Various stakeholders, including industries, governments and civil society organisations, need to join hands for improving plastic waste management and the reduction in microplastic pollution.

Dalai Lama's close aides figure on spyware list

1. Several of the top India-based aides to the Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, figure on the list of potential targets for spying using the Pegasus spyware.
2. The phone numbers of the Dalai Lama's aides were among the list of 50,000 numbers accessed by Forbidden Stories and Amnesty International and shared with 17 media organisations.



Israel appoints commission to review NSO

1. Israel has established a commission to review allegations that the NSO Group's controversial Pegasus phone surveillance software was misused, the head of Parliament's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee said.
2. Pegasus has been implicated in possible mass surveillance of journalists, human rights defenders and 14 heads of state.
3. NSO has said its exports to 45 countries, with approval from the Israeli government.
4. Reporters Without Borders on Wednesday called for a moratorium on cyber-surveillance software.
5. Pegasus can hack into mobile phones without a user knowing, enabling clients to read messages, track location and tap into the phone's camera and microphone.

RBI plans digital currency pilots soon

The Reserve Bank of India is likely to soon kick off pilot projects to assess the viability of using digital currency to make wholesale and retail payments to help calibrate its strategy for introducing a full-scale central bank digital currency (CBDC).

Highlights:

1. India is already a leader in digital payments, but cash remains dominant for small-value transactions, he said, stressing that an official digital currency would reduce the cost of currency management while enabling real-time payments without any inter-bank settlement.
2. A high-level inter-ministerial committee set up by the Finance Ministry had recommended the introduction of a CBDC with changes in the legal framework including the RBI Act, which currently empowers the RBI to regulate the issuance of banknotes.
3. India's fairly high currency-to-GDP ratio holds out another benefit of CBDC — to the extent large cash usage can be replaced by CBDC, the cost of printing, transporting and storing paper currency can be substantially reduced.



4. The advent of private virtual currencies is another reason. If these private currencies gain recognition, national currencies with limited convertibility are likely to come under some kind of threat.
5. Transacting with CBDC would be an instantaneous process as the need for inter-bank settlement would disappear as it would be a central bank liability handed over from one person to another. Moreover, foreign trade transactions could be speeded up between countries adopting a CBDC.
6. They could enable a cheaper and more real-time globalisation of payment systems — it is conceivable for an Indian exporter to be paid on a real-time basis without any intermediary.
7. The risks of dollar-rupee transactions, the time zone difference in such transactions would virtually disappear.