



News Analysis (27 Jun, 2020)

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36th ASEAN Summit

Why in News

Recently, the 36th **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit** was held via video conference to focus on the **Covid-19 pandemic** response, post-pandemic recovery and further cooperation with partner countries.

- The **theme** for the Summit was "**Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN**".
- The Summit was **chaired by Vietnam** which is also **holding the chairmanship** of ASEAN currently.

Key Points

- **ASEAN Covid-19 Response Fund:**
 - The summit has decided to establish the ASEAN Covid-19 response fund with a reserve for medical supplies to meet urgent needs during epidemics.
A special ASEAN meeting convened in April to tackle the pandemic had failed to agree on an emergency fund.
 - It has also decided to build the **ASEAN standard procedures of epidemic response** in case of health emergencies.
- **Crippling Economies:**
 - The Summit has stated that the **ASEAN region's economy** is expected to **contract** for the **first time in 22 years**.
 - It has also focussed on the crippling cost of the coronavirus, which has ravaged the **economies of tourism and export-reliant** countries such as **Thailand and Vietnam**.

- **South China Sea Issue:**

- The Summit noted concerns over **land reclamations and recent developments** in the **South China Sea**.
 - China claims most of the resource-rich South China Sea but is also **contested by Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Taiwan**.
 - **Vietnam had also accused China of sinking its trawler**. This incident had prompted the USA to warn that China is trying to exploit the pandemic situations of other states to expand its unlawful claims.
 - The **USA is not a claimant to any territories in the South China Sea** but has sent its navy to patrol the area in support of freedom of navigation, while China had slammed this move as an interference in regional affairs by an outside power.
- Both Vietnam and Philippines lodged protests with **China** after it **unilaterally** declared the **creation of new administrative districts on islands**.

Also, in April China has **officially named 80 islands** and other geographical features in the disputed waters to which Vietnam and the Philippines also have competing claims.
- The Summit has also called on parties to refrain from **escalating tensions and abide by responsibilities** under international laws.



- ASEAN is a regional grouping that promotes economic, political, and security cooperation.
- It was established in **1967 in Bangkok, Thailand**, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (**Bangkok Declaration**) by the **founding fathers of ASEAN**, namely **Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand**.
- It consists of **ten** members namely, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- Chairmanship of ASEAN **rotates annually**, based on the alphabetical order of the English names of Member States.
- ASEAN countries have a total population of 650 million people and a combined **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** of \$2.8 trillion.
- The group has played a central role in Asian economic integration, signing six free-trade agreements with other regional economies and helping spearhead negotiations for what could be the world's largest free trade pact.

Way Forward

The pandemic has already thrown the challenges within the political, economic and social environment of the world and in each region.

- The major economies like the US, EU and India etc. are witnessing economic shutdowns due to the lockdown imposed by the pandemic. This, in turn, has reduced the demand for oil and dragged the oil prices to a historic low.
- Irresponsible acts which are also violations of international law are affecting the environment of security and stability in certain regions. Thus, cooperation among regions as well as among countries to manage such geopolitical tensions and pandemic situations are expected to resolve such scenarios.

Source:TH

Anti Drug Action Plan for 2020-21

Why in News

Recently, on the occasion of **International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking** an annual **Anti-Drug Action Plan for 2020-21** for 272 districts was launched by the **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment**.

The plan includes **awareness** generation programmes, **identification of drug-dependent population**, focus on treatment facilities and **capacity-building** for service-providers to curb drug abuse and alcoholism.

Drug abuse or **substance abuse** is the use of illegal drugs (Heroin, Morphine, Opium etc), or the use of prescription drugs for **purposes other than those for which they are meant to be used**.

Key Points

- **Action Plan for 2020-21:**

- **De-addiction Facilities:** These would be set up in the “**most affected**” 272 districts identified by the **Narcotics Control Bureau** focussing on building up treatment and de-addiction facilities and giving emphasis on reaching the youth and high risk population.
The districts mostly belong to **Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and the North-East.**
- **Drop-in-Centres for Addicts:** The focus will be on setting up drop-in-centres for addicts and also on **peer-led community based outreach programmes** for high risk populations – particularly the youth.
These centres will have **provision for screening, assessment and counselling** and would provide linkage to treatment and rehabilitation services for drug dependents.
- **Integrated Rehabilitation Centre for Addicts (IRCAs):** Funded by the Ministry, IRCAs would reach out to communities to help those affected by **drug addiction.**
- **Drug-Free India Campaign:** The ministry also announced the launch of the ‘**Nasha Mukh Bharat**’, or **Drug-Free India Campaign** which focuses on community outreach programmes.
To step-up the battle against the severe challenge posed by **drug use and alcoholism**, the campaign will focus not just on **institutional support** but also on **community outreach programmes** in the districts identified in coordination.

- **Significance:**

- **Awareness and Sensitisation:** Apart from celebrity backed ‘**Say No to Drugs**’ **publicity campaigns**, national level campaigns are planned across schools and higher education campuses to sensitise youngsters, parents and schools about the issue.
- **Change in the Strategy:** It introduces a new change in the strategy against drugs. So far, India has been focussed on institutions, however the new action plan focuses on work in society at large.
- **Enhanced Funding:** Ministry would ramp up greater funding for institutions to curb the drug abuse.

- **Background**

National Survey on Extent and Pattern of Substance Use: The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, conducted a **National Survey on Extent and Pattern of Substance Use in India** through the National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre (NDDTC), **All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS)**, New Delhi during 2018, which is key to the action plan for 2020-21.

- It is estimated that about **850,000 Indians inject drugs, about 460,000 children and 7.7 million** Indians require help for opioid dependence.
- As per the survey, the prevalence of **opioids** (a type of drug e.g. Heroin) use in India is **three times** the global average.

- **Challenges to Curb the Drug Menace:**
 - **Related Data:** The findings of the “**Magnitude of Substance Abuse in India**” report 2019, revealed the estimated 16 crore alcohol consumers in the 10-75 years in the country, as many as 19% of them were dependent on alcohol.
 - **Legally Available Drugs:** Such as tobacco is a huge problem which is usually seen as a gateway drug which children take just to experiment with.
 - **Lack of Availability of Rehabilitation Centres:** There is a lack of rehabilitation centres. Also, NGOs operating de-addiction centres in the country, have failed to provide the required kind of treatment and therapy.
 - **Smuggling of Drugs:** **Smuggling of drugs** through the states like Punjab, Assam and Uttar Pradesh which share the border with neighbouring countries.
- **Global Initiatives:** The **United Nations** with the aid of its anti-drug abuse arm, **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** spreads awareness, urges governments to avoid stimulating the Narco economy and deal with the Illicit trafficking of drugs in the disguise of legal pharmaceutical businesses.

International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking



- **History:** Also known as ‘**World Drug Day**’, it is celebrated annually on **26th June** since 1987. The day is also meant to commemorate Lin Zexu’s efforts towards the strategic dismantling of the opium trade in Humen, Guangdong in China right before the First Opium War on the Chinese Mainland.
- **Theme 2020:** Better Knowledge for Better Care.
It emphasises the need to improve the **understanding of the world drug problem** and how better knowledge will foster greater international cooperation for countering its impact on health, governance and security.

Way Forward

- The action plan aims at addiction-free India by countering the growing menace especially across colleges and universities. However, there is a need to **design a more targeted campaign** against drugs and substance abuse.
- Addiction should not be seen as a character flaw, but as an ailment that any other person could be struggling with. Therefore, the **stigma associated** with drug taking needs to be reduced through **social awareness and voluntary processes** like medical help by psychologists, as well as strong support from family.

Source: TH

The World Drug Report 2020: UN

Why in News

Recently, the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**, in its 2020 **World Drug Report**, has highlighted the possible consequences of the **Covid-19 pandemic** on **Illegal Drug Production, Supply and Consumption**.

- According to it, due to **economic hardship**, people may resort to **illicit activities** linked to drugs to make a living.
- The report further, revealed that the **measures** taken by governments to counter the pandemic inevitably had **double-edged consequences** on large-scale drug supply.

Key Points

- **Economic Crisis and Diverted Focus:**
 - There would be reductions in **drug-related budgets** of the governments due to **Covid-19** and overall increase in drug use, with a shift towards **cheaper and more harmful drugs**.
 - Some countries, such as Italy, the Niger and countries in Central Asia, have experienced a **sharp decrease in drug seizures**, as drug traffickers have **diverted their attention to other illegal activities**, including **cybercrime and trafficking in falsified medicines** (in Balkan countries).
 - Other countries, including Morocco and Iran, have reported huge drug seizures, indicating large-scale drug trafficking.
- **Impact of Lockdown:**
 - The **lockdown** could hinder the production and sale of opiates in major producing countries as the key months for the opium harvest in Afghanistan are March to June.
 - The decline in international trade resulting from the pandemic could lead to a shortage in the supply of **acetic anhydride**, a precursor vital to the manufacture of heroin
 - A **shortage of poppy lancers** was observed in the western and southern provinces of the country, mainly due to the closure of a border crossing with Pakistan. However, the shortage of lancers was eventually overcome due to women workers increasingly engaged in the poppy-lancing process, therefore
 - The report also indicated that the **lockdown is increasing demand for cannabis**, given that its production often takes place near consumer markets and traffickers.
 - **Drug trafficking** by air is likely to be completely disrupted by the restrictions on air travel. There are signs of increased use of maritime routes.
- **Maritime Routes:**
 - The recent heroin seizures in the **Indian Ocean** could be interpreted as an indication of an increase in the use of maritime routes for trafficking heroin to Europe along the 'southern route'.
 - While border measures appear to be hindering trafficking in opiates, large shipments of cocaine are still being trafficked but by alternative means, via sea routes.

India and Illicit Drug Trade

- **Major Hub of Illicit Drug Trade:** According to a report by the **United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**, India is one of the major hubs of illicit drug trade ranging from age-old cannabis to newer prescription drugs like tramadol, and designer drugs like methamphetamine.
- **Drug Trafficking Routes:** India is in the **middle of two major illicit opium production** regions in the world, the **Golden Crescent (Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan)** in the west and the **Golden Triangle (South-East Asia)** in the east.

Golden Triangle

- It represents the region coinciding with the rural mountains of **Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand.**
- It is Southeast Asia's main opium-producing region and one of the oldest narcotics supply routes to Europe and North America.

Golden Crescent

- This region of South Asia is a principal global site for opium production and distribution.
- It comprises **Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan.**

Associated Challenges:

- **Easy Borders:** The borders are porous and difficult to control in the lower Mekong region so cross-border movements in many places are not significantly hindered by Covid-19 measures.
- **Evolving Ways of Trafficking:** The methods of containerised trafficking, couriers and body-packing have reduced due to shutting down of borders and trade. However, dealers might come up with other ways limiting the impact of reduced trade.
- **Limited Control:** There is limited government control in the Golden Triangle, trafficking would continue at high volumes.
- **Unaffected Supply:** The supply of precursor chemicals is not likely to be disrupted because major organised crime groups source chemicals through direct diversion from industry and not diversion from illicit overseas trade channels.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

- It was established in **1997 and was named as a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2002.**
- It acts as the **Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention** by combining the United Nations International Drug Control Program (UNDCP) and the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Division of the United Nations Office at Vienna.
- UNODC publishes the **World Drug Report.**

Way Forward

- Additional efforts would be required at the national, regional, and international level to carefully **analyse methods and trends to understand changes to drug markets** in the wake of the pandemic.
- There is a need to **understand the change in the strategy** of drug trafficking organisations as a result of the Covid-19 measures.

- Therefore, **use of maritime trafficking routes** from Myanmar along the Andaman Sea, some of which cross Indian territorial waters must be strategically observed by India to curb the trafficking.
- Moreover, methods or procedures to deal with illicit drug supply, their usage must be **institutionalised in order to ensure that fight against this menace** is not compromised in face of a pandemic or any other crisis.

Source: TH

UN 75 Declaration

Why in News

Recently, a **commemorative declaration marking the 75th anniversary** of the signing of the **United Nations (UN)** Charter was delayed as member states could not reach an agreement on phraseology.

Key Points

- **The Five Eyes (FVEY)**— Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States— **along with India, objected to the use of a phrase** “shared vision of a common future”, which is **associated with China**.
The Five Eyes (FVEY) network is an **intelligence sharing alliance** between these five countries.
- The **‘silence’ process** was broken at the request of the U.K’s Ambassador to the UN, who wrote a letter on behalf of the six countries to the President of the 74th General Assembly, suggesting alternative wording.
Silence process is a procedure by which a resolution passes if no formal objections are raised within a stipulated time.
- However, **China, on behalf of itself and Russia, Syria and Pakistan raised objections** to the silence being broken.
- The current impasse comes at a time when China’s relationships with a number of countries, including India, Australia and the U.S.A, are strained.
- Given the impasse, the UN General Assembly President has suggested an **alternatively phrased declaration**, which he has placed under the silence procedure.

75th United Nations Day

- The United Nations (UN) will celebrate its **75th anniversary on 24 October 2020**.
 - To mark its 75th anniversary in 2020, the UN is igniting a **people’s debate: UN75**.
 - Through UN75, the UN will encourage people to put their opinions together to define how enhanced international cooperation can help realize a better world by 2045.
- Each year on 24th October, the UN celebrates its anniversary. UN Day marks the anniversary of **the entry into force of the UN Charter** and the founding of the Organization in 1945.
- The name "United Nations" was coined by **United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt**.

- The main organs of the UN are:
 - the General Assembly,
 - the Security Council,
 - the Economic and Social Council,
 - the Trusteeship Council,
 - the International Court of Justice,
 - the UN Secretariat.

Demand of Reforms at United Nations

- **Security Council Reforms:** In **UNSC**, the permanent member countries (P5) have made the UN defunct in maintaining peace and order. Therefore, veto powers of P5 and composition of UNSC must be made more representative of the current world order.

The P5 countries include China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- **Multilateralism:** International relations today are characterized by the power relationships of the United States, China, Russia, India and Europe.

A new model of the UN must be formulated, as current world order has changed from bipolar to unipolar to multi polar today.
- **Democratisation of UN:** Developing countries like India are proposing reforms that seek to democratize the UN, such as **UNSC reforms**, **UN peacekeeping reforms**.
- **Financial Reforms:** This holds the key to the future of the UN. Without sufficient resources, the UN's activities and role would suffer.

Source: TH

Raw Material Uncertainties for Rechargeable Batteries: UNCTAD

Why in News

Recently, the **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development** (UNCTAD) released a report '**Commodities at a glance: Special issue on strategic battery and minerals**'.

The report facilitated **research into battery technologies** that depended less on critical raw materials and had the potential to provide **higher energy density**.

Energy density is the amount of energy that can be stored in a given mass of a substance or system, i.e. a **measure of storage of energy**.

Key Points

- **Uncertain Supply:** The report highlighted that the **supply of raw materials to produce rechargeable batteries is uncertain**.

Lithium, **natural graphite** and **manganese** are critical raw materials for the manufacture of rechargeable batteries.

- **Rising Demand:**

- **Integration of EVs:** There has been a **rapid growth in demand for rechargeable batteries** due to the gradual integration of **electric vehicles** (EVs) in global transportation.

The sales of electric cars have increased by 65% in 2018 from 2017 to 5.1 million vehicles and it will reach 23 million in 2030.

- **Increased Use of Raw Material:** With the increasing number of EVs, the **demand for rechargeable batteries and the raw materials used** in them have also **increased**.

The worldwide market for cathodes for **lithium-ion batteries** was estimated at \$7 billion in 2018 and is expected to reach \$58.8 billion by 2024.

- The **demand for raw materials** used to manufacture rechargeable batteries will **grow rapidly** as **other sources of energy lose their importance**.

- **Concerns:**

- **Limited Suppliers:** The **security of supplies** is a concern for all stakeholders because the **production of the raw materials is concentrated in a few countries**.

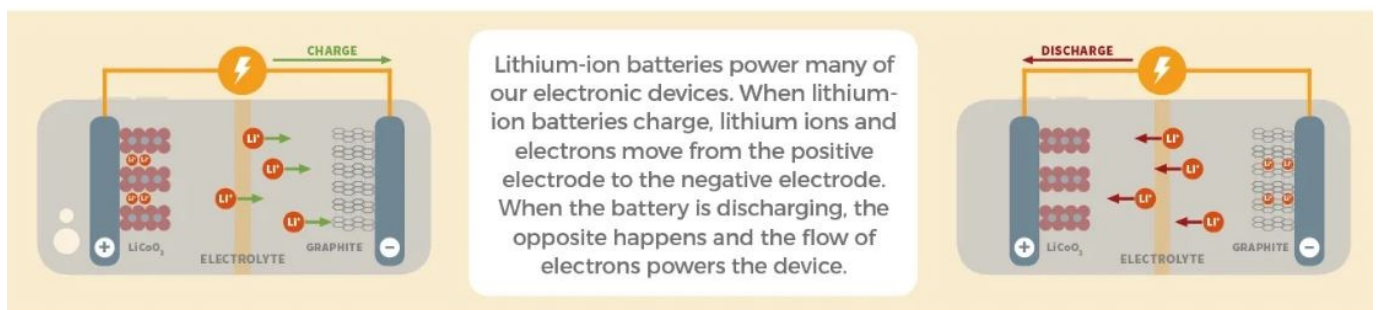
Over **60% of the world's Cobalt** is mined in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** while over **75% of global Lithium** is mined in **Australia and Chile**.

- **Prone of Volatility:** Any disruption to supply might lead to **tighter markets, higher prices and increased costs** of rechargeable batteries.

- In 2018, the demand for cobalt surged by 25% from 2017 to 125,000 tonnes, of which 9% accounted for the EV battery sector.
- Cobalt demand would reach 185,000 tonnes by 2023, with about 35% accounting for the EV battery sector, the report said.
- Growth in demand for lithium had been significant since 2015, increasing by 13% per year.

Li-ion Batteries

- A lithium-ion battery or Li-ion battery is a **type of rechargeable battery**.
- Li-ion batteries use an **intercalated** (Intercalation is the reversible inclusion or insertion of a molecule into materials with layered structures) **lithium compound** as one electrode material, compared to the metallic lithium used in a non-rechargeable lithium battery.
- The battery **consists of electrolyte**, which allows for ionic movement and the two electrodes are the constituent components of a lithium-ion battery cell.
- Lithium ions move from the negative electrode to the positive electrode during discharge and back when charging.
- They are **one of the most popular types of rechargeable batteries used for military, EVs and aerospace applications**.



Way Forward

- Alternative sources of energy such as electric batteries are becoming more important as investors become sceptical of the future of the oil industry.
- There is a need to make a strategy for dynamic monitoring of the raw material cycles, from mining through processing, refining and manufacturing to recycling.
- It will facilitate early detection of supply risks and also enable the development of mitigation strategies at either company or national level.

Source: DTE

Amendments in Postal Ballot System

Why in News

Recently, the Law Ministry has **reduced the age limit for senior citizens** who opt for postal ballot in the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections.

Key Points

- Now, the **voters aged above 65 years or a Covid-19 suspect** can opt for postal ballot.
- Earlier, in 2019, the Law Ministry had **amended the Conduct of Election Rules to allow persons with disabilities** and those **who are 80 years of age** or above to opt for postal ballot during Lok Sabha and Assembly elections.
- Voters of Bihar will be the first to benefit from the amended rules, since Bihar will be the first state to have assembly polls after the coronavirus outbreak in India.

Postal Ballots System

- Ballot papers are **distributed electronically** to electors and are returned to the election officers via post.
- Currently, only the following voters are allowed to cast their votes through postal ballot:
 - **Service voters** (armed forces, the armed police force of a state and government servants posted abroad),
 - **Voters on election duty,**
 - **Voters above 80 years of age or Persons with Disabilities (PwD),**
 - Voters under **preventive detention.**
- The exception to the above-mentioned category of voters is provided under Section 60 of the **Representation of the People Act, 1951.**

Representation of the People Act, 1951

This act provides for the **actual conduct of elections in India**. It deals with the following matters:

- Details like Qualification and Disqualification of members of both the Houses of Parliament and the State Legislatures,
- Administrative machinery for conducting elections,
- Registration of Political parties,
- Conduct of Elections,
- Election Disputes,
- Corrupt practices & Electoral offences, &
- By-elections.

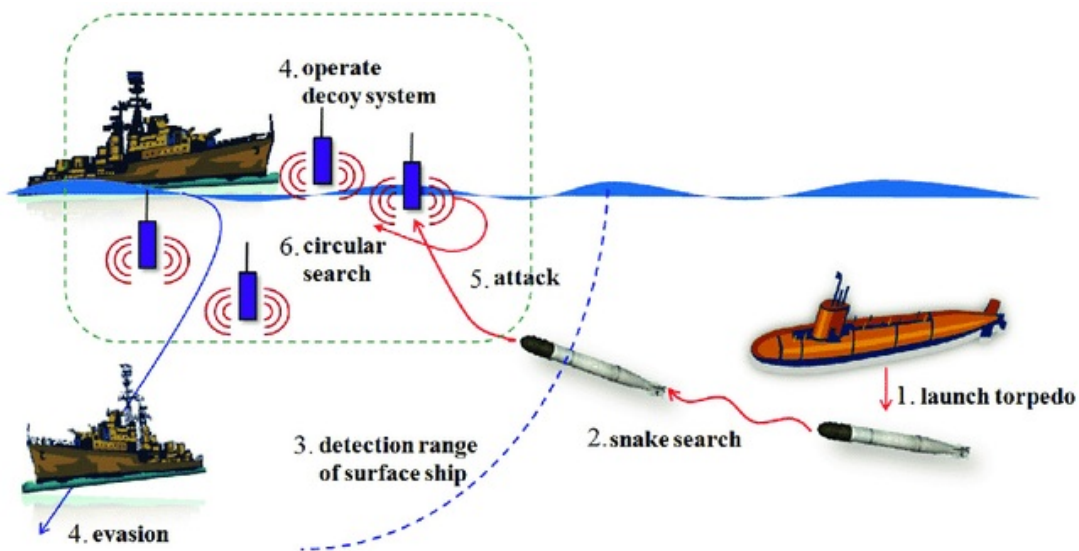
Source: IE

Advanced Torpedo Decoy System: Maareech

Why in News

The Indian Navy has inducted an **Advanced Torpedo Defence System (ATDS)** called '**Maareech**' that is capable of being fired from all frontline ships.

Torpedoes are self propelled weapons with a warhead and can be used **under or on the water surface**. They are one of the mainstay of sea-warfare attack systems.



Key Points

- **Description:**
 - 'Maareech' has been designed and developed indigenously by the **Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO)** and it is capable of detecting, locating and neutralizing incoming torpedoes.
 - Bharat Electronics Limited, a Defence PSU, would undertake the production of this decoy system.

- **Working:**

- Maareech detects and locate the incoming torpedo and applies countermeasures to protect the naval platform against attack.
- It **first detects and then confuses and divert** the torpedo attacks on ships from under the water.
- By diverting the torpedoes' original course, it forces it to **lose its energy thus preventing it from being effective on target.**

- **Significance:**

This induction not only stands testimony to the joint resolve of the Indian Navy and DRDO towards indigenous development of defence technology, but has also given a major fillip to the government's '**Make in India**' initiative and the country's resolve to become '**Atmanirbhar**' in niche technology.

Source: PIB

Anthropause Period

Why in News

Recently, researchers have coined the term '**anthropause**' to refer to the **Covid-19** induced **lockdown** period and they will study its impact on other species.

Key Points

- **Etymology:**

- The shortened form of prefix '**anthropo-**' (for '**human**') and '**pause**'.
- It is a more precise term for the lockdown period which is also being referred to as the '**Great Pause**'.
- It refers specifically to a **considerable global slowing of modern human activities** and notably travel.

- **Impact:**

- As a result of the lockdown, **nature appears to have changed** especially in **urban environments**.
- The **unprecedented curbs led to reports of unusual animal behaviour** and **unexpected animals are being spotted** more frequently.
 - For example, reported sightings of pumas in downtown Santiago, Chile, of dolphins in untypically calm waters in the harbour of Trieste, Italy, and of jackals in broad daylight in urban parks in Tel Aviv, Israel.
 - Hidden from human view, animals may also start roaming more freely across the world's oceans, following **reductions in vessel traffic and noise-pollution levels**.
- On the other hand, lockdown may have been **more difficult and challenging for various urban-dwelling animals** such as rats, gulls and monkeys who **depend on food provided or discarded by humans**.

- **Significance of the Study:**

- Studying this period will provide valuable **insights into the relationship between human-wildlife interactions** in the 21st century.
Expanding human populations continue to transform their environments at unprecedented rates.
- The linkages of human and animal behaviour can help **provide invaluable information**, useful in **preserving global biodiversity**, maintaining the **integrity of ecosystems** and **predicting global zoonoses** and **environmental changes**.
- Further, the **reduction in human activity** during the lockdown on both land and sea has been **unparalleled in recent history** and the **effects have been ‘drastic, sudden and widespread’**, making this period more important.

Way Forward

- The pandemic affords an opportunity to build a global picture of animal responses by pooling large numbers of datasets.
- Such collaborative projects can integrate the spatial and temporal approaches outlined above, in an attempt to uncover causal relationships.

Source: IE
