

1. Attukal Pongala Festival

Why in News?

- The annual “Attukal Pongala”, one of the largest all-women religious congregations has began recently. It is a ten-day- long festival of Attukal Bhagavathy Temple.

Key Points:

- The festival commences with the musical rendering of the story of the Goddess (Kannaki Charitam) during the "Kappu Kettu ceremony".
- The story invokes the presence of Kodungallur Bhagavathy and the slaying of the Pandyan King. This festival commemorates the victory of Good over Evil, by the slaying of Pandyan King.
- The event of the Goddess annihilating the Pandyan King is accompanied by much sound and fury of the temple drums, immediately followed by the lighting of the hearths for the preparation of the offering for the Goddess.

About Attukal Bhagavathy Temple:

- The Attukal Bhagavathy Temple is a Hindu religious shrine at Attukal in Kerala, India. Goddess Bhadrakali (Kannaki) is the main deity in this temple.
- Also known as “**The Sabarimala of Women**”, this temple attracts the biggest set of women devotees for the annual Attukal Pongala festival.
- Attukal Devi temple and its main festival Attukal Pongala reached Guinness Book of World Records of largest annual gathering of women, when over 2.5 million people took part in it.
- The temple is built with elements of Kerala architectural style and Tamil architectural style as well.

2. Pyramid of Djoser

Why in News?

- Last week, Egypt reopened the Pyramid of Djoser, the first pyramid ever built, after a 14-year restoration costing nearly \$6.6 million.

Highlights:

- The pyramid had sustained serious damage during an earthquake in 1992, and was on the verge of collapse when renovations started in 2006.
- The old structure is believed to be designed by Imhotep, described by some as the first architect of the world.

- The 4,700-year-old pyramid is 60 metres tall, and consists of six stacked steps over a burial shaft tomb 28 metres deep and seven metres wide.
- It is located at the Saqqara archaeological site, 24 km southwest of Cairo, outside the royal capital of Memphis.
- A complex of halls and courts is located around the pyramid. A UNESCO world heritage site, the pyramid was constructed during the era of Pharaoh Djoser, the second king of Ancient Egypt's Third Dynasty (2650 BC– 2575 BC).
- The Pharaoh's 19-year reign saw significant technical innovations in stone architecture. Restoration work for the pyramid, which began in 2006, was stopped in 2011 after a popular uprising in Egypt led to the ouster of longtime President Hosni Mubarak. The work resumed at the end of 2013.
- The project saw efforts to prevent the pyramid from collapsing, and external and internal restoration, including of the paths leading to the pyramid and the internal corridors leading to the burial chamber.
- The sarcophagus of King Djoser was also restored, along with the walls of the burial shaft tomb.

3. COVID-19 Updates

Why in News?

- Steps taken for curbing the spread of COVID-19 in India.

Highlights:

- An Advisory is issued for all incoming international passengers returning to India to self-monitor their health and follow the recommended “DOs and DON'Ts”, since more than 100 countries across the world now have reported cases of COVID-19 and travellers to these countries, or any person having travelled abroad, might possibly have come in contact with people affected with COVID-19 during their stay there or even while in transit at airports.
- The Advisory also calls for passengers with travel history to China, Hong Kong, Republic of Korea, Japan, Italy, Thailand, Singapore, Iran, Malaysia, France, Spain and Germany to undergo self-imposed quarantine for a period of 14 days from the date of their arrival, and their employers to facilitate work-from-home for such employees during this period.

- With respect to restrictions on visa, besides the already issued instructions, all regular Visas (including e Visas) which have been granted to nationals of France, Germany and Spain on or before 11.03.2020 and where these foreigners have not yet entered India stands suspended. Regular visas (including e Visas) granted to all foreign nationals who have travel history to these countries on or after 1.2.2020 and who have not yet entered India also stands suspended.
- Indian citizens are strongly advised to refrain from travelling to France, Spain and Germany.
- A total of fifty confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been reported in India, till now.
- Of these 50 cases, 34 cases are Indian nationals and 16 are Italians.
- More than 1400 contacts have been put under surveillance for these positive cases, till date.
- Till now, positive cases have been reported from the states of Delhi, Haryana, Kerala, Telangana, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh as well as the UTs of Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir.

Evacuation by India of its citizens and other nationals from COVID-19 affected countries:

- The Government of India undertook evacuation operations from several countries in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak.
- There were hundreds of Indians stranded in Wuhan, which was the epicentre of the outbreak.
- India engaged with China to safely evacuate its citizens and citizens of other friendly nations on a priority basis.
- Air India operated two special flights for the evacuation efforts which brought back 654 passengers that included 647 Indian citizens.
- The Indian Air Force also evacuated 112 passengers from Hubei province in China. Among these, 76 were Indian citizens.
- The other nationals evacuated included citizens of Myanmar, Bangladesh, Maldives, China, USA, Madagascar and South Africa. The IAF flight had also carried medical supplies which were given as a goodwill gesture to China.
- All the evacuated people were placed in isolation facilities for 14 days. They were tested twice and were found negative for COVID-19, after which they were discharged.

- Air India also evacuated 124 people from the Japanese cruise ship ‘Diamond Princess’ that included 16 Indian nationals. They tested positive for the virus and are now undergoing treatment. As it became clear that Iran was also facing a COVID-19 outbreak, the Government started to undertake measures to ensure the safety and security of its citizens in the country. Indian nationals in Iran include pilgrims, students and fishermen.
- On 7th March, 108 samples were received from Iran. These samples are being tested at the laboratory of AIIMS. Also, six scientists from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) have been stationed in Iran.
- Equipment and reagents have also been dispatched to enable them to setup a lab. India is expected to undertake operations to evacuate its citizens soon.
- So far, the Government of India has evacuated 890 passengers from COVID-19 affected countries.
- Out of these, 842 were Indian citizens and 48 belonged to different nationalities including Maldives, Myanmar, Bangladesh, China, US, Madagascar, Sri Lanka, Nepal, South Africa and Peru.

4. Contaminated Sites

Why in News?

- Recently, there are 128 sites in India contaminated by toxic and hazardous substances, according to Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

About:

- West Bengal led the list with 27 sites followed by Odisha at 23. Including those, there are 324 sites that may be contaminated, with 196 still awaiting an investigation and confirmation.
- Twenty sites in 6 States have seen agencies prepare a detailed project reports, or a plan of action, to clean up sites. Such action follows orders by the **National Green Tribunal (NGT)**.

These Incidents Include:

- Oil contamination due to leakage of underground oil pipelines of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited in Tamil Nadu,
- Pesticide and heavy metal contamination in creeks at Eloor, Kerala,
- Chromium contamination at Rania,

- Improperly disposed electronic waste lying on the banks of river Ramganga, Moradabad and
- Mercury contamination of the soil at Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu, and Ganjam, Odisha.

About Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB):

- It is a statutory organisation.
- It is Constituted in 1974 under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974.
- It was also entrusted with the powers and functions under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.
- It is the apex organisation in country in the field of pollution control, as a technical wing of MoEF.

5. Input Tax Credit

Context:

- Recently, restrictions imposed on the input tax credit, on inward supplies under the Central Goods and Services Tax Act have been challenged in the Rajasthan High Court.

About:

- The amended Rule 36 (4) of the CGST Rules, 2017, provides that the input tax credit can be availed only when a supplier of goods updates and uploads online the details of supplies through each of the bills.
- The petition now contended that the right to avail of credit could not be taken away by imposing the restrictions contained in the provisions of Section 43A of the Act, which was yet to be notified, through rules.

Input Tax Credit (ITC):

- It is the tax that a business pays on a purchase and that it can use to reduce its tax liability when it makes a sale.
- It means at the time of paying tax on output, you can reduce the tax you have already paid on inputs and pay the balance amount.
- A business under composition scheme cannot avail of input tax credit. ITC cannot be claimed for personal use or for goods that are exempt.