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Project Praana

- IISc Bengaluru has developed an indigenous ventilator prototype under project Praana in view of COVID-19 crisis.
- The project is a voluntary effort to help the nation at the time of crisis.
- The ventilator has been developed using materials readily available in India.
- The prototype has mass flow sensors and controllers which accurately tell how much oxygen is flowing and what volume the patient is inhaling in one breath.
- Pneumatics is built around mass produced water filter hardware.
- The control system is built around open source industrial controller.
- In a large country like India, the biggest challenge is the manufacturing of such ventilators on a mass-scale due to limited access to pneumatic and electronic hardware, sensors and actuators in the global marketplace.
- The indigenous ventilator prototype build under Project Praana will address the issue.

Price Monitoring & Resource Unit

- Price Monitoring & Resource Unit (PMRU) has been set up by National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) in J&K recently.
- It will be funded by NPPA for its recurring and non-recurring expenses.
- PMRU will help NPPA and State Drug Controller in ensuring availability and accessibility of medicines at affordable prices.
- PMRUs have already been set up by NPPA in 11 States, including, Kerala, Odisha, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Nagaland, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Mizoram.
- The PMRU, a registered society, shall function under the direct control and supervision of State Drug Controller of Jammu & Kashmir.
- It is also expected to organize seminars, training programs and other information, education and communication (IEC) activities in the areas of availability and affordability of medicines for all.
- PMRU will also collect samples of medicines, collect and analyse data and make reports with respect to availability and over-pricing of medicines for

taking action under the provisions of Drug Price Control Order (DPCO).
- This assumes added significance as PMRU, J&K will assist NPPA and Governments in checking overpricing and identifying causes & addressing local issues of shortages/hoarding in the current situation when country is fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

New Features to e-NAM Platform

- e-NAM was launched in 2016 as a pan-India electronic trade portal linking Agricultural Produce Market Committee - APMCs across the States.
- As of now 585 mandis in 16 States and two Union Territories have been integrated on e-NAM portal.
- e-NAM provides for contactless remote bidding and mobile-based any time payment for which traders do not need to either visit mandis or banks for the same.
- Recently agriculture Ministry has launched new features of National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) Platform.
- It will help strengthen agriculture marketing by farmers which will reduce their need to come to wholesale mandis for selling their harvested produce, at a time when there is critical need to decongest mandis to effectively fight against COVID-19.
- These software modules are warehouse based trading module in e-NAM software and Farmer Producer Organization trading module in e-NAM.

Red Flag Exercise

- Red Flag is USA's flagship multilateral air exercise.
- It is a Pacific Air Forces-sponsored exercise meant to provide realistic training in a simulated combat environment over the Joint Pacific Alaska range complex.
- The Red Flag Alaska 20-1 was scheduled to be held in Alaska from 30th April to 15th May, 2020.
- Recently, the U.S. Air Force has cancelled the Phase-I of Red Flag due to the COVID-19 outbreak.
- The Indian Air Force (IAF) was also to take part in the exercise with its Sukhoi Su-30 fighter jets.
- The IAF joined Red Flag for the first time in 2008 in Nevada.
- It has deployed Su-30MKI, Jaguar strike aircraft, the Il-78 tankers and the C-17 strategic airlift aircraft in the exercise.
- However, it had said it would not take part in every edition of the biennial exercise because of the high cost involved.

Agasthyavanam

- Established in 1997, Agasthyavanam Biological Park is a wildlife sanctuary in Kerala.
- The park is located near Thiruvananthapuram, the capital city of Kerala.
- Agasthyavanam Biological Park is spread over an area of 23 sq. km., of which 17.5 sq. km. of the park has been dedicated for natural regeneration to develop into a dense forest.
- It is contiguous to Neyyar Wildlife Sanctuary and Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary.
- The rest area of the park is left for systematic conservation programs.
- The park has been named after the Agasthyamalai Agasthyakoodam Peak, which can be seen at a distance from the park.
- Forest Department is procuring forest produce collected by the tribespeople of the Agasthyavanam Biological Park (ABP) and surrounding forest ranges to be sold to commercial establishments and various collectives to deal with the lockdown necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic

Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve

- The Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve is located in the southernmost end of the Western Ghats and incorporates peaks towering 1,868 m above sea level.
- It covers 3,500 km2 and encompasses tropical forest ecosystems that fall within the Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari districts of Tamil Nadu and the Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam districts of Kerala.
- The Park has endemic medicinal plants and rich biodiversity.

Link between BCG vaccine and COVID-19

- BCG, or bacille Calmette-Guerin, is a vaccine for tuberculosis (TB) disease.
- The BCG vaccine is known to confer a strong immune response and a significant degree of protection against leprosy and non-invasive bladder cancers.
- According to a recent study those countries where the elderly were likely to have had a BCG shot in their childhood were likely to be better protected against coronavirus because COVID-19 was particularly lethal to the elderly. (India’s data was not used for this study)
- Japan (which has a BCG policy since 1947) had one of the early cases of COVID-19 but it has maintained a low mortality rate despite not

implementing the strictest forms of social isolation.

- Iran, which has seen at least 3,000 deaths, began implementing its BCG vaccination policy only in 1984 and therefore anyone over 36 was vulnerable.
- Spain, France, the United States, Italy and the Netherlands, These countries don't have universal BCG policies and have seen many deaths from COVID-19.
- Many of these countries don't have a universal programme because BCG has been shown to not be always protective against tuberculosis in adults as well as an increased risk of mycobacterium (bacteria) species.
- Italy, where the COVID-19 mortality is very high, never implemented universal BCG vaccination.
- It is premature for India that has had a consistent TB vaccination policy since 1968, to take comfort from the study.
- Australia, the Netherlands, the United States are going to vaccinate healthcare workers with BCG, This may provide some evidence.

Source: PIB, the Hindu, News on Air

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