

The General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Act, 1972

Reference News-

The Bill which was introduced in Lok Sabha recently would pave the way for **the government to divest its stake in general insurance firms.**

- Opposition members have however strongly objected to it and called for its withdrawal.

Next Analysis-

Key Provisions:

1. It proposes amending [the General Insurance Business \(Nationalisation\) Act, 1972](#) to **remove the requirement for the Centre to hold at least 51 percent of equity in an insurer.**
2. Another provision ensures that **the 1972 Act stops applying to insurers on** and from the date the Centre ceases to have control over them.
3. The Bill also makes a director, who is not a whole-time director, liable only for acts of omission or commission committed with his knowledge and connivance by the insurer.

Rationale behind these changes:

While India's insurance sector has been growing dynamically in recent years, its share in the global insurance market remains abysmally low. The Bill aims to provide for greater private participation in the public sector insurance companies.

Criticisms/concerns:

1. This may lead to total privatisation of general insurance companies.
2. With this, the government will also lose money by way of dividend in the proportion of shares being offered.

Challenges in the Insurance sector:

1. Low penetration and density rates.
2. Inadequate investment in insurance products.
3. The dominant position and deteriorating financial health of public-sector players.

Important changes witnessed by the insurance sector over the years include:

1. Nationalisation of life (LIC Act 1956) and non-life sectors (GIC Act 1972).
2. Constitution of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) in 1999.
3. Opening up of the sector to both private and foreign players in 2000.
4. Increase in the foreign investment caps.

Delta variant as contagious as chicken pox:

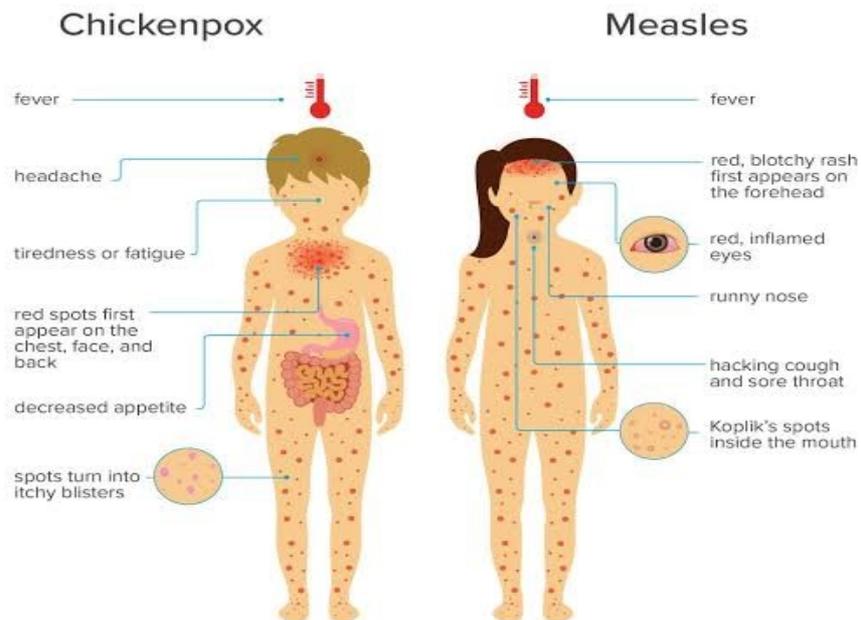
Reference News-

The [US Center for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#) has revealed that:

- The **Delta variant** of the coronavirus spreads as easily as **chickenpox** with a transmission rate up to nine times more than the original strain.
- Breakthrough cases in vaccinated individuals may be as transmissible as unvaccinated cases.
- Infection with the Delta variant produces virus amounts in the airways that are tenfold higher than what is seen in people infected with the Alpha variant, which is also highly contagious.

MEDICALNEWS TODAY

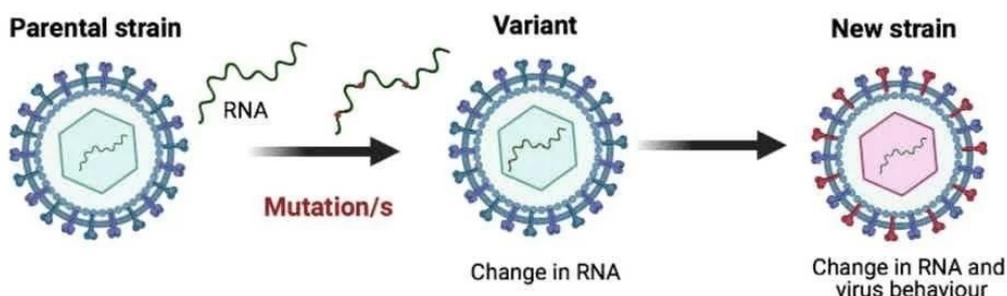
Chickenpox vs. Measles



Next Analysis-

What is a **Virus Variant**?

Variants of a virus **have one or more mutations** that differentiate it from the other variants that are in circulation. While most mutations are deleterious for the virus, some make it easier for the virus to survive. The SARS-CoV-2 (Corona) virus is evolving fast because of the scale at which it has infected people around the world. High levels of circulation mean it is easier for the virus to change as it is able to replicate faster.



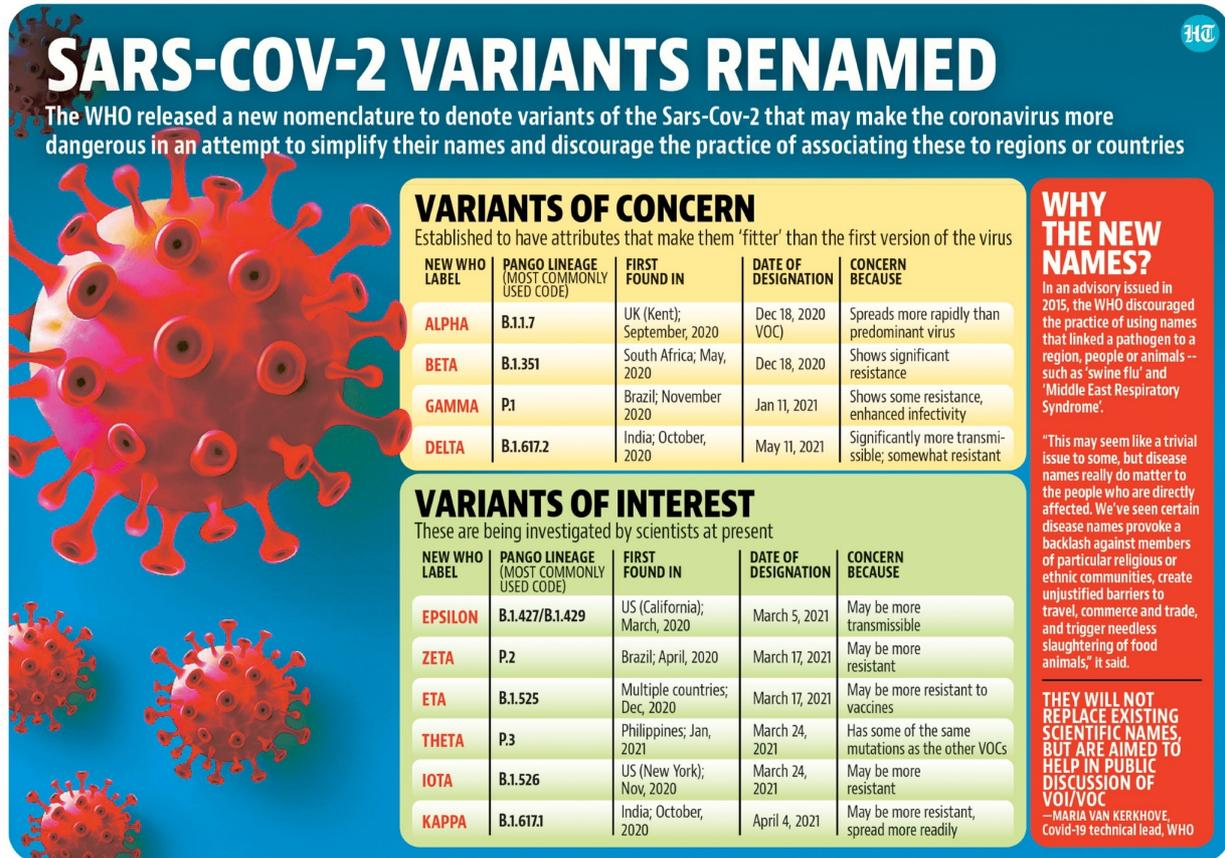
What is a **mutation**?

A mutation means **a change in the genetic sequence of the virus**. In the case of SARS-CoV-2, which is an **Ribonucleic acid (RNA) virus**, a mutation means a change in the sequence in which

its molecules are arranged. A mutation in an RNA virus often happens when the virus makes a mistake while it is making copies of itself.

What is Delta Variant?

The Delta variant (B.1.617.2) was first detected in India. The variant contains multiple mutations in the spike protein.



SARS-COV-2 VARIANTS RENAMED

The WHO released a new nomenclature to denote variants of the Sars-Cov-2 that may make the coronavirus more dangerous in an attempt to simplify their names and discourage the practice of associating these to regions or countries

VARIANTS OF CONCERN

Established to have attributes that make them 'fitter' than the first version of the virus

NEW WHO LABEL	PANGO LINEAGE (MOST COMMONLY USED CODE)	FIRST FOUND IN	DATE OF DESIGNATION	CONCERN BECAUSE
ALPHA	B.1.1.7	UK (Kent); September, 2020	Dec 18, 2020 (VOC)	Spreads more rapidly than predominant virus
BETA	B.1.351	South Africa; May, 2020	Dec 18, 2020	Shows significant resistance
GAMMA	P.1	Brazil; November 2020	Jan 11, 2021	Shows some resistance, enhanced infectivity
DELTA	B.1.617.2	India; October, 2020	May 11, 2021	Significantly more transmissible; somewhat resistant

VARIANTS OF INTEREST

These are being investigated by scientists at present

NEW WHO LABEL	PANGO LINEAGE (MOST COMMONLY USED CODE)	FIRST FOUND IN	DATE OF DESIGNATION	CONCERN BECAUSE
EPSILON	B.1.427/B.1.429	US (California); March, 2020	March 5, 2021	May be more transmissible
ZETA	P.2	Brazil; April, 2020	March 17, 2021	May be more resistant
ETA	B.1.525	Multiple countries; Dec, 2020	March 17, 2021	May be more resistant to vaccines
THETA	P.3	Philippines; Jan, 2021	March 24, 2021	Has some of the same mutations as the other VOCs
IOTA	B.1.526	US (New York); Nov, 2020	March 24, 2021	May be more resistant
KAPPA	B.1.617.1	India; October, 2020	April 4, 2021	May be more resistant, spread more readily

WHY THE NEW NAMES?

In an advisory issued in 2015, the WHO discouraged the practice of using names that linked a pathogen to a region, people or animals-- such as 'swine flu' and 'Middle East Respiratory Syndrome'.

"This may seem like a trivial issue to some, but disease names really do matter to the people who are directly affected. We've seen certain disease names provoke a backlash against members of particular religious or ethnic communities, create unjustified barriers to travel, commerce and trade, and trigger needless slaughtering of food animals," it said.

THEY WILL NOT REPLACE EXISTING SCIENTIFIC NAMES, BUT ARE AIMED TO HELP IN PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF VOI/VOC
—MARIA VAN KERKHOVE, Covid-19 technical lead, WHO

Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana:

Reference News-

The government has said that under the schemes implemented by the **Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (DA&FW)** at least 30 percent of the expenditure allocated for agricultural schemes is being incurred for women to bring them into mainstream agriculture. This mainly includes [Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana](#).

About [Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana](#):

- It was started in 2011.
- The "Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana" (MKSP) is a sub component of **the Deendayal Antodaya Yojana-NRLM (DAY-NRLM)**.
- It seeks to improve the present status of women in Agriculture, and to enhance the opportunities available to empower her.
- MKSP **recognizes the identity of "Mahila" as "Kisan"** and strives to build the capacity of women in the domain of agro-ecologically sustainable practices.

- Upto 60% (90% for North Eastern States) of the funding support for such projects is provided by the government.

The focus of MKSP is on:

Capacitating smallholders to adopt sustainable climate resilient agro-ecology and eventually create a pool of skilled community professionals.

Need for feminization of agriculture:

Most of the women-headed households are not able to access extension services, farmers support institutions and production assets like seed, water, credit, subsidy etc. As agricultural workers, women are paid lower wage than men.

Arctic Science Ministerial:

Reference News-

Information regarding India's participation in **the [3rd Arctic Science Ministerial \(ASM3\)](#)** was recently given in Parliament by the Government.

- It was **jointly organised by Iceland and Japan and is the first Ministerial meeting held in Asia.**

The theme for this year is 'Knowledge for a Sustainable Arctic'.

Background:

- The first two meetings—ASM1 and ASM2—were held in the USA in 2016 and Germany in 2018, respectively.
- The meetings are designed to provide opportunities to various stakeholders to enhance collective understanding of the Arctic region, emphasize and engage in constant monitoring, and strengthen observations.

Need for international collaboration and cooperation in maintaining the Arctic region:

Arctic warming and its ice melt are global concerns as they play a pivotal role in regulating climate, sea levels, and maintaining biodiversity. Moreover, there is growing evidence of connection between the Arctic and the Indian Ocean (which modulates the Indian monsoon).

Hence, improving the understanding of physical processes and quantifying the impact of Arctic ice melt on the Indian summer monsoon is very important.

India and the Arctic:

- India's engagement with the Arctic dates back to 1920 with the signing of **the Svalbard Treaty in Paris.**
- Since July 2008, India has had a **permanent research station in the Arctic called Himadri at NyAlesund, Svalbard Area in Norway.**
- It has also deployed a multi-sensor moored observatory called **IndARC in the Kongsfjorden fjord since July 2014.**

India's contributions further in Arctic:

- The country would deploy open ocean mooring in the Arctic for long-term monitoring of upper ocean variables and marine meteorological parameters.

- The launch of **NISER (NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar) satellite mission**, in collaboration with the USA, is underway. NISER aims to conduct global measurements of the cause and consequences of land surface changes using advanced radar imaging.
- India's contributions to **the Sustained Arctic Observational Network (SAON)** are continuing.



AERA Amendment Bill, 2021:

Context:

The Lok Sabha passed the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India (AERA) Amendment Bill, 2021 and seeks to amend **the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India Act, 2008**.

Background:

The 2008 Act established **the Airport Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA)**. AERA regulates tariffs and other charges (such as airport development fees) for aeronautical services rendered at major airports in India.

What are the new provisions?

1. The 2008 Act designates an airport as a major airport if it has annual passenger traffic of at least 35 lakh. As per the Bill, **the central government may also designate any airport as a major airport by a notification.**
2. It will allow **AERA to regulate tariff and other charges** for aeronautical services for not just major airports with annual passenger traffic of more than 35 lakh, but also a group of airports.
3. **Profitable Clubbing:** The government will be able to **club profitable and non-profitable airports** as a combination/package to bidders to make it a viable combination for investment under PPP (Public-Private Partnership) mode.

Need for reforms:

- Typically, airports run the risk of becoming a monopoly because cities usually have one civilian airport which controls all aeronautical services in that area.
- **To ensure that private airport operators do not misuse their monopoly**, the need for an independent tariff regulator in the airport sector was felt.

Benefits of the new legislation:

1. Helps in improving and expanding the air connectivity to relatively remote areas expediting the UDAN regional connectivity scheme.
2. Encourages the development of smaller airports.

Strategic petroleum reserves (SPR) programme:**Reference News-**

Two more commercial-cum-strategic facilities at **Chandikhol and Padur** of 6.5 MM storage capacity to be established under **phase-2 of SPR Programme. M**

Next Analysis-

Under **Phase I of strategic petroleum reserves (SPR) programme**, Government of India, through its Special Purpose Vehicle, **Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserve Limited (ISPRL)**, has established petroleum storage facilities with total capacity of 5.33 Million Metric Tonnes (MMT) at 3 locations, namely (i) Vishakhapatnam (ii) Mangaluru and (iii) Padur.

About the SPR Programme:

Strategic petroleum reserves are **huge stockpiles of crude oil** to deal with any crude oil-related crisis like the risk of supply disruption from natural disasters, war or other calamities.

- The petroleum reserves are **strategic in nature and the crude oil stored in these reserves will be used during an oil shortage event, as and when declared so by the Government of India.**
- The construction of the Strategic Crude Oil Storage facilities is being managed by **Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL)**, a Special Purpose Vehicle, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Oil Industry Development Board (OIDB) under the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas.

Need for strategic oil reserves:

1. In 1990, as the Gulf war engulfed West Asia, India was in the throes of a major energy crisis. By all accounts India's oil reserves at the time were adequate for only three days. While India managed to avert the crisis then, the threat of energy disruption continues to present a real danger even today.
2. To address energy insecurity, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government mooted the concept of strategic petroleum reserves in 1998. Today, with Indian Consumption increasing, the case for creating such reserves grows stronger.

The Commission for Air Quality Management in the National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Bill, 2021:

Reference News-

The Bill was recently introduced in Lok Sabha. The focus is on better coordination, research, identification and resolution of problems surrounding the air quality index.

- The bill will establish the commission and replace an ordinance.
- The Bill has taken into consideration the concerns of the farmers following several rounds of negotiations, after they had raised concerns of **stiff penalties and possible jail terms for stubble burning**.

Next Analysis-

Applicability:

The bill will apply to the NCR and the areas adjoining the NCR in the States of Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, where any source of pollution is located, causing adverse impact on air quality in the NCR.

What is proposed in the Bill?

The bill provides for the constitution of:

1. The commission for air quality management in NCR and adjoining areas.
2. Three sub-committees to assist the commission, including sub-committee on monitoring and identification; sub-committee on safeguarding and enforcement; and sub-committee on research and development.

Need for the Bill:

Sources of air pollution particularly in the NCR consist of a variety of factors which are beyond the local limits. Therefore, a special focus is required on all sources of air pollution which are associated with different economic sectors, including power, agriculture, transport, industry, residential and construction.

- Since air pollution is not a localised phenomenon, the effect is felt in areas even far away from the source, thus creating the need for regional-level initiatives through inter-State and inter-city coordination in addition to multi-sectorial synchronisation.

About the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM):

The Commission was first formed by an ordinance in October 2020.

The erstwhile **Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority, or EPCA** had been dissolved to make way for the Commission.

- The Commission will be a **statutory authority**.
- The Commission will supersede bodies such as the central and state pollution control boards of Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, UP and Rajasthan.

Other key provisions of the bill:

1. It has decriminalised the act of stubble burning and withdrawn the clause for possible jail time.
2. It proposed to levy environmental compensation fees on those who are found to be engaged in stubble burning, including farmers.

Odisha plans DNA profiling for leopards:

- Odisha's Forest and Environment Department has decided to do DNA profiling of the leopards in the state.
- The exercise will help ascertain and trace the origin in case of deaths of the leopards, after the skin and other organs from poachers and traders are seized.
- The system will strengthen the fight against wildlife crimes, especially poaching of leopards.

Reforms-based and Results-linked Scheme: DISCOMs

Reference News:

This Union cabinet has recently approved a [Reforms-based and Results-linked, Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme](#).

- The scheme requires that DISCOMs (Power Distribution Companies) submit **detailed project reports (DPRs)** on how they plan to reduce their operational losses to avail of funding.
- Initially, the preliminary timeline given to discoms was 31st October 2021. It is now **extended to 31st December 2021**.

Next Analysis

▪ Scheme Objectives:

- Reduction of **AT&C** (aggregate technical & commercial) losses to pan-India levels of **12-15%** by 2024-25.
- Reduction of **ACS-ARR gap** (i.e. between the total cost of electricity and revenues generated from supplying power) to zero by 2024-25.
- Developing **institutional capabilities** for modern discoms.
- Improvement in the **quality, reliability, and affordability of power supply** to consumers through a financially sustainable and operationally efficient Distribution Sector.
- Implementation of the Scheme would be based on the **action plan worked out for each state** rather than a "one-size-fits-all" approach.

▪ Features:

- **Conditional Financial Assistance:** The Scheme seeks to improve the **operational efficiencies and financial sustainability of all DISCOMs** (excluding Private Sector DISCOMs) by providing conditional financial assistance to DISCOMs for strengthening of supply infrastructure.
- **Subsuming of Various Schemes:** It is proposed that the currently ongoing approved projects under the following Schemes would be subsumed:
 - Integrated Power Development Scheme (IPDS)
 - Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY)
 - Ujwal Discom Assurance Yojana (UDAY)
 - **Prime Minister's Development Package (PMDP) 2015** for the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) and Ladakh.
- **Solarization of Agricultural Feeders:** The Scheme has a major focus on improving electricity supply for the farmers and for providing daytime electricity to them through solarization of agricultural feeders.
 - This Scheme converges with the [PM-KUSUM Scheme](#), which aims to solarize all feeders, and provide avenues for additional income to farmers.
- **Smart Metering:** A key feature of the Scheme is to enable consumer empowerment by way of prepaid **Smart metering** to be implemented in **Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) mode**.
 - **Smart meters** would allow consumers to **monitor their electricity consumption on a routine basis** instead of monthly basis, which can help them in usage of electricity as per their own needs and in terms of the resources available.
 - It is proposed to install approximately **10 crore prepaid Smart Meters by December, 2023 in the first phase**.
- **Leveraging Technology:** [Artificial Intelligence](#) would be leveraged to prepare system generated energy accounting reports.
 - This will enable DISCOMs to take informed decisions on **loss reduction, demand forecasting, Time of Day (ToD) tariff, Renewable Energy (RE)** Integration and for other predictive analysis.