

29 Apr 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Corridor linking India, Myanmar no longer under BRI framework

Context:

In an annex tagged with the Joint Communiqué of the Leaders' Round table of the Belt and Road Forum (BRF), which concluded in Beijing, the Chinese foreign ministry website has not listed the BCIM as a project covered by the BRI—the giant connectivity initiative spearheaded by China to revive the ancient Silk Road across Eurasia and Africa.

Details:

- Citing “sovereignty” concerns, India, for the second time, has not officially participated in the BRF,

as CPEC—a flagship of the BRI—passes through Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK).

- India’s decision to skip the BRF may have led to the exclusion of the Bangladesh- China- India- Myanmar (BCIM) Economic corridor from the list of projects covered by the China-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) umbrella.
- South Asia is covered by three major undertakings—the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), the Nepal-China Trans-Himalayan Multi-dimensional Connectivity Network, including Nepal-China cross-border railway, as well as the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar (BCIM) Corridor:

- The 2800 km BCIM corridor proposes to link Kunming in China’s Yunnan province with Kolkata, passing through nodes such as Mandalay in Myanmar and Dhaka in Bangladesh before heading to Kolkata.
- Significantly, a report titled, “The Belt and Road Initiative Progress, Contributions and Prospects,” released by the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative of the Communist Party of China (CPC) does list the BCIM as a BRI project.
- Over the past five years or so, the four countries [of the BCIM] have worked together to build this corridor in the framework of joint working groups, and have planned a number of major projects in institutional development, infrastructure connectivity, cooperation in trade and industrial parks, cooperation and opening up in the financial market, cultural exchange, and cooperation in enhancing people's wellbeing,” says the report.

China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC):

- The CMEC will run from Yunnan Province of China to Mandalay in Central Myanmar. From there it will head towards Yangon, before terminating at the Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ) on the Bay of Bengal.
- The 1,700-km corridor provides China yet another node to access the Indian Ocean.
- Last September, the BRI had got a high octane boost when Myanmar — facing the heat from the West because of the Rohingya refugee crisis — inked an agreement with Beijing to establish the CMEC.
- The CMEC will also reduce Beijing’s trade and energy reliance on the Malacca straits — the narrow passage that links the Indian Ocean with the Pacific.
- Chinese planners worry that the military domination over the Malacca straits of the United States — a country with which it is already engaged in a trade war — can threaten one of China’s major economic lifeline.

Nepal-China Trans-Himalayan connectivity network:

- The Nepal-China Trans-Himalayan connectivity network starts from Chengdu, from where it is linked to Tibet by the Sichuan-Tibet Highway, or the Sichuan-Tibet Railway.
- The Nepal-China Trans-Himalayan connectivity network is listed by the annex
- It is proposed that the railway from Tibet will be further extended to Kathmandu, via Ya’an, Qamdo, Lhasa and Shigatse.
- Chinese planners visualise that that railway will be eventually connected with the Indian railway network, linking China and India across the Himalayas.

Associate Professor of China’s West Normal University, had said that, “The CMEC was proposed during Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s visit to Myanmar in November 2017, because India has not been acting on the BCIM sub regional cooperation proposal. So it is better for China to go for bilateral cooperation with Myanmar and simultaneously wait for India’s participation.”

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. 'Protect rights of accused in sexual abuse cases'

Context:

A petition has been filed in the Supreme Court to frame guidelines to protect the reputation and dignity of persons accused of sexual offences.

Details:

- The petition was filed by the Youth Bar Association of India.
- It said that a person was considered innocent unless proven guilty by a court of law.

Concern:

- If a person was falsely accused, his reputation would be lost forever and exposed to public ridicule for no fault of his.
- This would be a violation of the fundamental right to life enshrined under Article 21 of the Constitution.
- Exposing the identity of falsely accused or the one who is not yet proven guilty does not only destroy an individual's life but also creates a social stigma for the family members too.
- Some preventive measures must be taken to avoid and deal with such situations in the interest of justice.
- Disclosure of his identity, especially during trial, would lead to media trial. Besides, considering the wide reach of social media, the person's name and even that of his family, which might include minors, would be exposed on the Internet.
- This would be a violation of their fundamental right to privacy.
- "In present times, where people are in a virtual world, the reputation and integrity of a person is always an easy target to destroy," the petition said.
- The petition said it would be tragic that the person, even after being found innocent, would continue to be known as a suspected sex offender on social media because once his identity entered the public domain it would become searchable and permanent.
- "The previous identification as a suspect will endure in the public sphere," the petition said.

2. SC: filthy language not criminal intimidation

Context:

Abusing a person with filthy language alone does not constitute the offence of criminal intimidation, the Supreme Court has held.

Details:

- The Bench was hearing an appeal filed by an insurance claim surveyor in Uttar Pradesh, who was accused of criminal intimidation by a factory owner in Mathura district.
- The question before the court was whether the acts of the appellant constituted criminal intimidation under Section 506 of IPC.
- "The threat must be with intention to cause alarm to the complainant to cause that person to do or omit to do any work. Mere expression of any words without any intention to cause alarm would not be sufficient to bring in the application of this section," a Bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and K.M. Joseph said in a judgment.

- It was observed that the “intentional insult must be of such a degree that it should provoke a person to break the public peace or commit any other offence.”
- The mere allegation that the appellant came and abused the complainant does not satisfy the ingredients [of criminal intimidation].
- In order to attract Section 506 IPC, the court, said that the the prosecution must prove:
 1. That the accused threatened some person.
 2. That such threat consisted of some injury to his person, reputation or property; or to the person, reputation or property of some one in whom he was interested;
 3. That he did so with intent to cause alarm to that person; or to cause that person to do any act which he was not legally bound to do, or omit to do any act which he was legally entitled to do as a means of avoiding the execution of such threat.

3. Govt hikes customs duty on wheat to 40%

Context:

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), through a notification, has hiked the basic customs duty (BCD) on wheat to 40 percent.

Details:

- The decision comes in the backdrop of the government’s plan of sell wheat in the open market to offload excess grain from the storage units of Food Corporation of India and state agencies.
- In May last year, the government had hiked the basic customs duty on wheat to 30% from 20%.
- The government has now hiked the customs duty on wheat to 40 % from 30% to “curb imports and protect the domestic industry”.
- The government wants to restrict overseas purchase so that domestic prices of wheat do not come under pressure as the country's wheat output is expected to scale a record high this year.
- At 40 percent import duty, imports are not viable for flour mills. They have to buy local crop.
- India's wheat production this season might cross 100 million tonnes.
- The government plans to sell 10 million tonnes of wheat and 2 million tonnes of rice in the open market.
- An oversupply in the domestic market due to back-to-back bumper production of foodgrains has put wheat prices under pressure in the country.
- The government has fixed wheat's minimum support price (MSP) or the price at which it buys from farmers, at Rs 1,840 per quintal, up from Rs 1,735 a year earlier, as part of its decision to fix the support price at a minimum of 1.5 times the production cost.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Caution, FMPs too can go astray

Context:

- Recently, investors in Fixed Maturity Plans (FMPs) of two fund houses were told that they may need to be a little flexible about receiving their maturity proceeds.
- Kotak Mutual Fund redeemed its FMPs series 127 and 183 on maturity date, paying back capital while deferring part of the returns to a later date, citing a delay in realisation of debt from the Essel group. It also informed its investors about four other FMPs with exposures to the Essel group and the

troubled IL&FS Transportation Networks.

- HDFC Mutual Fund sought investors' consent for extending the term of its 2016 FMP series 1168D by another 380 days and told them that it could either defer returns or seek a roll-over for other FMPs due later.

What are fixed maturity plans?

FMPs are closed-end debt funds with a maturity period that can range from one month to five years. Because debt funds enjoy long-term capital gains tax after three years, typically three-year FMPs are now popular. FMPs are predominantly debt-oriented, and their objective is to provide steady returns over a fixed-maturity period, thereby protecting investors from market fluctuations.

How do FMPs work?

An FMP portfolio consists of various fixed-income instruments with matching maturities. Based on the tenure of the FMP, a fund manager invests in instruments in such a way that all of them mature around the same time. During the tenure of the plan, all the units of the plan are held until they mature on a specified date. Thus, investors get an indicative rate of return of the plan.

Where do FMPs invest?

FMPs usually invest in certificates of deposits (CDs), commercial papers (CPs), money market instruments, non-convertible debentures over a defined investment tenure. Sometimes, they also invest in bank fixed deposits.

Are FMPs liquid?

Since FMPs are closed-end funds, they can only be traded on the stock exchange where they are listed. However, trading in these units is negligible which makes FMPs illiquid. Compared to this, open-ended debt funds can be bought or sold on a daily basis.

Lessons from the fiasco:

The FMP crisis highlights three hitherto hidden risks in this product for investors.

- One, even FMPs that promise to maintain high-quality portfolios with AAA or A1 rated instruments aren't immune to default risks. The IL&FS default has shown that even AAA or A1 ratings from Indian rating agencies can be fallible. Therefore, ratings do not completely insulate you against credit risks.
- Two, FMPs can expose one to higher risks than open-end debt schemes by owning concentrated exposures in corporate bonds.
- Three, since they are close-ended and attract more retail than institutional investors, there is less scrutiny into the investing decisions of FMPs than into open-end funds. In open end-debt funds, institutional investors tend to protest risky exposures by exiting the fund, a facility which close-ended FMPs don't allow.

Conclusion:

All these are reasons for avoiding FMPs as a class. However, it is a lesson for investors to stop thinking of FMPs as substitutes for bank deposits. Investors in ongoing FMPs must immediately check the portfolios of their schemes and watch out for any email communication from their fund houses on troubled bonds. Rolling over the fund, if given the choice, is your best bet though you may have to wait longer for your

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: ECONOMY

1. No more leeway – RBI gets SC ultimatum on RTI Act disclosures

Context:

The Supreme Court has ordered the Reserve Bank of India to disclose its annual inspection reports of banks, along with the list of wilful defaulters and information related to them under the Right to Information Act. The Supreme Court has also emphasised that RBI is ‘duty bound under the law’ to disclose information sought under the RTI Act.

Background:

- In 2011 the Central Information Commission said the public has the right to know how banks are functioning since significant amounts of public funds are kept in banks.
- Former CIC Shailesh Gandhi had directed the RBI to disclose the names of banks that had been penalized or served show-cause notices. However, the central bank defended its stance on the grounds of protecting fiduciary and commercial interests.
- In 2015, a petitioner had sought copies of inspection reports of certain commercial banks from April 2011 under the RTI Act.
- THE RBI withheld the information citing ‘economic interest’ and ‘fiduciary relationship’ with banks.
- Ruling on the matter in December 2015, Supreme Court judge M.Y. Eqbal rejected RBI’s defence of “economic interest” and “fiduciary relationship”.
- The court observed that the RBI is a statutory regulatory authority which oversees the functioning of the banks and the information about the banks is with it only by virtue of its nature as a statutory authority.
- The court had held that the RBI is accountable to the general public and cannot withhold information under the defence of “trust” with the financial institutions.
- The banking regulator has repeatedly tried to stonewall multiple requests seeking information ranging from the names of wilful defaulters on bank loans worth hundreds of crores of rupees, to the bank-wise breakup of mark-to-market (MTM) losses and the losses in foreign currency derivatives contract cases.
- The SC has now ruled that the RBI’s Non-Disclosure policy is in violation of its order and has warned RBI that further violations would be viewed seriously.
- The order is a part of long-running attempts to extract financial information in the backdrop of mounting bad debts at banks, with the RBI resisting such attempts and bankers worrying about the potential impact on financial stability.
- Banks’ total non-performing assets amounted to ₹11.2 trillion in FY18.
- In November 2018, the CIC served a show-cause notice to then RBI governor Urjit Patel for “dishonouring” a Supreme Court judgement on disclosure of wilful defaulters’ list. The CIC has also asked the Prime Minister’s Office, the finance ministry and the RBI to make public a letter written

by former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan on bad loans.

Details:

- RBI is empowered under section 35 of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 to conduct annual inspection of all commercial banks—public, private and foreign. It conducts an on-site inspection of all banks once a year.
- RBI officials visit the head offices and branches of banks to inspect the books.
- Currently, the annual inspection is based on a Risk-Based Supervision method which focuses on “evaluating both present and future risks, identifying incipient problems and facilitates prompt intervention/early corrective action”.
- It covers financial position, functioning of board and various links of the bank, details of assets and liabilities, treasury management, asset liability management, liquidity operations, para banking activities, etc. Earlier RBI used to follow the CAMELS approach—capital adequacy, asset quality, management, earning, liquidity and system and control.
- The content of the annual inspection report is discussed with the head of the particular bank before finalization. The final report is then shared with the banks to enable them to take corrective steps.
- “Typically bank inspection reports are not made public. The report is a comprehensive assessment of banks as an entity. Various thoughts can be taken out of context and could lead to wrong conclusions. That is a danger,” said R. Gandhi, former RBI deputy governor.
- “Banks hold deposits on demand. This kind of information, if it goes out in the public domain, will have an impact on financial stability. The RBI has been arguing that this is a matter of confidentiality between the central bank and other entities and section 28 of the RBI Act allows them to disclose only confidential rather than individual information,” said a former RBI official.

Conclusion:

At a time when the level of bad loans at commercial banks continues to remain worryingly high, worsening their combined capital to risk-weighted assets ratio (CRAR), it is inexcusable that the RBI continues to keep the largest lenders to banks, the depositors, and the public in the dark on the specific loan accounts that are endangering the banking system’s health and viability. The central bank’s intransigence and repeated failure to honour the court’s orders ultimately undermines the very rule of law it seeks to enforce as a banking sector regulator empowered by Parliament.

2. Downbeat diesel – on Maruti Suzuki’s decision to eliminate diesel models

Context:

Maruti Suzuki, India’s largest passenger vehicle manufacturer, has decided to eliminate diesel models from April 1, 2020, when the Bharat Stage VI emission standard is introduced. Maruti Suzuki’s decision makes it clear that in spite of being a strong past performer, diesel is riding into the sunset as far as the personal vehicle is concerned. This outcome should be welcomed for the positive impact it will have on air quality and public health.

Background:

- Bharat stage emission standards are emission standards instituted by the Government of India to regulate the output of air pollutants from internal combustion engine equipment, including motor vehicles. The standards and the timeline for implementation are set by the Central Pollution Control Board under the Ministry of Environment & Forests and climate change.
- The standards, based on European regulations were first introduced in 2000.
- Progressively stringent norms have been rolled out since then. All new vehicles manufactured after the implementation of the norms have to be compliant with the regulations.

- In 2016, the Indian government announced that the country would skip the BS-V norms altogether and adopt BS-VI norms by 2020.
- In its recent judgment, the Supreme Court has banned the sale and registration of motor vehicles conforming to the emission standard Bharat Stage-IV in the entire country from April 1, 2020.

Current scenario:

- Automotive emissions, especially in congested cities, have risen due to steady economic growth, proliferation of vehicles and more vehicle kilometres travelled.
- In Delhi, for instance, the effect of shifting the three-wheeler and bus fleet to Compressed Natural Gas during a four-year period from 1998 improved air quality, but the gains were quickly negated by a rise in overall vehicle numbers, especially those run on diesel, besides a rise in other sources of pollution.
- Marking the steady deterioration in air quality, one study found that people on the road in Delhi had 1.5 times greater exposure to the city's average ambient air pollution
- Diesel emissions pose hidden hazards, too. Besides the harmful fine and ultra fine particulates that they contain, the vehicular exhaust adds to ground-level ozone formed from nitrogen oxides and hydrocarbons combining in the presence of sunlight, seriously harming respiratory health.

Details:

- This move taken by Maruti Suzuki mirrors emerging global trends.
- Although diesel has powered India's commercial transport segment for decades, its fortunes are declining for several reasons, beginning with the narrowing of the price differential with petrol.
- It has lost its shine in Europe, the world's biggest market for diesel cars where sales of even well-known marques have fallen during 2018 by 20%.
- In a variety of mandated and suggestive ways, car-owners are being nudged towards petrol and alternative fuels.
- The diesel emissions data scandal involving carmaker Volkswagen dismayed many consumers.
- Given the prevailing economics and diesel's reputation as a dirty fuel that adds to pollution from cars, buses and freight vehicles, auto companies see a weak business case to upgrade them.

Way forward:

- The national plan to shift to higher quality BS VI grade fuels may offer some mitigation of pollution, but that can only be a respite.
- Improving air quality in the cities requires a transformative planning approach guided by the singular objective of reducing the use of polluting vehicles.
- Such a policy would prioritise less-polluting and alternative fuels for vehicles, but more important, encourage walking, cycling and using public transport.
- This is the direction that many world cities are taking.
- Paris, Madrid and Athens have announced a prohibition on diesel vehicles by 2025, while London has made it more expensive for older vehicles to enter the city.
- India has to chart its own equitable and accessible green path.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. An ineffectual angel – On SC's role in ensuring free and fair elections

Context:

The editorial talks about the crucial task of courts in ensuring that the ground rules of electoral competition,

which are necessary to ensure free and fair elections, are maintained.

Background:

- The transition from a colonial regime to a democratic republic was one of the most singular achievements in Indian history.
- Herculean efforts went into pulling off independent India's first general election.
- By stipulating in the Constitution that elections must be conducted on the basis of universal adult suffrage, the framers of our Constitution transformed an entire population from subjects to citizens in one sweeping stroke.
- It was an achievement that many doubted would be possible.

Editorial Analysis:

- At the heart of this achievement is the citizen's right to vote.
- It is through the vote that the democratic legitimacy is periodically renewed and the foundations of the republic remain stable.
- But it is not simply the act of voting that is enough: rather, voting must take place as part of a free and fair election. There must exist a number of institutional factors and conditions, all of which, taken together, culminate in that final act of the voter casting the ballot.

Steps taken by the Supreme Court in the past to ensure free and fair elections:

- The Indian Supreme Court has recognised this basic principle.
- In many judgments over the years, the court has set out the enabling conditions that guarantee that voting remains a meaningful activity.
- These include, for example, the citizen's right not to be arbitrarily denied the vote (the court has, therefore, held that voting is a fundamental freedom guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution);
- The right to know (thus, requiring compulsory declaration of certain information by candidates);
- The right to a secret ballot (that has prompted the court to order the inclusion of a NOTA, or None of the Above option).

As the Supreme Court has reminded us many times, public faith in the electoral process is crucial to the continued survival of republican democracy, and it is these institutional safeguards that come together to ensure it.

Judicial inaction:

- Like with any other competitive process, the ground rules that constitute the framework of the competition must be enforced by an impartial umpire. It is here that the role of an independent judiciary is crucial.
- While in popular imagination, the primary role of the courts is to protect the fundamental rights of individuals against the state, another — equally critical — task of courts is to ensure that the ground rules of electoral competition, which are necessary to ensure free and fair elections, are maintained.
- It is not a task that can be left to political actors, and can, in essence, only be performed by the judiciary.
- This, therefore, is an arena where courts have to be even more vigilant than usual, because what is at stake is the foundational legitimacy of democracy itself.
- In this context, the recent conduct of Indian courts reveals an unfortunate gap between judicial rhetoric and actual enforcement.
 1. **The right to know:** this much-vaunted principle, which has repeatedly been accorded pride of place by the Supreme Court, was flagrantly violated when the government introduced the

electoral bond scheme. The electoral bond scheme allows limitless, secret donations to political parties, including (and especially) by corporations. It denies to voters the knowledge of who funds the people who ask for their vote. The electoral bonds scheme was challenged immediately after it came into force; the Supreme Court, however, held off on hearing the case until a few weeks ago, and then it postponed the case to after the elections, citing a paucity of time. In the meantime, significant sums of anonymous donations have come in through electoral bonds.

2. **The secret ballot:** During this election season, Maneka Gandhi's threat to Muslim voters to vote for her or else she would refuse to help them after she was elected, raised eyebrows across the country. However, it has been demonstrated that political parties are now able to determine voting outcomes at the level of individual booths. This destroys the very concept of the secret ballot, and makes threats like the ones Ms. Gandhi delivered extremely credible and capable of distorting the electoral process.
3. **Totalisers:** When a case was filed before the Supreme Court in 2018 asking for the use of totaliser machines in elections — that would restore the secrecy of the ballot — the court dismissed it without even according it a hearing. Totaliser is a proposed mechanism in the voting machines in India to hide the booth-wise voting patterns. A totaliser allows the votes cast in about 14 polling booths to be counted together. At present, the votes are tallied booth by booth.
4. **The freedom to vote:** This election season has seen multiple complaints from voters who have found their names deleted from electoral rolls, without intimation or a chance to be heard. However, this is not new. The issue of voter deletions surfaced late last year, especially in the context of Assembly elections in Telangana, where the Election Commission of India (EC) itself admitted to the existence of the problem. It was alleged at the time — and has subsequently been established through detailed investigative reporting carried out by The Huffington Post — that the EC was using an un-audited de-duplication software, alongside (unauthorised) Aadhaar linking, to “cleanse” the electoral rolls, but the result, instead, was to remove a very large number of genuine voters. Accordingly, late last year, Srinivas Kodali, a Hyderabad-based technologist, filed a case before the High Court, asking that the EC be required to reveal the source code of the algorithm it was using, and open it up for auditing. Months have passed, the general election has come, but the High Court has failed to decide the petition.
5. **Public faith in the electoral process:** the Opposition parties filed a petition before the Supreme Court to verify 50% of the EVMs using the voter-verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) machines. The EC's only objection to this was that it would increase the time of counting by six days. One would imagine that a six-day increasing of the counting period, in the context of a seven-phase month-and-a-half-long general election, is a small price to pay for maintaining public faith in the electoral process. However, with three phases of the election having come and gone, the court is yet to even decide upon the petition.

Conclusion:

- On multiple occasions, over the course of many years, the Supreme Court has boasted about the glories of Indian democracy, the importance of free and fair elections, and the supreme sanctity of the vote.
- Democracy is a genuine achievement, worthy of pride. It, however, does not sustain itself. The court's rhetoric has little purpose if, when it comes to the crunch, it evades deciding cases that call for it to descend from the commanding heights of eloquence, and into the weeds of actually enforcing the grand principles of democracy.
- The voter's right to know, the secret ballot, and the freedom to vote itself — all these have been undermined to various degrees in the last few years, throwing into serious doubt the freedom and fairness of elections. But on each occasion, when the courts have been called upon to address these problems, they have dodged and ducked the issues, instead of solving them.

- The rhetoric is beautiful, but without enforcement, the judiciary remains, in the words of Mathew Arnold, “an ineffectual angel beating in the void [its] luminous wings in vain.”

F. Tidbits

1. Beijing in full bloom as horticultural expo opens

- 2019 Beijing International Horticultural Exhibition opened on the 29th of April. The horticultural expo has drawn international attention, putting Beijing's tourism in full bloom.
- The 162-day expo is poised to impress an expected number of 16 million visitors from home and abroad with a huge collection of plants, flowers and eye-catching pavilions as well as ideas for green development.
- This is the second time for China to hold such a high-level horticulture expo. Southwestern Chinese city Kunming held the expo in 1999.
- A total of seven major highway projects aimed at improving traffic conditions for the expo have been completed.
- At the center of the expo site stands the Chinese Pavilion, a curved exhibition hall in the shape of "ruyi," a traditional Chinese ornament symbolizing good fortune.
- As one of the expo's four main pavilions, the Chinese Pavilion displays a wide variety of plant species from across China and showcases the history of Chinese gardening and horticulture.
- The theme of the Beijing expo is "live green, live better," which is well embodied in the design of the expo gardens and pavilions.
- The Chinese Pavilion is designed as an earth-sheltered structure.
- The rainwater collection system on the roof and a storage pond underground are used for terrace field irrigation. More than 1,000 photovoltaic glass panels have also been installed on the steel roof to utilize solar energy.
- During the planning and building of the expo site, the existing 50,000 trees in the area were preserved and became the premise of the design.
- Meanwhile, over 100,000 trees and shrubs were planted to improve the conditions of wetlands, purify water and provide habitats for migratory birds.

2. UAE gives birth certificate to girl born to Hindu father, Muslim mother

- As per the marriage rules for expatriates in UAE, a Muslim man can marry a non-Muslim woman but a Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim man.
- In probably the first, the UAE government has given birth certificate to a nine-month old girl who was born to an Indian Hindu father and a Muslim mother, setting aside the country's marriage rules for expatriates during the Year of Tolerance.
- The UAE has declared 2019 as the Year of Tolerance to highlight UAE as an exemplary example of a tolerant nation, bridging the communication gap between different cultures and build an environment where people accept each other as they are.

3. Social media fraud rose 43% in 2018: report

- In a sign that platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp are emerging as new public square for criminal deception, a study has found that social media fraud increased 43% in 2018.
- The results suggest that cybercriminals are increasingly relying on Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and other legitimate social media and messaging platforms to communicate with each other and sell stolen identities, credit card numbers and other ill-gotten gains.
- Given the ease of use, absence of fees and other benefits of these platforms, continuation of this trend in 2019 should come as no surprise, said the whitepaper ‘Current State of Cybercrime — 2019’, released by RSA Security.

- According to the researchers, fraud in the mobile channel has grown significantly over the past several years, with 70% of artifice originating in the mobile channel in 2018. In particular, fraud from mobile apps increased 680% between 2015 and 2018, said the study, adding that the use of rogue mobile applications to defraud consumers was on the rise.

G. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1) Consider the following statements:

1. Zoji La separates Kashmir Valley from Drass Valley.
2. Zoji La is located on National Highway 1.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: c

Details:

Zoji La is a high mountain pass in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, located on National Highway 1 between Srinagar and Leh in the western section of the Himalayan mountain range. It separates Kashmir Valley to its west from Dras Valley to its northeast.

Q2) Microliths were most commonly found in:

- a. Paleolithic age
- b. Mesolithic age
- c. Neolithic age
- d. Chalcolithic age

Answer: b

Explanation:

The Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age is an archaeological term used to describe specific cultures that fall between the Paleolithic and the Neolithic Periods. The use of small chipped stone tools called microliths and retouched bladelets are the key factor to identify the Mesolithic as a prehistoric period.

Q3) Gandhara School of Art is related to which dynasty?

- a. Cholas
- b. Kushanas
- c. Guptas

d. Greek

Answer: b

Explanation

The Gandhara School of art had also developed in first century AD along with Mathura School during reign of Kushana emperor Kanishka.

Q4) Consider the following statements:

1. When a President is to be impeached for violation of the Constitution, the charge shall be preferred by the Rajya Sabha only.
2. The resolution for impeachment of the President has to be passed by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the total membership of the House.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: b

Explanation:

Article 61 of the constitution of India deals with the Procedure for impeachment of the President. When a President is to be impeached for violation of the Constitution, the charge shall be preferred by either House of Parliament. Such resolution has been passed by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the total membership of the House.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Is rationality the enemy of religion? Which among the two would be a healthier guide for the promotion of morality in a society? (15 Marks 250 Words)
2. China signals willingness to address criticism of Belt and Road Initiative. India should take a fresh look at the initiative and modulate its approach. Critically comment. (15 marks 250 Words)

