

13 May 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS1 Related

B. GS2 Related

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

- [1. Post-Fani, Naveen seeks special category status](#)
- [2. State reels under drought as water reserves dry up](#)

C. GS3 Related

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

- [1. Kerala govt. readies new action plan to handle disasters](#)

ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

- [1. Assam produces an orchid link to the Orient](#)

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

- [1. Prashant Bhushan sends notice to Centre on Bt Brinjal](#)

D. GS4 Related

E. Editorials

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

- [1. The War on Terror is in peril](#)

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

- [1. Substantive equality](#)

ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

- [1. Protecting forest fringes](#)

ECONOMY

- [1. Of shells, companies and GDP](#)

F. Tidbits

- [1. Proposal to train self-help groups](#)
- [2. Social media and polls](#)

G. Prelims Facts

- [1. Kolam tribe](#)
- [2. Euthanasia](#)

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

A. GS1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Post-Fani, Naveen seeks special category status

Context:

Odisha Chief Minister has demanded special category status from the Centre for his disaster-prone State, saying it faces natural calamities almost every year.

Details:

- In his first interview since Cyclone Fani ravaged the coastal districts killing 41 people, he said a special category status was the need of the hour due to the massive loss to infrastructure which may stall growth of the State.
- The demand was raised stating that the assistance that the state gets from the Centre is mostly for temporary restoration of infrastructure. And a lot has to be spent from State's own funds to work for the long-term.
- In the last five years we had Phailin, Hudhud, Titli and now Fani. In addition to this, the state experiences massive floods.

Current scenario in the state:

- Fani has left the Power infrastructure completely destroyed, especially in Puri and parts of Khurda districts where we complete re-electrification is necessary.
- Lakhs of houses have been destroyed.
- Serious damage has been caused to tree cover and plantation crops.

Special Category status:

- States which are granted special category status enjoy several benefits. These include
 1. preferential treatment in getting central funds
 2. concession on excise duty to attract industries to the state
 3. a significant 30% of the Centre's gross budget also goes special category states
 4. These states can avail the benefit of debt-swapping and debt relief schemes
 5. In the case of Centrally Sponsored Schemes and external aid, Special Category States get it in the ratio of 90% as grant, and 10% as loans. Other states, however, get 30% of their funds as grants
 6. Special Category States also get tax breaks to attract investment
- A Special Category Status catalyses the inflow of private investments and generates employment and additional revenue for the state. Besides, the State can create more welfare-based schemes from the new savings since the Center bears 90% of the expenditure on all Centrally Sponsored Schemes. Further, more grants from the Center helps in building state infrastructure and social-sector projects.
- The Constitution of India does not include any provision for the categorization of any state as a Special Category Status state.
- However, in the past, Central Planned Assistance were given to certain states on the ground that they are historically disadvantaged in comparison to others.

Criteria for Special Category Status:

The erstwhile Planning Commission body, the National Development Council (NDC), granted Special Category Status to states based on a number of features, which included:

1. Hilly and difficult terrain
2. Low population density
3. Presence of a sizeable tribal population
4. Strategic location along international borders
5. Economic and infrastructural backwardness
6. Non-viable nature of state finances

Jammu and Kashmir was the first state to get Special Category Status and another 10 states were added over

the years, with Uttarakhand being the last in 2010.

2. State reels under drought as water reserves dry up

Context:

As the water situation steadily worsens in the arid Marathwada region, districts in water-abundant western Maharashtra, too, are feeling the lash of the drought.

Details:

- Rising mercury levels have resulted in the rapid depletion of water stocks in the 22 dams which are part of the Bhima river basin in western Maharashtra and are the potable water lifelines of Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad.
- At least five of these dams have 0% water stock currently, while the collective stock in seven other dams is less than 10% of their capacity. The remaining 10 have a collective reserve stock of a little over 20% .
- Authorities said more than 750 tankers were deployed to provide relief to the worst-afflicted districts in the Pune division which include Solapur, Mangalwedha, Satara and Maan.
- The situation in Solapur is grave as Ujjani dam currently has a water level of -34.98% (dead water stock).
- The groundwater table has plummeted sharply in several villages in the district as in other parts of rural Marathwada.

Droughts:

- The term 'Drought' in simple words is the absence of water for a long period of time, at a place where it is considered abnormal as compared to its usual conditions.
- The distribution of water on the earth's surface is not even. Some places have lots of fresh water e.g. rivers, lakes, lagoons, ponds etc. and they are continuously replenished by rainfall and water from underground.
- If a region that has had lots of rainfall, goes for a couple of weeks without rains, and people, animals and plants begin to experience dryness, it can be called a drought.
- Drought can be defined as a relatively long time where there is not enough water than there usually is, as a result of dry weather, to support human, animal and plant life.
- Droughts become an issue only when it begins to affect water supply for irrigation, municipal, industrial, energy, and ecosystem function.
- Severe droughts can have serious consequences.

Types of droughts:

1. Meteorological drought:

Meteorological drought is the general lack of moisture in the weather such as lack of precipitation, and the play of other weather conditions such as dry winds, high temperatures and so on.

2. Agricultural drought:

This drought happens when atmospheric moisture is reduced to an extent that soil moisture is affected. This affects crops, animals and also evapotranspiration.

3. Hydrological drought:

Occurs when there is a deficiency in the surface and groundwater supply in a region, often due to less precipitation, unrestrained reliance on surface water for farming, energy and other needs.

4. Socioeconomic drought:

This is when the supply of some goods and services like food, drinking water and energy are diminished or threatened by changes in hydrological and meteorological conditions. Sometimes it is even made worse by growing populations and excessive demands of such goods, to the point that it creates stress on the little water available. It takes a very long time for this kind of drought to get into full gear, and a long time to recover from it.

C. GS3 Related

Category: DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. Kerala govt. readies new action plan to handle disasters

Context:

Picking up valuable lessons from the Cyclone Ockhi disaster and the 2018 floods, the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA) has updated standard operating procedures (SOP) and adopted new protocols for disaster management in the State.

Details:

- The State government has approved KSDMA's updated 'Orange book of disaster management — Kerala — SOP and emergency support functions plan' and a new, separate document, 'Monsoon preparedness and emergency response plan.'

The revision is meant to enhance the capacity of government departments to handle emergencies effectively.

- Named so for its orange-coloured outer cover, the orange book was earlier known as the 'Handbook on disaster management — Volume 2, emergency operations centres and emergency support functions plan.' It describes incidence response mechanisms to be adopted at the State, district and taluk level.
- Containing information on emergency response assets available across the State, the orange book explains the SOP for rainfall, flood, cyclone, tsunami, high waves (swell waves, storm surges, 'kallakadal'), landslip, petrochemical accidents and even mishaps caused by space debris (meteorites, falling spacecraft parts, etc.).

Monsoon preparedness and emergency response plan:

- On the other hand, the 'Monsoon preparedness and emergency response plan' is season-specific.
- It is meant to be strictly complied with by government departments, central agencies and district disaster management authorities during the south-west and north-east monsoon seasons (June to December).
- Earlier, directives on monsoon preparedness were issued in the form of government circulars.
- According to KSDMA, no single document spelt out the roles and responsibilities of individual government departments.
- The new document, published in Malayalam, lists the roles of the State emergency operations centre, central agencies, district disaster management authorities, and 29 departments.
- It was said that this plan would be updated every year after receiving the first Long Range Forecast

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY**1. Assam produces an orchid link to the Orient****Context:**

The Japanese Journal of Botany has published as a “new record for the flora in India” in its latest issue called *Lecanorchis taiwaniana*.

Details:

- An Assam forest officer’s chance discovery has given India one of its smallest orchids in terms of size and duration of bloom to be recorded botanically.
- The parasitic bloom, found by forest officer is a variant of a Japanese orchid.
- It is a mycoheterotroph, one of two types of parasitic plants that have abandoned photosynthesis.
- It bears 90% similarity with the taiwaniana species named after Taiwan.
- It derives its energy and nutrients from fungus, hence could be of herbal importance.
- *Lecanorchis taiwaniana* adds to the orchid wealth of northeast India, which has 800 of some 1,300 species in the country.
- About 300 species are found in the Western Ghats and 200 in the northwestern Himalayas.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**1. Prashant Bhushan sends notice to Centre on Bt Brinjal****Context:**

Senior advocate Prashant Bhushan has sent a legal notice to Union Environment Minister Harsh Vardhan asking for a freeze on all genetically modified organisms, including field trials. Though growing Bt brinjal is illegal in India, the letter comes in the aftermath of activist groups recently proffering evidence of Bt Brinjal, a GM crop, being grown in a farmer’s field in Haryana.

Issue:

- In 2010 the government placed an indefinite ban on commercial release of Bt brinjal, developed by Mahyco, and called for more independent scientific studies to establish its biosafety as India is a centre of diversity for brinjal, both domesticated as well as wild.
- A lab report, prepared by a private biotechnology firm, that confirmed the presence of the Bt-derived protein in brinjal samples from Fatehabad, Haryana, in April. This confirms the allegations that Bt brinjal, is being cultivated illegally in Haryana.
- It is clearly a failure of the government agencies concerned that illegal Bt brinjal is being cultivated in the country.

Bt Brinjal:

- Mahyco, an Indian seed company based in Jalna, Maharashtra, has developed the Bt brinjal.
- The genetically modified brinjal is a suite of transgenic brinjals (also known as an eggplant or aubergine) created by inserting a crystal protein gene (Cry1Ac) from the soil bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* into the genome of various brinjal cultivars.
- The insertion of the gene, along with other genetic elements such as promoters, terminators and an

antibiotic resistance marker gene into the brinjal plant is accomplished using Agrobacterium-mediated genetic transformation.

- The Bt brinjal has been developed to give resistance against lepidopteron insects, in particular the Brinjal Fruit and Shoot Borer (*Leucinodes orbonalis*)(FSB).
- Upon ingestion of the Bt toxin, the insect's digestive processes are disrupted, ultimately resulting in its death.
- It will reduce the farmers' dependence on pesticides and enable higher yields.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. The War on Terror is in peril

Context:

The brutal attacks on Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka, for which the Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility, have reignited discussion on the global 'War on Terror'. Scholars and officials across the world are studying the links of the bombers to the IS's former 'Caliphate' in Syria, where at least two of the bombers are believed to have travelled, and several leaders have now called for a greater focus on the global dimensions of the counter-terrorism effort.

Issue:

The attacks in Sri Lanka underline the many cracks in the concept of a global 'War on Terror', and raise questions on what it has achieved in the time since the idea developed.

War on Terror:

- The War on Terror, also known as the Global War on Terrorism, is an international military campaign that was launched by the United States government.
- The term was coined by former U.S. President George W. Bush after the September 11 attacks in 2001.
- First, the original mission that the War on Terror was named for is floundering.
 - Not only has the coalition of about 60 countries that sent troops and offered logistical support for 'Operation Enduring Freedom' failed to end terrorism in Afghanistan, it appears it is preparing to hand the country back to the oppressive Taliban regime that it defeated in December 2001.
 - Besides, there is no guarantee that the terror groups living in safe havens in Pakistan will not also have the run of Afghanistan once the coalition pulls out.
 - The war in Afghanistan was only one of the many coalitions the U.S. led in the name of the War on Terror: 46 nations joined the 'coalition of the willing' to defeat Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 2003, and 19 were a part of the coalition that ousted Muammar Qaddafi from power in Libya in 2011.
 - The U.S. and allied countries were sidetracked by the 'Arab Spring' in 2011, which led them to bolster anti-Bashar al-Assad groups in Syria.
 - This eventually paved the way for the IS to establish a 'Caliphate' in territories in Syria and

Iraq.

- The next coalition was formed to fight the terror of the IS.
- The number of global terror attacks (maintained in a Global Terrorism Database by the University of Maryland of events from 1970 to 2018) per year went up from 1,000 in 2004 to 17,000 in 2014.
- It is clear that the countries in question — Afghanistan, Syria, Libya and Iraq — are far from free of the spectre of terrorism.
- Despite the defeat of the ‘Caliphate’ territorially, the IS or its franchises are appearing in new parts of the world. Sri Lanka is the latest on that list.
- Rather than helping fight pan-Islamist terror groups, the War on Terror appears to help the IS and al-Qaeda more.
- It gives them a footprint far bigger than their actual abilities.
- This helps them recruit and radicalise Muslim youth from around the globe, and allows them to own terrorists around the world as their own, as IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi did in a rare video posted shortly after the Easter Sunday attacks.
- The narrative they build of a “fight for Islam” is equally false.
- According to the Global Terrorism Database of the 81 terror attacks in which more than 100 were killed (high casualty) since 2001, more than 70 were carried out in Islamic or Muslim-majority countries.
- In a specific search of high casualty terror attacks on religious institutions since 2001, 18 of the top 20 were by Islamist groups on mosques.
- The War on Terror thus appears to be a concept peddled mostly by pan-Islamist groups and propagated most often by extremists of other religions as a motive for terror attacks, such as the 2011 Utøya island attack in Norway or the New Zealand attacks this year.
- Governments in countries affected by terrorism must not subscribe to this narrative blindly.

Srilanka’s Example:

- In Sri Lanka the reason the members of the National Thowheed Jamaath (NTJ) were successful in their diabolical plot had as much to do with the fact that intelligence inputs given by India were ignored as it did with the fact that since the defeat of the LTTE.
- Sri Lankan authorities had let their guard down and ignored growing internal fault lines.
- As a result, despite complaints about the speeches that suspected mastermind Mohamed Zahran Hashim made as a preacher of a mosque in Sri Lanka’s Eastern province, he went unchallenged.
- Police and intelligence agencies also failed to keep a stern eye on other NTJ bombers who were IS returnees, despite the fact that only about 32 Sri Lankans in all are believed to have travelled to IS territory.

Approaches to fighting terror:

- It is necessary for countries fighting terrorism to learn more closely from their differences, rather than try to generalise from experience.
- It would be wrong to compare European states like the U.K., France and Belgium, where hundreds of immigrant Muslims have enlisted for the IS to South Asian states like India, where Muslim populations are indigenous and only a few dozen are believed to have left for Syria.
 - Indian officials have also claimed a higher success in deradicalising IS returnees, because they have enlisted whole families, neighbourhoods and local Maulvis in their efforts.
 - In Bangladesh too, after the 2016 attack on the Holey Artisan Bakery, government advertisements asked mothers to check on their children’s activities.
- This acknowledgement that radicalised terrorists are a part of a community is in stark contrast to the current debate in many European countries that are refusing to take IS returnees and their families back.
- Similarly, several Central Asian states propagate a much more hard-line approach on counter-

radicalisation, by banning beards and hijabs, while China's re-education internment camps in Xinjiang have raised questions about human rights.

- The success or failure of each of these approaches must be studied before deciding their applicability elsewhere.

Way forward:

- The world community must address contradictions in the War on Terror.
- For 20 years, the world has failed to agree on a common definition of terrorism at the United Nations. This has held up the passage of the Indian-sponsored proposal for a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.
- Despite the fact that Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar has been targeting Indians incessantly for years, it is question of concern why China allowed his UN Security Council designation as a global terrorist only after mentions of his attacks in India were removed.
- Questions must be asked as to why the U.S. is focused on billing Iran the “world’s biggest state sponsor of terrorism”, while states like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan that have funded and sheltered Islamist terror groups are still treated as “frontline allies” on terror.
- And why, despite all their resources and expertise, the alliance of the U.S., the U.K., Canada, Australia and New Zealand that share global intelligence was unable to see the impending threat in Sri Lanka.

Unless the world is truly united on the issue and resolves such contradictions, the global War on Terror will only be as strong as its weakest link.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Substantive equality

Context:

A recent Supreme Court upheld the law that grants reservation in promotion and consequential seniority to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in government services in the State of Karnataka (Reservation to the Posts in the Civil Services of the State Act, 2018).

Background:

- The Reservation Act 2018 was preceded in time by the Karnataka Determination of Seniority of the Government Servants Promoted on the Basis of the Reservation (to the Posts in the Civil Services of the State) Act 2002.
- The constitutional validity of the Reservation Act 2002 was challenged in *B K Pavitra v Union of India*, (2017) wherein it was held that Sections 3 and 4 of the Reservation Act 2002 to be ultra vires Articles 14 and 16 of the Constitution on the ground that an exercise for determining inadequacy of representation, backwardness and the impact on overall efficiency had not preceded the enactment of the law.
- Such an exercise was held to be mandated by the decision of a Constitution Bench of this Court in *M Nagaraj v Union of India*, (2006).
- The Karnataka government then appointed a committee to collect data on the “backwardness” of SC/ST communities, the inadequacy of their representation in the services and the overall impact of reservation on the efficiency of the administration — parameters laid down in the 2006 verdict as constitutional limitations on the power to extend reservation in employment.
- Based on the report, the State enacted a fresh law, which has now been upheld.

Details:

- The verdict is notable for being the first instance of quantifiable data being used to justify reservation.
- A key principle in this decision is that where reservation for SC/ST candidates is concerned, there is no need to demonstrate the 'backwardness' of the community.
- The other pre-requisites of a valid system — quantifiable data on the 'inadequacy of representation' for classes of people identified for reservation, and an assessment of the impact of such quota on the efficiency of administration — remain valid.

Significance of the judgement:

- Justice D.Y. Chandrachud's judgment applies the rule emerging from Jarnail Singh, which decided that Nagaraj did not require reconsideration. At the same time, it held that Nagaraj was not right in insisting on data to justify the 'backwardness' of SC/ST communities, as it contradicted a nine-judge Bench decision in Indra Sawhney (1992).
- The judgment places in perspective the historical and social justification for according reservation, rejecting the argument that - quotas, by themselves, affect administrative efficiency.
- It says merit lies not only in performance but also in achieving goals such as promotion of equality, and that India's transformative Constitution envisages not just a formal equality of opportunity but the achievement of substantive equality.
- It accepts the subjective satisfaction of the government in deciding the adequacy of representation, subject to the norm that there should be relevant material before it.
- One must also recognise the constant tension between legislative intent and judicial interpretation.
- Most judgments on affirmative action indicate that the courts are laying down constitutional limitations, lest the equality norm, a basic feature of the Constitution, be given the go-by.

Conclusion:

It is welcome that the backwardness of the SCs and STs no more needs to be demonstrated. Policy-makers should heed the appeal contained in the judgment: there is no antithesis between the concept of efficiency and the inclusion of diverse sections of society in the administration. While data on representation may be a requirement, the idea that reservation has an adverse effect on administration must be rejected.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY**1. Protecting forest fringes****Context:**

- India is among the fastest urbanising major countries and forest-rich nations of the world. The current trend of fast-paced, spatial urban expansion is increasing the proximity between forests and the cities.

Issues:

- In the next 10 years, this situation is likely to pose a severe sustainability challenge.
- In major cities, forests have already faced the brunt of encroachments, roads and highways, local extinction of wildlife, contamination of water bodies, and disturbances originating from the urban neighbourhoods.
- Across India, many more critical wildlife habitats and biodiversity areas are going to face a direct impact from cities in the near term.

- Neither the ongoing urban programmes such as ‘Smart Cities’, nor the draft of the new Forest Policy, 2018, have addressed this challenge.
- Urban planners and city administrators have ignored the fact that forests are natural shock-absorbers that provide green relief to our grey cities, shield them from the effects of climate change, and aid in urban issues such as air pollution, scarcity of drinking water, flood control and ‘heat islands’.
- Prioritising forest-city proximity will put the onus on cities to incorporate nature in their design.

City-forest cooperation:

- Recently notified eco-sensitive zones (ESZ) around protected areas hold the key to the place and the process in this regard.
- These zones are strips of land outside national parks and wildlife sanctuaries earmarked by the Ministry of Environment for sustainable management.
- The ESZ committee and its plans fulfil basic conditions to facilitate inter-departmental collaboration of the forest departments, urban bodies and civil society.

Challenges:

- Urbanisation close to forests often means that dense neighbourhoods expand up to the fringe of the forest, as has happened in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Mumbai, Bannerghatta in Bengaluru, and the Guindy National Park in Chennai.
- In the absence of physical buffers and hard fences, therefore, these forests will have to be soft-fenced from unscrupulous development.

Way forward:

- To create a working ground for soft-fencing, urban masterplans must recognise land use at forest fringes, according to ESZ guidelines.
- In addition, cities should secure wildlife corridors and ‘green belts’ that connect urban forests with a wider natural landscape.
- Most importantly, urban residents need to create social fences by strongly advocating for forests in their cities.

The urban citizenry aspires for a green, pollution-free and serene living environment. Integrating forests with urban planning and governance provides an opportunity to shape cities that not only cater to citizens, but also have the citizens actively involved in shaping the city’s future.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Of shells, companies and GDP

Issue:

- About a third of non-government non-financial companies in the services sector are not traceable is the finding of a National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) survey for 2016-17 that has just been released.
- Since such entities could be shell/fake/bogus companies included in the MCA-21 database of “active” companies used for estimating the gross domestic product (GDP), the new finding could imply that private corporate sector GDP is being currently overestimated, denting the official growth narrative.

Background:

- In 2015, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) issued a new GDP series with 2011-12 as the base year, replacing the earlier series with the 2004-05 base-year as a routine matter.
- Usually, the revision leads to a slight expansion of the absolute GDP in the base year, but its growth rate does not change, implying that the underlying pace of economic expansion in the two series has remained the same.
- This time was different as the absolute GDP size — the sum of the value of all (unduplicated) goods and services produced in a year — got diminished slightly in the base year, and its growth rates went up subsequently.
- Faced with public scrutiny and scepticism, the CSO defended the revision by claiming that it had followed the latest global template (the System of National Accounts 2008), applying improved methodologies to a newer and larger data set; hence the new GDP was legitimate.
- In a first, the new series estimated private corporate sector (PCS) GDP directly using the Ministry of Corporate Affairs' (MCA) statutory filing of financial returns, MCA-21.
- Accounting for over a third of GDP, as the non-financial PCS now spans widely, the revision has affected the estimates of many industries and services. Hence the GDP debate has mostly centred on the PCS.
- Since the MCA-21 database is much larger than those used earlier — like the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) for manufacturing or the Reserve Bank of India sample of large companies for estimating corporate saving and investment) — the CSO claims the new GDP better captures the economy's value addition, especially of smaller enterprises and services activities.
- Critics, however, wonder if it is a case of a better description or an overestimation.

Screening and setback:

- Though now contributing over a half of GDP, services sector output estimates are poorer, outside of the public sector and large private sector companies.
- To redress the shortcoming, the CSO is committed to launching an annual survey of services (on the lines of the ASI).
- As a first step, the NSSO carried out a survey of non-government and non-financial companies/establishments in 2016-17, using three list frames to draw samples for the survey, the MCA sample being the largest.
- A 10% sample was drawn from the CSO's universe of 3.5 lakh active non-financial companies.
- After due screening, at the survey stage, the NSSO, to its shock, found that 45% of the selected companies did not respond to the survey.
- To its dismay, the NSSO found the results to be so poor that it had to abandon the planned output of two-volume survey results, and instead settle for a brief technical report which was released recently.
- It admitted the difficulties the NSSO faced in the survey:
 - Many units, particularly of the MCA list, were not identifiable due to lack of proper/adequate postal addresses.
 - A large number of out-of-coverage units was also found in the list.
 - Affixing signatures on Schedule 2.35 for out-of-coverage units was time-consuming and difficult as owners were reluctant to sign.
 - In many cases, it was found that the selected enterprises had not prepared the Annual Audit Report for 2015-16 or the balance sheets any time before.
- The inference could be that such companies are likely to be shell/fake/spurious entities that remain legally registered, without actually producing goods and services.

What does this imply for GDP estimation?

- Though it may not be possible to show how much difference it would make to the GDP level and growth rate, the survey findings could bring down the growth estimates.

- However, those knowledgeable have dismissed such an apprehension on two counts:
 - Shell companies add value to the economy, hence their deletion would underestimate GDP.
 - Two, as all active companies are said to submit their audited accounts at least once in three years, the contribution of shell companies is well captured in the MCA database.
- Both arguments seem questionable. Shell companies, by definition, do not produce goods and services; they help the promoter/owner to hide profits or evade taxes/regulation.

Way forward:

- The NSSO's survey of active companies in the services sector discovered that 45% of them could not be traced or misclassified; hence they could represent or be shell/fake/bogus companies.
- The finding throws into sharp relief the poor quality of the MCA-21 data set, which has formed the backbone of the new GDP series.
- The NSSO survey results have added more questions about the beleaguered GDP series, strengthening doubts that have arisen from various aspects of the revision process.
- As a first step towards dispelling the growing distrust in the new GDP series, the government should put up the MCA-21 data for public scrutiny and lift the opacity of the methodology used in estimating corporate sector output.

F. Tidbits

1. Proposal to train self-help groups

- Under a special project named 'swayamsiddha', women will be trained in evacuation, rescue, restoration and rehabilitation during natural calamities, especially cyclones, in Odisha's Ganjam district.
- Members of Women Self-Help Groups (WSHGs) in the age group of 18 to 35 of this cyclone-prone region will be roped in.
- After facing Phailin, Hudhud and Titli cyclones in the past, Ganjam escaped the wrath of Fani. It has always faced cyclones in October. By that time, Ganjam will be well prepared through these trained women volunteers.
- Ganjam district has around 22,000 active WSHGs in its rural and urban areas.
- Under this project selected members from each WSHG will undergo a special training by personnel of police, fire services, Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force (ODRAF) and other key departments of the administration.
- They will also be trained in basic rescue measures, first aid and proper documentation of losses. Through this training they will be ready to face floods, cyclones and earthquakes and help people of their locality.
- The trained volunteers will be provided two pairs of uniform to be used during natural calamities. To keep them active and ready as peer leaders during evacuation, rehabilitation and restoration during natural calamities, they will be involved in different developmental schemes of the government like MGNREGA, housing projects for poor and distribution of food materials through PDS.
- A control room of 'swayamsiddha' will operate at district headquarters Chatrapur to coordinate and manage these trained volunteers of WSHGs of Ganjam.
- The Kerala government used WSHGs successfully in rehabilitation and restoration work after the floods it faced last year.
- The WSHG movement has been quite successful in Ganjam district and penetrated to the grassroots.

2. Social media and polls

- A survey conducted by a digital marketing company has claimed that nearly one-third of the first-time voters were influenced by political messages on social media platforms in this election.

- As many as half the 15-crore first-time voters received political messages through various social media platforms, said the report based on an online survey of around 25 lakh participants.
- Political movement on social media was higher in the 2019 Lok Sabha election than in 2014, the report by ADG Online said.
- It said more than 50% of the voters influenced by social media were less than 25 years of age.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Kolam tribe

- Kolam are a designated Scheduled Tribe in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.
- They belong to the sub-category Particularly vulnerable tribal group, one of the three belonging to this sub-category.
- The others being Katkari and Madia Gond.
- They have a high rate of returning positive to the Naked eye single tube red cell osmotic fragility test (NESTROFT) test, making them prone to high incidence of Thalassaemia.

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups:

- PVTGs are more vulnerable among the tribal groups.
- Some basic features are common among PVTGs. They are mostly homogeneous, with a small population, relatively physically isolated, slow rate of change etc.
- Due to these factors, more developed and assertive tribal groups take a major chunk of the tribal development funds, because of which PVTGs need more funds directed for their development.
- In this context, in 1975, the Government of India initiated to identify the most vulnerable tribal groups as a separate category called PVTGs and declared 52 such groups, while 1993 additional 23 groups were added to the category.

2. Euthanasia

Euthanasia is the practice of ending a life intentionally, in order to relieve the person off suffering and pain. It is a medical term for 'easy death'.

Read more about [Euthanasia](#).

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1) Consider the following statements with respect to UTTAM App:

1. The app was launched for Coal Quality Monitoring.
2. The app was jointly developed by Coal India Limited and the Ministry of Coal.

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

Explanation:

UTTAM App, abbreviated as 'Unlocking Transparency by Third Party Assessment of Mined Coal' was launched by the Ministry of coal for coal quality monitoring. The aim of the app is ensuring efficiency and transparency in the process of coal quality monitoring and at the same time, bringing the governance of coal, closer to the people. Coal India Limited (CIL) and the Ministry of Coal have jointly developed this app.

Read more about [UTTAM App](#).

Q2) Consider the following statements:

1. Both Ajanta caves and Ellora caves are UNESCO cultural heritage sites.
2. Ajanta caves are a series of 30 Buddhist caves.
3. All the caves of Ajanta are Viharas.

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

- a. 1 only
- b. 3 only
- c. Both 1 and 3
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: b

Explanation:

Of the 30 caves in Ajanta – 4 are Chaityas and the rest are Viharas. In Ellora, Cave-10 is the only Chaitya while the rest are Viharas.

Q3) Consider the following statements with respect to Nandankanan Zoological Park:

1. It is located in Odisha.
2. It is the first zoo in India to join World Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

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

Explanation:

Nandankanan Zoological Park is a zoo and botanical garden in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. Established in 1960, it became the first zoo in India to join World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) in 2009. It also contains a botanical garden and part of it has been declared a sanctuary. Nandankanan environs of the Chandaka forest, and includes the 134-acre (54 ha) Kanjia lake.

Q4) Consider the following statements with respect to Suez Canal:

1. Suez canal connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea.

2. It is an artificial sea-level waterway.
3. It provides shortest sea link between Asia and Europe.

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

- a. 1 only
- b. 1 and 2 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: d

Explanation:

Self-explanatory

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Acceleration in economic growth is not possible without addressing the problem of non-performing assets. Elucidate (15 Marks, 250 Words)
2. When disaster strikes, communication becomes the first casualty. Considering the significance of communication pre and post disaster discuss the importance having fail-safe communication network. (15 Marks, 250 Words)