

14 May 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [CTBTO invites India to be an observer at meetings](#)

Context:

The executive secretary of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) has offered India an 'Observer' status and access to state-of-art International Monitoring System (IMS) data.

What is CTBT?

The CTBT stands for the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. It is a multi-governmental treaty the

signatories of which agree to ban nuclear explosions in every environment whether for civilian or military objectives.

About The Treaty

- The 1996 CTBT bans all nuclear explosions, everywhere and by everyone.
- Before the CTBT can enter into force, all of the 44 countries listed in Annex 2 of the Treaty must ratify.
- These countries possessed nuclear power or research reactors when the CTBT was negotiated.
- Eight of the Annex 2 States have not yet ratified the People's Republic of China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Republic of India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the State of Israel, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the United States of America.
- More than 20 years have passed since the CTBT opened for signature in 1996, with the objective of banning all nuclear explosions everywhere and by everyone.
- Till today, it has not been able to become a global law because it is considered as 'discriminatory' by countries such as India.

Read in detail about [CTBT](#)

Details:

- In a renewed effort, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO) has offered India an 'Observer' status and access to state-of-art International Monitoring System (IMS) data.
- The executive secretary of CTBO opines that India should attend the meeting; see how CTBTO works and takes the time needed in making the decision.
- To start with, he invited India to participate in the science and technology conference scheduled for next month, which will bring together around 1,000 scientists, technologists, academics and CTBTO policy-makers. The conference will be addressed by former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

The Verification Regime – IMS:

- The IMS consists of 337 facilities worldwide which monitor the planet for signs of nuclear explosions.
- Over 90% of the facilities are already in operation, and the IDC in Vienna continuously processes this data stream.
- Both raw data and analysis results are made available to all 184 States Signatories of the CTBT.

Benefits of becoming an Observer:

- According to the executive secretary of CTBTO, India can benefit immensely from becoming a CTBTO Observer as the organisation setting has changed a lot over the years.
- India will have access to the data available which was traditionally not made available.
- CTBTO had task leader for data confidentiality, which does not exist anymore.
- For instance, the virtual Data Exploitation Centre (vDEC) provides scientists access to IMS data to conduct research and to publish new findings.
- The strong relationship between the scientific and technological community and the CTBTO helps ensure that the IMS remains at the forefront of technological innovation and that no nuclear explosion goes undetected.
- It is an established fact that IMS, consisting of 337 facilities worldwide, is the most sophisticated system. India has a lot to gain from it.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Infosys Foundation's FCRA licence cancelled

Context:

The Home Ministry has cancelled the FCRA licence of Infosys Foundation after a request was made by the not-for-profit initiative of the IT major.

What is Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA)?

The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) enables an association or an NGO to receive foreign funds, and they have to mandatorily register under it to receive such funds.

Read more about [FCRA](#) in detail

Background:

- The Home Ministry had last year served show cause notice on 1,755 NGOs, including Infosys Foundation, for failing to submit annual income and expenditure statements on foreign funding electronically on the Ministry's portal even though they received "nil" contributions.
- The Foundation was registered under the FCRA Act in January 2016.
- In May 2016, the Government amended the FCRA Act in the Finance Bill with retrospective effect from 2010 as a result of which the Foundation no longer fell under the purview of the FCRA Act.
- The Foundation thereafter applied for its de-registration from FCRA with an additional request to cancel the FCRA registration in June 2016, and received acknowledgement from the FCRA wing in the same month.
- As per FCRA guidelines, registered associations are required to submit electronically an online annual report with scanned copies of income and expenditure statement, receipts and payment account, balance sheet, etc., for every financial year within nine months of the closure of the financial year.
- Associations which do not receive foreign contribution during a particular year are also required to furnish a 'NIL' return for that financial year within the aforesaid period, read the guidelines.

Details:

- The Foundation declared that it has submitted its annual returns for financial years 2016, 2017 and 2018 "though it did not fall under the purview of Act following its amendment.
- Additionally, the Foundation has also submitted necessary paperwork to the Government in July 2018, to showcase that the Foundation has not received any foreign funding.
- As per its website, the association was established in 1996 and it supports programs in the areas of education, rural development, healthcare, arts and culture, and destitute care.
- Its mission is to work in remote regions of several states in India.

2. Decision to recuse is solely that of judge: SC

Context:

The Supreme Court has said that a litigant cannot seek recusal of the judge during a hearing.

Details:

- “Judicial functions, sometimes, involve performance of unpleasant and difficult tasks, which require asking questions and soliciting answers to arrive at a just and fair decision. If the assertions of bias are to be accepted, it would become impossible for a judge to seek clarifications and answers,” a Bench led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi observed in a recent order.
- If a judge recuses on the word of the litigant, it may fall into a practice and would descend into forum-shopping, the Bench said.
- The order was based on an plea by activist Harsh Mander seeking the recusal of the CJI from his PIL highlighting the plight of inmates in Assam’s detention centres for illegal immigrants.
- Chief Justice Gogoi said “a litigant should not be permitted and allowed to question a judge on perceived bias especially after hearing has commenced and orders on different dates have been passed”.
- It was observed that the decision to recuse is solely the judge’s own. “Normally, this should be left to the judge himself who is bound by the oath of office to administer justice to all persons alike without fear, favour and prejudice. The litigant, without any firm basis, cannot be permitted to raise such objection on the basis of the court hearing.”

C. GS3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. DNA database coming up for Indian rhino

Context:

The Union Environment Ministry has embarked on a project to create DNA profiles of all rhinos in the country.

Background:

- The rhinos were once abundant and well-distributed in the country. However poaching reduced its numbers to about “200 wild animals by the end of the 20th century.
- Since the 1980s, the government has been trying to move a significant number of rhinos out of Kaziranga in the interest of the species’ conservation, threats from poaching and challenges to their habitat.
- The project is a subset of the Centre’s larger, ongoing rhino conservation programme.

Details:

- By 2021, the project’s deadline, the Indian rhino could be the first wild animal species in India to have all its members DNA-sequenced.
- The project’s proponents, including the World Wide Fund for Nature-India (WWF-India) and the Centre-funded Wildlife Institute of India (WII), said the exercise would be useful in curbing poaching and gathering evidence in wildlife crimes involving rhinos.
- There are about 2,600 rhinos in India, with more than 90% of the population concentrated in Assam’s Kaziranga National Park.
- Outside Kaziranga, there are about 200 rhinos in West Bengal, 40 in Uttar Pradesh and 1 in Bihar.
- There are three species of rhinos, of which only one — the Indian rhino — is found in the country.
- Around 60 samples of tissue have been collected so far from some rhinos living outside Kaziranga.
- Once the project is completed, database will be hosted in the WII headquarters in Dehradun.

The National Rhino Conservation Strategy for India:

- The National Rhino Conservation Strategy for India was launched in February 2019
- It called for an engagement between India and Nepal to conserve the greater one-horned Rhinoceros
- The plan said the single population of rhinos in Sukla-Phanta (Nepal), Valmiki tiger reserve (India) and Chitwan National Park (Nepal) and Dudhwa (India) is separated by the political boundary between the two countries. Instead of managing the two populations differently in the two countries, it needs to be managed with the same protocol.

Indian Rhinoceros:

- The Indian rhinoceros also called the greater one-horned rhinoceros and great Indian rhinoceros, is a rhinoceros native to the Indian subcontinent.
- It is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.
- The Indian rhinoceros once ranged throughout the entire stretch of the Indo-Gangetic Plain, but excessive hunting and agricultural development reduced their range drastically to 11 sites in northern India and southern Nepal.
- The rhino's single horn is present in both males and females, but not on newborn young.
- The rich presence of blood vessels underneath the tissues in folds gives it the pinkish colour.
- The folds in the skin increase the surface area and help in regulating the body temperature.
- The thick skin does not protect against bloodsucking Tabanusflies, leeches and ticks.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. AI project eyes early stage diabetic retinopathy

Context:

In a first for Mumbai, early stage diabetic retinopathy has been detected using artificial intelligence (AI) at civic-run dispensaries.

Diabetic Retinopathy:

- It is a diabetes complication that affects eyes. It's caused by damage to the blood vessels of the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye (retina).
- At first, diabetic retinopathy may cause no symptoms or only mild vision problems. Eventually, it can cause blindness.
- **Causes:** Over time, too much sugar in the blood can lead to the blockage of the tiny blood vessels that nourish the retina, cutting off its blood supply. As a result, the eye attempts to grow new blood vessels. But these new blood vessels don't develop properly and can leak easily.
- The condition can develop in anyone who has type 1 or type 2 diabetes.
- A robust screening programme is thus the need of the hour. Screening is the only way to detect the complication early and prevent diabetic blindness.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that diabetes is a growing challenge in India, with an estimated 8.7% diabetic population in the age group of 20 to 70 years.
- There are an estimated 73 million diabetics in the country. Of these, nearly 25% are at the risk of diabetic retinopathy.

Details:

- The unique project is being implemented by the Aditya Jyot Foundation for Twinkling Little Eyes (AJFTLE).
- In a span of eight months, nearly 1,300 diabetes patients have been screened on a retinal imaging device attached to a smartphone.

- After the patient's eye images are clicked, the AI on the device screens them for signs of diabetic retinopathy, and prompts technicians on whether they should be referred to a hospital or not.
- Also, the added advantage is that the device does not depend on [an Internet] network and is completely offline.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Redactive pricing audit and the CAG's duties

What's in the news?

- The Supreme Court's recent observations in connection with the Rafale fighter aircraft deal by citing the Comptroller and Auditor General of India's (CAG's) report on redacted pricing, and subsequent media reports and the controversy over "stolen files" brought back into the spotlight the role of the CAG.

Editorial Analysis:

It is important to note that the CAG is the supreme audit institution of India.

- Many questions arise before the stakeholders. These questions are as follows:
 1. What is redactive pricing?
 2. Does the constitutional mandate provide redactive pricing to be included in the CAG's audit reports submitted to the President to be placed before Parliament?
 3. Do any supreme audit institutions (SAIs) such as the National Audit Office, the Government Accountability Office or Commonwealth countries follow redactive pricing in audit reports?

What is Redaction?

- Redaction is the selection or adaption by 'obscuring or removing sensitive information' from a document prior to publication.

Mandate of the CAG:

- The CAG is mandated to audit all receipts and expenditures of the three-tier governments in India and report to the legislature judiciously, independently, objectively in compliance with applicable laws, rules and regulations, without fear and favour.
- The CAG conducts financial compliance and performance audits and submits his reports to the legislature to help people's representatives in enforcing legislative oversight and public accountability of the executive.
- Legislative committees such as the **Public Accounts Committee** and **Committee on Public Undertakings** examine the CAG's selected reports.

Not being transparent?

- In the preface of the audit report, the CAG stated that redactive pricing was unprecedented but had to be accepted due to the Ministry's insistence citing security concerns.
- Consequently, the full commercial details were withheld and the figures on the procurement deal were blackened.
- Experts opine that it was unprecedented that an audit report submitted by the CAG to the President under **Article 151** of the Constitution suppressed relevant information.
- It is important to note that whether the Ministry's insistence citing security concerns could have been accepted by the CAG can be examined only by the Supreme Court of India. This is in light of the constitutional provisions on the CAG's duties and parliamentary privileges and prerogatives.

The issue with Redactive Pricing:

- Redactive pricing is nowhere used in SAI audit reports.
- It does not seem to have been used in a government audit by any SAI of any country.
- Redactive pricing in the 'Performance Audit Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on Capital Acquisition in Indian Air Force (Union Government – Defence Services, Air Force, Report No. 3 of 2019)' suppresses more than it reveals.
- For example, in the Rafale deal, Parliament, its committees, the media and other stakeholders of the CAG's reports cannot obtain complete, accurate and reliable information due to redactive pricing.
- Experts opine that the reduction in the original requirement, to 36 aircraft, a waiver of the earlier decision to involve Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, observations of the Indian Negotiating Team, cost escalation due to inclusion of bank guarantee and performance guarantee were not compared properly to arrive at the audit conclusion.

Essential attributes in Procurement:

- Pricing is the quintessence of any procurement decision.
- Along with quality and quantitative specifications, comparative merits and demerits are ascertained, and the pricing of comparable products are compared in decision-making.
- Pricing is an integral part of the procurement decision-making process of any equipment, product, goods or service.
- A strategic competitive advantage of a product, how best it should be procured, how many at a time are to be purchased and at what price and under what conditions, terms, instalments, along with after-service conditions, discounts, commissions and other conditions are evaluated to arrive at a purchase decision.
- Therefore, price integrity and comparative competitiveness are at the heart of any procurement decision.
- The CAG is mandated to get into the nitty-gritty of procurement terms, procedures, comparative advantages and disadvantages without fear and favour to form an objective, independent and judicious audit opinion.
- An audit is expected to analyse the facts and comparative pricing charts to highlight the financial propriety and prudence of the procurement decision.
- The CAG is constitutionally mandated and empowered to do its duties covering all essential factors about the procurement, customised end-to-end pricing assessments, legal requirements, escrow accounting, terms and conditions and arbitration clauses in compliance with legal and other regulations.
- The executive procurement decision is expected to be completely analysed in the CAG's audit to pinpoint inaccuracies, non-compliance of essential procurement procedures, conditions and pricing errors which may have a negative financial impact and cause potential damage to the country's interests.

Concluding Remarks:

- Given the dynamics of international competition in competitive products and pricing in today's modern market scenario, **pricing, delivery and post-delivery service and other conditions are essentially covered in an SAI audit.**
- It is a complex audit, demanding exceptional insight, expertise, knowledge and skills.
- It is important to note that in case the CAG's office lacks expertise to conduct a performance audit, expertise can be sought from the pool of resources or credible organisations to be coopted in the audit team.
- Pricing decisions must be subjected to detailed analysis, without resorting to redactive pricing. Parliament is constitutionally privileged to know what the executive has done and how and under what conditions a procurement was decided.
- The CAG's audit is expected to highlight value for money in purchase decisions.
- A performance audit is done to establish whether the procurement activity was executed keeping in mind economy, efficiency, effectiveness, ethics and equity.
- Only a thorough pricing audit can bring out the credibility and integrity of a purchase decision, thereby achieving an SAI's constitutionally mandated responsibilities.

2. The Madhava Menon model of legal education

Note to the Students:

The points covered here can help in writing points for the Essay paper as well, wherever aspirants are required to touch upon reforms concerning legal education in India.

Editorial Analysis:

- Some experts opine that legal education in India can be classified into two categories. These are:
- the years before the advent of N.R. Madhava Menon and
- the years after the advent of N.R. Madhava Menon.
- It is important to note that earlier, the study of law was often a default option, when you couldn't get admission to any other course or didn't know what course your life should take.
- The law degree was a three-year affair following an undergraduate degree.
- There were a few exceptional teachers and a few exceptional students; however, for the rest it was pretty much an active engagement with the "guide" books in the run-up to the examinations.

Real learning started when one was apprenticed to a senior lawyer.

The Contributions of N.R. Madhava Menon:

- N.R. Menon (1935-2019) made a significant contribution.
- Responding to an appeal from the Bar Council of India, which was gravely concerned with the steep decline in standards of the profession, **Menon accepted the challenge and transformed himself from an academic to an institution-builder.**
- With missionary zeal he established the country's first **National Law School in Bangalore in 1987, with an independent university status.**
- He oversaw the building of its campus. He drew in excellent faculty.
- He carefully designed a five-year law course as the first degree after school, thereby ensuring that only those who were seriously interested in the subject came in, and would emerge well equipped for what the profession needed.

The Menon model:

- He succeeded brilliantly.
- The mix of motivated students and faculty overseen by a Vice Chancellor to whom dedication and discipline came naturally produced results which made the Bar, Bench, law firms and other users sit up and take notice.
- As his graduates entered the field, it was clear that law had joined the ranks of other professions where much could be expected from an entrant, and the entrant could expect commensurate responsibility, position and compensation.
- **Inevitably this led to the creation of other national law schools which largely followed the Menon model, and whose heads were often Menon trainees.**
- That one achievement would have been enough to guarantee him a place in any honours listing, but Menon was far from done.
- Judges too, especially young recruits to the service, needed training. **The National Judicial Academy (NJA) was set up in Bhopal**, and the Menon magic of institution-building created another sterling institution from scratch.
- It became de rigueur to have this on the resume of a judicial officer, and it was a mark of subject expertise to be invited to teach a course.
- In time this expanded to reach higher levels of the judiciary, especially in new areas of law.
- Many senior judges received their first exposure to public interest litigation and human rights and environmental issues at the NJA long before these became current coinage. As a matter of fact, Menon's endorsement of these outlier subjects was a key reason for sceptics to become adherents.
- The Supreme Court judges also came to teach, learn and, on occasion, receive reprimand for an errant judgment, which took the occupant of the apex court back to his college backbencher days.

The best tribute:

- More was to come. At the request of the State government, he set up the **West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences, Calcutta**, which sought to focus on academics and research.
- To some extent, this was to alleviate his concern that students from his first and premier law school had shown a preference for law firms and corporates rather than joining the Bar or NGOs where a rights-based language was at play.
- For Menon, the law worked best when it worked for society's benefit. True enough, retirement and quieter times did not figure in his list of options.
- In his sunset years, he created and ran the M.K. Nambyar Academy for Continuing Legal Education in Kerala as well as the Menon Institute of Legal Advocacy Training for developing grass-roots capacity to access and use the law for underprivileged sections.

Concluding Remarks:

- Being the last word on the subject, he was, of course, the first choice when it came to being asked to serve on the Law Commission and other bodies and committees connected with legal education.
- All these tasks he accepted willingly and gave each one his best.
- At a personal level he constantly engaged with those working in fields close to his heart.
- They received his advice, encouragement and valued friendship.
- He will be missed and mourned by many, especially generations of his students.

Category: ETHICS, INTEGRITY AND APTITUDE

1. Private, public and political morality

Note to the Students:

- This is an important opinion section covered in the Hindu. The points covered here can help in

writing points for the Essay paper as well.

Editorial Analysis:

- It is important to note that though related, political, public and private morality are not identical.
- They may come from the same source, but are distinct. This point has been noted in the Western tradition since at least Machiavelli. However, its lineage in India is ancient.

Ethics in three domains: An example from the days of Asoka

- An example that one can cite here is that of Emperor Asoka who spoke of Dhamma (ethics) in three distinct domains.

1. First, **interpersonal morality**.

- Each of us has special obligations to our children, spouse, parents, teachers and relatives. We have a duty towards those under our special care, including the aged, 'servants', animals and, occasionally, strangers.
- Asoka distinguished this private ethic from what might be called **inter-group morality in public life**. Crucial here is harmony between different religious-philosophical groups generated by the exercise of sayamam (self-restraint).

2. He particularly emphasised the importance of **vacaguti** — controlling one's tongue to be critical of other groups only if there is good reason to, only on appropriate occasions and always moderately; also, to praise one's own group, only when there is good reason to, only on appropriate occasions and always moderately. **Neither hate speech nor speech glorifying oneself was acceptable as part of public morality — a point very relevant in our times.**

3. Asoka then distinguished private and public morality from power-related political morality specifying what rulers and the ruled owe one another.

1. Subjects owe obedience to their king. But the ruler too owed something to his subjects: to ensure **janahita**, the good of all (including all living species), and **janasukham**, happiness not only in this life but also in the afterlife.
 2. To achieve this, rulers and their officials must display **damdasamata** and **viyohalasamata** (impartiality in meting out punishment and in politico-legal acts more generally).
 3. This sums up the core of Asoka's political morality: a commitment to justice, to impartiality.
- An important question arises: **what then is the difference between private/public morality and political morality?** While in one's personal life, in our dealings with those with whom we have close daily encounters such as our family, friends or 'servants', we can't help but be partial, and while in the larger public domain, where we face people with different religio-philosophical sensibilities, we can't entirely escape some degree of partiality to our own world view, the political domain requires the impartial or just use of power for the good of all.

Family, civil society and state: Hegel's Viewpoints

- Two thousand years later, the German philosopher **Friedrich Hegel** made similar points, although in a different way and in an entirely different context.
- **He distinguished three spheres of human life: family, civil society and the state.**

The Family:

- **The family**, Hegel claimed, was the smallest community in which its members do not even distinguish themselves from one another. **Their identities are fused.**

- A family is bound by emotional ties, by mutual love and affection. Members take pride in each other's achievements and feel a strong sense of shame at the other's wrongdoing. Morality here is guided by unarticulated feelings.
- The family is different from another sphere of life that Hegel designated civil society but should more appropriately be called 'market society'.

Civil Society:

- Here, each person acts as an individual with a sharply defined sense of her own interests which are distinct from, compete and may even clash with the interests of others.
- No one is tied to the other by bonds of love or affection. Since there is no community but only an aggregate of individual interests, there is no commonly held ethic either.
- **Competitive life is governed by coercive legal rules to regulate the pursuit of self-interest.**
- At best, each individual devises her own personal, subjective moral maxims.

The States:

- Finally, Hegel spoke about a third domain where people once again see themselves as members of a large political community, as citizens of a state.
- Citizens in a political community must be bound together neither by feelings nor by self-interest but by a commitment to common values discovered by public reason — **values such as political freedom, solidarity, shared traditions and cultural heritage.**
- Morality in this domain requires that we overcome our loyalty to blood relations, not pursue only our private interests, and commit instead to using power grounded in shared principles.
- **Love and hate are largely imposters in this domain where consensus is forged by the use of public reason.** Its democratic version requires that, guided by values of openness, equal respect and justice, we deliberate and help each other arrive at impartial laws and public policies, acceptable in principle to everyone in the polity.
- Furthermore, those who wield political power must realise that what they do has enduring consequences affecting the lives of an incalculably large number of people.
- This brings with it enormous **public responsibility** which derives in no small part from the fact that they have at least temporary legitimacy to use force against ordinary citizens.
- They have, at their disposal, an apparatus of violence simply unavailable to heads of families or members of civil society.
- **Powerful politicians, therefore, must show great care and sensitivity to the appropriate use of force and violence.**

Private and political morality

- One important implication of the difference between private and political morality is this: **it is sometimes believed that moral scrupulousness in one's private life automatically guarantees high moral stature in political life.** This simply does not follow.
 - It is important to note that those wielding public power may refuse to enrich themselves, their family or friends, and resist from obtaining sexual favours.
 - However, such 'cleanliness' need not entail scrupulous political morality.
 - A few important questions arise:
1. **What use is personal incorruptibility if the politician is partial to or discriminates against one particular community, abandons public reason, smashes dissent to concentrate power in his own hands, makes arbitrary use of force, and lives in the illusion that he is greater than all the institutions that surround him?**
 2. What if he begins to believe that he alone possesses the truth or knows the good of the entire community?

3. And precisely because of the moral restrictions he has placed on his personal life, feels released from any restriction on the use of power in the political arena?

In short, **a person who is profoundly moral in his private life may brazenly violate all norms of political morality — undermine justice and public reason.**

Conversely, it is entirely possible that a person who has morally slipped in his private life (cheated on one's spouse, enriched himself) respects the integrity of public institutions, is acutely sensitive to the moral costs of violence, shows a deep commitment to justice, and upholds reason-based democratic norms.

Concluding Remarks:

- One is not suggesting that politicians are free to abandon private morality.
- However, we often find comfort in the illusion that there is one simple, seamless morality, reflected equally in private and in public.
- As a matter of fact, most humans are complex moral agents.
- It would be wonderful if our private and political moralities were perfectly aligned and we achieved the highest moral standards in both.
- But in a non-ideal world we can only hope that when people choose to lead a life in politics, they will at least follow minimum norms of political morality even as they fail to be scrupulously moral in their private lives.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Why herbivore census in Gujarat's Gir forest is significant?

Note to the Students:

This analysis is taken from the "Explained" section of the Indian Express published on the 14th of May, 2019. The focus of the article is on the "**Herbivore Census**" that has recently commenced at the Gir forest, Gujarat.

Editorial Analysis:

- The **Herbivore Census** covers ungulates such as spotted deer, blue bulls (nilgais), sambars, Indian gazelles (chinkaras), four-horned antelopes (choshinga) and wild boars, as well as Indian langurs and peafowl.
- Every summer, the Forest Department of Gujarat conducts a Herbivore Census in Gir forest.
- Furthermore, the exercise that recently began this year (2019), is of particular significance because it is the last **Herbivore Census** ahead of next year's (2020) **Lion Census**, which is a once-in-five-years exercise.

Why does it matter?

- Wild ungulates and langurs are the main prey of Asiatic lions, the endangered species whose only wild population in the world is surviving in the 22,000 sq km Greater Gir area.
- A count provides a sense of the available prey base for lions as well as other predators like leopards, hyenas and wolves.
- **A strong prey base can reduce depredation of livestock by lions and can reduce man-animal conflict.** In 2013-14, the last Herbivore Census before the previous Lion Census, the total count of all herbivores was 1.32 lakh, higher than the about 1.25 lakh counted in 2012-13.

Why is the Herbivore Census done in summer?

- During summer, foliage is reduced to a minimum in dry and deciduous tropical forests, which affords the best visibility for conducting a census.
- Also, wild animals concentrate around water points, which in Gir include 450 artificial ones filled by the Forest Department.
- The forest is divided into 19 routes and forest divisions for the census, with teams transacting routes thrice — morning, afternoon and evening — and depending on direct sighting.

F. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Prelims Facts

1. Water hyacinth

- Water hyacinth is a highly invasive weed which is considered to pose a threat to the many aquatic ecosystems.
- It is a fast-developing and -reproducing plant which is able to quickly overtake a body of water such as a lake or river.
- The problem is exacerbated in slow-moving water bodies.
- Because of the density of the mats it forms, it has the ability to out-compete other native aquatic plant life and block sunlight from entering the water, thus causing the death of submerged flora as they are unable to photosynthesise. This in turn depletes oxygen in the water and kills native fish and other organisms in the ecosystem.
- It also causes enormous water loss due to evapotranspiration creating negative impact on water balance in the region.
- “Evapotranspiration” is the process by which water is transferred from the land to the atmosphere by evaporation from the soil and other surfaces and by transpiration from plants.

2. YUVIKA – Young Scientist Programme

- Indian Space Research Organisation has launched a special programme for School Children called “Young Scientist Programme” “YUva Vigyani Karyakram” (YUVIKA).
- The Program is primarily aimed at imparting basic knowledge on Space Technology, Space Science and Space Applications to the younger ones with the intent of arousing their interest in the emerging areas of Space activities. ISRO has chalked out this programme to “Catch them young”.
- The residential training programme will be of around two weeks duration during summer holidays and it is proposed to select 3 students each from each State/ Union Territory to participate in this programme every year covering CBSE, ICSE and State syllabus.
- Those who have finished 8th standard and currently studying in 9th standard will be eligible for the programme.
- Yuvika focusses on one such important area and would inculcate a scientific temper in the students apart from contributing to national integration and nation building.

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. The Rhinoceros Sutra is found in the Gandharan Buddhist texts.

2. Rhinoceros is one of the animals surrounding “Pashupati” in the Pashupati Seal of Indus Valley Civilisation.

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:

The Rhinoceros Sutra is an early text in the Buddhist tradition, found in both the Gandhāran Buddhist texts and the Pali Canon. It praises the solitary lifestyle and stoicism of the Indian rhinoceros and encourages readers to emulate these virtues. A steatite seal, popularly known as Pashupati Seal discovered at the Mohenjo-daro archaeological site of the Indus Valley Civilization has a human figure at the center seated on a platform and the human figure is surrounded by four wild animals: an elephant and a tiger to its one side, and a water buffalo and a rhinoceros on the other.

Q2. Which of the following is popularly known as the “Terror of Bengal”?

- a. Red Calico plant
- b. Siam weed
- c. West Indian Lantana
- d. Water hyacinth

Answer: d

Explanation:

Water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) is known as the “Terror of Bengal” because it is an exotic shrub which strongly competes with the native species and has also eliminated many of them.

Q3. Which among the following ideals in the Preamble of Indian Constitution has been borrowed from the Russian Constitution?

- a. Justice
- b. Liberty
- c. Equality
- d. Fraternity

Answer: a

Explanation:

The ideals of justice (social, economic and political), expressed in the Preamble have been borrowed from Russia.

Q4. Consider the following statements:

- 1. Bt brinjal has been developed to give resistance against lepidopteron insects.

2. The government of India has placed an indefinite ban on commercial release of Bt brinjal.

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:

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. 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 Bt brinjal has been developed to give resistance against lepidopteron insects.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

- 1. Can judges determine their own impartiality? Discuss in the light of Supreme court's recent order that a litigant cannot seek recusal of the judge during a hearing. (10 Marks, 150 Words)
- 2. Is the formation of new states beneficial for Indian Economy? Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words)