BYJU'S The Learning App

18 May 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. 'Ujala Clinics' set for revamp

Context:

- A workshop of adolescent health counsellors was organised in Rajasthan under the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram.

Details:

- As part of an ambitious plan to revamp Ujala Clinics (Adolescent friendly health clinics) for adolescents, the Rajasthangovernment will appoint peer educators and "shadow educators" for counselling of youngsters and ensure better coordination with other medical and health schemes.
- The role of Ujala Clinics and the scope for connecting them with the initiatives for promoting mental health, reproductive health and de-addiction was discussed on the occasion.
- The adolescent health strategy is aimed at reducing the prevalence of malnutrition and anaemia and improving adolescents' knowledge and behaviour in relation to sexual and reproductive health.
- The "shadow educators" to be appointed in Rajasthan on the lines of Madhya Pradesh, would provide supplementary support to the on-going counselling services.
- The new batch of educators will deal with behavioural aspects of adolescents and help them cope with physical and hormonal changes.
- Ujala Clinics have been established at district hospitals, community health centres and selected primary health centres in 10 districts of the State.

Rashtriya Kishore Swasthya Karyakram:

- Rashtriya Kishore Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) – a health program was launched by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare for adolescents, in the age group of 10-19 years, which would target their nutrition, reproductive health and substance abuse, among other issues.
- The key principle of this programme is adolescent participation and leadership, Equity and inclusion, Gender Equity and strategic partnerships with other sectors and stakeholders.
- To guide the implementation of this programme, MOHFW in collaboration with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has developed a National Adolescent Health Strategy.
- The new adolescent health (AH) strategy focuses on age groups 10-14 years and 15-19 years with universal coverage, i.e. males and females; urban and rural; in school and out of school; married and unmarried; and vulnerable and under-served.

Objectives of RKSK:

1. Improving nutrition
2. Improving sexual and reproductive health
3. Enhancing mental health
4. Prevention of injuries and violence
5. Prevention of substance misuse
6. Prevention of Non Communicable Diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, cardio vascular diseases etc.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Peace pact with Taliban is unlikely before Sept. polls

Context:

- Addressing a gathering at the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), Chief Executive of the Afghan High Peace Council, said Afghanistan would not compromise on fundamental issues with the Taliban, stating that the rebels would have to come clean about ties with Pakistan.
- A peace agreement with the Taliban is unlikely to materialise before the September election in Afghanistan, said a leader of the High Peace Council of the country.

Concern:

Without a full or even partial ceasefire, there are fears that poll irregularities and a possible protracted political turmoil over the results could undermine any peace process and may increase political instability.

Background:

- For the first time in 18 years, the US government seems serious about withdrawing its forces from Afghanistan and winding up the longest war in its history.
- The US officials and representatives of the Taliban have held many rounds of direct talks aimed at ensuring a safe exit for the US in return for the insurgents guaranteeing that Afghan territory is not used by foreign militants and wouldn't pose a security threat to the rest of the world.
- A US-led military coalition overthrew the Taliban in 2001 for sheltering al-Qaeda, the militant group that Washington blamed for the 9/11 attacks.
- A rare consensus about resolving the conflict peacefully, both inside and outside Afghanistan, means peace has never been so close.

Details:

- The Government of Afghanistan ensured its pre-eminent position by holding a Loya Jirga recently which received representatives from at least 381 districts.
- In the Loya Jirga, it was decided that certain "non-negotiables" will not be allowed to be changed by discussion with the Taliban.
- The name of the country, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, freedom of expression and other freedoms are among those non-negotiable.
- However, a leader of the High Peace Council has said that a peace agreement with the Taliban is unlikely to materialise before the September elections.

2. House Democrats concerned over Trump's India policy

Context:

Disturbed by what they describe as a lack of leadership and policy coherence, Democrats from the U.S. House of Representatives, including the chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee have written to President asking him to appoint a permanent official for South Asia.

Details:

- The letter asks that the President appoint an Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs and lists a series of concerns, including the lack of a coherent India policy.
- The position has been vacant since January 2017.

Issues:

- The department had failed to engage directly with Sri Lankan government officials during the country's October-December 2018 constitutional crisis.
- It has failed to form a coherent India policy.
- They also accused the department of mishandling of the U.S.-Afghanistan relationship in the midst of seeking a peace deal with the Taliban
- The representatives believe that the series of failures are in part, the result of not filling the vacancy.

India-U.S. relationship:

- The India-U.S. relationship has been mixed over the last two-odd years of the Trump administration.
- Trump had announced his South Asia policy in August 2017:
  - o calling for a greater development role for India in Afghanistan (and linking that to India "making billions of dollars in trade" with the U.S.)
  - o asking Pakistan to end its support for terrorism
  - o seeking stability in Afghanistan.
- The administration has also sought increased defence cooperation and engagement with India (including via the Quad) and changed the name of U.S. Pacific Command to "U.S. Indo-Pacific Command" in 2018.
- The U.S. also played a central role in helping to get Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar sanctioned by the UN.
- However, of late, the trade-related irritants in the relationship have piled up.
- Disagreements over ICT, dairy products, medical devices, India's e-commerce policy and the U.S.'s H-1B visa policies are yet to be resolved.
- Trump's announcement that preferential trade benefits for India under the U.S.'s GSP program will be withdrawn and the U.S. requiring India to stop its imports of Iranian oil from May, have added to the strain on the relationship.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Varanasi has only one air quality monitoring station

Context:

A Right To Information request has found that despite being ranked among the top 3 most polluted cities in the world, Varanasi continues to have only one air quality monitoring station.

Details:

- The Central Pollution Control Board's 2015 dataset (made public in 2016) found Varanasi's air quality to be among the most toxic in the country and that it had only one air quality monitor
- Such air quality monitor was capable of measuring particulate matter 2.5 and particulate matter 10 levels.
- Out of 227 days measured in 2015, the city had zero 'good-air' days and this was attributed to the heavy levels of industrial pollution. Biomass burning, vehicular emissions, brick kilns and diesel generator sets were also major contributors.
- According to 2018 World Health Organisation data, Varanasi is ranked third among the cities with the most polluted air on Earth.
- 14 of the top 15 cities in the list are from India.

Steps taken:

- Varanasi's municipal bodies had taken steps to address road dust and curb road-side burning of garbage.

- Varanasi is one of the cities that is part of the National Clean Air Campaign, an initiative by the Union Environment Ministry to improve air quality in 100 cities by 20% at least by 2024. One of the commitments under this is to improve air quality monitoring.
- While the average air quality for PM 2.5 from 2017-2019 had improved to 104 from 206 in 2016, the maximum PM levels breached continued to be above 200, or in the "very poor" category.

Category: SECURITY

1. Navy boosts its air warfare capability

Context:

The Navy crossed a milestone in enhancing its anti-air warfare capability, with the maiden "cooperative engagement firing" of the medium-range surface-to-air missiles.

Details:

- The milestone was achieved by network-centric operations that helped to combine the capabilities of all military platforms in a formation.
- The trial was carried out by the Navy, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI).
- The firing was undertaken on the western seaboard by the INS Kochi and the INS Chennai, wherein the missiles of both ships were controlled by one ship to intercept different aerial targets at extended ranges.
- The missile was developed by the Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL), Hyderabad, a DRDO laboratory, and IAI. It is made by Bharat Dynamics Limited.
- The capability enhances the combat effectiveness of the Indian Navy thereby providing an operational edge over potential adversaries.
- With the successful proving of this cooperative mode of engagement, the Indian Navy has become a part of a select group of Navies that have this niche capability.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category:INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Charting a clear course in the Indo-Pacific

Editorial Analysis:

An Insight into the term Indo-Pacific:

- Though the term Indo-Pacific has been gaining traction in Indian policy circles for some time now, it achieved operational clarity after the Indian vision was presented by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2018.
- As a matter of fact, his speech underscored that **for India the geography of the Indo-Pacific stretches from the eastern coast of Africa to Oceania (from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas) which also includes in its fold the Pacific Island countries.**

Some Noteworthy Points:

- It is important to note that **India's Act East policy remains the bedrock of the national Indo-Pacific vision and the centrality of ASEAN is embedded in the Indian narrative.**
- **A Note of some of the associations that India has been an active member of:**

1. **India has been an active participant in mechanisms like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**,
2. India has also been an active member in **ASEAN-led frameworks like the East Asia Summit**, the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus, the ASEAN Regional Forum as well as,
3. The **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation** and the **Mekong-Ganga Economic Corridor**.
4. It is important to note that **India has also been convening the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, in which the navies of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) participate.**
5. India has also boosted its engagements with Australia and New Zealand and has deepened its cooperation with the Republic of Korea.
6. Furthermore, through the **Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation**, India is stepping up its interactions with the Pacific Island countries.
7. Also, India's growing partnership with Africa can be seen through the convening of mechanisms like the **India-Africa Forum Summits**.
8. It is also important to note that **India's multi-layered engagement with China as well as strategic partnership with Russia underlines its commitment to ensuring a stable, open, secure, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific.**

- **How does India view the Indo-Pacific?**
- India views the Indo-Pacific as a geographic and strategic expanse, with the 10 ASEAN countries connecting the two great oceans.
- As a consequence, inclusiveness, openness, and ASEAN centrality and unity lie at the heart of the Indian notion of Indo-Pacific.
- Security in the region must be maintained through dialogue, a common rules-based order, freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce and settlement of disputes in accordance with international law.
- More connectivity initiatives impinging on respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, consultation, good governance, transparency, viability and sustainability should be promoted.
- **Operationalizing the Indo-Pacific Policy:**
- It must be noted that **the setting up of the Indo-Pacific wing in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in April 2019 is a natural corollary to this vision.**
- It is important to note that **given how the term Indo-Pacific has been gaining currency and how major regional actors such as the U.S., Japan and Australia are articulating their regional visions — including this term in their official policy statements — it was becoming imperative for India to operationalise its Indo-Pacific policy.**
- Also, the **renaming of the U.S. Pacific Command to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command** as well as the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act in December 2018 showcase Washington's more serious engagement with the Indo-Pacific.
- **The Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept** was unveiled by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2016, and Australia released its Foreign Policy White Paper in 2017, which details Australia's Indo-Pacific vision centred around security, openness and prosperity.

- Given the huge geography that the Indian definition of Indo-Pacific covers, there was a need for a bureaucratic re-alignment to create a division that can imbibe in its fold the various territorial divisions in the MEA that look after the policies of the countries which are part of the Indo-Pacific discourse.
- **This wing provides a strategic coherence to the Prime Minister's Indo-Pacific vision, integrating the IORA, the ASEAN region and the Quad to the Indo-Pacific dynamic.**

- **What does the integration of the IORA mean?**
- The integration of the IORA means that attention will continue to be focused on the IOR.
- This can be a result of the growing Chinese footprint in the Indian Ocean and Chinese diplomacy in the region.
- The Ministry of Defence and the Indian Navy also are also taking note of the developments in this region and this wing can work in coordination with these two organs as well.
- Further, given New Delhi's stakes in its immediate neighbourhood, a more focused and integrated approach is needed.
- Additionally, **ASEAN forms the cornerstone of India's Act East policy and Indo-Pacific vision**.
- As ASEAN now enters into deliberations to carve out its own Indo-Pacific policy, it underscores a shift in the stand of the sub-regional organisation towards the Indo-Pacific concept. Initially there was a lurking fear within the grouping that the Indo-Pacific concept might just overshadow ASEAN's centrality and importance.
- Visualising the ASEAN region as a part of the wider Indo-Pacific shows an evolution in the region's thinking, opening new possibilities for India's engagement with the grouping.

Challenges that lie ahead:

- India's bureaucratic shift is an important move to articulate its regional policy more cogently, coherently and with a renewed sense of purpose.
- There are still challenges for India, especially how it will integrate the Quadrilateral initiative which got revived in 2017 with its larger Indo-Pacific approach.
- It will also be important for the new MEA division to move beyond security and political issues and articulate a more comprehensive policy towards the region.
- Furthermore, commerce and connectivity in particular will have to be prioritised if India is to take advantage of a new opening for its regional engagement.

Concluding Remarks:

- It is important to note that while India has been consistently emphasising "inclusiveness" in the Indo-Pacific framework, it will be challenging to maintain a balance between the interests of all stakeholders.
- There are differences between India's vision and the U.S.'s strategy for the Indo-Pacific even as countries like China and Russia view the Indo-Pacific with suspicion.
- As geopolitical tensions rise between China and the U.S., the MEA's new division will have its task cut out if India's long-term political and economic interests in the region are to be preserved.
- **A bureaucratic change was indeed needed, but going forward the challenge would be to see how effectively this change manifests itself in managing India's growing diplomatic footprint in the Indo-Pacific.**

2. Holding the centre (European Parliament Elections)

Editorial Analysis:

- On May 23, 2019, as the results of the Indian elections emerge, in Europe the world's second largest democratic electoral process will get under way.
- More than 425 million voters are eligible to participate in elections that will take place over a four-day period **to select 751 members of the European Parliament for a five-year term.**
- There would have been 705, but for the delays to Brexit, which means Britain will participate too.
- Thousands of candidates from hundreds of parties as well as independents will seek votes, and the winners will form cross-national groupings in the House based on their political ideology.

Possible Rise of the far-right?

- With turnout usually low (43% in 2014), predictions can be tricky, but **expectations are that far-right and Eurosceptic parties will make gains.**
- In April, 2019, Italy's Deputy Prime Minister and figurehead for the far right in Europe, Matteo Salvini, launched the campaign for the **European Alliance of People and Nations**, alongside allies from Germany to Denmark, on a platform invoking tougher immigration rules and in some cases Euroscepticism, uniting parties that had once been split between groupings.
- In Britain, the appeal of anti-European sentiment has manifested itself in the success of the Brexit Party, formed in January by former UK Independence Party head Nigel Farage — it is projected to win a 34% share of the vote.
- In Germany, the right-wing **Alternative für Deutschland** is expected to make gains, while in France the right-wing National Rally (former National Front) could to do better than President Emmanuel Macron's En Marche.

What the experts say?

- There is a risk that centre-right and centre-left coalitions will fail to command a joint majority.
- The temptation will be for centrist parties to see these elections as yet another sign that populism is on the rise, and a cause they must in one way or another pander to.
- In Britain for example, this has certainly been the case with the rightward lunge of the Conservative Party, while in Germany the centre-left SPD has toughened its stance on asylum-seekers.
- Yet, this would be the wrong message to take. **What is under way is vastly more complex. It is certain that people are seeking alternatives amid stagnating wages and living standards, with many shunning mainstream parties in their quest**.
- However, to infer that all see populism as the route ahead would be naive. Green parties, for example, are expected to make their best showing yet across the continent, as public support for an agenda that encompasses progressive climate change policies and social justice has grown.

Concluding Remarks:

- In conclusion, the European parliamentary elections should certainly trigger alarm bells for the mainstream parties, but should also motivate them to look imaginatively for fresh answers, rather than attempting to rehash decades-old illiberal ones.

Category: INDIAN ECONOMY

1. External woes

What's in the news?

The estimates for foreign trade have shown a sharp slowdown in merchandise export growth in April 2019, to 0.64% from a year earlier.

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts opine that this sharp slowdown ought to add to concerns about the economy.
- For example, if one were to strip away the 31% surge in shipments of petroleum products to overseas markets, India's export of goods actually contracted by over 3% in dollar terms in April, 2019.
- In contrast, overall merchandise exports had expanded 11% year-on-year in March 2019, with the growth in shipments excluding petroleum products exceeding that pace by about 50 basis points.
- Further, the slump in exports was fairly widespread, with 16 of the 30 major product groups listed by the Commerce Ministry reflecting contractions, compared with the 10 categories that had shrunk in March 2019.
- Worryingly, shipments of engineering goods declined by over 7% after having expanded by 16.3% in March 2019, while the traditionally strong export sectors — gem and jewellery, leather and leather products, textiles and garments and drugs and pharmaceuticals — all weakened.
- It is important to note that these are all key providers of jobs and any protracted pain across these industries will impact jobs, wages and consumption demand in the domestic market.
- While the contraction in gem and jewellery exports widened to 13.4% in April 2019, from 0.4% in March 2019, the slump in the leather segment broadened to 15.3% from 6.4%. And the pace of growth of garment exports decelerated to 4.4% from 15.1% in March 2019.
- Imports grew by 4.5% to $41.4 billion in April 2019, accelerating from March's 1.4% pace as purchases of crude oil and gold continued to increase. While the 9.3% jump in the oil import bill, from March's 5.6%, can partly be explained by the rise in international crude prices (Brent crude futures, for instance, advanced 6.4% in April 2019), India's insatiable appetite for gold, as reflected in the 54% surge in imports in April 2019, must give policymakers cause for reflection.
- Excluding oil and gold, however, imports shrank by more than 2% in April 2019, signalling that import demand in the real productive sectors is largely becalmed.
- As a result of merchandise imports outpacing exports, the trade deficit widened to a five-month high of $15.3 billion. It is important to note that **the widening trade shortfall will add pressure on India's burgeoning current account deficit, which at a provisional $51.9 billion in the first nine months of fiscal 2018-19 had already surpassed the preceding financial year's 12-month shortfall of $48.7 billion.**

Concluding Remarks:

- With stronger headwinds ahead in the form of an escalating trade war between the U.S. and China, and its knock-on impact on global growth, the outlook for export demand is far from reassuring.
- Compounding matters are the rising military tensions in West Asia and its potential to further push up oil prices. In essence, the scope to contain the trade and current account deficits seems significantly challenging. Clearly, this would be one more pressing concern for the new government to address.

2. Spectrum reform, the need of the hour

Note to the Students:

- This editorial analysis reflects the points covered in the article, "Spectrum reform, the need of the hour", published by the Hindu Business Line on the 18th of May, 2019.

Editorial Analysis:

- It is well accepted that mobile Internet and broadband accelerate economic growth.
- As a matter of fact, in 2017, the Internet contributed nearly 4 per cent to Indian GDP.
- It is estimated that eight out of the 13 million SMEs and 200 million individuals will transact online.
- Developments in technologies such as LTE/4G/5G provide greater speed of access, more bandwidth than earlier generations and hence make possible innovative uses and applications with consequent economic growth.
- It is important to note that for these services to be available to citizens of the country, **it is vital that at the national level, relevant spectrum bands are identified, and streamlined processes are put in place for allocating them to different service providers/users in a timely manner.**
- Proper regulation and management of spectrum at the national level is more critical in India, as mobile is by far the predominant method (>95 per cent) of Internet access.

A Wasted Economic opportunity:

- Since spectrum is a natural, perishable resource, unutilised or inefficiently used spectrum is a wasted economic opportunity.
- In India, although a transition from a command and control framework to a more open process for spectrum regulation has happened, the path has been slow and bumpy.
- It is important to note that **spectrum availability for commercial services continues to be constrained in relation to other countries.**
- One of the reasons for this state is that spectrum that was allocated to various public agencies was done administratively, and there was no proper framework to "refarm" the existing users to different bands or ensure that it was optimally utilised.
- **"Refarming" often requires investments in new network equipment and end user devices. Many agencies did not have the financial resources or a policy directive to enable them to switch to a different band or the more efficient digital mode.**

Perspective on Spectrum audits:

- Spectrum audits, especially of government and public users, could identify unutilised spectrum. Such agencies may not have an orientation to effective usage as they may have been allocated spectrum in the past at nominal charges or free.
- The audit could also lead to the digitisation of existing services, freeing some spectrum.
- To recognise the market potential/price, the released spectrum could be auctioned to service providers.
- This mechanism, called **incentive auction** creates a win-win situation for both the seller and the service provider who can exploit the released spectrum for commercial opportunities.
- The auction proceeds may then be used by the seller to go digital.
- Experts opine that **without such spectrum audits and incentive auctions, it may be difficult for public agencies to make available the spectrum that they are not using or "refarm" to another band.**
- It is important to note that incentive auctions have been used effectively in the US and UK, especially for the release of spectrum from erstwhile broadcast services to mobile services.

Broadcast Spectrum: A case in Point:

- Unfortunately, in India, spectrum audit studies have hardly been done.

- Even when it is known that there is unused spectrum with agencies, it is difficult to get them to "vacate" the spectrum for other uses. **A case in point is that of broadcast spectrum.**
- The I&B Ministry has been very slow in digitisation. Doordarshan (DD) has a monopoly in terrestrial services.
- Since 2003, when I&B came up with a plan for Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) until now, the service has not been commercially deployed, despite the significant investments in equipment.
- The very limited number of channels that have been provisioned (compared to more than 600 on C&S networks), the need for a DTT specific set-top boxes, and the already high rate (98 per cent) of penetration of cable and satellite (C&S) services in TV owning households are impediments.

DD's spectrum:

- While DD has largely ceased analog terrestrial transmission, its DTT platform is yet to take off, leaving the spectrum unutilised.
- DD also has a free DTH scheme (DD Free Dish – DDFD), where the dish and STB are subsidised and programming is free. DDFD has seen reasonable adoption.
- This further creates impediments for DTT adoption.
- Moreover, as per DD's plans, DTT has an urban focus. However, the raison-d'etre for DD was to provide access in rural areas which are commercially unviable.
- Review of the role of DTT in the current Indian scenario, where urban users, anyway have competing platforms of C&S, wired Internet and mobile to choose from, could release more than 80 MHz of bandwidth for mobile services. However, the I&B Ministry has been reluctant to review this and has plans to further expand its non-existent DTT services.
- As exemplified above, in order to have more spectrum commercially available and accelerate Internet use, India needs a review of its spectrum management and regulatory policies.
- It is important to note that the Wireless Planning and Coordination Wing (WPC) under the DoT does not have the required visibility to do so on its own.

Setting up an inter-ministerial group:

- As a first step, an inter-ministerial group with representation from concerned agencies, both public and private needs to be put in place.
- An action orientation and a well-laid out road map are necessary.
- Recommendations from previous such groups and task force have remained only on paper. Industry associations and citizens need to lobby for such reforms as these are also beneficial to them.

F. Tidbits

1. Centre issues drought advisory to 6 States

- With water storage in dams dropping to a "critical" level, the Centre has issued a "drought advisory" to Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu, asking them to use water judiciously.
- Water falls under the state list and the advisory recommends states to use it for drinking purpose only till the dams are replenished.
- The Central Water Commission (CWC) monitors water storage available in 91 major reservoirs across the country.

- The drought advisory is issued to States when the water level in reservoirs is 20% less than the average of live water storage figures of the past 10 years.

2. In a first for Asia, Taiwan Bill legalises same-sex marriages

- Taiwan's Parliament legalised same-sex marriage in a landmark first for Asia.
- Taiwan has been a leader for gay rights in Asia, hosting an annual gay pride parade in Taipei attended by LGBT groups from all over the continent.
- In 2017, Taiwan's constitutional court ruled that same-sex couples had the right to legally marry.
- It said then that the island had two years to make necessary changes to the law.
- But this was met with a public backlash, which pressured the government into holding a series of referendums.
- The referendum results showed that a majority of voters in Taiwan rejected legalising same-sex marriage, saying that the definition of marriage was the union of a man and woman.
- As a result, Taiwan said it would not alter its existing definition of marriage in civil law, and instead would enact a special law for same-sex marriage.
- The vote that took place on the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia is a major victory for the island's LGBT community and it places the island at the vanguard of Asia's burgeoning gay rights movement.
- The bill passed - allows same-sex couples to form exclusive permanent unions.
- Another clause lets them apply for a marriage registration with government agencies.

Laws on same sex unions in other countries:

- Vietnam decriminalised gay marriage celebrations in 2015, but stopped short of granting full legal recognition for same-sex unions.
- While same-sex marriage is still illegal in China, homosexuality was decriminalised in the country in 1997, and officially removed from its list of mental illnesses three years later.
- In a historic decision, India's Supreme Court ruled that gay sex was no longer a criminal offence in 2018.
- Brunei announced strict new Islamic laws that made anal sex and adultery offences punishable by stoning to death, but it says it will not enforce the death penalty for gay sex.

3. China creates app to recognize Pandas

- China has developed an app that allows conservationists to identify individual pandas using facial recognition technology.
- The researchers have also built a database with over 1,20,000 images and 10,000 video clips of giant pandas that would allow them to correctly identify individual animals.

G. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. "Sattriya" is one of the Indian Classical dance forms
2. A key musical instrument that accompanies a Sattriya performance is khol
3. Sattriya originated in the state of Mainpur

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

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

Sattriya originated in the state of Assam. The modern form of Sattriya is attributed to the 15th century Sankaradeva, who systematized the dance using the ancient texts, and introduced drama and expressive dancing as a form of a community religious art for emotional devotion to Krishna

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. Gray Slender Loris is a nocturnal animal
2. It has been listed as Least Concerned by IUCN
3. It is native to India and Sri Lanka

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

Self-explanatory

Q3. Which of the following pairs are not correctly matched?

a. Pithora Painting – Bihar
b. Kalamkari – Andhra Pradesh
c. Patachitra – Odisha
d. Chitrakar Painting – West Bengal

Answer: a

Explanation:

Pithora is a highly ritualistic painting done on the walls by several tribes such as the Rathwas and Bhilalas who live in the central Gujarat. It is also practiced in Madhya Pradesh.

Q4. Consider the following statements:

1. Mount Agung is in Philippines
2. It is an active volcano

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:

Mount Agung is an active volcano located in Bali, Indonesia

I. Practice Questions for UPSC Mains Exam

1. What is ATM Skimming? Explain the rules laid by the RBI to prevent such fraudulent transactions. (10 Marks 150 Words)
2. Explain the key differences between deradicalization, disengagement and counter-radicalization. What are the various initiatives taken by the government of India to reduce the Deradicalization. (15 Marks, 250 Words)