

27 May 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS1 Related

Category: GEOGRAPHY

1. Houses submerged due to Tripura flash floods

Context:

Heavy rain that led to flash floods has left hundreds of houses submerged in North Tripura.

Details:

- More than 1,000 families have been affected due to the flashfloods in Tripura.
- The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), Tripura State Rifles (TSR), firefighter team, district, and state administration have launched a joint rescue operation.
- The flood was caused after the level of river Juri and river Kakti started rising and came close to the danger level.
- According to Skymet Weather, the rains have been attributed to the cyclonic circulation present over Northeast Bihar and a trough extending from this system to Nagaland.
- Another cyclonic circulation is seen over South Assam and a trough is also running from eastern parts of Bihar to North Odisha.

- Warm and moist winds are continuing over the north-eastern states.
- Apart from these weather systems, Western Disturbance was also moving across higher latitudes.

What are flash floods?

- A flash flood is a rapid flooding of low-lying areas: washes, rivers, dry lakes and basins. It may be caused by heavy rain associated with a severe thunderstorm, hurricane, tropical storm, or melt water from ice or snow flowing over ice sheets or snowfields.
- Flash floods may occur after the collapse of a natural ice or debris dam, or a human structure such as a man-made dam.
- Flash floods are distinguished from regular floods by having a timescale of fewer than six hours between rainfall and the onset of flooding.
- Flash floods can occur under several types of conditions.
- Flash flooding occurs when it rains rapidly on saturated soil or dry soil that has poor absorption ability. The runoff collects in gullies and streams and, as they join to form larger volumes, often forms a fast flowing front of water and debris.
- They most often occur in normally dry areas that have recently received precipitation, but they may be seen anywhere downstream from the source of the precipitation, even many miles from the source.

B. GS2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Gujarat moves to enforce fire safety in buildings

Context:

Fire at an illegal structure in Surat claimed the life of 22 students.

Details:

- The building did not have a no-objection certificate from the Fire Department.
- The Gujarat government has asked builders of more than 9,000 properties, to equip themselves with fire safety installations within three days or face closure.
- At least 50 properties in Surat had been sealed for violations of fire safety norms.

NGOs demand strict enactment of safety laws:

- An NGO, working in the field of fire safety and prevention, has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, demanding a strong law to be enacted to prevent fire tragedies.

Way forward:

The tragedy highlights the gap between India's vision of Smart Cities and the harsh realities of urbanisation. Besides fixing accountability, it calls for nationwide update of fire safety protocol. Such man-made disasters can be easily avoided by following the protocols.

2. Central varsities asked to notify vacancies within 100 days

Context:

All Central universities have been asked to notify their faculty vacancies within the next 100 days. Currently, over 5,000 posts remain vacant in the 40 Central universities.

Background:

- In March 2018, the University Grants Commission (UGC) directed institutions to start treating each department as a separate unit in their recruitment process.
- In many smaller departments, this translated to few or no faculty reservations and led to outrage, especially among Dalit and Adivasi communities.
- After the Supreme Court dismissed the Centre's appeal against the High Court order, the government issued an ordinance in March 2019 to revert to the older system.
- While the court battles raged, hiring came to a virtual halt, leading to an increase in vacancies.
- Apart from the 40 Central universities, there are 5,000-odd faculty vacancies in the Indian Institutes of Technology and National Institutes of Technology.

Details:

- It is the Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry's agenda for the first 100 days of the NDA government's second term.
- The vacancy situation was exacerbated by legal battles over how to implement reservations in faculty hiring.
- Also on the agenda is a proposal to get Cabinet approval for 10 more Institutes of Eminence, at an additional cost of Rs. 7,000 crore.
- Other items on the 100-day action plan include the long-delayed National Education Policy.

Institute of Eminence:

- The scheme was initially meant to bestow the tag on 20 potentially world-class institutions, which would be given higher autonomy and freedom to decide fees, course durations and structures.
- The aim of the scheme is to bring higher educational institutions selected as IoEs in top 500 of world ranking in the next 10 years and in top 100 eventually overtime.
- The scheme was launched with an objective to provide world class teaching and research facilities to Indian students within the country and enhance general level of education of the country.
- Ten public institutions would also be given a Rs. 1,000 crore grant, while the ten chosen private institutions would not receive financial assistance.
- The empowered expert committee, headed by former Chief Election Commissioner N. Gopalaswami, had initially recommended 11 institutions for the scheme and the Centre finally bestowed the tag on six institutions.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Farmers want plan to procure alternative crops at MSP

Context:

Haryana government has planned to discourage planting of rice crop in a bid to save depleting groundwater.

Details:

- Water depletion in Haryana over the years has led to 60 dark zones in the State, which include 21

critical ones in 10 districts.

- Staring at an imminent groundwater crisis, the State government has decided to discourage rice sowing from the upcoming season.
- As the Haryana government plans to discourage planting of paddy, which threatens to deplete the State's groundwater, farmers have asked the government to first come out with a mechanism to procure alternative crops at the Minimum Support Price (MSP).
- Previously, the farmers had faced great difficulties in selling their maize produce.
- There is hardly any dependable mechanism of government procurement for crops on MSP in the State.
- Problems like delay in setting up of procurement centres, exploitation at the hands of commission agents who most of the times buy the produce from farmers below MSP, on one pretext or the other defeats the purpose of MSP.
- Unless farmers are given an assured market and assured price for their produce, they would continue to suffer.

Pilot Project:

- The Haryana government has decided to start a pilot project where sowing of maize and 'tuar' pulse would be promoted by giving incentives to farmers. The government intends to diversify from non-basmati paddy to maize and pulse.
- In Haryana, under the new scheme, identified farmers will be provided seed free of cost and given a financial assistance for ₹2000 per acre in two parts.
- The maize crop insurance premium will be borne by the government.
- Also, maize produce will be procured by government agencies at MSP.
- Likewise, seeds of 'tuar' will also be provided free of cost to farmers and incentives will also be provided on a similar pattern.

2. No wind, no sun: green projects in limbo

Context:

Renewable energy sector is stifled by a host of issues from low tariffs to lack of government push.

Background:

- In 2014, the Solar power had barely begun to take roots in India, and the country had a total installed solar power capacity of 2,632 MW.
- The industry was taking baby steps with the aid of cheap, imported modules.
- Anti-dumping duties ranging between ₹6 and ₹47 per watt of solar modules imported from China, Malaysia, Taiwan and the U.S. was recommended by the Ministry of Commerce.
- The anti-dumping duty was going to kill the industry. On the other hand, a clutch of domestic players had set up module manufacturing plants in India, eyeing business from a sunrise industry.
- The new government then made a pragmatic choice. It said 'no' anti-dumping duties; it also told the domestic manufacturers, that the government-owned companies would buy from them.
- The way the government handled a rather ticklish problem engendered confidence, which strengthened soon when the government set up an ambitious target of 175 GW for renewable energy — 100 GW for solar, 60 GW for wind and the rest for biomass and small hydro — to be met by 2022.
- Since the solar target was five times that set earlier by the previous government, it caused ripples of excitement around the world.

Concerns:

- Five years down the line, the Indian renewable industry is in a state of disarray.
- Wind and solar power capacity additions have been far less than satisfactory and hardly on the path to meeting the targets.
- Both sectors are buffeted by a range of issues, some caused by the government.
- And, outside of wind and solar, too, little has happened.
- For instance, solar heating is a segment that gives the returns in the clean energy space, but no policy has been made.
- Offshore wind is still distant despite international players responding overwhelmingly when asked to express interest.

Details:

- Singular achievement of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy was bringing down tariffs of wind and solar power that is sold to the electricity distribution companies.
- The reason for sad state of affairs is over-emphasis on keeping tariffs low.
- Many feel that such a low tariff is unviable and, quoted by bidders only in a rush to grab projects.
- However, the policy makers have taken that number to be some kind of a benchmark. Ceilings on tariffs have been brought in for solar and wind so as to keep tariffs depressed.
- Solar energy projects have had to face uncertainties in terms of safeguard duties, GST rates and a falling rupee.
- Wind installations have been crippled by land problems in Gujarat, as most of the developers flocked to the state.

Way forward:

- The government must plan out a long-term vision to look into other emerging areas where India could leapfrog and lead the world — such as ocean, geo-thermal energy, biomass and small hydro.
- To avoid flocking of developers to the windiest sites, the government must bring in State-wise or even sub-station-wise tenders, so that the setting up projects could be more spread out.
- The government must opt for closed tenders, where the bidder who offers the best price bags the project, as opposed to the current method of holding auctions, in which bidders try to outbid each other.
- Delays paying the dues to the energy companies by the State government-owned utilities must be eliminated.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**1. Seawater from Ice Age tucked in rocks discovered in Indian Ocean****Context:**

In a first, scientists have discovered the remnants of seawater dating back to the Ice Age, tucked inside rock formations in the middle of the Indian Ocean.

Details:

- Researchers from the University of Chicago have made the discovery during a scientific mission exploring the limestone deposits that form the Maldives.
- The ship, the JOIDES Resolution, is specifically built for ocean science and is equipped with a drill that can extract cores of rock over a mile long from up to three miles beneath the seafloor.

- The extracted water, in their preliminary tests were coming back salty much saltier than normal seawater.
- Further studies showed that the water was not from today's ocean, but from the last remnants of a previous era that had migrated slowly through the rock.

Significance of the study:

- Scientists are interested in reconstructing the last Ice Age because the patterns that drove its circulation, climate and weather were very different from today's.
- Understanding these patterns could shed light on how the planet's climate will react in the future.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. Fire and laissez-faire

Context:

Fire at an illegal structure in Surat claimed the life of 22 students. The building did not have a no-objection certificate from the Fire Department.

Issue:

- Man-made disasters like these highlight the gap between India's dreamy visions of smart cities and the cruel reality of urban chaos and lawlessness.
- There exists a culture of laissez-faire urbanisation that city governments have bred and which the courts allow to be pursued without severe penalties.
- India's frightful record on fire safety is reflected in the death of 17,700 people countrywide in fires in both public and residential buildings during 2015, according to the latest available data from the National Crime Records Bureau.
- Criminal culpability of the administrative machinery and officials who sanctioned unsafe buildings, often in return for bribes, remains largely unaddressed.
- There is a lack not only of a culture of fire safety, people do not even bother with simple things such as creating multiple exits and buying reasonably priced fire extinguishers and alarms for buildings.
- In addition there is lack of public sensitivity to fire tragedies in the country.

Details:

- According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) statistics, around 62 people die in fire incidents each day.
- The Surat fire cannot be called an accident, since there are reports of notices having been served to the builder on the risks, but not pursued by the Fire Department.
- Civic officials have displayed unforgivable indifference, since two deaths occurred in another coaching centre in the city late last year.
- That tragedy should have led to a comprehensive review of public buildings.

Way forward:

- The governments must make fire safety the priority it should be. Fire safety protocols must be updated nation-wide
- Inquiry into the disaster should go into any deviations from the sanctioned plan for the commercial building housing the coaching centre, and the role of urban planning officials in allowing it to come up.
- It is essential for the judiciary to send out the message that there will be no tolerance to corruption and evasion in the enforcement of building rules and fire safety.
- Beyond suspending a few officials and filing cases against the building owners, there is a need to make an example of sanctioning and enforcement authorities.
- The unwavering message must be that the citizens demand accountability.
- There is also an urgent need to ensure that the fire departments are well equipped.
- Mandating compulsory insurance for all public buildings against fire risk and public liability can bring about a change to the way architects and builders approach the question of safety, since the insurer would require a reduction of risk and compliance with building plans. That would be a start to rewriting India's sad record on fire safety.

F. Tidbits

1. Food waste may help cut fossil fuel use: study

- Wasted food can be turned into a clean substitute for fossil fuels, say scientists who used natural fermentation to produce a biodegradable chemical that can be refined as a source of energy.
- The chemical could also be used to replace petroleum-based chemicals in drugs.
- It can also be used for plastic packaging.
- Technology already exists to reduce the environmental impact by diverting food waste, collecting methane gas as it is broken down by microorganisms and burning the gas to produce electricity.
- Known as anaerobic digestion, it ultimately yields little or no net benefits when the high costs of food waste mixing and wastewater treatment are taken into account.
- The new technology dramatically cuts those costs by collecting and recirculating leachate a microbial cocktail mixed with microorganisms and nutrients, that trickles through the food waste in holding tanks, rather than stimulating biodegradation by intensive mixing.
- As they eat and digest food waste, the microorganisms in those tanks also spit out a chemical byproduct called carboxylate, which has numerous potential uses as a substitute for petroleum, or crude oil.
- In addition to being cheaper and more productive than existing technology, he said, the system is designed for use on small and medium scales.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Kuruvai paddy

- Kuruvai, also known as "short-term" in Tamil.
- Kuruvai paddy is the crop grown in Cauvery Delta of Tamil Nadu.
- The crops that are grown in this delta are mostly paddy and the health of these crops and the eventual livelihood of these farmers are extremely dependent on abundant flow of water on the Cauvery River.

2. Albino panda

- A rare all-white panda has been caught on camera at a nature reserve in southwest China, showing

albinism exists among wild pandas in the region.

- Albinism is a congenital disorder characterized in humans by the complete or partial absence of pigment in the skin, hair and eyes.
- Animals with albinism which results in a lack of melanin, or skin pigment are often at greater risk from predators in the wild as they can be spotted more easily and have poorer eyesight.
- The giant panda is classified as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Lonar Lake is a National Geological Monument of India.
2. It is located in Karnataka.
3. It was created by a meteor impact.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

National Geological Monuments of India are geographical areas of national importance and heritage, as notified by the Government of India's Geological Survey of India (GSI), for their protection, maintenance, promotion and enhancement of geotourism. Lonar Lake, also known as Lonar crater, is a notified National Geo-heritage Monument, saline lake, located in Maharashtra. It was created by a meteor impact during the Pleistocene Epoch.

Q2. The core is composed of:

- a. Silica and Aluminium
- b. Silica and Magnesium
- c. Nickel and Iron
- d. Magnesium and Aluminium

Answer: c

Explanation:

Core has the heaviest mineral materials of highest density. It is composed of nickel and iron [nife].

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. A Bio-indicator is any species that has a tendency to spread to a degree believed to cause damage to the environment.
2. Bio-indicators reflect the quality and changes in environmental conditions as well as aspects of community composition.

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:

Bio Indicator is any species whose function, population, or status can reveal the qualitative status of the environment.

Q4. Consider the following statements:

- 1. Tariff is a tax on tax.
- 2. Tariffs are used by governments to protect domestic industries from competition.

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:

A tariff is a tax on imports or exports between sovereign states. It is a form of regulation of foreign trade and a policy that taxes foreign products to encourage or safeguard domestic industry. Cess is a tax on tax.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

- 1. The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act is ambiguous and provides unreasonable powers to the authorities. Critically analyse. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
- 2. India is prepared for the direct tax system to be overhauled to a cleaner tax code that minimises distortions. Critically analyse. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

