

11 June 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. PM seeks five-year road map for each Ministry

Context:

Secretaries to the Government of India have been tasked with creating a five-year road map for each Ministry with well-defined targets.

Details:

- In their first meeting with Prime Minister after his re-election, Secretaries to the Government of India have been tasked with creating a five-year road map for each Ministry with well-defined targets.
- PM opined that each department had a role to play in making India a five-trillion dollar economy.
- While asking each Ministry to focus on 'ease of living', the Prime Minister added that India's progress in 'Ease of Doing Business' should reflect in greater facilitation for small businesses and entrepreneurs.
- Speaking of the demographic dividend, the Prime Minister said it is essential that the demographics be utilised efficiently. He touched upon the importance of the "Make in India" initiative, and the need to make tangible progress towards this end.
- He also stressed upon the need to increase the use of technology in governance and also to give due importance to aspirational district.
- Looking forward, the Cabinet Secretary mentioned two important tasks which would be placed before Sectoral Groups of Secretaries:

(a) A five year plan document for each Ministry, with well-defined targets and milestones.

(b) A significant impactful decision in each Ministry, for which approvals will be taken within 100 days.

- During the interaction, various Secretaries shared their vision and ideas on subjects such as administrative decision-making, agriculture, rural development and Panchayati Raj, IT initiatives, education reform, healthcare, industrial policy, economic growth, skill development, etc.

2. MoSPI proposes to use big data analytical tools to improve official statistics

Context:

The statistics ministry said that it proposes to set up a 'National Data Warehouse' with a view to leveraging big data analytical tools to further improve the quality of macro-economic aggregates.

Issues:

- There have been increasing demands on the statistical system for the production of relevant and quality statistics.
- MoSPI has been criticised in some sections for the quality of macro-economic data.

Details:

- Efforts are also on to evolve a legislative framework under which the National Statistical Commission (NSC) may function with independence and give holistic guidance for improving the national statistical system, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) said.
- In its release, the Ministry further said as far as the statistical reforms are concerned, it is important to note that system reforms are an ongoing process and are necessary for ensuring responsiveness to the changing needs of society.
- The recent step for the merger of CSO and NSSO was aimed at leveraging the strengths of the two organisations so that it can meet the increasing demands, MoSPI said.
- The Ministry said revision in GDP estimates occur when data coverage from administrative sources improves over time and these improvements get well documented. Consequently, the initial estimates of GDP tend to be conservative.
- To improve this, the release said it would require concomitant changes in the sectoral data flows and associated regulatory framework in the data source agencies to facilitate the use of more macro modelling techniques.

- The Ministry is also proposing to establish a National Data Warehouse on Official Statistics, where technology will be leveraged for using big data analytical tools for further improving the quality of macro-economic aggregates.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. China concerned about 'trade protectionism'

Context:

China invited India to join a budding international effort to counter headwinds of trade protectionism and unilateralism and brainstorm ways to address the bullying practices of the United States.

Details:

- The rising trade and technology tensions with the U.S. appear have spurred China to seek new allies and attempt forging new rules of international trade and commerce.
- Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Zhang Hanhui said at a press conference that “trade frictions between China and the United States and the spectre of trade frictions between the United States and India” could become an “important topic” for talks.
- He added: “Trade protectionism and unilateralism are very much on the rise, hoping that talks between the two leaders would yield extensive consensus to counter trade protectionism and uphold justice.
- The talks between the two leaders Mr. Xi and Mr. Modi are likely to be part of broader dialogue between China and other countries at the summit.
- He singled out last year’s successful informal summit in Wuhan, which has imparted strategic guidance for the development of China-India relations, paving the way for stable growth of China-India relations in the long run.

2. Iran has accelerated uranium enrichment

Context:

Iran has followed through on a threat to accelerate its production of enriched uranium, the head of the UN atomic watchdog International Atomic Energy Agency IAEA said.

Background:

- U.S.-Iranian confrontation has sharply increased.
- Washington tightened sanctions from the start of May, ordering all countries and companies to halt all imports of Iranian oil or be banished from the global financial system.
- It has also begun discussing military confrontation, dispatching extra troops to the region to counter what it describes as Iranian threats.
- A year ago Washington abandoned an agreement between Iran and world powers to curb Tehran’s nuclear programme in exchange for the lifting of international financial sanctions.

Details:

- IAEA chief Yukiya Amano, whose agency is responsible for monitoring Iranian compliance with the nuclear deal, said Iran was now producing more enriched uranium than before, but it was not clear when it might reach stockpile limits set in the pact.
- Iran said last month it was still abiding by the deal but would quadruple its production of enriched

uranium — a move that could take it out of compliance if stockpiles rise too far.

- It demanded that European countries do more to shield it from sanctions.
- France, Britain and Germany have set up a special-purpose vehicle called Instex, designed to allow payments to Iran that would legally bypass sanctions. It has yet to be launched.

Issue:

- Washington says the nuclear deal should be expanded to cover other issues including Iran's missile programme and its role in wars in the region.
- European countries say they share those concerns, although they argue that it would be harder to address them without the nuclear deal in place.
- Iran strongly opposes any effort to expand negotiations to cover other issues.

Way forward:

- It is essential that Iran fully implements its nuclear-related commitments" under the deal.
- Washington's European allies opposed its decision last year to abandon the nuclear deal.
- They have promised to help Iran find other ways to trade, though with no success so far.
- However, all the major European companies that had announced plans to invest in Iran have since called them off for fear of U.S. punishment.

3. India may give Pak. its due for action against terror groups

Context:

A year after Pakistan was put on the "grey list" by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), New Delhi is beginning to accept that Islamabad has taken some action against the terror organisations on the ground.

Background:

- Pakistan has been on and off the grey list in the past.
- Incidentally, in June 2018, Pakistan was put on the FATF grey list for the 2nd time for failing to curb terror financing, courtesy - a concerted bilateral effort by India with the US, UK, France and Germany all through 2017. The country was lobbying hard to be removed from this list at this meeting in Paris.
- Islamabad had reportedly been given a 27-point action plan to implement by September 2019, failing which it would be put on the FATF black list alongside North Korea and Iran post the October 2019 FAFT meeting.
- Pakistan had reportedly landed on the grey list between 2012 and 2015.

FATF:

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an inter-governmental body established in 1989 by the Ministers of its Member jurisdictions. It is headquartered at Paris.
- The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
- It is the global standard-setting body for anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT).
- In order to protect the international financial system from money laundering and financing of terrorism (ML/FT) risks and to encourage greater compliance with the AML/CFT standards, the FATF identifies jurisdictions that have strategic deficiencies and works with them to address those deficiencies that pose a risk to the international financial system.

- Jurisdiction subject to a FATF call on its members and other jurisdictions to apply counter-measures to protect the international financial system from the ongoing and substantial money laundering and financing of terrorism risks.

What does getting black listed mean?

- The FATF blacklist means the country concerned is "non-cooperative" in the global fight against money laundering and terrorist financing.
- A black-list would mean enhanced financial scrutiny of its government, possible sanctions against its central bank, and a downgrade of its financial and credit institutions.

Details:

- An official said Pakistani authorities had seized 771 seminaries — educational institutions run by the Lashkar-e-Taiba and its fronts, Jamaat-ud Dawa and Falah-i-Insaniyat, and the Jaish-e-Mohammad.
- To avoid being put on the blacklist, Pakistan has seized properties associated with terror groups in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir as well.
- It is for the first time since early 1990s that Pakistan has begun to take action against India-focussed terror groups and freeze their assets.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. SEBI mulls norms to reward whistle-blowers

Context:

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has proposed establishing a framework to reward individuals who bring forward instances of violations of insider trading norms (whistle-blowers) while at the same time protecting such persons from victimisation in the form of demotion or termination of job.

Details:

- SEBI has proposed that entities that come forward with such information will have to disclose the source of information and give an undertaking that such information has not been sourced from any regulator.
- It has been proposed that if such information leads to a final order by SEBI with a minimum disgorgement of Rs. 5 crore, then a monetary award of 10% of the money collected by SEBI, subject to a cap of Rs. 1 crore, can be given to the informant.
- The reward will be paid from the Investor Protection and Education Fund (IPEF).
- SEBI also plans to establish an Office of Informant Protection, which will be independent of the investigation and inspection wings of the regulatory body.
- While the informant would be required to disclose his or her identity at the time of submission of the complaint in the official format – Voluntary Information Disclosure Form, in SEBI's parlance – an anonymous complaint can also be submitted through an authorised representative who is a practising advocate.
- To protect such complainants against victimisation, the regulator has proposed that all listed companies and intermediaries would include in their code of conduct, provisions to ensure that such individuals are not "discharged, terminated, demoted, suspended, threatened, harassed, or discriminated against, directly or indirectly."
- While SEBI has also proposed an amnesty for such individuals, it has also stated that if a complaint

is found to be frivolous, the regulator can initiate actions against the informant.

Conclusion:

It is desirable and prudent that SEBI considers instituting a process that enables timely reporting of instances of insider trading violations and also provide for grant of reward with adequate checks and balances that could incentivise timely reporting of information relating to insider trading to SEBI at the first available opportunity.

2. Banks can offer cheque books for no-frills accounts

Context:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has allowed banks to offer cheque book facility and other services to the no-frills account holders, but said they could not ask such account holders to maintain any minimum balance for such services.

No-frill accounts:

- The basic savings bank deposit account or no-frills account was designed as a savings account which will offer certain minimum facilities, free of charge, to the holders of such accounts.
- The central bank had introduced 'no-frills' accounts in 2005 to provide basic banking facilities to poor and promote financial inclusion.
- As per the norms of no-frills account, account holders are not required to maintain minimum balance and can get certain minimum facilities for free.
- These facilities include, four withdrawals from ATMs in a month, deposit of cash at bank branch and ATM card or ATM-cum-debit card.

Details:

- Banks are free to provide additional value-added services, including issue of cheque book, beyond the above minimum facilities, which may/may not be priced (in non-discriminatory manner) subject to disclosure.
- The availment of such additional services shall be at the option of the customers, RBI has said.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Artificial Intelligence, the law and the future

The editorial talks about the necessity of a legal framework to regulate the AI-driven technology, failing which, it will become counterproductive.

Context:

- In February, the Kerala police inducted a robot for police work. The same month, Chennai got its

second robot-themed restaurant, where robots not only serve as waiters but also interact with customers in English and Tamil.

- In Ahmedabad, in December 2018, a cardiologist performed the world's first in-human telerobotic coronary intervention on a patient nearly 32 km away.
- All these examples symbolise the arrival of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in our everyday lives.
- AI has several positive applications, as seen in these examples. But the capability of AI systems to learn from experience and to perform autonomously for humans makes AI the most disruptive and self-transformative technology of the 21st century.

Issue:

- If AI is not regulated properly, it is bound to have unmanageable implications.
- For instance, that electricity supply suddenly stops while a robot is performing a surgery, and access to a doctor is lost? And what if a drone hits a human being? These questions have already confronted courts in the U.S. and Germany.
- All countries, including India, need to be legally prepared to face such kind of disruptive technology.
- While there are many developments taking place on the technological front, no comprehensive legislation to regulate this growing industry has been formulated in the country till date.

Challenges:

- Predicting and analysing legal issues and their solutions, is not that simple. For instance, criminal law is going to face drastic challenges. What if an AI-based driverless car gets into an accident that causes harm to humans or damages property? Who should the courts hold liable for the same? Can AI be thought to have knowingly or carelessly caused bodily injury to another? Can robots act as a witness or as a tool for committing various crimes?
- Except for Isaac Asimov's 'three laws of robotics' discussed in his short story, 'Runaround', recently has there been interest across the world to develop a law on smart technologies.

Details:

- In the U.S., there is a lot of discussion about regulation of AI.
- Germany has come up with ethical rules for autonomous vehicles stipulating that human life should always have priority over property or animal life.
- China, Japan and Korea are following Germany in developing a law on self-driven cars.
- In India, NITI Aayog released a policy paper, 'National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence', in June 2018, which considered the importance of AI in different sectors.
- The Budget 2019 also proposed to launch a national programme on AI.

2. The merits of a free ride

Context:

The Delhi government has proposed to make metro and bus travel free for women.

Details:

- According to various studies, women's choices (and often those of their spouses and families) about work are determined by their commuting experience, including the availability of modes of transport, distance of the workplace from their residence, presence of other women during commute, and safety of the overall route.
- For many families, it is the cost of commute that determines their choice of work.
- A recent report by Deloitte revealed that female labour force participation fell to 26% in 2018 from

36.7% in 2005 amidst the larger unemployment crisis.

- Post metro fare hikes in 2017, ridership dropped by over three lakh passengers per day, owing to increased unaffordability.

Merits of the proposal:

- The proposal not only encourages women to use public transport more, but also allows them to occupy public spaces more and exercise their right to work and commute much more freely.
- A move like this could therefore increase productivity and women's participation in the economy.
- More importantly, this move could make the Delhi metro (a state-of-the-art, air-conditioned public mode of transport) accessible to working-class women for whom the metro has always been an aspirational vehicle.
- Acknowledging large gender pay gaps, how women rampantly indulge in unpaid labour, or how public spaces are visibly gendered (there is a near absence of women on the streets of Delhi after a particular time), rules out the argument that this move would reinforce the idea that women are the 'weaker sex'.

Way forward:

- The government's proposal will not automatically lead to safer environments for women.
- It must be supplemented with efforts towards greater capacity building, increased frequency of metros and buses, provision of all-women's coaches and buses, street lighting, stepping up last-mile connectivity, deployment of women guards, and so on.
- And most important is the need for radical attitudinal shifts.
- Discussing the merits of a proposal like this and learning from examples around the world is important.
- Given that the principal logic of any public service is that it should be inclusive, free (or at least inexpensive) access to metro trains and buses must also necessarily extend to the urban working poor, students, the differently abled, and senior citizens — albeit with an option of self-exclusion for those who can afford it.
- Ecologically too, in a polluted city like Delhi, universalising cheap access to public transport and disincentivising private vehicles as much as possible is the need of the hour.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Foreign policy challenges five years later

The editorial talks about the foreign policy challenges to India.

Context:

- As Prime Minister Narendra Modi begins his second term, the world looks more disorderly in 2019 than was the case five years ago.
- Some of the developments that add to the complexity of India's principal foreign policy challenge of dealing with the rise of China are:
 - S. President Donald Trump's election and the new dose of unpredictability in U.S. policy pronouncements
 - The trade war between the U.S. and China which is becoming a technology war
 - Brexit and the European Union's internal preoccupations
 - Erosion of U.S.-Russia arms control agreements and the likelihood of a new arms race covering nuclear, space and cyber domains
 - The U.S.'s withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and growing tensions between Saudi Arabia

and Iran.

Redefining neighbourhood:

- As in 2014, in 2019 too Mr. Modi began his term with a neighbourhood focus but redefined it.
- In 2014, all South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) leaders had been invited for the swearing-in. However, the SAARC spirit soon evaporated, and after the Uri attack in 2016, India's stance affected the convening of the SAARC summit in Islamabad.
- Leaders from the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand) with Kyrgyzstan, added as current Shanghai Cooperation Organisation chair, highlighted a new neighbourhood emphasis.
- Yet it would be difficult to ignore Pakistan. Despite good planning there is always the risk of unintended escalation as Balakot.
- In the absence of communication channels between India and Pakistan, it appears that the U.S., Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates played a role in ensuring the quick release of the IAF pilot thereby defusing the situation.
- Unless the government wants to outsource crisis management to external players, it may be better to have some kind of ongoing dialogue between the two countries.
- Translating India's natural weight in the region into influence was easier in a pre-globalised world and before China emerged in its assertive character.
- Today, it is more complex and playing favourites in the domestic politics of neighbours is a blunt instrument that may only be employed, in the last resort; and if employed it cannot be seen to fail.
- Since that may be difficult to ensure, it is preferable to work on the basis of generating broad-based consent rather than dominance.
- This necessitates using multi-pronged diplomatic efforts and being generous as the larger economy.
- It also needs a more confident and coordinated approach in handling neighbourhood organisations — SAARC, BIMSTEC, the Bangladesh, the Bhutan, India, Nepal Initiative, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Forum for Regional Cooperation, the Indian Ocean Rim Association.
- This should be preferably in tandem with bilateralism because our bilateral relations provide us with significant advantages.
- Investing attention in State governments, both at the political and bureaucratic levels is necessary.

Managing China and the U.S:

- China will remain the most important issue, as in 2014.
- For Mr. Modi, the Doklam stand-off was a rude reminder of the reality that the tacit assumption behind the policy followed for three decades could no longer be sustained.
- The informal summit in Wuhan restored a semblance of calm but does not address the long-term implications of the growing gap between the two countries.
- Meanwhile, there is the growing strategic rivalry between the U.S. and China unfolding on India's doorstep.
- India no longer has the luxury of distance to be non-aligned.
- At the same time, the U.S. is a fickle partner and never has it been more unpredictable than at present.
- Despite this, a number of issues have emerged that need urgent attention. As part of its policy on tightening sanctions pressure on Iran, the U.S. has terminated the sanctions waiver that had enabled India to import limited quantities of Iranian crude till last month.
- The Generalised System of Preferences scheme has been withdrawn, adversely impacting about 12% of India's exports to the U.S., as a sign of growing impatience with India's inability to address the U.S.'s concerns regarding market access, tariff lines and recent changes in the e-commerce policy.
- Perhaps the most critical, is the threat of sanctions under the Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), were India to proceed with the purchase of the S-400 air and

missile defence system from Russia. Till the end of last year, then U.S. Defence Secretary had been confident of India securing a waiver — but times have changed.

- Other potential tricky issues could relate to whether Huawei, which is currently the prime target in the U.S.-China technology war, is allowed to participate in the 5G trials (telecom) in India.
- The reconciliation talks between the U.S. and the Taliban as the U.S. negotiates its exit from Afghanistan raise New Delhi's apprehensions about the Taliban's return, constituting another potential irritant.

Way forward:

- How New Delhi manages its relations with the U.S. will be closely watched in China and Russia, which have been moving closer.
- Russia has interests beyond, in Afghanistan, West and Central Asia and Europe, and it is here that India will need to exploit new opportunities to reshape the relationship.
- In a post-ideology age of promiscuity with rivalries unfolding around us, the harsh reality is that India lacks the ability to shape events around it on account of resource limitations.
- These require domestic decisions in terms of expanding the foreign policy establishment though having a seasoned professional at the top does help.
- We need to ensure far more coordination among the different ministries and agencies than has been the case so far.
- Our record in implementation projects is patchy at best and needs urgent attention.
- Employing external balancing to create a conducive regional environment is a new game that will also require building a new consensus at home.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Striking a balance – On stressed assets

Context:

The efforts of the Reserve Bank of India to clean up the non-performing loans mess in the banking system suffered a setback in April when the Supreme Court shot down its circular of February 12, 2018, terming it ultra vires. Version 2.0 of the circular, titled “Prudential Framework for Resolution of Stressed Assets”, issued by the central bank in June

February 12th circular of RBI:

- The circular gave lender banks six months to resolve their stressed assets or move under the Insolvency Code against private entities who have defaulted on loans worth over Rs.2,000 crore.
- The circular also imposed a one-day default rule — a company was treated as a defaulter even if it missed one day of the repayment schedule.
- The companies said the circular violated Article 14 of the Constitution.
- The Supreme court's decision restored the discretion of banks on debt resolution.

Details:

- The recent circular manages to retain the spirit of the original version even while accommodating the concerns of banks and borrowers.
- The RBI has achieved a good balance between its objective of forcing a resolution of stricken assets and giving banks the elbow room to draw up a resolution within a set timeframe without resorting to the bankruptcy process.
- Banks will now have a review period of 30 days after a borrower defaults to decide on the resolution

strategy, as compared to the one-day norm earlier.

- They will also have the freedom to decide whether or not to drag a defaulter to the insolvency court if resolution does not take place within 180 days of default. Banks had no such option earlier.
- By making an Inter Creditor Agreement between lenders mandatory, the RBI has ensured that they will speak in one voice, while the condition that dissenting lenders should not get less than the liquidation value puts a floor on recovery from the resolution process.
- The RBI's nuanced approach now is noteworthy. There will be disincentives in the form of additional provision of 20% to be made by banks if a resolution is not achieved within 180 days and a further additional provision of 15% if this extends to a year.
- But the advantage is that they can write back half of the additional provision once a reference is made to the insolvency court and the remaining half can also be clawed back by banks if the reference is admitted for insolvency resolution.
- This approach will give banks the freedom to explore all options before referring a defaulter to the insolvency process.

Conclusion:

- The central bank, anyway, retains the right to direct banks to initiate insolvency proceedings in specific cases by drawing on its powers under Section 35AA of the Banking Regulation Act.
- Meanwhile, the government has to assess what ails the insolvency resolution process, which has got bogged down in the case of several high-profile defaulters, beginning with Essar Steel.
- The delays in resolution are not good optics, and the gaps that defaulters typically use to subvert the process must be plugged.
- Ultimately, the RBI's efforts will be negated if banks, put off by the long delays in the resolution process, choose not to refer cases to the insolvency court.

F. Tidbits

1. A.P. villagers turn to age-old ritual for rain

- 'Valasa Devarlu', the age-old rural festival, has returned to a number of villages in the western mandals of Chittoor district in the face of drought conditions and only a few weeks left for the sowing season to close.
- 'Valasa Devarlu' is a traditional ritual, and some say a festival, dating back to the reign of emperor Srikrishna Devarayalu.
- During failure of rains and blight affecting the crops, and breakout of epidemics, the entire population of a village would abandon the households at dawn and retreat into the fields or tankbunds till dusk.
- The village elders would initiate special pujas to goddess 'Valasa Devaramma', an idol made of clay, consecrated under a tent or a tree.
- After having community lunch, the population would return to their village. The time is marked by dancing, singing and chit-chatting.
- This ritual is popular in about 50 villages Chittoor bordering Karnataka.
- Legend has it that during the regime of the Vijayanagara king, hundreds of villages had experienced pestilence – failure of rains, crops drying up and strange epidemics knocking their households.
- On the advice of a mystic, the people commenced the 'Valasa Devarlu' ritual, and this continues through generations till date.

2. Kerala to amend rules for elephant care

- The Kerala government will amend the rules to ensure that captive elephants in the state are looked after well, Minister for Forests has said.

- The amendment comes in the wake of the increasing harassment of elephants.
- It will ensure that captive elephants are looked after well and given proper diet and rest and the prescribed guidelines are followed while they are taken for public functions and festivals.
- The number of captive elephants in the State had come down from 521 to 507 as 14 deaths had been reported after the first ever census of captive elephants held on November 29 last year by the Forests and Wildlife Department.
- For implementing the guidelines, a mobile and web application has been prepared and online monitoring has commenced.
- A database of captive elephants was ready with the department on the basis of the findings of the census.
- The Minister said medical certificates had been made mandatory for captive elephants aged four years and above for parading at public functions.

3. Donate excess food, says Health Ministry

- The Union Health Ministry has suggested donating excess food and turning wet waste into compost as the way forward to sustainable development.
- The Ministry is now advocating and promoting a “zero food wastage” campaign in restaurants.
- “Display a clear message, which conveys this to all customers and staff members. Excess food must be distributed among the poor and kitchen wet waste must be turned into compost,” the Ministry said.
- The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that, every year, a third of food produced does not even reach the table.
- The UN estimates nearly 40% of the food produced in India is wasted or lost, and adds that food wastage in India is happening at every level, from harvesting, transporting and processing to packaging and consuming.
- Weddings, events, restaurants, hostels and houses are a major source of wastage of cooked food.
- “Doing this successfully requires action at every level As individuals, we can fight food waste by cooking less, sharing with neighbours, buying ugly produce, composting, and raising awareness among our communities. But systematic changes across major industries are also necessary to tackle the global issue of food waste,” it said.
- Union Health Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan advocating for the recently launched ‘Eat Right’ campaign noted that food is everyone’s responsibility.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Regional Anti-Terror Structure (RATS)

- The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), headquartered in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, is a permanent organ of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) which serves to promote cooperation of member states against the three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism. The Head of RATS is elected for a three-year term. Each member state also sends a permanent representative to RATS.
- The RATS was formed in the June 2004 summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) which was held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.
- RATS is engaged in furthering cooperation and ties between member countries on concerns of terrorism, security, drug trafficking, crime and cyberwarfare.
- In 2017, international current affairs magazine ‘The Diplomat’ reported that through the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation or SCO had foiled terror plots to the tune of 600.
- It also reported that through RATS, 500 terrorists were extradited.

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1) Which of the following statements are incorrect with respect to Payment Banks?

1. They can offer Credit Cards
2. They can sell Mutual Funds and insurance
3. They can accept NRI deposits

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

While payment banks can offer internet banking, sell Mutual Funds, sell insurance, offer bill payment services, they cannot extend loans, offer credit cards or accept NRI deposits.

Q2) Consider the following statements:

1. The Asian Tea Alliance was launched in India
2. It is an alliance of five tea growing and consuming countries

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:

The Asian Tea Alliance (ATA) is a union of five tea-growing and consuming countries. It was launched in Guizhou, China. India, China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Japan are the participating countries.

Q3) The "Lithium Triangle" recently in news is made of which of the following countries?

1. Argentina
2. Chile
3. Bolivia
4. Uruguay

Choose the correct option

- a. 1,2 and 3

- b. 1, 3 and 4
- c. 1, 2 and 4
- d. 2, 3 and 4

Answer: a

Explanation:

Lithium triangle is made up of South America's 3 largest lithium producers: Argentina, Chile and Bolivia. The lithium triangle possesses 54% of the world's lightest metal.

Q4) Consider the following statements:

1. P waves or Primary waves are longitudinal in nature
2. P waves cannot travel in all mediums

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: a

Explanation:

P waves can travel in all mediums. Their velocity depends on shear strength or elasticity of the material. Velocity of P waves in Solids > Liquids > Gases. They are also called as the longitudinal or compressional waves.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Buddhism constitutes a bridge between India and South Asia. Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words).
2. Discuss the evidences that support the Continental Drift Theory. (10 Marks, 150 Words).

