

14 Jun 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Modi, Xi meet in Bishkek, agree to speed up boundary talks

Context:

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the President of China Xi Jinping met in Bishkek, on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit.

Background:

- The border dispute dates back to the 1962 India-China war. Several rounds of talks have not yielded results.
- The 73-day Doklam standoff was triggered by Chinese troops' attempts to build a road close to

Indian border in an area also claimed by Bhutan in 2017.

- The status of bilateral relationship is being discussed since the Wuhan Summit of 2018 which came in the backdrop of tension following the 73-day Doklam standoff.
- Wuhan meet had helped improve strategic communications at all levels.
- The last round of talks were held in November 2018, where Ajit Doval of India met Wang Yi of China in Chengdu for the 21st round of talks between the Special Representatives.

Details:

- The SCO Summit will be held at Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan.
- Both the leaders agreed to expedite the dialogue on the India-China boundary issue and arrive at a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution.
- Special Representatives from each sides have been asked to meet and carry forward the discussions for an amicable solution.
- The need for regional cooperation and connectivity was highlighted by Mr. Xi. He also highlighted the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor as an example for expanding the India-China ties.
- BCIM is part of China's multibillion dollar Belt and Road Initiative.
- Both leaders discussed the plans for celebrating the 70th anniversary of the establishment of bilateral ties, with Mr. Modi proposing 70 events.
- China's contribution to the listing of Masood Azhar as a global terrorist at the United Nations Security Council was appreciated by Mr. Modi.
- The two leaders will meet in Osaka for G20 Summit and in BRICS Summit which are being interpreted as preparatory rounds for Mr. Xi's visit to India.

Way forward:

- India must proactively address the concerns in India-China bilateral ties.
- Reaping every opportunity that presents itself has become more crucial now, given that the global environment is in for even more challenging times (Ex: US-China trade war).
- Both the countries can work together in expanding cooperation channels, carrying out cooperation in investment, production capacity and tourism, expanding common interests, and jointly promoting regional connectivity,
- Working together, China and India will not only boost each other's development, but also contribute to peace, stability and prosperity of Asia and the world at large.

2. U.S. open to talks on GSP with India, says Pompeo

Context:

U.S. Secretary of State has hinted that it is possible to reinstate the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) for India.

Issue:

- Ties between the two countries have warmed considerably in the past two decades with more bilateral visits at the US presidential and senior official levels than ever before. However, relations are currently weighed down by a series of trade irritants.
- Effective June 5th, Trump ended India's designation as a beneficiary under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP).
- Under GSP, the US allows preferential duty-free entry for thousands of products from about 120-plus designated beneficiary countries.
- In addition to GSP, data localisation regulations and proposed policies have been a source of friction

between India and the U.S.

- Under threat of U.S. sanctions, India had, reluctantly, stopped oil imports from Venezuela and Iran.

Impact on the U.S:

- India is the largest beneficiary nation under the GSP and exported goods worth \$6.35 billion to the US.
- The GSP program, while ostensibly designed to help the developing countries, also benefited US small businesses as they could import materials from India without paying duties and, thereby, keep the cost of finished consumer products in the US low.
- The decision to remove India from the list of GSP beneficiaries could end up costing American businesses over \$300 million in additional tariffs.

Impact on India:

- India's total benefits from GSP tariff exemptions amounted to \$260 million in 2018, according to the data from the Office of the United States Trade Representative.
- The Indian government's reaction to Trump's decision to end India's tariff-free access to the US market has been unusually mature and cool.
- While for products having GSP benefits of 3% or more, exporters might find it difficult to absorb the loss.
- The impact will only be marginal on sectors such as processed food, leather, plastic, building material and tiles, engineering goods, and hand tools.
- Some exporters fear that the termination of GSP benefits could mean handing away the market share to low-cost producers in other GSP beneficiary countries.

Details:

- The Secretary of State said that the U.S. would push for free flow of data across borders, not just to help American companies, but to protect data and secure consumers' privacy.
- He expressed their will to help India establish secure communications networks — including 5G networks.
- He also made a pitch for U.S. crude oil and natural gas. The move comes in the backdrop of end of waivers to all eight countries importing oil from Iran to stop the imports immediately, failing which would attract sanctions from the U.S.
- US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross has also urged the Indian government to carry out reforms that will open up the economy and market.
- US's concerns that American companies based in the Indian market are confronted with both tariffs and non-tariff barriers, particularly including e-commerce rules, data localisation, restrictions, price controls on medical devices and pharmaceuticals other products were also expressed by Mr. Ross.
- "For the development of a viable commercial relationships, US companies need more predictability, more transparency or more consistency of regulations", Ross said.
- However, he also acknowledged the fact that India has been making significant improvement in ease of doing business ranking of the World Bank.

3. Netanyahu thanks Modi for vote against Palestinian group

Context:

Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu has thanked Mr. Narendra Modi for voting in favour of a decision introduced by the Jewish state that objected to granting consultative status to a Palestinian group at the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Background:

- In a rare move, India voted in favour of Israel in ECOSOC to deny the Palestinian non-governmental organisation 'Shahed' the observer status.
- Israel has said that the organisation did not disclose its ties with Hamas.
- The proposal made by the Palestinian NGO 'Shahed' to obtain observer status in the UN was rejected by a 28-14 vote.
- Palestinian Islamist group Hamas has been described as a terrorist organisation by many European countries.

Details:

- India has for the first voted on a resolution at the UN that is being perceived as pro-Israel.
- India's position on the Middle East Peace Process has been consistent and clear.
- India supports a negotiated solution resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognised borders, side by side at peace with Israel as endorsed in the Quartet Roadmap and relevant UNSC Resolutions.
- The ECOSOC vote, which took place at the UN, saw countries such as the U.S., France, Germany, India, Japan, the U.K., South Korea and Canada polling in favour of Israel, while China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and others voted against it.
- India has also always played a proactive role in garnering support for the Palestinian cause in multilateral fora.
- New Delhi had abstained during a voting at the UNHRC in 2015 on a resolution related to violence in Gaza which was seen as a "significant move" in Israel and attributed by many to the emerging strong relations between Mr Modi and Mr Netanyahu.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Centre reduces contribution rate for ESI

Context:

Starting July 1, both employee's and employer's contribution under the Employees' State Insurance (ESI) Act, which gives insured workers medical benefits among other facilities, would be reduced, the Centre said.

Details:

- The total contribution towards ESI was reduced from 6.5% of an employee's wages to 4%, with the employer's share cut to 3.25%, from 4.75%, and the employee's contribution lowered to 0.75% of wages, from 1.75%.

Benefits of the move:

- 6 crore employees and 12.85 lakh employers would benefit from this.
- The reduced rate of contribution will bring about a substantial relief to workers under the ESI scheme.
- It will bring more and more workforce into the formal sector.
- The financial liability on employers would also be reduced, leading to improved viability of the establishments, increased ease of doing business and likely improved compliance with the Act.

Rising cover

There has been a substantial rise in the number of people being brought under the ESI scheme and the number of employers who opted for it



2015-16

2.1 crore

People insured under the scheme

₹11,455 crore

Contribution amount

7.83 lakh

Employers who opted for the scheme

2018-19

3.6 crore

People insured under the scheme

₹22,279 crore

Contribution amount

12.85 lakh

Employers who opted for the scheme

However, a member of the Employees' State Insurance Corporation's Standing Committee and a representative of the RSS-affiliated Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh opined that the reduction in contribution rates was a reason for concern.

C. GS3 Related

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. India will have its own space station, says ISRO chief Sivan

Context:

Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), announced that India plans to have its own space station, and modalities for it would be worked out after Gaganyaan - the first manned mission.

Details:

- The ambition is to launch a small module for micro gravity experiments.
- A detailed report would be submitted to the government in this regard.
- It was told that the proposed space station is envisaged to weigh 20 tonnes
- It would serve as a facility where astronauts can stay for 15-20 days.
- It would be placed in an orbit 400 km above earth.
- The time frame for launch is 5-7 years after Gaganyaan is launched.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. In Arunachal Pradesh, the Asiatic golden cat wears new colours

Context:

Scientists have found that the Asiatic golden cats' coat comes in six types: cinnamon, golden, gray, melanistic, ocelot and tightly rosette.

Asiatic golden cat:

- The Asian golden cat (*Catopuma temminckii*) is a wild cat native to the northeastern Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia.
- It is found across eastern Nepal through north-eastern India to Indonesia.
- Conservation status as per IUCN Red List of threatened species: near threatened.
- Asian golden cats in Sumatra are reddish brown in colour.
- Black ones were recorded in the eastern Himalayas.
- Golden, reddish brown and grey cats were recorded in north-eastern India and Bhutan
- A spotted Asian golden cat with large rosettes on shoulders, flanks and hips was described for the first time from China in 1872. This morph was recorded in China, Bhutan and in West Bengal's Buxa Tiger Reserve.

Details:

- The recent discovery in Arunachal Pradesh may be the world's greatest number of different-colored wild cat species ever reported in one area.
- Colour morphs are basically occurrence of two or more discrete colour forms of the animal within a population, due to a genetic mutation. For example- Black panther is a color morph of the common leopard.
- They are thought to arise from random genetic mutations and take hold in the population through natural selection.
- These color morphs are not classified as different sub-species as they may live in the same area and even inter-breed.
- If they do not interbreed then this could represent the beginning of the evolutionary process into separate subspecies.
- The wide variation displayed in the cat's coats enables them to occupy different habitats at different elevations from wet tropical lowland forests to alpine scrubs and provides camouflage while hunting different prey such as tropical pheasants or a rabbit-like mammal called Himalayan pika.
- It is also suspected by scientists that the phenomenon is driven by competition with other big cats such as tigers and clouded leopards.
- Being dark colored in the mountains helps the cats conceal themselves from their prey making them better predators.

Significance of the discovery:

- According to evolutionary theory, if a colour morph is not beneficial for a species survival over time, it should die out in the population.
- The fact that there are so many different colour morphs persisting in Dibang Valley shows there are some ecological advantages to the variety of colours.
- Understanding how this phenomenon takes hold in a population could help scientists to understand how quickly species can adapt and evolve to changing environments.
- This would help scientists to gain better insight into the resilience capacity of the species to climate change or habitat degradation and destruction, which is also the reason for decreasing population of these species.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. City on edge

What's in the news?

- The recent mass protests in Hong Kong against an extradition Bill the city legislative council is planning has brought the focus back on the difficult relationship between the territory's Beijing-appointed authorities and its pro-democracy movement.

Historical Background:

- When Hong Kong was handed over to China in 1997, both sides had agreed that the city would remain a semi-autonomous region with the Basic Law for 50 years.
- When the extradition agreements were finalised, Taiwan and mainland China were excluded because of the different criminal justice systems that existed in those regions.
- However, China has steadily tried to deepen its influence.
- In the case of the extradition Bill, two members of the Politburo Standing Committee have called for its approval. But Hong Kong has always resisted top-down changes.
- In the year 2003, the city's first Chief Executive, Tung Chee-hwa's bid to pass stringent security legislation triggered mass protests, which forced him to back down.
- Next, in 2014, the local authorities' proposal to change the city's electoral system attracted more protests. In less than five years they are back: a million people assembled at the legislative council recently, demanding withdrawal of the extradition Bill.
- Experts opine that these incidents suggest a fundamental contradiction between the way Hong Kong is ruled by the pro-Beijing elite and the expectations of civil society.
- As a matter of fact, the local authorities' insistence on going ahead with unpopular measures such as the extradition Bill is only sharpening this contradiction.

Editorial Analysis:

- The legislation, championed by Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam, will allow the local government to extradite a suspect to places with which the city has no formal extradition accord, including mainland China.
- Lam argues it is needed to close a loophole in the criminal justice system that, she says, has let criminals evade trial elsewhere by taking refuge in Hong Kong.

What do the protestors think?

- However, the protestors see the Bill as an attempt by Beijing to increase its influence in matters to do with the city.
- The extradition law would practically allow the city authorities to send any suspect wanted by Beijing to mainland China, where the judiciary is unlikely to go against the wishes of the establishment.
- Activists point to the abduction of Beijing's critics and the growing authoritarian nature of the city

government, with instances of elected lawmakers being disqualified, activists banned from running for office, a political party prohibited and a foreign journalist expelled.

- As a matter of fact, they fear that the new legislation would further erode the freedoms people enjoy under the Basic Law, the city's mini-constitution.

Concluding Remarks:

- Beijing should reach out to the people of Hong Kong, alleviate their fears and concerns and assure them of their rights guaranteed under the "one country two systems" model.
- Else, it is feared that Hong Kong is likely to remain caught in a cycle of protests and repression.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Faint glimmer

Editorial Analysis:

- It is important to note that industrial activity in the new financial year appears to have started on a healthier note than the trend witnessed in the last quarter of the previous fiscal, the government's latest quick estimates show.

A Look at the numbers:

- Industrial output rose 3.4% in April, 2019 buoyed by a generally broad-based revival that saw electricity, mining and even manufacturing post faster growth compared to the listless performance witnessed in the January-March period.
- As a matter of fact, manufacturing output growth, which had decelerated sharply from the pace of 8.2% in October 2018 to a revised level of less than 0.1% in March 2019, rebounded to a four-month high of 2.8%.
- A look at the use-based classification reveals that all six segments were in positive territory, with only infrastructure and construction goods marking a slowdown from both the earlier year and March 2019 levels and providing cause for some concern.
- Hearteningly, capital goods, a sector that serves as a closely tracked proxy for business spending intentions, posted a 2.5% expansion, snapping three straight months of contraction.
- To be sure, the growth even in this key area trails the pace of 9.8% that was reported in April 2018 by a wide margin, and it would be premature to celebrate the single reading until a more abiding trend emerges in the coming months.
- Experts point out that it would be interesting to see what growth-supportive policy measures Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman unveils in the newly elected government's and her own maiden budget.
- The recent data release from the government was, however, less reassuring, revealing as it did an acceleration in retail inflation to a seven-month high.

A Look at a few more specifics:

- Price gains measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) quickened to 3.05% in May 2019, from April's 2.99%, as prices of vegetables and pulses jumped by 23% and 10% respectively in urban areas, contributing to a bump-up in food inflation.
- It is important to note that the Reserve Bank of India had recently flagged the risks to the inflation trajectory from factors including spikes in vegetable prices and international fuel prices and marginally raised its CPI inflation projection for the fiscal first half to a 3% to 3.1% range.

Concluding Remarks:

- While the inflation reading remains below the RBI's inflation threshold of 4%, policymakers would need to keep a close watch on price trends, especially as global energy prices continue to remain volatile amid heightened geopolitical tensions in West Asia and uncertainty on the demand outlook owing to the ongoing China-U.S. trade spat.
- Lastly, while the monsoon is forecast to be normal this year (2019), the actual rainfall and its spatial distribution will have a significant bearing on agricultural output and food prices.
- Thus, a fiscally prudent budget, with incentives to support the nascent industrial recovery, would surely tick several boxes at one go.

Category: EDUCATION

1. Do exams throttle India's education system?

A Look at the Issue being analyzed:

- The importance accorded to school-leaving examinations in India puts enormous pressure on students to score the highest possible marks. As a matter of fact, bagging a rank among lakhs of students is accepted widely as a mark of excellence. This examination system is something that reminds us of the beginnings of the modern education system in India.
- However, an important question arises: How scientific is the examination system at determining the progress of students? This is an area which will be discussed in the following analysis.

Editorial Analysis:

A Perspective on the current school-leaving examination:

(a) Examination System: A barrier more than an enabler?

- It is important to note that the school-leaving examination was designed in the latter half of the 19th century as a way to determine who can be selected for further education, which was very scarce at that time, and also for lower-level jobs in offices.
- Thus, it was basically a means of elimination. And it has remained that all the way up to now.
- As a matter of fact, the Grade 10 exam, for instance, fails a large number of children and stops them from going any further.
- This is a kind of structural arrangement in a system in which secondary education is not very widespread and higher secondary education is even less so.
- **Opportunities for further education at the undergraduate level or various kinds of technical education are also relatively scarce.**
- So, the exam system acts as a custodian which doesn't permit a vast number of children to go forward.
- Further, it has acquired its legitimacy over the century, and therefore it is not questioned, but it has very little scientific basis, and it is not a system of any kind of valid assessment of the potential of a young person.
- Rather, it is a means of keeping out [children]. In what manner can you be stopped from going further? **Grade 10 is the most draconian barrier; Grade 12 also fails a large number of children.**
- That is one function of the examination system.

(b) An illusion of equal opportunity?

- Critics have opined that the other big function of the examination system is to create an illusion of

equal opportunity in an otherwise highly unequal society.

- It is in the exam that all children — no matter what their background is, or whether they study in a posh school or a poor school — face the same test of three hours.
- Their names are turned into roll numbers.
- The identity of paper-setters and evaluators is not revealed. Thus, confidentiality enhances the legitimacy of a situation where children from contrasting circumstances are given an equal-looking opportunity.

(c) A well-known problem:

- Experts opine that the problem is well-known for quite some time.
- The first mention of the educational system being throttled by exams was in 1904 in the Indian Educational Policy, at the time formulated by the Governor General in Council.
- After that this was mentioned in every commission and report.
- Critics opine that the government always tries to say that exams should be reformed and something should be done about it.
- However, as far as reliability of children's understanding, acquiring knowledge and ways of formulating knowledge are concerned, these critics don't think that the examination system leaves much scope.
- As a matter of fact, it is important to note that children do acquire snippets of information, but whether they construct that into knowledge remains seriously doubtful.
- Some experts feel that this is also an outcome of intense competition in society.
- For example, **as long as the school structure and the structure of the curriculum remains as it is today, where every child has to finish certain kinds of learning in a given time, and at the same time the possibility of children exploring on their own is limited, it seems that the exam system cannot be changed.**
- If one changes these two things — the structure of the school and the curriculum — and somehow an alternative way is found which ameliorates the high competition in the parents' mind, there is a possibility of reforming the system in such a manner that it is more insightful and less stressful.

India's exam system in comparison with the systems of other countries:

- Our system compares very poorly with the evaluation and assessment systems which are in place in other societies, including European and North American societies as well as China.
- These societies have reformed their evaluation systems from within by improving teachers' understanding of what they are looking for in a child right from the start.
- However, in our case, we don't equip our teachers with a deep understanding of how children learn and how to assess a child's growth.
- Our system right from the beginning becomes intensely competitive and stressful and starts promoting cramming as a way to move forward with high marks.
- A recent attempt made in the Right to Education (RTE) Act to introduce Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) was an important step but this was not welcomed by a large number of schools and State authorities.
- And the idea that the RTE introduced — that we will not have a Board examination up to Grade 8 — has now been amended by Parliament.
- States are now once again free to introduce a Board exam. Some have already moved towards that by reintroducing at Grade 5 and Grade 8 levels an exam that can classify children into pass and fail categories. This was the old system.
- **This reversal of a progressive step that the RTE had taken also shows how accustomed our system is to this old and rigid practice of examining children one against the other.** And how dependent it is on certain time-honoured skills like cramming and preparing for an exam through coaching.
- In comparison, it is important to point out that European systems, including the British system on

which we were modelled originally, have moved on to far more holistic and humanistic ways of assessing each child's own growth trajectory right from the beginning.

- **Even where there are public exams, they are taken with much greater care for objectivity and justice for every child.**
- **The GCSE [General Certificate of Secondary Education] in Britain, for example, makes sure that each child's work and performance gets a fair chance to be assessed properly by more than one evaluator.**
- Furthermore, internal reforms in the system in these directions have taken place in all those societies and they have been ignored in India.

Model answers coming in the way of students creatively answering an exam question.

(a) How it affects the process?

- It is important to note that these model answers are prepared to provide the evaluator with a yardstick to see how many marks will be given to a child's answer.
- So, since the whole process is so hurried, the evaluator looks at the model answer, and looks for an exact replication of that in the child's answer sheet.
- If a child has written something sensible in slightly different words — for instance, instead of the word 'architecture', if a child has used the word 'structure' — the evaluator will strike off a mark simply because the model answer says the correct answer should use the word 'architecture'.
- **The model answer is rigidly applied** and thereby the chances of any justice being done to a child's original answer which carries the child's own creative use of language or her own way of expressing something is likely to be ignored — not just ignored but punished and evaluated poorly.
- Sometimes so poorly that gross injustice is done to the child's answer.

(b) International Perspective:

- In comparison, when we look at the assessment systems in Finland, the U.K., and some States in the U.S., one or two things stand out clearly. **A kind of continuous assessment which feeds back into the teaching-learning process and a kind of taking care of the child's continuous progress is in place.**
- The second and more important thing, perhaps, is that in the public exam, the questions are on concepts, critical thinking and various ways of looking at the avenues of knowledge, and [there are] criteria for judging the veracity of that knowledge.
- However, the Indian emphasis is on speedy reproduction of information. **It seems that the approach of looking at the conceptual side and critical analysis and justification is a much more constructive and better way for the child's learning.**
- Lastly, our system is rigid. We never give adequate time for these ideas to take root in an institution. We think that a document when prepared and given to the Board, it [the Board] has the capability to translate that document into action, which is not the case.
- Similarly, we never pay attention to helping the teacher understand the new system.
- It is important to note that giving certain words and ideas to people is one thing, and exploring with teachers what their views, assumptions are, and what the problems are with that understanding and how to move to a better understanding has never happened.

Looking at the draft National Education Policy 2019: Shifting to modular exams- Is this actual reform?

- This idea has been given many times earlier.
- The National Institute of Open Schooling does provide the facility for taking one subject at a time, when completing your examination process over three-four years if necessary.
- Some experts don't think this idea is going to make any impact on this very highly competitive

system.

- In fact, the draft policy has ignored a number of very good reforms within the various Boards that have been recommended over the last 20-25 years.
- Further, many of the Boards don't have adequate staff, enough academic faculty to monitor their own procedures.
- Many of the State Boards are actually in very poor shape as far as their academic infrastructure is concerned.
- **Even the CBSE and ICSE operate as bureaucratic, mechanical set-ups.**
- Unfortunately, the policy draft doesn't even look at this phenomenon of improving the institutional functioning of the Boards.
- It is important to note that exam reform doesn't come alone in the draft education policy; it comes along with the changes recommended in structure, curriculum, choice of subjects.
- Further, a lot is written about curriculum reform. However, at this moment, in the first reading, it was somewhat confused, and talks of too many things simultaneously and repetitively.
- **For example, if we give more flexibility to children at the secondary level [the draft education policy proposes to do away with secondary-senior secondary distinction] with eight semesters and around 40 courses, for 24 courses students should take Board exams.**
- The draft education policy also says that the exam will shift from testing rote memory to basic concepts and their relevance to life, situations and problem-solving. Moreover, if the bulk of the recommendations are implemented, then there seems to be a possibility that we will get a kinder and better assessment system.

Concluding Remarks:

- Experts point out that on the curricular reforms to the subjects, for example, there are 14 or 15 different kinds of courses and subjects for 6th to 8th standard students, however, there doesn't seem to be that much room in the time table.
- So, at this moment it seems the situation is not very clear.
- However, as far as examinations are concerned, if the policy understands what they are writing, the emphasis is more on the fundamental concepts in subjects and more on understanding. Through a modular kind of Board exam, it might help.

F. Tidbits

1. Movement to stop water privatisation

- In order to stop privatisation of water, a group of activists and conservationists have launched "Marching Blue".
- The activists undertake a series of 'Jal Yatras' in Rajasthan and neighbouring States.
- The activists have demanded for steps to address the real issues confronting the water sector.
- The trust deed for establishing the international organisation's State unit was signed.
- Environmentalist Rajendra Singh, known as the Waterman of India, and Gandhian activist and Ekta Parishad president P.V. Rajagopal have extended support to the movement to protect water rights of people and generate awareness on conservation of water among the local communities.
- The plan for privatisation of water has been termed unnecessary and unwarranted by both.
- It was expressed that the global policies for privatisation of water resources and supply had led to immense suffering among people because of lack of accountability.
- The Ramon Magsaysay Award winner said the water privatisation model adopted in Maharashtra had failed because of high costs and infringement of public rights.

2. More English medium sections in Karnataka schools

- The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has decided to allow those government schools offering English as a medium of instruction to start additional sections if the demand is more than the number of seats available.
- Schools can start additional sections only if there are trained teachers available to instruct students in English.
- This academic year, the department introduced English-medium sections on a pilot basis in 1,000 government primary schools.
- The government's decision to teach students in English was a controversial one, which was opposed by Kannada writers, academicians, and a section of the elected representatives.
- However, parents as well as the School Development and Monitoring Committee have submitted requisitions to officials seeking additional English-medium sections in schools.
- Parents attributed the demand to the fact that it was no longer possible for them to obtain a seat under the RTE quota in private schools in most neighbourhoods.

G. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. The Asian golden cat is a wild cat native to the North-Eastern Indian subcontinent.
2. They are classified as vulnerable in the IUCN Red List of threatened species.

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:

The Asian golden cat is a wild cat native to the North-Eastern Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. It is found across eastern Nepal through north-eastern India to Indonesia. Conservation status as per IUCN Red List of threatened species: near threatened.

Q2. Consider the following statements:

2. Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) is a body involved in regulating and developing the insurance and reinsurance industry in India.
3. It was created on the recommendations of the Malhotra Committee Report.
4. It is headquartered at Delhi.

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

- a. 1 only

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) is an apex regulatory body involved in regulating and developing the insurance and reinsurance industry in India. It was constituted as a statutory body as per the provisions of Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act 1999. The body was created on the recommendations of the Malhotra Committee Report. All the companies wanting to run the insurance business in India are to be registered with the IRDAI. IRDAI is headquartered in Hyderabad, Telangana.

Q3. Who is known as the Father of Communal Electorate in India?

- a. Lord Ripon
- b. Lord Mountbatten
- c. Lord Willingdon
- d. Lord Minto

Answer: d

Explanation:

Indian Council Act of 1909 also popularly known as Morley-Monto Reform introduced separate electorates on the basis of religion. Therefore Lord Minto came to be known as Father of Communal Electorate in India.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Do you think integrating early child care into the draft National Education Policy 2019 is the panacea for India's falling standards in the Education Sector. Critically examine.
2. What is 'Peri-Urban agriculture'? Elaborate on its contribution in dealing with climate change. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

