

18 June 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Iran to breach uranium stockpile limit

Context:

Iran has said it would surpass its uranium stockpile limit set under the nuclear deal with world powers.

Background:

- In 2015, Iran agreed a long-term deal on its nuclear programme called the “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)” with a group of world powers, the P5+1 - the US, UK, France, China,

Russia and Germany.

- Under the JCPOA
 - Iran's uranium stockpile was reduced by 98% to 300kg
 - Iran said it would redesign its heavy-water nuclear reactor, so it could not produce any weapons-grade plutonium, and that all spent fuel would be sent out of the country as long as the modified reactor exists.
 - Iran was also not permitted to build additional heavy-water reactors or accumulate any excess heavy water until 2031, as per the nuclear deal.
 - Iran also agreed to implement the Additional Protocol to their IAEA Safeguards Agreement, which allows inspectors to access any site anywhere in the country they deem suspicious.
 - Sanctions previously imposed by the UN, US and EU were lifted and Iran gained access to more than \$100bn in assets frozen overseas. It was able to resume selling oil on international markets and using the global financial system for trade.
- However, in May 2018, US President Donald Trump abandoned the deal.
- The latest developments come at a time of high tension in the Middle East, with the US accusing Iran of being behind suspected attacks that left two oil tankers ablaze in the Gulf of Oman. Iran has denied any involvement.

Details:

- Limit on its stockpile of enriched uranium was set under the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.
- Its atomic energy agency has announced that it has quadrupled production of the material, which is used to make reactor fuel and potentially nuclear weapons.
- Iran's decision has turned up the pressure, after the U.S. walked away from the pact last year.
- Iran also mentioned that it would reverse its decision once the other parties to the deal would live upto its commitments.

Repercussions of the move:

- The UK, France and Germany have warned Iran not to violate the 2015 deal, stating that they would have no choice but to impose sanctions on Iran if it would not oblige to the limits set under the nuclear deal.
- The sanctions were lifted in return for limits on the Iranian nuclear programme.
- There are speculations that Washington and Tehran are on the verge of a military clash.
- Mr Trump wants to renegotiate the deal and broaden it to curb Iran's ballistic missile programme and its involvement in conflicts around the Middle East.
- Iran is adamant that the deal cannot be renegotiated.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. EU leaders to debate push for zero emissions by 2050

Context:

EU leaders have announced that they would discuss setting a target of zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Details:

- A draft of the EU's strategic agenda for the next six years emphasises the urgency to step up the

action to manage the existential threat of climate change.

- European Union leaders meeting in Brussels will debate the 2050 target of “climate neutrality”.
- The environmental group WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) says that this has the support of 16 of the EU’s 28 countries.
- The EU aims at engaging in an in-depth transformation of its own economy and society to achieve climate neutrality.
- EU countries want more debate on financing the shift from an economy running on fossil fuels, especially those in Eastern Europe, to one driven by clean energy.
- The growing stress on climate action comes after the elections to the European Parliament where Green parties made substantial gains.
- Under the 2015 Paris climate change treaty, the EU pledged to reduce its carbon emissions by 40% below 1990 levels by 2030.

2. India to host UN meet on land degradation in September

Context:

India is set to host the 14th session of the Conference of Parties (COP-14) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) for the first time.

United Nations Conventions:

The United Nations has three major Conventions:

1. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
2. Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
3. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

UNCCD:

- United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification is a Convention to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought through national action programs incorporating long-term strategies with the support of international cooperation and partnership arrangements.
- UNCCD stems from a direct recommendation of agenda 21 one of the five documents of Rio Conference of 1992.
- 196 countries are members to the convention.
- The Secretariat of UNCCD is located in Bonn in Germany.
- It is the first and only internationally legally binding framework set up to address the problem of desertification and other land issues.
- The convention addresses desertification and land issues, to be specific, arid areas, semi-arid areas and dry sub-humid areas, known as dry lands where some of the most vulnerable ecosystems and peoples can be found.
- The convention aims at linking environment and development to sustainable land management. Bottom-up approach is followed, i.e, local people’s participation in combating land degradation and desertification is encouraged.
- As the dynamics of climate, biodiversity and land are intimately connected, the UNCCD collaborates closely with two other Rio Conventions; United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to meet these complex challenges with an integrated approach and the optimum use of the available natural resources.
- India became a signatory to UNCCD on October 14, 1994 and ratified it on December 17, 1996.
- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) is the nodal Ministry for the Convention.

Issues:

- India faces a severe problem of land degradation.
- A 2016 report by the ISRO states, 29% of India's land (in 2011-13) was degraded.

Details:

- The session will see participation from at least 5,000 delegates from nearly 197 countries.
- Ahead of the COP-14, the Union Environment Minister launched a flagship project, part of a larger international initiative called the Bonn Challenge, to enhance India's capacity for forest landscape restoration (FLR).
- It will be implemented in Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Nagaland and Karnataka, during a pilot phase of three-and-a-half years and will eventually be scaled across the country.
- The Bonn Challenge is a global effort to bring 150 million hectares of the world's deforested and degraded land under restoration by 2020, and 350 million hectares by 2030.
- The project will aim to develop and adapt the best practices and monitoring protocols for the country, and build capacity within the five pilot States.
- India will take over the COP presidency from China for two years until the next COP in 2021.

Category: ECONOMY**1. Kovalam-Mahe boat service to be operational by 2020****Context:**

Boat services will be made operational from Kovalam to Mahe by May 2020 as part of making the 633-km West Coast Canal (WCC), the arterial waterway through 11 districts of Kerala.

Details:

- Development of the National Waterway was one of the key election promises of the LDF.
- Shifting of at least 5% of cargo from roads to the waterway in five years has been mandated by the Chief Minister.
- Solar boats that can carry a minimum of 25-30 people at a time would be launched.
- The government is working on clearing, desilting and cleaning the tunnels.

2. Financial stability is a key theme for monetary policy**Context:**

The RBI Governor has highlighted the importance of the central bank's role to maintain financial stability, in the backdrop of liquidity crisis of non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) threatening to spillover to other sectors.

Details:

- The Governor said that despite the absence of explicit mandate of the monetary policy to maintain financial stability, it would be the underlying theme.
- Adding, that the Primary objective of monetary policy is to maintain price stability, while keeping growth in focus, he further said that the price stability, which is the explicit mandate of the RBI's monetary policy, may not be sufficient for financial stability while emphasising the importance of financial stability in the current global financial scenario.

- Moreover, this role has been restated as per the amendment in the RBI Act in May 2016, according to which “the primary objective of the monetary policy is to maintain price stability, while keeping in mind the objective of growth”.
- Referring to the challenges faced by the shadow banks, it was reiterated that the RBI would not hesitate to take the required steps to maintain financial stability.
- It was made clear that the endeavour of RBI is to ensure price stability under the flexible inflation targeting regime and simultaneously focus on growth when inflation is under control.
- He also emphasised on the high policy attention accorded by the RBI to reform both banking and non-banking sectors, adding that it has been taking steps to strengthen the regulatory and supervisory frameworks to increase the resilience of the banking system.

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E. Editorials

Category: ECONOMY

1. Serious concerns over Bt brinjal

Editorial Analysis:

- A month ago, **Bt brinjal** genetically modified (GM) to resist the brinjal fruit and shoot borer (an insect), was found growing illegally in Haryana.
- This was a different Bt brinjal from the one developed by the Indian company, Mahyco, in which Monsanto has a 26% stake.
- It is important to note that **Mahyco’s Bt brinjal** has been under a moratorium since 2010.
- Even as the government clamped down on the illegal GM crop, some farmer groups have demanded the release of Mahyco’s Bt brinjal and other GM crops in the regulatory pipeline.
- It is true that the moratorium was imposed by the then Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh, despite being cleared by the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), the apex regulatory body for GM crops.
- However, an important question arises: Is Bt brinjal actually ready for release?

A Look at the impacts:

- Before imposing the moratorium, Mr. Ramesh had sought comments from a range of experts and concerned groups on environmental impacts and implications for consumers and farmers. Despite demands from activists and social scientists, the Ministry of Agriculture has not offered evidence that Bt brinjal will benefit farmers.
- Ironically, the **National Institute of Agricultural Economics and Policy Research** anticipates that if Bt brinjal performs as Mahyco proposes, brinjal output will increase and retail prices will fall, benefiting consumers far more than farmers.
- It is important to note that the report ignores the scenario that companies might charge premium prices for Bt brinjal seeds, in which case farmers may not benefit at all.

(a) Divided opinions on issues of biosafety:

- On biosafety issues, scientific opinion is divided down the middle.
- While some scientists such as Deepak Pental of Delhi University were in favour of releasing Bt

brinjal, others such as the late Pushpa Bhargava, entomologist David Andow of the U.S., and the then Vice-Chancellors of the Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University and the Dr. Y.S.R. Horticultural University highlighted crucial deficiencies in the characterisation of Bt brinjal, and in the environmental impacts assessment.

- The ecologist, **Madhav Gadgil**, warned of contamination of India's diverse brinjal varieties. **It is important to note that biodiversity is critical for nutrition and sustainability**, and the government's own task force on biotechnology (2004) had recommended that no GM crop be allowed in biodiversity-rich areas.
- Further, a majority of the technical expert committee appointed by the Supreme Court (in the public interest litigations over GM crops), recommended a ban on genetically modifying those crops for which India is a centre of origin or diversity.
- Brinjal happens to be such a crop.

(b) A Perspective on Nutrition issues:

- In terms of nutrition, there seem to be some significant differences between Bt and ordinary brinjal.
- Many health researchers and professionals, and scientists such as immunologist David Schubert of the Salk Institute, U.S. and Suman Sahai of Gene Campaign have argued that **Bt brinjal poses risks to human health**.
- Furthermore, M.S. Swaminathan and V.M. Katoch, then the Director General of the Indian Council of Medical Research, asked for **long-term (chronic) toxicity studies, before taking any decision on Bt brinjal**.
- As a matter of fact, they asked that these be conducted independently, instead of relying exclusively on Mahyco for data.

(c) Finding no support from State governments:

- Bt brinjal found no support from State governments.
- Kerala and Uttarakhand asked for a ban on GM crops.
- States with substantial brinjal cultivation, i.e. West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar opposed the release pending rigorous, extensive testing.
- As did Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and undivided Andhra Pradesh. These States were ruled by parties across the political spectrum.

(d) Findings of key committees:

- Furthermore, in 2012 and 2017, respectively, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on Science & Technology, Environment and Forests assessed the GM controversy. Both committees expressed grave concerns about lapses in the regulatory system.
- In fact, the Committee on Agriculture was so alarmed by the irregularities in the assessment of Bt brinjal, that it recommended "a thorough probe by a team of eminent independent scientists and environmentalists".
- Unfortunately, this thorough probe never happened.
- Further, both committees endorsed labelling GM foods to protect a consumer's right to know.
- However, since retailing is largely unorganised, enforcing truthful labelling is a logistical nightmare, and the Ministry of Agriculture believes it is impractical.
- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India has only recently begun putting labelling rules into place.

(e) An absence of a scientific consensus:

- In sum, there is a moratorium on Bt brinjal because there is no scientific consensus on its safety and efficacy, and because the States and Parliament have profound misgivings about the regulatory

system.

- Further, in recent years, pests have developed resistance to Bt cotton, forcing farmers to spray lethal pesticides.
- This led to over 50 deaths by pesticide-poisoning in Vidarbha in 2017.
- It is important to note that a GM-based strategy of pest control is unsustainable, all the more so since farmers, already pressed for land, ignore the government's recommendation to plant refuge crops.

Concluding Remarks:

- Experts opine that we as a society cannot wish all these concerns away simply because some farmers want to try Bt brinjal, or farmers in Bangladesh have been cultivating Bt brinjal since 2013.
- Farmers do not and cannot assess long-term impacts on ecology and health, which needs more rigorous and sensitive studies than those conducted so far.
- Yet, in the nine years since the moratorium, there has hardly been any progress toward addressing these issues.
- If anything, the problem of sustainable, remunerative farming has become more acute, and alternative strategies such as organic and zero budget natural farming, which do not allow GM seeds, are gaining ground.
- Experts point out that at the very least, the government must detail the steps it has taken since 2010 to address the scientific lacunae, clarify precisely how Bt brinjal will benefit farmers, put the infrastructure to ensure labelling into place, and demonstrate how Bt brinjal fits in with sustainable farming and biodiversity conservation.
- In conclusion, as things stand, Bt brinjal runs counter to the framework for agricultural development and farmers' well-being devised by parliamentary panels and the government's own task forces and expert committees.

2. Gloves off on trade

What's in the news?

- The government of India's recent decision to finally go ahead and impose retaliatory tariffs on 29 U.S. goods with effect from June 16th, 2019 almost a year after it first announced them, **unambiguously signals that on trade India has decided to join issue with President Donald Trump's protectionist administration.**

Editorial Analysis:

- As a matter of fact, what clearly emerges is the fact that the trigger for the move was the U.S. withdrawal of duty-free access to Indian exporters under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) from June 5th, 2019.

The Position taken by the Trump Administration:

- It is important to note that Mr. Trump chose to go ahead and proclaim on May 31st, 2019 that he was terminating India's designation as a beneficiary developing country over Delhi's failure to assure the U.S. of "equitable and reasonable access to its markets", notwithstanding the fact that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his new Council of Ministers had just been sworn in the previous day.
- Experts opine that this reflects an unwillingness to meet India halfway on trade.
- Not that there had been no warning lights flashing. As a matter of fact, on a visit to New Delhi in early May, 2019, U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross had made no bones about the administration's perception of India being a "tariff king" that adopted "overly restrictive market access barriers".
- As a matter of fact, Mr. Ross had also threatened India with "consequences" were it to impose the

retaliatory tariffs.

- Now, the government led by Mr. Modi and his key interlocutors on trade, including the new External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, have sent a strong message that India is not going to be compelled to negotiate under duress.

Understanding the position taken by India:

- The change in tack on India's part also indicates that it is done, at least for now, with a more conciliatory stance after it had kept delaying the imposition of retaliatory tariffs over the past 12 months.
- Furthermore, during that period **India had not only to contend with the withdrawal of GSP status but also had to, under a U.S. ultimatum, terminate its imports of vital crude oil from Iran, with which it has had a long-standing and strategic relationship.**
- As a matter of fact, to be sure, **India has much at stake in ensuring that economic ties with its largest trading partner do not end up foundering on the rocky shoals of the current U.S. administration's approach to trade and tariffs, one that China has referred to as "naked economic terrorism".**

Concluding Remarks:

- An important point to be kept in mind is the fact that **trade is not, and must not be viewed as, a zero-sum game.**
- To that end, the government ought to review with flexibility some of its decisions such as the data localisation requirements and the new e-commerce regulations that have become a sore point with the U.S. side, including business investors.
- Lastly, Indian trade negotiators also need to impress upon their American counterparts the importance of ensuring that market access for Indian services exporters remains free of new, restrictive visa curbs.
- In conclusion, the counter-tariffs have now lent the Indian side a bargaining chip that the U.S. Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, will have to grapple with during his visit later during the month of June, 2019.

3. The litchi link?

What's in the news?

- Experts opine that the recent death of over 90 children in about a month in the Muzaffarpur district of north Bihar due to low blood sugar level could have easily been prevented with some foresight and early care.
- Six years ago, a two-member team invited by the State government suspected that a toxin (methylenecyclopropylglycine, MCPG, also known as "**hypoglycin A**") which is naturally present in litchi fruit was responsible for the mysterious deaths. A large Indo-U.S team confirmed this in 2017.

Editorial Analysis:

- This two-member team that was invited by the State government six years ago, found that undernourished children who ate the fruit during the day and went to bed on an empty stomach presented with serious illness early the next morning.

(a) What did this two-member team do?

- As a matter of fact, in 2014, the team saved 74% of sick children through a simple intervention. This simple intervention involved infusing 10% dextrose within four hours of the onset of illness.

- The recommended prevention strategy — making sure that no child goes to bed without eating a meal — adopted from 2015 ensured a sharp drop in the number of children falling sick.

(b) Blame that can be apportioned on the state government:

- Experts opine that it is appalling that this year (2019) the government failed to raise awareness on this strategy.
- Worse, some doctors came up with alternative explanations for the illness and even pointed to the heat wave.

(c) The problems that litchi can cause:

- It is important to note that while the most common causes of acute encephalitis syndrome are traced to a bacteria or a virus and it takes at least a few days before presenting serious symptoms and deaths, the toxin in litchi causes serious problems overnight.
- Next, it is also important to note that while well-nourished children who eat the fruit remain unaffected even if they go to bed on an empty stomach, the under-nourished ones are at grave risk.
- Blood glucose falls sharply causing severe brain malfunction (encephalopathy), leading to seizures and coma, and death in many cases.

Why do under-nourished children suffer?

- Under-nourished children lack sufficient glucose reserve in the form of glycogen and the production of glucose from non-carbohydrate source is blocked midway leading to low blood sugar level.
- This causes serious brain function derangement and seizures.
- While 5% dextrose infusion serves the purpose in cases of general low blood sugar, children suffering from acute hypoglycaemic encephalopathy can be saved only by infusing 10% dextrose within four hours of illness onset.
- Recovery is rapid and complete if 10% dextrose is infused within the golden hours.
- Infusing a higher concentration of dextrose is necessary to completely stop the attempt by the body to produce glucose from non-carbohydrate source.

Concluding Remarks:

- It is important to note that if encephalopathy was indeed the cause of death, this simple medical intervention could have saved many lives.
- Experts point out that dextrose infusion could have been done even as children were being transported to hospitals in ambulances.
- The failures were at the stages of both prevention and care.

4. Unleashing the potential of urban India

Editorial Analysis:

- It is important to note that the **Global Metro Monitor 2018** reports that 36% of employment growth and 67% of GDP growth were contributed by the 300 largest global metros, with those in emerging economies outperforming those in advanced economies.
- Further, metropolitan areas concentrate and accelerate wealth as these are agglomerations of scale that concentrate higher-level economic functions.
- Nine Indian metros feature in the top 150 ranks of the economic performance index.
- By 2030, India will have 71 metropolitan cities, of which seven would have a population of more than 10 million.
- Experts opine that what emerges very clearly is that **metropolises are going to be a key feature of**

India's urbanisation and will play a crucial role in fuelling growth.

A Perspective from the Constitution of India:

- **Article 243P(c) of the Constitution of India** defines 'metropolitan areas' as those having "population of ten lakhs [a million] or more, comprised in one or more districts and consisting of two or more municipalities/panchayats/ other contiguous areas, specified by the governor through public notification to be a metropolitan area".
- It recognises metropolitan areas as multi-municipal and multi-district entities.
- It mandates the formation of a **Metropolitan Planning Committee (MPC)** for preparing draft development plans, considering common interests between local authorities, objectives and priorities set by Central and State governments, and investments likely to be made in the area by various agencies.
- It is important to note that **to ensure the democratic character of the MPC, it is mandated that at least two-thirds of the members of the committee must be elected by and from among the elected members of the municipalities and chairpersons of the panchayats in the metropolitan area, proportionate to the ratio of their respective populations.**
- Importantly, the size and manner of filling such seats are left to the State's discretion.

Metropolitan Planning Committee (MPC)'s: Lack of Implementation

- MPCs were expected to lay frameworks for metropolitan governance, but on the ground they do not exist in most cases.
- Janaagraha's Annual Survey of India's City-Systems (ASICS) 2018 found that only nine out of 18 cities mandated to form MPCs have constituted them.
- Where constituted, their functionality is questionable, with the limited role of local elected representatives raising further questions on democratic decentralisation.
- Thus, the provision for an MPC has not introduced robust governance of metropolises, as the metropolises continue to be a collection of local bodies in an entirely fragmented architecture.

International Perspectives: U.K., Australia and China

- The U.K. has rolled out 'City Deals', an agreement between the Union government and a city economic region, modelled on a 'competition policy style' approach.
- The city economic region is represented by a 'combined authority'.
- This is a statutory body set up through national legislation that enables a group of two or more councils to collaborate decisions, and which is steered by a directly elected Mayor.
- This is to further democratise and incentivise local authorities to collaborate and reduce fragmented governance, drive economic prosperity, job growth, etc. 'City Deals' move from budget silos and promote 'economic growth budget' across regions.
- The U.K. has established nine such combined authorities.
- Australia adopted a regional governance model along these lines in 2016 and has signed four City Deals till date.
- Meanwhile, China is envisioning 19 seamlessly connected super city clusters.
- India, however, is yet to begin the discourse on a governance framework for the future of its metropolises.
- It is yet to recognise that disaster management, mobility, housing, climate change, etc. transcend municipal boundaries and require regional-level solutions.
- The World Bank notes that despite the emergence of smaller towns, the underlying character of India's urbanisation is "metropolitan", with towns emerging within the proximity of existing cities.

Concluding Remarks: The Way forward

- It is time that India envisions the opportunities and challenges from a ‘city’ level to ‘city-region’ level.
- The Central government must create a platform to build consensus among State governments. Perhaps, the Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill, 2018, drafted by the Expert Committee for Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike Restructuring, could offer direction.
- As a matter of fact, it proposes for a Greater Bengaluru Authority headed by a directly elected Mayor, responsible for the overall planning of Greater Bengaluru with powers for inter-agency coordination and administration of major infrastructural projects across the urban local bodies within the area.
- However, this Bill is yet to see the light of day.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. A blinkered understanding of migration

Editorial Analysis:

Brief Historical Background:

- India has been home to one of the longest and largest episodes of emigration in the world, from the Second Century BC, when **Alexander the Great took back Indians to Central Asia and Europe**, to the present times where Indians, moving out on their own volition, form one of the world’s largest populations of emigrants.
- This population is also diverse in every aspect, from its geographical presence and skill sets to their purposes for migration and migration strategies.

(a) A Large emigrant population: Benefit for India?

- A large emigrant population has many benefits for India: the much-discussed international remittances (which touched \$80 billion in 2018), and also a positive impact on foreign direct investments, trade and foreign relations.
- Furthermore, the Indian diaspora also provides much needed philanthropic activities in health and education to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
- They also do fund political parties of their choice during the elections.
- There is another side to the Indian emigration story, which is characterised by information and power asymmetries in the global labour markets to include exploitation, inhuman living conditions, violence and human rights violations.

Lost focus:

- Since Independence, a steadily increasing number of low-skilled emigrants moved to destinations in West Asia.
- In order to safeguard their rights and welfare, the government of India enacted the **Emigration Act, 1983**.
- Some experts have opined that this Act was perhaps an Act that was ‘formulated with the mindset of the 19th century, enacted in the 20th century and implemented in the 21st century’.
- In the last 35 years, to cite the government, “the nature, pattern, directions, and volume of migration have undergone a paradigm shift”.
- Thus, in an effort to update and upgrade this framework, a draft Emigration Bill, 2019 was released. Almost a decade in the making, this draft bill aims to move from the regulation of emigration to its management.

Criticisms of the draft Emigration Bill, 2019:

- Experts opine that unfortunately, the provisions of the Emigration Bill, 2019 fail to match the ambitions of its objectives.
- They continue the post-1983 ad hoc approach towards emigration, relying on the regulation of recruiting agents/employers and the discretion of the government.
- As a matter of fact, the bulk of it focusses on establishing new statutory bodies and giving them broad and vaguely defined duties.
- **Looking at some of the crucial exclusions:**
- What is most positive about the draft Bill is the inclusion of all students and migrant workers within its purview and the abolishment of the two passports (emigration clearance required and emigration clearance not required, or ECR and ECNR) regime based on a person's educational qualifications.
- This will significantly improve the collection of migration flow data when compared to the current system, which excludes most migrants leaving India.
- Despite these developments, most trajectories of migration from India continue to be excluded.
- For instance, Indians reuniting with family members abroad (who can be Indian emigrants, non-resident Indians and/or foreign nationals) constitute a major chunk of out-migration from India.
- Studies show that each member of emigrant families often contributes towards remittances sent back home. Many family migrants often convert their immigration status and become workers, which is a factor not given thought in the 2019 draft Bill.

(b) Dependent Migrants:

- It is important to note that in an increasingly hostile political environment for migrants globally, these “**dependent migrants**” have increasingly little economic or political freedom at their destinations.
- An example that can be pointed out here being the recent attempt by the Trump administration in the U.S. to repeal the employment eligibility of spouses of high-skilled H1B immigrants (a majority are from India).
- Also alarming are numerous instances of Indian spouses being ‘lured’ abroad in marriage and then stranded or exploited.
- As a matter of fact, between January 2015 and November 2017, the government received 3,328 such complaints.

(c) Undocumented Migrants:

- Another excluded category is that of **undocumented migrants**.
- The perception is that undocumented migrants are those persons who leave India through informal channels, but most migrants become irregular on account of expired visas/permits.
- In West Asia, when migrant workers flee their employers to escape exploitation, a single police complaint can make them ‘undocumented’ for no fault of theirs.
- As a matter of fact, data from the U.S. and Europe reveal a dramatic rise in the number of Indians being apprehended for immigration-related crimes.
- These migrants live in incredibly precarious situations, with many living in poverty.
- It is important to note that family migrants and irregular migrants abroad are as vulnerable, if not more, as workers and students and warrant at least equivalent protection and promotion of their welfare.

(d) Regulation of intermediaries:

- It is important to note that the draft Bill incorporates many already established ad hoc regulations and obligations for recruiting agents.
- It also includes subagents (often a relative or friend of the potential emigrant) and student enrolment

agencies into its regulatory purview.

- These intermediaries play an instrumental role in minimising information asymmetries and migration costs.
- Thus, any regulatory framework needs to balance strong disincentives for migrant welfare-destroying practices with the efficient supply of affordable intermediary services for prospective workers and students.
- Having said this, it is important to note that in the past decade, while emigration from India to West Asia has been decreasing, emigration from Bangladesh to this region has increased in the same period, which is attributed to a more liberal emigration policy.
- This suggests that the prescribed regulatory process in India has inadvertently created barriers to migration — for instance, nurses can be recruited only through government recruitment agencies — and increased the cost of emigration.
- Further, given that student enrolment agencies have a different business model and a completely different customer base, i.e. students applying overseas, it is unclear why they are prescribed the same regulations as recruitment agents.

(e) Looking at return migrants:

- An important question arises surrounding that of return migrants.
- As a matter of fact, to effectively ensure their welfare, any emigration policy framework needs to be considerate of the complete migration cycle. This complete migration cycle includes:
 1. the pre-departure,
 2. journey,
 3. destination and
 4. return
- It is important to note that the 2019 draft Bill addresses only the first three parts of the cycle while completely ignoring return migration.
- Globally, one in four migrants today is a return migrant.
- In fact, most Indian migrants in West Asia return home — the current estimate of return migration in Kerala alone ranges between 1.2 and 1.5 million according to the Kerala Migration Surveys conducted by the Centre for Development Studies since 1998.

Concluding Remarks:

- Experts opine that many of the oversights in the draft Bill reiterate the government's restricted understanding of migration from India; there is no complete database number of Indian migrants abroad.
- There is also an erroneous assumption that Indian migrants in a developed destination country have sufficient protection and welfare.
- The draft Bill personifies the government's primary view of emigration policy as a means for managing the export of human resources rather than a humanitarian framework to safeguard Indian migrants overseas.
- It is important to note that migration is a complex and highly dynamic process with constantly evolving profiles of migrants and their destinations.
- In conclusion, a migrant rights-based approach that is an ex ante in nature (based on forecasts) and which is inclusive of all Indian migrants abroad can be considerate of this and provide them adequate security and welfare.
- There are a whole host of multilateral migration-related treaties and conventions which can provide the necessary guidance for a truly visionary and future-proof Indian emigration policy framework.
- Finally, without drastic changes to the draft Bill's approach, we will miss the opportunity to fulfil the

hard-fought shared objectives of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

F. Tidbits

1. 'Virtual biopsy' device can non-invasively detect skin tumours

- A Virtual Biopsy device has been designed by scientists, which can quickly and non-invasively determine whether a skin tumour is cancerous and needs to be removed surgically.
- With the help of sound vibrations and pulses of near-infrared light, the device can determine a skin lesion's depth and potential malignancy without using a scalpel.
- The first-of-its-kind experimental procedure, called vibrational optical coherence tomography (VOCT), creates a 3D map of the lesion's width and depth under the skin with a tiny laser diode.
- The procedure also makes use of soundwaves to test the lesion's density and stiffness since cancer cells are stiffer than healthy cells.
- This device can make the process much less risky and less distressing to the patients.

2. Bitcoin use causing huge CO2 emissions, says study

- A study has found that the use of Bitcoin emits over 22 mega tonnes of carbon dioxide each year.
- A detailed calculation of the carbon footprint of the Bitcoin system was carried out by Researchers from Technical University of Munich (TUM) in Germany.
- The emissions is almost equivalent to the total emissions of cities like Las Vegas and Vienna.
- Bitcoin mining is energy-intensive. The process of Bitcoin Mining has increased significantly in the recent years, having quadrupled in the year 2018 alone.
- Though there are larger factors contributing to climate change, it was opined that carbon footprint of Bitcoins is big enough to make it worth discussing the possibility of regulating cryptocurrency mining in regions where power generation is especially carbon-intensive.

3. India to actively curb 'conflict' diamonds

- India has committed to strengthening the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS), in order to curb the circulation of 'Blood Diamonds' or 'Conflict Diamonds'.
- India is committed to play an active role in the evolution and transformation of the Kimberley Process (KP) and in the transition from conflict diamonds to peace diamonds.
- India is the Kimberley Process chair for the year 2019.
- **Blood diamonds:** also called conflict diamonds, war diamonds, hot diamonds, or red diamonds) is a term used for a diamond mined in a war zone and sold to finance an insurgency, an invading army's war efforts, or a war lord's activity.

4. Conrad Sangma wants Shillong to be Presidential retreat

- The Chief Minister of Shillong has proposed for a retreat for President, in the state.
- Apart from Rashtrapati Bhavan, the President has two other places of stay:
 - The 1895 Retreat Building at Mashorba, Shimla
 - The Rashtrapati Nilayam at Bolarum, Hyderabad
- A memorandum has been submitted to the Prime Minister for setting up of a retreat for the President in Shillong.
- It was said that, having a President's retreat in Shillong would send out a strong message of inclusiveness and assure the region of the importance the Union government accords to it.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Cloudburst

- A cloudburst is extreme amount of precipitation in a short span of time. It is often accompanied by thunders and lightning.
- During Cloudburst, massive coagulated clouds with heavy water content hover, over a very small location.
- The dead weight of the cloud is so massive and unbearable that it simply collapses under its own weight
- A cloudburst is different from rain only in terms of the amount of water that pours down on the earth.
- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) labels rainfall over 100 mm per hour as cloudburst.
- Usually when a cloud burst occurs, small areas – between 20-80 square kilometres are affected.

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. The Election Commission of India is a permanent and independent statutory body.
2. The body is constituted to conduct free and fair elections to the national and state legislatures and of President and Vice-President.

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 Election Commission of India is a permanent and independent constitutional body. It is established by Constitution of India under Article 324 to ensure fair and fair elections in the country. The body conducts free and fair elections to the national and state legislatures and of President and Vice-President.

Q2. Chief Election Commissioner is appointed by

- a. The President
- b. The Chief Justice of India
- c. The Prime Minister
- d. The Lok Sabha Speaker

Answer: a

Explanation:

The Chief Election Commissioner heads the Election Commission of India, a body constitutionally empowered to conduct elections in India. The appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners is made by the President.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to United Nations Convention to Combat

Desertification:

1. UNCCD is the first and only internationally legally binding framework set up to address the problem of desertification and other land issues.
2. India is a signatory to UNCCD.

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

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: c

Explanation:

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification is a Convention to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought through national action programs incorporating long-term strategies with the support of international cooperation and partnership arrangements. It is the first and only internationally legally binding framework set up to address the problem of desertification and other land issues. India became a signatory to UNCCD on October 14, 1994 and ratified it on December 17, 1996.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. The quality of democracy will suffer with the absence of an opposition leader. Discuss the importance of the Leader of Opposition in Indian polity. (15 Marks, 250 words)
2. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is becoming vital to India's Eurasia policy Critically comment. (15 Marks, 250 Words)