

20 July 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Plea to frame guidelines on identifying 'minorities'

Context:

The Supreme Court has asked the Attorney-General of India to be served a copy of a writ petition seeking directions to the government to either frame guidelines for identification of minorities at States' level or, in the alternative, to "declare Hindus as 'Minority' for States where they are real minority".

Details:

- Under Section 2(c) of National Commission for Minorities (NCM) Act, 1992, five religious communities; Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Parsis are declared as minority communities through a Government Notification issued in October 1993.

- However, the act is silent on the definition of minority and framing parameters for identification of minority.

Issue:

- The petition states that Hindus are real minority in eight States i.e. Lakshadweep (2.5%), Mizoram (2.75%), Nagaland (8.75%), Meghalaya (11%), J&K (28%), Arunachal Pradesh (29%), Manipur (31%) and Punjab (38.40%).
- But, the minority rights are being siphoned off illegally and arbitrarily to majority population because Central Government has not notified them a 'minority' under Section 2 (c) of the NCM Act.
- Therefore, Hindus are being deprived of their rights, guaranteed under the Articles 25-30.
- It argues that the Notification and Section 2(c) of the NCM Act is not only arbitrary and unreasonable but also invalid and ultra-virus the Constitution.
- The classification of religious minorities by the Centre at a pan-India level has not only created a wave of inequality across different States but also encouraged those who did not belong to those minority religions, to convert themselves for the social, political and economic benefits.
- According to the petition, minority benefits are given to religious communities in certain States where they are in fact a majority, whereas religious communities which are actually minorities in those States are not even given equal status.

Conclusion:

- The petition said that, an 11-judge Constitution Bench in the T.M.A. Pai judgment had unequivocally stated that the unit for determining minority status is the State.
- It is contended that the religious and linguistic minorities for the purposes of Articles 29 and 30 of the Constitution should be determined State-wise after countenancing the numeric proportions of various communities in each State.
- It asserts that the denial of minority rights to real minorities and arbitrary/unreasonable disbursement of minority benefits to the majority, infringes upon fundamental right to prohibition of discrimination.

2. RTI Bill introduced amid Opposition flak

Context:

A Bill to amend the Right to Information (RTI) Act was introduced in the Lok Sabha.

Details:

- The bill seeks to give the Union government the power to set the service conditions and salaries of Information Commissioners
- The new Bill seeks to change the status of the Information Commissioners who are on a par with the Election Commissioners, and states that the term of office, salaries, allowances and other terms and conditions shall be "as prescribed by the Central government".
- Current situation: Section 13(5) of the Act provides that these are equivalent to that of the Chief Election Commissioner for the Chief Information Commissioner and to an Election Commissioner for an Information Commissioner.
- The bill says that: The functions being carried out by the Election Commission and the Central and State Information Commissions are totally different. The Election Commission of India is a constitutional body and on the other hand, the Central Information Commission and State Information Commissions are statutory bodies established under the Right to Information Act, 2005.

Criticisms:

- Both, the Opposition members as well as RTI activists have claimed that the Bill is an attempt to take away the autonomy of the institution.
- There was resistance from the for introduction of the Bill with senior leader Shashi Tharoor calling it an “RTI elimination Bill” removing two greater powers of institutional independence.
- Leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said the draft law was a threat to the independence of the Central Information Commission.
- Trinamool Congress leader Saugata Roy sought that the Bill be referred to a parliamentary standing committee. He said only 26% Bills were referred to such panels in the last Lok Sabha.

C. GS3 Related

Category: SECURITY

1. Israel spyware firm can hack data from social media: report

Context:

An Israeli spyware firm has told clients it can scoop user data from the world’s top social media.

What is a spyware?

- Spyware is software that enables a user to obtain covert information about another's computer activities by transmitting data covertly from their hard drive.
- Any software can be classified as spyware if it is downloaded without the user's authorization.
- Spyware is controversial because even when it is installed for relatively innocuous reasons, it can violate the end user's privacy and has the potential to be abused.
- Spyware is not just one type of program. It's an entire category of malicious software that includes adware, Trojans, keystroke loggers, and information stealing programs.

Details:

- The firm told buyers its technology can surreptitiously scrape all of an individual’s data from the servers of Apple, Google, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft, according to people familiar with its sales pitch.
- NSO is based in Herzliya, near Tel Aviv.
- It says it employs 600 people in Israel and around the world.
- However, the allegations were denied by NSO, claiming that there is a fundamental misunderstanding of NSO, its services and technology.
- The group came under the spotlight in 2016 when researchers accused it of helping spy on an activist in the UAE.
- NSO says it does not operate the Pegasus system, only licensing it to closely vetted government users for the sole purpose of preventing or investigating serious crime including terrorism.
- Pegasus is an invasive tool that can reportedly switch on a target’s cell phone camera and microphone, and access data on it, effectively turning the phone into a pocket spy.

2. Women in CRPF will soon get specially designed body gear

Context:

For the first time, women personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) who have to face riotous

mobs will soon get a body gear that fits them.

Details:

- The idea for gender- specific protective gears was first mooted at the National Conference for Women in 2016.
- Since Independence, the women personnel had to compromise with bulky, oversized body protectors designed for men.
- The full body protector has been designed by a team of scientists of the Defence Institute of Physiology and Allied Sciences (DIPAS), a unit of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- Anthropometric data has been used to design the gears which ensure protection of vital organs of women.

Benefits:

- Around 300 women CRPF personnel posted in Srinagar to control the stone-pelting incidents are to benefit from these gears.
- The gear is anti-stab, anti-acid.
- It will ensure better mobility. It has also paved the path for further research and development in the field of women-specific body armours and vests.
- Around 8,000 women deployed in the anti-riot Rapid Action Force (RAF) will get the body protectors.

3. Drug haul unveils unique smuggling strategy

Context:

Five persons, including two Afghan nationals, have been arrested and 150 kg of Afghan heroin worth Rs. 600 crore in the international market recovered from their possession.

Issue:

A unique strategy of smuggling heroin into India has come to light following a Delhi police crackdown on an international drug syndicate operating in the Capital.

Details:

- The five men were found extracting the narcotic from jute sacks soaked in heroin-laden solution, dried and packed with spices to be transported to India from Afghanistan.
- Stepped-up surveillance revealed that the convoy was transporting drugs and a heroin processing unit was possibly being set up.
- The accused confessed to taking advantage of the spice trade between India and Afghanistan.
- The jute sacks, once empty, were picked up from the mandis by gang members and brought to the processing unit, where they were put in chemicals and the heroin extracted. The narcotic was then packed and transported across the country, especially to Punjab, and also to Sri Lanka.

Drug Menace in India:

- India lies between two major drugs producing areas in the world i.e. Golden Crescent (Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan) and Golden Triangle (Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Myanmar). From age-old cannabis to newer synthetic opioids like tramadol, and designer drugs like methamphetamine, India is one of the major hubs for illicit drug trade, according to the 2018 annual

report by United Nations-backed International Narcotics Control Board (INCB).

- Illegal production and smuggling of drugs has been a major reason for crime and violence worldwide.
- The consequences of drug abuse include domestic violence, wastage of economic potential, spread of diseases like HIV etc.
- India has also become a transit country for illicitly produced opiates, in particular, heroin.

In order to stop smuggling of drugs into India from these areas International coordination assumes utmost importance.

Read more about: [Golden Crescent](#)

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E. Editorials

Category: ECONOMY

1. Green shoots of economic growth

Context

- India is aspiring to achieve a \$5-trillion economy by 2024 and this vision has been envisaged in the Economic Survey this year.
- The document lays down a clear strategy to augment the growth of key sectors by shifting gears as the current economic conditions are smooth in terms of macroeconomic stability to expand growth.

However, **unless there are adequate investment reforms in primary sectors, steps taken to augment growth in other sectors would be futile.**

Investment is the key

- According to the **Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)**, insufficient investment in the agriculture sector in most developing countries over the past 30 years has resulted in low productivity and stagnant production.
- In India, with a steadily decreasing share of 14.4% in Gross Value Added since 2015-16, the **sector's contribution to a \$5-trillion economy would be around \$1 trillion** — assuming a positive annual growth rate hereafter.
- Investment is the key to unlocking the potential of a developing economy. However, the myopic policy regime in the past several decades has resulted in sluggish investment growth in the farm sector. Therefore, strengthening the sector with an enabling investment package (both public and private) is critical.

Focus Areas

- **First**, the wave of investment should touch segments such as agro-processing, and exports, agri-startups and agri-tourism, where the potential for job creation and capacity utilisation is far less.
 - Integrating the existing tourism circuit with a relatively new area of agri-tourism (as a hub-and-spoke model), where glimpses of farm staff and farm operations are displayed to attract

tourists, would help in boosting the investment cycle and generate in-situ employment.

- **Second**, investment needs to be driven to strengthen both public and private extension advisory systems and the quality of agri-education and research through collaboration and convergence.
 - It would also serve as a stage to demonstrate resource conservation and sustainable use through organic, natural and green methods, and also zero budget natural farming.
- **Third**, given that India has the highest livestock population in the world, investment should be made to utilise this surplus by employing next-generation livestock technology with a strong emphasis not only on productivity enhancement but also on conservation of indigenous germplasm, disease surveillance, quality control, waste utilisation and value addition.
 - This would lead to a sustained increase in farm income and savings with an export-oriented growth model.
- **Fourth**, investment in renewable energy generation (using small wind mill and solar pumps) on fallow farmland and in hilly terrain would help reduce the burden of debt-ridden electricity distribution companies and State governments, besides enabling energy security in rural areas.
- **Fifth**, a farm business organisation is another source of routing private investment to agriculture. Linking these organisations with commodity exchanges would provide agriculture commodities more space on international trading platforms and reduce the burden of markets in a glut season, with certain policy/procedural modifications.
- Finally, data is the key driver of modern agriculture which in turn can power artificial intelligence-led agriculture, e-markets, soil mapping and others. Currently, there are issues of enumeration, maintenance and accessibility to help maintain agri-data on various fronts.
 - There also needs to be a centralised institutional mechanism to help maintain farm level-data available for real time (virtual) assessment, while also helping plug the loopholes in subsidy distribution, funding and unrealistic assumption in production estimation.
 - This will help in effectively implementing and monitoring various schemes for a pragmatic food system.

Trickle-down effect

- Though economic transition has seen significant growth contribution from services and industry, **agriculture remains the most trusted sector in helping alleviate poverty, hunger and malnutrition** and ensuring better income distribution.
- An earlier experience of **BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) nations** has shown that a 1% growth in agriculture is at least two to three times more effective in reducing poverty than similar growth in non-agricultural sectors.
- Public investment in agriculture research and development in terms of percentage share in agri GVA stands at 0.37%, **which is fairly low in comparison to between 3% and 5% in developed countries.**

Way forward

- In real terms, the current investment should create an enabling environment to route private investment in R&D.
- Therefore, public investment in agriculture should see a commensurate rise with a healthy mix of education, research and extension encouraging 'blue-sky thinking' in all segments, while pushing for a **targeted pruning of public expenditures on subsidies, kind transfers, loan waivers and populist measures.**
- An inclusive business model facilitating strong investor-farmer relations should be created, with a legal and institutional framework for governance. Expanding institutions is essential to accommodate the developmental impacts of foreign agricultural investment.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Inclusion over exclusion- National Register of Citizens

Background

- The first draft NRC published on December 31 and January 1, 2018 had the **names of 19 million people out of the total 32.9 million** who had applied for inclusion as citizens.
- The second draft NRC, published on July 30 last, upped it to 28.9 million but left out four million found ineligible.
- Around 3.6 million of them subsequently filed citizenship claims. An “additional exclusion list” was issued last month containing **1,02,463 names included earlier in the draft list**.

Steps initiated to solve the exclusion issue

- In anticipation of millions being ultimately left out, the Assam government is moving to **set up 200 Foreigners’ Tribunals** to handle cases of people to be excluded from the final NRC, as part of a larger plan to establish 1,000 such tribunals.
- The State government is also preparing to construct **10 more detention centres**; six are now running out of district jails.

Apprehensions due to rejection of names in NRC

- A **humanitarian crisis awaits Assam** whether the final NRC is published on July 31 or after.
- In the run-up to the final publication, case after case has emerged of **persons wrongfully left out of the list**.
- The process has left no group out of its sweep, be it Marwaris or Biharis from elsewhere in the country, people tracing their antecedents to other Northeastern states, people of Nepali origin, and caste Hindu Assamese.
- The **prime targets of this exercise, however, are Hindu Bengalis and Bengali-origin Muslims of Assam** — more than 80% of the 4.1 million people named in the two lists belong to these two groups.

Centre, Assam move SC seeking extension of deadline for finalisation of NRC

- Alleging wrongful inclusions and exclusions in the National Register of Citizens, the Centre and the Assam government sought from the Supreme Court **extension of the July 31 deadline for finalisation of the NRC and said India could not be the refugee capital of the world**.
- The union and state government also sought to **include sample verification of the citizens in the NRC, saying lakhs of people have been wrongly included in areas bordering Bangladesh** due to the involvement of local officers
- It has also sought direction that such **re-verification exercise to be conducted by Class I officers** of the state government from other districts who have knowledge and experience of handling the process of enquiry/investigation.
- The pleas have also sought a **direction to fix the venue of the sample re-verification at a place which was not in the vicinity of the initial NRC verification** to rule out possibility of local influences, bias and threat.

Amidst this call for re-verification **State NRC Coordinator’s reports** to the apex court suggested that up to 27% of names have been re-verified during the process of disposal of claims.

Conclusion

- For lakhs of people, what the future holds is uncertain as ever. Only a long court battle is certain, while a stateless identity with curtailed rights is a possibility. The accent should be on inclusion, not exclusion.
- The wheels of justice cannot pander to the suspicions of a vocal majority without giving the excluded access to due process.

Category: GEOGRAPHY/DISASTER

1. Why Assam is prone to floods and what’s the solution?

Stats

- Assam is in the grip of yet another flood, with 57 lakh people affected across all 33 districts, and 36 people killed besides hundreds of animals.
- This is the first wave of floods this monsoon, and flood control experts expect at least two more.

Why are floods so destructive in Assam?

- Apart from **incessant rainfall during the monsoon**, there are many contributory factors, natural and man-made.
- At the crux is the very nature of the **river Brahmaputra —dynamic and unstable.**
- Its 580,000 sq km basin spreads over four countries: China, India, Bangladesh and Bhutan, with diverse environments.
- The Brahmaputra features among the **world’s top five rivers in terms of discharge as well as the sediment it brings.**
- At 19,830 cubic meters per second (cumec), it **ranks fourth in discharge at the mouth**, behind only the Amazon (99,150 cumec), the Congo (39,660 cumec) and the Yangtze (21,800 cumec)
- **In terms of sediment yield**, two spots along the Brahmaputra’s course were at second and third places in 2008, behind the **Yellow River** whose annual sediment yield is 1,403 tonnes per sq km.
 - The Brahmaputra’s annual sediment yield was 1,128 tonnes per sq km at Bahadurabad of Bangladesh, and 804 tonnes per sq km at Pandu of Guwahati.



How do these characteristics of the river relate to flooding?

- The **vast amount of sediment comes from Tibet**, where the river originates
 - That region is cold, arid and lacks plantation. Glaciers melt, soil erodes and all of it results in a highly sedimented river
- By the time the river enters Assam — a state comprising primarily floodplains surrounded by hills on

all sides — **it deposits vast amounts of this silt**, leading to erosion and floods.

- As the river comes from a high slope to a flat plain, its velocity decreases suddenly and this results in the river unloading the sediment
- The river's channels prove inadequate amid this siltation, leading to floods.
- Again, because of the earthquake-prone nature of the region, the river has not been able to acquire a stable character. Following the **devastating earthquake of 1950**, the **level of the Brahmaputra rose by two metres in Dibrugarh area in eastern Assam**.

Manmade Causes

- Besides these natural factors are the man-made ones — habitation, deforestation, population growth in catchment areas (including in China) — which lead to higher sedimentation.
 - For example, the sediment deposition itself creates temporary sandbars or river islands.
- It is **common for people to settle in such places, which restricts the space the river** has to flow. When rainfall is heavy, it combines with all these factors and leads to destructive floods. This happens very frequently.

How bad is the current flood compared to previous ones?

- While floods are a regular annual feature in Assam, some years witness more destruction than others. In terms of impact on human lives, the floods of **1988, 1998 and 2004** were the worst; the 2004 floods alone affected 12.4 million people and claimed 251 lives.
- The **current wave of floods** has affected 57 lakh people and claimed 36 lives so far.

Has the government tried to address the factors that cause floods?

- In its **master plan on the river in 1982**, the Brahmaputra Board had suggested that **dams and reservoirs** be built to mitigate floods.
 - The idea of dams, however, has traditionally been a double-edged sword. While one of their objectives is to regulate the release of flood waters, the release when it comes can sometimes be beyond the capacity of the channels downstream.
 - In the Brahmaputra basin, **locals and environmentalists protested against dam-building plans** on grounds of displacement and destruction of ecology, preventing the plans from moving forward.
- As such, the government has been using only one approach towards floods: **building embankments on the river**.
- The government also considered **dredging, basically digging up the riverbed and making the river “deeper”**. However, experts have strongly advised against this simply because the Brahmaputra sediment yield is among the highest in the world.
 - Experts believe that even if we take out all the silt this year, more silt will be deposited the following year, making the very expensive effort futile

What should be done going forward?

- An “**Integrated Basin Management**” system should ideally bring in all the basin-sharing countries on board.
 - Addressing the issues only in Assam when the flood strikes isn't the solution — one needs the countries to come to an understanding about taking measures in the catchment areas
 - For that, interstate relationships, political cooperation and the role of the government are important.
- Another option is “**Flood-Plain**” **Zoning**, which is done in US.
 - Depending on the vulnerability of the area, one can divide the area into categories, and

accordingly ban certain activities on it: like farming, building a house, etc.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Japan and South Korea at loggerheads

What is the dispute?

- According to CNBC **Japan placed export restrictions on South Korea with regard to three key high-tech materials that are critical for manufacturing semiconductors.**
 - Japan reportedly also removed South Korea from its “**white country**” list, that is, nations Japan deems to have trustworthy export control systems.
 - Japan has announced that it will **implement tighter export curbs** on essential chemical materials— **fluorinated polyamides, photoresists and hydrogen fluoride** which are mostly imported by Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix to produce memory chips, displays and next-generation semiconductors.
 - Semiconductors take up some 25% of Korea's exports.
- In response, **South Korea** has now threatened to take **Japan’s export restriction to the World Trade Organization**, after preliminary negotiations failed.
 - What further points to growing tensions is that South Korea’s Finance Minister, announced that Seoul was “working on comprehensive plans to reduce the country’s dependence on Japan’s materials, components and equipment industries.”

Why did Japan restrict exports?

- Japanese officials have hinted that **South Korea doesn’t adequately oversee the end use of those chemicals, which could also have military applications outside the technology field**
- Japan has even accused South Korea of passing on one of the said materials — **hydrogen fluoride — to North Korea.**
- The shipment was cleared for exports **from Japan to South Korea only.** On its part, Seoul denied these allegations.

What are the likely economic implications of this feud?

- They cannot be good. For one, if instead of bilateral negotiations, this feud reaches WTO, it will only make it linger. That will **hurt the semi-conductor business across the world** because of the disruption to the global supply chain.
- **Countries that rely on South Korea's semiconductors such as United States, China and even Japan will all be adversely affected,** causing a domino effect on the global supply chain in computer and smartphone industries.
- It has the potential to become a **more widespread trade war between the two neighbours, far beyond the few goods that are in question at present.**

So, what’s the fight really about?

- Most experts believe the tech trade war is all about **World War II—specifically, South Korean umbrage at Japan’s use of forced labor during the wartime occupation** and what many in South Korea see as Japanese unwillingness to fully acknowledge the country’s wartime activities or make amends.
- The immediate trigger for the trade war appears to be a **South Korean court case in 2018,** which ruled that **Japan’s biggest steelmaker, Nippon Steel, used forced labor during the war and ordered the firm to compensate some South Korean survivors with about \$89,000 each.**

- A similar case last year ruled against **Mitsubishi Heavy Industries**, and other cases against scores of other Japanese firms are being heard in lower courts.
- **Japan** argues that it has already made amends with a **monetary settlement in the 1965** accord that reestablished diplomatic relations between the two countries, but South Korean courts don't see it that way.

So what's next?

- The WTO will take up the Japan-South Korea dispute, but that could require a year or more to work its way through the dispute settlement process
- In the meantime, the United States should take an active role in defusing the fight between its two main allies in Asia.

F. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. A private member can introduce a money bill.
2. A money bill can be introduced only on prior recommendations of the President.
3. President can withhold assent to money bill but cannot return it for reconsideration of the Lok Sabha.

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

A money bill can be a government bill only. No private bill can be a money bill.

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. The Strait of Hormuz is a strait between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.
2. It is one of the world's most strategically important choke points.

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:

The Strait of Hormuz is a strait between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. A third of the world's liquefied natural gas and almost 20% of total global oil consumption passes through the strait, making it a highly important strategic location for international trade.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to RTI Act:

- 1. According to the Act, the salaries, allowances and other terms of an Information Commissioner are equivalent to that of the Election Commissioner.
- 2. Whenever there is a conflict between the provisions of the RTI Act and Official Secrets Act, the former shall prevail.

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:

Self-explanatory.

Q4. Which of the following is/are included in the List of Ramsar sites in India:

- 1. Bhoj Wetland
- 2. Chilika Lake
- 3. Ashtamudi Lake

Choose the correct option:

- a. 1 only
- b. 1 and 2 only

c. 2 only

d. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: d

Explanation:

Self-explanatory

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Criminals and Terrorists equipped with increasingly sophisticated tools are taking advantage of encrypted technologies to plan and conceal their crimes, leaving intelligence and law enforcement agencies in the dark and putting public safety and national security at risk. What are the steps taken by the government to address this challenge? (15 Marks, 250 Words)
2. Fifty years after bank nationalisation, the image that bank is an enterprise driven by social purpose and political considerations and not depositors' interests, needs to change. Critically analyse. (15 Marks, 250 Words)