

31 July 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: HEALTH

1. [IMA calls for strike against NMC Bill today](#)

Context:

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has given a call for a 24-hour withdrawal of non-essential services across the country to protest the passage of the National Medical Commission Bill.

Details:

- The Bill, seeks to replace the Medical Council of India, saying it is "anti-poor, anti-student and anti-democratic".
- The bill provides for setting up of a National Medical Commission in place of MCI for development and regulation of all aspects of medical education, profession and institutions.
- Section 32 of the NMC Bill provides for licensing of 3.5 lakh unqualified non-medical persons to practice modern medicine.
- Section 31 of the Act pertains to maintaining a national register of all the recognised medical practitioners by the Ethics and Medical Registration Board.
- The NMC bill proposes a common final year MBBS examination, to be known as National Exit Test (NEXT), for admission to post-graduate medical courses and for obtaining license to practice medicine. Besides, the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), common counselling and the NEXT will be applicable to institutes of national importance like AIIMS in order to achieve a common standard in medical education sector in the country.
- The bill seeks to introduce NEXT and scrap NEET-PG.
- It seeks to regulate fees by the NMC for 50 per cent seats in private medical colleges and deemed universities.
- The Bill provides that the Medical Assessment and Rating Board (MARB) will conduct an assessment of medical colleges and develop a system of ranking them which enable students to choose medical colleges wisely. It provides for the repeal of the Indian Medical Council Act 1956. The Medical Assessment and Rating Board (MARB) will issue ratings to medical colleges according to their performance.

Issues:

- The medical fraternity is anguished that the health minister, a surgeon, instead of including key recommendations made by the Parliament Standing Committee, replaced many provisions with clauses detrimental to the doctors' community.
- The fraternity claims the bill will encourage quackery.
- Under Section 32 of the Bill, the term community health provider has been vaguely defined to allow anyone connected with modern medicine to get registered in NMC and be licensed to practice modern medicine. It is opined that this would legalise quackery and endanger the lives of people.
- Objections have been raised against Section 45 of the bill which, IMA opines that it empowers the Union government to override any suggestion by the National Medical Commission.
- It is believed that, if the Bill is passed, the Government of India can also make any directions to NMC and autonomous boards constituted there-under regarding any policy matter to be followed religiously without any argument by the commission.
- It is opined that the NMC bill is a pro-private management bill and will pave the way for widespread corruption.

Indian Medical Association:

- The Indian Medical Association is a national voluntary organisation of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine in India.
- It looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well-being of the community at large.
- It was established in 1928 as the All India Medical Association, renamed "Indian Medical Association" in 1930.
- It is a society registered under The Societies Act of India.
- The Indian Medical association is a founder member of the World Medical Association.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Triple Talaq Bill sails through Rajya Sabha

Context:

Rajya Sabha has passed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2019, better known as the Triple Talaq Bill.

Details:

- The triple talaq bill makes instant triple talaq a criminal offence and provides for a jail term to a Muslim man for the crime.
- The bill was passed thrice by the Lok Sabha over the last 19 months, finally has been passed by the Rajya Sabha.
- The bill will replace an ordinance promulgated last on February 21 to the same effect as the bill.
- In 2017, the Supreme Court, in a landmark 3-2 verdict, had struck down instant triple talaq. Three of the five judges on the Constitution Bench had called the practise un-Islamic and “arbitrary” and disagreed with the view that triple talaq was an integral part of religious practice.

What is there in the triple talaq bill?

- The triple talaq bill makes declaration of talaq-e-biddat in spoken, written or through SMS or WhatsApp or any other electronic chat illegal.
- Talaq-e-biddat refers to the pronouncement of talaq three times by a Muslim man in one sitting to his wife resulting in an instant and irrevocable divorce.
- The triple talaq bill also makes declaration of talaq-e-biddat cognisable offence that gives a police officer powers to arrest the offender without requiring a warrant.
- To check misuse of cognisable nature of the offence, the triple talaq bill makes declaration of talaq-e-biddat only if the complaint is filed by the aggrieved woman or any of her relation by blood or marriage.
- A Muslim man pronouncing instant triple talaq attracts a jail term of three years under the triple talaq bill. The accused under the triple talaq bill is entitled to bail, which can be granted by a magistrate. But the bail can be granted only after the magistrate has heard the aggrieved woman.
- The triple talaq bill also provides scope for reconciliation without undergoing the process of nikah halala if the two sides agree to stop legal proceedings and settle the dispute.
 - Nikah halala refers to practice under which a divorced Muslim woman has to marry another man and consummate the marriage and get a divorce. Only then can she be eligible to remarry her former husband.
- A woman divorced through talaq-e-biddat is entitled to demand a maintenance for her and her dependent children under the triple talaq bill. The magistrate has the power to determine the amount of subsistence allowance.
- Under the triple talaq bill, the divorced Muslim woman is entitled to seek custody of minor children. This would be determined by a magistrate.

2. Too much quota may impact right to equal opportunity, remarks Supreme Court

Context:

The Supreme Court orally remarked that excessive quota may impact the right to equal opportunity guaranteed under the Constitution.

Background:

- Modi Cabinet, in January approved the 10 per cent reservation for economically backward among

general categories.

- The Bench was examining whether to refer to a Constitution Bench a batch of petitions challenging the validity of a constitutional amendment providing 10% economic quota in government jobs and educational institutions.

Details:

- “Quota benefits given to the most forward classes, especially to those who had no qualification whatsoever, would result in excess reservation and breach equality”, Justice S.A. Bobde, leading a three-judge Bench, said.
- Petitioner argued that the economic reservation violated the 50% reservation ceiling limit fixed by a nine-judge Bench in the Indra Sawhney case.
 - Further, the 1992 judgment had barred reservation solely on economic criterion.
 - In a 6:3 majority verdict, the apex court, in the Indra Sawhney case, had held that “a backward class cannot be determined only and exclusively with reference to economic criterion... It may be a consideration or basis along with and in addition to social backwardness, but it can never be the sole criterion.
- After a gap of 27 years, the Constitution (103rd Amendment) Act of 2019 has provided 10% reservation in government jobs and educational institutions for the “economically backward” in the unreserved category.
- The Act amends Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution by adding clauses empowering the government to provide reservation on the basis of economic backwardness.
- This 10% economic reservation is over and above the 50% reservation cap.

Arguments FOR the reservation:

- The government, represented by Attorney General K.K. Venugopal, however, has justified to the Supreme Court that the 10% economic quota law was a move towards a classless and casteless society.
- It said the law was meant to benefit a large section of the population who are mostly lower middle class and below poverty line.

Equality of Opportunity in Public Employment:

- Article 16 deals with the equality of opportunity in matters of public employment.
 - Article 16 is an instance of the application of the general rule with special reference to the opportunity of appointments under the State.
 - It says that there shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State.
- Article 16(1) & 16(2) have laid down a general rule that there shall be equal opportunity for all citizens and thus emphasizes on universality of Indian Citizenship.
- The Constitution of India has given a wide interpretation of this article. Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) principles apply to:
 - Access to jobs
 - Conditions of employment
 - Relationships in the workplace
 - The evaluation of performance and
 - The opportunity for training and career development.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Government did not try out GST system before rollout: CAG

Context:

The report on the first ever audit of the Goods and Services Tax was tabled in Parliament.

Details:

- The report states that failure to try out the system before rollout is leading to inadequate compliance mechanisms, and lower tax revenues.
- The CAG also pointed out that the Centre's revenue from taxes on goods and services subsumed in GST registered a 10 per cent decline in 2017-18 compared to the previous year.
- The report pointed out that the keystone of the tax system, the invoice matching system, had not yet been put in place even two years after the GST rollout.
- It added that compliance in terms of the number of returns filed had been falling month after month.
- The CAG said that the complexity of the return mechanism and the technical glitches resulted in rollback of invoice-matching, rendering the system prone to ITC [Input Tax Credit] frauds.
- The system of payment and settlement of tax that was envisaged for GST was based on one hundred per cent invoice-matching and availment of input tax credit (ITC), as well as settlement of I-GST on the basis of invoice-matching. Neither of it is possible as the invoice-matching system has not kicked-in.
- Without invoice matching and auto generation of refunds, assessments, etc. on the whole, the envisaged GST tax compliance system is non-functional, he added.
- The CAG said the extent of the changes that have to now be undertaken, as well as the suspension of key aspects of the GST system such as the invoice matching mechanism, show that there was inadequate coordination between the Department of Revenue, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs and the GST Network.

Rules flouted in transfer of GST funds to States:

- The report highlights that government has not been following the rules set out regarding the transfer of revenue to the States.
 - The government had in 2017-18 transferred the Integrated GST amount in a manner that was in contravention of the rules laid out for such a transfer.
 - During 2017-18, Government of India resorted to devolution of IGST year-end balance to States as per Finance Commission formula, in contravention of the provisions of the Constitution of India and the IGST Act.
 - It is found that this also had the impact of distribution of funds to the States on a completely different basis instead of the 'Place of Supply' concept as envisaged in the IGST Act.

To know more in detail about GST, watch: Goods and Services Tax, GST latest Updates

Way forward:

- Invoice-matching is the critical requirement that would yield the full benefits of this major tax reform. It would protect the tax revenues of both the Centre and the states, it would lead to proper settlement of IGST and would minimise, if not eliminate, the tax official-assessee interface.
- "Assessment" in the sense understood in the manual system may no longer be necessary (returns

themselves can be generated by a system that matches invoices); and cases of evasion etc., can be traced by applying analytical tools and AI to the massive data that crores of invoices generate.

- Ad hoc manner of provisioning integrated GST between the states and Centre, is a contravention of the constitutional provisions and must be stopped.

2. End-use norms for external commercial borrowings eased

Context:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has relaxed the norms for end-use of money raised through external commercial borrowings (ECBs).

External Commercial Borrowings:

- External Commercial Borrowings is a loan availed by an Indian entity from a nonresident lender with a minimum average maturity.
- They are used widely in India to facilitate access to foreign money by Indian corporations and PSUs (public sector undertakings).

Background:

- The Reserve Bank of India had drawn up a new external commercial borrowing (ECB) framework in order to further improve the ease of doing business in India, earlier this year (2019).
- RBI had also eased end-use of ECB proceeds to allow companies to raise foreign funds via the approval route from all eligible lenders except from overseas branches and subsidiaries of Indian banks.

Details:

- RBI said that ECBs with a minimum average maturity period of 7 years can be availed for repayment of rupee loans availed domestically for capital expenditure as also by NBFCs for on-lending for the same purpose.
- It is said that for repayment of rupee loans availed domestically for purposes other than capital expenditure and for on-lending by NBFCs for the same, the minimum average maturity period of the ECB is required to be 10 years.
- According to RBI, ECBs with a minimum average maturity period of 10 years can be used for working capital purposes and general corporate purposes and borrowing by NBFCs for the above maturity for on lending for the above purposes is also permitted.
- It has been decided to permit eligible corporate borrowers to avail ECB for repayment of rupee loans availed domestically for capital expenditure in manufacturing and infrastructure sector if classified as SMA-2 ((special mention account) or NPA, under any one time settlement with lenders.
- Lenders, are also permitted to sell, through assignment, such loans to eligible ECB lenders, except foreign branches or overseas subsidiaries of Indian banks, provided, the resultant ECB complies with all-in-cost, minimum average maturity period and other relevant norms of the ECB framework.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Hidden Chenchus and crouching tigers

Context:

Blending into the natural habitat, the Chenchus are conserving Tigers in the Nagarjunasagar Srisailem Tiger

Details:

- The people of Chenchu tribe toil day in and day out in the expansive Nallamala forests manning the base camps.
- A group of five Chenchus man each of the base camps and move into the interior forests at dawn each day conscientiously to digitally capture pug marks and other remnants left by the big cats in the sprawling Nallamala forests.
- Referred to as 'Pancha Pandavas' locally, they work tirelessly unmindful of treacherous terrain to provide a safe environment for the big cats and other wild animals and generate vast data from the ground for analysis by the NTCA authorities who come out with the tiger census every four years.
- Equipped with GPS-based Garmin GPS72h equipment, the tiger trackers record the droppings and other evidence left by the wild animals overnight in the Nagarjunasagar Srisailem Tiger Reserve (NSTR), the biggest sanctuary in the country.
- The number of Tigers in Andhra Pradesh has been put at 48 as per the assessment done by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).
- It was the maiden survey in the State after bifurcation.

Chenchus:

- Chenchus are the members of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG).
- The Chenchus are referred to as one of the Primitive Tribal Groups that are still dependent on forests and do not cultivate land but hunt for a living.
- They live in states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Odisha.
- They are an aboriginal tribe whose traditional way of life has been based on hunting and gathering.
- The Chenchus speak the Chenchu language, a member of the Dravidian language family.
- In general, the Chenchu relationship to non-tribal people has been largely symbiotic.
- Some Chenchus have continued to specialize in collecting forest products for sale to non-tribal people.
- Many Chenchus live in the dense Nallamala forest of Andhra Pradesh.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Tiger Census

Context:

- The four-year tiger census report, Status of Tigers in India, 2018, released by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, shows numbers of the big cat have **increased across all landscapes**.

A look at numbers

- The total count has risen to 2,967 from 2,226 in 2014 — an increase of 741 individuals (aged more than one year), or 33%, in four years.

- This is by far the **biggest increase in terms of both numbers and percentage since the four-yearly census using camera traps and the capture-mark-recapture method began** in 2006.
- The number that year was 1,411; it rose by 295 (21%) to 1,706 in 2010; and by 520 (30%) to 2,226 in 2014.

Why is a tiger census needed?

- The **tiger sits at the peak of the food chain**, and its conservation is important to ensure the well-being of the forest ecosystem.
- The tiger estimation exercise includes habitat assessment and prey estimation. The **numbers reflect the success or failure of conservation efforts**.
- A steep fall in the tiger population **could lead to a rise in the herbivore population**, which could destroy forests by feeding on trees and plants. That is why the decline in tiger numbers in 2005-2006 rang alarm bells amongst wildlife scientists and conservationists, prompting the government to form a **Tiger Task Force**, and tighten protection measures.
- This is an especially **important indicator in a fast-growing economy** like India where the pressures of development often run counter to the demands of conservation.
- The **Global Tiger Forum, an international collaboration of tiger-bearing countries**, has set a goal of doubling the count of wild tigers by 2022. More than 80% of the world's wild tigers are in India, and it's crucial to keep track of their numbers.

Where has the tiger population increased the most?

- The **biggest increase has been in Madhya Pradesh** — a massive 218 individuals (71%) from 308 in 2014 to 526.
 - While **Pench Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh** recorded the highest number of tigers,
 - Pench is well managed because it has a season-wise biodiversity plan as well as flying squads and tactical patrolling for managing security.
 - **Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu** registered the maximum improvement since 2014.
- In **Maharashtra**, the number has gone up from 190 to 312 (64%), and in **Karnataka**, from 406 to 524 (118, or 29%).
- **Uttarakhand** has gained over 100 tigers (340 to 442; 30%)
 - Madhya Pradesh saw the highest number of tigers at 526.
 - Karnataka came second with 524 tigers, followed by Uttarakhand with 442 tigers.
- The remarkable fact about the latest census shows that the tiger population has **increased by more than 100 per cent from 2006**, when the numbers of the big cat had hit an all-time low of 1,411 — the animal had been completely wiped out from some reserves such as Sariska in Rajasthan.
- Since tigers keep moving between states, conservationists prefer to talk about tiger numbers in terms of landscapes.
- **India's five tiger landscapes are:** Shivalik Hills and Gangetic Plains, Central Indian Landscape and Eastern Ghats, Western Ghats, North-East Hills and Brahmaputra Plains, and the Sundarbans.

Which states/regions have done badly?

- **Only one of the 20 tiger-bearing states has seen a fall in numbers — Chhattisgarh**, where the census counted 19 tigers, significantly fewer than the 46 of 2014. The report has cited law and order as the reason — large parts of the state are hit by the Maoist insurgency.
 - While all the States saw a “positive” increase, Chhattisgarh and Mizoram saw a decline in tiger population.
- Greater conservation **efforts are needed in the “critically vulnerable” Northeast hills and Odisha**.

- No tiger has been found in the Buxa, Palamau and Dampa reserves.

How were the estimates reached?

The census was carried out in four phases.

- **Phases 1 and 2** covered forest beats, generally spread over 15 sq km each, by Forest Departments, to collect signs of tiger presence like scat and pugmarks.
 - Enumerators walked paths called line transects to estimate the abundance of prey.
 - This was followed by sampling of plots along the transects to assess habitat characteristics, human impact, and prey dung density.
- **In phase 3**, the information was plotted on the forest map prepared **with remote-sensing and GIS application**.
 - Sample areas were divided in 2-sq-km parcels, and trap cameras were laid in these grids.

So, why have the numbers gone up?

- The success owes a lot to **increased vigilance and conservation efforts** by the Forest Department.
- **Healthy increases in core area populations eventually lead to migrations** to areas outside the core; this is why the 2018 census has found tigers in newer areas.
- Over the years, there has been **increased focus on tigers even in the areas under the territorial and commercial forestry arms of Forest Departments**.
 - The brightest spot in the non-protected tiger-bearing areas is the Brahmapuri division of Chandrapur district of Maharashtra, which has more than 40 tigers.
- The **other important reason is increased vigilance, and the fact that organised poaching rackets have been all but crushed**.
- The **increased protection has encouraged the tiger to breed**. Tigers are fast breeders when conditions are conducive.
- The **rehabilitation of villages outside core areas in many parts of the country** has led to the availability of more inviolate space for tigers.
- Also, because estimation exercises have become increasingly more accurate over the years, it is possible that **many tigers that eluded enumerators in earlier exercises were counted this time**.

There is, however, a flip side to the increase in the tiger population.

- As the animals spill out of protected areas, their **proximity to human habitats increases**.
- And, when humans and tigers come face to face, the big cats often pose **serious threats to humans and their livestock**. There have been several reports of human-tiger conflict in the past five years.
- Sustaining the country's tiger population will, therefore, require a deft balancing of the imperative of conservation with the needs of local people and the demands of infrastructure development.

Way forward

- It is imperative for the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) to **analyse why some landscapes have lost tigers**, when the entire programme has been receiving high priority and funding for years now at ₹10 lakh per family that is ready to move out of critical habitat.
- The conflict in **opening up reserves to road-building has to end**, and identified movement corridors should be cleared of commercial pressures.
- **Hunting of prey animals, such as deer and pig, needs to stop** as they form the base for growth of tiger and other carnivore populations.

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. The Odisha model

Reservation of seats in electoral Politics

- The Biju Janata Dal (BJD)-led State government was among the **first to reserve 50% of seats in Panchayati Raj institutions for women**.
- Further, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik nominated women for one-third of the seats in Lok Sabha election. Thus, seven candidates out of 21 fielded by the party for the 2019 election were women.
- The success rate among the women candidates was higher than for men, as five out of seven won the elections.

The power of self-help groups

Besides empowering women politically, the BJD government has been **organising women into self-help groups in order to empower them economically** ever since the BJD assumed power

- As of now, **Odisha has six lakh self-help groups** with seven million women under its flagship 'Mission Shakti'
 - The programme **aims at empowering women by helping them start income-generating activities**.
- The self-help groups are linked to the **Odisha Livelihoods Mission and Odisha Rural Development and Marketing Society**.
 - Members of the self-help groups are **encouraged to sell products at fairs and exhibitions** organised by the State round the year.
 - This gives them an opportunity to travel across different parts of the State and gain greater exposure.
- The State government had announced an **interest-free loan** of ₹3 lakh in January 2019 to each of the self-help groups. This amount was increased to ₹5 lakh
- In a bid to win the trust of women and also to empower them, the Naveen Patnaik government has announced **several sops like smartphones, award of work contracts, and higher entitlements** in the State's health insurance scheme, arguably superior to the national level scheme, Ayushman Bharat.
- The State government has announced an **accident insurance scheme** for all members of self-help groups.

Category: GOVERNANCE

1. Automated Multi-modal Biometric Identification System (AMBIS)

Context

- Maharashtra became the first state to adopt a digital fingerprint and iris scanning system to aid police investigations.

AMBIS

- An AMBIS unit comprises a computer terminal, a camera, and iris, fingerprint, and palm scanners.
- It also includes a **portable system to dust off and capture fingerprints** from crime scenes.
- With the integration of the system with facial recognition from CCTV cameras, AMBIS enables the

police to cross-reference and put faces to criminals whose fingerprints have been captured on paper over the decades, apart from solving fresh crimes.

How will it work?

- Under the system, **every police station in the state will have a scanner which will be linked to the main server** which is located at the state headquarters on a secured server.
- The hi-tech system ensures that there will be **no data loss and has a back-up facility at a very high level**.
- Another feature of AMBIS is that **it can be interfaced with any other operating system**, whereby data can be accessed anywhere, anytime

Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS)

- AMBIS replaces the AFIS, which has been used by Indian law enforcement agencies to search finger and palm prints.
- However, **AFIS has limited utility**, providing only one-to-one fingerprint matches as compared multimodal matches possible with AMBIS.
- With **facial recognition technology**, the new system is also an upgrade on AFIS.

Significance

- The system will prove useful in **identification of unidentified bodies**, especially in cases where the body is mutilated, does not have an arm or a hand is lost. In such cases, the bare sole scan can help identify the body
- The major irrefutable advantage of the **system is that with retinal scans**, it will be difficult for criminals to escape the ambit of the law.
- Another feature of the system is that it **can do facial recognition of suspects** in cases of mob violence and mob lynching with the help of photographs and going through CCTV footages.

Conclusion

- AMBIS adopted by the Maharashtra Police **will soon be replicated across the country**, with the state government working with the National Crime Records Bureau in New Delhi to create standards to be used by other state police forces.
- The system is expected **to be of help in more serious offences as its accuracy improves** and the database expands.

Category: EDUCATION

1. Draft National Education Policy 2019

Background

- The Committee for Draft National Education Policy was Chaired by Dr. K. Kasturirangan
- The Committee was constituted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development
- The report proposes an education policy, which seeks to address the challenges of: (i) access, (ii) equity, (iii) quality, (iv) affordability, and (v) accountability faced by the current education system.
- The draft Policy provides for reforms at all levels of education from school to higher education. It seeks to increase the focus on early childhood care, reform the current exam system, strengthen teacher training, and restructure the education regulatory framework.

Early Childhood Care and Education

Currently, most early childhood education is delivered through anganwadis and private-preschools. However, there has been less focus on the educational aspects of early childhood.

- Hence, the draft Policy recommends developing a two-part curriculum for early childhood care and education. This will consist of:
- guidelines for up to three-year-old children (for parents and teachers), and
- Educational framework for three to eight-year-old children. This would be implemented by improving and expanding the anganwadi system and co-locating anganwadis with primary schools.
- Currently, the RTE Act provides for free and compulsory education to all children from the age of six to 14 years. The **draft Policy recommends extending the ambit of the RTE Act to include early childhood education and secondary school education**. This would extend the coverage of the Act to all children between the ages of three to 18 years.

Curriculum framework:

The current structure of school education must be restructured on the basis of the development needs of students. This would consist of a 5-3-3-4 design comprising:

- five years of foundational stage (three years of pre-primary school and classes one and two),
- three years of preparatory stage (classes three to five),
- three years of middle stage (classes six to eight), and
- Four years of secondary stage (classes nine to 12).

Concerns

Two significant concerns identified from **collaborative research by Ambedkar University and ASER Centre** need to be addressed in implementation.

- The preschool curriculum was observed to be primarily a **downward extension of the primary curriculum**. Children were engaged for most of the time in **copying or rote learning of alphabet and numbers, a practice which is developmentally inappropriate** and can be counterproductive from the perspective of a sound foundation.
 - Children at this stage require a curriculum which emphasises play-based learning opportunities that promote engagement with play materials, picture books, building blocks, puzzles, etc. and include teacher-led storytelling, conversations, rhymes, emergent literacy and numeracy activities, outdoor and indoor play.
 - These opportunities will enable children to acquire not only the right foundation for development of skills prioritised for the 21st century, i.e. creativity, critical thinking, communication, collaboration and self-confidence, but also an abiding interest in lifelong learning.
- The second issue is the rigid structure of the primary grades' curriculum, which changes annually with every grade, thus providing little or no opportunity for children to revisit the previous year's curriculum.
 - The foundational stage can address this rigidity, but for this the requirement would be to develop a progressive curriculum upward from pre-school to primary stage. Further, it has to be in a spiral, not linear, mode with adequate flexibility to enable children to revisit concepts and learn at their own pace.
- This brings us to a third concern, which is a **lack of discussion about what it takes to prepare teachers to successfully teach foundational literacy** in a multilingual country. Instead, the document recommends **recruiting volunteers and community members to support** the acquisition of early literacy (even remedial instruction!) in the primary grades, albeit under the guidance of

teachers.

- This lends credence to a dangerous and erroneous idea that any literate person can teach literacy, and undercuts sophisticated understandings related to children's development and literacy learning that teachers ideally bring to their jobs. Volunteers can be used, but cannot be a primary mechanism that a national policy relies upon to deliver foundational literacy to students.

Higher Education

According to the All India Survey on Higher Education, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education in India has increased from 20.8% in 2011-12 to 25.8% in 2017-18.

Regulatory structure and accreditation:

- The Committee noted that the current higher education system **has multiple regulators** with overlapping mandates. This **reduces the autonomy of higher educational institutions** and creates an environment of dependency and centralised decision making. Therefore, it proposes setting up **the National Higher Education Regulatory Authority (NHERA)**.
- This independent authority **would replace the existing individual regulators in higher education**, including professional and vocational education.
- This implies that the role of all professional councils such as AICTE and the Bar Council of India would be **limited to setting standards for professional practice**.
- The role of the University Grants Commission (UGC) will be limited to providing grants to higher educational institutions.

Restructuring of higher education institutions:

Higher education institutions will be restructured into three types:

- **research universities** focusing equally on research and teaching;
- **teaching universities** focusing primarily on teaching; and
- **Colleges focusing only on teaching at undergraduate levels**. All such institutions will gradually move towards full autonomy - academic, administrative, and financial.

Concerns

The NEP has proposed a consolidation of the 40,000 odd colleges into effectively a three-tier system of 12,000 multi-disciplinary institutions. Colleges (or institutions) are to be classified as type I, which are primarily research institutions, type II, which do both teaching and research, and, type III, which will only do teaching.

- There is **no mechanism, such as innovative curricula or extension units, for tier II or tier III** institutions to work on local problems. It has no access or accountability to people or their representatives.
- **Funds may largely go to tier I institutions to follow "world-class research"**. This will neither permeate to local colleges nor change state agencies

The Positives:

- **Emphasis on Research and the National Research Foundation (NRF):** The emphasis on research and the recommendation to create an autonomous NRF is an excellent one.
 - If India has to become a highly innovative society, it has to be fuelled by research.
 - As the policy says, we currently invest 0.69% of GDP on research as against 2-4% in China,

the US, Israel and South Korea. An annual grant of Rs. 20,000 crores is proposed

- **Emphasis on Foundational Learning:** The second, equally important positive, is the emphasis for the **first time in an Indian policy document, on Foundational Learning**. We all know about the learning crisis that exists in India and it is acknowledged multiple times in the policy.
 - A lot of this learning crisis can be attributed to children not learning to read fluently by grades 2/3 and not learning fluent arithmetic operations by grade 4/5. For us as a country today, focussing on foundational learning is key.
- The **policy acknowledges some important problems in the Indian education system**: In acknowledging problems, the policy does not mince words. It says ‘we have been almost **fatally slow in the adoption of technology** to improve the quality of education’, and ‘salary, promotion, career management, and leadership positions in the school system and beyond **tend not to have any formal merit-based structures, but rather are based on lobbying**, luck, or seniority’ and further ‘the teacher education sector has been beleaguered with mediocrity as well as rampant corruption.’
 - Unfortunately, the policy seems to be less effective in proposing concrete solutions to these problems **but acknowledging a shortcoming is a key step towards any solution**.
- **Commitment to public education, investment in education** and religious and other equity unequivocally re-affirmed: The draft policy re-affirms each of these and that is welcome. Only well-funded, public education can ensure that the quality of education a child receives is not dependent on her parental income and we need to strive towards that goal.
 - The policy makes these arguments well. The commitment that **education should be a tool to reduce inequity in society is also well-made**.
 - India can never achieve greatness if stark divides that exist today continue in society.

Conclusion

- Therefore the NEP should have clear objectives that remain effective for a period of time like a decade or so
- Additionally, it should be evidence-based and strongly linked to ground realities as well as challenges.

F. Tidbits

1. Assam's golden tea sells for ₹50,000 per kg

- The Manohari Gold tea fetched ₹50,000 a kg at the Guwahati Tea Auction Centre (GTAC).
- This was the highest price commanded by any tea sold in any auction centre in India.
- In July last year, the same tea from the same plantation — the 1,000-acre Manohari Tea Estate — had created a record; a kilogram sold for ₹39,001 to become the most expensive tea sold at any auction in India.
- But less than a month later, Golden Needles tea from the Donyi Polo Tea Estate in Arunachal Pradesh fetched ₹40,000 for a kg and sold 1.1 kg at that price.

2. Pakistan allows special group of pilgrims for Nankana Sahib

- As part of the celebrations for the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, Pakistan has allowed a special group of Indian pilgrims to enter the country.
- The group heading for the holy Sikh shrine of Nankana Sahib will begin the festivities that will ultimately lead to the main festival at the Gurudwara of Kartarpur Sahib.
- India and Pakistan are building infrastructure for a peace corridor called the Kartarpur Corridor.
- The corridor is expected to be ready by the end of October and will facilitate the expected large flow of pilgrims to Kartarpur, Nankana Sahib and other important pilgrimage centres.
- The group of 500 pilgrims was granted visa on July 26 as a special provision over the usual number

of visas issued under the 1974 **India-Pakistan** Protocol on Visits to Religious Shrines of 1974.

- It is believed that the policy of promoting visits to religious shrines and people to people contacts between Pakistan and India could lead to better bilateral relations.

G. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Vembanad Lake is a designated Ramsar site.
2. It is the largest lake in India.
3. Vembanad wetland has been identified for the National Wetlands Conservation Programme.

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

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

The largest lake in the state of Kerala, Vembanad Kayal is constantly counted as the longest Lake in India. Spanning several districts in the state of Kerala, it is known as Vembanadu Lake in Alappuzha, Punnamada Lake in Kuttanad and Kochi Lake in Kochi. Wular lake is considered as the largest fresh water lake of India. It is located in Bandipora district of Jammu and Kashmir. The government of India has identified the Vembanad wetland under the National Wetlands Conservation Programme.

Q2. Which of the following are the effects of over use of fertilizers?

1. Imbalance in the nitrogen cycle.
2. Surface and Ground water pollution.
3. Climate change.

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

The fertilizer industry contributes to two major environmental challenges — imbalance in the nitrogen cycle and climate change. Nitrogen pollution of surface and groundwater in India has reached alarming

proportions. After carbon dioxide and methane, nitrous oxide (N_2O) is the most potent greenhouse gas, trapping heat and contributing to global warming, climate change. It also destroys stratospheric ozone, which protects the planet from harmful ultraviolet rays.

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. The Indian Medical Association is a founder member of the World Medical Association.
2. The Indian Medical Association is registered under the Companies Act of 1956.

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 Indian Medical Association is a national voluntary organisation of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine in India. It looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well-being of the community at large. It is a society registered under The Societies Act of India. The Indian Medical association is a founder member of the World Medical Association.

Q4. Consider the following statements:

1. Chenchu Tribes are listed as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups.
2. They live in states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Odisha.

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:

Chenchus are the members of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG). The Chenchus are referred to as one of the Primitive Tribal Groups that are still dependent on forests and do not cultivate land but hunt for a living. They live in states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Odisha. They are an aboriginal tribe whose traditional way of life has been based on hunting and gathering.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Growing tiger numbers point to the urgency of devising conservation models that also work outside protected areas. Discuss. (10 Marks, 150 Words)
2. Why were indentured labour taken by the British from India to their colonies? Have they been able

to preserve their cultural identity there? (15 Marks, 250 Words)

