

12 Aug 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Amarinder asks Pak. not to slow down Kartarpur work

Context:

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, expressing concerns over reports of slowdown on the Kartarpur Corridor project, has urged Pakistan not to back down on its commitment as it would hurt sentiments of the Sikh community.

About Kartarpur Corridor:

- The Kartarpur shrine, in Pakistan's Narowal district across the river Ravi is where Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikhism, spent his final days.
- The shrine is highly revered by the Sikh community.

- The corridor is intended to be completed before the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev in November 2019.
- The Kartarpur shrine has one of the last copies of the original Guru Granth Sahib; there are some who believe that it contains not only the wisdom of the 10 Gurus but is itself the 11th and last Guru.

Details:

- India has revoked Article 370 to withdraw the special status to Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcated the region into two Union Territories - Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.
- In reaction to India's move, Pakistan downgraded diplomatic ties with India by expelling Indian High Commissioner Ajay Bisaria and also formally suspended its trade relations with India.
- Pakistan has also suspended import of Indian goods under the Pak-Afghan transit treaty.
- India has sent a reminder to Pakistan for organising technical-level meetings, which India had proposed to hold during the first week of August 2019.
- With Pakistan reportedly not having responded to the proposed meeting, India has sent a reminder.
- Concerned with these developments, Punjab chief minister has expressed concern over reports of discernible slowdown in activities for the development of the Kartarpur corridor.
- While reiterating that Jammu and Kashmir was an internal matter of India, the chief minister said Pakistan should not link it with diplomatic or trade ties.
- It is believed that it would be a travesty to waste the opportunity made possible for diplomatic dialogue between the two countries, by the Kartarpur corridor.

2. 'We're still here': Hong Kong protesters return to streets

Context:

Thousands of pro-democracy protesters hit the streets of Hong Kong for a tenth weekend in-a-row, defying police who fired tear gas at several locations.

Background:

- Hong Kong is a semi-autonomous region and a part of China. The city was an outpost of the British Empire for 156 years, during which time it developed into a global business hub.
- In a 1984 joint declaration, the British agreed to give the city back in 1997, and China agreed to allow a high degree of autonomy for 50 years, including guarantees of free speech, capitalist markets and English common law under a "one country, two systems" arrangement.

Details:

- Hong Kong's government is now attempting to pass a law that would for the first time allow extraditions to mainland China. It currently, does not have an extradition agreement with Beijing.
- The proposal has generated massive opposition and a series of protests.
- The government of China has said that the proposed amendments would "plug loopholes" that allow the city to be used by criminals.
- It has assured that courts in Hong Kong would make the final decision on extradition, that only certain categories of suspects would be liable, and that individuals accused of political and religious offences would not be extradited.
- However, Human Rights Watch and the International Chamber of Commerce have warned against changing the law.

What's the new extradition law?

- The "Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment)

Bill 2019” was proposed by Hong Kong’s government in February 2019.

- It covers mainland China and other jurisdictions that don’t have an extradition agreement with Hong Kong.
- The bill was sparked by the case of a Hong Kong man accused of murdering his girlfriend in Taiwan. He was arrested in Hong Kong and convicted of money laundering but couldn’t be sent back to Taiwan for trial there because there’s no legal framework to do so.
- The Hong Kong government says the new law will ensure the city doesn’t become a haven for suspected criminals.

Concerns:

- Opponents are concerned that it could open the door for anyone, including political dissidents or civil rights activists, who runs in conflict with the Chinese government to be arrested on trumped-up charges in Hong Kong and sent to the mainland.
- Extradited suspects are likely to face torture.
- The law would apply to Hong Kong citizens, foreign residents and even people passing through on business or as tourists.
- Critics note the draft bill assigns to the city’s chief executive chosen by a committee stacked with Beijing supporters the leading role in handling extradition requests. Currently, the legislature can block extraditions.
- The proposed change is the latest in a series of moves by China under President Xi Jinping that are viewed as chipping away at Hong Kong’s autonomy,
- It is believed that the continued erosion of autonomy could jeopardize Hong Kong’s special status.
- Canada, the European Union and the U.K. also have expressed concern about the legislation and its potential effect on their citizens and business confidence.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Govt. to launch ‘Uber for tractors’ app to aid farmers

Context:

India’s agriculture ministry has developed a farm equipment rental app for Indian farmers, which lets them hire tractors, rotavator and other farm related machinery on rent for with flexible tenures.

Details:

- The new app - “Uber for tractors” would enable farmers to have affordable access to cutting-edge technology at their doorsteps.
- The app is reportedly similar to Uber and looks to bring a similar convenience to farmers.
- The mobile app seeks to efficiently connect farmers with custom hiring centres CHCs, just like Uber connects passengers to cabs.
- There are more than 38,000 custom hiring centres (CHCs) across the country, which rent out 2.5 lakh pieces of farm equipment every year.
- Once the app is officially launched, farmers who wish to hire equipments can register using their names, addresses and mobile numbers, and then punch in their requirements.
- The app also includes a rating system wherein the feedback from both the CHC and the farmers, allowing customers to make informed decisions.
- The app will also create an invaluable database for policy-makers, who can track the use and cost of equipment.

- The system would also help to track the usage of new technology that the government wants to promote, such as the Happy Seeder that aims to prevent stubble burning that causes air pollution, or solar dryers that can help farmers process and preserve their produce.
- Successful demos have already been conducted in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Punjab.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. No formalin found in fish imported to Goa: minister

Context:

Regular checks were being conducted on fish imported to Goa and the state's Health Minister has confirmed that no trace of formalin has been found in fish brought to the state from outside.

Formalin:

- Formalin is a toxic, colourless solution that is derived by dissolving formaldehyde gas in water.
- Formaldehyde is highly reactive and flammable gas.
- Formalin is a cancer-inducing chemical used to illegally preserve fish.
- It is used in the manufacture of pesticides, fertilisers, glue, paper and paint, among other products.
- It irritates the eyes, throat, skin and stomach. In the long run, continued exposure to formalin can result in cancers and also harm to the kidneys and liver.

Details:

- Formalin increases the shelf life of fish (highly perishable), therefore, is used as a preservative.
- Some amount of formalin is naturally formed while fish is transported with ice, but these are usually bound with tissues and not a risk.
- If fish is laced externally with formalin, it remains free and can cause serious health issues.
- In July 2018, the state government had banned the import of fish from outside in view of the scare of formalin (formaldehyde), being found in it.
- Since then, The state government is taking services of the Quality Council of India (QCI) to conduct random checks on fish brought on the state borders and various local markets.
- It is found that no added formalin has been detected in any samples of fishes imported to Goa so far.

2. A.P. forum protests uranium mining

Context:

Protests are being staged against Uranium mining in Nallamala in Andhra Pradesh.

Concerns:

- Public resistance over uranium mining has hobbled India's efforts to boost domestic production of the mineral, even as portions of the installed capacity at nuclear plants lie unutilized due to a fuel shortage.
- The government is, facing protests by residents and activists, who oppose uranium mining on health and environmental grounds.
- India faces a shortage of uranium because it has been slow in opening up new mines.

Details:

- A group of retired scientists from top research institutions along with environmentalists from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have cautioned the AP Pollution control board about contamination of ground water in several villages around the Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UICL).
- It is also said that the mining would affect Krishna river, polluting the water and later the villages around it.
- Additionally, it is believed that the uranium mining in the forests would inevitably damage the delicate ecology of the region.
- And claimed that Chenchu tribes of the region would also be immediately affected.
- Generally, toxic waste is buried inside the earth. Concerns are being raised on how government is doing a sub-par job at management and the waste is exposed to human beings and ecology.
- The protestors have urged the government to spend money on research and development of renewable energy, such as solar, to provide for public needs instead of promoting the use of uranium, which only accounts to 3% of power in the country.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. A point to ponder over in the POCSO Bill

Context:

Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill, 2019 has been passed by both the houses of Parliament and set to become the 'law of the land'.

Details:

- There has been much development with respect to the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.
- The bill was introduced with an objective of stopping the rampant sexual abuse of children, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill, 2019.

Highlights of the bill:

The amendment bill has a number of provisions to safeguard children from offences of sexual assault and sexual harassment.

- The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2018 introduced the death penalty for rape of girls below the age of 12. At the same time, the POCSO Act, provides that where the same act constitutes an offence under the POCSO Act and any other law, then the offender will be punished under the Act or such law, whichever provides for greater punishment.
 - This has created an issue as the effect of such an amendment was death penalty for rape of minor girls but not for assault against minor boys.
 - The Bill does away with such a discrepancy. It is gender neutral and provides for the death penalty for "aggravated penetrative sexual assault of a child", thus bringing both these pieces

of legislation on a par with each other in this respect.

- The definition of 'Sexual Assault' has been extended to incorporate administration of hormones or chemical substances to children to attain early sexual maturity for the purpose of penetrative sexual assault.
- The bill is critical because it clearly defines child pornography and makes it punishable.
 - The Bill defines child pornography as any visual depiction of sexually explicit conduct involving a child including photograph, video, digital or computer generated image indistinguishable from an actual child.
 - The amendments also penalize the transmitting of pornographic material to children and propose to synchronise it with the Information Technology Act.
- The bill seeks to enhance punishment for sexual offences against children, with a provision of **death penalty**.
 - According to the amendment bill, those committing penetrative sexual assaults on a child below 16 years of age would be punished with imprisonment up to 20 years, which might extend to life imprisonment as well as fine.
 - In case of aggravated penetrative sexual assault, the bill increases the minimum punishment from ten years to 20 years, and the maximum punishment to death penalty.
- To curb child pornography, the Bill provides that those who use a child for pornographic purposes should be punished with imprisonment up to five years and fine.
- However, in the event of second or subsequent conviction, the punishment would be up to seven years and fine.

Concerns:

- The Bill provides for death penalty for the rape of minors. The intention of the Bill is to have a deterrent effect; but it can be argued that the introduction of the death penalty may backfire in cases of child sexual abuse and even have a catastrophic effect.
 - Often, the perpetrators of abuse are family members and having such penalty in the statute book may discourage the registration of the crime itself.
 - Also, it may threaten the life of the minor as the maximum punishment for murder is also the death sentence.

Death penalty – a double edged sword:

- The debate is about the probable ramifications of 'death penalty' provision in the Act.
- Today, the death penalty has become a prominent tool of symbolic legislation. Many a time, the Government, by introducing the death penalty, portrays itself to be strict and serious with regard to such offences.
- But, it largely diverts attention from the core issues of infrastructural apathy, procedural lapses and trial delays and conveniently evades the fact that it is the certainty of punishment rather than its severity which has deterrence in real sense.
- It is pertinent to note here that even a year-and-a-half after the passage of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2018, which introduced the death penalty for rape of a minor girl, such incidents have not been under check.
- The Justice J.S. Verma Committee, which was constituted in 2013 in the aftermath of the Nirbhaya case, after due deliberations found itself against the imposition of death penalty in rape cases.
- The 262nd Report of the Law Commission of India, 2015, also provides for abolition of the death penalty except in terror cases.
- Globally, there is research to support the view that despite stringent punishments, there is no fall in the rate of commission of crimes.
- Robin Conley in his book, *Confronting the Death Penalty*, has observed that the death penalty may seem just and appropriate in abstract but once you are privy to its practicality, it becomes less

appealing.

The Supreme Court data:

- The Supreme Court has recently taken cognisance of the sexual abuse of children, directing its registry to file a case as writ petition with cause title “In-re Alarming Rise in The Number of Reported Child Rape Incidents”.
- According to National **Crime** Records Bureau data of 2016, the conviction rate in POCSO cases is 29.6% while pendency is as high as 89%.
- The prescribed time period of two months for trial in such cases is hardly complied with.
- The court has also taken note of the delay in trials, in turn directing the Central Government to set up special courts within 60 days of the order in each district having more than 100 pending cases under the Act.

The Bill is a step forward in preventing child abuse but the consequences of providing for the death penalty need to be closely observed.

2. Dealing with doping

Context:

The Indian cricket board (BCCI) has relented in its long standoff with the government over control of the dope-testing regime of its cricketers and agreed to come under the ambit of the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA).

Background:

- Earlier, the BCCI had its in-house dope-tests but it only lent credence to the allegations about conflict of interest.
- The issue came to a boil when Prithvi Shaw was given a back-dated eight-month suspension after he tested positive for a banned drug, Terbutaline.
- The 19-year-old batsman, claimed that the substance was present in an over-the-counter cough syrup. Shaw’s excuse and the BCCI’s quick acceptance of his self-medication, bred scepticism.
- The silver-lining is that the episode hastened the BCCI’s move into the NADA’s ambit and also cleared the decks for the Indian women’s cricket team to compete in the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

Details:

- The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), since its inception in 1999, has imposed stringent measures so that sport stays drug-free.
- In India, WADA’s rules have been enforced by the Government-run National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) and almost all sports federations had fallen in line except the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).
- But that aberration was erased as the BCCI accepted NADA’s supervision.
- Before its turn-around, the BCCI had resisted NADA’s intervention. The main objection pertained to the ‘whereabouts’ clause, which made it mandatory for a player to reveal where he would be on a daily basis. The need for privacy was offered as an excuse.

Conclusion:

- With the BCCI allowing NADA to monitor its domestic cricketers, by extension the International Cricket Council too has finally come under the WADA.

- It is faulty to stress that cricket is just a reflection of skill and that drug-enhanced muscular efficiency cannot influence match results.
- Sport has to be a level playing-field and it is finally one with cricket subjecting itself to universal drug-testing rules.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Rethinking water governance strategies

The editorial talks about the water crisis in India and the pressing need for governing strategies that will help in dealing with the crisis.

Context:

- India's water crisis was widely talked about on various social media platforms, recently.
- Questions were raised on the quality of the discourse and choice of water governance strategies in India as India's cities are running out of water, coupled with Chennai's drinking water woes.
- It was the videos and news reports claiming that Indian cities are running out of groundwater went viral. These news items gained popularity as they relied on a 2018 report of India's own Niti Aayog, which was titled 'Composite Water Management Index: A tool for water management.'
- The report emphasised that 21 major cities are expected to run out of groundwater as soon as 2020, affecting [nearly] 100 million people.
- However, perseverance of Joanna Slater of The Washington Post led to an eventual conclusion that there was no credible evidence for this assessment.

Details:

- Niti Aayog's projection was only a means to an end goal: leveraging some action from the Indian States.
- The report's central goal was to propose a tool, an index, to monitor the States' water resource management strategies and provide the necessary course-shift, beyond supply augmentation approaches.
- The report was, in reality, a desperate move to engage with the States, in the absence of any substantive leverage to influence their approaches to water resources management. This also emphasised that the central role of any course correction lies with States.
- However, India cannot remain in a state of denial that a crisis is not in the making.

Data supporting the prevalence of water crisis:

- Central Ground Water Board's (CGWB) 2013 estimates say that the groundwater development in India is just about 62% of the utilisable groundwater reserves.
- A recent report by the Central Water Commission, prepared in collaboration with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), asserted that India is not yet in water scarcity condition. But it is certainly in a water-stressed condition, with reducing per capita water availability.

Way forward:

- India needs to reconsider the institutional processes for dissemination of information about water resource management. There is a certain amount of danger inherent in the casual manner in which knowledge about water resources is legitimised and consumed.
- It must be understood that the crisis is not as much of scarcity as of delivery. The challenge is to ensure an adequate access to quality water, more so in urban areas.

- It must be realised that that with the country's rapid urbanisation, demand cannot be met by groundwater reserves alone.
- The urban needs, which underpin much reporting on water crises, need to be met by robust long-term planning and preparation for droughts and other contingencies.
- The approaches to water governance must be reconsidered.
- For long, water resource departments in States have continued to follow the conventional approaches of supply augmentation. They need to reorient themselves towards deploying strategies of demand management, conservation and regulation.
- The Centre has to work with States towards an institutional change for the necessary course-shift.
- The government must strengthen the federal governance of water resources towards long-term water security.

F. Tidbits

1. Odisha villagers seek refuge atop trees to escape from elephant attacks

- A herd comprising 10 elephants has been roaming the locality, giving the locals of a remote village in Odisha, sleepless nights.
- Generally, jumbos are attracted to the rice stored in thatched houses.
- With the incidents of elephant depredation increasing, villagers are now forced to build barbed wire fences around their houses and crop fields. Jumbos avoid barbed wire as it pinches them.
- The Keonjhar district administration has formed a trackers' teams comprising 100 personnel to tackle the issue.
- Villagers are given information about elephant movement in advance so that they can take precautions.
- Although as per the elephant census, the district is home to around 50 elephants, about 150 elephants are running amok in the interior pockets of Keonjhar.
- Four persons have lost their lives, while around 50 houses have been damaged by elephant depredation during the last two months.
- To escape from wild elephants, people have constructed wooden platform atop trees.
- It is believed that the wooden platform is safe as elephants can neither climb big trees nor uproot it.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Indian National Science Academy (INSA)

- The Indian National Science Academy is the apex body of Indian scientists representing all branches of science and technology.
- INSA promotes science and its use in India.
- It was originally established in 1935 and was known as the 'National Institute of Sciences of India' until the present name was adopted in 1970.
- The Government of India recognised it in 1945 as the premier scientific society representing all branches of science in India.
- In 1968, it was designated as the adhering organisation in India to the International Council for Science (ICSU) on behalf of the Government of India.
- It is headquartered in New Delhi.

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. 'Operation Sagar Rani' was launched to create awareness and find evidence of formalin adulteration in fishes.
2. It was launched in the state of Goa.

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:

In 2017, Operation Sagar Rani was started by the food safety department along with the state fisheries department of Kerala to create awareness and find evidence of formalin adulteration in fishes.

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. Formaldehyde is highly reactive and flammable gas.
2. Formaldehyde occurs naturally in plants and animals as a result of their own metabolism.

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:

Formaldehyde occurs naturally in plants and animals as a result of their own metabolism. For instance, in vegetables, 20 to 60 mg formaldehyde per kg is present and 5 to 140 mg in a kilo of fish depending on the type. As the chemical is water soluble it dissolves in water and can be removed by cleaning and cooking the vegetable or meat properly. The European Food Safety Authority recommends an oral exposure of 100mg formaldehyde per day. But when it is applied as a preservative, the levels differ, causing health implications such as severe abdominal pain, vomiting, coma, renal injury and death.

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. Uranium is a radioactive chemical element.
2. Largest viable deposits of Uranium are found in India.

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:

Uranium is a silvery-gray radioactive chemical element. Largest viable deposits of Uranium are found in Australia, Kazakhstan, and Canada. India has no significant reserves of Uranium and the needs are met through imports.

Q4. Ambubachi Mela is

- a. an annual festival held on Makar Sankranti in Kerala, at the shrine of Sabarimala.
- b. an annual chariot festival popular in the state of Odisha
- c. a festival of the Jaintia tribe, celebrated in the month of July for good health, property and bumper harvest
- d. a festival to mark the annual menstruation of the goddess at the Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati

Answer: d

Explanation:

Ambubachi Mela is a festival to mark the annual menstruation of the goddess at the Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati, Assam. It is believed that the presiding goddess of the temple, Devi Kamakhya, the Mother Shakti, goes through her annual cycle of menstruation during this time stretch. The Ambubachi is a ritual of ascetics observed with "Tantrik means".

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. What are the adverse effects of formalin used in fish? Discuss the measures taken and the need for complete ban. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
2. The growing e-commerce sector in India demands for policy reforms for it to flourish. Analyse and suggest the way forward. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

