

19 Aug 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. ‘India, Bhutan are natural partners’

Context:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was on a two day visit to Bhutan. It is his first to Bhutan since the 73-day India-China standoff in 2017 triggered by an intrusion by Chinese troops into territory claimed by Bhutan.

Details:

- Addressing the students of the prestigious Royal University of Bhutan he emphasised the natural

partnership that India and Bhutan share.

- The Prime Minister emphasised on the fact that besides geography, history, culture and spiritual traditions have created unique and deep bonds between the peoples and nations, of India and Bhutan.
- The Prime Minister invited more students to visit India for studies in traditional areas such as Buddhism
- 10 MoUs in the fields of space research, aviation, IT, power and education were inked to infuse new energy in ties.
- One of the key outcomes of the visit was Modi and Bhutanese Prime Minister Lotay Tshering inaugurating the 720 megawatts Mangdechhu hydel power project.
 - The Mangdechhu hydel power project is a run-of-river hydroelectric project.
 - The project is funded by the Indian Government through a 70% loan and a 30% grant.
- Modi and Tshering also jointly inaugurated the Ground Earth Station and SATCOM network, developed with assistance from ISRO for utilization of South Asia Satellite in Bhutan.
 - The South Asia Satellite, also known as GSAT-9, is a geostationary communications and meteorology satellite operated by the ISRO for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) region.
 - The satellite was launched on 5 May 2017.
- Both sides reaffirmed their shared security interests and reiterated their commitment to maintain close co-ordination on matters affecting each other's security and national interests.

Category: HEALTH

1. Doctors' federation pushes to check hysterectomy rates

Context:

There are rising concerns about increasing number of women opting for hysterectomies in Beed district.

Concerns:

- The Beed district in drought-stricken Marathwada came into focus in May after media reports highlighted that a large number of women, especially those who migrated for sugarcane-cutting work, have had their uterus removed.
- A hysterectomy is an operation to remove a woman's uterus.
- Data collected by the government showed that 4,605 hysterectomies were carried out in Beed in a span of three years in 99 private hospitals.
- Activists have alleged that the rate of hysterectomies in Beed is 14 times higher than other parts of the State or the country.

Details:

- The high rate of hysterectomies in Beed district has put the medical fraternity in a spot for carrying out unwanted procedures.
- The Federation of Obstetric & Gynaecological Societies of India (FOGSI), has decided to sensitise its members and reach out to the community and the government.
- Through its 'save the uterus' campaign, FOGSI is reaching out to all members and talking about how a hysterectomy can be avoided.
- The doctors assert that there are so many new medical treatments and other surgeries that can be opted for instead of a hysterectomy.
- They are working towards raising awareness among people with respect to the alternate treatments that can be offered.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Home loans linked to repo rate are cheaper, but carry risks

Context:

India's largest lender, the State Bank of India, launched repo-rate linked home loans that came into the market on July 1 2019.

Issue:

- The interest rate for normal home loans given by banks are calculated based on the marginal cost of funds-based lending rate (MCLR), which is an internal reference rate set by banks.
- This rate is nominally based on the RBI's repo rate — which itself is the rate of interest the central bank charges banks — but in practice the calculation of the MCLR by each bank is opaque and complex.
- The MCLR could be different for different banks, and be influenced by various factors such as the risk assigned to the loan taker and other factors.
- There was a constant complaint from customers that even under the MCLR regime and before that the base rate regime, the benefits of the cuts of the policy rate were not getting transmitted to the end consumer. But, whenever there was an increase in interest rates by the regulator, the banks were very quick to pass that on.
- The RBI has, over four actions, cut the repo rate by 110 basis points, whereas, according to some estimates, banks have transmitted only a 29 basis point cut to the consumers.

Details:

- India's largest lender, the State Bank of India, launched repo-rate linked home loans.
- This was swiftly followed by several other public sector banks, such as Syndicate Bank, Bank of India, Union Bank and Allahabad Bank, who each announced home loan products that would be directly linked to the central bank's repo rate.

Advantages of repo-linked home loans:

- It is believed that the new repo rate-linked home loans being offered by banks could be cheaper for homebuyers and more transparent.
- A repo rate-linked home loan is one way to speed up this process of transmission of rate cuts by RBI so that the end user can benefit from the RBI action.
- It is opined that it is a pro-investor move.

Concerns about repo-linked home loans:

- Some consumers have the apprehension that a repo rate-linked product will mean that the effective interest rate of the loan would change as constantly as the repo rate itself does, thereby making it more difficult for the loan taker to systematically make the payments.
- In the case of the repo rate linked loans, the changes in the interest rate can be more frequent and it could result in changes in the instalment amount itself, which was not the case in the MCLR regime
- There is a higher chance, if the repo rate is increased significantly over a short time, that the instalment amount itself could be increased.

2. Finance Ministry asks PSBs to align with national priorities

Context:

A recent note from the Finance Ministry has asked banks to align themselves to the national priorities.

Details:

- The note has asked the banks to seek feedback on several issues such as the rise in bad loans and slow credit growth in the last five years, and to prepare a roadmap for the coming years.
- PSBs have been asked to involve all their approximately 1 lakh branches in the exercise.
- This is part of an initiative taken by the government to find out ways in which banks can align with its national objectives.
- Some of the national priorities to which banks need to align include doubling farm income, Jal Shakti Mission, housing for all, education loans, ease of living, corporate social responsibility and financial inclusion.
- The exercise, termed as “bottom-up consultative process” for PSBs, is the first comprehensive review of PSBs after Nirmala Sitharaman took charge of the Finance Ministry.
- It will also provide a direction to the banks for the next five years.
- The process will provide a platform for field personnel to represent and bring forward the grassroots-level challenges in their respective areas.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Odisha to conserve two of its largest lakes

Context:

The Odisha Wetland Authority has approved implementation of an integrated management plan for Lake Chilika and Lake Ansupa.

Details:

- Lake Ansupa was sustaining from the freshwater supply during the rainy season from the Mahanadi river.
- With reduced inflow over the years, the lake’s hydrology has undergone serious and visible changes.
- The water spread area has reduced and fishery resource is almost non-existent.
- The five-year management of lakes is intended at strengthening livelihood of thousands of fishermen relying on the two water-bodies.
- Besides, tourism promotion and conservation of ecology will be taken up.
- During past two years, the Chilika Development Authority has managed to make 172 sq km free from encroachment which resulted in increase in fish catch by 20%.

Chilika Lake:

- Chilika Lake is India’s largest brackish water lagoon.
- It is spread over 1,100 sq km.
- Lakhs of tourists visit the lake to watch endangered Irrawaddy dolphins and migratory birds during winter.
- About 151 villages carry out fishing, the principal livelihood for two lakh traditional fishermen.
- It is the largest wintering ground for migratory waterfowls on the Indian subcontinent.

- In 1981, Chilika became the first Ramsar site in India.

Lake Ansupa:

- Lake Ansupa is Odisha's largest freshwater lake.
- The lake spread over almost 2 sq km is also the wintering ground for 32 species of migratory birds.
- Its calmness, scenic beauty and forest coverage behold the visitors.
- Ansupa is famous for its sweet water fish, especially *labeo bata* locally known as *pohala*.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: HEALTH

1. Taking on TB

Context:

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently approved the anti-tuberculosis drug pretomanid.

Tuberculosis:

- Tuberculosis is a bacterial infection that caused about 1.6 million deaths globally in 2017.
- When TB infection becomes resistant to the first line of treatment — isoniazid and rifampicin, it is called MDR-TB.
- However, when the infection becomes resistant even to the second-line treatment, it is called XDR-TB.

New BPaL regime:

- The recently approved anti-tuberculosis drug pretomanid will be a game changer for treating people with extensively drug-resistant TB (XDR-TB) and those who do not tolerate or respond to now available multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) drugs.
- Pretomanid was developed by TB Alliance, a not-for-profit organisation, funded by governments of Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom and the US, as well as philanthropic sources.
- The treatment involves pretomanid tablets in combination with bedaquiline and linezolid, collectively referred to as the “BPaL regimen”.
- The all-oral, three-drug regimen of bedaquiline, pretomanid, and linezolid (BPaL) has a 90% cure rate.
- Importantly, the regimen was found to be safe and effective in curing TB in people living with HIV.
- Unlike 18-24 months needed to treat highly-resistant TB using nearly 20 drugs, the BPaL regimen took just six months, was better tolerated and more potent in clearing the bacteria.
- The shorter duration is more likely to increase adherence to therapy and improve treatment outcomes.
- Pretomanid is only the third drug in the last 40 years to get FDA approval.
- Though the total number of people who will require the new drug may not be high, these are people who have very little alternative treatment options that are safe and efficacious.

Details:

- TB bacteria is rapidly developing resistance against most available drugs.
- That pretomanid is only the third drug in the last 40 years to get FDA approval highlights the scarcity of new drugs to treat multidrug-resistant TB.
- While BPaL has a 90% cure rate, the current treatment success rate for XDR-TB and MDR-TB is about 34% and 55%, respectively.
- They also had severe side-effects like deafness, numbness, joint pain, renal failure hormonal imbalance, vertigo, among others.
- Studies have shown an increase in the number of new patients who are directly infected with drug-resistant bacteria.
- The number of those who would need a pretomanid-based regimen is increasing due to rising drug resistance.
- With only a low percentage of MDR-TB cases being treated, the actual number of people who do not tolerate or respond to available MDR-TB drugs and so will be eligible to receive the BPaL regimen is unknown.
- The new drug regimen is important for countries like India, which has the second-highest burden to XDR-TB patients in the world, after Russia.

Way forward:

- This is an important development for India.
- While the availability of a potent drug is welcome news, it remains to be seen if it would be made affordable, particularly in the developing countries where the burden of XDR-TB and MDR-TB is the highest.
- TB Alliance, has already signed an exclusive licensing agreement with a generic-drug manufacturer for high-income markets.
- Unlike in the case of bedaquiline, where its prohibitive cost has severely restricted access especially in the developing countries, pretomanid might become affordable.
- In line with the TB Alliance's commitment to affordability and sustainable access, the drug will be licensed to multiple manufacturers in about 140 low- and middle-income countries, including India.
- Making the drug affordable to those with extreme form of drug resistance will be highly commendable and a desperately needed model to be followed.
- After all, there is a compulsion to keep the prices low and increase treatment uptake to stop the spread of highly drug-resistant TB bacteria.

Category: GOVERNANCE

1. A law for those who testify – On protection of Witness

Context:

The conspiracy theory over the car crash involving the Unnao rape survivor has turned into a major political controversy. Events of attacks on witnesses highlights the urgent need for measures and legislation on witness protection.

Cases of attack on witnesses:

- The woman, who had accused an Uttar Pradesh BJP MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar of rape, was travelling in a car with her family and lawyer.
 - The car was hit by a speeding truck in Rae Bareli killing two members while leaving her and the advocate critically injured.

- Consequent to the death of the two individuals, one of whom was also a witness in the case, charges pertaining to attempt to murder were added to those already present against Sengar.
- On June 2 2019, Assistant Sub Inspector Suresh Pal, assigned to protect murder witness Rambir, was accidentally killed when the assailants missed their aim while attempting to kill the witness.
- In 2017, in the Asaram Bapu case concerning the rape of some women devotees, three witnesses were killed and as many as 10 attacked in an attempt to weaken the case.

Details:

- It was the killing of the three Asaram Bapu case witnesses followed by a Public Interest Litigation, which prompted the apex court to issue directions to the Centre and the States to frame laws for protection of witnesses.
- Following this, Maharashtra came out with the Maharashtra Witness and Protection and Security Act 2017, which was notified in January 2018.
- However, the Centre, and most other States, are yet to act on the directive.
- Meanwhile, the apex court gave its assent last year to the Witness Protection Scheme, which was drafted by the Centre in consultation with the Bureau of Police Research and Development and the National Legal Services Authority.
 - Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 provides for protection of witnesses based on the threat assessment and protection measures inter alia include protection/change of identity of witnesses, their relocation, installation of security devices at the residence of witnesses, usage of specially designed Court rooms, etc.
- The Centre was to implement the scheme after circulating it among all States and Union Territories and obtaining their comments.
- However, the scheme was meant to be a measure in force only till the government brought out its own law on the issue.

Concerns:

- Though the Centre is scheduled to bring an Act on the subject by the end of this year, it has not made much progress.
- What emboldens the criminals the most is the support they get from the police. The politician-police nexus is so strong that no policeman, at the mercy of political leaders for his career progression, dares take any action against his master. As long as this nexus continues, the delivery of criminal justice in India will remain a casualty.
- Further, though the scheme provides for police personnel to be deployed to protect the witness on the basis of threat perception, it is silent on the punishment to be given to those policemen who, while being charged with providing security, themselves threaten the witnesses.

Way forward:

- As regards the existing measure, though its objective is to ensure the safety of witnesses, so that they are able to give a true account of the crime without any fear of violence or criminal recrimination, its implementation on the ground leaves much to be desired.
- The Witness Protection Scheme calls for more elaborate and stricter laws to be incorporated so that criminals find no loopholes that can be exploited to their advantage.
- The sooner the Centre comes up with a legislation codifying the protection to be given to witnesses, the better it is for India's criminal justice system.

Category: SECURITY

1. An intervention that leads to more questions

The editorial talks about India's Nuclear doctrine and its "No first use" policy.

Context:

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, appears to have altered a key pillar of India's nuclear doctrine when he tweeted that India's future commitment to a posture of No First Use of nuclear weapons 'depends on the circumstances'.
- On the first death anniversary of former Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, and in the nuclear proving ground in Pokhran, the Minister said two things: that the no-first-use has served India well so far, and that what happens in future depends on circumstances.

Background:

- On August 17, 1999, the then caretaker Bharatiya Janata Party government released a draft Nuclear Doctrine in order to generate discussion and debate on India's nuclear posture.
- There was much discussion and criticism of the doctrine, as indeed of the timing of the release of the draft, coming as it did just weeks before a national election.
- It was known that the first National Security Advisory Board, a group of 27 individuals convened by K. Subrahmanyam, and comprising strategic analysts, academics, and retired military and civil servants, had completed their draft some months earlier.
- Following criticism of the draft doctrine, the government appeared to move away from it. It was never discussed in Parliament and its status remained unclear for three and a half years until it was abruptly adopted by the CCS with minor modifications in 2003.
- The draft's emphasis on NFU, however, remained unchanged.
- The adoption of the nuclear doctrine came soon after Operation Parakram (2001-02), when the threat of a nuclear exchange on the subcontinent had figured prominently in international capitals, if not in New Delhi and Islamabad.
- The public adoption of the doctrine was in part an attempt by New Delhi to restate its commitment to restraint and to being a responsible nuclear power.

Details:

- The announcement marks a significant revision of India's nuclear stance, seemingly without any prior structured deliberation or consultation.
- The nuclear doctrine, like any directive guiding national security, needs to be a dynamic concept that responds to changing circumstances. However, this raises the question of what has changed in India's strategic outlook that requires a revision of one of the two foundational pillars of its nuclear doctrine.
- India is one of two countries, China being the other — that adheres to a doctrine of No First Use (NFU).
- A statement circulated on January 4, 2003 by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), said that it had 'reviewed progress in operationalizing India's nuclear doctrine', and was making public the relevant details as appropriate. It said:
 - India would maintain a credible minimum deterrent.
 - "No First Use": nuclear weapons will only be used in retaliation.
 - The remaining five points flow mainly from these two points mentioned.
- India has maintained that it will not strike first with nuclear weapons but reserves the right to retaliate to any nuclear first strike against it (or any major use of weapons of mass destruction against Indian forces anywhere) with a nuclear strike that will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage.
- With two nuclear neighbours, the NFU simply raises the nuclear threshold in order to bring stability

into a volatile environment.

Restraint as a pivotal point:

- Restraint has served India well.
- India used the strategic space offered by its repeated proclamations of restraint to repulse the intruders in Kargil 20 years ago and regain occupied land despite the nuclear shadow created by India and Pakistan's nuclear tests of 1998.
- Raising the nuclear threshold gave India the space for conventional operations and gained it sympathy in foreign capitals despite the fears of nuclear miscalculation that were widespread from Washington DC to London to Tokyo.
- India's self-proclaimed restraint has formed the basis for its claims to belong to the nuclear mainstream — from
 - the initial application for the waiver in 2008 from the Nuclear Suppliers Group in order to carry out nuclear commerce with the grouping
 - its membership of the Missile Technology Control Regime
 - its membership in the Wassenaar Arrangement and the Australia Group
 - to its ongoing attempts to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

Consequences of revoking the commitment to NFU:

- While revoking the commitment to NFU does not necessarily equate with abandoning restraint, it does leave India's doctrine more ambiguous.
- Ambiguity, in turn, can lead to miscalculations.
- Neither does adhering to the NFU symbolise weakness, for India is committed to a devastating response to nuclear first use — a stance which underscores India's understanding of nuclear weapons as meant primarily to deter.
- But there is a danger that the minister's remark could spark off a nuclear arms race, given the strategic paranoias that have been at work in this part of the world for over half a century.
- It is conceivable that nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of non-state actors in Pakistan, but even in such scenarios that warrant pre-emptive action, a nuclear strike cannot be a viable option.

Conclusion:

- NFU has had its critics among those who advocate a more muscular nuclear policy for India.
- Bharat Karnad, a member of the first National Security Advisory Board that drafted the basis of this current nuclear doctrine, made it known that NFU would be 'the first casualty' if war were to break out.
- However, consensus among the remaining members of the board clearly coalesced around an understanding of nuclear weapons as weapons of last resort, meant to deter the threat and use of nuclear weapons.
- It is also this understanding that has formed the basis of India's nuclear posture, from force structure to numbers to its overall nuclear
- All of these points are up for revision with the announcement by the defence minister at Pokhran.
- It would have been much better if Mr. Singh had elaborated on his thoughts so that a debate could have taken place.
- In this respect it is a good idea for the government to make public any periodic review in its strategic posture.
- The no-first-use policy comes with being a confident nuclear power. In matters of nuclear doctrine, it is important to be clear above all else. Nothing must be left to interpretation.

F. Tidbits

1. UAE to give Modi highest civilian award

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit the UAE on August 23 and 24 2019.
- During his visit, he will receive the Order of Zayed.
- Order of Zayed is the highest civilian award of the country.
- It is in the name of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, founding father of the UAE.
- The highest civil decoration of the UAE was conferred earlier in April 2019 in recognition of the distinguished leadership of Prime Minister Modi for giving a big boost to bilateral relations between the two countries.
- It acquires special significance as it was awarded to Prime Minister Modi in the year of the birth centenary of Sheikh Zayed.
- The visit acquires importance as it would be the first by Mr. Modi to a leading member of the Organisation of Islamic Countries after India had changed the status of Kashmir.
- Modi's visit to Bahrain will be the first ever Prime Ministerial visit from India.

2. Talks, if any, with Pakistan would focus only on PoK

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has asserted that, any future talks with Pakistan would focus only on the status of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).
- He also asserted that there would be no talks with the country unless it acted against terrorists and stopped supporting terror activities.
- Singh said Article 370 and 35A have been revoked from Jammu and Kashmir, to remove all obstacles in the path of holistic development of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

G. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Lake Chilka is the largest brackish water lagoon in the world.
2. It was the first lake from India to be designated as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

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

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

It is the largest coastal lagoon in India and the second largest coastal lagoon in the world.

Q2. Consider the following pairs:

- a. Palani Panchamritam : Tamil Nadu
- b. Tawlhlohpuan: Assam
- c. Mizo Puanchei : Mizoram
- d. Tirur betel: Kerala

Which of the pairs is not correctly matched?

Answer: b

Explanation:

The Geographical Indication (GI) under the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade has recently registered 4 new GIs.

- Palani Panchamirtham from Palani Town in Tamil Nadu
- Tawlhlohpuan from Mizoram
- Mizo Puanchei from Mizoram
- Tirur Betel leaf from Kerala

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. 'Shyamoli' is an experimental mud-house built at Santiniketan in 1935.
2. It is the heritage house of Rabindranath Tagore.

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:

Shyamoli is an experimental mud-house built at Santiniketan in 1935. It is the heritage house of Rabindranath Tagore that house has been recently renovated by the Archaeological Survey of India as a deposit work and is a property of Visva-Bharati at present. Rabindranath, out of a traumatic and claustrophobic childhood-experience of his own education at school within the boundaries of four walls, set up a school for children at Santiniketan in 1901. He then built 5 new houses at the Northern corner of the Santiniketan ashram which is now known as Uttarayana and named them Konark, Udayan, Shyamali, Punascha and Udichi.

Q4. Consider the following statements:

1. Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) is a defence contractor owned by the Indian government.
2. It is called the Fourth Arm of Defence.
3. It is the largest defence equipment manufacturer in India.

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) is a defence contractor owned by the Indian government. It is often called the “Fourth Arm of Defence” and the “Force Behind the Armed Forces” of India. OFB is the 37th largest defence equipment manufacturer in the world, 2nd largest in Asia, and the largest in India.

I. UPSC Mains Practise Questions

1. With rapid industrialization and exponential population growth, there has been a crunch for farmland in India. The proposition of organic farming in India’s Rural Economy has the potential to arrest the problem. Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words).
2. Appointment of a Chief of Defence staff is the most significant defence policy reform in decades. Comment. (15 Marks, 250 Words).