

23 Aug 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Rajasthan ranks 1st in free medicine scheme implementation

Context:

The National Health Mission (NHM) has given first rank to Rajasthan among 16 States in the implementation of its flagship free medicine scheme.

Details:

- Chief Minister of Rajasthan Ashok Gehlot had launched the scheme on October 2, 2011, during his previous tenure, for providing free drugs to patients coming to public health facilities.
- To implement the scheme, Rajasthan Medical Services Corporation Limited (RMSCL) was incorporated in 2011, as a Public Limited Company.
- RMSCL was established as a centralised procurement agency for procuring generic medicines, surgical equipment, sutures and medical equipment for the department of Medical, Health and Family Welfare, Medical Education department, among others.
- While the Free medicines scheme was implemented in 2011, the free test scheme was introduced in 2013.
- The initiative was aimed at reducing out-of-pocket expenditure of patients suffering from cancer, heart and kidney-related diseases as well as other serious ailments.
- 104 new medicines were added after the formation of the new government in December 2018. A record number of 712 medicines are being given at present.
- Since 2011, as many as 67 crore patients have benefited from the scheme. About 2.25 lakh patients get free medicines every day.
- The first phase of the free test scheme was implemented in hospitals affiliated with state medical colleges, as well as district /sub-divisional and satellite hospitals.
- In 2013, it was brought to the community health centres (CHCs), primary health centres (PHCs) and dispensaries.

Performance assessment:

- The NHM has initiated giving rankings as it is encouraging and supporting states to provide free drugs to patients coming to public health facilities.
- NHM —free drug service initiative has been implemented by ministry of health and family welfare (MOHFW) under which states/UTs are being supported under NHM to provide free drugs to patients coming to public health facilities.
- The initiative was taken aiming to reduce out of pocket expenditure (COPE) and improve footfalls in public facilities.
- The performance of States was assessed on the basis of parameters such as stock of drugs, value of drugs about to expire and compliance with the drugs and vaccine distribution management system.

2. Trump suggests India should fight Islamic State in Afghanistan

Context:

U.S. President Donald Trump has named India as one of the countries that ought to be fighting the Islamic State (IS) in Afghanistan.

Background:

- The U.S. is currently negotiating an agreement with the Taliban to end the war in Afghanistan.
- The process has been criticised for side-lining the Afghan government and prioritising the withdrawal of some 14,000 U.S. troops over building a peace that can withstand the complex political realities of the situation.

Details:

- Trump was responding to a question whether he was concerned about the potential re-emergence of the IS in Afghanistan and how that might impact his plans to withdraw troops from Afghanistan.
- Answering, he named India and also suggested that Russia, Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan were countries that should be fighting the IS in Afghanistan.
- The President also said “Europe” would have to take the “thousands” of IS fighters the U.S. was holding. Failing which, Mr. Trump said, the U.S. would release them back to their countries [Germany and France].
- Trump had also said that the U.S. would not completely withdraw from Afghanistan but always have intelligence [in Afghanistan].
- The Afghan peace process is expected to feature in the discussions Mr. Trump will have with Prime Minister Modi at the G-7 talks this weekend in Biarritz, France.

Category: HEALTH

1. SC refers Oxytocin ban to larger bench

Context:

The Supreme Court has referred a batch of petitions challenging a government notification banning private companies from manufacturing Oxytocin to a larger Bench.

What is Oxytocin?

- Oxytocin is a hormone that is made in the brain, in the hypothalamus. It is secreted by, the pituitary gland, which is located at the base of the brain.
- Oxytocin is a first line drug administered to save the lives of young mothers suffering from excessive bleeding immediately after childbirth.
- Oxytocin is included as a lifesaving drug in the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM).

Issue:

- An April 2018 notification issued by the Centre under Section 26A of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 restricting the manufacture of Oxytocin for domestic use is at the centre of controversy.
- The notification said, only public sector undertakings could manufacture the drug.

Details:

- The trigger for the notification was a 21-year-old problem: clandestine manufacture of the drug and its misuse by dairy owners on milch animals to artificially extract milk.
- The Delhi High Court, in a decision in December 2018, quashed the notification as arbitrary and unreasonable.
- The High Court said Oxytocin was an essential drug and the “Central government did not adequately weigh the danger to the lives of the users of Oxytocin, i.e. pregnant women and young mothers, nor did it consider the deleterious effect to the public generally and women particularly, of the possible restricted supply of a lifesaving drug, if the manufacture is confined to one single public sector enterprise”.
- The Bench of Justices A.M. Sapre and Indu Malhotra, in a 41-page judgment, concluded that the case raises substantial questions of law to be answered by a three-judge Bench.
- According to the SC, the bench should look into various aspects like:
 - Whether the government notification will result in monopoly
 - Whether the restriction on its manufacturing is in public interest
 - Whether the government's decision would achieve the objective and purpose of preventing

the unregulated and illegal use of the drug, among others.

C. GS3 Related

Category: SECURITY

1. Afghan, Pashtun fighters poised to enter J&K: Defence sources

Context:

Intelligence inputs have warned that Pakistan is recruiting Afghan and Pashtun fighters for infiltration into Kashmir and over 100 of them are positioned at various launchpads along the Line of Control (LoC).



Details:

- There have been specific intelligence inputs that Pakistan-based terror group Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) has deployed over a dozen Afghan and Pathan terrorists for Border Action Team (BAT) attempts, comprising of Afghan militants and highly trained Special Services Group (SSG) of the Pakistan Army and for infiltration across the LoC into Lipa valley in North Kashmir.
- It was added that Pakistan is desperately trying to keep the LoC active in an attempt to keep international focus on Kashmir in the aftermath of recent developments there.
- Intelligence inputs also warned of attempts by a group of terrorists to carry out major attacks in major cities across the country.
- There has been regular exchange of fire on the LoC and usually Pakistan Army resorts to ceasefire violations (CFV) to aid infiltration.

2. India-U.S. 2+2 meeting being held in California

Amid increased India-Pak tension, the United States is hosting an intersessional meeting of the US-India 2+2 Dialogue in California to discuss ways to advance cooperation on critical diplomatic and security priorities.

Details:

- Indian and U.S. officials have gathered in the Naval Postgraduate School at Monterey, California, for the 2+2 intersessional and the Maritime Security Dialogue.
- The U.S. will be led by Acting Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Affairs. Joint Secretary, Americas, and officials from the Indian Embassy in Washington will participate from the Indian side.
- The two countries will discuss maritime developments in the Indo-Pacific and the strengthening of

bilateral maritime security cooperation.

- Discussions would be on
 - The ways to advance cooperation on critical diplomatic and security priorities
 - Shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region
 - Review preparations for the next 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue.
- Since their first 2+2 Dialogue in September 2018, India and the U.S. have had intense engagement, albeit with mixed results in the trade, strategic and defence aspects of their relationship.
- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo are set to meet for the 2+2 Dialogue later in the autumn in the U.S. The interactions will lay the ground work for the visit.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Tax resolution, amnesty scheme announced

Context:

The government has announced a new scheme aimed at eliminating the bulk of pending tax dispute cases besides providing partial amnesty to those having tax dues.

Details:

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had, in her Budget speech, announced the Sabka Vishwas (Legacy Dispute Resolution) Scheme, 2019.
- This scheme will be operationalised from September 1 with the window being open till December 31,
- The scheme is expected to be availed of by a large number of taxpayers for closing their pending disputes relating to legacy service tax and central excise cases that are now subsumed under GST (Goods and Services Tax) so that they can focus on GST.
- The two main components of the scheme are dispute resolution and amnesty.
 - The dispute resolution component is aimed at liquidating the legacy cases of central excise and service tax that are subsumed in GST and are pending in litigation at various forums.
 - The amnesty component of the scheme offers taxpayers the opportunity to pay any outstanding tax and be free of any other consequence under the law.
- The most attractive aspect of the scheme is that it provides substantial relief in the tax dues for all categories of cases as well as full waiver of interest, fine, penalty.
- There is also a complete amnesty from prosecution.
 - The scheme offers a relief of 70% from the duty demand if it is less than Rs. 50 lakh and 50% if it is more than Rs. 50 lakh for all cases pending adjudication or appeal in any forum.
 - The same relief is available for cases under investigation and audit where the duty involved is quantified and communicated to the party or admitted by him in a statement on or before June 30, 2019.
 - Further, in cases of confirmed duty demand, where there is no appeal pending, the relief offered is 60% of the confirmed duty amount if the same is Rs.50 lakh or less and it is 40% if the confirmed duty amount is more than Rs.50 lakh.
 - In cases of voluntary disclosure, the person availing the scheme will have to only pay the full amount of disclosed duty.
- The scheme is especially tailored to free the large number of small taxpayers of their pending disputes with the tax administration.
- The government urges the taxpayers and all concerned to avail the Sabka Vishwas (Legacy Dispute Resolution) Scheme, 2019 and make a new beginning.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Russia sends its first humanoid robot Fedor into space

Context:

Russia launched an unmanned rocket carrying a life-size humanoid robot that will spend 10 days learning to assist astronauts on the International Space Station.

Details:

- The robot is the first-ever sent up by Russia.
- It is named Fedor, short for Final Experimental Demonstration Object Research.
- Fedor blasted off in a Soyuz MS-14 spacecraft from Russia's Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.
 - Soyuz is a series of spacecraft designed for the Soviet space program by the Korolev Design Bureau in the 1960s that remains in service today.
 - Soyuz ships are normally manned on such trips, but onboard MS-14, no humans are travelling in order to test a new emergency rescue system.
- Fedor will spend 10 days in space learning to assist astronauts on the International Space Station.
- Fedor copies human movements, a key skill that allows it to remotely help astronauts or even people on Earth carry out tasks while they are strapped into an exoskeleton.
- Fedor, also known as Skybot F850, was strapped into a specially adapted pilot's seat, with a small Russian flag in hand.
- The silvery anthropomorphic robot stands 1.80 metres tall and weighs 160 kg.
- Fedor has Instagram and Twitter accounts with posts saying it is learning new skills such as opening a bottle of water. In the station, it will trial those manual skills in very low gravity.
- On the website of one of the state backers of the project, the Foundation of Advanced Research Projects, Fedor is described as potentially useful on Earth for working in high radiation environments.

Fedor not the first:

- Fedor is not the first robot to go into space.
- In 2011, NASA sent up Robonaut 2, a humanoid robot developed with General Motors and a similar aim of working in high-risk environments.
- It was flown back to Earth in 2018 after experiencing technical problems.
- In 2013, Japan sent up a small robot called Kirobo along with the ISS's first Japanese space commander.
- Developed with Toyota, it was able to hold conversations (only) in Japanese.

Category: DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. Big Data helps confront complex disasters

Context:

The United Nations, in a report said, Technological innovations from unique digital identities for drought-hit farmers to use of data from drones and social media, can better predict increasingly complex disasters in the Asia-Pacific region and limit their impact on vulnerable people.

Issues:

- The Asia-Pacific region is particularly vulnerable to climate-related threats, with more fatalities and greater economic damage from disasters.
- Rising global temperatures have increased the frequency and intensity of floods, cyclones and droughts in the region, making it harder to accurately forecast and monitor them, according to the report by the U.N.'s Asia-Pacific social agency (UNESCAP).
- Since 1970, natural disasters in the region have killed two million people — 59% of the global death toll for that period, according to UNESCAP.
- Technological advances are expected to become more important as warming temperatures cause a rise in the number and duration of heatwaves and droughts, particularly in semi-arid and arid areas in north and central Asia, the UNESCAP report said.
- Cyclone intensity and flooding is also expected to increase, with serious impacts for coastal areas in southeast Asia, and extreme rainfall also a threat for South Asia.
- Disasters also cause more damage in Asia and the Pacific, measured as a percentage of GDP, than the rest of the world, and this gap has been widening.

Details:

- Big data refers to the analysis of very large data sets to reveal patterns, trends and associations. The data can come from a range of sources, including satellite imagery, drone videos, simulations, crowdsourcing, social media and global positioning systems.
- Flood and cyclone forecasting now relies on computer simulations, with machine learning helping to predict the location and severity of floods.
- Sensor webs and the Internet of Things have enabled efficient earthquake early-warning systems, while remote sensing via satellites and drones provide quick assessments of damage and people affected, and help prioritise relief efforts.
- Big data innovations, using the large data sets from mobile phone tracking to satellite platforms reveal patterns, trends, and associations of complex disaster risks.
- These play a role in understanding, monitoring and predicting the risk of extreme and slow-onset events, and address the key challenges of the new climate reality.
- Technological innovations are already reducing some of that vulnerability, the UNESCAP report said.
- Technology can help identify and locate those most at risk, to warn them ahead of a disaster, and deliver targeted relief afterwards.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Microplastics in drinking water not a health risk for now: WHO

Context:

The World Health Organization (WHO) said that the level of microplastics in drinking water is not yet dangerous for humans but called for more research into potential future risk.

Details:

- In its first report into the effects of microplastics on human health, WHO looked into the specific impact of microplastics in tap and bottled water.
- The headline message reassures the drinking water consumers around the world that, based on this assessment, the risk involved is low.
- WHO said that microplastics larger than 150 micrometres are not likely to be absorbed by the human body but said the chance of absorbing very small microplastic particles, including nano-sized plastics, could be higher, although it said data is limited.

- However, the report said that irrespective of human health risks caused by microplastics in drinking water, “measures should be taken by policymakers and the public to better manage plastics and reduce the use of plastics where possible”.

Way forward:

- WHO said that data on the presence of microplastics in drinking water is currently limited, with few reliable studies, making it difficult to analyse the results.
- WHO has called on researchers to conduct a more in-depth evaluation into microplastics and the potential impact on human health.
- The organisation has also urged a crackdown on plastic pollution to benefit the environment and reduce human exposure to microplastics.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: ECONOMY

1. SEBI's liberalized norms for FPIs

Context

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), based on the recommendations of the **R. Khan committee**, eased several regulatory restrictions that are likely to make life easier for foreign portfolio investors (FPIs).

Background

- FPIs have been withdrawing from Indian equities after the **finance minister introduced higher tax surcharge** on the super-rich in the budget in July.
- In the past two months, FPIs have sold Indian shares worth \$3.07 billion, while they were net buyers of shares worth \$11.3 billion till June.

Foreign investors who have been fleeing the country since the Union budget have something to cheer about finally.

Measures taken by SEBI

- Among a slew of measures, the financial markets regulator has **simplified the registration process for FPIs by doing away with the broad-based eligibility criteria**, which required a minimum of at least 20 investors in a foreign fund, and certain documentary requirements.
- FPIs can now also **engage in the off-market sale of their shares** with fewer restrictions.
- Further, SEBI has allowed **entities registered at an international financial services centre to be automatically classified as FPIs**. This might help foreign investors bypass some of the restrictions.
- **Mutual funds with offshore funds too can invest in India** as FPIs to avail certain tax benefits now.
- **Central banks that are not members of the Bank of International Settlements are also allowed to register as FPIs** and invest in the country under the new norms.

Changes in Classification

- Till now, Sebi classified FPIs into three categories, with the easiest set of compliance norms for Category-I FPIs and the strictest for Category-III FPIs.
- The classification of an **FPI depends on the way the offshore entity is regulated in its home market** or the number of investors in the fund. The most well-regulated FPIs fall into Category-I.
- Sebi removed the concept of Category-III FPIs.
- **There will now be only two categories of FPIs**, said Sebi. However, Sebi has not elaborated how the two categories of FPIs will be decided.

Conclusion

- But given the **broadier trend of capital flowing out of emerging markets** across the world, it remains to be seen whether SEBI's present move will yield immediate benefits.
- Even if it fails to do so, the move will **still help Indian markets become more attractive** to foreign investors in the long-run.
- In a world of globalised capital markets, where many nimble emerging markets compete to attract capital from the developed world, India cannot afford to be seen as flip-flopping on its commitments.

2. Increasing investment to stimulate growth

Introduction

India's current economic slowdown is due to a combination of two underlying trends.

- First, there is the short-run cyclical slowdown exhibited by a number of high-frequency indicators, reflecting a **significant fall in demand, especially for sectors such as automobiles, consumer durables and housing**.
- Second, there is the more serious **long-term fall in investment and savings rates**. Raising growth requires that attention be paid to both cyclical and structural dimensions of the problem.

Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF)

- As per RBI, Gross capital formation refers to the '**aggregate of gross additions to fixed assets** (that is fixed capital formation) plus change in stocks during the counting period.'
 - It consists of resident producers' investments, **deducting disposals**, in fixed assets during a given period.
 - GFCF is **not a measure of total investment**, because only the value of net additions to fixed assets is measured, **and all kinds of financial assets are excluded**, as well as stocks of inventories and other operating costs
- Fixed asset refers to the construction, machinery and equipment.
 - They are tangible or intangible assets produced as outputs from production processes that are used repeatedly, or continuously, for more than one year.
- The most important exclusion from GFCF is land sales and purchases.
- Any rise or increase in GFCF means an increase in investment in fixed assets which gets translated into higher rate of economic growth in long run.

Stats

- When it comes to the Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) relative to GDP at current prices, a **steady fall has been visible since 2011-12**, when it was 34.3%. By 2017-18, it had fallen by 5.7% points, to a level of 28.6%.
- Assuming an Incremental Capital Output Ratio (ICOR) of 4, **this meant a fall of nearly 1.4%**

points in the potential growth rate. The fall consisted of sectoral decreases in the household, private corporate and public sectors

- It is noticeable that the **fall in the household sector's investment rate** got arrested by 2015-16.
 - However, by then, the rate had already fallen by 6.3% points.
 - From 2016-17, the sector's investment rate even showed some recovery.
- In contrast to the household sector rate, **the private corporate sector investment rate did not show any fall up to 2015-16** when, at 11.9%, it was in fact higher than the corresponding rate for 2011-12 (11.2%).
 - It fell in the subsequent years, but only by 0.7% points.
 - This near-constancy runs counter to what industry leaders have been saying and what other data sources such as CMIE indicate, casting some doubts on the veracity of the figures.
- In the case of the **public sector**, the rate fell by 0.3% points between 2015-16 and 2017-18.
- Thus, the period from 2011-12 to 2017-18 can be seen as consisting of two parts:
 - 2011-12 to 2015-16, when the household sector investment rate fell sharply;
 - 2015-16 to 2017-18 when the investment rates of the private corporate and public sectors fell marginally.

Fall in household savings rate

- The Gross Domestic Savings Rate also fell between **2011-12 and 2017-18 by 4.1% points, from 34.6% of GDP to 30.5%**. However, this fall was **entirely due to the household sector**, with the private corporate and public sectors showing increases in their savings rates by margins of 2.2% points and 0.2% points, respectively.
- Throughout the period from 2011-12, the savings rate of the private corporate sector increased, reducing its dependence on the surplus savings of the household sector.
- Given this pattern, at present, all the surplus savings of the household sector is available for the public sector. With **private corporate sector's investment demand being largely met by its own savings, public sector's borrowing requirements can be fully financed using the surplus from the household sector**, supplemented by net inflow of foreign capital without any fear of crowding out.

In 2018-19, the real GDP growth rate was 6.8%. Two critical policy challenges need to be addressed.

- First, a countercyclical policy should increase growth rate to its current potential of 7%-7.5% and then
- Second structural reforms should raise the potential growth itself to above 8.5% if India is to attain a size of \$5 trillion by 2024-25.

More capital expenditure

- **From the monetary side**, reducing the repo rate by a cumulated margin of 110 basis points in 2019 has not as yet induced a noticeable growth response.
- Complementary **fiscal stimulus**, in the form of additional public sector investment, may prove to be more effective.
 - However, given the fiscal deficit constraint, there is limited flexibility for increasing center's capital expenditure directly.
- There may be some expansion, if **additional dividends from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** flow to the government. Further, there may be some **possible additional disinvestment**. However, care should be taken to deploy all of these **additional funds for capital expenditure**.

Prescription to meet slowing demand is to increase government expenditure.

- In the current situation, there can be an increase in government expenditure but it has to be directed

towards an **increase in investment expenditure**.

- A similar effort may be made by **State governments and non-government public sector enterprises** to increase capital expenditures. All these measures may also crowd in private investment.
 - Another area that needs immediate attention is the financial system, which must be activated to lend more.
- Thus, this fiscal push, together with the already-initiated monetary stimulus, may help raise the growth rate.

Conclusion

On the structural reforms that are needed to push the economy onto a sustained high growth path, much can be said.

- We need a **re-look at the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act (FRBM) Act**.
 - The government should actually move towards **reducing the revenue deficit to zero**.
 - This can happen if the Centre focusses more on items on the Union list.
- Once this is achieved, the Central Government can be given full freedom over fiscal deficit, as the entire deficit will be directed towards meeting capital expenditures. This was described as the 'golden rule' in U.K.

Category: POLITY

1. Why is age of marriage different for men and women?

Context

- The Delhi High Court took up a plea **that sought a uniform age of marriage for men and women**.
- A bench comprising Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice C Hari Shankar issued a **notice to the Centre and the Law Commission of India**, seeking their response to the public interest litigation filed by advocate and BJP spokesperson Ashwini Kumar Upadhyaya.

Current Law

- Currently, the law prescribes that the minimum age of marriage is 21 and 18 years for men and women, respectively.
 - For Hindus, **Section 5(iii) of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955** sets 18 years as the minimum age for the bride and 21 years as the minimum age for the groom.
 - The **Special Marriage Act, 1954 and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** also prescribe 18 and 21 years as the minimum age of consent for marriage for women and men respectively.
- The **minimum age of marriage is distinct from the age of majority**, which is gender-neutral.
- An individual attains the age of majority at 18 as per the **Indian Majority Act, 1875**.

Why a minimum age?

- The law prescribes a minimum age of marriage to essentially **outlaw child marriages and prevent abuse of minors**.
 - Child marriages are not illegal but can be declared void at the request of the minor in the marriage.
- Personal laws of various religions that deal with marriage have their own standards, often reflecting custom.

- In Islam, the marriage of a **minor who has attained puberty is considered valid** under personal law.

How the law evolved?

- The **Indian Penal Code enacted in 1860** criminalized any sexual intercourse **with a girl below the age of 10**.
- The provision of rape was amended in 1927 through the **Age of Consent Bill, 1927**, which made marriages **with a girl under 12 invalid**.
 - The law had faced opposition from conservative leaders of the nationalist movement such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Madan Mohan Malaviya who saw the British intervention as an attack on Hindu customs.
- In 1929, the **Child Marriage Restraint Act** set 16 and 18 years as the minimum age of marriage for women and men respectively.
- The law, popularly known as **Sarda Act after its sponsor Harbilas Sarda**, a judge and a member of Arya Samaj, was eventually amended in 1978 to prescribe 18 and 21 years as the age of marriage for a woman and a man, respectively.

Two genders, two ages

- In a consultation paper of **reform in family law in 2018**, the **Law Commission** argued that having different legal standards “contributes to the stereotype that wives must be younger than their husbands”.
 - The Law Commission paper recommended that the minimum age of **marriage for both genders be set at 18**.
 - “The difference in age for husband and wife has no basis in law as spouses entering into a marriage are by all means equals and their partnership must also be of that between equals,”
- **Women’s rights activists too** have argued that the law perpetuates the stereotype that women are more mature than men of the same age and therefore can be allowed to marry sooner.
- The **international treaty Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**, also calls for the abolition of laws that assume women have a different physical or intellectual rate of growth than men.

The challenge in court

- Upadhyaya, the petitioner in the Delhi High Court case, has challenged the law on the grounds of discrimination.
 - He alleges that **Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution**, which guarantee the right to equality and the right to live with dignity, are violated by having different legal age for men and women to marry.
- Two Supreme Court rulings could be significant to the context of this argument.
 - In 2014, in **National Legal Services Authority of India v Union of India**, the Supreme Court while recognising transgenders as the third gender said that justice is delivered with the “assumption that humans have equal value and should, therefore, **be treated as equal, as well as by equal laws**.”
 - In 2019, in **Joseph Shine v Union of India**, the Supreme Court decriminalised adultery and said that “**a law that treats women differently based on gender stereotypes is an affront to women’s dignity**.”

2. Polygraph, Narcoanalysis Tests

Polygraph Test

- It is based on the assumption that **physiological responses that are triggered when a person is lying are different from what they would be otherwise.**
- Instruments like **cardio-cuffs or sensitive electrodes** are attached to the person, and variables such as blood pressure, pulse, respiration, change in sweat gland activity, blood flow, etc., are measured as questions are put to them.
- A **numerical value is assigned to each response** to conclude whether the person is telling the truth, is deceiving, or is uncertain.

Narcoanalysis

- It involves the **injection of a drug, sodium pentothal**, which induces a **hypnotic or sedated state** in which the subject's imagination is neutralised, and they are expected to **divulge true information.**
- The **drug, referred to as "truth serum"** in this context, was used in larger doses as anaesthesia during surgery, and is said to have been used during World War II for intelligence operations.

More recently, investigating agencies have sought to **employ these tests in investigation, and are sometimes seen as being a "softer alternative" to torture or 'third degree'** to extract the truth from suspects.

Concerns

- However, **neither method has been proven scientifically to have a 100% success rate**, and remain contentious in the medical field as well.

Are Indian investigators allowed to put suspects through these tests?

- In **Selvi & Ors vs State of Karnataka & Anr (2010)**, a Supreme Court Bench comprising Chief Justice of India K G Balakrishnan and Justices R V Raveendran and J M Panchal ruled that no lie detector tests should be administered **"except on the basis of consent of the accused"**.
 - The Bench took into consideration international norms on human rights, the right to a fair trial, and the right against self-incrimination under **Article 20(3) of the Constitution**
- Those who volunteer must **have access to a lawyer**, and have the physical, emotional, and legal implications of the test explained to them by police and the lawyer, the Bench said.
- It said that the **'Guidelines for the Administration of Polygraph Test on an Accused'** published by the National Human Rights Commission in 2000, must be strictly followed.
- The **subject's consent should be recorded before a judicial magistrate**, the court said.
- The **results of the tests cannot be considered to be "confessions"**, because those in a drugged-induced state cannot exercise a choice in answering questions that are put to them.
- However, any **information or material subsequently discovered with the help of such a voluntarily-taken test can be admitted as evidence**, the court said.
 - Thus, if an accused reveals the location of a murder weapon in the course of the test, and police later find the weapon at that location, the statement of the accused will not be evidence, but the weapon will be.

Context

- Gokulnath Shetty retired deputy manager of Punjab National Bank (PNB), refused to give his consent for the test, stating among other reasons, that it could have an adverse effect on his health.
- He also cited a Supreme Court judgment that makes it mandatory to obtain the consent of the accused for such tests.

Why has the CBI sought to use these tests in the PNB case?

- The CBI has said that it has been **unable to ascertain Shetty's "other motives and details of undue pecuniary advantage obtained by him"**.
- Shetty is alleged to have issued fraudulent Letters of Understanding in favour of Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi, and their firms in violation of bank rules.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Henley Passport Index

- **Prepared by Henley and Partners, a London-based global citizenship and residence advisory firm**, the Henley Passport Index claims to be the "original ranking of all the world's passports".
- The index gathers data from the **International Air Transport Association (IATA)** that manages inter-airline cooperation globally.
- The Henley Passport Index is **updated in real-time according to countries' visa policy changes**. It covers 227 destinations and 199 passports.
- The index receives **data from the IATA on a fixed day every year that forms the basis of the index**.
- This data is supplemented by accounting for real-time changes in visa policies using publicly available sources to prepare a visa list, which is a list of **destinations that a passport can access visa-free**, through a visa on arrival, e-visa or with a traditional visa.
- The **strength of a passport** is defined as the countries to which holders are eligible to travel without a visa. This implies that passport holders can obtain a visa on arrival, an electronic travel authority, or a visitor's permit when entering the destination country.

Context India's latest ranking

- According to the **Henley Passport Index 2019**, the strength of the Indian passport has weakened considerably in the last decade.
- India slipped nine places on the list, from 77 in 2010 to **86 in 2019** down five places from 81 in 2018.
- In the last decade, only eight nations granted visa-free-access to Indian nationals.
- India ranks below other BRICS countries, with which are at a similar stage in their economic development.

Global ranking

- Singapore has the strongest passport.
- Afghanistan holds the weakest passport, with a score and ranking of 25 and 109, respectively.
- Syria and Pakistan follow with rankings of 107 and 106 and scores of 29 and 30, respectively.

How are passport ranks and scores interpreted?

- The score is the sum of the number of countries accessible by that passport holder without requiring pre-departure government approval for visa-types including a visitor's permit, visa on arrival or an **Electronic Travel Authority (ETA)**.
 - For every territory/country that a passport holder of a particular country/territory is able to access through these visa-types (without pre-departure government approval), a value of 1 is attributed to it.
 - A value of 0 is attributed to a score when a passport holder has to seek pre-departure government approval for visa-types including e-visa (visas applied for online and received) and visa on arrival. Therefore, the total score becomes the sum total for all the values of 1.
- For instance, a passport holder from Singapore and Japan can travel to 189 countries/territories

without requiring pre-departure government approval.

What assumptions does the index make?

- The index assumes that the passport is valid, belongs to an adult who is a citizen of the issuing country and that it is not diplomatic, emergency or temporary in nature.
- It also assumes that the person **travelling is doing so alone, rather than in tourist groups** and meets all the basic requirements for entry such as hotel reservations.
- Furthermore, the **traveller is assumed to be arriving and departing from the same airport** and is seeking a short stay (between three days-several months) for business and tourist purposes only.

What does this mean for Indian passport holders?

- India has a score of 58. That is the number of destinations an Indian passport holder can travel to today, without pre-departure government approval.
- That is the same as a citizen of any country, on an average, could travel to 13 years ago.

Significance

- Passport rankings point towards the strength of diplomatic relations between countries.

F. Tidbits

1. UN team alleges violation of rights in Kashmir

- The information blackout in Kashmir has amounted to a collective punishment for the people of the region, experts of the United Nations Human Rights Council have said.
- In a statement, they said, the communication lockdown and denial of fundamental rights to the Kashmiri people violated fundamental rights.
- The shutdown of Internet and telecommunication networks, without justification from the government, is inconsistent with the fundamental norms of necessity and proportionality.
- They declared that they had received information about an increase in the arrest of political figures, journalists, human rights activists, and protesters.

2. No need for third party mediation in Kashmir: Emmanuel Macron

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron discussed the government's move to suspend Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir and split the State into two Union Territories.
- Briefing the media in Chantilly after one-on-one talks Mr. Macron said France would support any policy that would give the region stability, adding that no one should provoke violence there.
- France believes that issue of Kashmir should be resolved between India and Pakistan and no other party should be involved, said Mr. Macron.
- "We would like to support any policy that keeps the situation stable and free from terror. I will be speaking to the Pakistan PM shortly, and would say to him to that this issue must be resolved bilaterally as well," he added.
- Describing the International Solar Alliance as proof of India-France cooperation, Mr. Modi said, "Today as we face challenges of terrorism and climate change, etc, France and India stand together with full support,".

G. Prelims Facts

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. CPEC is a joint project between Pakistan and China involving a network of highways, railways and oil and gas pipelines and fiber optic cables from China to the Pakistani coast.
2. The CPEC is part of China's 'One Belt, One Road' initiative'.

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:

Both statements are correct. It aims to connect the ancient Chinese trading town Kashgar in Xinjiang with Pakistan's deep-sea Gwadar port in Balochistan.

Q2. The National Health Mission comprises which of the following components?

1. National Rural Health Mission
2. National Urban Health Mission
3. Tertiary Care Programmes
4. Human Resources for Health and Medical Education

Choose the correct option:

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 3 and 4 only
- c. 1, 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: d

Explanation:

The National Health Mission is India's flagship health sector programme to revitalize rural and urban health sectors by providing flexible finances to State Governments. The National Health Mission comprises of 4 components namely the National Rural Health Mission, the National Urban Health Mission, Tertiary Care Programmes and Human Resources for Health and Medical Education.

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. Financial Action Task Force is an organ of the United Nations.
2. It is headquartered in Paris.
3. It is involved in developing policies to combat money laundering and terror financing.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

The Financial Action Task Force is an intergovernmental organization founded in 1989. It was founded on the initiative of the G7 to develop policies to combat money laundering. In 2001 its mandate expanded to include terrorism financing. It is headquartered in Paris in France.

Q4. Consider the following statements:

- 1. Oxytocin is a hormone secreted by the pituitary glands.
- 2. It acts as both, a hormone as well as a brain neurotransmitter.

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:

Oxytocin is a hormone that is made in the brain, in the hypothalamus. It is secreted by the pituitary gland, which is located at the base of the brain. It acts both as a hormone and as a brain neurotransmitter. Oxytocin is a first-line drug administered to save the lives of young mothers suffering from excessive bleeding immediately after childbirth.

I. UPSC Mains Practise Questions

- 1. An outright ban of Oxytocin is not the solution to its misuse in the dairy sector. Discuss the implications of such a ban. (15 Marks, 150 Words)
- 2. Big data innovations, using large data sets from mobile phone tracking to satellite platforms reveal patterns, trends, and associations of disaster risks. Discuss the importance of Big Data in confronting complex disasters. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

