

26 Aug 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Rifts emerge as G7 summit kicks off](#)

Context:

The 45th G7 summit is being held from August 24–26, 2019, in Biarritz, France.

Details:

- The G7 gathering is taking place against a backdrop of worries about a global economic downturn and coincides with an era of international disunity across an array of matters.
- Trump insisted that he was getting along well with leaders at a G7 summit in France, but rifts emerged with his Western allies on issues ranging from his trade war with China to Iran, North Korea and Russia.
- Tensions were quickly on show, however, as the first full day of talks between the leaders of Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States got underway in Biarritz.
- Before leaving Washington, Mr. Trump stepped up his tariff war with Beijing in a battle between the world's two largest economies and called on U.S. companies to move out of China.
- Underlining the multilateral discord even before the summit got underway, Mr. Trump threatened the meeting's host, saying Washington would tax French wine unless Paris dropped a digital tax on U.S. technology companies.
- European Council President Donald Tusk, who takes part in the G7 discussions, warned the EU would respond "in kind" if Mr. Trump acted on his threat.
- Trump up-ended last year's G7 meeting in Canada, walking out early and disassociating himself from the final communique.
- Looking to broaden the scope of the debate, French President Emmanuel Macron has invited several African leaders to discuss problems facing their continent, while leaders from India, Australia, Chile and Spain are due to attend a dinner on Sunday where the focus will be on the environment and other issues.
- Senior U.S. officials accused Macron of looking "to fracture the G7" by focusing on "niche issues" rather than major global concerns.

Differences over Iran, North Korea, Russia:

- Trump appeared to brush aside French efforts to mediate with Iran, saying that while he was happy for Macron to reach out to Tehran to defuse tensions he would carry on with his own initiatives.
- Trump appeared to brush aside French efforts to mediate with Iran, saying that he would carry on with his own initiatives.
- Trump also appeared at odds with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe over the seriousness of North Korea's series of short-range missile launches.
- There was also disagreement over Trump's calls for Russia to be readmitted to the group of advanced economies.
 - Russia was excluded from what used to be the G8 in 2014 after it annexed Ukraine's Crimea and then backed an anti-Kiev rebellion in the industrial region of Donbas in eastern Ukraine.
- Macron added to the internal EU strains by unexpectedly threatening to block an EU trade deal with a group of South American states over Brazil's handling of fires that are ravaging the Amazon rainforest.
- Germany and Britain both voiced deep concern about the fires, but said shooting down the ambitious Mercosur trade accord would not help save the Amazon.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. PM calls for mass movement against single-use plastic from Oct 2

Context:

In his monthly radio address 'Mann ki Baat', Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that, a new mass

movement against the use of plastic would be launched when the country observes the 150 birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation.

Details:

- Prime Minister urged people to observe the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi this year as a day to make India plastic-free and exhorted municipalities, NGOs and the corporate sector to come up with ways for safe disposal of accumulated plastic waste before Diwali.
- He urged all municipalities, municipal corporations, district administrations, gram panchayats, government and non-governmental bodies to work towards ensuring adequate arrangement for collection and storage of plastic waste.
- The call for a mass movement comes days after Mr. Modi's Independence Day's address in which he had urged people to shun 'single-use' plastic to protect the environment.
- The Prime Minister also urged people to participate in the annual 'Swachhta Hi Seva' or 'the quest for cleanliness is service' campaign

Swachhta Hi Seva:

- Swachhta Hi Seva campaign aims at fulfilling Mahatma Gandhi's dream of a clean India by mobilizing the masses and reinforcing "Jan Andolan" for sanitation.
- The campaign intends to mobilise people from various walks of life to undertake shramdaan (volunteering) for construction and cleanliness of toilets, make the country open defecation free.
- The campaign will see participation from people with diverse background, like Chief Ministers, Union Ministers, celebrities and legislators.
- Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, the convening Ministry for the Swachh Bharat Mission will take care of the coordination of the campaign.
- The hallmark of the campaign would be to reach out to the poor, marginalised and providing them with sanitation services that are sustainable.
- Three Sundays during the period will be dedicated for large scale shramdaan for cleaning of public places, lakes and ponds and construction of toilets.

Category: SECURITY

1. CVC sets up panel to probe bank fraud

Context:

The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) has constituted an Advisory Board for Banking Frauds (ABBF) to examine bank fraud of over ₹50 crore and recommend action.

Details:

- The Advisory Board for Banking Frauds (ABBF) is headed by former Vigilance Commissioner T.M. Bhasin.
- The panel in its previous form was called the Advisory Board on Bank, Commercial and Financial Frauds.
- The ABBF is formed in consultation with the RBI.
- The tenure of the Chairman and members would be for a period of two years from August 21, 2019.
- The board is headquartered in Delhi.
- The Reserve Bank of India will provide required secretarial services, logistic and analytical support along with the necessary funding to the board.
- In a bid to check incidences of banking frauds, the government has already issued the 'framework for

timely detection, reporting, and investigation relating to large-value bank frauds' to PSBs, which makes it clear that all accounts exceeding ₹50 crore, if classified as an NPA, should be examined by banks from the angle of possible fraud, and a report be placed before the bank's Committee for Review of NPAs based on the findings of the investigation.

- Besides, the PSBs have been advised to obtain a certified copy of the passport of promoters/directors and other authorised signatories of companies taking loan facilities of more than ₹50 crore.

Functions of ABBF:

- It would function as the first level of examination of all large fraud cases before recommendations or references are made to the investigative agencies by the respective public sector banks (PSBs).
- The four-member board's jurisdiction would be confined to those cases involving the level of officers of General Manager and above in the PSB in respect of an allegation of a fraud in a borrowal account.
- Lenders would refer all large fraud cases above ₹50 crore to the board and on receipt of its recommendation or advice, the bank concerned would take further action in such matter.
- The Central Bureau of Investigation may also refer any case or matter to the board where it has any issue or difficulty or in technical matters with the PSB concerned.
- The board would also periodically carry out frauds analysis in the financial system and give inputs for policy formulation related to the fraud to the RBI.

2. Separate flag, law key to Naga solution: NSCN(IM)

Context:

A Naga extremist group has for the first time said a "separate flag and Constitution" were necessary for an honourable solution to the 22-year-old Naga peace process.

Details:

- The demand comes less than a month after the Centre ended Jammu and Kashmir's special status that allowed it to have its own Constitution and a flag.
- The Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) has in a letter to the Prime Minister, said any solution to the Naga political issue would be far from honourable if the core issues are yet to be agreed upon.

Framework Agreement

- The Naga Movement is the oldest movement for self-determination in India and is also the longest surviving insurgency.
- The movement began during the British rule and continued after 1947. Even after the formation of a separate state of Nagaland in 1963, the movement didn't die down.
- NSCN(IM) demands a Greater Nagalim comprising of all contiguous Naga areas spread across the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur along with a large tract in Myanmar (before independence, the British demarcated Indo- Burma boundary. Due to which some Naga areas went into Myanmar).
- In August 2015, Government of India signed a Framework Agreement with National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) IM to resolve the long-standing Naga issue in a peaceful manner.
- The Framework Agreement was initiated and signed by former NSCN(IM) chairman Isak Chishi Swu. This is believed to have taken the peace process to a critical stage.
- Neither the Centre nor the outfit, however, has divulged the contents of the agreement.
- The Centre had a year ago insisted that the peace process would be incomplete if at least six other

Naga extremist groups, some of whom are dormant, were not taken on board the negotiations.

- The Khaplang faction of the NSNC ceased to be a part of the peace process after it walked out of a 14-year-old truce in March 2015.
- The Khaplang faction is primarily based in Myanmar while most of the leaders and cadres of the Isak-Muivah group are from Manipur.

3. Manmohan Singh set to lose SPG cover

Context:

According to several sources, the Narendra Modi government is likely to withdraw the Special Protection Group (SPG) from former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's security detail shortly.

Details:

- The decision has reportedly been taken after a three-month review involving the Cabinet Secretariat and the Ministry of Home Affairs with inputs from intelligence agencies the Research and Analysis Wing and the Intelligence Bureau.
- According to the procedures laid down by the SPG Act, 1988, the government had renewed Dr. Singh's SPG detail for a year after he demitted office in 2014, and subsequently, on an annual basis after reviewing the threats faced by him and his wife.
- The elite protection force of about 3,000 officers meant for the Prime Ministers, the former Prime Ministers and their families would now be tasked with protecting only Mr. Modi, Congress president Sonia Gandhi and her children Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra.
- SPG cover would only be reduced on the basis of threat levels as defined in the SPG Act of 1988.
- The government is technically within the law to withdraw SPG protection to any former Prime Minister. However, the government had chosen not to do so for Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who demitted office in 2004 and had SPG protection until he passed away in 2018.

Concerns:

- Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's assassination had brought much criticism to his successor V.P. Singh, whose government had withdrawn Mr. Gandhi's SPG protection.
- Plans for the move raised some eyebrows within the security establishment.
- It is believed that Dr. Singh is more exposed, as he frequently travels for political engagements and is just re-elected a member of the Rajya Sabha.

Special Protection Group (SPG):



- The SPG was set up in 1985 after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.
- The Parliament passed the SPG Act in 1988 dedicating the group to protecting the Prime Minister of India.
- At the time, the Act did not include former Prime Ministers, and when V.P. Singh came to power in 1989 his government withdrew SPG protection to the outgoing PM Rajiv Gandhi.
- After Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in 1991 the SPG Act was amended, offering SPG protection to all former Prime Ministers and their families for a period of at least 10 years.
- During his tenure that began in 1999, PM Vajpayee's government conducted a major review of the SPG's operations, and decided to withdraw SPG protection to former PMs P.V. Narasimha Rao, H.D. Deve Gowda, and I.K. Gujral.
- In 2003, the Vajpayee government also amended the SPG Act to bring the period of automatic protection down from 10 years to "a period of one year from the date on which the former Prime Minister ceased to hold office and beyond one year based on the level of threat as decided by the Central Government."

Category: ECONOMY

1. IMF report flags several delays in India's data reporting

Context:

According to the IMF's "Annual Observance Report of the Special Data Dissemination Standard for 2018", India failed to comply with multiple requirements prescribed in the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) — a practice mandatory for all IMF members.

Concerns:

- The most recent data from the National Crime Records Bureau dates back to 2016 and accident statistics have not been updated since 2015.
- A recent report published by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), shows that inconsistencies have crept into the dissemination of fiscal datasets as well.
- Also, India's non-compliance in multiple categories in 2018 and to an extent in 2017 breaks with an otherwise near perfect dissemination record.
- India, in 2018, has deviated from the SDDS in at least one instance in all the data categories listed.
- In 2018, in at least nine data categories, India has not disseminated data. None of the other BRICS countries' reports records missing data for the period.

- India's non-compliance with IMF standards is a recent phenomenon. The "X"s for non-dissemination of data and "O"s for data categories missing from the ARC were few and far between in India's reports in the 2006-2016 period. The graphic lists such instances since 2006.

Details:

- While India failed to comply with multiple requirements prescribed in the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS), comparable economies comprising the BRICS grouping of Brazil, China, South Africa and Russia, have maintained a near impeccable record in the same period.
- While the IMF acknowledged India's deviations, it termed them "non-serious".
- However, independent observers see these deficiencies as a result of indifference to data dissemination procedures.
- When the IMF was asked to explain why India's non-observance was deemed as non-serious, their statistical department persisted that this was due to information availability in other government websites and National Summary Data Page (NSDP).

Importance of Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS):

- The IMF launched the SDDS initiative in 1996 to guide members to enhance data transparency and help financial market participants with adequate information to assess the economic situations of individual countries.
- India subscribed to the SDDS on December 27, 1996.
- The yearly observance report for each member country lists the compliances and deviations from the SDDS under each data category for that year.
- There are over 20 data categories which IMF considers for this report to capture a nation's economic health including national accounts (GDP, GNI), production indices, employment, and central government operations.
- The report lists three types of deviations from SDDS.
 - The first deals with delays in data dissemination from the periodicity prescribed in the SDDS.
 - The second occurs when member countries do not list a data category in their Advance Release Calendars (ARC) despite the category being mandated by the SDDS.
 - The third deviation occurs when data is not disseminated at all for a particular period.
- The IMF document also states that, monitoring observance of the SDDS is central to maintaining the credibility of the IMF's data standards initiatives and its usefulness to policymakers.
- It further states that if the IMF staff considers a non-observance as a "serious deviation" then procedures would be initiated against the member country.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. IISER team's find may help fight drug-resistant infections

Context:

A team of scientists at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) in Pune claim to have determined the atomic structure of McrBC — a complex bacterial protein which helps prevent viral infections in a bacterial cell and functions as a molecular scissor.

Details:

- The pathbreaking structure of the McrBC is said to be a major step towards understanding the working of the molecular scissors.
- This is the first report of the high-resolution structure from India determined using electron

cryomicroscopy, commonly known as cryo-EM.

- It is believed that the determination of the McrBC's structure has long-term implications in 'phage therapy' and could help combat drug-resistant infections in the future.
- Phages are groups of viruses that infect and kill bacterial cells and phage therapy is the therapeutic use of bacteriophages to treat bacterial infections.
- The main reason for the renaissance in phage therapy in the West and elsewhere is that antibiotics are losing ground.

Background:

- Pioneering work in the field of bacterial immunity against viruses was first undertaken by in the early 1950s renowned Italian microbiologist Salvador Luria.
- Luria discovered the phenomenon of host-controlled restriction and modification of a bacterial virus.
- The phenomenon that the Nobel Prize-winning Luria discovered was later found to be a result of the action of McrBC, which only cuts DNA that is labelled by a specific chemical mark.
- Interestingly, this chemical mark is also seen in human DNA that regulates the reading of the encoded genetic information.
- Consequently, McrBC is used as a laboratory tool to study the readability of human and other genomes.

How the 'scissors' work:

- Like the human immune system, which fights viruses, bacteria too have an elaborate defence system to combat phages (the viruses which infect bacterial cells).
- These phages inject their DNA into the bacterial cell, wherein they multiply and duplicate the virus that eventually bursts out of that cell to infect many more.
- To prevent infection, bacteria have specialised 'molecular scissors' which specifically cut the foreign DNA, thus preventing their multiplication in bacterial cells.
- The molecular scissors not only cut the viral DNA, but also regulate the entry of other foreign DNA that might host an antibiotic resistance gene.
- Understanding of the molecular scissors would aid in combating multidrug resistant microbes.
- The McrBC's unique feature is that it requires to be powered by an inbuilt motor that uses GTP (guanosine triphosphate), an energy currency of the bacterial cell — as 'fuel' to cut the foreign DNA.
- It is important to know how the machinery works in order to be able to regulate it.
- If there is a drug-resistant strain in bacteria, it is often seen that this machinery is absent and they become resistant to antibiotics
- The technological revolution in the field of cryo-EM has allowed the determination of the three-dimensional position of every atom in biomolecules such as the McrBC.
- The atomic structure of McrBC reveals the details of its working parts and is a snapshot of the molecular machine designed by nature in action. Information derived from the 3D structure of proteins is integral to designing their activators and inhibitors.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. On the wrong side

The editorial talks about Press Council of India backing Kashmir restrictions

Issue:

The Press Council of India has moved the Supreme Court supporting the Centre and Jammu and Kashmir government's decision to impose restrictions on communication in the state following the abrogation of Article 370. Issues are being raised about the Press Council of India (PCI)'s support of government restrictions on communication last week as brazenly contrary to its mandate and purpose.

Concerns:

- The PCI has justified restrictions on communication in J&K to be “in the interest of the integrity and sovereignty of the nation”.
- The notion that an open society, and an independent media, are somehow a threat to the nation's integrity and sovereignty is nothing less than a rationale for despotism.
- That it is coming from a statutory, quasi-judicial, autonomous body whose mandate it is to protect and reinforce a professional and objective media is shocking.

Details:

- PCI has sought to intervene in a petition by Kashmir Times executive editor Anuradha Bhasin, pending before the apex court, seeking an end to the restrictions on communication in Jammu and Kashmir that were imposed before the Government's decision on August 5 to revoke the special constitutional status of the erstwhile State.
- The petitioner has cited Articles 14 (equality before the law) and 19 (freedom of speech and expression) of the Constitution of India.
- The PCI explains its *raison d'être* as “rooted in the concept that in a democratic society the press needs at once to be free and responsible”.
- Freedom of expression like any other freedom is subject to reasonable restrictions. But the operative word is ‘reasonable’. “Where the norms are breached and the freedom is defiled by unprofessional conduct, a way must exist to check and control it. But, control by Government or official authorities may prove destructive of this freedom... Hence, the Press Council,” it says.
- The PCI's track record may not have been stellar; nevertheless, its interventions occasionally held the mirror to deviant journalists and publications and, at the same time, sought to shield the profession and professionals from the highhandedness of the state and non-state actors.
- It supported the Punjab Press in its “efforts to inform the people truthfully and impartially” during the years of militancy in the early 1990s; around the same period, it pulled up several publications that showed communal bias in coverage of the Ayodhya agitation.
- The PCI considers “defaming a community a serious matter” and believes “ascribing to it a vile, anti-national activity is reprehensible and amounts to journalistic impropriety”.

Way forward:

- India is currently witnessing a disturbing debasement of standards in journalism, and the PCI's legal and ethical obligation has never been so critical.
- Media is often called upon by the state to privilege a narrowly defined national interest over truthful reporting; professional media in a democracy must view truthful reporting in itself as in national interest.
- The PCI must play its mandated role and not kowtow to the government of the day.

2. Privacy no longer supreme – On Right to Privacy

Background:

- Two years ago, a nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd) vs Union Of India unanimously held that Indians have a constitutionally protected fundamental right to privacy.
- It held that privacy is a natural right that inheres in all natural persons, and that the right may be restricted only by state action that passes each of the three tests:
 - First, such state action must have a legislative mandate;
 - Second, it must be pursuing a legitimate state purpose;
 - Third, it must be proportionate i.e., such state action — both in its nature and extent, must be necessary in a democratic society and the action ought to be the least intrusive of the available alternatives to accomplish the ends.

Significance of the judgement:

- That judgment fundamentally changed the way in which the government viewed its citizens' privacy, both in practice and prescription.
- It undertook structural reforms and brought transparency and openness in the process of commissioning and executing its surveillance projects,
- It built a mechanism of judicial oversight over surveillance requests.
- It demonstrated great care and sensitivity in dealing with personal information of its citizens.
- It legislated a transformative, rights-oriented data protection law that held all powerful entities that deal with citizens' personal data (data controllers), including the state, accountable.

Details:

- The data protection law embodied the principle that the state must be a model data controller and prescribed a higher standard of observance for the state.
- The law also recognised and prohibited the practice of making access to essential services contingent on the citizen parting with irrelevant personal information.
- This law established an effective privacy commission that is tasked with enforcing, protecting and fulfilling the fundamental right to privacy implemented through the specific rights under the legislation.
- The data protection law also revolutionised the technology sector landscape in the country, paving way for innovative privacy-aware and privacy-preserving technical solution providers to thrive and flourish, and establishing the country as a global leader in the space.

Concerns:

- The government, instead of following the script, did the exact opposite.
- The judgment in K.S. Puttaswamy effected little change in the government's thinking or practice as it related to privacy and the personal data of its citizens.
- It continued to commission and execute mass surveillance programmes with little regard for necessity or proportionality, with justifications always voiced in terms of broad national security talking points.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs, authorised 10 Central agencies to “intercept, monitor and decrypt any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer in the country”.
 - This notification is presently under challenge before the Supreme Court.
- It became known that the Ministry of Information Broadcasting had floated a tender for ‘Social Media Monitoring Hub’, a technical solution to snoop on all social media communications, including e-mail.

- The government had to withdraw the project following the Supreme court's stinging criticism.
- A request for proposal for a similar social media surveillance programme was floated yet again by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), which is presently under challenge before the Supreme Court.
- The Income-Tax department has its 'Project Insight' which also has similar mass surveillance ends.

Data use vs. privacy:

- The government has shunned a rights-oriented approach in the collection, storage and processing of personal data and has stuck to its 'public good' discourse.
- Personal data in the custody of the state is for the state to use, monetise and exploit in any manner it desires so long as it guards against security incidents such as breaches and unauthorised access — i.e. unauthorised by the government.
- This convenient redux of the idea of privacy to mere information security appears to inform all its policies.
- This is evident from this year's Economic Survey as it commends the government for having been able to sell and monetise the vehicle owners' data in the Vahan database and exhorts it to replicate the success with other databases.
- The Justice Srikrishna committee which has published the draft Personal Data Protection Bill uses a similar language of 'free and fair digital economy', with the digital economy being the ends and the notion of privacy merely being a shaper of the means.
- This not only misrepresents the purpose of the bill, but also its history and the mischief that it intended to tackle.
- The committee made the choices it made despite being aware that the courts are likely to interpret every provision of the legislation purposively, taking note that the purpose is couched in terms of the economy as opposed to the bill having a singular focus on the fulfilment of the right to privacy.

Conclusion:

As K.S. Puttaswamy judgement ages and steps into its third year, hopes are still alive for a rights-oriented data protection legislation. The legislation - which includes comprehensive surveillance reform prohibiting mass surveillance and institution of a judicial oversight mechanism for targeted surveillance — and which recognises the principle that the state ought to be a model data controller as it deals with its citizens' personal information should be made possible.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. A bottom-up approach to conservation

Issue:

- The 2018 floods and landslides in Kerala that caused huge financial losses and manifold human tragedies were thought of as a once-in-a-century calamity, and that normalcy will return soon.
- Further, the probability of two such back-to-back events was only 1 in 10,000.
- Hence, in 2019, a repeat of the shocking train of intense floods, landslides, financial losses and manifold human tragedies has not just left people stunned but also made them realise that it is unwise to continue business as usual, and that fresh options must be thought about.

What are these alternatives?

- One set of possibilities is provided by the recommendations of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) which was chaired by Madhav Gadgil.
- Those measures wouldn't have pre-empted the intense rainfall, but they would have definitely reduced the scale of devastation caused by the downpours.
- All the recommendations were grounded in a careful examination of facts.
- Furthermore, the policy prescriptions fell firmly within the framework of the constitutional duties and laws.
- The suggestion was that the existing laws relating to environmental protection and devolution of powers, right down to the gram sabha and ward sabha level, be followed.

A leader in devolution:

- Kerala leads the country in democratic devolution.
- The Kerala High Court had ruled in favour of Plachimada Panchayat that cancelled Coca-Cola's licence because the company polluted and depleted groundwater reserves, drying up wells and adversely impacting agriculture and livelihoods.
- While doing so, the panchayat invoked its constitutional rights, arguing that it had the duty to protect the well-being of its citizens and had the right to cancel — or refuse permission for — anything that affected its citizens adversely.
- The company's counterargument was that the panchayat was subordinate to the State government, which had granted it the licence.
- The Kerala High Court rejected this contention, affirming that grass-roots institutions have the authority to decide on the course of development in their own locality.
- Furthermore, the Kerala legislature unanimously passed a law asking Coca-Cola to pay Plachimada Panchayat due compensation for losses inflicted on them.
- Kerala had also been at the forefront of the country's Literacy Mission of the late 1980s; it pioneered Panchayat Level Resource Mapping involving neo-literates and followed it up with the People's Planning campaign that attempted to involve every panchayat in the preparation of a Panchayat Development Report.

WGEEP recommendations:

- The WGEEP called for a model of conservation and development compatible with each other.
- A replacement of the prevailing 'Develop Recklessly, Conserve Thoughtlessly' pattern with one of 'Develop Sustainably, Conserve Thoughtfully.' was sought.
- The fine-tuning of development practices to the local context would have required the full involvement of local communities.
- It would have therefore been entirely inappropriate to depend exclusively on government agencies for deciding on and managing Ecologically Sensitive Zones, and the Gadgil panel certainly had no intention of imposing any development or conservation priorities on the people.
- Acting on the WGEEP report would have implied using the recommendations regarding ecological sensitivity as the starting point for a bottom-up democratic process for deciding on how to safeguard this global biodiversity hotspot and water tower of peninsular India.

Preserving the 'sensitive zones':

- The WGEEP's mandate asked it "to demarcate areas within the Western Ghats Region which need to be notified as ecologically sensitive and to recommend for notification of such areas as ecologically sensitive zones under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986."
- In line with the National Forest Policy, 60% of the total area of Western Ghats in Kerala, including the region housing wildlife sanctuaries and national parks, were decided to be assigned as a zone of highest ecological sensitivity, 'ESZ1'.
- 'Elevation' and 'slope' were proposed as two indicators of sensitivity. In Kerala, rainfall increases

rapidly with elevation, and high rainfall and steep slopes render localities vulnerable to landslides. Hence, areas prone to landslides would come under ESZ1.

- The extent and quality of natural vegetation was the third indicator for classifying an area as ESZ1.
 - Landslides are under check in areas with intact natural vegetation because the roots bind the soil.
 - Any disturbance to such vegetation would render any locality that has steep slopes and experiences high rainfall susceptible to landslides.
 - Such disturbances may include quarrying or mining, replacement of natural vegetation by new plantations, levelling of the land using heavy machinery, and construction of houses and roads.
 - Therefore, recommendations were made that such activities be avoided in ESZ1 areas.

Way forward:

- Had the Gadgil panel recommendations been accepted, the extent and intensity of landslides being encountered today would have been much lower.
- Implementation of its overall recommendations would have also had a plethora of other desirable results, both for nature and for people.
- So, it would surely be wise to apply the panel's recommendations now.
- This would imply building on India's greatest strength, its deep-rooted democracy. Democracy is the active involvement of citizens in governing the country at all levels, most importantly at the local level.
- The Kerala High Court ruling that local bodies have the authority to decide on the course of development in their own localities be made genuinely operational across the country.
- Full advantage of powers and responsibilities conferred on citizens under provisions such as the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution, and the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 must be taken.
- It is to be asserted that conservation prescriptions should not be merely regulatory, but include positive incentives such as conservation service charges.
- The economic activities like quarrying must be left to agencies like the Kudumbashree groups that are accountable to local communities.
- The citizens must engage more actively in the governance of the country and lead it on to a path of people-friendly and nature-friendly development.

F. Tidbits

1. Young biologist from Andhra Pradesh recreates a blue whale from bones

- Balaji a research scientist at the Coringa Marine Museum in Rajamahendravaram city has assembled the skeleton of 32-ft-long life-size blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*).
- The skeleton he engineered is being preserved and on public display since early 2018.
- The blue whale falls in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- It is classified as "Endangered" as per the IUCN Red List of Threatened species.
- With hunting of the Blue Whale now prohibited by the International Whaling Commission, there are signs that populations are slowly recovering, although there is still a long way to go before the species is secure.
- It is the largest animal known to have ever existed.
- Dozens of dead blue and sperm whales have washed ashore on the Nagayalanka, Machilipatnam, Kakinada, and Srikakulam coast in Andhra Pradesh since 2015.
- What caused their death is the subject of study.

2. No new engines for Jaguars, phase-out starts in 2023

- The Indian Air Force (IAF) has called off the long-pending plan to give new engines to the Jaguar fighter fleet because of time and cost concerns.
- The IAF now has 116 Jaguars and the plan was to replace the current underpowered engines on 80 jets with more powerful Honeywell F-125IN engines, but the plan has been repeatedly delayed.
- Now, the IAF has decided that the cost of the programme has become prohibitive and it was taking too long by which time phasing out of the aircraft will begin.
- The defence sources have also made it clear that there is no immediate need for their replacement.
- The proposal has been called off because the design and development [of the engines] itself will take six years and then [more years for] modifying the aircraft.
- India, which is one of the last users of the Jaguar jets, has procured older Jaguar airframes from several countries in the past few years to cannibalise them for spares to maintain its fleet. Airframes have been procured from France and Oman, which gave them free of cost. The U.K. is set to give some frames at a nominal cost.
- The first Jaguar with DARIN-III upgrades is ready and has completed corporate flying last week.
- The DARIN-III upgrades include a new radar, a fully integrated electronic warfare suite, smart multi-function displays, new avionics, and a new attack system.
- The Jaguars will get a new advanced short-range air-to-air missile (ASRAAM) of European missile-maker MBDA, which is in the process of being integrated.
 - The ASRAAM is widely used as a within visual range (WVR) air-dominance missile with a range of over 25 km.
 - It will be the first wing-launched missile in the IAF inventory.
 - All missiles are now fired from under the wing.
 - The IAF is looking to adopt the ASRAAM on its Su-30MKIs and the indigenous light combat aircraft.
 - The first firing of the ASRAAM from a Jaguar is expected by year-end.

3. PM Modi launches \$4.2 mn redevelopment project of Hindu temple in Bahrain

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the \$4.2 million redevelopment project of the 200-year-old Sri Krishna temple in the Bahraini capital.
- Modi, is the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Bahrain - the key Gulf nation.
- The facelift for the Shreenathji (Shree Krishna) temple in Manama will kick off later this year.
- The heritage and the 200-year-old legacy of the temple will be highlighted in the redevelopment and the new iconic complex will house the sanctum sanctorum and prayer halls.
- There are also facilities for traditional Hindu marriage ceremonies and other rituals, promoting Bahrain as a wedding destination and boosting tourism.
- The Prime Minister also launched the RuPay card in UAE.

4. Assam NRC: Apex court rejected most of 51 petitions in 6 years

- An analysis of petitions related to Assam's National Register of Citizens (NRC) filed in the Supreme Court has revealed that the stakeholders received a favourable verdict in only **four of the 51 cases** heard since 2013.
- Many individuals and organisations had since 2013 filed petitions challenging one aspect of the NRC or the other.
- But the apex court narrowed the stakeholders down to 10, including the Central and Assam
- These stakeholders are the All Assam Students' Union, All Assam Minority Students' Union, Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, Assam Public Works, Assam Sanmilita Mahasangha, National Democratic Front of Bodoland (Progressive), Indigenous Tribal People's Federation, and the Joint Action Committee for Bangali Refugees.
 - Of the four judgments that went in favour of the stakeholders, the most significant was allowing certificates issued by the Gram Panchayat or executive magistrate to be used as an identity document for claiming citizenship if issued after conducting proper enquiries.

- The overruling of the High Court's order provided relief to at least 29 lakh rural women in the State, who use the document to establish linkage with fathers and husbands.
- The overruling of the High Court's order provided relief to at least 29 lakh rural women in the State, who use the document to establish linkage with fathers and husbands.
- The third favourable ruling was on November 1, 2018, when the apex court reversed the NRC authority's move to trim the list of admissible documents from 15 to 10.
- The five documents that the NRC authority said could not be relied upon included the NRC of 1951, electoral rolls up to the midnight of March 24, 1971, and citizenship and refugee registration certificates issued by the competent authority.
- Of the 47 petitions that were rejected, the most damaging included acceptance of the NRC authority's claim that legacy data have been exchanged or traded, exclusion of declared foreigners, doubtful voters and people with cases pending in Foreigners' Tribunals, exclusion of people using legacy data by mistake and those with birth certificate errors
 - Legacy data is a set of pre-1971 documents containing the name of a person from whom lineage is claimed.

5. CSIR to certify air quality monitoring sensors

- The Union Environment Ministry has tasked the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR)-National Physical Laboratory (NPL) with certifying air quality monitoring instruments.
- It is designated as national verification agency for certifying instruments and equipments for monitoring emissions.
- CSIR-NPL is tasked with developing necessary infrastructure, management system, testing and certification facilities conforming to international standards.
- The Centre in January launched a programme to reduce particulate matter (PM) pollution by 20%-30% in at least 102 cities by 2024.
- An edifice of this initiative is to have a vast monitoring network of sensors that can capture the rapid fluctuations of pollutants, necessary to ascertain how these gases and particles affected health.
- This is in anticipation of a rising demand by States for low cost air quality monitoring instruments that can monitor levels of nitrous oxides, ozone and particulate matter.

G. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Central Vigilance Commission is a constitutional body.
2. The body was created on the recommendations of the Santhanam Committee.

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:

Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) is an apex Indian governmental body created in 1964 to address governmental corruption. In 2003, the Parliament enacted a law conferring statutory status on the CVC. It has the status of an autonomous body, free of control from any executive authority, charged with monitoring all vigilance activity under the Central Government of India, advising various authorities in central Government organizations in planning, executing, reviewing and reforming their vigilance work. It was set up on the recommendations of the Committee on Prevention of Corruption, headed by Shri K. Santhanam Committee, to advise and guide Central Government agencies in the field of vigilance.

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. Advisory Board for Banking Frauds is the first level of examination of all large fraud cases before recommendations are made to the investigative agencies by the public sector banks.
2. Advisory Board for Banking Frauds is set up by the Reserve Bank of 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:

The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) has constituted an Advisory Board for Banking Frauds (ABBF) to examine bank fraud of over ₹50 crore and recommend action. It would function as the first level of examination of all large fraud cases before recommendations or references are made to the investigative agencies by the respective public sector banks (PSBs). The four-member board's jurisdiction would be confined to those cases involving the level of officers of General Manager and above in the PSB in respect of an allegation of a fraud in a borrowal account.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) :

1. The SDDS is a global benchmark for disseminating macroeconomic statistics to the public.
2. The practice is mandatory for all IMF members.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

The SDDS is a global benchmark for disseminating macroeconomic statistics to the public. SDDS

subscription indicates that a country meets the test of “good statistical citizenship”. The practice is mandatory for all IMF members.

Q4. As per the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, Blue Whales are classified as:

- a. Vulnerable
- b. Near Threatened
- c. Critically Endangered
- d. Endangered

Answer: d

Explanation:

The blue whale falls in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. It is classified as “Endangered” as per the IUCN Red List of Threatened species.

I. UPSC Mains Practise Questions

1. The National Medical Commission (NMC) Act 2019 aims to improve access to quality and affordable medical education, and ensure availability of adequate medical professionals in all parts of the country, but remains silent a number of crucial issues. Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
2. Discuss the role and contribution of Differential Voting Rights in the growth of Start-up ecosystem in India. (10 Marks, 150 Words)