

09 Aug 2019: Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. ‘Medical law will bring down fees’

Context:

President Ram Nath Kovind has approved the National Medical Commission Bill, 2019.

Details:

- This paves way for the establishment of the country's new regulator of medical education and certification.
- The Union Health Minister described the NMC Act as a 'progressive' legislation that would help reduce the burden on students, ensure probity in medical education, bring down costs of medical education, simplify procedures, help to enhance the number of medical seats in India, ensure quality education, and provide wider access to people for quality healthcare.
- The Minister also sought to dispel an impression about the NMC being dominated by central government nominees. Stating that there will be 10 Vice Chancellors of State Health Universities and 9 elected members of State Medical Councils in the NMC.

National Medical Commission Act 2019:

- A 'singular' feature of the NMC Act is that it provides for the regulation of fees and all other charges in 50% seats in private colleges as well as deemed Universities.
 - Nearly 50% of the total MBBS seats in the country are in government colleges, which have nominal fees. Of the remaining seats, 50% would be regulated by NMC. This means that almost 75% of total seats in the country would be available at reasonable fees.
- The Act repeals the Indian Medical Council Act, 1956 and dissolves the current MCI.
- The 2019 Act sets up the National Medical Commission (NMC) as an umbrella regulatory body with certain other bodies under it. The NMC will subsume the MCI and will regulate medical education and practice in India. Under the Bill, states will establish their respective State Medical Councils within three years. These Councils will have a role similar to the NMC, at the state level. Functions of the NMC include:
 - laying down policies for regulating medical institutions and medical professionals,
 - assessing the requirements of human resources and infrastructure in healthcare,
 - ensuring compliance by the State Medical Councils with the regulations made under the Bill, and
 - framing guidelines for determination of fee for up to 50% of the seats in the private medical institutions.
- The NMC will consist of 25 members, including:

(i) Director General of the Directorate General of Health Services and the Indian Council of Medical Research,

(ii) Director of any of the AIIMS,

(iii) five members (part-time) to be elected by the registered medical practitioners, and

(iv) six members appointed on rotational basis from amongst the nominees of the states in the Medical Advisory Council.

- There will be a uniform National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test for admission to under-graduate and post-graduate super-speciality medical education in all medical institutions regulated under the Act.
- Further, the Act introduces a common final year undergraduate examination called the National Exit Test for students graduating from medical institutions to obtain the license for practice. This test will also serve as the basis for admission into post-graduate courses at medical institutions.
- Under this Act, Foreign medical practitioners may be permitted temporary registration to practice in India.

- To fill in the gaps of availability of medical professionals, the Act provides for the NMC to grant limited license to certain mid-level practitioners called *community health providers*, connected with the modern medical profession to practice medicine.
 - These mid-level medical practitioners may prescribe specified medicines in primary and preventive healthcare.
 - However, in any other cases, these practitioners may only prescribe medicine under the supervision of a registered medical practitioner.

Category: HEALTH

1. Telangana government stalls deworming drive for children

Context:

The deworming drive aimed at distribution of Albendazole tablets to around 6.68 lakh children in two districts of Telangana as part of the National Deworming Programme (NDP) was stalled after two batches of the anti-worm tablets supplied were found to be 'Not of Standard Quality' (NSQ).

Concerns:

- India has the greatest number of children with Soil Transmitted Helminths (STH) infections in the world - more than 220 million. This means India accounts for over one quarter of the world's infected children.
- Soil-transmitted helminth infections are among the most common infections in humans, caused by a group of parasites commonly referred to as worms, including roundworms, whipworms and hookworms. Those living in poverty are most vulnerable to infection.
- Soil Transmitted Helminths (STH) or worm infestation in children is a leading cause of anaemia and impaired mental and physical development.
- The situation of undernutrition and anaemia which is linked to STH also pose a serious threat to children's education and productivity later in life.

National Deworming Programme:

- National Deworming Programme makes targeted investments, so they can conduct high-quality, cost-effective, school-based deworming programmes to reach 75% of children.
- National Deworming Day is observed bi-annually on 10th February and 10th August in all states and UTs followed by mop-up activities. In 2019, the NDD is being conducted on 8th February and mop up day on the 14th February.
- Deworming with Albendazole tablet is an evidence-based, globally-accepted, and effective solution to controlling worm infections.
- Evidence shows that preventive chemotherapy (deworming), or the periodic large-scale administration of anthelmintic medicines to populations at risk, can dramatically reduce the burden of worms caused by soil-transmitted helminth infections.
- Hence, the National Deworming Day has been designed to reach all children.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: SECURITY

1. BrahMos missile to be deployed along coast for maritime security

Context:

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) has approved the procurement of a Software Defined Radio (SDR) and the Next Generation Maritime Mobile Coastal Batteries (NGMMCB) for the Navy.

Details:

- The NGMMCB will be fitted with the BrahMos surface-to-surface supersonic cruise missiles and deployed along the coast.
- The SDR has been designed and developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) and the Navy's Weapons Electronics Systems Engineering Establishment (WESEE).
- SDR will facilitate high-speed data and secure voice communication with anti-jamming capability.

BrahMos:

- BrahMos was jointly developed by India and Russia and has been inducted into the the Army and the Navy.
- It is a joint venture between the Russian Federation's NPO Mashinostroyeniya and India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) who together have formed BrahMos Aerospace.
- The name BrahMos is a portmanteau formed from the names of two rivers, the Brahmaputra of India and the Moskva of Russia.
- The BrahMos is a medium-range ramjet supersonic cruise missile.
- It can be launched from submarine, ships, aircraft, or land.
- It is the fastest supersonic cruise missile in the world and the world's fastest anti-ship cruise missile in operation.
- The missile travels at speeds of Mach 2.8 to 3.0, which is being upgraded to Mach 5.0
- In 2019, India upgraded the missile with a new range of 500 km.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Changes in PMLA Act empower ED

Context:

The Centre has issued a notification on certain changes in the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

Details:

- Under the PMLA, the Enforcement Directorate is empowered to conduct money laundering investigation.
- The most crucial amendments are the deletion of provisos in sub-sections (1) of Section 17 (Search and Seizure) and Section 18 (Search of Persons), doing away with the pre-requisite of an FIR or chargesheet by other agencies that are authorised to probe the offences listed in the PMLA schedule.
- Another important change is the insertion of an explanation in Section 44. It says that the jurisdiction of the Special Court, while dealing with the offence under this Act, during investigation, enquiry or

trial under this Act, shall not be dependent upon any orders passed in respect of the scheduled offence, and the trial of both sets of offences by the same court shall not be construed as joint trial.

- The changes are in line with the intent to treat proceedings under the Act as separate from those under the scheduled offences.
- Some of the changes tend to treat money laundering as a stand-alone crime and also expand the ambit of “proceeds of crime” to assets that may have been derived from any other criminal activity related to scheduled offences.
- An explanation added to Section 45 clarifies that all PMLA offences will be cognisable and non-bailable.
 - Therefore, ED officers are empowered to arrest an accused without warrant, subject to certain conditions.
- Another vital amendment to Section 3 makes concealment of proceeds of crime, possession, acquisition, use, projecting as untainted money, or claiming as untainted property as independent and complete offences under the Act.
 - These activities have been explicitly declared to be continuing offences until such time a person is directly or indirectly enjoying the proceeds of crime.
- Amendments have been made to Section 72 to include a part, giving power to the Centre to set up an Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee for inter-departmental and inter-agency coordination for operational and policy level cooperation, besides consultation with all stakeholders on anti-money laundering and counter-terror funding initiatives.

2. ‘No action even if CSR norms aren’t followed’

Context:

Industry leaders held a collective meeting with the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The meeting was attended by senior Finance Ministry officials as well.

Details:

- In the meeting, the government gave an assurance that it will not initiate punitive action against companies not following the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) norms as mentioned in the recent amendments to the Companies Act.
- The recent amendments to the Companies Act mandate a jail time of up to three years and a possible fine for those companies and its officials that do not comply with the stated CSR norms.
- The other issue that was discussed extensively in the meeting was the transmission of the central bank’s interest cuts by the banks to the customers.
- The Finance Ministry will also be looking into ways to ensure that the rate cuts undertaken by the Reserve Bank of India are passed on to consumers by banks.
- The Industry leaders opined that the Government needs to look at the small savings rates and reduce them in line with the market rates, failing which, the ability of banks to reduce deposit rates and hence ease the lending rates will be at best limited.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Indian soil may have reached moon on crashed Israeli lander

Context:

The Lunar Library, the only surviving payload aboard Israeli lunar lander called Beresheet, contained a small sample from the Bodhi tree in India.

Background:

- On February 21 2019, an Israeli lunar lander called Beresheet (Hebrew for ‘the beginning’) began its journey to the Moon aboard a SpaceX rocket in its quest to be the first privately-funded spacecraft to land on the Moon.
- A month later, it was reported, Beresheet had crash-landed and was irredeemably broken except, for a curious, quirky payload called the Lunar Library.

Lunar Library:

- The Lunar Library is a 30 million page archive of human history and civilisation, covering all subjects, cultures, nations, languages, genres, and time periods.
- In the event of human extinction, it’s meant to be a backup of earth-life.
- It is housed within a 100 gram nanotechnology device that resembles a 120mm DVD.
- The first four layers contain more than 60,000 analog images of pages of books, photographs, illustrations, and documents — etched as 150 to 200 dpi, at increasing levels of magnification, by optical nanolithography.
- The first analog layer is visible to the naked eye. It contains 1,500 pages of text and images, as well as holographic diffractive logos and text.
- The next three analog layers each contain 20,000 images of pages of text and photos.
- Beneath the analog layers of the Library are 21 layers of 40 micron thick nickel foils. Each of the foils house a DVD master, which contain more than 100GB of highly compressed datasets that decompress to almost 200GB of content, including the text and XML of the English Wikipedia, plus tens of thousands of PDFs of books — including fiction, non-fiction, a full reference library, textbooks, technical and scientific handbooks, and more.

Details:

- The Lunar Library also contained a small sample from the Bodhi tree in India, along with material on learning Hindi, Urdu and information on music.
- The management of Mahabodhi stupa (Bihar) had given a leaf from the Bodhi tree and some soil from under the Bodhi seat to be included in the Lunar library.
- In a controversial revelation, it was mentioned that the Lunar library also contained thousands of tardigrades — small, multicellular animals, first found by scientists in Antarctica, and known to be extremely resilient in hostile environments.
 - They can survive without food and water for decades.
 - Assuming that the Lunar library has survived they could be the first living organisms splashed across the surface of the moon.
 - However, the first microbes on the Moon are those left behind in the human faeces from the astronauts aboard the Apollo missions of 1968-1972.
- That these life-forms were part of the Lunar library was deliberately kept a secret because the Outer Space Treaty - is a global, United Nations-backed agreement bars countries from pursuing actions that could harmfully contaminate outer space including the Moon.

Category:ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. At CITES, India to seek boost to protection status of 5 species

Context:

- India has made submissions of proposals regarding changes to the listing of various wildlife species in the CITES secretariat meeting.
- The meeting is scheduled later this month in Geneva, Switzerland.

Details:

- The proposals submitted are regarding changes in the listing of the smooth-coated otter, small-clawed otter, Indian star tortoise, Tokay gecko, wedgefish and Indian rosewood.
- India seeks to boost the protection of all the five animal species as they face a high risk of international trade.
- For the Indian rosewood, the proposal is to remove the species from CITES Appendix II.
- India has laid its proposal for re-listing of the star tortoise from CITES Appendix II to Appendix I. The species faces two threats: loss of habitat to agriculture and illegal harvesting for the pet trade.
- With regard to the two otter species, India, Nepal and the Philippines have proposed that the listing be moved from CITES Appendix II to Appendix I for the more endangered species.
- For Tokay gecko as well, proposals have been made to move the species to Appendix I.

CITES:

- CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) is a multilateral treaty to protect endangered plants and animals.
- It was drafted to ensure that the trade in wild animals and plants do not threaten their survival.
- It was drafted as a result of a resolution adopted in 1963 at a meeting of members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature.
- The convention was opened for signature in 1973 and CITES entered into force on 1 July 1975.
- Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants should not threaten their survival.
- CITES is legally binding on the state parties who are obliged to adopt their own domestic legislation to implement their goals.
- CITES classifies plants and animals into three categories, based on how threatened they are and the degree of protection they require.
 - Appendix I lists species that are the most endangered among CITES-listed animals and plant.
 - Appendix II lists species that are not necessarily now threatened with extinction but that may become so unless trade is closely controlled. It also includes so-called "look-alike species", i.e. species whose specimens in trade look like those of species listed for conservation reasons.
 - Appendix III is a list of species included at the request of a Party that already regulates trade in the species and that needs the cooperation of other countries to prevent unsustainable or illegal exploitation
- Roughly 5,600 species of animals and 30,000 species of plants are protected by CITES against over exploitation through international trade.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

1. 50th Anniversary of Bank Nationalisation

Context:

- **14 private banks** were nationalised on July 19, **1969**.
- It was a watershed moment in the history of Indian banking.
- **Another six** private banks were nationalised in **1980**.

Before 1969:

- At the **time of Independence**, India's rural financial system was marked by the domination of **landlords, traders and moneylenders**.
- In 1951, 93% of the outstanding debt of a rural household came from **non-institutional sources**.
- The predominantly private banking system failed to meet the credit needs of the rural areas.

Banking for All:

- India's banking policy after 1969 followed a **multi-agency approach** towards expanding the **geographical spread** and **functional reach** of the **formal banking system**:
 1. **New Branch Licensing Policy**: Banks had to open four new branches in unbanked rural areas for every branch opened in a metropolitan or port area.
 2. **Priority Sector Lending**: All banks had to compulsorily set aside **40%** of their net bank credit for agriculture, micro and small enterprises, housing, education and "weaker" sections.
 3. **Differential Interest Rate Scheme (1974)**: Loans had to be provided at a low interest rate to the weakest among the weakest sections of the society.
 4. **Lead Bank Scheme (1969)**: Each district was assigned to one bank, where they acted as "pace-setters" in providing integrated banking facilities.
 5. **Regional Rural Banks (RRB; 1975)**: Enlarged the supply of institutional credit to the rural areas.
 6. **National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD; 1982)**: Established to regulate and supervise the functions of cooperative banks and RRBs.
- **Outcomes**:
 - The **number of rural bank branches increased** from 1,833 (in 1969) to 35,206 (in 1991).
 - The **share of institutional sources** in the outstanding debt of rural households **increased** from just 16.9% in 1962 to 64% in 1992.

Nationalisation Starts Paying Back:

- India's nationalisation experience defeats the argument that administered interest rates cause '**financial repression**'.
- It was believed that if the government administers interest rates, the savings rate would decline, leading to a rationing of investment funds.
- However, India's nationalisation led to an impressive growth of **financial intermediation**.
- The **share of bank deposits to GDP** rose from 13% in 1969 to 38% in 1991.
- The **gross savings rate** rose from 12.8% in 1969 to 21.7% in 1990.
- The **share of advances to GDP** rose from 10% in 1969 to 25% in 1991.
- The **gross investment rate** rose from 13.9% in 1969 to 24.1% in 1990.

- Nationalisation also demonstrated the utility of monetary policy in furthering **redistributionist goals**.
- Some economists argue that banks cannot be used to right '**historical wrongs**'.
- However, India's nationalisation shows that monetary policy, banks and interest rates can be effectively used to **take banks to rural areas, backward regions and under-served sectors**, furthering redistributionist goals in an economy.

Financial Liberalisation:

- The theory of financial repression was the base for arguments in favour of financial liberalisation after 1991.
- The **Narasimham Committee of 1991** recommended that monetary policy should be divorced from redistributionist goals.
- Instead, **banks should be free to practise commercial modes of operation**, with profitability as the primary goal.
- Hence, the **Reserve Bank of India allowed** the following:
 - Banks to open and close branches as they desired.
 - Priority sector guidelines were diluted.
 - Banks were allowed to lend to activities that were remotely connected with agriculture or to big corporates in agri-business, yet classify them as agricultural loans.
 - Interest rate regulations on priority sector advances were removed.
- **Outcomes:**
 - More than 900 rural bank branches closed down across the country.
 - The **rate of growth of agricultural credit fell sharply** from around 7% per annum in the 1980s to about 2% per annum in the 1990s.
 - Between 1991 and 2002, **the share of institutional sources** in the total outstanding debt of rural households **fell** from 64% to 57.1%.
 - **Moneylenders and other non-institutional sources** took over the space vacated by institutional sources.

The Return of Public Banks:

- The government and the RBI probably saw the danger of liberalisation coming.
- In 2004, a **policy to double the flow of agricultural credit** within three years was announced. Only public banks could make this happen.
- In 2005, the RBI quietly brought in a **new branch authorisation policy**.
- Permission for new branches began to be given only if the RBI was satisfied that the banks concerned had a plan to **adequately serve under banked areas and agriculture**.
- By 2011, it was mandated that **at least 25% of new branches were to be** compulsorily located **in unbanked centres**.
- **Outcomes:**
 - The number of rural bank branches rose from 30,646 in 2005, to 33,967 in 2011 and 48,536 in 2015.
 - The annual growth rate of **real agricultural credit rose** from about 2% in the 1990s to about 18% between 2001 and 2015.
 - **However**, much of the agricultural credit went to **big agri-business firms and corporate houses** instead of farmers, but recorded in the bank books as "agricultural credit".
 - Hence, the share of institutional credit in the debt outstanding of rural households in 2013 stood at 56%, still lower than the levels of 1991 and 2002.
 - Yet, the expansion of public bank branches was pivotal in achieving the high growth of credit provision.
 - After 2005, public banks also played a central role in furthering the **financial inclusion agendas** of successive governments.

- Between 2010 and 2016, the key responsibility of **opening no-frills accounts** for the unbanked poor fell upon public banks.
- More than 90% of the new no-frills accounts were opened in public banks.
- However, most of these accounts lie dormant or inactive.
- The same public banks **secured India during the global financial crisis of 2007** when most markets in the developed world, dominated by private banks, collapsed.

Need to Promote Public Banks:

- The **macroeconomic policy framework** of successive governments has hardly been supportive of a banking structure dominated by public banks.
- In times of slow growth, **the excess liquidity in banks** was seen as **a substitute for counter-cyclical fiscal policy**. A counter-cyclical fiscal policy refers to strategy by the government to **counter the boom or recession** through fiscal measures.
- **To avoid higher fiscal deficits**, governments encouraged public banks to lend more for retail and personal loans, **high-risk infrastructural sectors and vehicle loans**.
- Banks **funded by short-term deposit liabilities** were giving loans that involved **long-term risks**, often **not backed by due diligence**.
- Many loans turned into **non performing assets**.
- At the same time, fear of **fiscal deficits** is scaring the government away from **recapitalising banks**.
- **Privatisation is being seen as a solution** to all these questions.

Conclusion:

Public sector banks were the pillars of **financial inclusion** and **institutional credit provision** in India. Successive governments need to reconsider the view that privatisation is the solution to the current issues in banking.

Category:DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. How to Mitigate Urban Floods?

Context:

Once again, as a strong monsoon causes havoc, there is need for rethinking our disaster management and urban planning strategies.

Background:

- The pre-monsoon phase between March and May was worrying as the rainfall was scarce.
- The monsoon, so far, has been advantageous to Indian economy.
- However, **very heavy rainfall** has been recorded in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, the north eastern States, Karnataka, the Konkan coast, hilly districts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
- This pattern may extend into Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Bengal and other eastern regions.

Cause of Concern?

- **Last year's flooding in Kerala**, and the **Chennai catastrophe of 2015** showed, there can be a **terrible cost in terms of lives and property lost, and people displaced**.

- Even in a rain-shadow region such as Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu, the collapse of a railway parcel office after a downpour has led to avoidable deaths.

Impacts of Floods:

- Since the **decadal high of 1971-80**, the impact of floods in India have been declining in terms of loss of lives and cattle.
- But **absolute economic losses** kept on increasing, though not as a share of GDP.

Lack of Learning from Past Experiences?

- The response of **State governments** is far from satisfactory.
- They are hesitant to act against **encroachment of lake catchments, river courses and floodplains**.
- In **Chennai**, the State government continues to **reclassify lands** and to allow building of structures such as a police station on a lake bed.
- Such acts proves to be an **abdication of responsibility** and a **violation of National Disaster Management Authority Guidelines** to prevent **urban flooding**.

How do we prepare for Floods?

- The preparation strategy for the rainy season could be as follows:
- **Water Harvesting measures**, as advocated by the Centre's **Jal Shakti Abhiyan**.
- **Safety audit** of structures.
- Scientific consensus based on influences of a **changing climate** (such as extreme levels of rainfall) in the drafting of **state level management plans**.
- Investment in **reliable infrastructure**.

Need for Planning:

- Resilience towards flood conditions need to be increased through **proper planning**:
- Special focus to be laid on **cities and towns which are expanding**
- **Orderly urban development** is critical for sustainability, as the mega flood disasters in Mumbai and Chennai revealed.
- Due consideration should be given to **scientific hydrology**, coupled with the **traditional wisdom of saving water** through large innovative structures.

Conclusion:

As India is moving forward to become the most populous nation in less than ten years, we must address the issues caused by the crippling cycles of drought and flood, with immediate consideration.

Category:POLITY

1. Will the Medical Commission Bill Solve the Shortage of Doctors?

Context:

The **National Medical Commission Bill, 2019**, passed by Rajya Sabha, provides for the training of community healthcare providers in modern medicine as a solution for the shortage of doctors.

Is there an Acute Shortage of Doctors?

- There is **no credible data** to back the argument.
- But estimates show that there are only about eight lakh doctors who are practicing actively.
- Additional **five lakh doctors are required** to maintain a **fair doctor-patient ratio**.
- The **condition in southern states is better** when compared to northern States.
- Further, there is a **rural-urban gap**, as a large number of doctors prefer to settle down in urban areas.
- The situation is worse in **tribal and very backward areas**.
- India as a whole also has a huge shortage of **specialist doctors**.

What are the Root Causes?

- The **investment** in rural health is inadequate.
- The **incentive** structure is very weak.
- **The nature of work** that a doctor in a primary healthcare setting in a rural area demands a training in dealing with **public health issues**.
- Public health is a very weak area of instruction in an MBBS course.

Past Attempts at Solving the Shortage:

- Past attempts were based on opening **more medical colleges** or **increasing the number of seats**.
- A **'bond' model** in which after the completion of the course with government support, one has to serve for a certain number of years in rural areas.
- Successive governments have offered **additional incentives** for practicing in rural areas.
- **Post-graduation students** have been assigned with part time practicing.

Advantages of the Bill:

- A **five year long degree is not needed** to deal with some of the **basic public health issues** in rural areas.
- Those who have a **previous experience**, such as **nurse practitioners or AYUSH** (Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) doctors could handle the challenges of public health.

Disadvantages:

- A **six month course as well as its structure** may prove to be **inadequate** in producing qualified practitioners.
- The move may **downgrade the promotion of AYUSH systems** as there will be huge outflow of doctors to become modern medicine practitioners.
- There is wide spread **opposition** from the doctors' collectives, especially the Indian Medical Association (IMA).
- People may not be willing to get treated by non-MBBS doctors. So, the partially trained practitioners **may not get preference** and may fall by the wayside.

Alternate Models:

- **Chhattisgarh and Assam** had earlier attempted at forming cadres of **three year trained physicians**, similar to the erstwhile LMPs (Licentiate Medical Practitioners).
- **Auxiliary nurse midwives**, who are trained for 18 months, are already giving antibiotics and are also involved in immunisation programmes.

Conclusion:

Large sections of the rural and urban populations have been suffering from the absence of quality health care. Any action to solve the issue should be evidence based, well regulated, adequately planned and periodically redesigned.

F. Tidbits

1. Museum of Sikhism sets new record

- The Virasat-e-Khalsa museum is all set to find a place in the Asia Book of Records for becoming the most visited museum in the Indian sub-continent on a single day.
- The museum is located in Punjab's Anandpur Sahib town.
- It celebrates 500 years of the Sikh history and the 300th anniversary of the birth of Khalsa, based on the scriptures written by the tenth and last human guru, Guru Gobind Singh.
- The museum had witnessed a record footfall of 20,569 visitors on a single day on March 20, 2019.

2. Food supply is at dire risk: UN

- A UN report that prepared by more than 100 experts from 52 countries has been released in summary form in Geneva.
- The report states that the world's land and water resources are being exploited at unprecedented rates.
- Half a billion people live in places that are turning into desert, and soil is being lost between 10 and 100 times faster than it is forming, according to the report.
- Already, more than 10% of the world's population remains undernourished, and some authors of the report warned in interviews that food shortages could lead to an increase in crossborder migration.
- Some authors also suggested that food shortages are likely to affect poorer parts of the world far more than richer ones.
- That could increase a flow of immigration that is already redefining politics in North America, Europe and other parts of the world.
- It says that the exploitation of resources, combined with climate change, is putting dire pressure on the ability of humanity to feed itself.
- The report offers a measure of hope, laying out pathways to addressing the looming food crisis, although they would require a major re-evaluation of land use and agriculture worldwide as well as consumer behaviour.
- Proposals include increasing the productivity of land, wasting less food and persuading more people to shift their diets away from cattle and other types of meat.

G. Prelims Facts

1. National Disaster Response Force

- The National Disaster Response Force or the NDRF is a specialized force formed under the Disaster Management Act of 2005 with the objective of having a specialized response to an impending disaster situation or disaster.
- Its purpose is to direct and implement a specialized response to both man-made and natural disasters.
- It was constituted in 2006 and is headed by a Director-General, who is a senior IPS officer.
- The NDRF operates on the basis of 'proactive availability' and 'pre-positioning' to the states.
- Its parent ministry is the Ministry of Home Affairs.

H. UPSC Prelims Practise Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Godavari is India's second largest river
2. It originates near Triambakeshwar in Maharashtra

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

[su_dropcap]See[/su_dropcap][su_spoiler title="Answer"]

Ans: c

Explanation:

The Godavari is India's second longest river after the Ganga. It originates near Triambakeshwar in Nashik District of Maharashtra state. It flows east for 1,465 kilometres, draining the states of Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, ultimately emptying into the Bay of Bengal.[/su_spoiler]

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. The "Apex Body for Disaster Management" in India is the National Disaster Response Force
2. NDRF is a specialised force constituted under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

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

[su_dropcap]See[/su_dropcap][su_spoiler title="Answer"]

Ans: b

Explanation:

The "Apex Body for Disaster Management" in India is the National Disaster Management Authority. The National Disaster Response Force or the NDRF is a specialized force formed under the Disaster Management Act of 2005 with the objective of having a specialized response to an impending disaster situation or disaster.

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is a multilateral treaty to protect endangered animals only.
2. CITES is legally binding on the Parties.

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

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

See

Ans: a

Explanation:

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is a multilateral treaty to protect endangered animals and plants. CITES is one of the largest and oldest conservation and sustainable use agreements in existence. Participation is voluntary, and countries that have agreed to be bound by the Convention are known as Parties. Although CITES is legally binding on the Parties, it does not take the place of national laws.

Q4. Which of the following books were NOT authored by Jawaharlal Nehru?

1. Bills introduced by Ministers are referred to as government bills.
2. Government bills are backed by the government.

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

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

See

Ans: c

Explanation:

Bills introduced by Ministers are referred to as government bills. Government bills are backed by the government and reflect its legislative agenda.

I. UPSC Mains Practise Questions

1. Discuss the contributions of Indian handicrafts to Indian economy. What are the challenges they face? (15 Marks, 250 words)
2. India's medical faculty has expressed strong disapproval against licensed community health providers being permitted to independently prescribe specific medicines for primary and preventive healthcare. Do you think that National Medical Commission Act, 2019 would encourage quackery? Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words).

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