

07 Sep 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS1 Related

Category: ANCIENT HISTORY

1. Indus Valley settlers had a distinct genetic lineage

Context:

A study of DNA from skeletal remains excavated from the Harappan cemetery at Rakhigarhi argues that the hunter-gatherers of South Asia, who then became a settled people, have an independent origin.

Details:

- The researchers had successfully sequenced the first genome of an individual from Harappa and combining it with archaeological data, found that hunter-gatherers of South Asia had an independent origin, and authored the settled way of life in this part of the world.
- The finding also negates the hypothesis about mass migration during Harappan times from outside South Asia.
- The researchers who conducted the study contend that the theory of the Harappans having Steppe

pastoral or ancient Iranian farmer ancestry thus stands refuted.

- They do not contain genome from either the Steppe region or ancient Iranian farmers. The genetic continuity from hunter gatherer to modern times is visible in the DNA results.
- The study finds that the same hunter-gatherer communities developed into agricultural communities and formed the Harappan civilisation.
- The researchers also suggest that there was a movement of people from east to west as the Harappan people's presence is evident at sites like Gonur in Turkmenistan and Sahr-i-Sokhta in Iran.
- As the Harappans traded with Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Persian Gulf and almost all across South Asia, there was bound to be movement of people resulting in a mixed genetic history. India had a heterogeneous population right from the beginning of settled life.
- There was a hint that settled life and domestication went from South Asia to West Asia.

Origins of farming:

- In Europe, ancient-DNA studies have shown that agriculture tended to spread through an influx of people with ancestry in Anatolia, in modern day Turkey.
- The new study shows a similar dynamic in Iran and Turan (southern Central Asia), where the researchers found that Anatolian-related ancestry and farming arrived around the same time.
- In South Asia, however, the story appears different.
 - Researchers found an absence of Anatolian-related ancestry.
 - They saw that Iranian-related ancestry in South Asians comes from a lineage that separated from ancient Iranian farmers and hunter-gatherers before those groups split from each other, nearly 9,000 years ago.
- The researchers, therefore, concluded that farming in South Asia was not due to the movement of people from the farming cultures of the west and that local foragers adopted it.

B. GS2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. NCPCR to visit 117 aspirational districts

Context:

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), is visiting 117 Aspirational Districts to hold public meetings on complaints affecting children pertaining to education, health and nutrition as well as lack of infrastructure.

Details:

- The Aspirational District Programme focuses on five main themes to improve socio-economic status which include Health and Nutrition, Education, Agriculture and Water Resources, Financial Inclusion and Skill Development.
- Of these, three issues come directly under the mandate of NCPCR and account for 70% of the total weightage for ranking districts.
- So NCPCR has been holding benches where meetings are held with officials from nearly 30 departments as well as local residents.
- (NCPCR) has so far held 23 benches in 27 districts and has received nearly 5,000 complaints.
- The complaints made to the Commission pertain to:
 - Construction of access roads for schools
 - Providing benefits under the Ayushman Bharat programme for disabled children
 - Provision for toilets, etc.

- Complainants are supposed to give a written submission, which is then taken up by a bench comprising Members of the NCPCR.
- The local district officials present include District Commissioner or District Magistrate, Sub-Divisional Magistrate, and representatives from Juvenile Justice Board, Child Welfare Committee, Special Juvenile Police Units, Child Welfare Police Officers.
- The NCPCR will also set up two cells at its headquarters here to monitor compliance of laws governing child rights for the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh after the dilution of Section 370.
- Its plan for the two UTs is still in the nascent stage, but will involve monitoring of issues like adoption, shelter homes, Right to Education.

National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR):

- NCPCR is an Indian governmental commission, established by an Act of Parliament, the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act in December 2005.
- It is a statutory body.
- The commission works under the aegis of Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- The Commission considers that its Mandate is to ensure that all Laws, Policies, Programmes, and Administrative Mechanisms are in consonance with the Child Rights perspective as enshrined in the Constitution of India and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- As defined by the commission, child includes those up to the age of 18 years.

2. Respond to pleas against UAPA amendments, SC tells Centre

Context:

The Supreme Court has asked the Union government to respond to petitions challenging its decision to amend the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act giving it powers to categorise anyone as a terrorist.

Issue:

A Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Ranjan Gogoi issued notice to the Centre on petitions filed by Sajal Awasthi and NGO Association for Protection of Civil Rights, which said the amended law allowed the government to freely encroach upon the fundamental rights of dignity, free speech, dissent and reputation.

Details:

- The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act, 2019 seeks to substantially modify Chapter VI of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 and Section 35 and 36 therein.
- The new Section 35 of the UAPA Act, 1967 empowers the Central government to categorise any individual as ‘terrorist’ and add name of such a person in Schedule 4 of the Act.
- The petitions said the UAPA Amendment Act of 2019, passed by Parliament, conferred the Centre with “discretionary, unfettered and unbound powers” to categorise a person as a terrorist.
- The law could now be used by the government to bring a person into disrepute, and even worse, rob him or her liberty.
- The heavy burden to prove the entire government machinery wrong would lie on the person.
- The petition said the right to reputation was an intrinsic part of fundamental right to life with dignity under Article 21 of the Constitution and tagging an individual as “terrorist” even before the commencement of trial or any application of judicial mind over it, did not amount to following the ‘procedure established by law’.
- The right of dissent is a part and parcel of fundamental right to free speech and expression and therefore, cannot be abridged in any circumstances except for mentioned in Article 19 (2).

- It said that the UAPA, 2019 empowers the ruling government, under the garb of curbing terrorism, to impose indirect restriction on right of dissent which is detrimental for our developing democratic society.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. India, South Korea seal logistics pact

Context:

India and South Korea concluded a military logistics agreement during the ongoing visit of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to Seoul.

Details:

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his South Korean counterpart Jeong Kyeongdoo comprehensively reviewed bilateral defence cooperation and signed two agreements.
 - To expand defence educational exchanges
 - To extend logistical support to each other's navies.
- They discussed the ongoing cooperation at Service-to-Service level and prospects for enhanced cooperation between defence industries of India and Korea.
- The two countries also formulated a forward-looking road map to take bilateral defence industry cooperation to the next level.
- On the road map, a number of proposed areas of cooperation in land, aero and naval systems, research and development cooperation and collaboration in testing, certification and quality assurance have been listed.
- Singh also invited the South Korean industry to explore the feasibility of local production of items, used in main weapon systems imported by Defence public sector undertakings (PSUs).

Conclusion:

This foreign cooperation initiative would greatly help interoperability. India will be able to get assured logistic support when it operates in the Indo-Pacific in the ports of South Korea. Such agreements extend the reach, presence and sustainability of Navy ships when deployed at great distances from home ports.

C. GS3 Related

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. ISRO loses contact with Lander Vikram

Context:

The Vikram Lander of Chandrayaan-2, India's second lunar mission, failed to make a smooth soft-landing.

Details:

- At around 1:38 am (IST) on 7th September 2019, the Vikram Lander began its final descent to the surface of the moon.
- Around six minutes after it began its descent, the Vikram Lander successfully completed the rough-breaking phase.
- The Vikram lander lost contact with the ISRO Centre about 13 minutes after it began its descent. It

was a little over two kilometres away from the moon's surface. The Lander failed to bring down its speed from around 6,048 km per hour to 7 km per hour to make a soft-landing.

- The thrusters onboard Vikram used two chemicals — mono methyl hydrazine and nitrogen tetroxide — as fuel. These are mixed and burnt in the thruster chamber and expelled in gaseous form.
- The Vikram lander and Pragyan rover were supposed to land on the moon and carry out observations and experiments for 14 days.
- The Orbiter component of Chandrayaan-2, however, was doing fine and continued to communicate with the control room.
- Both the lander as well as the rover have been designed to be operational for 14 days, the duration of a lunar day.
- The main spacecraft, or the Orbiter, would continue to go around the moon for at least a year, its eight onboard instruments collecting different kinds of data from a distance of 100 km.

Chandrayaan-2:

- Chandrayaan 2 is a follow-on mission to the Chandrayaan 1 Mission. Chandrayaan-2 was India's first attempt at landing a spacecraft on the moon.
- Only three countries — the United States, the erstwhile USSR and China — have managed to place a spacecraft on Moon so far.
- The Chandrayaan-2 mission comprises of three modules – the Orbiter, Vikram lander and Pragyaan rover. The lander which is named after Dr. Vikram A Sarabhai, who is considered as the father of the Indian Space Programme, carries the Pragyaan rover.
- Unlike Chandrayaan-1, Chandrayaan-2 attempted to soft land its Vikram module on the lunar surface and deploy a six-wheeled Rover, Pragyaan on the Moon to carry out several scientific experiments. The lift-off mass of Chandrayaan-1 was 1380 kg while Chandrayaan-2 weighs 3850 kg.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Prepare plan for protection of the Great Indian Bustard: NGT

Context:

The National Green Tribunal has directed the Centre to prepare a time-bound action plan within two months for protection of Great Indian Bustard.

Details:

- The direction comes in the wake of high mortality rate of the Great Indian Bustard.
- A Bench headed by NGT chairperson also constituted a joint committee comprising officials of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Ministry of Power and Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.
- The committee was asked to prepare an action plan for the implementation of suggestions put forth by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).
- The WII in its report also said steps should be taken to reduce poaching of the species and other wildlife in the Thar landscape.

Concerns:

- 75 per cent of the birds have died due to collision with power lines in the past 30 years.
- Power lines, especially high-voltage transmission lines with multiple overhead wires, are the major threat to the critically endangered species as they have poor frontal vision.
- Activities such as mining, stone quarrying, growth of industries, heavy pesticide use, grassland

conversion and power projects along with the expansion of roads, electricity pylons, wind turbines, solar energy projects and other infrastructures have increased the severity of habitat degradation and disturbance.

- The Union Environment Ministry has acknowledged that adult mortality among Great Indian Bustard is still very high due to collisions with power-lines that crisscross their flying paths.
- WII has suggested a slew of measures, including mitigation of all power transmission lines passing through priority bustard habitats, disallowing new wind turbines, solar farms among others.

Great Indian Bustard:

- The great Indian bustard (*Ardeotis nigriceps*) or Indian bustard is a bustard found on the Indian subcontinent.
- It is a large bird with a horizontal body and long bare legs, giving it an ostrich like appearance.
- It is among the heaviest of the flying birds.
- These birds are often found associated in the same habitat as blackbuck.
- IUCN Red data list classifies Great Indian Bustard as Critically endangered.
- It is protected under Schedule 1 of Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act 2002.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Opposition questions aid to Russia

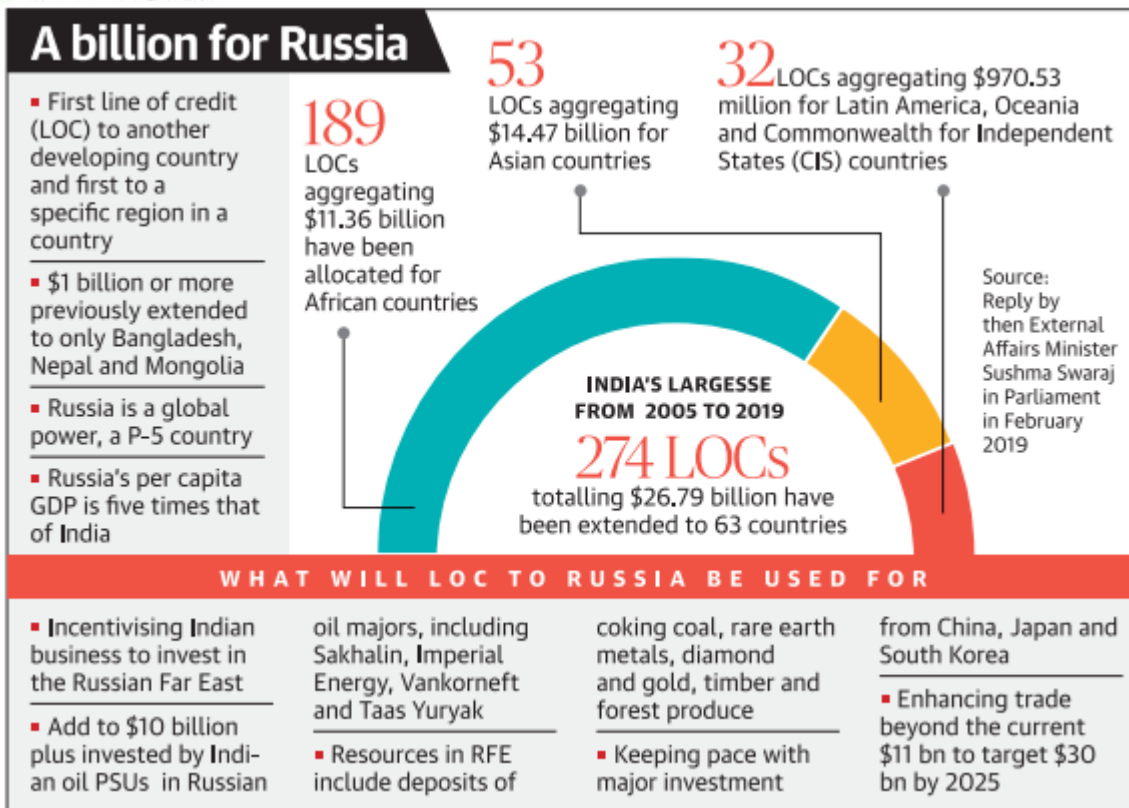
Context:

Unveiling the 'Act Far East' policy to boost India's engagement with the Russian region, at the plenary session of the Fifth Eastern Economic Forum (EEF), PM Narendra Modi announced a \$1 billion line of credit for the development of the resource-rich region (Russian Far East).

Issue:

- The Opposition on Friday questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement of a \$1-billion line of credit (LOC) to Russia for the development of the Russian Far East.
- This is the first time India has extended an LOC to another developing country (so far, such assistance has gone only to least developed countries).
- The Opposition cited the current economic scenario, and asked why India would help finance projects in a country that has ample resources.
- Critics pointed out that while Russia's GDP figures are far behind India's in recent years (\$1.6 trillion vs \$2.6 trillion at current prices, 2017), the GDP per capita for the average Russian is five times that for the average Indian.

Details:



- The External Affairs Ministry said the decision was based on a number of reasons, including the fact that there were large Chinese, Japanese and Korean investments in the region.
- It is believed that Indian line of credit will attract more Indian businesses to the Russian Far East.
- It was also said that trade resulting from the line of credit would contribute to the target set by both countries of achieving \$30 billion of annual bilateral trade by 2025, which at present is less than \$11 billion.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Eastern Economic Forum (EEF)

Context

- Speaking at the Plenary Session of the 5th Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) in Vladivostok, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that India would extend a \$1 billion line of credit towards the development of the Russian Far East.
- This was the first instance of an Indian prime minister attending the East Economic Forum.

Details

- EEF was established by a decree of the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, in 2015, **with the aim of supporting the economic development of Russia's Far East**, and to expand international cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.
 - It is a region extending between Lake Baikal - world's largest freshwater lake and deepest lake, and the Pacific Ocean.
 - This is a region situated in the cold Siberian climate but more significantly, it shares borders with China, Mongolia, North Korea and Japan (maritime).
 - On its own, it could be the eight largest - just behind India - in terms of area, and fourth least densely populated country.
- The Summits have roundtable conferences, panel sessions, business breakfasts, besides business dialogues and bilateral talks and agreements.

What has the EEF achieved till now?

- There are as many as 17 different countries which have invested in the Far East, according to the EEF website.
- These include regional and global heavyweights like China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and Vietnam.
- As a result, **20 advanced special economic zones and five free ports have been put in place**. A total of 1,780 new investment projects, worth over 3.8 trillion rubles, and 230 new enterprises have become functional, the EEF website says.

Vladivostok

- In Russian, Vladivostok is 'Ruler of the East'. **Located on the Golden Horn Bay north of North Korea** and a short distance from Russia's border with China, it is the largest port on Russia's Pacific coast, and home to the Pacific Fleet of the Russian Navy.
- It is the eastern railhead of the legendary Trans-Siberian Railway, which connects the Far East of Russia to the capital Moscow, and further west to the countries of Europe.
- At Vladivostok's massive port, shipping and commercial fishing are the main commercial activities. Automobiles are a major item of import at the port, from where they are often transported further inland.

Geostrategic Significance

- Realizing its geostrategic significance, India opened a consulate in Vladivostok in 1992. India was the first country to have a resident consulate in Vladivostok then.
- This **Vladivostok-Chennai sea link** is somewhat a counter to China's Maritime Silk Route (MSR) plan as part of One Belt One Road project.
 - Vladivostok-Chennai shipping link is likely to **pass through or very close to the South China Sea**, which China has turned into an international geostrategic hotspot by claiming exclusive control over the resource rich maritime zone in the Pacific Ocean.
 - Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have counter claims over the sea.
 - There is an alternate possibility as well that Vladivostok-Chennai link **would become an extension of existing India-Japan Pacific to Indian Ocean Corridor**, which China considers as a challenge to its maritime OBOR plan in the region
- A busy Vladivostok-Chennai link means India strengthening its checks and balances equation with China.

The investment in the Far East, which is often neglected given that Russia is seen as a European power in the post-Soviet era, also underlines India's desire to draw Russia into its strategic forays in the Indo-Pacific.

Economic Importance

- An area of special interest for India is the **exploration of hydrocarbon reserves along the coast of Russia's Far East.**
- Russian Far East is a resource rich region in a hostile climate. It is rich in oil, natural gas, timber, gold and diamond among other resources. India requires all of them

Conclusion

- Current engagement of India with this region is limited to select pockets such as Irkutsk where the MiG and Sukhoi fighter planes are built and in Sakhalin where ONGC Videsh has invested over \$ 6 billion in oil and gas and exploration.
- The maiden visit by an Indian prime minister to Vladivostok is set to strengthen India's position in Asia-Pacific that has emerged as the kernel of future geo-strategy.
- This push to 'Act Far East' allows India to demonstrate its commitment to an area of concern for Moscow, thus reassuring its traditional partner that in an increasingly polarised world, India is confident of working with multiple alignments, even if they are at cross purposes with each other.

Category: ECONOMY

1. USA- China Trade War

Context

- The trade war between the U.S. and China has seen a significant escalation.
- Recently, the U.S. administration notified its decision to impose 15% tariffs, in two phases, on imports valued at \$300 billion.
- The latest round of tariff increases implies that the country has imposed **tariffs on almost all of its product imports from China**, totalling nearly \$540 billion in 2018.
- Pharmaceutical imports are the **only major exception.**

China announces additional tariffs

- Immediately after the U.S. administration issued the notification, China increased tariffs on more than 5,000 products imported from the U.S. valued at \$75 billion.
- The sensitive sectors of agriculture and forestry were targeted.
- Tariffs were also hiked for the first time on crude oil.
- China has raised the ante further by initiating a dispute in the World Trade Organization (WTO) against the U.S.'s unilateral tariff increases.

USA targets China for violations of IPR

- Earlier, the U.S. administration had targeted China primarily for **what it perceived to be violations by the latter of intellectual property rights (IPRs)** of American companies.
- The administration's argument was that **Beijing was forcing these companies to transfer their proprietary technologies.**
- In fact, on this issue, the U.S. became the **judge and the jury by indicting China for indulging in "forced technology transfer"** and then bringing penal provisions against its imports using the provisions of the **Trade Act of 1974.**
- The **provisions of this Act (like Section 301)** allow the U.S. to **"investigate" any country which, in its opinion, has violated IPRs of American companies.**
- If found "guilty", the violating countries can be sanctioned with trade retaliation. The tariff increases

against Chinese products were tantamount to trade retaliation. It needs to be further mentioned here that **Section 301 actions are a violation of WTO rules as disputes must be resolved by the organisation's dispute settlement mechanism.**

'Currency manipulator' label

- However, while triggering the most recent escalation, the U.S. administration not only violated the spirit of multilateralism, it also shifted the goalposts.
- The action was triggered when the U.S. Secretary of Treasury invoked the provisions of **Section 3004 of the Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act.**
- This Section authorises the Treasury Secretary to examine whether the U.S.'s trade partners are manipulating the "rate of exchange for purposes of preventing effective balance of payments adjustments or gaining unfair competitive advantage in international trade".
- It was based on a report presented to the U.S. Congress in 2018 that concluded that China's "**exchange rate practices continue to lack transparency, including its intervention in foreign exchange markets**", although it found that "direct intervention in foreign exchange markets by the People's Bank of China" over the past several months was limited.

The latest action by the Trump administration raises at least two sets of issues.

The **first concerns its pursuit of unilateralism.** The country has challenged the framework of multilaterally agreed rules in two ways —

- By **not allowing WTO members to conduct negotiations** so that the rules respond to the needs of the members, especially the lesser developed countries;
- By making the **dispute settlement mechanism non-functional.**
 - A critical component of the dispute settlement mechanism is the Appellate Body, which **needs seven members to function effectively.**
 - But the U.S. administration has **refused to allow retiring members of the Appellate Body to be replaced by new members,** and this has brought the dispute settlement mechanism to the brink.

Second, nearly a year and a half after the trade war was officially announced in Washington, one question that begs an answer is:

- **Have the American people gained anything from the exertions of the administration?**
- Are there any signs that President Trump's vision of 'Making America Great Again' is gaining further traction?

This could spell disaster for US economy

- There is hardly any doubt that the latest round of **tariff increases would hurt the U.S. economy even more since China has targeted agriculture and crude oil,** two of the most sensitive sectors.
- An impact on these sectors could adversely affect President Trump politically because **people and companies associated with these areas are among the President's major funders.**
- Further, since the current round of tariffs **target products like garments, toothbrushes, footwear, toys and video games,** the U.S.'s consumer goods markets would be impacted quite considerably.
- Clearly, the administration is worried about the price increases following the imposition of tariffs on some of these goods, a reason it has postponed the tariff increases until after the Christmas purchases.

Conclusion

- The timing of the latest escalation could not have been worse; it could bring the global economy closer to an economic slowdown, much earlier than its predicted onset in 2020.

F. Tidbits

1. Craniopagus twins head home

- India's only successfully separated craniopagus twins from Odisha have been discharged from the All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS).
- The toddlers were born with fused brain and skull, a condition known as craniopagus.
- They were admitted two years ago, operated and started on rehabilitation at the hospital.
- All modern adjuncts of technology for surgical planning, 3D print model technology for brain and skull model development, venous bypass, staged surgeries and continuous post-operative care was provided by the craniopagus team of over 75 doctors and 50 nursing/support team staff at AIIMS.
- It is the first successful craniopagus conjoined twin separation surgery from India wherein both the children had survived.
- Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said that it was a major achievement for the country.
- Harsh Vardhan said this case had also amply depicted that India was competent to perform such surgeries, and also that poor people from tribal regions from where the twin brothers hailed from, could also get the best medical care.
- Worldwide only 10-15 children have survived after surgical separation of this condition in the last 50 years.

G. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Great Indian bustard is classified as critically endangered as per IUCN Red data list.
2. These birds are often found associated in the same habitat as blackbuck.

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 great Indian bustard (*Ardeotis nigricaps*) or Indian bustard is a bustard found on the Indian subcontinent. It is a large bird with a horizontal body and long bare legs, giving it an ostrich like appearance. These birds are often found associated in the same habitat as blackbuck.

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. National Commission for Protection of Child Rights is a constitutional body.
2. Its Mandate is to ensure that all Laws, Policies, Programmes, and Administrative Mechanisms are in consonance with the Child Rights perspective as enshrined in the Constitution of India and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
3. As per the commissions' definition "Children" includes individuals of age of upto 18 years.

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

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

National Commission for Protection of Child Rights is a statutory body.

Q3. "Craniopagus" is:

- a. A medical condition where twins are born with fused brain and skull
- b. A medical condition where a part of the brain becomes inflamed and causes symptoms that present as fever
- c. A new species of spider found in the forests of Kerala
- d. None of the above

Answer: a

Explanation:

Craniopagus is a medical condition where twins are born with fused brain and skull. Craniopagus twins are conjoined twins that are fused at the cranium.

Q4. Which of the following is the biggest Harappan site?

- a. Mohenjo-daro
- b. Rakhigarhi
- c. Lothal
- d. Kalibangan

Answer: b

Explanation:

Rakhigarhi in Hisar district, Haryana, is the biggest Harappan civilisation site. Until now, specialists in the Harappan civilisation had argued that Mohenjo-daro in Pakistan was the largest among the 2,000 Harappan sites known to exist in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The archaeological remains at Mohenjo-daro extend around 300 hectares.

I. UPSC Mains Practise Questions

1. The trade war between the U.S. and China has seen a significant escalation; it could bring the global economy closer to an economic slowdown, much earlier than its predicted onset in 2020. Discuss (15 Marks, 250 Words)
2. The recent amendments to Unlawful Activities Prevention Act,1967 (UAPA) impose indirect restriction on right to dissent which is detrimental for India's developing democratic society. Critically examine. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

