

# 16 Sep 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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## B. GS2 Related

### Category: HEALTH

#### 1. Gooseberry candy rescues Assam nutrition drive

##### Context:

A drive for good nutrition among pregnant women and children in a southern Assam district has been given a gooseberry candy twist. This follows a report that the targeted groups find the prescribed iron-folic acid tablets repulsive.

### Background:

- According to the 2015 National Family Health Survey, 47.2% of the women of reproductive age in Hailakandi were anaemic.
- The district, thus, has the most anaemic children below 5 years, adolescents and women of reproductive age in Assam.

### Concerns:

- Data reveals that the mothers, pregnant women and children in the district, consume only 24.3% of the total iron-folic acid tablets that the district receives and distributes.
- The tablets given to these groups are often not consumed as they feel nauseated or have constipation issues.
- There are also myths that these tablets will kill them or make them incapable of conceiving.
- About 32.5% of the children aged below five in Hailakandi are underweight. The average figure for Assam is 30%.

### Details:

- To get around the problem while launching *Poshan Maah*, or nutrition month, a few days ago, the district administration decided to produce roundish amla-gur candies with a dose of salt.
- Nutritionists involved in the campaign said amla, or gooseberry, is rich in Vitamin C and antioxidants, while jaggery, is rich in iron, vital vitamins and minerals that boost the immune system.
- The gooseberry candy is provided alongside iron-folic acid tablets as behavioural change in nutritious eating is a slow process.
- If women and children avoid the tablet, they can get the required vitamin and mineral inputs through the improvised delicacy of which ingredients are available locally.
- The candy is cost-effective too.
- Anganwadi workers, supervisors and mothers have been engaged to prepare and distribute the 'laddoos' with the ingredients given by the district authorities.

### Conclusion:

This novel initiative could go a long way in checking anaemia that increases the risk during pregnancy and at childbirth, besides resulting in low birth weight and malnourished children.

## Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

### 1. Voices grow louder against Shah's pitch to push Hindi

#### Context:

Union Home Minister Amit Shah's assertion that Hindi, as the most spoken language, could work to unite the country has continued to draw sharp reactions from the opposition parties and non-Hindi speakers.

#### Details:

The issue has been comprehensively covered in BYJU'S Comprehensive News Analysis on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2019.

Go to the below URL to read more:

## 2. Boat tragedy exposes serious safety lapses

### Context:

In a major tragedy in Andhra Pradesh, a private boat carrying tourists to Papikondalu capsized in the Godavari near East Godavari district on September 15, 2019, leaving at least eight dead and over 37 missing.

### Issue:

- The accident occurred post-noon when the boat 'Vashista' headed to the tourist destination against an inflow of about 5 lakh cusecs of floodwater in the Godavari, which has been in spate for the past several days.
- The boat had no permission from the government to operate.

### Concerns:

- Twenty-one persons drowned in the Krishna on November 12, 2017, when a boat carrying tourists to Pavitra Sangamam, near Ibrahimpatnam, on the outskirts of Vijayawada, capsized.
- Nineteen persons drowned when a boat overturned in the Godavari near Manturu village in East Godavari district in May, 2018.
- Despite frequent boat accidents in the Godavari and Krishna rivers claiming several lives, no precautionary measures are being taken to prevent them.
- According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), on an average, 30 people die in boat mishaps every year in the state.
- According to officials, many private boat operators don't follow the rules prescribed by the Indian Registration of Shipping and the Inland Vessels Act, 1917.

### Details:

- Sources say that more than 40 boats operate in the Krishna and about 75 in the Godavari.
- However, only a few possess fitness certificates as per the Public Canals and Ferry Act, 1890.
- The AP Tourism Department Corporation (APTDC) operates 52 boats. However, unconfirmed reports say that over 200 boats operate in rivers and canals to tourist places without licence and ignoring safety norms.
- After the boat tragedy in the Krishna in 2017, the then TDP government constituted a committee to study the licensing system for boats in other States.
- Based on the three-member committee report, a meeting in 2018, had fixed specific responsibilities for ports, irrigation, DG fire services and panchayat raj departments.
- The director of ports was made the competent authority and nodal agency for boat survey, registration and management under AP Inland Vessel Rules, 2017, and enforcement for maintaining safety standards in all the waterways.
- As per the mandate, the route permissions for the various vessels operating in the rivers would be given by the irrigation department.
- However, in the Godavari mishap despite flood levels, irrigation department didn't act on boats operating in the river.
- Also, the boat owners claim that despite several instructions from them people on boat refused to wear life jackets.

### Way forward:

- Permission should be given only after verifying the hull shape, motor capacity, tonnage, length and breadth, bottom and other specifications.
- AP State Disaster Response and Fire Services personnel said owners should follow all fire safety norms and ensure that the boats contain fire extinguishers, caution boards, sand buckets and other fire-fighting equipment.
- Private boat owners flouting the norms must be heavily penalised.
- To prevent tragedies, officials should conduct raids regularly at tourist spots.

## Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### 1. Saudis to tap oil reserves after attacks on plants

#### Context:

Saudi Arabia will use its vast oil reserves to offset disruption to production, Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman has said.

#### Details:

- Drone attacks on two major oil facilities on Saturday knocked 5.7 million barrels per day (bpd) off production — close to 6% of the global crude supplies.
- Between 1988 and 2009, Riyadh had built five giant underground storage facilities across the country to be used during crises.
- The disruption represents half the output of the kingdom, which is the world's biggest oil supplier.
- Abqaiq is the world's largest oil processing plant and can handle up to seven million bpd, some 70% of total Saudi output.
- It is located near Ghawar oilfield, the biggest in the world with reserves of over 60 billion barrels and a daily output capacity of six million bpd.
- The plant also receives crude oil and gas from Shayba oilfield in the Empty Quarter.
- Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi rebels have claimed responsibility for the attack.

The issue has been comprehensively covered in BYJU'S Comprehensive News Analysis on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2019.

Go to the below URL to read more:

<https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/upsc-exam-comprehensive-news-analysis-sep15-2019/>

### 2. Delhi-Dhaka ties best ever now: Bangladesh Minister

#### Context:

Bangladesh and India are currently enjoying “best ever” relations, Foreign Minister of Bangladesh Dr A.K. Abdul Momen said during an interaction with the media in Dhaka.

#### India-Bangladesh:

- The relations between Bangladesh and India, the South Asian neighbours have been friendly, although sometimes there are border disputes.
- The historic land boundary agreement was signed on 6 June 2015 which opened a new era in the relations and further stopped all irritants in ties.
- They are common members of SAARC, BIMSTEC, IORA and the Commonwealth.

- The two countries share many cultural ties. In particular, Bangladesh and the East Indian state of West Bengal are Bengali-speaking.

**Details:**

- The observations form the backdrop to the October 3-6, 2019 visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that will include a summit-level meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- Sheikh Hasina is also expected to participate in the India Economic Forum.
- Bangladesh has recently been in the spotlight after the final list of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam was published on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2019.
- The exercise excluded more than 1.9 million individuals.
- However, India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had assured Bangladesh that the future of the NRC-excluded Bengali-speaking people in Assam is an internal issue of India.
- Subsequently, however, Home Minister Amit Shah had said the people excluded from the NRC will not find space in India.
- Bangladesh has steadfastly refused to be drawn into the debate.

**3. India, Australia to elevate strategic ties**

**Context:**

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is expected to visit Australia in November, 2019 when both countries are likely to conclude the long-pending mutual logistics support agreement and a broader maritime cooperation agreement to elevate the strategic partnerships.
- These will lead to greater interoperability and help in elevating the strategic partnership.
- There have been a series of high-profile visits aimed at elevating the partnership between India and Australia.

**Mutual logistics support agreement:**

- Logistics agreements are administrative arrangements facilitating access to military facilities for exchange of fuel and provisions on mutual agreement simplifying logistical support and increasing operational turnaround.
- Australia has been keen on a mutual logistics support agreement and submitted a draft after India signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement with the U.S. in 2016.
- But New Delhi said it would consider more such agreements only after the first was operationalised.
- India's latest such agreement was with South Korea.
- Officials of both countries said that with more engagement, the mutual logistics support agreement would facilitate cooperation by simplifying paperwork and procedures, which are pretty huge.

**Details:**

- The defence cooperation between India and Australia is underpinned on the Memorandum on Defence Cooperation 2006, the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation 2009 and the bilateral Framework for Security Cooperation 2014.
- The two countries have steadily expanded cooperation in maritime domain awareness.
- The information exchange agreement, with a border mandate, is important for better maritime domain awareness.
- The bilateral naval exercise, AUSINDEX, held earlier this year saw the participation of the largest Australian naval contingent ever sent to India, with over 1,000 men.
- The Indian Navy and the Royal Australian Navy are partners in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), a maritime cooperation construct conceptualised by the Indian Navy in 2008.
- Both Navies are also co-chairs for the IONS working group on information-sharing and

## C. GS3 Related

### Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

#### 1. Windfall for Odisha tribals if single-use plastic is banned

##### Context:

India's policy on single-use plastic has been much in the news, with reports that a ban is in the offing.

##### What is single-use plastic?

- Single-use plastics, often also referred to as disposable plastics, are commonly used for packaging and include items intended to be used only once before they are thrown away or recycled. These include, among other items, grocery bags, food packaging, bottles, straws, containers, cups and cutlery.
- Plastic packaging is mostly single-use, especially in business-to-consumer applications, and a majority of it is discarded the same year it is produced.
- Such plastics are problematic because they are not biodegradable.

##### Is there an imminent ban on single-use plastic?

The issue has been comprehensively covered in BYJU'S Comprehensive News Analysis on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2019, under GS 3 "Environment and Ecology".

Go to the below URL to read more:

<https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/upsc-exam-comprehensive-news-analysis-sep10-2019/>

##### What are the concerns?

- India currently follows the Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2018.
- One of its key obligations is to have industries that make products that ultimately employ plastic (and generate plastic waste) collect a fixed percentage every year.
- The State Pollution Control Boards as well municipalities have the responsibility to ensure that plastic waste is collected and sent to recycling units.
- Compared to other countries such as the U.S. and China, India has a very low per capita generation of plastic waste.
- However, in real terms, this is quite substantial and nearly 10,000 tonnes of plastic waste is left uncollected every day.
- Studies by organisations like The Energy Resources Institute (TERI) on landfills have found that 10.96% of waste was only plastic and of these, non-recyclable plastics accounted for 9.6%. The disparity is because certain kinds of plastic, such as PET bottles are remunerative for rag pickers as they are in demand at recycling facilities.

##### How is the ban on single-use plastics going to benefit Odisha?

- As the focus is likely to shift to alternative products from single-use plastic millions of people, especially tribals residing in Odisha's forest-rich regions, expect an upturn in their income.
- Close to five million people in Odisha are currently involved in plate-making using both hand and

machine stitching methods.

- They depend on two major leaves of forest species – sal and siali – for their earnings.
- Odisha's leaf plate and cup market is worth ₹1,500 crore.
- While 2.5 million people mostly tribals are sal leaf pluckers, 1.5 million are siali leaf pluckers.
- Around one million are connected with other leaves.
- As soon as plastic products are banned, the focus will shift to degradable materials and leaf plates and cups are one of the obvious choices.
- In 22 of the 30 districts of Odisha, inhabitants of forest-fringe villages are traditionally involved in leaf-plate making.
- In some districts, tribal women have already formed federations to get a better deal in the trade.

## 2. Vulture culture: How the bird was saved from extinction

### Issue:

- In the late 1990s, the population of the vultures in the country had begun to decline sharply.
- The number declined from 40 million in the 80s to a few thousand by 2009.

### Background:

- To study the cause of deaths of vultures, a Vulture Care Centre (VCC) was set up at Pinjore, Haryana.
- It was here that the rescued vulture from Keoladeo National Park in Rajasthan, Haryana, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh were brought in.
- By the time vulture conservation breeding centers were started in 2004, the vulture population had already crashed significantly, almost by 99 %.
- As vultures are slow-breeding birds, intervention was of immediate requirement otherwise the vultures would have become extinct.
- With a decline in the vulture population, a rise in the plague causing rodents and feral dogs was also seen.

### Vulture Care Centre (VCC):

- Starting with just a few vultures, the VCC, until then the sole facility for the conservation of vultures in the country, has come a long way in the past two decades.
- At present, there are nine Vulture Conservation and Breeding Centres (VCBC) in India, of which three are directly administered by Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS).
- The total number of vultures in these VCBCs is more than 700.
- The objective of the VCBCs was not only to look after the vultures and breed them in captivity, but also to release them into the wild.
- The first objective of the VCBC was to produce a few hundred pairs of each of the three species of the endangered vultures.

### Details:

- The major reason behind the vulture population getting nearly wiped out was the drug Diclofenac.
- Diclofenac was found in the carcass of cattle the vultures fed on.
- The drug, whose veterinary use was banned in 2008, was commonly administered to cattle to treat inflammation.
- Apart from the establishment of VCBCs and getting Diclofenac banned, the scientists' imperative was to manage the carcass dumps and make sure that poisoned carcasses were not dumped for the vultures to feed on.
- There was also an emphasis on creating awareness and on creating safe zones for vultures in places

where there is an existing vulture population.

- So far nine states have been undertaken programmes to create safe habitats for vultures.
- Estimation of the vulture population in the wild is said to have stabilised.
- Surveys in 2015 revealed that there are about 6,000 White-backed vultures, 12,000 Long-billed vultures and 1,000 Slender-billed vultures in the wild.

#### **Vultures:**

- Vultures are scavenging raptors.
- Vultures are rightfully called the sanitizers of the ecosystem as they feed on the flesh of dead animals and prevent the bacteria and diseases in animals by clearing the carcass to the bones that helps to decompose the dead three times faster than otherwise.
- In India, upon death, cows are dumped in a common place which is inhabited by the vultures.
- Vultures are long-lived and slow breeding birds that attain sexual maturity by five years of age.
- The slow breeding process makes it even more difficult to conserve or reintroduce them.
- Killing them is strictly prohibited, even for research purposes.
- A particular characteristic of many vultures is a bald head, devoid of normal feathers.
- Although it has been historically believed to help keep the head clean when feeding, the bare skin may play an important role in thermoregulation.
- Vultures have been observed to hunch their bodies and tuck in their heads in the cold, and open their wings and stretch their necks in the heat.
- Vultures also use urine as a way to keep themselves cool by urinating on themselves.

## **D. GS4 Related**

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## **E. Editorials**

### **Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

#### **1. Mission successful, end product defunct**

##### **Context:**

Completed in record time and launched with fanfare, the Train 18 project now finds itself off track

##### **Train 18 project:**

- Vande Bharat Express, also known as Train 18, is an Indian semi-high speed intercity electric multiple unit.
- It was designed and built under the Indian government's Make in India initiative over a span of 18 months.
- The first Indian Trainset for long-distance run was indigenously manufactured at Chennai's Integral Coach Factory (ICF).
- It was launched in February 2019.

##### **Details:**

- Train 18 had propelled India into the exclusive club of about a half a dozen countries in the world that have the capability to turn out a brand new design of a high-speed/semi-high-speed train set in



such a short time.

- The Prime Minister had flagged off the inaugural run of the Train 18 as ‘Vande Bharat Express’ in Varanasi.
- The train did provide a trouble-free performance for six months.
- Unfortunately, perhaps it was the outstanding success of the Train 18 project that proved to be its undoing.

### What went wrong?

- Following top-level changes in the Railway Board at the turn of the New Year, a vigilance investigation was launched into certain alleged procedural irregularities and allegations of undue favours shown to a particular indigenous firm in awarding contracts for the crucial propulsion system.
- It was also reported that deviations had been observed from the specifications prescribed by the Research Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO).
- Meanwhile, the man who had spearheaded the Train 18 project — from its conception and design to its launch — as General Manager of Integral Coach Factory (ICF) was not even extended an invitation for the train’s ceremonial inaugural run in February 2019.
- A few months after the train’s inauguration, it was announced at the highest policymaking level of the Indian Railways that the Railways would be willing to start the import of complete train sets from foreign suppliers if they agreed to establish the coach manufacturing facility in India.
- With the train set’s production having come to a halt in ICF, Chennai, despite tenders having been floated, Project 18 is as good as dead now.

### Conclusion:

- The scourge of interdepartmental rivalries and internecine turf wars within the Indian Railways has caused enormous damage to the organisational morale and synergistic functioning of the nation’s prime public transporter. Unfortunately, Train 18 appears to have become the latest victim of this age-old malady of the Indian Railways.
- A committee of experts under economist and NITI Aayog member Bibek Debroy, tasked among other things to suggest ways of breaking down departmental silos within the Indian Railways to improve efficiency and speed of decision-making, gave its recommendations in early 2015.
- The ‘Mission Train 18’ episode is proof, that nothing has changed since then and that the departmental silos are alive and well.
- It is futile to expect the techno-bureaucracy of the Indian Railways to reform itself.
- The political leadership must put in efforts to push for reforms in this area.
- Otherwise, the Indian Railways will continue to achieve more successes like Train 18 that would eventually be pushed to the state of being forgotten, unlike ISRO where, it seems, public opinion reckons even a failure as a victory.

## 2. Effort worth emulation

### Context:

The Rajasthan government has launched the “Jan Soochna Portal” (public information portal), that details various schemes run by 13 government departments — the employment guarantee programme, sanitation, the public distribution system among others, by not only explaining the schemes but also providing real-time information on beneficiaries, authorities in charge, progress, etc.

### Details:

The issue has been comprehensively covered in Byju’s Comprehensive News Analysis on 14<sup>th</sup> September

2019, under “Editorials” segment. Go to the below URL to read more:

<https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/upsc-exam-comprehensive-news-analysis-sep14-2019/>

## Category: ECONOMY

### 1. Why India’s growth figures are off the mark

#### Context:

The economic growth rate (quarterly), in India has been sliding for the last five quarters from 8% to 7% to 6.6% to 5.8% and now to 5%.

#### Details:

- Despite the drop in GDP figures, experts have been talking of a 7% annual rate of growth.
- Every quarter when the rate of growth has been announced, they have argued that things have bottomed out and that the rate would rise henceforth.
- The Economic Survey in July talked of a growth rate of 7% for the current year. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), in its August policy statement, talked of a slowdown to 6.9%, from the 7% predicted in June and 7.2% predicted before that.
- The Asian Development Bank cut its growth forecast from 7.2% to 7% in April 2019. Similar is the case with the IMF which cut its forecast for the year from 7.3% to 7%.
- So, they all talked of a 7% rate of growth when a year earlier it had fallen below that.

#### Why are these agencies so far off with their estimates?

- The reason is that they are not independent data gathering agencies and depend on official data.
- So, if official data is erroneous, their projections would also turn out to be incorrect.
- The government is interested in projecting a good image and so discounts bad news and ramps up data.

#### Current Economic Scenario:

- The rate of growth is much less than 5%, which is why investment rate and consumption are stagnating or declining.
- The investment rate has hovered at around 30% for the last several years because the capacity utilisation in the economy has been around 75%. Unless this rises, fresh investment will mean even lower capacity utilisation and lower profitability since capital will be underutilised.
- In June 2019, the stock market was at a record high and yet the investment rate did not rise.
- Data from the Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt. Ltd. shows that investment proposals are at a 14-year low.
- In the last year, the RBI has cut interest rates four times and by a total of more than 1%; but the investment rate has not budged.
- The government has been in denial but now experts in the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, in NITI Aayog and the RBI have admitted that there is a slowdown.

#### Concerns:

- The Ministry of Finance announced a slew of measures for Economy’s revival. This is an admission of there being a slowdown in the economy.
- Unfortunately, it is opined that these announcements will not lead to a recovery, as they do not

address the source of the problem.

- The government also announced the big bank merger. Bank mergers will have little impact on the immediate problem of the slowing economy. It may only further disturb a major chunk of the banking system.
- The package for the automobile sector or making banks pass on interest rate cuts to businesses, announced a little earlier will also have little impact since the problem did not originate there.
- The announcement of a transfer of ₹1.76 lakh crore from the RBI to the government will only cover the shortfall expected in revenue (which is a result of an unduly high projection of revenue growth).
  - It will allow the government to maintain the fiscal deficit target at 3.3%.
  - But, this will not provide the needed stimulus.
- The fiscal deficit today is at about 9% if the States and the public sector units are taken into account.

### Source of the problem:

- The problem originates from the unorganised sector which has been in decline since demonetisation.
- It was further hit by the Goods and Services Tax though it is either exempt from it or there is a simplified provision for this sector.
- This sector producing 45% of the output and employing 94% of the workforce has been in decline, which is pulling down the rate of growth of the economy.
- However, this data does not picture in the growth data because the data for this sector is collected once in five years (called reference years) since the sector has tens of millions of units for which data cannot be collected monthly, quarterly or even annually. In between the reference years, the data is only projected on various assumptions.
- For estimating quarterly growth latest estimates of Agricultural Production, Index of Industrial Production (IIP) and performance of key sectors like Railways, Transport s, Communication, Banking, Insurance and Government Revenue Expenditure are used.
  - Except for agriculture, these belong to the organised sector of the economy.
- Even for the annual estimates, basically data for the organised sector are used.
  - For construction, steel, glass, etc are used which are also derived from the organised sector production.
  - Thus, the implicit assumption is that the organised sector can be a proxy for the unorganised sector.
- But with the economy suffering three shocks in quick succession over the last three years which adversely impacted the unorganised sector, this assumption does not hold true.
- Most of the experts have implicitly accepted the government's fallacious argument and have thus fallen behind the curve.

### Way forward:

- To incorporate the unorganised sector, data from alternative sources need to be used.
- The government must reveal the rate of growth of the unorganised sector that it is using in its estimates and which is not based on using the organised sector as a proxy.
- The fiscal deficit would have to be allowed to rise or there has to be an increase in expenditures on the basis of mobilisation of additional revenues.

## 2. Waiting for reforms

### Context:

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman recently presented the third round of stimulus measures to resuscitate the struggling Indian economy.

**Details:**

- The previous two rounds of the stimulus plan, presented at press conferences held by the Finance Minister focused primarily on:
  - Reviving the automobile sector
  - Boosting the confidence of foreign investors who were spooked by the Budget announcements
  - Improving the health of dangerously fragile state-owned banks by doing everything short of privatising them.
- This time around the focus has been on helping out the underperforming export and real estate sectors through piecemeal fiscal reforms.
- Among other things, announced is a new tax refund scheme and greater priority sector lending for the export sector to incentivise exports.
  - It is expected that the new tax breaks to the exports sector will cause a dent of up to ₹50,000 crore to the government's revenue.
  - Further, external commercial borrowing norms have been eased to make it easier for Indian real estate companies to tap funds from abroad.
  - Funds worth ₹10,000 crore have also been allocated to aid the completion of affordable housing projects.

**Concern:**

- With lack of demand and major supply-side bottlenecks being the primary issues facing exports and real estate, it is doubtful whether the present measures will be enough to revive these flailing sectors.
- Cutting across all three stimulus rounds announced till date, the government has been relying almost entirely on providing fiscal relief, in the form of tax cuts coupled with a tiny amount of government spending, to wade through what seems like a structural crisis in the economy.

**Conclusion:**

- The hope seems to be that these measures combined with a looser monetary policy stance adopted by the RBI will boost spending and revive growth.
- This is, however, far from what many expected from a government that promised radical structural reforms when it rose to power in 2014.
- Without enacting any major supply-side reforms like land and labour reforms that can raise potential growth, it is also hard to see how greater spending can raise growth for very long.
- The government may believe that the present slowdown, marked by five consecutive quarters of dropping growth, is merely a cyclical one.
- But the government should aim higher by trying to push through long-pending structural reforms that can raise India's growth trajectory to the next level.

## F. Tidbits

### 1. Survey of India to deploy 300 drones for mapping country

- India's oldest scientific department, the Survey of India (SoI) historically tasked with mapping the country will for the first time rely on drones to map the country.
  - SoI came into being 1767.
- The organisation aims to procure about 300 drones for the gargantuan exercise.
- Other than unprecedented detail, a consequence of the mapping will be creating high-resolution maps of land in villages facilitating the digitisation of land titles in villages.
- A major consequence of the drone-based exercise will be the mapping of settled habitations in

villages (called *abaadi* areas in legal parlance).

- Based on the availability of accurate maps, residents will finally be able to get property cards as well as proper legal titles to their lands.
- Currently, the best SoI maps have a resolution of 1:250000, meaning a 1 cm on the map represents 2500 cm on the ground.
- The maps being prepared, according to senior officials associated with the project will be of 1:500 resolution.

#### **Aim of the exercise:**

- The primary objective is to provide high-resolution foundation maps.
- The aim is to map 75% of India's geography— about 2.4 million sq km of the 3.2 million sq km — within the next two years.
- However forests, hills and deserts are likely to be left out.

#### **2. Pakistan summons Afghan, Indian diplomats after soldiers, civilian killed**

- Pakistan has summoned diplomats from Afghanistan and India after several shooting incidents along two different borders killed four Pakistani soldiers and a civilian woman.
- Accusations of firing by both sides across the Afghan-Pakistani border, and by both Indian and Pakistani forces across an old ceasefire line dividing their areas in the Muslim-majority region of Kashmir are common.
- The latest incidents come at an especially tense time between Pakistan and India, and as talks between the United States and the Afghan Taliban have broken down.
- Pakistan's Foreign Office summoned an Afghan diplomat to account for what it said was firing into Pakistan by militants in Afghanistan.
  - The militants shot and killed a Pakistani soldier on patrol in one incident late.
  - In a second incident, Pakistani forces fencing a section of the border were attacked and three were killed.
- Both incidents occurred in Pakistan's northwestern Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province.
- Pakistan underscored in its meeting with the Afghan diplomat that Afghanistan was responsible for securing its side of the border.
- Afghan officials have in recent weeks accused the Pakistani military of several incidents of heavy artillery fire into Afghanistan.
- Both of the uneasy neighbours are battling militant factions along their largely porous border and each accuses the other of harbouring their militant enemies.
- Pakistan also summoned an Indian diplomat after it said firing by Indian forces across the Line of Control (LoC) in the disputed territory of Kashmir killed a woman from the village of Balakot.

#### **India - Pakistan:**

- The nuclear-armed neighbours have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir.
- The LoC, an old ceasefire line, is the de facto border between the parts of Kashmir that India and Pakistan administer.
- Tensions between the two countries have flared since Aug. 5, 2019, when New Delhi flooded Indian Kashmir with troops to quell unrest after it revoked the region's special status.
- Pakistan foreign affairs spokesman Mohammad Faisal said in a statement that India deliberately targets civilian areas.
- India has long accused Pakistan of supporting militant groups fighting Indian security forces in its part of Kashmir. Pakistan denies that.

## G. Prelims Facts

### 1. Vallam Kali

- The annual snake boat regatta (Uthrittathi Vallamkali) held in the river Pampa marked the grand finale of the annual season of snake boat races in the part of Central Travancore.
- Vallam Kali is a traditional boat race in Kerala, India.
- It is a form of canoe racing and uses paddled war canoes.
- It is mainly conducted during the season of the harvest festival Onam in autumn.
- Vallam Kali includes races of many kinds of paddled longboats, and fame in Kerala the traditional boats of Kerala.
- The Nehru Trophy Boat Race is a popular Vallam Kali event held in the Punnamada Lake near Alappuzha, Kerala.

## H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. The primary reason behind the vulture population getting nearly wiped out in India was the drug Diclofenac.
2. The drug Diclofenac was commonly administered to cattle to treat inflammation.

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 major reason behind the vulture population getting nearly wiped out was the drug Diclofenac. Diclofenac was found in the carcass of cattle the vultures fed on. The drug, whose veterinary use was banned in 2008, was commonly administered to cattle to treat inflammation. The veterinary drug diclofenac, which is a wonder drug for pain relief in cattle, was found to be extremely toxic to vultures and was implicated in the population crash of the species.

Q2. Nandankanan Zoological Park is located in:

- a. Madhya Pradesh
- b. Assam
- c. Tamil Nadu
- d. Odisha

**Answer: d**

**Explanation:**

Self-explanatory

Q3. "Vallam Kali" is

- a. An annual Hindu mela held at Kamakhya Temple Assam
- b. A traditional boat race held in the state of Kerala
- c. A traditional performing artform from the state of Kerala
- d. A type of hand-painted or block-printed cotton textile produced in the state of Andhra Pradesh

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

Vallam Kali is a traditional boat race in Kerala, India. It is a form of canoe racing and uses paddled war canoes. It is mainly conducted during the season of the harvest festival Onam in autumn.

Q4. The IUCN Red List classifies White-backed vulture as:

- a. Extinct in the Wild
- b. Critically Endangered
- c. Endangered
- d. Vulnerable

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

Self-explanatory

## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. What are single-use plastics? Discuss why, despite the fact that they pose a major environmental threat; they have not been banned in India yet. (15 Marks, 250 Words).
2. The recent Godavari boat mishap underscores the criminal negligence on part of various government wings of Andhra Pradesh who failed to follow the 'safety mandate' recommended. Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words).