

18 Sep 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. In a setback to BSP, all six MLAs join the Congress in Rajasthan

Context:

In a major setback to the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), all its six MLAs in Rajasthan have joined the ruling

Details:

- All six BSP MLAs wrote to state assembly Speaker C P Joshi to merge the legislative party with the Congress.
- This is the second time since 2009 when six MLAs of BSP had moved sides to join the Congress.
- Now, the Congress's tally in the 200-member Assembly has gone up to 106.
- The anti-defection law does not apply in this case as the entire legislative party has changed sides.

Anti-defection law has been comprehensively covered in BYJU'S Comprehensive News Analysis under GS Paper 2 – Polity and Governance on 26th June 2019.

2. Activists debate on Article 341, urge Centre for quota benefits

Context:

A group of Muslim activists came together at Laxmi Nagar's Gurdwara in Delhi for a debate on Article 341.

Details:

- The idea behind such debates, they said, was to spread awareness among the Muslim population about the controversy surrounding Article 341.
- They aimed to make pleas to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to categorise Dalit Muslims among Scheduled Castes in order to allow them to get benefits of the country's reservation policy.

Article 341:

- Article 341(1) of the Indian Constitution gives the president the power to notify which castes in the country, and in specific states come under the category of Scheduled Castes.
- Scheduled Castes are those castes named in the Scheduled Castes order of the Government of India, promulgated in August 1950.
- The name 'Scheduled Caste' derives from the fact that this is annexed as a Schedule to the Constitution.
- Article 341(1) of the Constitution prescribes the procedure for regarding castes as "Scheduled Castes".
- As per the procedure to make additions or deletions to the Schedule by amending the concerned Presidential Order for a state under Article 341(2), state governments first propose to modify the Schedule.
- Only proposals agreed by both the Registrar General of India and the National Commission for Scheduled Castes are introduced as a Bill in Parliament.
- This procedure was adopted by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in 1999 and was amended in 2002.
- A similar provision exists for Scheduled Tribes under Article 342.
- So far, six Presidential Orders have been issued between 1950 and 1978 for specifying SC in respect of various States/Union territories.
- These Orders have been amended from time to time by Acts of Parliament enacted as per Article 341(2) of the Constitution between 1956 and 2016.

3. Despite hurdles, Vande Bharat to remain on track for Railways

Context:

The Indian Railways plans to begin the second Vande Bharat Express on the Delhi-Katra route before Deepavali, October 2019.

Details:

- Railway Board Chairman V.K. Yadav said the plans to add 40 such semi-high-speed trains by 2022 remained on track despite a few hurdles.
- It was also said that the specifications of the new trains had been modified to also support sleeper class coaches as against only chair-car class coaches now.
- Additionally, with regards to alleged vigilance inquiry being ordered for the Vande Bharat project, the Chairman said the inquiry was for some irregularities found at the Integral Coach Factory (ICF), but not specific to the Vande Bharat Express.
- It was also said that the Railways is working on three more dedicated freight corridors at an estimated cost of about Rs. 2.6 lakh crore, which will help the national transporter to free up the current tracks to run enough passenger trains so that no traveller gets wait-listed.
 - The Railways has said it would move to a HOG system or Head on Generation technology for powering of trains, a move which will make the train journey quieter for travellers and more economical for the carrier.
 - The power generator cars which used to make huge noise and emit fumes will no more be there. In HOG, the power will be drawn from the overhead electric supply.

The issue on “**Train 18**” or the “**Vande Bharat Express**” has been comprehensively covered in BYJU’S Comprehensive News Analysis under the Editorials section – Polity and Governance on 16th September 2019.

4. Govt.-funded NGOs come under RTI ambit, says SC

Context:

The Supreme Court, in a judgment has held that Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) “substantially” financed by the government fall within the ambit of the Right to Information Act.

Details:

- The Bench laid down that NGOs which receive considerable finances from the government or are essentially dependent on the government fall under the category of “public authority” defined in Section 2(h) of the Right to Information (RTI) Act of 2005.
- NGO, may also include societies which are neither owned nor controlled by the government, but if they are significantly funded by the government, directly or indirectly, they come under the RTI Act.
- It was held that such NGOs have to disclose vital information, ranging from finances to hierarchy to decisions to functioning, to citizens who apply under RTI.
- “It does not necessarily have to mean a major portion or more than 50%. No hard and fast rule can be laid down in this regard. Substantial financing can be both direct or indirect,” Justice Gupta wrote in the judgment.
- Whether an NGO or body is substantially financed by the government is a question of fact which has to be determined on facts of each case, it was explained.
- If the government gives land in a city free of cost or on heavy discount to hospitals, educational institutions or any such body, this in itself could also be substantial financing, the judgment explained.

It is considered a significant order intended to inject transparency and accountability in functioning of NGOs and other private institutions receiving substantial government funds.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Govt. to peg MGNREGA wages to inflation in bid to hike incomes

Context:

The Centre plans to inject more money into the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme by linking wages under the Act to an updated inflation index, which will be revised annually.

Details:

- The consumption basket of CPI-AL [which determines MGNREGA wage revisions] has not been updated for more than three decades, and it is believed that the rural consumption patterns have changed drastically in that time.
- It hopes that this change will increase wages, thus increasing purchasing power and reviving rural demand.
- Wage rate revisions are usually notified at the beginning of a financial year, but the Ministry is trying to implement the hike during the current year itself, as part of a stimulus package to counter the ongoing slowdown.
- This is one of the demand-side interventions that the government is carrying out in light of the current scenario in the rural economy.
- It has also been decided to update the indices annually.

Kickstarting rural demand

The government aims to revise wages of MGNREGA workers to address the slowdown in the rural economy



- MGNREGA wages will be linked to an updated inflation index
- Higher wages will increase MGNREGA expenditure by 10%
- They may also increase purchasing power and revive rural demand
- MGNREGA budgetary allocation for FY20: **₹60,000 crore**
- Funds released till Sept. 17: **₹46,486 cr.**
- Additional funds requested: **₹15,000-20,000 crore**

Concerns:

- Some economists are apprehensive about linking wage rates to a better inflation index, given that MGNREGA workers get paid much lower than market rates.
- The national average wage of an MGNREGA worker is 178.44 per day, less than half of the Rs.375 per day minimum wage recommended by a Labour Ministry panel.
- According to the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey, market wages for men were higher than MGNREGA wages by 74% in 2017-18, while for women, it was a 21% gap.
- Droughts and floods in several States have led to an increased demand for work in the early part of the year, and the economic slowdown could spur demand again once the rabi planting season is over.

Way forward:

- It is opined that first the wages must be increased and subsequently better inflation indexation must be ensured. Otherwise, the impact would be minimal.
- Grants to the scheme must be enhanced as, even with existing wages, the scheme is running out of funds due to increased demand for work.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme

- MGNREGA is the largest work guarantee programme in the world.
- It was enacted in 2005 with the primary objective of guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment per year to rural households.
- It aims at addressing causes of chronic poverty through developmental projects and thus ensuring sustainable development.
- The Act provides a list of works that can be undertaken to generate employment related to water conservation, drought proofing, land development, and flood control and protection works.
- There is also an emphasis on strengthening the process of decentralisation through giving a significant role to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in planning and implementing these works.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. NGT seeks report on steps for gharial conservation

Context:

The National Green Tribunal has directed the Madhya Pradesh government to submit within three weeks separate progress report of the departments concerned on the steps taken according to an action plan to conserve gharial habitat along the Son river.

Issue:

- In an order dated July 31, 2018, the NGT had constituted a committee to prepare an action plan to check illegal mining, conserve gharials and turtles, and maintain a minimum ecological flow downstream the Ban Sagar Dam.
- While it was asked to frame a plan within a month of its constitution, it had to submit a report within three months. However, the report was submitted only in February 2019.
- NGT stated that the government had filed an additional status report instead of a progress report as directed by it.
- The NGT held that the status report didn't make clear the action taken so far or what remained to be done.

Details:

- The petition, filed flagged the declining population of gharials along a 200-km stretch of the river due to illegal sand mining.
- Contending that even the Forest Department and the police were unable to check it, the petition said that according to the IUCN, their population has declined by 96-98% since 1946, despite the Centre declaring it a protected species under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- The increasing intensity of fishing using gill nets, and large-scale illegal and impermissible mining activity in the protected area of the Son Gharial Sanctuary along the Son river is rapidly killing many of the scarce adults and many sub-adults.
- Earlier there were between 400 and 600 gharials in the area and later their population went down to 18 in 2004. Now there are 45 gharials.
- It is found that the mafia kills gharials selectively and illegal sand mining is also prevalent on the riverbed.
- The petitioner also quoted a study by the Madras Crocodile Bank Trust which highlighted the excessive, irreversible loss of riverine habitat caused by the construction of the Ban Sagar Dam, changes in the river's course, artificial embankments and large-scale illegal sand mining.

Gharial:

- The gharial (*Gavialis gangeticus*) is also known as the gavial, and fish-eating crocodile is a crocodylian in the family Gavialidae.
- It is native to sandy freshwater river banks in the plains of the northern part of the Indian subcontinent.
- The male gharial has a distinctive boss at the end of the snout, which resembles an earthenware pot known in Hindias.
- Gharials once inhabited all the major river systems of the Indian Subcontinent, from the Irrawaddy River in the east to the Indus River in the west. Their distribution is now limited to only 2% of their former range.
- In India, Gharials can be found in Girwa River, Chambal River, Ken River, Son River, Mahanadi River, Ramganga River.
- ICUN Redlist classifies it as Critically Endangered.

2. Researchers find two new plant species in Western Ghats

Context:

A team of researchers has reported the discovery of two new plant species from the shola forests of the Western Ghats.

Details:

- Both the plant species belong to the Asclepiadaceae or milkweed family.
- Latex in plant parts and pappus seeds are the general characteristics of the milkweed family.

Tylophora balakrishnanii:

- *Tylophora balakrishnanii* is a straggling vine, has been discovered from the Thollayiram shola.
- Thollayiram shola in Wayanad is a biodiversity hotspot in the Nilgiri biosphere reserve.
- It is a tuberous species.
- Flowers of the plant are reddish-pink and the species is similar to the coastal plant *Tylophora flexuosa*. However, it differs in its floral parts arrangement and morphology.

Tylophora neglecta:

- Tylophora neglecta has been discovered from the shola forest on the Thooval Mala hill under the Achencoil forest division in Kollam.
- The flowers of the species are white with a violet tinge.
- Its leaves are thick and bristly in nature.

Conclusion:

The discovery highlights the rich biodiversity and the need for a conservation strategy for the fragile ecosystem of the Western Ghats.

Category: SECURITY

1. Navy plans to seek a rise in its share of defence budget

Context:

The Navy will seek an increase in its share of the defence budget which has gone down over the years, Navy Vice Chief Vice Admiral Ashok Kumar has said.

Issue:

- Navy's share of the capital budget within the defence services budget has dropped in the last 6-7 years
- Share of the Navy was 18% of the Defence budget in 2012-13. Today it stands at about 13.66%

Details:

- The aim is to convince the powers to enhance the share to 18-20% of the total defence budget.
- Three landmark events are planned by the Navy on September 28, 2019.
 1. Commissioning of second Scorpene submarine Khanderi
 - Khanderi was launched in January 2017.
 - It is the second of the Indian Navy's six Kalvari-class submarines being built in India.
 - It is a diesel-electric attack submarine which is designed by French naval defence and energy company DCNS
 - It is manufactured at Mazagon Dock Limited in Mumbai
 2. Launch of the first P-17A frigate Nilgiri
 - The Nilgiri-class frigate or Project 17A is a follow-on of the Project 17 Shivalik-class frigate for the Indian Navy
 - P17A frigates are a part of India Navy's most advanced stealth frigate project.
 3. Commissioning of the largest dry dock the Indian Navy

With these new inductions and launch of the Dry Dock, Indian Navy's reach and combat sustenance goes up, as it plays a major role in the region.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**1. Fire to fuel****Context:**

- Last week, the Houthi rebels of Yemen have reportedly carried out a swarm drone attack on two critical oil installations of Saudi Arabia.
- The attack on the Khurais oilfield and Abqaiq oil processing facility belonging to Saudi's state-owned oil firm Aramco, has resulted in the suspension of more than half of Saudi Arabia's daily crude oil output.
- The Abqaiq oil processing facility is considered to be the world's largest and it is a prized asset of the Saudi kingdom.
- Saudi Arabia being the world's largest oil supplier, any disruption in production could have an impact on the global oil markets.
- Even though the world has enough buffer in the form of strategic reserves, the impact of the attack will be felt on global oil prices.
- Even though Saudi Arabia restored a portion of the supply that was affected, the sudden disruption and panic in the markets have resulted in a nearly 20% increase in Brent crude prices, which is the highest spike in more than a decade.
- Later, the statement of Donald Trump that the U.S. would release some of its strategic reserves helped the prices to drop to \$66 per barrel, which translates to a 10% increase over the day.

The Saudi – Iran Proxy War:

- The attacks were a direct outcome of the 4 year-long civil war in neighbouring Yemen, where Saudi Arabia and Iran, the two major regional powers, have been engaged in a covert proxy war against each other.
- The Houthi rebels, who essentially belong to a Shiite sect were backed by Iran, which represents the Shia power block to overthrow the pro-Saudi Yemeni government.
- This later drew Saudi Arabia and UAE, which represent the Sunni power block, into the conflict and they have subsequently launched a military intervention on behalf of the Yemeni government.
- The Houthis have been consistently targeting critical installations of Saudi Arabia with the help of Iran and this has resulted in a significant increase in regional tensions.
- However, the usage of swarm drones has evolved as a recent trend and the Houthis have managed to breach Saudi's air defence repeatedly to strike at its critical installations.

The Response:

- In the latest attacks on Aramco's oil plants, the Houthis themselves have claimed entire responsibility for the attacks. But despite that, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia have suggested that Iran was responsible for them.
- Initially, the US seemed to suggest that it is prepared for any eventuality with Iran and indicated the possibility of a military escalation.
- But later, Mr. Trump has suggested that he was still making attempts to draw the Iranians to make a deal over their nuclear weapons programme.
- Iran has responded by dismissing these allegations and it has stuck to its position of not engaging in any talks with the US until it dismantles the economic sanctions that have been imposed on it.
- Even though Mr. Trump has been erratic and belligerent in his foreign policy decisions, he has consistently tried to make attempts at avoiding conflict or risking a new military adventure.

- So it is high time for Iran to drop its hostile policy and it should seek to work towards de-escalation through diplomatic channels, considering the risk posed by the possibility of yet another conflict in the Middle-East

De-escalation: An urgent need

- Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia must halt its military intervention in Yemen and work with the UN in order to provide for a negotiated settlement in the war-torn country.
- The Saudi military intervention in Yemen has received logistical support from the U.S. and the U.K. But despite the heft of these powers, the intervention has only resulted in a stalemate in Yemen
- One of the direct consequences of this intervention is that the conflict has spiralled to include critical energy supply targets that the world had imagined to be stable and secure.
- The US decision to unilaterally quit the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) has unravelled the painstakingly crafted nuclear deal between the P5+1+EU and Iran.
- Added to this, the Saudis' reckless misadventure in Yemen and the Iranian sponsorship of its proxies in West Asia as a response has had an unintended consequence on the global crude oil supply.

Conclusion:

- These alarming developments in West Asia are bound to affect several developing countries around the world, including India.
- India's Petroleum Ministry has sought to calm the nerves by relaying messages of assurance from Aramco officials, but there is already an indication that crude prices would rise further due to an increase in the risk premium, leading to increased fuel pump costs.
- With India importing more than 75% of its crude oil requirement from West Asia, a price hike is expected to burden India's current account, and will further depreciate the rupee.
- Increased fuel costs and the resultant import of inflation could also affect the citizens at a time when the economy is already in a slowdown mode.
- India should be prepared to contain the impact by taking a relook at the excise duties on petroleum products, which are currently on the higher end.

Category: HEALTH & GOVERNANCE

1. Deadly spread

Context:

- In January 2019, the World Health Organization included 'vaccine hesitancy' as one of the 10 threats to global health this year, due to a 30% increase in measles cases in 2018.
- Vaccine hesitancy is defined as the "reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccines".
- The threat from vaccine hesitancy to global healthcare only appears to have grown more dangerous over the years.

The Global Surge in Measles:

- In the first six months of 2019, there have been around 3, 65,000 measles cases reported from 182 countries and this comes after a major surge in measles cases in 2018.
- The WHO African region has registered the biggest increase, which stands at 900% for the first six months of this year as compared to the same period last year.
- These cases have largely been reported in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar and Nigeria.

- In the WHO European region as well, there has been a sharp increase with 90,000 cases being recorded in the first six months of 2019, which is higher than the numbers recorded for the whole of 2018.
- The spread of the infection in the European region has been unprecedented in recent years and it has accounted for 1, 74,000 cases from 49 of the 53 countries between January 2018 and June 2019.
- In fact, last month the following countries have even lost their measles elimination status - U.K., Greece, the Czech Republic and Albania.

The Lack of Public Confidence in Vaccines:

- A 2018 report on vaccine confidence among the European Union member states shows as to why the coverage of the vaccine has not increased in the European region to reach over the desired target of 90% in order to offer protection even to those who are not vaccinated.
- It found that younger people in the age group of 18-34 years and those with less education are less likely to agree that the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine is safe.
- According to a March 2019 report, only 52% of respondents from 28 EU member states agree that vaccines are definitely effective in preventing diseases, while 33% felt they were probably effective.
- The more alarming fact is that 48% of those who were surveyed believed that vaccines can have serious side effects and 38% think vaccines are actually responsible for causing the disease that they are supposed to protect against.

The case with India:

- A disconcerting similarity can be seen in India as well with regard to 'vaccine hesitancy'.
- A study conducted in 2018 brought out that low awareness is the main reason why 45% of the children missed their vaccinations in 121 Indian districts that are known to have higher rates of unimmunised children.
- While 24% did not get vaccinated due to concerns about adverse side effects, 11% were reluctant to get immunised for reasons other than the fear of side effects.

What needs to be done?

- These alarming statistics point out the impact of low awareness and misinformation on the effectiveness and reach of vaccination programmes.
- Social media, in particular, has played a crucial role in spreading misinformation about vaccines.
- In this regard, the recent commitment made by Facebook to act against the circulation of vaccine-related misinformation, will be crucial in winning the war against vaccine deniers.
- Measles vaccine not only provides lifelong protection against the virus but also reduces mortality from other childhood infections.
- This is because measles viruses kill immune cells, leaving the child vulnerable to infectious diseases for two to three years.

What is Measles?

- Measles is a highly contagious infectious disease caused by the measles virus.
- Symptoms usually develop 10–12 days after exposure to an infected person and last 7–10 days. Initial symptoms typically include fever, cough, runny nose, and inflamed eyes.
- Small white spots known as Koplik's spots may form inside the mouth two or three days after the start of symptoms.
- A red, flat rash which usually starts on the face and then spreads to the rest of the body typically begins three to five days after the start of symptoms.
- Common complications include diarrhea, middle ear infection, and pneumonia.
- These occur in part due to measles-induced immunosuppression. Less commonly seizures, blindness,

or inflammation of the brain may occur.

- Measles is an airborne disease which spreads easily through the coughs and sneezes of infected people. It may also be spread through direct contact with mouth or nasal secretions.
- Interestingly, most people do not get the disease more than once.
- The measles vaccine is effective at preventing the disease and is often delivered in combination with other vaccines.
- It is one of the leading 'vaccine-preventable disease' causes of death.

Category: GOVERNANCE

1. Pipe dreams, ground reality

Context:

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced in July that the government will provide piped water to all rural households by 2024 under the Jal Jeevan Mission.
- The Prime Minister has also stated that around ₹5 trillion will be spent under the ambitious Jal Jeevan Mission aimed at providing potable water.
- Under the Jal Jeevan Mission, the government will focus on rainwater harvesting and water conservation in 256 districts in the first phase and carry out other initiatives, including renovation of traditional water bodies and tanks, reuse of water and recharge structures, watershed development and intensive afforestation.
- The NDA government has also formed a new ministry to address all water issues that looks at the management of water resources and drinking water supply in a holistic manner.
- The Jal Shakti Ministry, formed by integrating the Water Resources and Drinking Water and Sanitation Ministries, aims to work with state governments to ensure Har Ghar Jal to all rural households by 2024.

Is the proposed plan viable?

- This will be a costly and futile exercise since over 70% of India's surface water (rivers and lakes) and groundwater is polluted.
- The plan will require digging up the whole country and squandering lakhs of crores away for little gain.
- Since surface and groundwater is unfit for domestic use, Indians will soon need reverse osmosis (RO) for home, which will only burden the country's already expensive water programme.

Protecting the unpolluted sources:

- Hence, it is of utmost importance that we protect the few unpolluted sources of water that remain.
- Otherwise, India will be consigned as a nation to drink unhealthy and expensive RO water.
- The only unpolluted sources of water that remain are the waters underlying the floodplains of rivers (for bulk water) and the subterranean natural mineral water underlying forest tracts (for drinking). These precious unpolluted water resources must be protected and conserved at any cost.

Yamuna Palla floodplain scheme: A local and sustainable scheme

- There are very few non-invasive schemes which can perennially provide natural mineral water and unpolluted bulk water for our cities.
- Such local and sustainable schemes are strongly supported by Nobel Laureate A.J. Leggett and renowned scientist M.S. Swaminathan.
- One such scheme is the Yamuna Palla floodplain scheme for Delhi which was initiated in 2009.

- It has been actively pursued by the Delhi Jal Board and provides quality water to more than a million people in Delhi.
- Such local and sustainable river floodplain schemes can provide water supply for hundreds of river cities in India.
- It will be path-breaking not only for India but also the world to invest in such localised schemes that are self-sustaining.
- It is not only environmentally sustainable but it will also yield great economic returns.
- In the case of India, examples of self-sustaining floodplain water cities include Varanasi, Prayagraj, Agra, Mathura, most towns in Bihar and West Bengal, Cuttack, Bhubaneswar, Amravati, Vijayawada, Rajahmundry, and many cities in Tamil Nadu.
- In these above-mentioned cities which are blessed with a self-sustaining floodplain, such localised water supply schemes can be implemented successfully.

Conserving and Securing the Floodplains:

- Floodplains can be secured by planting organic food forests or fruit forests which don't demand or consume much water.
- Carving out lakes, as has been suggested under the Jal Jeevan Mission, would require digging out vast quantities of sand.
- This will not only affect the wetland ecology of the floodplains but it will also cause loss of water due to evaporation.

For unpolluted water

- Another source of unpolluted water is natural mineral water that underlies our forests.
- This water is pure and it is of the highest international quality. Unpolluted rain falls on the forest, percolates through the vegetation, humus or leaf cover on the forest floor while picking up nutrients, and then through the underlying rock while picking up minerals.
- It finally settles in underground aquifers and this is referred to as natural mineral water which is bottled and sold at exorbitant prices.
- Many parts of the country can still tap these pristine water sources. All major cities that fall under the Western and Eastern Ghats belt have such forest aquifers.
- The hills around Visakhapatnam can provide enough water for millions of people. Shimla has a forest mineral water sanctuary spread over nearby hill ranges.
- Bengaluru's Bannerghatta National Park and Mumbai's Sanjay Gandhi National Park have underground forest aquifers that can supply natural mineral water for the entire population of these cities.
- So can the Delhi Ridge, for Delhi. Even the Aravallis can provide the best quality natural mineral water to all the cities in Rajasthan.

Sustainable exploitation and conservation:

- However, over-exploiting these water resources can destroy the process of natural recharge. Hence, we need to adopt sustainable 'conserve and use' solutions for the future.
- Most importantly, the water levels of the floodplain aquifers need to be monitored scrupulously to be well above the river water level so as to avoid contamination by river water.
- We must maintain adequate water levels for the subterranean forest aquifers in order to ensure sustainability.
- These floodplains and forest aquifers need to be declared as 'water sanctuaries' similar to our national parks and tiger reserves, in order to improve conservation efforts.
- If not, we will lose this amazing gift of natural infrastructure, as has already happened in some cases.

Category: ENVIRONMENT & ECOLOGY

1. The future of food is animal-friendly

Context:

- The article talks about the monumental challenges that are facing our global food system.
- It is expected that by 2050 around 10 billion people have to be fed and with our current agricultural practices it is almost impossible.

Current Food System:

- Currently, our food system puts undue pressure on our limited natural resources.
- One of the incidents that could highlight the extent of these pressure factors was the massive Amazonian forest fires, which was mainly a result of man-made fires by cattle ranchers and loggers, in order to clear forest areas for their agro-industrial activities.
- Ranchers deliberately set fire to the forests so that they can be cleared for cattle grazing. Cattle ranching is responsible for nearly 80% of the destruction of the rainforests of Amazon.
- In India as well, our forests are threatened by overgrazing of buffaloes and goats which are used for dairy and meat.
- Further, greenhouse gas emissions, such as methane, are very high from the meat industry.

Problems of the meat industry

- The very design of our food system is extremely inefficient because we feed grains to cattle and chickens and then eat the animals.
- So, essentially, for every 9 calories of food fed to a chicken, we get 1 calorie back due to the natural loss of energy which takes place in the food chain.
- The irony is, despite the wide availability of food in our current agricultural system, around 34.7% of Indian children suffer from malnutrition.
- This shows how inefficient the current model of production is. It is neither fulfilling our basic requirements nor is it environment-friendly.
- The meat industry is also responsible for tremendous amounts of water wastage. According to reports, about one third of the world's water consumption is for producing animal products.
- On the other hand, NITI Aayog has predicted that 21 major cities including Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad are going to run out of their groundwater supplies by 2020.
- In the light of these alarming observations on the future availability of water, we need to be all the more judicious while consuming water.
- Upon this, the usage of antibiotics and hormones is widespread in the animal husbandry industry and are used in both livestock and poultry feed.
- The World Health Organization has said that antibiotic resistance is one of the biggest threats to global health, food security, and development today.
- Perhaps the greatest casualty of the meat industry are the animals which are crammed into farms, face extreme cruelty during their lives and are inhumanely slaughtered.
- As our incomes increase, our consumption of meat also increases and the pressure on our limited resources will amplify.
- But despite this significant increase in meat production in order to meet the rising demand, we will still continue to be a malnourished nation.

The future lies in plant-based meat:

- However, the innovation of healthy and nutritious plant-based meat provides a safer and sustainable

alternative.

- We also have lab-grown meat which is referred to as “cultivated meat”, or also called as clean meat. Clean meat is grown in a lab from a small sample of cells taken from an animal.
- Both plant-based meat and clean meat are free from the negative impacts of animal meat production, such as climate change.
- It is also healthier as it is free of antibiotics and hormones.
- Globally, the Netherlands, the U.S., Israel, Japan and Singapore are developing both plant-based and clean meat.
- India’s huge population can benefit by making plant-based and clean meat available.
- India enjoys a unique advantage to position itself as a leader in this sector because crops such as millets, ragi, pulses and chickpeas, which grow abundantly here, are ideal raw ingredients for plant-based meats.
- Further, India has already envisioned the setting up of the world’s first centre of excellence for clean meat. This can provide a jump start for India’s non-animal meat sector.
- This promising sector can counter the climate impact of the meat industry, increase farmers’ incomes, combat malnutrition and spare the lives of billions of animals. It is time we as a people support it and encourage it to flourish.

F. Tidbits

1. Only permanent residents to be recruited for police posts in J&K

- The Jammu & Kashmir police, in a fresh notification issued, has decided to recruit only permanent residents to the post of women constables, despite the State Subject law, Article 35-A, ceasing to be in vogue after the August 5 presidential order diluting it.
- A police spokesman said the recruitment for two women battalions, one each from Jammu and Kashmir regions, will entertain only “permanent residents” and “any candidate furnishing wrong information shall attract legal action”.
- This comes at a time when the fate of the Permanent Resident Certificate is not clear.

2. U.S., India keen to wrap up trade deal

- Both, the U.S. and India are frantically working on ways to resolve long-disputed trade issues, especially relating to medical devices, agriculture, and e-commerce.
- It is learnt that U.S. Ambassador to India Kenneth I. Juster held a meeting with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal on these issues.
- The U.S. government’s demands, on behalf of its pharmaceutical companies, are for India to remove the price caps on medical devices, especially on bioabsorbable stents for the heart and the knee.
- Trump will visit Mr. Modi at the ‘Howdy Modi’ event in Houston for Indian-Americans on September 22, 2019.
- The U.S. government has also been batting for increased market access in India in the agricultural sector, and an easing of FDI norms and data localisation rules for foreign e-commerce companies.
- Apart from U.S. President Donald Trump’s participation in ‘Howdy, Modi!’, it is understood that there will be an India-U.S. bilateral when both leaders are in New York City, on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly’s 74th session.

3. Howdy Modi

- Howdy, Modi! is one of the most anticipated global events of 2019 where Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address over 50,000 attendees during his US visit in Houston, Texas.
- This is an Indian community event.
- It will be hosted by Texas India Forum (TIF).

- The White House has announced that American President Donald Trump will be joining PM Modi at the Howdy Modi event to reaffirm the strategic partnership between the world's largest and oldest democracies.
- TIF said that Howdy Modi will be the largest gathering for an invited foreign leader visiting the US other than the Pope.
- This will also be the first time that a US president would be addressing thousands of Indian Americans at one place in America.
- Members of US Congress, a delegation of governors and Mayors will also attend the event.

4. NGT to launch e-court to help petitioners

- In a bid to facilitate petitioners from across the country to file their respective pleas online, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) will soon launch an e-court.
- A statement issued by the panel said, "With a view to facilitate access remedy before the NGT, it is hereby clarified that any petition can also be filed and received online on the NGT portal at the Principal Bench a Regional Benches concerned."
- Such e-filing need not be from the place where the seat of the Bench is located and can be from any place at the convenience of the aggrieved party.
- The matter will be dealt with by the Bench concerned as per relevant rules.

G. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to the exceptions under the Anti-defection law:

1. When $2/3^{\text{rd}}$ of the legislators of a party decide to merge into another party, neither the members who decide to merge, nor the ones who stay with the original party will face disqualification.
2. A split in a political party won't be considered a defection if a complete political party merges with another political party.

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:

Exceptions under the Anti-defection law:

- Under the circumstance where $2/3^{\text{rd}}$ of the legislators of a party decide to merge into another party, neither the members who decide to merge, nor the ones who stay with the original party will face disqualification.
- A split in a political party won't be considered a defection if a complete political party merges with another political party.

- Any person elected as speaker or chairman could resign from his party, and rejoin the party if he demitted that post.

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. INS Khanderi is the second of the Indian Navy's six Kalvari-class submarines.
2. It is a diesel-electric attack submarine.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

Both the statements are correct.

Q3. IUCN Red List classifies Gharial as:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

The gharial (*Gavialis gangeticus*) is also known as the gavial, and fish-eating crocodile is a crocodilian in the family Gavialidae. It is threatened by loss of riverine habitat, depletion of fish resources, and entanglement in fishing nets. As the wild population has declined drastically since the 1930s, the gharial is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to "Tylophora neglecta" and "Tylophora balakrishnanii":

1. These plant species were recently discovered in the Eastern Ghats.
2. Both the plant species belong to the milkweed family.

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

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

A team of researchers recently reported the discovery of two new plant species “Tylophora neglecta” and “Tylophora balakrishnani” from the shola forests of the Western Ghats. Both the plant species belong to the Asclepiadaceae or milkweed family. Latex in plant parts and pappus seeds are the general characteristics of the milkweed family.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Write a brief note on the challenges facing the global food system. Is cultivated meat a sustainable alternative? (15 Marks, 250 Words)
2. What do you understand by “Vaccine hesitancy”? Is vaccine hesitancy a public health threat in India? Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words)