

27 Oct 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Indian Ocean Rim to get boost with UAE, Bangladesh at helm

Context:

Indian Ocean Rim Association ministerial meeting is scheduled to be held in Abu Dhabi. The United Arab Emirates and Bangladesh, will take charge as the new chair and vice-chair of one of the largest regional maritime organizations for the duration of 2019-21.

Significance of Indian Ocean Region:

- Indian Ocean region is a major conduit for international trade, especially energy. Its littoral is vast, densely populated, and comprised of some of the world's fastest growing regions. The Ocean is also a valuable source of fishing and mineral resources. And yet its governance and security are under constant threat of being undermined.
- The Indian Ocean basin is of particular importance for India, as the region's most populous country and geopolitical keystone.
- The Indian Ocean region is a significant region for India given that it could act as a pivot for India's growth. The concept of Blue Economy is envisaged for India keeping in mind India's advantageous location in the Indian Ocean region.
- The Indian Ocean is now at the heart of global geopolitics. The Indian Ocean is likely to witness clashes of economic interests and a turbulent security environment. External powers are keen to intervene, not only to mediate or reduce this volatility but also in their attempt to extend their influence right up to the IOR through their physical presence. Ex China's growing clout in the region. India needs to guard against external influences in its immediate neighbourhood.

Significance of IORA:

- India's Indian Ocean Region strategy conforms closely to global priorities for preserving the Ocean as a shared resource: an important channel for trade, a sustainable resource base, and a region secure from heightened military competition, non-state actors, and catastrophic natural disasters.
- Achieving these objectives will require further investments in capacity, greater transparency and confidence-building measures, and enhanced institutional cooperation.
- The 19th IORA Council of Ministers meeting will be held on November 7 in Abu Dhabi with the theme of "Promoting a Shared Destiny and Path to Prosperity in the Indian Ocean". This provides an opportunity for greater coordination in the Indian Ocean region.
- India promotes policy of "coordination, cooperation and partnership" in this significant regional maritime domain. The rise of partner countries to the helm of affairs of IORA will help India in managing the crucial maritime region.

Indian Efforts:

- India is aiming to use the maritime domain as a "connector" for intra-regional co-operation. The government's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) programme aims to make the region more inclusive.
- India has been trying to emerge as the net provider of information in the IOR and in that direction it created the Information Fusion Centre in Gurugram to assist member countries with real time crisis information.
- Joint Maritime exercises with the regional countries, naval aid to lesser developed countries in the neighbourhood and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) efforts in the aftermath of natural disasters has gained considerable goodwill in the region for India.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Ease of doing business leap creditable: World Bank chief

Context:

India's ranking in the World Bank's annual "Ease of Doing Business", has observed a substantial jump from 140 in 2014 to 63 in 2019. India remains one of the top 10 most improved countries for the third consecutive time in the annual survey.



Details:

- Ease of doing business ranking is based on quantitative indicators on regulation for starting a business, dealing with construction permits, getting electricity, registering property, getting credit, protecting minority investors, paying taxes, trading across borders, enforcing contracts and resolving insolvency.
- India's jump of 14 ranks in a year was primarily driven by significant improvements in seven out of 10 factors on which ease of doing business is measured.
- Government's moves to liberalize procedures for registering businesses, facilitating more cross-border trade, bankruptcy resolution and in the construction process have helped boost the rankings.
- India saw the biggest jump in ranking in the "resolving insolvency" category on the back of the government implementing the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code. The establishment of a modern insolvency regime in 2016 as part of a comprehensive strategy to reform corporate law paved the way for gradual increase in the number of reorganizations, despite some implementation challenges
- India's ranking improved substantially in "dealing with construction permits" and "trading across borders".
- Compared to last year, India's ranking deteriorated on two parameters—"protecting minority investors" and "getting credit"—and remained unchanged in "enforcing contracts".
- While there has been substantial progress, India still lags in areas such as enforcing contracts and registering property.

Significance:

- The systemic reforms like the GST and IBC are beginning to show results in the form of improvements in the rankings. It's a clear indication that efforts made by the government have helped boost investor confidence.
- This will help in attracting investors to Asia's third-largest economy and fuel economic growth.

Way forward:

- To work on those parameters where India is presently lagging. Specific reforms such as more local courts, setting up a fast-track commercial dispute resolution mechanism, land data digitization and contract enforcement protections would help improve the rankings on “contract enforcement” parameter. There is an urgent need to address the challenges in the financial sector in the country.
- Though the government’s recent move to cut corporate tax rates is welcome, but many more steps are required for India to attract investment into manufacturing. The ease of doing business is just one of the many other factors like macro-economic stability, skills of the workforce etc in order to attract investments from companies.
- India is being affected by the global environment and has slowed from the fast growth rates in over a year. Openness to reform and to innovation and improvements in government structures will allow faster growth. India must focus on structural improvements to improve its growth rate.
- Harnessing the data generated by India for future economic growth of India.

2. Bold steps to push Air India sale: Puri

Context:

Government’s previous attempt to sell 76% stake in the ailing national carrier found no takers. An alternative mechanism was set up, headed by the Home Minister to take forward the plans of privatization of Air India.

Background:

- Currently, although Air India holds around 13% of the market share and is the third largest carrier in India, the airline has been a loss-making entity since almost a decade, with no respite in sight. Further, Air India’s share has been on a steady decline in the past few years.
- The debt has been mounting over the years. Attempts to consolidate Air India’s debt have been going on since 2012 with no workable solution in sight apart from the routine infusions. Any amount of equity infusion will not help bring the airlines out of its current state of debt.
- The airline’s debt is an integral part of India’s fiscal deficit. Failure to divest Air India’s shares is one of the main reasons the government will miss its fiscal deficit target for 2018-19. Taxpayer’s money needs to be spent responsibly. Complete disinvestment seems like the only way out of the situation.
- Previous attempts like the government’s move to sell 76% stake found no takers.

Concerns:

- The government’s offer to sell 76% of its stakes in the airline was not attractive enough as the private players were hesitant to buy a company where they would have to deal with government interference.
- The large size of Air India’s debt of over ₹50,000 is a major deterrent for private player’s involvement.
- The proposed severance package for the airline’s employees would severely impede the investor’s ability of reforming the ailing air carrier. The government’s divestment option includes retaining Air India staff for a year. Air India’s staff used to working under the bureaucratic setup have resulted in recurrent complaints on the indifference of the staff.

Government’s Move:

- The Government has decided to exit the airline completely and invite bids for a 100% stake sale which would be a more attractive package for private investment.
- The government has removed ₹29,000 crore of debt from the carrier’s balance sheets and transferred it to a separate entity or a special purpose vehicle (SPV).

Way forward:

- Declaring invites for bids without consultation with potential buyers is a haphazard move. Consulting private players, interested in buying the airlines would ensure that the workable solution is charted out.
- The government is looking to initiate the process of strategic disinvestment of Air India in the second half of 2019-20 and in between it should work towards selling some of its subsidiaries and monetize its assets.
- Any move should ensure the long term interests of the Indian economy with due regard to the interests of all stakeholders including the employees.

Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

1. Nagaland, Manipur brace for likely Naga peace pact

Context:

The last leg of negotiations between the government and the representatives of the six Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) are being conducted in Delhi and the Naga peace process is expected to conclude by October 31.

Background:

- The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) (NSCN-IM) — one of the largest Naga groups with which the Centre had signed a framework agreement on August 3, 2015 has been fighting for 'Greater Nagaland' or Nagalim — where it wants to extend Nagaland's borders by including Naga-dominated areas in neighbouring Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh — to unite 1.2 million Nagas.
- NSCN-IM has also demanded a separate flag and constitution for the Nagas.
- NSCN-IM signed a Ceasefire agreement with the Centre in 1997.
- Interlocutor R.N. Ravi inks framework agreement in 2015. Also signs Preamble in 2017 with six Naga National political groups to continue discussions for finding a solution to the issue.

Government's Move:

- The Centre has ruled out any disintegration of the States of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur in order to merge the Naga-inhabited areas with the existing State of Nagaland.
- The interlocutor has ruled out a separate flag and Constitution for the Nagas.
- The administrations in Nagaland and Manipur are bracing for the possible challenges in the aftermath of the declaration of peace accord.
- People have cautioned against hoarding fuel and essential commodities. Stating that no price enhancements of any commodity will be allowed in the name of scarcity. Additional forces are on stand by and the medical staff are kept ready for any emergency.

Way forward:

- To find a solution to the decades-old Naga issue is in the interest of both the Nagas as well as the Centre. It will help India address a decades old Security issue on the one hand while it will bring in the much needed growth in the region.
- Geo-political situation demands the Nagas are to be pragmatic and realistic in their negotiations with Government of India. There is scope for regional autonomy as per the Indian constitution but there is no scope for secessionism.
- The peace accord must safeguard Naga's right to self-determination. The unresolved contentious issues must be pursued earnestly post-solution, politically and democratically.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. New class of quantum materials for clean energy technology

Context:

The research in the emerging field of Semi- Dirac materials have yielded interesting results of interest for human utility.

Details:

- The term Dirac matter refers to a class of condensed matter systems which can be effectively described by the Dirac equation. Dirac metals differ from normal metals in that the energy carried depends linearly on the momentum of the transfer medium. This difference is responsible for their unique properties. The velocities of the energy carriers can be over a100 times more than normal metals, thus increasing the mobility and currents that can be carried across devices made of these so-called Dirac materials.
- Semi-Dirac metals behave like Dirac metals in one direction and like normal metals in the perpendicular directions (since their microscopic structure is different along the two directions). In the semi-Dirac metals, the properties are direction dependent. Direction-dependence of the microscopical properties gives the material special optical properties.
- Research has discovered special properties in a class of materials called “semi-Dirac metals”. Examples of semi-Dirac metals are systems such as TiO₂/V₂O₃ nanostructures.
- A very high optical conductivity of semi-Dirac materials for electromagnetic waves [light waves] of a specific frequency and specific polarization has been observed. Optical conductivity is a measure of the opacity offered by the material to the passage of light through it.
- Semi-Dirac materials can display such thermoelectric properties. Thermoelectricity is a clean energy technology that uses waste heat to produce electricity typically in low power applications.

Significance:

- With the advent of man-made 2D materials, the directional properties have become quite tailorable in what comprises the active field of quantum materials. The materials can be tailored for utility.
- There are many known applications for transparent conducting films – the common example being touch screens used in mobiles.
- The Thermoelectric technology is used in efficient cars, where it is used to keep lights on and to warm seats. Space crafts like Voyager which are too far from the sun to use solar energy can make use of thermoelectricity.

Conclusion:

This new work in the emerging field of semi-dirac material paves the way for experimental studies on realising the potential benefits of this technology.

Category: AGRICULTURE

1. Assam tea growers may take AI route to recovery

Context:

India’s oldest tea company has begun the process of deploying artificial intelligence (AI) to help take the industry to a sustainable future.

Background:

- The tea industry is currently going through a “bad patch” because of falling prices of tea, rising cost of production due to non-availability of sufficient labour in this labour intensive industry and aged tea bushes.
- The present attempt is hoping that technology would help add value to the tea industry that is currently going through a bad phase.

Details:

- The proposal includes developing two types of drones — one that analyses plant health, soil conditions and other natural factors and the other that sprays fertilizers or targets pests from 6-8 ft with precision so that other bushes are not affected.
- Drones can address shortage of workers as well as spray hazardous pesticides with precision.
- Investing in robotic drones for precision treatment of a diseased tea bush and implanting molecular markers in leaves to develop traits for mass production. Such markers control the genes of a plant for developing resistance to pests and diseases, improving the quality and quantity of the yield.

Concerns:

- The move might lead to large scale retrenchment of labourers in this labour intensive field.
- There are challenges in replicating the AI, deployed in farming in developed nations, for use in the tea sector. Initial cost and Technical capability are impeding factors.
- The technology to implant molecular or genetic markers in plants is existent but tea is a new area for this technology.

Conclusion:

- The “embrace” of cutting-edge technology in the tea industry must be encouraged and should be aimed at dealing with a shortage of farmhands and ensuring a scenario where workers find it more remunerative to return to the plantations.
- One should look at the technology as taking care of cancer and tuberculosis-causing jobs such as spraying of fertilizers and pesticides but not as a replacement of the workers who would be absorbed in other more productive and safer jobs.
- There have been successful examples where AI has uplifted lives of the workers besides maximizing production efficiencies.
- Technology supported agriculture must be the way forward for the vision of doubling farmers income.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

1. Why have the Naga peace talks stumbled?

Context:

Following the long protracted negotiations between the Centre and the Nagas, a final peace agreement is expected soon.

Timeline of the Naga movement:

- The Naga Hills became part of British India in 1881. IN 1918, the Naga club was formed to bring unity among the Naga tribes.
- Since 1929, The Naga club has advocated for complete autonomy for the Nagas and had also petitioned the Simon commission in 1929 to leave the Naga inhabited territories to their own faith and not to club it with the larger Indian Territory.
- The Naga club metamorphosed into the Naga National Council (NNC) in 1946. Under the leadership of Angami Zapu Phizo, the NNC declared Nagaland as an independent State on August 14, 1947, and conducted a “referendum” in May 1951 to claim that 99.9% of the Nagas supported a “sovereign Nagaland”.
- In June 1947, Assam Governor Sir Akbar Hydari signed the Nine-Point Agreement with the moderates in the NNC but Phizo rejected it outright.
- On March 22, 1952, Phizo formed the underground Naga Federal Government (NFG) and the Naga Federal Army.
- The government of India sent in the Army to crush the insurgency and, in 1958, enacted the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act.
- A 16-point Agreement followed in July 1960 leading to the creation of Nagaland on December 1, 1963. The agreement was with the Naga People’s Convention that moderate Nagas formed in August 1957 during a violent phase and not with the NNC.
- In April 1964, a Peace Mission was formed for an agreement on suspension of operations with the NNC, but it was abandoned in 1967 after six rounds of talks. The insurrection petered out by the mid-1970s.
- The Shillong Accord of November 11, 1975, followed, under which a section of NNC and NFG agreed to give up arms. A group of 140 members led by Mr. Muivah, who was in China then, refused to accept the Shillong Accord and formed the NSCN in 1980. The outfit split in 1988 with one faction led by Mr. Muivah the other by the Myanmar-based Khaplang.
- NSCN-IM signed a Ceasefire agreement with the Centre in 1997.
- Interlocutor R.N. Ravi inks framework agreement in 2015. Also signs Preamble in 2017 with six Naga National political groups (NNPG’s) to continue discussions for finding a solution to the issue.

Background:

- The Centre’s push for a solution to the vexed issue by October 2019 and the non-flexibility of the Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) on the “Naga national flag” and “Naga Yezhabo (constitution) have delayed the peace settlement.
- Nagaland Governor and also the Naga talks interlocutor R.N. Ravi has blamed the NCSN-IM for the “procrastinating attitude” it has adopted to delay the settlement by dragging in the Framework Agreement to impute “imaginary contents” to it.
- **Framework Agreement:**
- N. Ravi and NSCN-IM general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah signed the Framework Agreement on August 3, 2015 in the presence of the PM.
- The government sought to fast-track the Naga political issue that had slackened since the NSCN-IM-declared truce in 1997.
- This agreement, after nearly 80 rounds of talks, seemed to be heading in the right direction with both parties being optimistic of the process.
- The Central government’s move to bring in other Naga armed groups on board the peace talks though well intentioned had a bad effect on the process. It bred suspicion about Delhi exploiting divisions within the Nagas on tribal and geopolitical lines.

- An agreement on the political parameters of the settlement was worked out with the Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs), in 2017.

Impediments to Peace settlement:

- Non-flexibility of the NSCN-IM on the issue of a separate flag and constitution have delayed the peace settlement.
- Internal divisions in the Naga society. While the NNPGs want a solution for Nagas within Nagaland, the NSCN-IM seeks integration of Naga-inhabited areas beyond the geographical boundary of Nagaland.
- Suspicion among the Nagas about Delhi trying to exploit divisions within the Nagas on tribal and geopolitical lines. New Delhi's efforts to bring all the armed groups to the negotiating table has led to this speculation as the different armed groups have different interests being pursued.
- Speculation among the Naga society that the Central government may renege on the principles of "shared sovereignty" for co-existing as two separate identities as was stated in the framework agreement. This has been fuelled by the Nationalism driven policies of the Centre like the abrogation of Art 370 and the call for "one nation, one constitution".
- The demands for greater Nagaland or Nagalim from the NSCN-IM is bound to lead to redrawing of the state boundaries in the north east. As the final peace deal could yield a pan-Naga cultural entity and territorial councils beyond Nagaland. The territorial integrity of the neighbouring states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur are bound to be redrawn and hence are wary of a peace settlement. Manipur has issued a strong statement against any move which would compromise Manipur's territorial integrity.
- The peace settlement would lead to counter movements from other groups in the region and hence the need for a well deliberated agreement considering the views of all stakeholders.

Way forward:

- To find a solution to the decades-old Naga issue is in the interest of both the Nagas as well as the Centre. It will help India address a decades old Security issue on the one hand while it will bring in the much needed growth in the region.
- Geo-political situation demands the Nagas to be pragmatic and realistic in their negotiations with Government of India. There is scope for regional autonomy as per the Indian constitution. The principles of "shared sovereignty" for co-existing as two separate identities is possible under the Indian Constitution. But there is no scope for secessionism.
- The peace accord must safeguard Naga's right to self-determination. The unresolved contentious issues must be pursued earnestly post a peace settlement, politically and democratically.

Category: ENVIRONMENT

1. How green are Deepavali crackers?

Context:

In a landmark judgment, the Supreme Court of India mandated the use of green crackers for Deepavali and also issued a set of guidelines for sale and use of firecrackers.

Background:

- Traditionally, firecrackers have been made with barium nitrate, antimony and a range of metals that, over the years, have been linked to respiratory diseases and even cancer.

- The ban in October 2018 came on the basis of a petition filed in 2015, by a few infants through their parents on the basis of their right to a clean environment which flows from their right to life via Article 21.

Details:

- Green crackers are basically fireworks without barium nitrate. The Nagpur-based NEERI has been successful in substituting barium nitrate with potassium nitrate and zeolite.
- 'Green' crackers have a small shell size compared to traditional crackers. They are produced using less harmful raw materials and have additives which reduce emissions by suppressing dust. These are milder avatars of traditional firecrackers in terms of the sound and smoke generated when burnt.
- Green crackers don't contain banned chemicals such as lithium, arsenic, barium and lead. They are called Safe Water Releaser (SWAS), Safe Thermite Cracker (STAR) and Safe Minimal Aluminium (SAFAL) crackers.
- Green crackers release water vapour and don't allow the dust particles to rise. They are designed to have 30% less particulate matter pollution.

Concerns:

- The ban on crackers has meant a shortage of unskilled labour which is the mainstay of the industry. Also several manufacturers got the legal go-ahead to make the Green crackers only in May 2019. This will not give the manufacturers enough time to make and supply crackers across the country for Deepavali. The supply chains are not yet adapted green crackers.
- The reach of the 'green crackers' has been limited. Given the very few companies manufacturing it. This is bound to increase the costs of the firecrackers and affect the affordability.
- Lack of legal clarity on a sub-category of green crackers called "improved crackers", which uses barium nitrate but in extremely reduced amounts. The harmful effects are limited as compared to traditional crackers. The Supreme Court is yet to take a decision on whether to allow them. This uncertainty will lead to lack of clarity among the buyers and sellers.
- There is always the risk of counterfeit crackers going on sale in the lack of strict enforcement.
- The size of the cracker market is reportedly valued at around ₹1,800 crore and is expected to take a severe hit this year.
- The livelihood opportunities of the people employed in this sector is bound to be hurt during this transitional phase.
- In spite of the SC guidelines being in force even last year, revellers burst crackers wantonly, around the country. Lack of enforcement agencies capacity and will to enforce the SC guidelines led to numerous violations of the guidelines.
- Although it has been claimed that green crackers result in 30% reduction in emissions, these numbers have been computed in a laboratory setting and not been verified in real world conditions.
- Lack of awareness of the issue of pollution has led to lackadaisical attitude among the public regarding the SC guidelines.

Way forward:

- The above case illustrates the importance of generating public opinion and spreading awareness on the relevant issues along with suitable alternative for the successful implementation of any desirable change in society. Educating the public on the harmful effects of firecrackers would be more effective than policing to regulate the use of firecrackers.
- A bottom up approach would be more efficient and less destructive while initiating changes.
- Air pollution is a serious challenge for India and this positive guideline is a step in the right direction to address this issue. The changed times require some changes in cultural practices too. Initiatives like the Laser show dubbed the electric Diwali are positive developments.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. The world of mimic organs

Context:

The ongoing Research in the field of Organoids.

Background:

- Organoids are a group of cells grown in laboratories into three-dimensional, miniature structures that mimic the cell arrangement of a fully-grown organ.
- They are tiny organ-like structures that do not achieve all the functional maturity of human organs but often resemble the early stages of a developing tissue.
- Organoids are grown in the lab using stem cells that can become any of the specialised cells seen in the human body, or from induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSC).
- Stem cells are provided with nutrients and other specific molecules to grow and become cells resembling a specific organ.
- The growing cells are capable of self-organizing into cellular structures of a specific organ and can partly replicate complex functions of mature organs like physiological processes of regeneration.
- Organoids of the brain, small intestine, kidney, heart, stomach, eyes, liver, pancreas, prostate, salivary glands, and inner ear have already been developed in the laboratory.

Significance of Organoids:

- Since the use of embryonic stem cells to grow organs has been banned, researchers have turned to generating organoids using stem cells. Since the organoids closely resemble mature tissues, it opens up new vistas like studying the complex arrangements of cells in three-dimension and their function in detail, and understanding how cells assemble into organs
- Organoids can be used to study the safety and efficacy of new drugs and also test the response of tissues to existing medicines.
- Organoids will bring precision medicine closer to reality by developing patient-specific treatment strategies by studying which drugs the patient is most sensitive to.
- The traditional approach of the use of animals during drug development studies is becoming increasingly difficult, the focus has been on refining, reducing and replacing them. The use of organoids will eliminate the need for animal sampling studies.
- Scientists have been increasingly using human cell lines to replace animal testing but this approach cannot mimic the whole organ system and hence the results obtained would have limited accuracy. Organoids are a far superior alternative to cell lines.
- Organoids offer new opportunities to studying proteins and genes that are critical for the development of an organ. This helps in knowing how a mutation in a specific gene causes a disease or disorder. Researchers have used brain organoids to study how the Zika virus affects brain development in the embryo.
- Scientists have developed the ability to grow organoids using cancer stem cells which has allowed the researchers to study the genes, proteins and signalling pathways that cancer cells use to develop and grow. This can help understand Cancer better and could possibly lead to the development of its treatment.

Challenges:

- The Organoids do not achieve the functional maturity of human organs but often resemble the early stages of a developing tissue. Hence the results obtained in the organoids cannot be guaranteed in the real organs.
- Growing organoids poses certain ethical challenges. The developments in the field have got us perilously close to growing mini-brains or organoids in the laboratory that can perceive or feel things. The use of such bodies which can perceive and feel things for research purpose poses an ethical challenge.

F. Tidbits

1. Guidelines to stop misuse of social media

- The government is drafting guidelines under Section 79 of the Information Technology Act that will bind companies such as Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube and Facebook to respond to complaints over content in a “few hours” as against the current norm of 36 hours.
- This is necessary in order to fight the menace of fake news over social media. Companies will also be required to have grievance officers stationed in India. The new intermediary guidelines under Section 79 of the Information Technology Act will also require companies to respond to complaints from not just courts and government entities, but also the general public.

2. Prahari scheme

Delhi Police launched Prahari scheme to prevent crime. It is basically a community policing scheme. Under this scheme, civil personnel such as chowkidars and security guards deployed in the commercial and VIP areas will act as the eyes and ears of the police.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Cyclone Kyaar likely to hit south Gujarat, Saurashtra

Ahmedabad Parts of south Gujarat and Saurashtra are likely to receive light to moderate rains over the next four days with cyclonic storm “Kyaar” hovering over the Arabian Sea.

2. Disabled people can now vote via postal ballots

The disabled and people over 80 years of age can now cast their vote through postal ballot, the government said on Saturday, in a move that will help increase voter turnout. At present, voting through postal ballot is available to armed forces and those assigned poll duties.

3. Institutes of Eminence

- Institutes of Eminence (IoE) is a scheme of excellence for higher education institutes in India, set by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 2017. It aims to help 20 higher education (10 public and 10 private) institutions from country break into top 500 global rankings in 10 years, and then eventually break into top 100 over time.
- These selected institutions will have greater autonomy compared to other higher education institutions, both administratively (e.g. setting fees) and academically, and will enjoy collaboration opportunities with global universities.

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Which of the following statements are correct regarding the National Green tribunal (NGT) ?

1. Established via the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010 of the Parliament of for the expeditious disposal of the cases pertaining to environmental issues.
2. The Tribunal shall not be bound by the procedure laid down under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, but shall be guided by principles of natural justice.
3. India is the third country following Australia and New Zealand to have such a system.

Options:

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

Answer: b

Explanation: All statements are correct.

Q2. Which of the following statements are correct regarding Sarus crane?

1. It is the tallest of all the flying birds.
2. It is endemic to the Indian sub-continent.
3. Unlike many other cranes that make long migrations, Sarus cranes are largely nonmigratory.
4. The Sarus crane is classified as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.

Options:

- a. 1 and 2
- b. 1, 2 and 3
- c. 1, 2, 3 and 4
- d. 1, 3 and 4

Answer: d

Explanation: Sarus cranes are found in parts of the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, and Australia.

Q3. Which of the following statements are correct regarding POCSO act?

1. Recent amendments have included the provision of death penalty for aggravated sexual assault on children.
2. The Bill provides for levying fines and imprisonment to curb child pornography.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation: Self-explanatory.

Q4. Which of the following statements are correct with regard to the SC guidelines on crackers?

1. These guidelines are valid only for the NCR where severe air pollution is a grave concern.
2. The Guidelines prohibits bursting of crackers in and around 100 mts from hospital, educational institutes, religious institutions and courts.

Options:

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

Answer: b

Explanation: These guidelines are applicable throughout the country and not just NCR. However the states are allowed to make suitable modifications while implementing.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. With the Naga peace process moving towards the last leg elucidate the importance of an early settlement of the decade's old issue. Discuss the key demands of the Centre and the Nagas. (250 words, 15 marks)
2. In the backdrop of the SC guidelines on crackers in India, discuss the progress made in this regard and the challenges in their implementation. (150 words, 10 marks)

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