

25 Nov 2019: Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Category: GEOGRAPHY

1. Centre nudging M.P., U.P. on Ken-Betwa

Context:

The delay in the Ken-Betwa river interlinking project.

Details:

The central government has said it is pushing Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh to make progress on the Ken-Betwa river interlinking project.

Background:

- The **Ken-Betwa river interlinking project** involves transferring surplus water from the **Ken River in Madhya Pradesh to the Betwa in Uttar Pradesh** through the use of a concrete canal and

irrigate 3.64 lakh hectares in the **Bundelkhand region** of both States, which is one of the worst drought-affected areas in India.

- A **tripartite Memorandum of Understanding** was signed between the Centre and the governments of UP and MP for the project. It will meet irrigation purposes, drinking water and electricity needs of 6 districts in both the states.
- The ₹18,000 crore project has been mired in several controversies.
 - Nearly 8,650 hectares of forest land including part of Panna National Park in Madhya Pradesh will be submerged if the project is to become a reality. It will also have an adverse impact on tiger reserves and wildlife sanctuaries in the region. This has led to widespread opposition from conservationists.
 - There have been disagreements between the two state governments. The most recent one is a disagreement between the States on the share of water. While there is a 2005 agreement between the two States on how water would be shared, Madhya Pradesh says these assumptions are no longer valid and the only way to meet the increased water requirements would be to include local management projects — the Kotha barrage, Lower Orr and Bina complex that were envisaged in the second phase of the project — in the first phase. This would increase project costs.
 - The project has been delayed due to political and environmental issues.

Way forward:

- The government must pursue the interlinking programme in a consultative manner. Efforts have to be made by the Central government for generating consensus between the concerned States given the potential benefits of the given project.
- The formation of a **river basin authority** would act as the cooperating and coordinating authority between the two riparian states and will help in accelerating the progress of the report.

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. NSO survey debunks Swachh Bharat ODF claims

Context:

NSO survey on sanitation coverage in India.

Details:

- The latest [National Statistical Office](#) (NSO) survey on sanitation debunked the claims of an open defecation-free or ODF India made by the Centre's flagship **Swachh Bharat scheme**, although it did record **great progress in toilet access and use in rural areas**.
- The survey was carried out between July and December 2018.
- On October 2, 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared that the whole country was ODF with complete access to toilets.
- In the first week of October 2018, the [Swachh Bharat Abhiyan](#) (Grameen) said 25 States and Union Territories had been declared ODF, while toilet access across the country touched 95%.
- Large States which had been declared ODF — that is, 100% access to toilets and 100% usage — even before the survey began included Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan. Others that were declared ODF during the survey included Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

- The survey showed that about 71% of rural households had access to toilets at a time when the Centre was claiming 95% had access.

Concerns:

- According to the NSO, almost 42% of the rural households in Jharkhand had no access to a toilet at the time of the survey. In Tamil Nadu, the gap was 37%, followed by 34% in Rajasthan.
- In Gujarat, which was one of the earliest States declared ODF, back in October 2017, almost a quarter of all rural households had no toilet access, the NSO data showed.
- The other major States listed also had significant gaps: Karnataka (30%), Madhya Pradesh (29%), Andhra Pradesh (22%) and Maharashtra (22%).
- **The NSO said 28.7% of rural households had no toilet access at the time of the survey.**
- The NSO noted that there may be respondent bias in the reporting of access to latrine as the question on benefits received by the households from government schemes was asked prior to the question on the access of households to a latrine.

Positives:

- The **71% access to toilets** was still a **significant improvement** over the situation during the last survey period in 2012, when only 40% of the rural households had access to toilets.
- The NSO's **statistics on toilet usage** were also encouraging. It said **95%** of people with access to toilets in rural India used them regularly, indicating that the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan's efforts to change behaviour had borne fruit.
- Only 3.5% of those with toilet access in rural India said they never used them.

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. HC lays stress on mediation to reduce backlog of cases

Context:

With the number of pending litigations before it touching 2.29 lakh, the Calcutta High Court is stressing on **alternative dispute redressal mechanism** like mediation to reduce the backlog.

Details:

- The Calcutta High Court is encouraging litigants involved in various disputes, from commercial to matrimonial issues, to go for mediation to resolve their differences, instead of fighting their cases in the courts that may take a long time before any outcome is reached.
- **Mediation is an effective alternative dispute redressal system** between contesting litigants, where parties can settle their differences in a win-win situation.
- Though the **Arbitration and Conciliation Act** has been in place since 1996, giving settlement of disputes through mediation a legal sanction, it has not been quite popular among the people, mainly owing to a lack of knowledge about it.

Way forward:

- There is a need to **raise awareness among all kinds of stakeholders** in the field of mediation regarding the Arbitration and Conciliation Act and the potential benefits of mediation. The awareness programmes will help sensitise people at the grass-root level.
- The concept of pre-litigation mediation in the field of commercial and matrimonial disputes needs to be considered.
- Augmenting the process of mediation will help bring down the ever-increasing pile of pending cases.

2. Floor test plea: SC wants Governor's order, Fadnavis letter

Context:

Shiv Sena-NCP-Congress combine approached the Supreme Court for an immediate floor test.

Background:

- There was a political crisis in Maharashtra, following the Legislative Assembly election over the formation of a new state government. No political party was able to prove its majority in the Assembly.
- On 12 November, the Governor recommended imposing the **President's Rule** to the Council of Ministers of India and the President, which was accepted and President's Rule was imposed in the state.
- On 23 November 2019, in the early hours, the President's rule was revoked and the Bharatiya Janta Party led by Devendra Fadnavis formed the government with the help of a faction of the Nationalist Congress Party led by Ajit Pawar.
- The government formation was challenged by other parties which moved the Supreme Court regarding the **discretion of the state Governor** in inviting BJP to form the government. Shiv Sena has also requested the Supreme Court to order the new government to prove majority in the Legislative Assembly.

Details:

- The Supreme Court put on hold a plea for ordering a floor test in the Maharashtra Assembly till it examined records that might shed light on what led the Governor to invite BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis to form the government and later swear him in as the Chief Minister on November 23.
- A three-judge Bench, requested the Solicitor General, in his capacity as the Centre's law officer, to place on record before the court, the letter of Mr. Fadnavis to the Governor staking claim to form the government.
- The Solicitor General was also asked to produce the Governor's order of November 23.
- The court rejected the Solicitor General's plea for more time to produce the documents.

Category: HEALTH

1. U.P. primary health centres ailing, Centre says in LS

Context:

Reply given by the Union Health Ministry in the Lok Sabha on the question of shortage of doctors and the state of infrastructure in primary health centres (PHCs).

Details:

- Facing a shortfall of 2,277 doctors, Uttar Pradesh's **primary health centres (PHCs), the backbone of health delivery**, have the worst **patient-doctor ratio**.
- The States that have shown poor PHC ratings include Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Karnataka and Bihar, as per the **Rural Health Statistics, 2018**, quoted by the Ministry.
- With 942 of these primary health centres (PHCs) working without electricity, regular water supply or all-weather motorable approach roads, the State's PHCs have the worst infrastructure in the country. The States that have poor infrastructure based on the same parameters include Jammu and Kashmir, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Assam and Uttarakhand.
- In its reply, the Ministry noted that **public health and hospitals being a State subject**, all administrative and personnel matters, including recruitment of doctors at the PHCs, lie with the State governments. The shortage of doctors in public health facilities varies from State to State, depending on their policies and context.

Concerns:

- Health is a fundamental human right and a global social goal. It is pertinent for the realization of basic human needs and for a better quality of life.
- Health is a causative factor that affects a country's aggregate level of economic growth. Since development is a consequence of good health, even the poorest developing countries should make it a priority to invest in the health sector. Unfortunately, health has been poorly invested in India and the health sector especially PHCs still remain largely untapped and continue to suffer neglect.
- India's rank in the **Human Development Index Report 2018 (130 out of 189 countries)** issued by the UNDP depicts the level of ignorance of the health sector in India.

Measures taken:

- Under the **National Health Mission (NHM)**, financial and technical support is provided to the States and Union Territories to strengthen their healthcare systems, including support for recruitment of doctors on contract, based on the requirements posed by them in their Programme Implementation Plans (PIPs) within their overall resource envelope.
- Measures to improve the availability of doctors through the establishment of new government colleges and increasing of seats at existing government medical colleges under a **Centrally sponsored scheme** and rationalisation of norms for government medical colleges in terms of faculty and land have been done.
- The number of MBBS seats have been increased by more than 29,000 in the past five years.
- Under the Budget announcement of 2017-18, **5 lakh sub-health centres and PHCs were being transformed into health and wellness centres under Ayushman Bharat** for the provision of **comprehensive primary care** that includes **preventive healthcare and health promotion at the community level with a continuum-of-care approach**.

C. GS 3 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

D. GS 4 Related

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. The broken promise of decent and fair wages

Context:

Government's draft rules to the **Labour Code on Wages Act 2019**.

Concerns:

- It was expected that the draft rules to the Act would be a 'game-changer' to the status quo as far as the lives of workers in the informal sector are concerned.
- It was believed that **informal workers who account for 93% of the total working population and contribute to over 60% of India's GDP** had finally been acknowledged for their contributions to the nation-building process.
- An in-depth reading of the draft rules does not match this glorious picture and has in effect, by creating a façade of false promises, struck a blow against the aspirations of millions of workers in the informal sector.

Failure to consider a living wage:

- It was expected that the rules would have considered the Supreme Court of India's landmark jurisprudence in the '**Raptakos**' case (1991) which advocated the **concept and the right of a living wage**.
- '**Need-Based Minimum Wage**' is a Supreme Court jurisprudence (covering nutrition, health care, education, housing and provisions for old age as well). Therefore it was expected that in the draft rules, it would have been treated as a fundamental constitutional right for every citizen of India.
- The proposed framework to determine wage will continue pushing 'starvation wages' in India. This has been done by proposing the **concept of a floor wage**: in the draft rules.
- In effect, this would mean that "**starvation wages**" which currently guarantees just ₹178 per day, will continue to exist and this government, like the ones preceding it will not go beyond offering the minimum needs of life (food, clothing and housing).
- One can imagine the plight of workers by just looking at the **recently reported "Consumer Expenditure Survey"** result; it shows the average family expenditure in rural areas to be ₹83 per day, and in urban areas as ₹134. These figures show how workers will continue to live in exploitative and marginalised conditions, where their constitutional right to a fair wage will be infringed upon by employers and the state.

Implementational challenges:

- The concept and intention of floor wage in the draft rule only reiterate archaic principles which were echoed by the Constitutional Bench of Supreme Court in *U. Unichoyi And Others vs. The State Of Kerala*.

- In the above case, the court remarked, “In an underdeveloped country which faces the problem of unemployment on a very large scale, it is not unlikely that labour may offer to work even on starvation wages”.
- Unfortunately, this situation still prevails in India where the **labour market preys on the excess availability of workers** for whom living a precarious life is their permanent mode of existence.
- In such a situation, they continue to be lured to work at their will on less than minimum wages, and in exploitative conditions.
- A floor-level wage would only encourage and exacerbate this archaic practice and promote forced labour.

Labour inspection system:

- Another huge concern with the law is in its provision of an arbitrary deduction of wages (up to 50% of monthly wages) based on performance, damage or loss, advances, etc.
- In a country such as India, where employers, due to their higher social status, continue to exploit labour with impunity, this provision will only continue to push workers further into exploitative conditions, stamping on their bargaining power and rights of association.
- This will make the lives of workers worse as the draft rules do not clarify the governance and institutional structure for the “**labour inspection system**” in the law.
- The International Labour Organisation’s Labour Inspection Convention of 1947, ratified by India, provides for a well-resourced and independent inspectorate with provisions to allow thorough inspections and free access to workplaces. Ignoring these provisions, the draft rules propose another ad-hoc and unclear mechanism called the “inspection scheme”.
- In the absence of clarity in the draft rules, workers will not be able to demand even basic work rights in the fear of wage deductions and will continue to be oppressed and marginalised.

Conclusion:

- Working people who form the backbone of the Indian economy are a national asset and in view of the everyday survival and livelihood issues faced by millions of workers in India, due to their underprivileged social status and caste in comparison to that of employers and the state, a well defined Labour Code on Wages is the need of the hour.
- It is worth mentioning that the governments of Delhi and Kerala have not only managed to achieve a living wage jurisprudence in recent years but have also set the highest living wage in India (₹14,842 a month in Delhi and ₹600 a day in Kerala).
- Granting the **constitutional right of a guaranteed minimum wage** should be the way forward.
- Such a move will also **increase income capacity and the purchasing power of the informal workers** and offer **a way out of the crisis of the current economic slowdown**.

For more regarding this issue refer to the following articles:

Fixing a minimum wage - [Click here](#)

Unions upset over draft wage rules - [Click Here](#)

Category:INTERNAL SECURITY

1. An ill-advised proposal

Context:

Reports suggest that an attempt is underway to shift the operational control of Assam Rifles from the Army to the Home Ministry.

Details:

- In 2009, a draft Cabinet note for the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) was moved to amalgamate the **Assam Rifles, a paramilitary force**, with the **Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), a Central Armed Police Force**, and provide leadership from the police, replacing military leadership.
- This proposal was turned down by the CCS, understandably recognising the importance of the history and traditions of Assam Rifles, and the crucial role it continues to play in the security of the Northeast region.
- Since then, at least seven attempts have been made to target Assam Rifles in order to enlarge options for cadre management of police. Having failed to convince the discerning political leaders, the current effort is to hijack Assam Rifles by transferring its full control to the Home Ministry and replace Army officers with police officers.

Concerns:

- Downgrading Assam Rifles from its present status of paramilitary force by merging a part or whole of it with a Central Armed Police Force will not only impinge on national security but also affect the strength and morale of the force.

Operating in a sensitive region:

- A peep into the history of Assam Rifles shows that the force, created in 1835 to protect British interests in the Northeast, continues to operate in that region with the advantage of understanding the terrain and the people.
- Having participated in all the major wars and insurgency situations in the country, Assam Rifles has been awarded over 1,700 gallantry and distinguished service awards for its service to the nation. All this was possible due to the military training, ethos and leadership provided by Army officers since 1884.
- The Northeast is the most volatile and insurgency-affected region of India after Kashmir. Besides operating from within the region, militants surreptitiously operate from neighbouring countries by exploiting the free movement regime along the India-Myanmar border and inaccessible terrain. These borders, though settled, require specialised skills, not just mere policing functions.

Neighbouring countries' moves:

- Recently, China has brought its frontier troops, including those guarding its border with India, directly under the military command, removing civilian control over them. The India-Myanmar border, though manned by Myanmar's Border Guard Police, is also controlled by Myanmar's Army for conducting seamless operations against insurgent groups operating against the state. India is busy in divesting the Army of operational control of a force which has imbibed military ethos and special skills and handing it over to police officers to command.

The workload of ITBP:

- At present, **ITBP is guarding the 3,388 km India-Tibet border**; assigning them another 1,643 km of the India-Myanmar border will be a command and control nightmare for the Director-General of the ITBP.

Operational Challenges:

- The Assam rifles and the ITBP follow very different sets of rules, hierarchies and operating philosophies. A merger of the two would lead to operational challenges.

Wrong priorities:

- The proposed merger of ITBP with Assam Rifles is premised on the profile management of an already expanded IPS cadre. Shifting Assam Rifles under a cadre that is looking to just create career opportunities places personal interests over national security.

Way forward:

- A more viable alternative for the Home Ministry would be to look inwards and merge ITBP with the **Sashastra Seema Bal** to space out the almost continuous high altitude tenures of ITBP personnel. Since both are being led by police officers, internal management would be easier.
- It is advisable to maintain the status quo regarding the Assam rifles as it is prudent to have a **specialised counterinsurgency force**, which doubles as a reserve for conventional war. This is due to Assam Rifles' continued functioning, manning and training under the Army with a similar ethos and structure.

F. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Prelims Facts

1. Manipur, J&K top UAPA cases list

- More than 35% of the cases registered under the stringent [Unlawful Activities \(Prevention\) Act \(UAPA\)](#) were recorded in Manipur, show the National Crime Records Data (NCRB) provided by the Home Ministry in the Rajya Sabha.
- Under the UAPA, the investigating agency can file a charge sheet in a maximum of 180 days after the arrests and the duration can be extended further after intimating the court.
- The anti-terror Act has death penalty and life imprisonment as the maximum punishment.
- According to rules, the competent authority in the Home Ministry or the State government has to give sanction to file a charge sheet in seven days after being approached by the investigating agency.

2. Centre extends ban on Bodo insurgent group NDFB

- The Centre has extended the ban on the Assam-based Bodo insurgent group NDFB by five years.
- The NDFB was first declared an outlawed organisation in the 1990s. The National Democratic Front of Bodoland has been indulging in illegal and violent activities, intended to undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India in furtherance of its objective of achieving a separate Bodoland.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following pair is incorrectly matched?

- a. Panna National Park: Uttar Pradesh
- b. Anshi National Park: Karnataka
- c. Betla National Park: Jharkhand
- d. Kanger Ghati National Park: Chattisgarh

Answer: a

Explanation:

Panna National Park is a national park located in Panna and Chhatarpur districts of Madhya Pradesh in India.

Q2. Which of the following pairs is incorrectly matched?

- a. Par-Tapi Narmada Link Project: Maharashtra and Gujarat
- b. Mahanadi Godavari Link project: Odisha and Andhra Pradesh
- c. Ken Betwa Link Project: Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh
- d. Godavari-Cauvery link project: Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka

Answer: d

Explanation:

Godavari-Cauvery link project: Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

Q3. Which of the following publishes the Human development Report?

- a. World Bank
- b. United Nations Development Programme
- c. Amnesty International
- d. International development organization

Answer: b

Explanation:

The Human Development Report (HDR) is an annual report published by the Human Development Report Office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a statistic composite index of life expectancy, education, and per capita income indicators, which are used to rank countries into four tiers of human development. A country scores a higher HDI when the lifespan is higher, the education level is higher, and the gross national income GNI (PPP) per capita is higher.

Q4. Which of the following statements is/are correct regarding UAPA?

1. It allows the government to declare an individual a “terrorist” and also attach his or her properties even before trial.

2. Under the UAPA, the investigating agency can file a charge sheet in a maximum of 180 days after the arrests and the duration can be extended further after intimating the court.
3. The anti-terror Act has death penalty and life imprisonment as maximum punishment.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act is an Indian law aimed at the effective prevention of unlawful activities and associations in India. Its main objective was to make powers available for dealing with activities directed against the integrity and sovereignty of India.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Primary health care is the key to the attainment of the goal of “Health for All” and prosperity of the nation. Comment. Discuss the challenges to primary care in India. (150 words, 10 Marks)
2. Discuss the framework of the security forces in India. List the security agencies in India and their respective mandates. (150 words, 10 marks)