

24 Jan 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. A condemned man cannot fight death penalty endlessly: CJI

Context:

- Chief Justice of India (CJI) has stated that a condemned person cannot fight the death penalty endlessly and it is important for the capital punishment to reach its finality.
- The death penalty, he noted, cannot be questioned at every turn by the convict.

Background:

- The death row convicts in the Nirbhaya gangrape and murder case of 2012 have been filing review, curative and mercy petitions, which have delayed their hanging.
- The oral remarks came a day after the Centre filed an application, in the background of the Nirbhaya case, to modify a 2014 judgment of the court in the Shatrughan Chauhan case.

Cardinal duty:

- The CJI said it was not for a judge to forgive a crime.
- The cardinal duty of a judge was to see if the punishment was proportionate to the crime. The law applied whether the criminal was a first-timer or a hardened one.

2014 guidelines:

- The 2014 verdict had issued guidelines, which primarily held that an unexplained delay in carrying out an execution would lead to the commutation of the death penalty to life imprisonment.

Details:

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has sought a direction from the [Supreme Court](#) in fixing the deadline for filing of curative pleas after the rejection of review petitions.
- In its application, the government asked the court to set short deadlines for death row convicts to seek legal remedies.
- It wanted the court to limit the time for filing curative petitions. A mercy plea should be filed within a week of the issuance of the death warrant.

This topic has been covered in 23rd January Comprehensive News Analysis. [Click here](#) to read.

2. India slips two places on global corruption perception index

Context:

Transparency International has announced that India's ranking in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI-2019) has slipped from 78 to 80, compared to 2018.

Corruption Perceptions Index:

- The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) is an index published annually by Transparency International since 1995 which ranks countries by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, as determined by expert assessments and opinion surveys.
- The CPI generally defines corruption as the misuse of public power for private benefit.
- The 2019 CPI draws on 13 surveys and expert assessments to measure public sector corruption in various countries and territories, giving each a score from zero (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). It

was launched at the [World Economic Forum \(WEF\)](#) 2020.

Findings:

- India's score of 41 out of 100 remains the same. The global average for 2019 is 43.
- China has improved its position from 87 to 80 with a score of 41 out of 100.
- The top-ranked countries are New Zealand and Denmark, with scores of 87 each, followed by Finland (86), Singapore (85), Sweden (85) and Switzerland (85). The countries ranked at the bottom of the list are Somalia, South Sudan and Syria with scores of 9, 12 and 13. These countries are closely followed by Yemen (15), Venezuela (16), Sudan (16), Equatorial Guinea (16) and Afghanistan (16).
- In the Asia Pacific region, the average score is 45, after many consecutive years of an average score of 44, which illustrates general stagnation across the region.

Analysis:

- In the last eight years, only 22 countries significantly improved their CPI scores, including Greece, Guyana and Estonia. In the same period, among the 21 countries that saw a significant fall in their scores are Canada, Australia and Nicaragua. In the remaining 137 countries, the levels of corruption show little to no change.
- The report observed that, in democracies like India and Australia, unfair and opaque political financing, undue influence in decision-making and lobbying by powerful corporate interest groups, have resulted in stagnation or decline in the control of corruption.
- The CPI report has revealed that a majority of countries are showing little to no improvement in tackling corruption.
- Transparency International pointed out that their analysis also showed that corruption was more pervasive in countries where big money could flow freely into electoral campaigns and where governments listened only to the voices of wealthy or well-connected individuals.

Conclusion:

The CPI has been widely credited with putting the issue of corruption on the International Policy Agenda. It sends a powerful message and the governments are forced to acknowledge their scores and act on it. The governments must urgently address the corrupting role of big money in political party financing and the undue influence it exerts on the political systems.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. UN top court orders Myanmar to prevent Rohingya genocide

Context:

In a sweeping legal victory for members of the Rohingya Muslim minority, the United Nations' top court has ordered Myanmar to take all measures in its power to prevent genocide against the Rohingya people.

Background:

- The world court order for what it calls provisional measures came in a case brought by the African nation of Gambia on behalf of an organisation of Muslim nations that accuses Myanmar of genocide in its crackdown on the Rohingya.

- The hearings drew intense scrutiny as Myanmar's former pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi defended the campaign by military forces that once held her under house arrest for 15 years.
- Buddhist-majority Myanmar has long considered the Rohingya to be "Bengalis" from Bangladesh even though their families have lived in the country for generations. Nearly all have been denied citizenship since 1982, effectively rendering them stateless. They are also denied freedom of movement and other basic rights.
- In August 2017, Myanmar's military launched what it called a clearance campaign in northern Rakhine state in response to an attack by a Rohingya insurgent group. The campaign forced more than 700,000 Rohingya to flee to neighboring Bangladesh and led to accusations that security forces committed mass rapes, killings and burned thousands of homes.

Read more about the [Rohingya Issue in CNA dated 21 May 2019.](#)

Details:

- The court's President, Judge Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf, said the International Court of Justice "is of the opinion that the Rohingya in Myanmar remain extremely vulnerable".
- The court added that its order for so-called provisional measures intended to protect the Rohingya is binding and creates international legal obligations on Myanmar.
- Judges also ordered Myanmar to report to them in four months on what measures the country has taken to comply with the order and then to report every six months as the case moves slowly through the world court.

Conclusion:

- The ICJ order to Myanmar to take concrete steps to prevent the genocide of the Rohingya is a landmark step to stop further atrocities against one of the world's most persecuted people.
- The world court's orders are legally binding but it relies on the United Nations to add political pressure, if necessary, to enforce them.
- Concerned governments and U.N. bodies should now weigh in to ensure that the order is enforced as the genocide case moves forward.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. SEBI to tap artificial intelligence, big data analytics to curb market manipulations

Issue:

Systemic risks are becoming important objectives for financial regulators; it requires identification and monitoring of important financial institutions, leverage, inter-connectedness, risk concentrations and market sentiment. Catching malpractices in the market using the standard tools that analyse only structured data of price and volume is increasingly getting difficult.

Details:

- SEBI is acquiring capabilities to monitor and analyse social media posts to keep a tab on possible

market manipulation.

- It is said that the capabilities will involve the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), big data analytics and natural language processing tools to spot market manipulation.
 - AI/ML tools are being increasingly deployed in fund management, trading, supervision and surveillance functions in the capital markets.
 - AI (Artificial Intelligence) and ML (Machine Learning) tools have the potential to bring a paradigm shift in the securities market landscape; blockchain can be used in clearing and settlement activities.
- It was revealed that the new plan involves creating a “data lake” project to augment analytical capabilities.
- SEBI has also been keeping a watch on social media and there have been cases where social media posts have helped in acting against manipulative activities.

Conclusion:

There is a need for the technologists to invest time in research in these tools for applications in the capital markets.

Read more on [SEBI](#).

2. RBI reopens scheme for FPI investments in debt

Context:

- The Reserve Bank of India ([RBI](#)) has decided to reopen allotment of the investment limit under the revised Voluntary Retention Route (VRR) for debt investments by foreign portfolio investors (FPIs).
- Separately, the central bank has raised investment limit for FPIs in government and corporate bonds, in a move to attract more foreign funds into the country.
 - Short-term investments by an FPI into government securities and treasury bills can now be up to 30 percent of the total investment of an FPI compared to 20 percent earlier.
 - Similarly, the short-term investment limit by an FPI into corporate bonds has been raised to 30 percent of the investor’s total investment.
 - FPIs are also allowed to invest in exchange-traded funds that invest only in debt instruments.

Details:

- The investment limit under VRR has been increased to Rs. 1,50,000 crore from the Rs. 75,000 crore of the earlier scheme, with a minimum retention period of three years.
- FPIs that have been allotted investment limits under VRR may, at their discretion, transfer their investments made under the General Investment Limit to VRR.
- The route has seen considerable success, particularly in the corporate debt segment.

Voluntary Retention Route:

- In March 2019, the RBI introduced a separate channel, the ‘Voluntary Retention Route’, to enable FPIs to undertake long-term investments in the debt markets in India.
- Investments through VRR are free of the macro-prudential and other regulatory prescriptions applicable to FPI investments in debt markets, provided FPIs voluntarily commit to retaining a required minimum percentage of their investments in India for a particular period.

1. 644 extremists surrender in Assam

Context:

Altogether 644 extremists, belonging to eight banned outfits, surrendered at an official ceremony in Guwahati, Assam.

Details:

- The extremists deposited 177 firearms, 71 bombs and 52 grenades.
- This is significant for the State as well as Assam Police with such a large number of the militants joining the mainstream.

Rehabilitation programme:

- Assam has a rehabilitation programme for surrendered militants in place.
- They get financial assistance from the government and can also avail of a bank loan to start a business or invest the money in farming or entrepreneurship, according to officials.
- A screening committee comprising the civil administration, the police, the Army and other security agencies decide the eligibility for rehabilitation package.
- There have been reports of non-extremists becoming beneficiaries in order to show a certain number of “surrendered militants”.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category:INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. As India prepares to honour Bolsonaro

Context

- Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro will be the Chief Guest at India’s 71st Republic Day celebrations.

Bolsonaro and his policies

- Bolsonaro studied at Brazil’s prestigious military academies and served as a captain in the Army before moving to Rio and making his political career.

- The defining aspects of his administration have been a **strong inclination towards the U.S.** and damaging policies **affecting the Amazon rainforest**.
 - In foreign policy, his affiliation with the U.S. is driven by an admiration for President Donald Trump. **Brazil has been designated a ‘major non-NATO ally’**, a status held by close U.S. allies like Japan, Israel and South Korea.
 - On the Amazon delta, his policy has been to withdraw regulation and enforcement, facilitating the utilisation of the indigenous people’s land for the purposes of agri-business, mining and cattle-ranching.

Imbalance within BRICS

- BRICS was set up as a move towards greater multi-polarity; hence it has spread across three continents (Asia, Africa and South America) and both hemispheres (North and South).
- The BRICS combination **accounts for about one-third of global output**, but a glance at the GDP table and growth rates will show the infirmities of the group:
 - **In terms of GDP**, China occupies the second position; India the fifth; Brazil the ninth; Russia the 11th; and South Africa the 35th.
 - **In terms of growth rates**, China grew at 6%; India at 4.5%, Russia 1.7%, Brazil 1.2% and South Africa 0.1%.
 - Both politically and economically, Brazil and South Africa have been the laggards in recent years.
- Global rating agency Standard & Poor’s (S&P) has said that Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) as an economic grouping has lost relevance due to diverging long-term economic trajectory.
 - The better economic performance of China and India over the past two decades contrasts with disappointing results in Brazil, Russia, and South Africa.
- Each country has **different economic and political leverage**, and its own burden of domestic and external issues.
 - Their political regimes range from different types of democracy in Brazil, India and South Africa to Vladimir Putin’s oligarch system and Chinese Communist Party rule under a leader for life.
- Bolsonaro in the past was critical about China, but he had to share the stage with China’s head in the BRICS summit.

Achievements of the grouping

- The main achievement of BRICS is the **New Development Bank**, with each country **contributing equally to its equity**. The bank has so far financed over 40 projects at a cost of \$12 billion.
- The BRICS countries are also developing a **joint payments mechanism to reduce foreign trade settlements in U.S. dollars**.
- They share the benefits of autonomous decision making and the **group’s informal structure is an advantage for coordination among the most influential non-Western countries**.
- An offshoot of the group, **dealing with climate change**, is BASIC (BRICS without Russia), which met at the Spain conference and reiterated its support to the Paris Agreement.

Brazil India Relationship

- Brazil has agreed to waive visa requirements for Indian citizens.
- In recent years, Brazil and India have demonstrated an interest in **having a more decisive role in international institutions**, one that is proportional to their geographic size and share in world population. Both have **campaigning for a UN Security Council permanent seat**.
- Owing to their geographical significance and relative advantages, **Brazil in South America and India in South Asia** are also considered as “regional” powers that wield influence in their respective

neighborhoods.

- Their **foreign policy activism offers alternative narratives to those of the West** in the BRICS and IBSA, that provide a reference to their “**soft balancing**” strategy that resents the dominant views of the West.
- Brazil, like India, **was little receptive to China’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** and there is discussion in Brazil regarding China’s growing economic influence in South America.
- India’s trade with Brazil in 2018-19 stood at more than \$8 billion.
 - Top export items from India include organic chemicals, chemical-based products, and pharmaceuticals.

Conclusion

- The [BRICS](#) group can survive only if its members maximize their congruence to the extent possible, despite the **growing intensity of Sino-Russian ties**; the **pro-American leanings in Brazil**; the socio-economic difficulties of South Africa; and **India’s many difficulties with China**, including its abstention from the [Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership](#).
- India and Brazil have shown the desire to increase cooperation in diverse areas such as defense and agriculture. But the total two-way trade is at a paltry \$8 billion. Therefore both countries need to work on the economic front to bring a new optimism in their relationship.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Budgeting for jobs, skilling and economic revival

Context

- This article speaks about changes that need to be introduced in the upcoming [Budget 2020](#) to provide direction to India’s tottering economy and a boost to aggregate demand and investment.

A look at key stats

- The **unemployment** rate at 6.1% (Financial Year 2017-2018) is the highest in 45 years.
 - The rate for urban youth in the 15-29 years category is alarmingly high at 22.5%.
- The **Labour Force Participation Rate** has come down to 46.5% for the ‘15 years and above’ age category.
 - It is down to 37.7% for the urban youth.
- Even among those employed, a large fraction gets low wages and is stuck with ‘employment poverty’.

Structural factors

The **prolonged and ongoing slowdown** is the main reason behind the depressing employment scenario, though **several structural factors** have also contributed to the situation.

- The GDP growth for the second quarter of Financial Year 2019-2020 is 4.5%, the lowest in the last six years, for which a **decline in private consumption and investment** is the factor primarily responsible.
 - The **aggregate investment** stands at less than 30% of the GDP, a rate much lower than the 15-year average of 35%.
 - The capacity utilisation in the private sector is down to 70%-75%.

- **Private consumption**, which contributes nearly 55-60 per cent to India's GDP, has been slowing down.
- **Savings by household sector** – which are used to extend loans for investment – have gone down from 35% (FY12) to 17.2% (FY18).

Budget should focus on reviving demand to promote growth and employment.

- Schemes like **PM-KISAN** and **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)** are good instruments to boost rural demand.
- Farmers and landless laborers spend most of their income. This means that **income transfers to such groups will immediately increase demand.**
- Further, rural India consumes a wide range of goods and services; so, **if allocation and disbursement are raised significantly**, most sectors of the economy will benefit. And, the payoff will be immediate.
- **Rural unemployment can be reduced by raising budgetary allocation for irrigation projects and rural infrastructure** like roads, cold storage and logistical chains.
 - These facilities, along with a comprehensive **crop insurance scheme**, can drastically increase agricultural productivity and farmers' income.
- Moreover, by **integrating farms with mandis**, such investments will reduce wastage of fruits and vegetables, thereby leading to a decrease in the frequency of inflationary shocks and their impact.
- Boosting urban employment: In urban areas, **construction and related activities** are a source of employment for more than five crore people; across the country, the sector's employment figures are **second only to those of the agriculture sector.**
 - These projects, along with infrastructure, support 200-odd sectors, including core sectors like cement and steel.

Issues with the Real Estate Sector

Due to the crisis in the real estate and infrastructure sectors, construction activities have come to a grinding halt.

- At present, many **real-estate projects are caught up in legal disputes** — between home-buyers and developers; between lenders and developers; and between developers and law enforcement agencies like the Enforcement Directorate.
- The sector has an **unsold inventory of homes**, worth several lakh crores.
- Even worse, multiple authorities — the **Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA)**; the **National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)**; and the **many consumer courts** — have jurisdiction over disputes.

Consequently, restructuring and liquidation of bad projects are very difficult, and in turn, is a main source of the problem of Non-Performing Assets faced by the Non-Banking Financial Companies.

How to revive the demand for the housing sector?

- The Budget can **raise the limit for availing tax exemption on home loans.**
 - The ₹25,000-crore fund set up by the centre to bailout 1,600 housing projects should be put to use immediately.
 - The funds should be used to salvage all projects that are 80% complete and not under the liquidation process under the NCLT.
- Several additional measures can also help. For example, **there should be a single adjudication authority.**
- The multiplier effects of spending on infrastructure and housing in terms of higher growth and

employment are large and extensive. Therefore, the ₹102-lakh-crore National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) programme is a welcome step.

Action Plan for the Future

More than 60% of the planned investment is expected from the **private sector and the States**.

- **Private Sector:** Many infrastructure projects are **languishing due to regulatory hurdles and contractual disputes** between construction companies and government departments. As a result, infrastructure investment has come to be perceived as very risky.
 - This is the major reason behind the non-availability of private capital for infrastructure.
 - The government should standardize the regulatory uncertainty.
- The **State finances are shaky due to low GST collection**, the onus is on the Centre to ensure that the programme does not come a cropper.
 - The budgetary support to infrastructure will have to be much more than the NIP projection at 1.11% of the GDP.
- **Bidding and contracting for new roads, highways, railway tracks and urban development projects** is a lengthy process.
- This is also the reason why several infrastructure-linked ministries like those for civil aviation and roads have not been able to spend money allocated to them in the current fiscal year.
- Therefore, **rather than earmarking budgetary support for new projects, the focus should be on projects that are currently under implementation** so as to complete them as soon as possible.
- In addition to creating employment, timely completion of infrastructure projects will help increase the competitiveness of the economy.
- The distress among **Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)** is another area of concern.
 - For many products produced by these enterprises, the **GST rates are higher for inputs than the final goods**. Due to this anomaly, around ₹20,000 crore gets stuck with the government annually in the form of input tax credits.
 - This has increased the cost of doing business for SMEs, which employ over 11 crore people.
- Next, according to some estimates, there are **more than 22 lakh vacancies in various government departments**.
 - Such negligence is baffling when the unemployment among youth is very high.
 - The government should fill these vacancies.
- Job openings that arise in the private sector put a premium on practical skills and work experience.
 - So the government should provide affordable and good quality vocational training programmes.
 - The Budget should give tax incentives to companies and industrial units to encourage them to **provide internships and on-site vocational training opportunities**.

Conclusion

- It is high time these reforms are introduced in the upcoming budget to give a boost to multiple sectors in the economy.

[su_box title="National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP)" box_color="#7960a0" title_color="#ffffff"]

- It is estimated that India would need to spend \$4.5 trillion on infrastructure by 2030 to sustain its growth rate.
- The endeavour of the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP), is to make this happen in an efficient manner.
- NIP will enable a forward outlook on infrastructure projects which will create jobs, improve ease of

living, and provide equitable access to infrastructure for all, thereby making growth more inclusive.

Benefits

- **For Government:** Well-developed infrastructure enhances the level of economic activity, creates additional fiscal space by improving the revenue base of the government, and ensures quality of expenditure focused on productive areas.
- **For Developers:** Provides a better view of project supply, provides time to be better prepared for project bidding, and ensures enhanced access to sources of finance as a result of increased investor confidence.
- **For Banks/financial institutions (FIs)/investors:** Builds investor confidence as identified projects are likely to be better prepared, exposures less likely to suffer stress given active project monitoring, thereby less likelihood of NPAs.[/su_box]

Category:POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Needless impatience: On Centre's plea on death row convicts

Context

- The Supreme Court (SC) of India has upheld its decision of imposing the death penalty to the four convicts in the heinous 'Nirbhaya gang rape case'.
 - But a change in the date of the execution and the delay is seen as justice delayed.
- So the Ministry of Home Affairs essentially seeks the **incorporation of measures aimed at reducing the scope for death row convicts to adopt dilatory tactics**.

Guidelines given by the SC in Shatrughan Chauhan case

- Article 21 of the Constitution postulates that every human being has an inherent right to life and mandates that no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law.
- In line with this, the Supreme Court, in the **Shatrughan Chauhan case**, had stipulated that a convict must be given **14 days between being informed that his mercy plea has been rejected and his execution**.
- These guidelines were undoubtedly aimed at **protecting the constitutional rights of prisoners** in the context of a sound body of jurisprudence that maintains that such rights extend right up to the moment of their execution.
- Further, the 14-day time lag between the **closure of the clemency route and their hanging is aimed at preventing secret executions**.
 - The court was concerned about the right of the convicts' family members to be informed.
 - The court had stated that this period of 14 days would give a convict time to make "peace with God", accept his fate and prepare mentally.

Government View

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has informed the SC that convicts of heinous offences who are given a death sentence take refuge under this precedent and Article 21, and **thereby take the "judicial process for a ride"**.
- The government wants to make the guidelines **victim-centric, rather than convict-centric** as they are now.

- The **Ministry has requested the court to alter these guidelines** in a way that the convicts be bound to file a curative petition within a specific time period after the review petition is rejected.

Cases with multiple convicts

- The government has stated that if there are **multiple convicts of a crime in which the death sentence has been awarded**, the court should mandate the issuance of death warrant within seven days of the rejection of the mercy plea, and the execution should take place within seven days after the warrant is passed.
- This process, the government has urged, **should be irrespective of any other legal proceedings opted for by the co-convicts.**
- It has argued that when there are multiple convicts of the same crime awarded death penalty, the **delay tactic is visible when one convict files for review, others are advised not to opt for the same legal remedy** and wait until the first one exhausts his legal options.
 - The review petitions of the four convicts were filed in 2018 and 2019. Three of the petitions were rejected in 2018; the fourth in 2019.
 - Thereafter, only two convicts filed curative petitions, while the other two still haven't.

The following are the modifications sought:

- Declare that death row convicts can file a curative petition after the dismissal of review petition only within the time stipulated by the Court.
- Clarify that the mercy petition has to be filed within 7 days of the issuance of death warrant by the court.
- Direct that death warrant against a convict has to be executed within 7 days of rejection of mercy petition, regardless of the pendency of legal proceedings at the instance of co-convicts.

Conclusion

- The death penalty is about snatching the life of a person as per the procedure established by law. The death penalty is limited to the “rarest of rare” cases. Therefore, those facing the execution should be allowed to exhaust all possible remedies.

F. Tidbits

1. India helps Maldives tackle measles outbreak

- India has stepped in to help the Maldives tackle a recent outbreak of measles.
- The Indian Embassy in Male handed over 30,000 doses of measles and rubella (MR) vaccine to the Maldivian Health Ministry.
- The outbreak comes less than three years after the World Health Organisation declared the Maldives measles-free.

India-Maldives Ties:

New Delhi's bilateral ties with Male witnessed a significant shift after President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih was elected to office in 2018, following a tenuous relationship with his predecessor President Abdulla

Yameen's administration that New Delhi considered to be favouring stronger ties with China.

- The Indian government's initiative comes even as the two countries implement the Memorandum of Understanding on health cooperation — signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Male in June 2019.
- India is also helping to build a 100-bed Cancer Hospital in Hulhumale as part of its \$800 million Line of Credit to the island nation.

2. Nepal invites Modi, Imran for Sagarmatha Dialogue

What's in News?

Nepal has invited the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan along with several other heads of government and heads of state for the Sagarmatha Sambaad.

- It is the first-ever multi-stakeholder dialogue event in Nepal's recent history that will be attended by many global figures apart from the leaders of the member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation ([SAARC](#)).
- It is expected to be the biggest diplomatic initiative.
- Sagarmatha Sambaad will also highlight Nepal's ability to assert its point of view before the global audience with officials saying that they are expected to build the event as a global and regional diplomatic venue.

Significance:

- India and Pakistan have been caught up in a cycle of hostility, which had prevented Islamabad from hosting the SAARC Summit in 2016.
- The Kathmandu event aims to draw all the SAARC leaders and provide an opportunity to break the ice.
- India had accused Pakistan of cross border terrorism while boycotting the Islamabad summit leading to its cancellation.

3. Rising carbon dioxide levels may double floods

What's in News?

In a study titled "Impacts of Carbon Dioxide Emissions on Global Intense Hydro-meteorological Disasters", scientists have warned that the risk of extreme floods or storms could double every 13 years at the rate carbon-dioxide concentrations are building up in the atmosphere. The study also warns that this could spell a "catastrophe" for India.

- The number of intense hydro-meteorological disasters could increase by 5.4% annually for an average country facing annually nearly one extreme disaster (defined as one that causes 100 or more fatalities and/or affects 1,000 or more people).
- India faces 5-10 times as many extreme events as the average country.
- One more extreme event in India [such as the Kerala floods of 2018 that killed at least 400] would strain the ability of the country to cope, it has warned.

4. Indian nurse tested positive for coronavirus in Saudi Arabia not infected with Wuhan strain

What's in News?

An Indian nurse working in Saudi Arabia has tested positive for a coronavirus, but with a different strain from the one that has claimed several lives in China.

- The Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) was first identified in Saudi Arabia in 2012.
- The 2019 Wuhan coronavirus is a novel one, meaning a member of the coronavirus family that has never been encountered before.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Awards in disaster management announced

Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar

- Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar is awarded for contribution in the field of disaster management.
- The award is announced every year on January 23, the birth anniversary of [Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose](#).
- This year, 330 nominations were received and the final decision was taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

What's in News?

- Mr. K M Singh who has been selected for the award is a founder member of the National Disaster Management Authority. He is known for his work during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.
- Disaster Mitigation and Management Centre in Uttarakhand has also been chosen for the award.
- In 2019, the 8th Battalion of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) located in Ghaziabad was selected for its commendable work in disaster management.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following is/are the publication/s of Transparency International?

1. Corruption Perceptions Index
2. Democracy Index
3. Global Corruption Barometer

Choose the correct option:

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

d. 1 and 3 only

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Transparency International publishes Global Corruption Barometer and the Corruption Perceptions Index.
- The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) is an index published annually by Transparency International since 1995 which ranks countries by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, as determined by expert assessments and opinion surveys.
- The Global Corruption Barometer published by Transparency International is the largest survey in the world tracking public opinion on corruption.
- The Democracy Index is an index compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), a UK-based company. It intends to measure the state of democracy in various countries.

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to International Court of Justice (ICJ) :

1. It has the jurisdiction to deal with applications only from states, non-governmental organizations, corporations or any other private entity but not individuals.
2. It can Suo Motto take up disputes between states.
3. Judgments delivered by the Court are binding upon the parties concerned.

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

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Only States are eligible to appear before the Court in contentious cases.
- The Court has no jurisdiction to deal with applications from individuals, non-governmental organizations, corporations or any other private entity. It cannot provide them with legal advice or help them in their dealings with national authorities.
- The Court can only hear a dispute when requested to do so by one or more States. It cannot deal with a dispute on its own initiative. Neither is it permitted, under its Statute, to investigate and rule on acts of sovereign States as it chooses.
- The States involved in the dispute must also have access to the Court and have accepted its jurisdiction, in other words, they must consent to the Court's considering the dispute in question. This is a fundamental principle governing the settlement of international disputes, since States are sovereign and free to choose how to resolve their disputes.
- Judgments delivered by the Court (or by one of its Chambers) in disputes between States are binding upon the parties concerned. Article 94 of the United Nations Charter provides that "[e]ach Member of the United Nations undertakes to comply with the decision of [the Court] in any case to which it is a party".

Q3. "Ophichthus kailashchandrai" is:

- a. A new snake eel species discovered in Odisha
- b. A new species of ginger found in the Western Ghats
- c. A new species of snake discovered in the Western Ghats
- d. None of the above

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Zoological Survey of India has documented another new snake eel species in Odisha and named it “Ophichthus kailashchandrai”.
- This is the eighth species of the Ophichthus genus found on the Indian coast, and the fifth new species discovered by the Gopalpur-on-Sea centre.
- The Ophichthus kailashchandrai lives at a depth of around 50 metres in the sea. According to the studied specimens, individuals of this species are around 420 mm to 462 mm in length. They are light brown in colour, with white fins.
- They have a well-developed pectoral fin and also have a dorsal fin. Their posterior nostril is a hole covered by a flap on the upper lip opening towards the mouth. There are 180-182 total vertebrae in this new species. Their teeth are moderately elongated, conical and sharp.
- Ophichthus kailashchandrai feeds on small fish and crabs. The outer surface of their bodies is slimy but they are not poisonous.

Q4. Which of the following countries have been declared Measles free by the World Health Organisation (WHO)?

1. Maldives
2. Sri Lanka
3. Brazil
4. Greece

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

In August 2019, the WHO said based on the 2018 data that measles is no longer considered eradicated in the UK, Greece, the Czech Republic and Albania.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. With inconsistencies on the Economic and Political front, do you think BRICS is still a relevant bloc? Justify your Opinion. (150 words, 10 marks)
2. The persistent slowdown in the economy will require big-ticket reforms from the Government

especially on the demand side. Suggest measures to spur economic growth. (250 words, 15 marks)

