

17 Jan 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Category: Social Issues

1. 34,000 Bru refugees to be settled in Tripura

Bru Tribe:

- Bru (or Reang) tribals inhabit parts of Northeastern states of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura.
- In Mizoram, they are largely restricted to Mamit and Kolasib.

Background:

- In 1995, following a clash between Mizos and Brus, the Young Mizo Association and Mizo Students' Association demanded that Brus be removed from the state's electoral rolls, contending that the tribe was not indigenous to Mizoram.
- This led to an armed movement led by the militant outfit Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF), and a political one by the Bru National Union (BNU).
- Many Bru villages were burnt down and scores allegedly raped and killed, which led to the displacement of 40,000 Bru people.
- A large number of Bru families fled to North Tripura.
- The first phase of repatriation started in November 2010, when 1,622 Bru families with 8,573 members were resettled in Mizoram.
- The process was stalled in 2011, 2012 and 2015 amid protests by Mizo NGOs.
- Brus settled in Tripura also expressed fears for their security in Mizoram.

Details:

- Due to ethnic tensions in Mizoram, around 34,000 people were forced to live in sub-human conditions in tents in Tripura.
- No solution could be reached all these years. In 2018, an agreement was signed and a package was sanctioned, but many people did not want to go back to Mizoram.
- Only 328 families moved back.
- Due to the initiative by Prime Minister, negotiations were started afresh. The displaced people will now be settled in Tripura permanently.

- The Ministry of Home Affairs brought the stakeholders to the talks in 2015, and a financial package of Rs. 435 crore was arrived at.
- The package covers 32,876 members of 5,407 Bru families. It included a one-time assistance of Rs. 4 lakh in a fixed deposit within a month of repatriation, monthly assistance of Rs. 5,000 through direct benefit transfer, free rations for two years, and finally, Rs. 1.5 lakh in three instalments for building houses.

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Taliban propose brief Afghan ceasefire

Context:

The Taliban have offered a brief ceasefire to the U.S., two insurgent sources have revealed.

Background:

- The Taliban and the U.S. had been negotiating the deal for a year, and were on the brink of an announcement in September 2019 when President Donald Trump abruptly declared the process “dead”, citing Taliban violence.
- Talks were later restarted between the two sides in December 2019 in Qatar, but were paused again following an attack near the Bagram military base in Afghanistan, which is run by the U.S.

Details:

- It is a move which could allow for the resumption of talks seeking a deal for Washington to withdraw troops from
- Washington has for weeks been calling on the militants to reduce violence, posing it as a condition for resuming formal negotiations on an agreement that would see U.S. troops begin to leave the country in return for security guarantees, after a near two-decade fight.
- A second insurgent source, based in Pakistan, confirmed that the offer had been handed to the U.S.

Way forward:

- The insurgents’ offer, if accepted by the Americans, could see the negotiations begin again.
- The reports of a temporary ceasefire have been seen as a positive signal.

- It is believed that the recent reduction of attacks in urban centres has added weight to the process.

2. India to invite Imran Khan for Shanghai Council meet

Context:

The Pakistan Ministry of External Affairs has said that Prime Minister Imran Khan will be invited to participate in the Heads of Government Council meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) that will be hosted in India this year (2020).

Issues:

- Prime Minister Khan who assumed office in 2018 has been a tough critic of India's continued lockdown of Kashmir.
- He has also taken up the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 and the National Register of Citizens both domestically and on global platforms.
- Though his predecessor Nawaz Sharif had visited India in May 2014 for the "mini-SAARC summit", Mr. Khan has not been invited to India till now.

Details:

- As per the established practice and procedure within SCO, all eight members of the SCO, four observer states, and other international dialogue partners will be invited to attend the meeting.
- Since becoming a full-time member of the SCO in 2017, both India and Pakistan have participated in multiple meetings of SCO and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) despite hostilities and tension in Kashmir.
- The Heads of Government Council meeting is attended by the Prime Minister-level leaders of the member states that deliberate on the regional body's economic and other pressing issues.
- The meeting also firms up SCO's annual budget.

Regional power play

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's (SCO) annual Heads of Government Council meeting will be hosted by India later this year. Here is a brief look at the organisation

■ **Current SCO members:** India, China, Pakistan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan

■ **Founded on** June 15, 2001

■ **Observer states:** Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia

■ **SCO dialogue partners:** Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey, Sri Lanka

■ **SCO permanent bodies:** Secretariat - Beijing; and Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) - Tashkent

■ **8-9 June 2017:** India and Pakistan became full SCO members at the Astana summit



Imran Khan has not been invited to India after he assumed office as Pakistan PM in 2018

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO):

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is a Eurasian Economic, Political and Security organization. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization was formed with the primary objective of military cooperation between its member nations. It works towards intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism operations in the Central Asian Region (CAR).

Read more about **SCO**.

3. China, U.S. sign initial trade agreement

Context:

China will boost purchases of U.S. goods and services by \$200 billion over two years in exchange for the rolling back of some tariffs under an initial trade deal signed by the world's two largest economies, defusing an 18-month row that has hit global growth.

Details:

- China has pledged to purchase at least an additional \$200 billion worth of U.S. farm products and other goods and services over two years, above a baseline of \$186 billion in purchases in 2017.

- Commitments include \$54 billion in additional energy purchases, \$78 billion in additional manufacturing purchases, \$32 billion more in farm products, and \$38 billion in services.
- Chinese companies would buy \$40 billion in U.S. agricultural products annually over the next two years “based on market conditions” which may dictate the timing of purchases in any given year.
- The Phase 1 deal cancelled planned U.S. tariffs on Chinese-made cellphones, toys and laptop computers and halved the tariff rate to 7.5% on about \$120 billion worth of other Chinese goods, including flat-panel televisions, Bluetooth headphones and footwear.
- But it will leave in place 25% tariffs on a \$250-billion array of Chinese industrial goods and components used by U.S. manufacturers, and China’s retaliatory tariffs on \$100 billion in U.S. goods.
- The trade deal includes Intellectual Property (IP) Protection and Enforcement, ending forced technology transfer, a dramatic expansion of American agriculture, removing barriers to American financial services, ending currency manipulation, rebalancing the US-China trade relationship and effective dispute resolution.

Global reactions:

- Key world stock market indices climbed to record highs after the deal was signed on, but later stalled on concerns over unresolved thorny issues.
- President Donald Trump hailed the agreement as a win for the U.S. economy and his administration’s trade policies.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. No SC relief, telcos have to pay Rs. 1.47 lakh cr.

Context:

A three-judge Bench of the Supreme Court led by Justice Arun Mishra, has dismissed petitions filed by telecom companies for a review of its October 2019 judgment upholding the recovery of past dues amounting to Rs. 1.47 lakh crore from them.

Background:

- In October 2019, the Supreme Court dealt a huge blow to telecom service providers when it upheld the Department of Telecom's move to recover adjusted gross revenue (AGR) of about 92,000 crores from them.
- The Bench had said the telecom sector had long reaped the fruits of the Centre's liberalised mode of payment by revenue sharing regime.

Concerns:

- Industry and experts have opined that the decision would hit the fund-raising and investment capability of service providers, leading to an adverse impact on the NDA government's flagship 'Digital India' initiative.
- One of the firms added that the money required to pay the interest and penalties on the pending dues, could instead be used for serving the 'Digital India' initiative.

This issue has been covered in **25th October 2019 Comprehensive News Analysis**.

2. Unclaimed telco refunds to go into consumer fund

Context:

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has said that the telecom service providers will need to deposit all unclaimed money of consumers, including excess charges and security deposit, in the Telecommunication Consumers Education and Protection Fund (TCEPF).

Details:

- The authority observed that there is a need to bring clarity among service providers in depositing money which they are unable to refund to the consumers.
- TRAI added that while some service providers were depositing money only on account of excess billing revealed in the audit, others were depositing unclaimed money such as security deposits and plan charges of failed activations.
- Such unclaimed/nonrefundable amount belonging to consumers would be deposited in the TCEPF fund as it will be utilised for the welfare measures of the consumers.

TCEPF:

- The Telecommunication Consumers Education and Protection Fund Regulations of 2007 offers a basic framework for depositing unclaimed money of consumers by service providers, maintenance of the fund and other aspects.
- The income from the fund is utilised for programmes and activities relating to consumer education and protection.

Way ahead:

- It was felt that an amendment in the TCEPF regulation may be carried out to remove any kind of ambiguity and facilitate deposit of any unclaimed money of the consumer such as excess charges, security deposit, plan charges of failed activations, etc.
- The TCEPF Regulations, 2007, which have now been amended, provide the basic framework for depositing unclaimed money of consumers by service providers, maintenance of the TCEPF and other related aspects.

With this amendment, service providers will deposit any unclaimed consumer money of any form such as excess charges, security deposit, plan charges of failed activations, or any amount belonging to a consumer, which service providers are unable to refund to consumers, to the fund after providing time of 12 months or period of limitation specified under law whichever is later.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. Preventing mob lynching

Context:

Though no data has been compiled by the NCRB of the number of cases of lynching in the country since 2015 for reasons unknown, the figures reported by various sections of the media are troubling.

Details:

- In 2018, the Supreme Court described lynching as a “horrendous act of mobocracy”.

- The Court exhorted the Centre and State governments to frame laws specifically to deal with the crime of lynching and laid down certain guidelines to be incorporated in these laws including fast-track trials, compensation to victims, and disciplinary action against lax law-enforcers.

State laws:

- In this backdrop, the Manipur government came up first with its Bill against lynching in 2018, incorporating some logical and relevant clauses.
 - The Bill specified that there would be nodal officers in each district to control such crimes.
 - Police officers who fail to prevent the crime of lynching in their jurisdiction are liable to be imprisoned for a term that may extend from one to three years with a fine limit of 50,000.
 - Additionally, no concurrence of the State government is required to prosecute them for dereliction of duty.
- It devolves upon the State to protect victims of mob violence and witnesses from any inducement or coercion apart from initiating schemes for rehabilitation and setting up relief camps where a community is displaced.
- The law provides for adequate monetary compensation to the victims or their immediate kin.
- The Rajasthan government passed a bill against lynching in August 2019.
 - “After 2014, 86% cases of mob lynching reported in the country happened in Rajasthan.”
 - However, not only has the government accepted only a few guidelines issued by the apex court, it is also silent on any action to be initiated against police officers who may be accused of dereliction of duty.
- West Bengal came up with a more stringent Bill against lynching.
 - Punishment for lynching to death is punishable with the death penalty or life imprisonment and a fine of up to ₹5 lakh.
 - Most other guidelines of the Supreme Court have been adopted by the State.

Way forward:

- While adopting the guidelines, the Centre would do well to incorporate sections in the law for penal action against doctors who stand accused of dereliction of duty, for delay in attending to victims of mob violence, or submitting false reports without carrying out a proper and thorough medical examination of

the victims, either under coercion by the police or due to their own prejudice against the community or religion of the victims.

- Under the compensation scheme for the victims, the amount to be paid to the victims should be recovered from the perpetrators of the crime or collective fines be imposed on the villagers where the lynching takes place.
- While framing the laws, the Centre could provide for punitive action against political leaders found guilty of inciting mobs.
- Until a zero-tolerance attitude is adopted in dealing with mob lynching, this crime will continue to show a rising trend.

Punitive action to be taken against police officers accused of dereliction of duty, as incorporated in the law enacted by the Manipur government, could be replicated in the Central law too as it would deter police officials acting in a partisan manner in favour of the lynch mob.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Talking of Kashmir

Context:

For the second time since the government's decision on Article 370 in August 2019, China has raised the issue of Kashmir at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), prompting a protest from New Delhi.

Details:

- In its response, the Government of India said that Beijing should “refrain” from bringing a bilateral issue into the UNSC, and accused China of working at Pakistan's behest.
- India's response also pointed to the overwhelming majority of Security Council members being opposed to the Chinese reference on conditions in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), which resulted in a lack of consensus for any kind of statement at the end of the meeting.
- India's case rests on the **1972 Shimla accord**, where India and Pakistan agreed to resolve the Kashmir issue bilaterally.
- China's repeated raising of Kashmir, is unconstructive and will impact the India-China bilateral relationship if it continues.

- It is also unlikely to push the government, which has already defied several international calls from friendly countries, into lifting restrictions or rolling back its measures in Kashmir.
- Given that New Delhi has refrained from raising similar issues over Tibet, Xinjiang or Hong Kong, it is unfair on the part of Beijing to take its concerns to the international stage, especially since President Xi Jinping didn't officially raise such concerns while visiting India.

Way forward:

- While China's move may be unwarranted, it is yet another reason for New Delhi to take heed of the continuing and unprecedented criticism of its actions in Kashmir.
- Prior to August, the last time Kashmir was raised at the UNSC format was in 1971; it has since been raised twice within a period of five months.
- China may have found no takers for a statement, but the fact that it was allowed to raise the issue at the UNSC cannot be brushed away. Nor can India maintain the duality of insisting, on the one hand, that Kashmir is a bilateral issue and, on the other hand, rejecting all bilateral talks with Pakistan.
- At some point, the government must push for the normalisation of ties with Pakistan as well as for the lifting of restrictions in Jammu and Kashmir.

Recent developments:

In the past few days, it seems the government has decided to review some of its decisions taken in August:

- It has released political prisoners and restored 2G connectivity to select places.
- It has also taken one group of envoys to Srinagar and Jammu, and is making plans for 36 Cabinet Ministers, who have not visited the region yet, to travel there.

These measures, however, must be comprehensive. Only when all communications are restored, all political prisoners freed and added security restrictions removed can the real task of healing in J&K even begin.

Category: ECONOMY

1. The perils of RBI's fixation on inflation

Context:

Inflation is back in the news and attention has turned on the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

- The National Statistical Office released data that showed annual **Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation for December 2019 at 7.35%**, which was the highest since the 7.39% of July 2014, and also more than the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) upper target limit of 6%.
- But the real shocker was **retail food inflation, which soared to a more than six-year high** of 14.12%.

Recognising the Central Bank's mandate:

- The establishment of some of the world's oldest central banks was inspired by the goal of **maintaining financial stability**.
- It was recognised that when private commercial banks fail, whether due to malfeasance or misjudgment, they not only harm their trusting depositors, they can also take down with them the rest of the financial system. The latter can take place when banks have lent to one another, which is not uncommon.
- In the crisis that ensues, there is a collapse of credit which, in turn, leads to a downturn in economic activity.
- To avoid this, the central bank was conceived of as the **lender of last resort**, one that could pre-empt a run on banks and give them time to put their books back in order.
- However, this was to be accompanied by the adoption of a **tough regulatory stance**, whereby the central bank would stay hawk-eyed towards the activities of banks, particularly risky lending. This was necessary as the knowledge that they could always rely on the lender-of-last-resort facility may leave banks less than diligent or even make them indulge in plain dishonesty.
- However, with the rise of neoliberalism, the central tenet of which is that markets should be given free play, the regulatory role of central banks took a back seat. They came to be primarily mandated with **inflation control**.
- It is hardly the case that central banks were unconcerned with **inflation** earlier, but they were at the same time **concerned with financial stability and the level of economic activity**.

Moving the goal post:

- In India, the RBI had earlier pursued a 'multiple indicators approach', implying concern for outcomes other than inflation, including even the balance of payments. But, developments in economic theory discouraged such acceptance by arguing that **having economic activity as an objective of monetary policy leads to higher inflation**

- It should be noted that this argument **privileged low inflation over low unemployment**, favouring owners of financial wealth over workers. But, not to be left behind in the race to adopt the architecture of the West, the Indian government also instituted inflation targeting as the sole objective of the monetary policy.
- The RBI was permitted to **exceed or fall short of a targeted inflation rate of 4% by a margin of 2 percentage points**. This was hailed by the government as the **adoption of the ‘modern monetary policy framework’ by India**, and came into effect from the year 2016-17.

But have all the objectives of the RBI’s original mandate as a central bank been met as a result?

- In 2018, within three years of the adoption of inflation targeting goal, **a crisis engulfed IL&FS**, a non-banking financial company in the infrastructure space.
 - It defaulted on several of its obligations, including repayment of bank loans and the redemption of commercial paper.
 - The IL&FS was not just another ‘shadow bank’; it operated over 100 subsidiaries and was sitting on a debt of Rs. 94,000 crore.
 - Given this, its default had a chilling effect on the investors, banks and mutual funds associated with it both directly or indirectly.
- Since then, in 2019, a run on the **Punjab and Maharashtra Co-operative Bank had to be averted by imposing withdrawal limits**.
 - It was discovered that fictitious accounts, reportedly over 21,000 of them, had been created so that the books would tally, even as deposits were siphoned off as loans to the promoters.
 - While in the case of IL&FS, some part of the problem may have been caused by a slowing economy, outright fraud underlay the crisis at PMC Bank.
 - In early 2020, curbs have had to be placed on withdrawals from the Bengaluru-based Sri Guru Raghavendra Sahakara Bank.

Issues:

- Further, even apart from regulatory infirmity, it is not as if the RBI is doing spectacularly on the inflation targeting front either. At over 7%, the inflation rate in December is the highest in five years. It raises a question on the efficacy of inflation targeting as a means of inflation control.

- Inflation led by rising prices of foodstuff cannot quickly or easily be contained by the mode of control underlying inflation targeting. It requires enhancing supplies which, in turn, would mean raising imports in the short run.
- The extent of the failure of inflation targeting right now is substantial indeed; the inflation rate has exceeded the permissible range of error by 65%.
- The central bank has a monopoly on the issue of notes. Yet, there is an absolute shortage of small denomination notes?.
- The RBI and the government showed themselves to be entirely out of touch with reality when, in 2016, the 1,000-rupee note was replaced with a 2,000-rupee note.
 - Small denomination notes are mostly unavailable.
 - In this department, India's central bank has failed substantially.

This issue has been covered in 15th January 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis. [Click here to read.](#)

F. Tidbits

1. India-Pakistan situation has impacted Afghanistan, says Hamid Karzai

- We are the best of friends with India, but how do we convey to Pakistan that we can be the best of brothers at the same time, asks the former Afghan President at the Raisina Dialogue.
- The unfortunate situation between India and Pakistan had impacted Afghanistan “tremendously”, former Afghan President Hamid Karzai said.
- Speaking at the Raisina Dialogue, he said there was no other way for Afghanistan, “we need the peace process to be successful.”
- Terming Iran and Pakistan the most consequential relationships for Afghanistan, he said, “We cannot have peace in Afghanistan, unless we have the best of relationships in Pakistan.”
- On the issue of continued U.S. military presence in Afghanistan, Mr. Karzai said a vast majority of people would agree with a U.S. presence in Afghanistan as long as the Afghan people are given the legitimacy to live in a dignified way, and politics and institutions in Afghanistan are not interfered with.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Myeloma

- Multiple myeloma is a type of cancer that forms in a type of white blood cell called a plasma cell.
- Plasma cells help the body fight infections by making antibodies that recognize and attack germs.
- Multiple myeloma causes cancer cells to accumulate in the bone marrow, where they crowd out healthy blood cells.
- A cancerous or malignant plasma cell is called a myeloma cell. Myeloma is called “multiple” because there are frequently multiple patches or areas in the bone where it grows.
- It is a type of blood cancer that affects the bones, most of the cases reaching tertiary care centres are in the advanced stage in which complications in kidney failure set in and bone marrow function gets completely affected.
- Many factors have been implicated in the development of multiple myeloma.
- Exposure to toxic chemicals, atomic radiation, anything that interferes with the immune system, or infection with cancer-causing viruses have all been implicated as causes or triggers of myeloma.
- Toxic chemicals that have been identified include: benzene, dioxins (such as those found in Agent Orange), agricultural chemicals (such as defoliants and pesticides), solvents, fuels, engine exhausts and cleansing materials.
- Myeloma can also be hereditary.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

1. Consider the following statements with respect to Multiple myeloma:

1. It is a cancer that forms in a type of white blood cell called a plasma cell.
2. It causes cancer cells to accumulate in the bone marrow.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

Multiple myeloma is a cancer that forms in a type of white blood cell called a plasma cell. It causes cancer cells to accumulate in the bone marrow. It is a type of blood cancer that affects the bones.

2. Consider the following statements with respect to Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO):

- 1 SCO is a Eurasian Economic, Political and Security organization.
2. It has eight member nations.
3. India, Pakistan and Iran are among the permanent members of SCO.

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

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

Answer: b**Explanation:**

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is a Eurasian Economic, Political and Security organization. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization was formed with the primary objective of military cooperation between its member nations. It works towards intelligence sharing and counter terrorism operations in the Central Asian Region (CAR). Currently, the organisation has eight member nations: Six founding members (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, China) the two new members, India and Pakistan. Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia currently have the observer status.

3. Consider the following statements:

1. Bru tribals inhabit parts of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura.
2. They are recognised as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG).

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

Bru (or Reang) tribals inhabit parts of Northeastern states of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura. In Mizoram, they are largely restricted to Mamit and Kolasib. They are recognised as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) in Tripura.

4. Consider the following statements with respect to Regional Antiterrorism Structure (RATS):

1. RATS was established at the Asthana Summit of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).
2. RATS is a permanent organ of the SCO.
3. It is engaged in furthering cooperation between member countries on concerns of terrorism, security, drug trafficking and cyber warfare.

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), headquartered in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, is a permanent organ of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) which serves to promote cooperation of member states against the

three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism. The Regional Antiterrorism Structure (RATS) was established in the year 2004 at the Tashkent Summit. SCO-RATS is a permanent body established to bring about coordination and interaction between member states in ensuring security in the region. It is engaged in furthering cooperation and ties between member countries on concerns of terrorism, security, drug trafficking and cyber warfare.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Recent laws passed with respect to mob lynching in some states provide a good start yet fall short in adhering to the criteria laid down by the Supreme Court. Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words).
2. Discuss the challenges associated with addressing the issue of Bru refugees to be settled in Tripura. What are the features of the tripartite agreement signed in this regard? (10 Marks, 150 Words).

