

12 Feb 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. China denies role in cybertheft following Equifax accusations

Context:

China has denied involvement in any hacking activities after the U.S. indicted four members of the Chinese military for allegedly breaking into the computer networks of the Equifax credit reporting agency and

stealing the personal information of tens of millions of people.

Details:

- The accusation is the latest against Chinese suspected of breaching the computer networks of American corporations, including steel manufacturers, a hotel chain and a health insurer.
- It comes as the Trump administration has warned against what it sees as the growing political and economic influence of China, and efforts by Beijing to collect data for financial and intelligence purposes and to steal research and innovation.
- Members of Trump administration have been warning against cybersecurity and surveillance risks posed by China, especially as the tech giant Huawei seeks to become part of new, high-speed 5G wireless networks across the globe.

Earlier Security breach:

- The hackers in the 2017 breach stole the personal information of roughly 145 million Americans, collecting names, addresses, Social Security and driver's license numbers and other data stored in the company's databases.
- The intrusion damaged the company's reputation and underscored China's increasingly aggressive and sophisticated intelligence-gathering methods.
- This theft not only caused significant financial damage to Equifax, but invaded the privacy of many millions of Americans, and imposed substantial costs and burdens on them as they have had to take measures to protect against identity theft.

Concerns:

- Experts and officials say the theft represents Beijing's interest in accumulating as much information about Americans as possible.
- The data could be used by China to target U.S. government officials and ordinary citizens, including possible spies, and to find weaknesses and vulnerabilities that can be exploited — such as for purposes of blackmail.

2. Delhi, Dhaka agree on speedy return of Rohingya

Context:

The Minister of State for Home has informed the [Lok Sabha](#) that the issue of repatriation of the Rohingyas has been discussed with Bangladesh at the highest level and both countries have agreed on the need to expedite their safe, speedy and sustainable repatriation to their homes in Myanmar.

Background:

Rohingya belong to Rakhine state in Myanmar but more than a million have taken refuge in Bangladesh and some in India following an ethnic campaign of violence against them.

Read more about the [Rohingya Issue](#).

Details:

- The central government has issued periodic instructions to State governments requesting them to sensitise the law enforcement and intelligence agencies for taking appropriate steps for identification

- of illegal migrants, and their restriction to specified locations as per provisions of law.
- The instructions also include capturing their biographic and biometric particulars, cancellation of fake Indian documents, and starting legal process, including initiation of deportation proceedings as per the provisions of law.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Special agri zone status may not affect ongoing projects in T.N.

Context:

The Tamil Nadu state government has clarified that the Chief Minister's announcement that the Cauvery delta region would be declared 'Protected Special Agricultural Zone' (PSAZ) would not affect various ongoing projects in the districts, including hydrocarbon exploration.

Background:

This issue has been covered in detail in the 10th February 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis. [Click here](#) to read.

Details:

- The primary intention of the government is to prohibit any fresh attempts at the exploration of gas and minerals in the Cauvery delta region, senior bureaucrats indicated.
- It is wet-land ecology and such explorations would affect agriculture.
- Moreover, such explorations would also lead to seawater intrusion.

This issue has been covered under the Editorials segment in the 11th February Comprehensive News Analysis. [Click here](#) to read.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. First call

Context:

Sri Lankan Prime Minister's official visit to India.

Background:

- India had traditionally enjoyed strong and close ties with Sri Lanka. But in the wake of victory over the LTTE and after successfully ending the island's decades-long ethnic war, Mahinda Rajapaksa had started leaning towards China, India's rival in the region.
- **India-Sri Lanka ties underwent a strain for several reasons, while SL-China ties grew in strength.**
- The recent elections in SL and the coming back to the power of the Rajapaksa brothers had led to apprehensions in India, casting doubts over the likely chances of SL drawing close to China, with **India having to cede strategic dominance in the region.**
- However, contrary to the concerns, by making New Delhi their first stop abroad, Sri Lanka's new President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's visit in November 2019, and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's recent visit, have signaled hope for the beginning of a **new India-Sri Lanka bilateral relation.**

Details:

- Reciprocating Sri Lanka's desire for better bilateral ties, India too has indicated that it would like to strengthen the ties between the two countries.

Development Work:

- India has proposed working on **development projects in SL.** There are also proposals for a **joint India-Japan project of the East Container Terminal at Colombo.**

Line of credit:

- SL has discussed extending the **\$400-million Line of Credit from India,** calling for India's enhanced assistance for nationwide housing in SL.

Improved connectivity:

- The **air connectivity to Sri Lanka's north and east** from India has witnessed improvement in the recent past, with the already operational direct flight between India and SL and the proposed flight to Batticaloa.

Security ties:

- Post-2019's Easter Sunday bombings in SL, India and SL have **enhanced intelligence sharing, and joint training between the security agencies.** India has also extended a **special \$50-million Line of Credit** post the Easter Sunday bombings in SL.
- There have been high-level talks with respect **to strengthening military ties** between the two countries.
- There have also been discussions regarding the setting up of a **joint maritime research coordination centre.**
- **India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives** are expected to revive their **trilateral on security,** including joint maritime security talks and anti-terror cooperation.

Economic ties:

- **India is Sri Lanka's largest trading partner** and also one of the largest investors in the country. Sri Lanka is India's second-largest trading partner in SAARC.
- **India is the largest contributor to the number of tourists visiting Sri Lanka.** This is significant given the fact that tourism constitutes a major share of SL's economy and employment generation.
- Sri Lankans, of all economic strata, across racial and religious divides, come to India for **healthcare, education, and pilgrimage.**
- **India and Sri Lanka signed FTA in 1998,** which facilitated increased trade relations between the two countries.

Challenges:

- Though India and Sri Lanka share good bilateral ties, there are certain **challenges and threats** to this bilateral relation.

Tamil Issue:

- India has a lot of stake in racial harmony in Sri Lanka and has contributed immensely in the past, in terms of resources and human lives to ensure Sri Lanka's integrity and racial harmony.
- During the recent visit of the SL Prime Minister, India raised the SL Tamil issue and stated that it hopes that the **expectations of the Tamil people for equality, justice, peace, and respect** would be met by the SL government. It has also called for greater devolution of powers to the provinces according to the **13th Amendment.**
- However, the visiting SL Prime Minister declined to comment on India's stand and **gave no commitment on the Tamil issue,** adding that though the present administration was in favour of the 13th Amendment, they would not accept any solution that would not be unacceptable to the majority [Sinhala] community.
- Notably, the **Chinese have repeatedly backed SL in the Tamil issue,** calling it Sri Lanka's internal matters. This is meant to **strengthen China-SL ties and draw a wedge between India and SL.**

The China factor:

- Chinese presence has only grown in SL over the last few years, as **Beijing has adopted a more assertive policy towards the Indian Ocean region.**
- Relations between Rajapaksa and the Indian leaders were seriously strained after Colombo allowed a **Chinese nuclear submarine and a warship to be docked at the Colombo port** in total disregard for India's concerns.
- In the end years of Mahinda's presidency, China invested heavily in Sri Lanka, which included major projects like the opening of the Hambantota Port and the expansion of the Colombo port.
- **Sri Lanka is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative,** under which it has received an estimated \$8 billion as loans, out of a total of around \$11 billion of Chinese investment in the country.

Indian investment in Sri Lanka:

- The present SL administration has ruled out taking forward the MoU signed by the previous government, allowing **Indian participation in energy and infrastructure projects in Trincomalee.**
- The previously proposed Indian involvement in the **Mattala airport project** also seems unlikely.
- India's absence in SL may lead to **ceding space to China.** In the past when India did not take up an offer to develop Hambantota port in SL, the project ended up with China.

Sri Lankan debt crisis:

- Sri Lanka has to deal with its debt crisis, which is nearly \$60-billion outstanding debt in foreign and domestic borrowings. SL will have to pay about \$5-billion a year in repayments.
- SL has asked for India's help in this regard and has **requested a three-year moratorium on repayments.**
- Given India's own economic woes, the likely consideration of the SL request seems unlikely. **Ignoring or rebuffing the new request could damage bilateral ties between India and Sri Lanka.**

Way forward:

The indispensability of the relation:

- Given the fact that **Sri Lanka is India's closest maritime neighbour** and India shares deep **historical and cultural ties with SL**, the bilateral relationship is indispensable for both the countries.
- Apart from the China factor, Indian interests in Sri Lanka are also driven by other important factors, including post-war reconciliation and respect for the dignity of the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka and its cultivation of ties in its **immediate neighborhood and the wider Indian Ocean.**
- If India has vital interests for which a partnership with Sri Lanka is critical, Sri Lanka, too, cannot become a **pivotal Indian Ocean power** without a substantive engagement with India.
- There is a need to consolidate the trust and confidence between the two sides and **deepen cooperation** in important areas.

Working on common interests:

- Developmental work in SL and the **challenge posed by extremism** are **common concerns** for the two countries. Co-operation in these areas can help build mutual trust between the two countries. Security and intelligence-sharing should be enhanced.

Countering China:

- Given the fact that **India cannot match China's financial heft to make a difference to Colombo's developmental requirements**, India is best advised to **leverage its civilizational and cultural connection with Sri Lanka to strengthen ties.**
- Though China will continue to be a key player in Sri Lanka's trade and infrastructure development, **SL must not do anything that undermines India's security.**

Involving like-minded strategic partners:

- India should consider carving out a niche role for itself in some areas and also **partner with like-minded strategic partners like Japan** to make an economic and strategic difference in Sri Lanka.
- Given **the U.S. interest in countering China in the region**, India could consider involving the U.S. in developmental works and security co-operation between India and SL.

For more information on this issue refer:

[CNA dated Feb 9, 2020](#)

2. A new approach on investment

Context:

India U.S. trade agreement negotiations.

Background:

- India shedding its pre-1990 stance of non-alignment has moved decisively towards forging a better relationship with the USA. This is in line with the present global geopolitical atmosphere and India's immediate needs.
- Contrary to expectations that were generated after the Houston rally of the Indian Prime Minister and US President, India, and the United States failed to arrive at a trade deal then.
- However, the **first-ever trade agreement between India and the U.S.** is expected during the U.S. president's visit to India.

Details:

Significance of the deal:

- Though the total value of the trade deal would not be comparable to other international trade deals, a **U.S.-India trade deal will have historic significance.**
- It is expected to usher in a period of **strong collaboration between the two countries to advance a shared bilateral trade agenda** and effectively resolve issues as they arise, instead of seeking a remedy from the [WTO](#).
- The signing of the deal will allow the two sides to continue efforts to achieve incremental outcomes and possibly enable the start of negotiations on a **comprehensive free trade agreement (FTA)**.

Way forward:

- There is tremendous potential in India-US trade relations. **Bilateral trade between India and the US has almost touched \$150 billion** and there has been a growth every year in the last few years. Realizing the growth potential of this relation will need some give and take from both countries.

Incremental outcomes:

- Given the possible **roadblocks to a comprehensive free trade agreement (FTA)**, the two countries should look at **incremental outcomes first**. At a later stage, when the two countries are prepared to negotiate a more comprehensive bilateral FTA, they can take up more complex issues for discussions.
- India and the U.S. should focus on what is doable.
- The relatively easier-to-solve **issues of intellectual property rights (IPR), digital trade, and investment** should be prioritized.
- IPR has historically been an area of contention between the two countries, but **discussions on IPR have progressed well in recent years** and there is the need to build on the progress made.

Shared interests:

- Given the **shared interests between India and the U.S.** in certain areas, the co-ordination and partnership in such areas can be **mutually beneficial** to both countries.
- **Investment is an important segment for both economies.** India invests in the U.S. and continues to seek U.S. investment in India. There is a need to encourage foreign direct investment (FDI).
- The two countries should negotiate an agreement on investment matters that can provide **greater**

transparency, predictability, and regulatory certainty to investors from the other country.

- Given the Indian government and U.S. administration's scepticism towards '**BITs**' (**bilateral investment treaties**), there is the need to look for newer options.
- A U.S.-India investment agreement could focus on **fair treatment for investors from the other country**, regulatory transparency and predictability, and approaches for resolving concerns short of investor-state dispute settlements.
- Both India and the U.S. are still trying to deal with the issue of appropriate scope and approach of **regulating electronic commerce issues in this digital age**. Greater collaboration and sharing of each other's experiences can help strengthen the relationship.

A new approach:

- India and the U.S. could **review their recent FTAs**, to come up with a new approach.
- The recently concluded **U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement** contains a novel approach on investment, notably its **abandonment of investor-state dispute settlement**.
- The [Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership](#) also does not include investor-state dispute settlement.

For more information on this issue refer:

[CNA dated Feb 8, 2020](#)

[CNA dated Feb 9, 2020](#)

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Six years on, Lokpal is a non-starter

Context:

Background:

- A nationwide public campaign in 2011 demanding an **independent anti-corruption ombudsman** resulted in the passage of the Lokpal law in India.
- **The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013** had been enacted to ensure a prompt and fair investigation and prosecution, in cases of corruption against public servants.
- The Lokpal had been envisioned to be independent and was accorded a high stature and given **extensive powers including the power to inquire, investigate and prosecute acts of corruption**.

Concerns:

- More than six years after the Lokpal law received the President's assent, the institution of the Lokpal is **yet to play any significant role in tackling corruption in the country**.

Delay in appointments:

- There had been a long delay in the appointment process of the chairperson and members of the Lokpal. **The chairperson and members of the Lokpal were appointed only in March 2019** after a contempt petition was filed in the Supreme Court following the failure of the government to comply

with the 2017 ruling of the court to initiate the process of making appointments.

Government's lack of intent:

- The government's argument for not appointing the chairperson and the members was that since no one could be recognized as the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) after the 2014 general election, the committee responsible for selecting members of the Lokpal could not be constituted.
- This despite the fact that the situation could have been easily remedied by either recognizing the leader of the single largest party in Opposition in the Lok Sabha as the LoP or by amending the Lokpal law to allow the leader of the largest opposition party to be a member of the committee in the absence of a recognized LoP. Such a course of action was adopted previously also in the **case of the selection committee of the CBI Director**.

Independence of the Lokpal:

- **A truncated selection committee, without the LoP, was set up.** The eminent jurist considered for the selection committee was the previous Attorney General of India.
- **The four-member selection committee, having a preponderance of representatives of the ruling party** with an inherent bias towards recommending candidates favoured by the government, selected the Chair and members of the Lokpal.
- This has cast serious **doubts about the independence of the Lokpal** even before it has become operational.

Key provisions still not in place:

- Almost six years after the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 was signed into law, **several key provisions needed for the anti-corruption ombudsman to function have still not been operationalized.**
- The Lokpal has not yet notified a **format for filing complaints**. The lack of this may lead to many complaints filed being dismissed.
- The Central government has also failed to **formulate rules regarding asset disclosure by public servants**.
- Despite the important enabling provision of setting up of the Lokpal's own inquiry wing headed by a Director of Inquiry and its own prosecution wing headed by a Director of Prosecution, the process of constituting **the Lokpal's inquiry and prosecution wings has** not yet begun.
- Further, regulations which the Lokpal was obligated to make under the law are yet to be made, including those **specifying the manner and procedure of conducting preliminary inquiry and investigation**.

Failure to meet expectations:

- Without the requisite rules, regulations, and machinery in place, it is not surprising that the Lokpal has failed to meet expectations.
- The website of the Lokpal states that it has scrutinized 1,065 complaints received till September 2019, and disposed of 1,000 of them. Since necessary procedures to operationalize the law are yet to be put in place, the **legal veracity of the decisions of the Lokpal are questionable** and could potentially be challenged in a court of law.

For more information on this issue refer:

[CNA dated Dec 9, 2019](#)

1. States given Rs. 81,043 cr. as GST compensation for April-Sept.

What's in News?

The Centre has released Rs. 81,043 crore as GST compensation to States for April-September 2019.

- Under GST law, States were guaranteed to be paid for any loss of revenue in the first five years of GST implementation, which came into force on July 1, 2017.
- For providing such compensation to States, compensation cess is being levied on certain luxury and demerit goods as per provisions in Section 8 of the GST (Compensation to States) Act, 2017.
- The compensation cess is being credited into a non-lapsable fund known as Goods and Services Tax Compensation Fund which forms part of the Public Account of India.

2. Coronavirus poses 'very grave' threat to the world, says WHO

- Deaths due to coronavirus outbreak in China have surpassed 1,000 and the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned of a global threat potentially worse than terrorism.
- The world must "wake up and consider this enemy virus as public enemy number one," WHO chief said.

Renamed COVID-19:

- The disease is now officially named **COVID-19** by the WHO.
- "co" stands for "corona", "vi" for "virus" and "d" for "disease", while "19" was for the year, as the outbreak was first identified on December 31, 2019.
- With 99% of cases in China, this remains very much an emergency for that country, but one that holds a very grave threat for the rest of the world as well.

For more on the Wuhan Coronavirus, click [here](#).

3. Kem chho Trump

What's in News?

U.S. President Donald Trump will visit India on February 24th and 25th 2020, as per an official announcement from the White House.

- He is to attend the inauguration of the new Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Stadium, the largest cricket stadium in the world.
- Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hold the "Kem chho Trump" (Howdy Trump) event at the stadium with approximately 1.25 lakh people witnessing the special programme aimed at showcasing the Modi-Trump bonhomie.

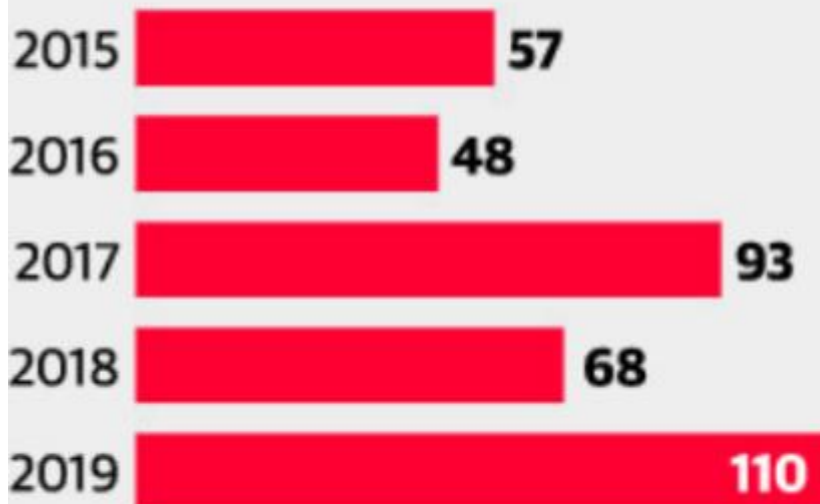
4. Cleaning of drains & septic tanks claims 110 lives in 2019

What's in News?

The number of people who died while cleaning sewers and septic tanks in the country increased by almost 62% from 68 in 2018 to 110 in 2019.

Raising a stink

No. of deaths while cleaning sewers and septic tanks in the last five years



*SOURCE: SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY IN THE LOK SABHA ON FEBRUARY 11, 2020



5. Ministry of Earth Sciences may go in for decadal forecast system

- The Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) is planning a 'decadal forecast' system along the lines of the United Kingdom's Met Office to ensure better predictability in the climate time scale.
 - The system, based on a coupled climate model, would first be taking shape in the form of a research programme and would be operational only after its merits have been evaluated.
 - The World Meteorological Organization has set up global producing centres, coordinated by the U.K. Met Office, for annual to decadal projections that are already providing global-scale information.
- This is a new idea with more relevance to present climate forecasting needs. Given the need for longer-range prediction for 10 or 20 years, a new programme will be started in the country using a coupled climate model by utilising signals emanating from deep oceans to predict decadal climate changes.
- Once the system is established, it would initially function for long-range forecasting at the national level and the model, if successful, would later be downscaled to the state or even district-level.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Lok Sabha clears Bill to include more tribes in Karnataka in ST category

What's in News?

The Lok Sabha has passed the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2019 by voice vote.

- Parivara, Talwara and Siddi are Scheduled Tribes in Karnataka.
- The Bill seeks to include the Parivara and the Talwara communities in the ST category to ensure they get reservation and other benefits provided by the government.
- The Siddi tribes of Belagavi and Dharwad would also be included in the category apart from those living in the Uttar Kannada districts.
- The amendments had been made in the list of the STs in Karnataka.

Note: Inclusion in or exclusion from and other modifications in the list of Scheduled Tribes can be made only through an amending Act of Parliament.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to River Kaveri/Cauvery:

1. River Kaveri flows through the states of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
2. It originates in the foothills of the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu.
3. Hemavati, Shimsha and Arkavati are its right-bank tributaries.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

River Kaveri flows through the states of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The river originates in the foothills of Western Ghats at Talakaveri, Kodagu in Karnataka and flows through Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and across the southern Deccan plateau through the South Eastern lowlands. The Harangi, the Hemavati, the Shimsha and the Arkavati are its left bank tributaries. Lakshmantirtha, the Kabbani, the Suvarnavati, the Bhavani, the Noyil and the Amaravati are the right bank tributaries.

Q2. Parivara, Talwara and Siddi are Scheduled Tribes from which state?

- a. Chhattisgarh
- b. Rajasthan

- c. Karnataka
- d. Telangana

Answer: c

Explanation:

Parivara, Talwara and Siddi are Scheduled Tribes in Karnataka.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to Privilege Motion:

1. Privilege Motions are handled in a joint sitting with the Speaker presiding the sitting and deciding the matter.
2. Privilege Motion can be passed by any parliamentarian against anyone accused of breaching parliamentarians' privileges.
3. Privilege Motion does not involve arrests of the guilty but just the suspension or fining.

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

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

A committee of 15 members is elected by the Speaker in the Lok Sabha and a committee of 10 members is elected by the Chairperson at the Rajya Sabha. These committees are responsible for managing all the cases and accusations related to the privilege motion and take relevant actions. Privilege Motion can be passed by any parliamentarian against anyone accused of breaching parliamentarians' privileges. Privilege motion does not involve arrests of the guilty but just the suspension or fining.

Q4. Consider the following statements:

1. The first specification of Scheduled Tribes in relation to a particular State/Union Territory is by a notified order of the President, after consultation with the State governments concerned.
2. These orders can be modified through an Act of Parliament only.
3. No community has been specified as a scheduled tribe in relation to the state of Punjab.

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

All the statements are correct.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Despite a nationwide public campaign in 2011 and the subsequent passage of The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act of 2013, the institution of the Lokpal is yet to play any significant role in tackling corruption in the country. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
2. Though India and Sri Lanka share good bilateral ties, there are challenges to the bilateral relation. Comment. Discuss what should India's strategy be with respect to its bilateral relation with Sri Lanka. (15 marks, 250 words).

