

19 Feb 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Pakistan to remain in terror financing watchdog's 'Grey List'](#)

Context:

The International Co-operation Review Group (ICRG) of the [Financial Action Task Force \(FATF\)](#) recommended that Pakistan be retained on the 'Grey List', given its failure to completely implement the 27-

point action plan to check terror financing.

For background, refer to the article “[Black and Grey](#)” covered in the Editorial segment in the 27th January 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis.

Details:

- The final decision would be announced at the end of the five-day FATF Plenary session in Paris, sources aware of the proceedings said.
- Pakistan's Minister for Economic Affairs assured the group that all the objectives would be achieved as early as June 2020. He claimed that since the last FATF plenary, the country had taken all possible measures against terror financing.

2. Ashraf Ghani named winner of Afghanistan presidential election

Context:

Afghanistan has declared incumbent Ashraf Ghani winner of a disputed presidential election.

Details:

- Afghanistan's independent Election Commission has announced that incumbent President Ashraf Ghani has won a second term. The announcement comes more than four months after polls closed.
 - Polls were held in September 2019 to elect a president for the fourth time since U.S.-led forces overthrew the Taliban government in 2001.
 - But the process was marred by allegations of rigging, technical problems with biometric devices used for voting, attacks and other irregularities.
 - On election day, many Afghans found incomplete voters' lists and in some cases hostile election workers.
 - Election results were repeatedly delayed amid accusations of misconduct and technical problems with counting ballots.

Concerns:

- The opponent, Mr. Abdullah contested the results and vowed he would form his own parallel government. This threatens a new turmoil, as the United States strives to seal a U.S. troop withdrawal deal with Taliban militants.
 - Ghani and Mr. Abdullah head a fragile national unity government that was put together under U.S. pressure after both leaders claimed victory in Afghanistan's 2014 elections.
- A potential political crisis looms as the United States and the Taliban near an agreement in Doha, which officials on both sides say could be announced by the end of February 2020 if an initial seven-day reduction in violence (RIV) is successfully observed. The RIV also would cover Afghan forces.
- The election results come days after U.S. Defence Secretary announced a truce agreement between the United States and the Taliban that could lead to the withdrawal of American troops from the country.
 - The agreement was expected to be formally announced on February 23, 2020 and the reduction in violence would subsequently begin, according to people familiar with the plan.
 - That would be followed by all-Afghan peace talks that envision the phased withdrawal of U.S. forces over 18 months, ending 18 years of war.
- Ghani has been critical of the way U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad has conducted the talks with the Taliban, complaining about being kept in the dark.

- The Taliban has also rejected the result and termed Ghani's re-election to be against the peace process.
 - However, Ghani is seeking to appoint a team to negotiate with the Taliban. That effort has been mired in political wrangling and the dispute with Abdullah could add further complications.

3. Trump's visit may seal helicopter deal

Context:

President Donald Trump is set to make his maiden visit to India on February 24-25, 2020. With no headway in the talks for a trade deal, there are expectations that a few big-ticket defence deals will be announced.

Details:


- The deal for 24 MH-60R Multi-Role Helicopters (MRH) for the Navy, which is likely to be announced during the visit of U.S. President Donald Trump, is lined up for the final approval of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS).
- The 24 Lockheed Martin-built helicopters, worth \$2.4 billion, are being procured through the Foreign Military Sales route of the U.S. government.

Flight support

The deal to procure 24 MH-60R multi-role helicopters (MRH), as replacement for 15 Sea King anti-submarine warfare and one Sea King 42B MRH which was lost in accident, is expected to be announced during U.S. President Donald Trump's visit. A look at some features of the MRH:

- The **24 helicopters**, worth around **\$2.4 billion**, are being procured through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) route of the U.S. government
- The current MRHs in service were inducted in the **1980s**

MISSION CAPABILITIES: Anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare, special operations, search and rescue, utility, vertical replenishment, command and control



WEAPONRY:
.50 caliber/
7.62mm machine
guns, torpedos,
Hellfire missiles

**INTERNATIONALLY
USED BY:**
U.S. Navy,
Royal Danish
Navy, Royal
Australian Navy,
Royal Saudi
Naval Forces

COMMUNICATION:
Airborne low
frequency
sonar, electronic
support mea-
sures, tactical
communications

Need for Multi-Role Helicopters (MRH):

- The Navy is facing an acute shortage of MRHs, with several warships operating with empty helicopter decks.
- These helicopters are being procured as replacement for 15 Sea King Anti-Submarine Warfare helicopters de-inducted in 1991 and one Sea King 42B MRH lost in an accident.
- The MRHs in service, Sea King 42Bs, were inducted in the 1980s and are in need of replacement.

Several big-ticket deals in the pipeline:

- Six Boeing P-8I long-range surveillance aircraft.
- Thirteen BAE Systems-built 127-mm MK-45 naval gun systems worth around \$1 billion for the Navy.
- Six AH-64E Apache attack helicopters for the Army.
- Thirty armed drones for the three services.
- A tactical air defence system for Delhi.

However, these are at various stages of procurement.

For more details refer to the [13th February 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Sanjay Kothari tipped to be CVC; Bimal Julka is CIC

Context:

- Sanjay Kothari, Secretary to the President of India, is tipped to be the next Chief Vigilance Commissioner (CVC).
- Former Information and Broadcasting Secretary Bimal Julka will be the Chief Information Commissioner (CIC).

Issues:

- The post of CVC has been vacant since June 2019. Vigilance Commissioner Sharad Kumar has been functioning as the interim CVC.
- A few other posts in the CIC are lying vacant and, the Commission has been working with a reduced strength of six Information Commissioners as against the sanctioned strength of 11.

Read about the [Central Information Commission](#).

Details:

- The decision, however, was arrived at by a majority opinion as the Opposition leader objected to the process and pointed to “certain legal infirmities”.
 - The opposition leader is reported to have objected to the fact that the government had not shared the names of the short-listed candidates for the post of CIC before the meeting, as is the norm.
 - The Opposition leader also objected to the fact that for the post of CVC, a member of the search committee was included as a short-listed candidate.
- The government is yet to make a formal announcement.

Central Vigilance Commission:

- The Indian government introduced the Central Vigilance Commission in the year 1964 to address governmental corruption.
- The Commission was set up on the recommendation of the K.Santhanam Committee on Prevention of Corruption.
- The Central Vigilance Commission is led by the Central Vigilance Commissioner and has two

Read more about [Central Vigilance Commission](#).

Selection Committee for CVC chief:

- The Prime Minister heads the selection committee for choosing the CVC chief.
- The Home Minister and the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha or the Leader of the largest Opposition Party make up the rest of the panel.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: SECURITY

1. Karbis protest against ST status for hill Bodos

Context:

An Assam-based insurgent group of Karbis, which signed a ceasefire agreement with the Centre, has demanded that the Bodos in the hill areas not be given the Scheduled Tribe status as it will affect the identity of the Karbis.

Details:

- The Bodos, an ethnic group in Assam, had been demanding a separate State since 1972, and are recognised as a Scheduled Tribe (Plain).
- The Home Ministry, the Assam Government and Bodo groups signed the pact in January 2020 to redraw and rename the Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD), spread over Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri districts.
- Under the agreement,
 - The Bodos in the hills will be given the Scheduled Hill Tribe status.
 - Villages dominated by the Bodos outside the BTAD will be included and those with non-Bodos excluded after the areas are redrawn.

“Bodo Accord” has been comprehensively covered in the 10th February 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis. [Click here](#) to read.

Issue:

- After the conclusion of the latest Bodo pact, the Karbi Longri and North Cachar Hills Liberation Front (KLNLF), a militant group that signed a ceasefire pact with the Centre in 2009, has said a political settlement should be reached soon.
 - It has raised concerns that the identity of Karbis will come under threat if Bodos who live in the hill areas [along with Karbis] are also given a Scheduled Hill Tribe status.
 - The group’s primary demand was a separate State.
- After the peace accord with all Bodo groups, the Centre is at a very advanced stage of sealing a peace deal with other key militant groups, including the pro-talks faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom and the Karbi insurgent group.

Note:

In Assam, there are 14 recognised Plains Tribe communities, 15 Hill Tribe communities and 16 Scheduled Caste communities.

2. One in three adolescents face online abuse, finds study by NGO

Context:

A study on school students has revealed that one in every three adolescents exposed to the Internet are victims of cyberbullying and other forms of online abuse and nearly half of the users display some level of addiction.

Details:

- In an attempt to assess the pattern of Internet use and online safety, an NGO — Child Rights and You (CRY) — conducted a survey in collaboration with Forum for Learning and Action with Innovation and Rigour (FLAIR).

Key findings:

- The study shows that adolescents had easy access to the Internet with 93% of them using it in their homes.
- There was a clear gender disparity in access to personal devices with 60% boys and 40% girls owning a device.
- 30% of adolescents had a negative experience online, the study points out.
- There was also a lack of awareness among the students on Internet safety guidelines developed by the NCERT with only 30% of respondents being familiar with them.
- However, access to the Internet is not all harmful as 40% of the respondents said they used it to take help in their studies such as through online search for words or information, tutorials and access to their school's online education programme.
- The same ratio of children also used the Internet for extra-curricular activities such as for music, painting or sports.

Suggestions:

- The study recommends facilitating among students, familiarity with Internet safety rules, with it being built into the school curriculum.
- It highlights the need to modify the Central government's child protection scheme to build infrastructure to deal with cybercrimes against children.
- It also presses for schools to recognise an increase in online crimes against children and develop strategies on prevention, reporting and redressal.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

1. In U.S. trade action, an Indian counter-strategy

Context:

India-U.S. trade relations.

Background:

Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (ASCM):

- Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (ASCM) is an agreement under the framework of the [World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#) dealing with countervailing duties.
 - **Countervailing duties, also known as anti-subsidy duties, are trade import duties imposed to neutralize the negative effects of subsidies.**
 - It is basically an import tax imposed on certain goods in order to **prevent dumping or counter export subsidies.**
- As per the ASCM, **developing countries are allowed to grant higher levels of subsidies** as compared to the developed countries before countervailing duties (CVD) can be imposed.
 - The ASCM stipulates that any countervailing duty investigation for a developing country must be terminated if the export subsidies granted are found to be less than 2% of the value of imports of the product being investigated.
 - For a developed country the limit is set at less than 1% of the import value of the investigated product.

Details:

United States of America's moves:

- The United States has **officially designated developing and least-developed countries** for the purposes of implementing the countervailing measures provided by the ASCM.
- Notably, the U.S. has **dropped India from the list of developing countries**, which implies that in future countervailing duty investigations, **the U.S. would treat India as a developed country.** India's export subsidies would be subject to tighter regulations.

WTO rules:

- Unlike in the **World Bank classification, where per capita incomes are used to classify countries** as developing or developed, the WTO classification methodology is different.
- The WTO does not lay down any specific criteria for making a distinction between a developed and a developing country member. **Under the WTO rules, any country can "self-designate" itself as a developing country or a developed country.**

United States of America's stand:

- The United States Trade Representative (USTR) took into consideration factors like the level of economic development of the country, based on the measure of the country's per capita GNI and the country's share of world trade.

- This is in **complete deviation from the accepted methodology as per the WTO rules.**

Concerns:

India as target:

- The U.S. move to exclude India from the list of developing countries under the ASCM is the second instance when the **U.S. has refused to extend to India the benefits enjoyed by developing countries under the multilateral trade rules.**
- In May 2019, U.S. President had announced that India would be taken off the list of beneficiary-developing countries under its **scheme of Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)**, citing the lack of good market access to U.S. goods in India.
 - The GSP is a U.S. trade program designed to promote economic growth in the developing world by providing concessional rates of duties for identified products from developing countries. **The GSP is a preferential tariff system which provides tariff reduction on various products.**
 - Unlike the **concept of Most Favoured Nation (MFN)**, GSP confers non-reciprocal benefits, implying that the developed countries cannot expect reciprocal market access from the beneficiary developing countries.
- The recent initiatives taken by the U.S., challenge India's status as a developing country in the WTO and it is **aimed at excluding India from enjoying the benefits that would accrue from such a classification.**
- The U.S. has been arguing that emerging economies like Brazil, China and India, have performed much better than many developed countries and therefore they should no longer enjoy the many benefits that they enjoy as developing countries.

Consequences of the classification:

The recent designation by the USTR would entail an **adverse impact on India's interest** in many respects.

Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT):

- **The concept of S&DT reduces the burden of adjustment** that developing countries have to make while acceding to the agreements under the WTO. Every developing country member of the WTO has the privilege of making use of the S&DT provisions.
- **Developing countries are allowed longer implementation periods for the agreements.** This allows developing countries to introduce a new agreement in phases to ensure that they are not required to deploy resources beyond their capacities.
- Due to the recent designation of India under the ASCM framework, **India would lose the ability to use the special and differential treatment (S&DT) provision.**
- S&DT has been beneficial for India in two critical areas of agricultural subsidies and the issue of trade tariffs.

The WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA):

- **The WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA)** provides an extensive and comprehensive discipline on subsidies in agriculture.
 - The discipline **exists in case of price support measures (minimum support price) and input subsidies** which is the more common form of subsidies for most developing countries like India.
 - **For developing countries**, spending on price support measures and input subsidies taken together **cannot exceed 10% of the total value of agricultural production.** In contrast, developed countries are allowed to spend only **5% of their value of agricultural**

production.

- India uses the provisions of price support measures and input subsidies to support the agricultural sector. Given the **on-going farm distress**, the government has been trying to rework its subsidies' programme in order to extend greater benefits to small and marginal farmers.
- Given the **constraints imposed by the AoA**, the government has been keen to move into the system of direct benefit transfer (DBT) for supporting farmers. However, since the **implementation of DBT in agriculture faces several challenges**, India might continue to depend on price support measures and input subsidies.
- In such a scenario, **the government needs the policy space to provide adequate levels of subsidies to the agricultural sector**, and therefore it is imperative that India continues to enjoy the benefits as a developing country member of the WTO.

Issue of tariffs:

- The issue of market access, or the use of import tariffs, is one of the important trade policy instruments available for the developing countries to protect its domestic sectors.
- The government of India has been extensively **using import tariffs for protecting Indian businesses from import competition**.
 - India's average tariffs have increased from about 13% in 2017-18 to above 17% at present.
 - The 2020-21 Budget has increased the level of protection of the domestic players in several key sectors, thus pushing the average tariffs even higher.
- India's interests in maintaining a reasonable level of tariff protection would be well served through its **continued access to S&DT**, by remaining a developing country member of the WTO. The recent move of the USTR challenges India's classification as a developing country.

Category: HEALTH

1. Powering the health-care engine with innovation

Context:

The article analyzes the performance of the **Ayushman Bharat scheme** and suggests the way forward for the scheme.

Background:

- **The Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), or the national health protection scheme** was launched in 2018.
- The launch and expansion of Ayushman Bharat-PM-JAY was a watershed moment for the Indian health-care service delivery ecosystem.
- The scheme is currently being implemented in 32 of the 36 States and Union Territories. It constitutes the **world's largest and most ambitious publicly funded health-care assurance programme**.
- The scheme has provided 84 lakh free treatments to poor and vulnerable patients for secondary and tertiary ailments at 22,000 empanelled hospitals.

Details:

- Though the initial performance of the scheme has been very encouraging, there is still the **need for scaling up of the scheme to meet the huge demands of the large Indian population**.

- The key areas of focus to be considered by expanding the scale of the scheme entail the following:
 - To expand the secondary and tertiary hospitals empanelled under PM-JAY.
 - Ensure the quality and capacity of the empanelled hospitals.
 - Keeping the cost of treatment at viable levels.

Way forward:

Expanding the supply side:

- Given the fact that at present, there is one government bed for every 1,844 patients and one doctor for every 11,082 patients, the public health system would not be able to cater to the demands of the vast Indian population.
- Notably, considering even 3% hospitalization of PM-JAY-covered beneficiaries, the scheme is likely to provide treatment to 1.5 crore patients annually. This will **require the physical and human infrastructure capacity to be augmented immensely**.
- There is an urgent need to **expand the number of secondary and tertiary hospitals empanelled under PM-JAY**.
- While the long-term strategy will focus on expanding hospital and human resources infrastructure, an **effective near-term approach should consider improving efficiencies to bridge gaps between the existing supply and likely demand**.

Transformative solutions:

- **Mainstreaming innovation** in the Indian health system could play a vital role in **accelerating health system efficiency in India**.
- India's flourishing entrepreneurial spirit combined with a systematic push for the development of a start-up ecosystem has led to a large number of innovations in health care.
 - There are an estimated 4,000 health-care technology start-ups in India.
 - The start-ups are working to **bring innovative technologies and business models** that will help **address the infrastructure, human resources, cost-effectiveness and efficiency challenges** in Tier-2 and -3 cities.
 - Artificial Intelligence has aided in rapid radiology diagnoses in low resource settings.
 - Tele-ICU platforms have helped bridge the gap in high-skilled critical care personnel.
 - Centralized drone delivery of blood, medicines, and vaccines have enabled one to reach remote locations cost-effectively and reliably.
- The transformative solutions after due testing should make their way into the hospitals, especially in Tier-2 and -3 cities, to enable health care to be delivered at scale.
- The mainstreaming of health-care innovations and enabling their path to market would require addressing many challenges.

Addressing the constraints:

Non-uniform regulatory and validation standards:

- **Regulatory requirements, specifically for biomedical start-ups, are still evolving in India**, with hospitals often relying on foreign regulatory certifications.
 - Non-uniform regulatory standards make it difficult for a bio-medical start-up to understand the minimum necessary validation requirements for their products.
 - Lack of standards has resulted in huge variations in validation requirements at States and hospitals, forcing the start-ups to undertake the **avoidable multiple piloting studies**.
- The government is currently trying to **overhaul Indian med-tech regulatory standards and product standards**. This move will prove beneficial for med-tech companies and the health system.

Operational liquidity crunch:

- Start-ups and especially those in the med-tech domain **often face operational liquidity crunch due to the long gestation periods of their life cycle.**
 - Health-care start-ups spend long periods of time in the development of their product, given the **potential clinical risks involved.**
 - The process of testing the idea and preparing a working prototype, receiving certifications, performing clinical and commercial validations, and raising funds, in a low-trust and unstructured environment make the gestational period long.
- There is a need for a **dedicated financial framework** for these med-tech companies to address their **special needs.**

Lack of incentives to adopt innovations:

- A major hurdle in the mainstreaming of healthcare innovations is the lack of incentives and adequate frameworks to grade and adopt innovations.
- **Health-care providers and clinicians, given their limited operational capacities, lack of incentives,** do not find it necessary to consider and adopt innovations. The lack of demand at the grass-root levels leads to limited market opportunities for start-ups promoting innovative solutions.
- The government should work **towards building the operational capacity of the grass-root level** medical personnel and ensure a two-way interaction between them and the potential startups.
- The government should encourage the grass root level workers to implement innovative measures through appropriate incentives.

Procurement Challenges:

- Start-ups face procurement challenges in both public and private procurement.
 - Start-ups often **lack the financial capacity to deal with lengthy tender processes** in public procurement. The lack of experience and understanding places severe limitations on the start-up's ability for better price discovery.
 - Private procurement is complicated due to the presence of a **fragmented customer base and limited systematic channels for distribution.**
- The government should address the above challenges to enable the effective participation of the start-ups in public procurement. Handholding and concessional terms in the initial years of a company can help the start-ups gain requisite experience and understanding.

Focusing on market-ready health care innovations:

- Given the long gestational periods of product development, the short term strategy should focus on **identifying promising market-ready health-care innovations that are ready to be tested and deployed at scale.**
- The government should establish a **standardized operational validation study pattern** to ensure the effectiveness of the innovations and help build confidence for market adoption.

Recognizing the role of start-ups:

- A noticeable trend in mature health-care systems of developed countries is the **presence of a vibrant and seamless interface between hospitals and health-care start-ups.**
- Start-ups can be effective partners in helping address the most pressing health-care delivery challenges faced by hospitals.
- The government should focus on developing a robust ecosystem where hospitals actively engage with health-care start-ups by providing access to testbeds, communicating their needs effectively and adopting promising innovations.

- There is potential for **private-sector health-care providers, health innovators, industry and start-ups to be equal partners in the Ayushman Bharat scheme** which envisions an **accessible, affordable and high-quality health-care system for all.**

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Birds hit

Context:

‘State of India’s Birds 2020’ report.

Background:

- ‘**State of India’s Birds 2020**’ report has been produced by 10 globally influential organizations.
- The Environment Ministry released the status report at the **global conference of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals at Gandhinagar, Gujarat.** For more on the COP on CMS, check [PIB dated 10th Feb 2020](#).
- The report is a **rare synthesis of scientific understanding and citizen-led initiatives**, using over 10 million observations made by over 15,500 bird watchers.

Concerns:

Lack of adequate data:

- Worryingly, in spite of India having a rich ornithological tradition, **only 261 species out of 867 spotted qualified for a full analysis.** The 261 species were considered since robust long-term data were available for these species.
- **Data inadequacies have led to the exclusion of many species** whose status could be worse than expected.

Declining populations:

- The scientific report, ‘State of India’s Birds 2020’, notes with concern that the **once-thriving endemic or migrant bird populations have seen their populations decline drastically** over the last 25 years.
 - The abundance index of 12 endemic species including **the Nilgiri Pipit, Nilgiri Thrush and several Sholakilis, of the Western Ghats**, has dropped by 75% since 2000.
 - **The Hodgson’s bushchat wintering away from Mongolia migrates to the Terai grasslands in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and the northeastern States.** Their numbers have reduced drastically.
- The study notes the long-term decline of several species.
- Some bird species previously assessed as ‘least concern’ by the IUCN, have been found to be under greater stress now.
- Out of the 261 species considered for full analysis, **52% of them are now classified as being of ‘high concern’.**

Also read: [IUCN Red List](#)

Increasing pressure:

- The report notes that the birds are under **increasing pressure from human activity**.
- The issue of **habitat loss, excessive use of pesticides, hunting and trapping of the birds for the pet trade** have pushed many species towards extinction.
 - The fortunes of the Nilgiri Pipit, Nilgiri Thrush and several Sholakilis are tied to the survival of the high shola forest-grasslands of the Western Ghats. The degradation of the shola forests has had a devastating impact on their numbers.
 - The Hodgson's bushchat originally from Mongolia migrates to the Terai grasslands in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and the northeastern States in winters. The degradation of the Terai grasslands has led to a reduction in the number of these migratory species in India.

Significance:

- The report, by noting the drastic decline in bird diversity in India, points towards the **need for conservation activities**.
- Bird diversity in India must be **protected for cultural and ecological reasons**.
 - Bird diversity makes India and Kerala in particular, a **bird-watching destination**, thus helping increase its tourism potential.
 - The conservation efforts directed towards birds will **help improve the health of forests, wetlands, open country habitat and high mountains**.

Way forward:

Habitat revival:

- **Determined efforts to protect forests and other habitats** will confer multiple benefits apart from helping protect several bird species.
 - Coursers and floricans would be benefitted by helping improve the delicate habitat that they inhabit. **Bengal floricans live in open tall grassland habitats with scattered bushes. Coursers occur in dry stony, scrubby or rocky areas.**
 - The focus on ensuring the survival of the high shola forest-grasslands of the Western Ghats can aid the Nilgiri Pipit, Nilgiri Thrush and several Sholakilis of the region.

Scientific study and customized efforts:

- Each bird species is affected by different factors. Scientific studies should aim at **understanding the underlying pressures and efforts should be directed at addressing these pressures more effectively**.
 - **The Great Indian Bustard** has been reported to number very low. Given that these are **endemic to the dryland ecosystem** and the availability of knowledge of the threat factors to the Great Indian Bustard, efforts should be directed at addressing these particular challenges.
 - **Neglected small birds such as the Green Munia are widely trapped**. This is the major pressure factor on such birds. Steps to address the pet trade of such species with suitable legislation and rules can help these species.

Citizen participation:

- The latest report taps into citizen science for good data and this should serve as a foundation for **further collaborative work**.
- Enhancing citizen participation not only entails **better and more accurate studies** but also **helps improve awareness among the general citizenry**.

For more information on this topic refer:

[CNA dated Feb 18, 2020](#)

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. It's time to empower mayors

Context:

The article calls for the Elections to urban local bodies to take place on non-party lines and calls for direct elections of the mayors.

For more information on this issue refer:

[CNA dated Jan 15, 2020](#)

F. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Tidbits

1. Foodgrain production set to touch a record high

What's in News?

Total foodgrain production is projected to scale **an all-time high** of almost **292 million tonnes** in 2019-20, propelled by record production of both rice and wheat, according to the Agriculture Ministry's second advance estimates.

- Despite the government's drive to encourage millets and nutri-cereals, production failed to match targets this year.
- Pulses production was also estimated to come in lower than the targeted 23 million tonnes, although it was still higher than the previous year's harvest.
- Oil seed production was estimated at almost 342 million tonnes, higher than last year but still lower than the target for this year.

Food for the palate

The estimated total foodgrain output of 291.95 MT is over 6 MT higher than that produced in 2018-19

In million tonnes-MT	2018-19	2019-20 target	2019-20 2nd advance estimate
Total foodgrain production	285.21	291.10	291.95
Rice	116.48	116.00	117.47
Wheat	103.60	100.50	106.21
All pulses	22.08	26.30	23.02
Jowar	3.48	4.90	4.38
Bajra	8.66	9.50	8.90

SOURCE: GOVT.

2. China's envoy thanks India for support during coronavirus crisis

What's in News?

China appreciates the support and solidarity that India has extended in its fight against the novel coronavirus, Beijing's envoy has said.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi had written to President Xi Jinping extending India's assistance to fight the coronavirus outbreak.
- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had also spoken to his counterpart Wang Yi and urged an objective evaluation of the crisis.
- The envoy said both China and India were facing similar public health challenges and there was huge potential for collaboration to counter emerging threats.
- The ambassador said that China is ready to explore opportunities with India for cooperation in areas of public health and science.

Read more on the [Wuhan Coronavirus](#).

3. J&K woos investors with 6,000-acre land bank

What's in News?

With just 242.25 acres of land under industry in Jammu and Kashmir, the Union Territory administration is wooing investors by opening up a 6,000-acre land bank for setting up multiplexes, processing units, food parks, film production centres, schools, Information Technology parks and medical complexes.

- For the first time since 1947, the administration has started a major exercise to convince investors across the country to buy land and invest in the Union Territory.
- Interested investors are expected to participate in the 'J&K Global Investors Summit-2020', to be held in the capital cities of Srinagar and Jammu.
- The J&K administration has centred its campaign to woo investment around six key sectors, including healthcare, tourism, IT, food processing, education and skill development and industries.

Stating that J&K has a gross enrolment ratio of 30.9% in higher education, the administration has asked

investors to explore the opportunities in the education and skills sector.

5. Centre's response sought on plea by Arjuna awardee

What's in News?

The Delhi High Court issued notice to the Centre on a plea by a specially-abled sportsperson who claimed discrimination by the government in rewarding Deaflympics athletes over Olympics and Para Olympics sportspersons.

- Deaflympics, organised by the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf, is the highest competitive international championship for world deaf athletes with a minimum hearing disability of 55 decibels.
- The Paralympic Games, on the other hand, is an international multi-sport event for athletes with physical disabilities or intellectual impairments. This includes athletes with mobility disabilities, amputations, blindness, and cerebral palsy.

Special awards:

- In 1986, the government introduced a scheme of special awards to the medal winners in international events and their coaches.
- The objective was to incentivise the achievements of outstanding sportspersons, encourage and motivate them for higher achievements.

Issue:

- The advocate contended that as per the scheme, the award is given to sports disciplines in Olympics or Asian Games or Commonwealth Games and chess.
- The plea argued that the current policy of rewarding the persons winning medals in Olympics or Para Olympics games is discriminatory with the persons winning medals in blind or deaf championships.
- The petition has also sought for a direction to include him and other sportspersons who are medalists in International Deaf Olympics sports or other sports in the category of deaf/dumb in the **Scheme of Sports Fund for Pension to Meritorious Sportspersons**.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Selection Committee for the Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) includes:

1. The Prime Minister
2. Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha
3. The Home Minister
4. A Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

As per Section 12(3) of the RTI Act 2005, the committee for selection of Chief Information Commissioner shall comprise of:

- (i) The Prime Minister, who shall be the Chairperson of the committee;
- (ii) The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha; and
- (iii) A Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister.

Q2. Consider the following statements:

- 1. Bodos are the single largest community among the notified Scheduled Tribes in Assam.
- 2. Bodos traditionally practise Buddhism.
- 3. Bodo is listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

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

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

Bodos are the single largest community among the notified Scheduled Tribes in Assam. Part of the larger umbrella of Bodo-Kachari, the Bodos constitute about 5-6% of Assam's population. Bodos traditionally practise Bathouism, which is the worshiping of forefathers, known as Obonglaoree. Bodo is listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. It is spoken in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and West Bengal.

Q3. Consider the following statements:

- 1. The President of India appoints the members of the Central Vigilance Commission.
- 2. Central Vigilance Commission is led by the Central Vigilance Commissioner and has five Vigilance Commissioners.
- 3. Matters pertaining to State Governments are not within the powers of the Central Vigilance Commission.

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

- a. 1 only
- b. 3 only
- c. 2 only
- d. None of the above

Answer: c

Explanation:

The President of India appoints the members of the Central Vigilance Commission. The Central Vigilance Commission is led by the Central Vigilance Commissioner and has two Vigilance Commissioners. The Commission is empowered to enquire or cause inquiries to be conducted into offences alleged to have been committed under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 by certain categories of public servants of the Central Government, corporations established by or under any Central Act, Government Companies, societies and local authorities owned or controlled by Central Government. Matters pertaining to State Governments are not within the powers of the Central Vigilance Commission.

Q4. "Kambala" is:

- a. An annual traditional Buffalo Race held in coastal districts of Karnataka.
- b. A popular bull taming sport held during Pongal typically practised in Tamil Nadu.
- c. A traditional boat race conducted during the season of the harvest festival in Kerala.
- d. Assam's traditionally woven piece of cloth with a distinctive red border and floral motifs.

Answer: a

Explanation:

Kambala is a traditional slush track buffalo race that is held annually in coastal districts of Karnataka. The contest generally takes place between two pairs of buffaloes, each pair race in two separate wet rice field tracks, controlled by a whip-lashing farmer.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. There is potential for private-sector health-care providers, health innovators, industry and start-ups to be equal partners in the Ayushman Bharat scheme of the government. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
2. In the backdrop of the U.S. move to drop India from the list of developing countries under the framework of the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures of the World Trade Organization, discuss the associated concerns for India. (15 marks, 250 words)

