

## 28<sup>th</sup> February 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

#### A. GS 1 Related

#### B. GS 2 Related

##### **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

- [1. India gets invite for U.S.-Taliban deal event](#)
- [2. U.K. threatens to pull out of EU trade talks](#)
- [3. 'We need liberal trade arrangements'](#)

#### C. GS 3 Related

##### **ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY**

- [1. U.P. pollution control body pulled up for Ganga's plight](#)
- [2. AAP govt. to chalk out three -level action plan to curb air pollution](#)

##### **ECONOMY**

- [1. Telcos seek help on 'priority basis'](#)

#### D. GS 4 Related

#### E. Editorials

##### **INTERNAL SECURITY**

- [1. What should India's joint command structure look like?](#)

##### **ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY**

- [1. A browning east](#)

##### **HEALTH**

- [1. Virus marches on](#)

##### **POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

- [1. Aadhaar, no standout performer in welfare delivery](#)

#### F. Prelims Facts

- [1. Light Combat Helicopter](#)
- [2. Lockheed to deliver six MH-60R copters in 2021](#)

#### G. Tidbits

- [1. India to carry out projects in Rakhine](#)
- [2. India evacuates 112 people from China, 124 from Japan](#)
- [3. Bank credit growth slips to 6.4%](#)
- [4. Sugar output set to beat estimate: ISMA](#)
- [5. Oil slumps over 4% on virus fears](#)

#### H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

#### I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

### A. GS 1 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

### B. GS 2 Related

#### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

##### 1. India gets invite for U.S.-Taliban deal event

##### Context:

The signing of the **peace deal between the U.S. and the Taliban** in Doha.

##### Details:

- India has been invited to the ceremony of signing of the peace deal. Around 24 countries are expected to participate in the ceremony.
- India has always held that the peace negotiation should be **Afghan-owned, Afghan-led and Afghan-controlled** and has emphasized on the **participation of the Afghan government** in the ceremony as it would indicate that the U.S.-Taliban deal will be all inclusive.
- India was waiting to see the stance of the government of President Ashraf Ghani.
- Subsequent to a six-member Afghan delegation from Kabul conducting negotiations in Doha with the Taliban, India has confirmed its participation also.
  - The negotiation is about the release of 5,000 Taliban fighters who are in the custody of the Afghanistan government. This issue is part of the draft **peace agreement**, and Kabul is expected to deal with this soon after the U.S.-Taliban deal is signed on February 29.
  - The same six-member delegation from Kabul will represent the government of Afghanistan in the ceremony and begin **the intra-Afghan negotiations**.

## 2. U.K. threatens to pull out of EU trade talks

### Context:

#### U.K.-E.U. Trade talks post Brexit.

### Background:

- **Britain left the EU on January 31 2020**, but both sides agreed to a standstill transition period.
- The **post-Brexit transition period** expires in December 2020.
- The transition period slot idea was to enable enough time for both to strike a new partnership.
- The U.K. and E.U. are trying to finalize a trade deal which would outline the trade relations between the two, for post December 2020.
- The European Commission is negotiating on behalf of the EU's 27 member states.

### Details:

#### U.K. demand:

- The U.K. wants a **free trade agreement similar to the EU's deal with Canada**, set alongside **separate agreements on issues such as fishing, energy and aviation**.
- The E.U. argues that Britain's geographical proximity and existing close ties make it a different case as compared to Canada and fears that U.K. could gain an uncompetitive advantage by relaxing costly environmental and labour laws.

#### Fishing rights:

- One crucial issue for both sides in the upcoming negotiations is fishing rights. Moreover, it is also **vital for many EU countries**, notably France, where fish and seafood caught in U.K. waters account for 30% of the sales for fishermen.
- Brussels wants to maintain the right of its fleets to fish in U.K. waters.
- The U.K. proposes that fishing be negotiated annually, based on stock levels.

#### Trading standards:

- **The E.U. has insisted that Britain must mirror EU standards** if it wants to continue freely trading goods with the bloc's huge single market.

- UK has rebuffed EU demands for common trading standards and argues that it will **not agree to any obligations for U.K. laws to be aligned with the EU's**, as this would undermine the whole intention of Brexit.

#### Financial services:

- Another potential flashpoint is financial services, a key concern for Britain that it wants resolved by June 2020 to allow firms to keep working in the EU after December 31.
- The fact that **London is an important financial service centre** not just for the U.K. but for also EU further complicates the issue. Many financial firms in London have business interests in the EU region.

#### **Concerns:**

- The U.K. has warned it could walk away from the talks if a broad outline of a deal is not agreed by June 2020.
- This would see Britain's currently seamless trading arrangements with the EU, forged over half a century abruptly end after the post-Brexit transition period expires.

### **3. 'We need liberal trade arrangements'**

#### **Context:**

Australian Trade Minister's visit to India.

#### **Details:**

- Australia is looking to deepen the economic cooperation with India. As part of its efforts in this direction, it has formulated the '**India Economic Strategy' (IES)**.
  - **India is Australia's eighth-largest trading partner and fifth-largest export market in 2018-19, driven mainly by coal and higher education.** The two-way goods and services trade with India was \$30.3 billion.
  - **The stated aim of the IES is to expand Australian exports to India** from \$14.9 billion in 2017 to around \$45 billion, and outward **Australian investment to India** from \$10.3 billion to over \$100 billion.
- **Tourism**, bilateral trade and investment across resource, **agribusiness** and produce, and **higher education services sectors** are expected to get a boost under the IES.
- **The India-Australia Business Exchange**, a 120-strong business delegation from Australia visiting India, would help spread awareness about investment opportunities and the business landscape in Australia.
- Australia can be a **trusted and valued supplier of resources and energy to meet the growing needs of Indian industry and manufacturing.**

#### **Way forward:**

- Achieving the latent potential of India-Australia trade would require **progress on the trade barriers that exist.**

## **C. GS 3 Related**

### **Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY**

#### **1. U.P. pollution control body pulled up for Ganga's plight**

### Background:

- The **Namami Gange Programme** had undertaken the cleaning of some of the drains emptying into the Ganga.
  - The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and the U.P Pollution Control Board (UPPCB) had been jointly **monitoring 24 drains** since March 2019.
  - Drains that revealed **“high colour” from chemical effluents or Biochemical Oxygen Demand and Dissolved Oxygen**, mostly due to higher microbial presence, were to be cleaned under the Programme.
- Errant municipal bodies or industrial units were to be fined or face shutdowns.
- Over a thousand industries in the region, including **sugarcane, pulp and paper and tanneries, and slaughter houses** had been identified and **monitored for effluent load**.

### Details:

- The CPCB has pulled up the UPPCB for its inability to prevent drains in Kanpur from polluting the Ganga.
  - The inspection revealed the **insufficiency of the existing tapping arrangement**. The inspection revealed **high total chrome content in the drain water**, indicating the discharge of untreated, **chrome-bearing wastewater from tannery units** located in and around Kanpur.
  - Kanpur contributes the highest pollution load among all of the cities of Uttar Pradesh, which itself accounts for 75% of the pollution load in the Ganga.
- The CPCB has ordered the UPPCB to expedite **surveillance of tanneries** responsible for the discharge.

## 2. AAP govt. to chalk out three -level action plan to curb air pollution

### Context:

**Delhi's pollution woes** and the new government's action plan to curb air pollution.

### Details:

- Recently, a **conference was held in Delhi** to come up with suggestions to curb air pollution. Many important suggestions have come from the conference.
  - The Environment Minister of Delhi has stated that the government will come up with a **three-level action plan, with a five-year plan, one-year plan and winter plan** to fight air pollution in the city.
  - There are suggestions for the **formation of a joint inter-state committee of implementing agencies for better coordination** among the states.
  - There is a suggestion to **allow outdoor construction only till October to curb contribution to air pollution from construction activities**. Indoor works could be done during winter, so that there is no need to ban construction activities completely.
  - Previously, the government had prepared an action plan for 13 air pollution hotspots, but experts have now suggested that 40 monitoring stations should get such an action plan.
- The government also plans to come up with a **20-point list of actions residents can take** to reduce air pollution, turning the efforts into a **mass movement**.

## Category: ECONOMY

### 1. Telcos seek help on 'priority basis'

### Context:

Stress in the telecom sector of India.

#### Details:

- Reeling under pressure to clear their **adjusted gross revenue-related dues**, telecom companies have sent an urgent request to the government seeking measures to facilitate reduction of **financial stress in the industry**.
- The industry body COAI had highlighted the **unwillingness of the banks to take any risk with regard to the telecom sector and further credit to the sector**. The COAI has asked the government to give a clear message to banks that the government was willing to support the sector.

#### Demands:

- The telecom companies are requesting the government to do away the **requirement for financial bank guarantees (FBGs) to secure payment of licence fee** or alternatively they should be reduced to one fourth of the license fee.
- Given the stressed financial situation of the telecom companies and their best efforts on the payment of AGR dues, the government could **adjust the GST credit due to the telcos** from the government. The payment of the balance amount may be **allowed in a staggered manner**.
- The telecom companies are requesting **a moratorium of 3 years for the payment of AGR dues**, followed by a payment tenure of 15 years at a simple interest of 6%. This would be a financially viable model for the telecom companies to bear.
  - As an alternative, the government may consider granting loan equal to the AGR amount at 6% rate of interest so that the AGR liability may be discharged immediately.
- COAI also requested for **reduction in licence fee, spectrum usage charges as well as rationalisation of universal service levy**.
- The industry body has also pitched for implementation of **floor price for telecom tariffs** April 1, 2020 onwards. This would remove the practice of predatory pricing in the sector.

## D. GS 4 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## E. Editorials

### Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

#### 1. What should India's joint command structure look like?

#### Background:

- There has been a massive **restructuring of the military command structure in India** in recent times.
  - **The post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)** has been created backed by the formation of the **Department of Military Affairs**.
  - There is the **decision in principle to set up theatre commands**, centred on the theme of **tri-service integration**. A three-year timeline for rolling out theatre commands has been indicated by the CDS.

#### Details:

Kargil War of 1999:



- After the **Kargil War**, a decision was taken to overhaul the higher defence organization as **several weaknesses were detected, especially in the conduct of joint operations by the three services**. The imperative to create a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) assumed great importance after the war.
- There was a comprehensive review of the entire command structure after the Kargil War.
- **The Kargil Review Committee (KRC)** was set up by the Government of India to examine the sequence of events and make recommendations for the future.
- A nuclear dimension had also come into the equation, following the 1998 nuclear tests, the 'no first use' doctrine, and the need for a second strike capability through a nuclear triad.
- But unfortunately, given the fact that both the military and civilian organizations are extremely reluctant to change, no significant changes were observed.
- **The Naresh Chandra task force (2011) reviewed the recommendations of the Kargil Review Committee**, assessed the implementation and accordingly suggested new changes needed relating to national security.
  - According to the task force, many of the main recommendations of the Kargil Review Committee have not been implemented.
  - The task force **deliberated on the theatre command concept but had recommended the formation of regional commands**.

### **Significance of the Current Military reforms:**

#### Theatre command structure:

- Theatre commands framework is something which is desirable for India, given its present and future interests.
- The plan is to create theatre commands: Dedicated tri-service commands that are to be deployed along the northern border with China, the western border with Pakistan, an air defence command, and in the maritime domain, a peninsular command.
- Instead of having separate commands for every service, the CDS is working on having a **joint or theatre command** that can carry out all war-fighting formations under a single commander.
- In the absence of theatre commands, there would be the duplication of functions and roles.

#### Security challenges in the neighbourhood:

- The Doklam crisis with China and the Balakot airstrikes in Pakistan can be considered critical trigger points for the current focus on military reforms in India.
- The recent reforms will sharpen the combat edge of the Indian forces through streamlined tri-service operations.

#### Financial sense:

- The recent decisions may also be **financially driven**.
- The Navy and Air Force have repeatedly been requesting for more ships and fighter jets. Given the **limited resource base of India for military expenditure** and also the **changing nature of warfare**, there is the need to pool and share costly assets, bringing down operating costs.

#### The negative experience of tri-service command structure:

- **The Andaman and Nicobar Command is the first tri-service command, set up in 2001** to focus on India's interests in south-east Asia and the Strait of Malacca. India has had a very patchy experience with respect to the tri-service command.
  - The joint command was not allowed to succeed because the three services did not want to share their assets, and did not post their best officers on it.

- The Andaman and Nicobar Command did not take off because **no service allocated resources**. Theatre commands work best when you have dedicated assets.
- The negative experience might have convinced the current administration to create an **empowered office of the CDS, capable of sweeping aside resistance from individual services**.

### Concerns:

#### DMA:

- The formation of the DMA is a key pillar of the ongoing military reforms.
- The **uniformed personnel for the first time will be involved in high-level decision-making**.
- There have been questions raised on whether the **balance between the civilian bureaucracy and the armed forces** has been achieved or not. Worryingly, the restructuring seems to have dismantled the old civil-military relationship, by bestowing far **greater powers in decision-making on the armed forces**.

#### Peninsular command:

- The CDS has stated that an **Indian Ocean-centered Peninsular Command, possibly formed by merging the Eastern and Western Naval Commands**, should start shaping up by the end of 2021.
- Given the vast maritime frontiers, the formation of one peninsular command, as recommended, **may not be good enough**. The increased reference to the Asia-Pacific, the Quad framework with the U.S., Japan and Australia has only increased India's stakes in the oceanic region.

### Way forward:

#### Vision document:

- With respect to the theatre commands, India needs a clear, realistic vision document about what India's strategic interests are. Based on this vision document, specific roles for the theatre commands can be assigned.
- **The Chief of Defence Staff must spell out India's strategic interests as part of a vision document.**

#### Addressing the aspects of command and control in designated theatres:

- The CDS heads the DMA and is the Principal Adviser to the Defence Minister and the Military Adviser to the strategic nuclear forces.
- **The CDS is not an operational head of the tri-service theatre commands unlike, the Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee in the United States**. There are concerns that this can cause problems in command and control in the designated theatres.
- To deal with this issue, there is a need to appoint **a dedicated task force** in which the three services are involved and given a six-month time frame to define the desired concept and address command and control aspects over theatre commands.

#### Military Education:

- **Under the DMA, the military has been asked to perform complex administrative roles**.
- The current professional military education within the armed forces focusses exclusively on operation and training and not enough towards education. The exposure to the civilian stream is minimum.
- There is a need to **encourage the officers to get a more comprehensive education**.
- The U.S. and many European countries include within military education, awareness of the wider society. The setting up of the **Indian version of the National Defence University** may help in this regard.

The education imparted should equip the officers to perform complex inter-agency roles as demanded by institutions such as the DMA.

## Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

### 1. A browning east

#### Context:

Climate change and the Eastern Ghats.

#### Details:

- The Eastern Ghats are spread across 75,000 sq. km. from **Odisha to southern Tamil Nadu**.
- The region receives an annual average rainfall of 1,200 mm to 1,500 mm. The discontinuous mountain range is **mainly composed of deciduous forests**.
- The Eastern Ghats play an important role in:
- Sustaining biodiversity:
  - The Eastern Ghats are home to about 3,000 flowering plant species of which nearly 100 are endemic, occurring in the **dry deciduous, moist deciduous and semi-evergreen landscapes**.
  - Many animals, including tigers and elephants, and some 400 bird species are found in the region.
- Sustaining the human inhabitants:
  - The Eastern Ghats of Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu provide **forest produce and ecosystem services to millions of human inhabitants**.
  - The mountain range has a key role in modulating the climate of the region.

#### Concerns:

##### Diminishing area:

- The forest protection policy has failed dismally with respect to the Eastern Ghats. The **Eastern Ghats have shrunk by 16% over the past century**, and just one region, **Papikonda National Park**, has lost about 650 sq. km. in two decades from 1991.

##### Decreased productivity:

- New research findings note that the Ghats may be facing a serious threat from climate change. The temperature variations are the major cause of worry.
- **A disruption of the annual average temperature and diminished rainfall would drastically decrease the productivity of these deciduous forests.**
- This implies lower biomass production in the region.

##### Reduced ability to store carbon:

- The decreased productivity would imply the forest's **reduced ability to store carbon**.
- This would **affect the carbon budget of the country** and further aid Climate Change.
- The reduced ability of the critical region of Eastern Ghats to store carbon would severely **disrupt India's Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) targets and plans**.

##### Disrupt the life of human inhabitants:



- The reduced carbon-storing ability would **reduce the availability of wood, a major subsistence material for the human inhabitants.**

#### Affecting Biodiversity:

- Existing data also reveals that areas experiencing rainfall deficiency and higher temperatures have witnessed **reduced plant species diversity with herbs dominating the trees.**

#### **Way forward:**

- Protecting the Eastern Ghats is an ecological imperative.

#### Reducing carbon emissions:

- Given the challenge of Climate Change, there is a need for decisive steps to **mitigate carbon emissions.**

#### Need for forest protection:

- Human needs have led to extreme pressure on the limited forest resources.
- Relieving the pressure on forests can be done through policies that **reduce extraction of scarce resources and incentivise settled agriculture.** The government should help the inhabitants pursue a different occupation and more sustainable lifestyles.

#### Afforestation:

- Given that India is committed, under the [Paris Agreement](#) on Climate Change, to create an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes through enhanced forest and tree cover, afforestation is a policy prerogative for India.
- India, however, needs to focus on **scientific afforestation.**
- Schemes for the **restoration of forest peripheries through indigenous plant and tree species** could qualify for international climate finance and must be pursued.

Moreover, improving tree cover nationally will also confer **other benefits, like the modulation of the monsoons, improved air quality and wider spaces for biodiversity to persist.**

## **Category: HEALTH**

### **1. Virus marches on**

#### **Context:**

The rapid **spread of COVID-19 outside China.**

#### **Details:**

- Though the number of confirmed cases in Wuhan and other parts of mainland China has come down of late, the spread of the **novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) that causes COVID-19 disease** remains unchecked in other countries.
  - **South Korea has the most number of infections outside China as on date.** Beyond the high number of cases reported from South Korea, what is **indeed alarming is the rate of viral**

**spread.** From just 51 cases and no deaths on February 20, the number of cases has grown rapidly each day during the last seven days.

- The spread of novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) has been equally alarming in Iran. There have been **26 deaths in Iran, the highest outside China.**
- With 528 confirmed cases so far, the number of those infected **in Italy** is more than double than that of Iran and there have been 14 deaths as well.
- The number of countries that have so far reported at least one confirmed case has also gone up in the past week with 3,346 cases from 49 countries. For the first time, one case each has been reported from South America (Brazil) and the WHO African Region (Algeria).
- Notably, cases have been increasing only slowly in Hong Kong. **Singapore has almost cut the transmission cycle.**

For more information on this issue read [Feb 27th 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

## Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

### 1. Aadhaar, no standout performer in welfare delivery

#### Context:

A new **research paper, published in the National Bureau of Economic Research**, details findings from an extensive empirical study of the impact of Aadhaar in reducing leakages and increasing fiscal savings.

#### Background:

- **India spends a large amount of money every year across several core welfare programmes** such as Public Distribution System (PDS), LPG, [Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act](#), etc.
- The government estimates that roughly 30-40% of the money spent by the government is lost in leakages.
  - Leakages are **largely due to 'ghost' and 'duplicate' beneficiaries** using fake identities to avail government benefits.
- **A unique identity biometric scheme could eliminate the large leakages and vastly improve efficiency in welfare delivery.**
- The Aadhaar Bill was renamed '**Targeted Delivery of Financial and other Subsidies, Benefits and Services' Bill**, to make clear the fact that Aadhaar's primary purpose, was to improve welfare delivery efficiency.
  - The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) and the government have repeatedly claimed that Aadhaar has reduced leakages of government subsidies leading to fiscal savings for the government.
  - The annual report of 2017-18 claimed that through Aadhaar, savings worth ₹90,000 crores had accrued to the government.

#### Details:

- A new research paper offers an account of Aadhaar's performance.

#### The study:

- The research team conducted a scientifically designed study of the PDS system in Jharkhand covering 15 million beneficiaries using the technique of randomised control trials (RCT).

- The study compared two sets of beneficiaries. One set of beneficiaries went through the Aadhaar-based biometric authentication while the other group used the old system of procuring their ration.

#### The findings:

- Comparison to check if Aadhaar-based biometric authentication had any impact in reducing leakages revealed that Aadhaar-based biometric authentication had no measurable benefit.
- Aadhaar-based biometric authentication did not reduce leakages due to elimination of ghosts and duplicates, as widely perceived.
- The research paper claims that **Aadhaar-based biometric authentication increased transaction costs for beneficiaries, because of multiple trips to authenticate themselves and the opportunity cost of time spent.**
- Aadhaar-based biometric authentication also **introduced an error of exclusion.**
  - Aadhaar authentication falsely rejected genuine PDS beneficiaries who were then denied their ration supplies.
  - The study finds that **nearly 10% of legitimate beneficiaries were denied their ration** either because they did not have their Aadhaar linked to their ration card or due to an exclusion error.

#### **Concerns:**

##### Lack of pilot studies and testing:

- Only the widespread belief among the policy elite that ghost beneficiaries and duplicates were the challenges of India's welfare delivery was reason enough for the law of Aadhaar to be enacted.
- **A robust pilot project of scale to test the accurateness of the long-held belief was not carried out.**
- Many recent studies now establish that ghosts beneficiaries and duplicates are not a significant cause of leakages.
- A similar mistake was also committed with respect to the Goods and Services Tax (GST).
  - Policy economists have always claimed that the previous system of a **multitude of State taxes are a drag on inter-State commerce** and called for the adoption of a nationwide Goods and Services Tax (GST).
  - There was no empirical evidence to back the claim of the policymakers.
  - Three years after the implementation of the GST, the promise of vastly improved inter-State trade and a two percentage point boost to GDP seem distant while States are hurting badly with sole dependence on the Centre for their taxes.

## F. Prelims Facts

### 1. Light Combat Helicopter

- India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has inaugurated Hindustan Aeronautics Limited's (HAL's) **new Light Combat Helicopter (LCH)** production hangar.
- LCH is a 5.5-tonne class combat helicopter designed and developed by HAL. It is powered by two Shakti engines and inherits many technical features of the Advanced Light Helicopter. **LCH has the distinction of being the first attack helicopter to land in Forward Bases at Siachen, 4,700 mts above sea level with 500kg load.**

### 2. Lockheed to deliver six MH-60R copters in 2021

- Lockheed Martin will deliver six **MH-60R Multi-Role Helicopters (MRH) to the Navy** in 2021 and the order would be completed by 2025. The deal, worth around \$2.2 billion, was signed during the visit of the U.S. President to India.
- The helicopters were being procured under the **'Buy (Global)' Category through the Foreign Military Sales route of the U.S.**
- These helicopters will replace the Sea King 42/42A helicopters decommissioned in the 1990s. They are envisaged to **operate from frontline ships and aircraft carriers** providing them flexibility of operation, enhanced surveillance and attacking capability.

## G. Tidbits

### 1. India to carry out projects in Rakhine

- As part of **India's Rakhine State Development Programme (as part of the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation mechanism)**, India will carry out more development projects in the Rakhine province of Myanmar, the region considered home of the Rohingya community.
- The decision was taken during the state visit of President U Win Myint of Myanmar, who is paying a four-day visit to India.
- One of the main purposes of **India's developmental work** is aimed at creating hospitable conditions for the Rohingya community and ensuring their return.

### 2. India evacuates 112 people from China, 124 from Japan

- India has evacuated its nationals from **Wuhan** and brought back those who were quarantined on board the **Diamond Princess cruise ship docked off Yokohama in Japan** amid the **COVID-19 outbreak**.
  - A civilian aircraft evacuated **119 Indian nationals and five foreign citizens** including two from Sri Lanka and one each from Nepal, South Africa and Peru who were quarantined on board the cruise ship.
  - The Indian Air Force C-17 aircraft brought back **76 nationals and 36 foreign nationals from Wuhan** after delivering 15 tonnes of medical cargo to the Chinese authorities.
- All the evacuees will undergo a **14-day quarantine at the facility set up by the Army in Manesar**.

### 3. Bank credit growth slips to 6.4%

- The latest data released by **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** shows that the **banks' credit growth slipped to 6.4% on a year-on-year basis**.
- **Year-on-year growth in deposits has also moderated**.

### 4. Sugar output set to beat estimate: ISMA

- The Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) has revised its sugar production estimate for the current season (2019-2020) following a **study of satellite images of cane areas**.
- According to ISMA, the production in this season is expected to be 26.5 million tonnes (MT). The initial estimate in 2019 was 26 MT. There is an estimation of **increase in sugar production** despite the **increased production of ethanol** and sugarcane juice.

### 5. Oil slumps over 4% on virus fears

- **World oil prices have decreased by more than 4%**, mostly due to the impact of the spreading coronavirus on crude demand, particularly from the **key consumer economy of China**. The production

activity in China has declined drastically owing to the strict regulations on movement of goods and people in China. This has reduced the demand for crude oil from China.

- **Brent oil and New York's WTI crude** have witnessed steep declines.
- Investors are growing increasingly fearful about the **economic impact of the new coronavirus or COVID-19 outbreak**.

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. Papikonda National Park is located in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh.
2. The Polavaram irrigation project once completed will submerge parts of the Papikonda National Park.

Options:

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

**Answer: Option c**

**Explanation:**

Papikonda National Park is located in the Papi Hills in East Godavari and West Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh. It is an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area and home to some endangered species of flora and fauna.

Q2. The term MH-60 is associated with:

- a. Novel wheat variety developed by CSIR
- b. Drug being developed for COVID-19
- c. Indigenous UAV
- d. Helicopters for Navy

**Answer: Option d**

**Explanation:**

- The Indian Navy has procured 24 MH-60 Romeo helicopters at a cost of \$2.6 billion from the US.
- These helicopters would serve as replacements for the Sea King 42/42A helicopters that were already decommissioned in the 1990s. The choppers will operate from frontline ships and aircraft carriers providing them with the critical attributes of flexibility of operation, enhanced surveillance and attacking capability.
- The MH-60 is famously called as 'Romeo' and is known as a helicopter that can hunt submarines deep inside the ocean.

Q3. 'India Economic Strategy' (IES) is associated with which of the following countries?

- a. Brazil
- b. Australia
- c. The European Union
- d. The United States



**Answer: Option b**

**Explanation:**

The stated aim of the 'India Economic Strategy' (IES) is to expand Australian exports to India from \$14.9 billion in 2017 to around \$45 billion, and outward Australian investment to India from \$10.3 billion to over \$100 billion.

**Q4. Which of the following cities lies closest to the 82.5 degree east longitude?**

- a. Lucknow
- b. Raipur
- c. Ranchi
- d. Patna

**Answer: Option b**

**Explanation:**

Raipur lies on the longitude  $81.63^\circ$  E.

## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. In the backdrop of the recent decision in principle to set up theatre commands in India, centred on the theme of tri-service integration, discuss the significance and also the associated concerns. (15 marks, 250 words)
2. New research findings note that the Eastern Ghats may be facing a serious threat from climate change and calls for urgent action. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)