

16 Mar 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Modi calls for SAARC emergency fund

Context:

- First **videoconference of the heads of member countries of SAARC** to discuss a common strategy to tackle COVID-19.

Details:

- Given the seriousness of the challenge posed by **COVID-19** to the world and the uncertainty surrounding it, countries must work together to **devise a common strategy and go ahead with a coordinated effort.**

- Agreeing with the suggestion of the Indian PM, leaders of the SAARC region held the first-ever videoconference of the heads to discuss a common strategy to tackle COVID-19.
- The videoconference was also addressed by Bangladesh Prime Minister, Bhutan Prime Minister, Nepal Prime Minister, Maldives President, Sri Lankan President, Afghan President, and Special Assistant on Health to Pakistan's Prime Minister.
- The regional leaders explained how they had taken measures to stop the spread of the virus.

COVID19 Emergency Fund:

- The Indian Prime Minister has called on the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to create a **COVID19 Emergency Fund**, based on voluntary contribution, to fight the threat of COVID-19.
- **India has extended \$10 million as its contribution** to the proposed fund.

SAARC agency:

- Given the **past precedent and the current crisis**, the Bangladeshi PM pitched for an **institution in the form of a SAARC agency to fight contagious diseases** that pose a threat to public health in the region.

Impact on economies:

- Addressing the **impact of the pandemic on the region's economy**, Maldives President said the **economy of the Maldives** would be affected as the tourist flow from Italy, China and Europe had dried up.
- Bhutan Prime Minister also highlighted the economic impact that the virus would have on the **economies of South Asia** and urged **SAARC to help the member countries**.

Taskforce:

- Afghan President highlighted the **vulnerability of Afghanistan** as it shares a long border with Iran, one of the worst-affected countries and suggested that the **SAARC countries create a task force and a framework of telemedicine** to deal with the threat.
- **Afghanistan urged India to provide satellite links for distance education**.

For more information on this topic refer:

[CNA dated March 14, 2020](#)

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. SC approves Kerala slotting projects in orange category

Context:

- Supreme Court's observations regarding Kerala state slotting based on **Environment (Protection) Rules**.

Background:

CPCB slotting of industries:

- The [Central Pollution Control Board \(CPCB\)](#) had slotted industrial activities into the **red, orange, green and white categories**, based on the pollution index, in March 2016. This was meant to implement more effective measures to control pollution based on the severity of pollution by the industries.
 - The criteria of categorization of industrial sectors are **based on the Pollution Index** which is a function of the **emissions (air pollutants), effluents (water pollutants), hazardous wastes generated and consumption of resources**.
 - The Pollution Index (PI) of any industrial sector is a number from 0 to 100 and the increasing value of PI denotes the increasing degree of pollution load from the industrial sector.
 - The following are the criteria on the '**Range of Pollution Index**' for the categorization of industrial sectors.
 - Industrial Sectors having Pollution Index score of **60 and above - Red category**
 - Industrial Sectors having Pollution Index score of 41 to 59 – Orange category
 - Industrial Sectors having Pollution Index score of 21 to 40 – Green category
 - Industrial Sectors having Pollution Index score **up to 20 - White category**
 - There shall be **no necessity of obtaining the Consent to Operate for the White category of industries**. The red category of industries shall not be normally permitted in the ecologically fragile area/protected area.

Kerala's SPCB rules:

- Based on the report of an expert committee and in line with the CPCB's direction, in 2017, the Kerala State Pollution Control Board brought **flats, apartments, and commercial buildings, spanning over 2,000 sq.m, but less than 20,000 sq.m, under the orange category**.
- This decision of the State Pollution Control Board was successfully challenged before the Appellate Authority which held that residential constructions did not fall in the category of industry.
- The State Pollution Control Board had argued that it is authorized to use its power under the directions of the CPCB and the Environment (Protection) Rules, to **impose such stringent conditions to prevent environmental degradation and pollution**.
- The State Pollution Control Board then appealed before the NGT, which set aside the Appellate Authority's decision and held that these stringent conditions were required on account of **high groundwater consumption and contamination of water bodies and the groundwater by such buildings**.

Details:

- The [Supreme Court](#) has upheld the views of the NGT and declined to entertain the appeal filed by the Kerala chapter of the Confederation of Real Estate Developers Association of India (CREDAI) that the categorization was arbitrary.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Labour Ministry yet to spend ₹2,053.59 cr. of 2019-20 Budget

Context:

- The **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour's** report.

Details:

Underutilization of funds:

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour has flagged the **under-utilization of funds by the Labour and Employment Ministry**.
 - The Labour and Employment Ministry was **yet to spend almost 20% of its 2019-20 Budget** (revised estimate) as of February 2020, pointing to gross under-utilization of funds. Underutilized funds amounted to about ₹2,053.59 crores for 2019-20 fiscal.

Uneven spread:

- The committee also noted that the **utilization of funds was not evenly spread out across all the four quarters** for the 2019-20 fiscal.
- The percentage of **fund utilization across the schemes has not been uniform**.
 - **The Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana**, which gives employers incentives to generate new employment, recorded **100% utilization**, compared with the revised estimate.
 - The Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana Scheme **aims to incentivize employment generation** by the Government paying the full employers' EPS contribution of 12%, for the new employees, for the first three years of their employment.
 - **This Scheme has a dual benefit**, as it incentivizes increasing employment base for workers in the establishment, and will also enable the workers to have access to social security benefits of the organized sector.
 - **The National Career Service (NCS) project** of the Labour Ministry, which facilitates job-seekers, recorded **only 60.88% utilization of allotted funds**.
 - National Career Service (NCS) project is an initiative launched by the Ministry of Labour and Employment (India) as a Mission Mode Project for establishing quick and efficient **career-related services**.
 - National Career Service works towards **bridging the gap between job-seekers and employers** by transforming the National Employment Service.
 - It **brings together all stakeholders** like job seekers, employers, counsellors, trainers, and private placement agencies to facilitate the convergence of information and create synergies through these associations.
 - NCS provides a host of career-related services such as dynamic job matching, career counselling, job notifications, vocational guidance, information on skill development courses, internships, etc.

Ineffectiveness of the schemes:

- 3,751 job fairs had been conducted under the National Career Service (NCS) scheme until December 2019. However, only 3.69 lakh of the 19.71 lakh candidates had received job offers.

Additional summary:

Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan Yojana:

- **Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan is a central government scheme** meant for old age protection and **social security of Unorganised Workers (UW)**.
 - There are an estimated 42 crore unorganized workers in India.
- It is a **voluntary and contributory pension scheme**, under which the subscriber would receive a

minimum assured pension of Rs 3000/- per month after attaining the age of 60 years and if the subscriber dies, the spouse of the beneficiary shall be entitled to receive 50% of the pension as a family pension.

To know more about the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan, click [here](#).

Category: AGRICULTURE

1. Distress sale of mustard in Haryana as govt. yet to start procurement

Context:

- Distress sale of mustard in Haryana.

Details:

- As the Haryana government is yet to begin the procurement process, mustard farmers are resorting to distress selling of their produce at prices far lower than the **mandated [minimum support price](#)** fixed by the Haryana government for mustard.

Concerns:

Marginal farmers fail to benefit:

- Given the fact that **marginal farmers have limited or no access to storage facilities, have loans to repay and many other expenses to meet**, farmers with small landholdings cannot afford to wait for long for the government to start the procurement process and hence, **resort to distress selling**. Most of them sell off their crop soon after harvesting.
- Notably, it is only the **big farmers who avail of the government's procurement policy**.
- The commission agents make immediate payment while the payment from the government takes weeks. This too discourages farmers from selling their produce to government agencies.

Decreasing earnings:

- The **unexpected rain** has delayed the arrival of mustard, besides also **reducing mustard production**.
- The distress selling has led to farmers selling to commission agents at **prices much lower than the MSP**, leading to a **further decrease in the farmers' earnings**.

Way forward:

- Resorting to a **fixed schedule for the procurement of crops** under the MSP framework should be the focus.
- Ideally, **the window for MSP procurement should start early in the crop season** to ensure that all the farmers can benefit from government procurement and there is no distress selling.
- The MSP procurement should be **uniformly distributed and should benefit all regions equally**.

Additional Information:

Kisan Credit Card:

- The **Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme** is a credit scheme introduced in August 1998 by Indian banks. The model scheme was prepared by **the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)** to provide term loans for agricultural needs.
 - The scheme's objective is to meet the comprehensive credit requirements of the **agriculture sector and fisheries and animal husbandry sector (added in 2019)** by giving financial support to farmers.
 - Participating institutions include all commercial banks, Regional Rural Banks, and state co-operative banks.
 - The scheme has **short term credit limits for crops and term loans**. The validity period is five years, with an option to extend for up to three more years.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY

1. Needless appeal: On U.P. move against removal of 'name and shame' posters

Background

- Banners had come up at a major roadside with personal details of those accused of vandalism during the anti-CAA protests.
 - The posters sought compensation from the accused persons and further, to confiscate their property, if they failed to pay compensation.
- The Allahabad High Court had suo motu, taken cognizance of the UP government's move to put up roadside posters **naming and shaming and giving photos and details of individuals accused of damaging public property during the anti-CAA protests** in Lucknow.

Allahabad High Court Judgment

The High Court made two significant observations: there is **no legal basis** to allow such banners and they violate the **fundamental right** to privacy.

- The court reprimanded the UP government for “undemocratic functioning”, for **violating the individual's fundamental right to privacy and the assurance of Article 21**, that no person shall be deprived of life and personal liberty except by procedure established by law.
- It directed the government to take down the posters “forthwith” and set a date for it **to submit a compliance report to the court**.

The UP government quickly moved the Supreme Court. The court took up the matter on an urgent basis.

Supreme Court

- The SC repeatedly asked Uttar Pradesh **what law gave it the power to publicly shame people**.
- It told the state that while an individual can commit any act that is not prohibited by law, a state can take only actions that are expressly sanctioned by law. This is a crucial aspect of the rule of law to

protect the individual from the might of the state apparatus.

- The Supreme Court observed that the **UP government's decision was missing the “backing of law”**.
- The Supreme Court bench then decided that there were larger questions of law involved in the case, so a larger bench would have to deal with it.

Issues with name and shame

- It undermines the **presumption of innocence until proven guilty by due process of law** — a cardinal principle of criminal jurisprudence.
- The anti-CAA protestors have already suffered irreparable **damage to their reputations**.
 - When the dignity of an individual is taken away, it can be worse than a physical blow.
- It makes the protestors **vulnerable to mob justice** because a state-sanctioned hoarding carries a certain legitimacy.
- Even if a court declares them guilty, the appropriate measure would be to **convict them or impose a penalty according to law**. The state cannot exercise its powers to punish in a manner not supported by law.

Conclusion

No democracy can afford to punish people without a due process of law.

New law in U.P. to recover costs for damaging property

Context:

- The State government of Uttar Pradesh has notified the **Uttar Pradesh Recovery of Damage to Public and Private Property Ordinance, 2020**, promulgated by the Governor.

Details:

- The ordinance is meant to arm the state with a stringent law to **recover compensation from those who damage public and private property during protests and riots**.

Claiming compensation:

- The owner of any private property or the head of the office concerned in respect of public property may file **claims for compensation within three months** of any incident that causes any damage during public protests, bandhs or riots.
- The claim can cite as respondents those who instigated or committed acts that caused the damage. **The claim can be filed against those named by the police in the riots.**
- The claims would cover not only damage to public and private property but also the costs borne by the police and the administration in taking preventive measures.

Claim tribunals:

- Claims for compensation will be **decided by designated Claims Tribunals** that will be authorized to **investigate complaints and assess the damage**.
- The chairperson of the Claims Tribunal would be a retired district judge, while its members would be of the rank of additional commissioner.
- The Claims Tribunal shall have **all the powers of a civil court**.
- The Claims Tribunal would have the **power to attach the property of the respondents and publicize their names**, addresses, and photographs to warn the public against purchasing the

property.

- The order passed by the Claims Tribunal would be final and no appeal would be maintainable before other courts

2. Reforming power to serve people

Context

- The article highlights issues with the political parties and their hunger for power, and a growing need to introduce [electoral reforms](#).

Examples

- The campaign for the **Delhi Assembly elections** was filled with hate speeches.
- In **Madhya Pradesh**, the ruling Congress is battling defections.
- The Maharashtra Government currently has political parties that are ideologically mismatched.
- In Karnataka, defections from the Janata Dal (Secular)-Congress coalition to the BJP brought the government down.

Capturing power

- The primary goal of political parties is to capture power, and they use all the means at their disposal to obtain power. Power brings money, privileges, and control of the treasury. So, the stakes are high.
- Political parties in power are supposed to deliver good governance and serve the public, but **usually, power becomes an end in itself**.
- The fact that more and more freebies are being provided nowadays clearly shows that **public funds are being used by those in power to lure voters, and are not necessarily being used for public service**.

Factors that strengthen the growing deterioration in the quality of campaigns

- One is the rapidly increasing **criminalization of politics**.
 - In 2019, the Lok Sabha had 43% of MPs with a criminal record, up from about 23% in 2004.
 - Political parties that give tickets to such candidates are directly responsible for this.
- The other factor is peddling **fake news** during an election campaign. Most of what is online consists of abuse of rivals and vilification of opposition parties.

How Money affects Elections?

- Money fuels much of what we witness today. Defection from one party to another is primarily due to the influence of money.
 - Who is elected or which party wins does not seem to matter any longer. Those with money and the ability to engineer defections can always come to power.
- Two factors contribute to this open use of money to topple governments.
 - One is the **total lack of transparency in the funding of political parties**.
 - [Electoral bonds](#) have made it even more difficult to trace the source of funds of political parties.
 - The second is that **political parties in power have a complete hold over law and order**.
 - A corporate scamster is arrested when the money trail is discovered, but no effort is taken to trace the money trail during massive defections.
 - Political parties in India are fully controlled by a small ruling clique. Finances are raised and used in a completely opaque way.

Consequences

- All governments, whether Central or State, are in financial difficulty. More than 25% of the Central Budget is spent on **paying interest on money** borrowed by the government.
- Then there is deficit financing.
 - The Central government has made efforts to bring it down but has not been able to meet its targets. **India's fiscal deficit is among the highest in the developing world**, with the IMF estimating it to be 7.5% of the GDP in 2019.
 - State government finances are worse: a substantial amount is spent on salaries and pensions.
- Then we have a huge problem in the financial sector with banks, non-banking financial companies and ILFS going almost into liquidation. That means **a lot of the public's money is either gone or is under great risk**.
- Other manifestations of these problems are an increasing number of government scams; corruption; growing fear and insecurity; average or poor governance, including public services provided by the government; and rising unemployment.

The way forward

- India needs a system that throws up parties and politicians **whose primary goal is public service, not power**.
- Mahatma Gandhi suggested a way: "Democracy is an impossible thing until power is shared by all... Even a laborer, who makes it possible for you to earn your living, will have his share in self-government."
- **Politicians in the ruling party** are rarely arrested, and old cases against them are even withdrawn. Sometimes no action is taken against those making hate speeches.
 - **Only rival politicians** are targeted. This shows that the police follow the orders of their political masters. Therefore, **police reforms are required**.
- As a quick fix for misuse of money power and engineered defections, a **forensic audit by an independent agency should be mandatory** when MLAs defect to other parties.

Conclusion

- Political parties who can reform the system do not want to change. Voters who want to reform are not in a position to bring about inner change in the electoral and political system merely through voting.
- Therefore, to promote a sustainable democracy, we need to encourage active participation of citizens in governance and work towards educating them about major public policy issues. Citizen awareness is the answer.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)

- It was formerly known as the Millennium Dam and sometimes referred to as Hidase Dam.
- It is a gravity dam whose construction **began in 2011 on the Blue Nile tributary in the northern Ethiopia highlands**, from where 85% of the Nile's waters flow.
- When complete, the Grand Renaissance Dam, which Ethiopia is building, **will be Africa's biggest hydroelectric power plant**.

Ethiopia's new Nile dam



Why is it so contentious?

- At the centre of the dispute are plans to fill up the mega-dam as **Egypt fears the project will allow Ethiopia to control the flow of Africa's longest river.**
- Hydroelectric power stations do not consume water, but the speed with which Ethiopia fills up the dam's reservoir **will affect the flow downstream.**

Why is Egypt so upset?

- Egypt relies on the Nile for 90% of its water. It has historically asserted that having **a stable flow of the Nile waters is a matter of survival in a country where water is scarce.**
 - Egypt also fears that the dam could restrict its already scarce supply of the Nile waters, which is almost the **only water source for its citizens.**
 - It could **also affect transport on the Nile in Egypt** if the water level is too low and affect the livelihood of farmers who depend on the water for irrigation.
- A **1929** treaty (and a subsequent one in **1959**) **gave Egypt and Sudan rights to nearly all of the Nile waters.**
 - The colonial-era document also gave **Egypt veto powers over any projects by upstream countries that would affect its share of the waters.**

- **Under the 1959 Nile Waters Agreement**, the two downstream riparian states Egypt and Sudan, respectively, were allocated 55.5 billion cubic metres and 18.5 billion cubic metres of Nile water annually.
 - That settlement reduced Cairo's control of the waters, compared to the virtual veto over utilisation it was granted under the 1929 treaty.
- **Egypt accuses Ethiopia** of not factoring in the risk of drought conditions such as those that affected the Nile Basin in the late 1970s and early 1980s.
- **Ethiopia** was outside the purview of the 1959 treaty, as also other upstream states including Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda.
 - Ethiopia has said it should not be bound by the decades-old treaty and went ahead and started building its dam at the start of the Arab Spring in March 2011 without consulting Egypt.

Why does Ethiopia want such a big dam?

- The dam is at the **heart of Ethiopia's manufacturing and industrial dreams**. When completed, it is expected to be able to generate a massive 6,000 megawatts of electricity.
- Ethiopia has an acute shortage of electricity, with 65% of its population not connected to the grid.
- The energy generated will be enough to have its citizens connected and sell the surplus power to neighbouring countries.
- Ethiopia also sees the dam as a matter of national sovereignty.
 - The dam project does not rely on external funding and relies on government bonds and private funds to pay for the project.
 - The country has been critical of what it considers foreign interference in the matter.

Does anyone else benefit?

- Neighboring countries including Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, Djibouti and Eritrea are likely to benefit from the power generated by the dam.

F. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following pairs of Mountain pass and the corresponding state/UT is wrongly matched?

- Nathu la: Sikkim
- Bomdi la: Arunachal Pradesh
- Lipu lekh: Himachal Pradesh
- Zoji la: Jammu and Kashmir

Answer:

Option c

Explanation:

Lipu Lekh pass is present at the trijunction of Uttarakhand (India), Tibet (China) and Nepal borders.

Q2. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?

1. SAARC was founded in the year 1985.
2. SAARC's secretariat is based in Dhaka, Bangladesh.
3. China and the USA have observer status in SAARC.

Options:

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

Answer:

Option d

Explanation:

- The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is the regional intergovernmental organization and geopolitical union of states in South Asia. The organization promotes the development of economic and regional integration.
- Its member states are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- SAARC was founded in Dhaka on 8 December 1985. Its secretariat is based in Kathmandu, Nepal.
- States with observer status include Australia, China, the European Union, Iran, Japan, Mauritius, Myanmar, South Korea and the United States.

Q3. Which of the following statement/s is/ are correct?

1. CPCB has categorized industrial sectors based on the Pollution Index into the red, green and white categories only.
2. The Pollution Index is a function of the air emissions, water effluents, hazardous wastes generated and consumption of resources.
3. The White category of industries does not need Consent to Operate.

Options:

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

Answer:

Option c

Explanation:

- The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) had slotted industrial activities into the red, orange, green and white categories, based on the pollution index, in March 2016.
- The criteria of categorization of industrial sectors are based on the Pollution Index which is a function of the emissions (air pollutants), effluents (water pollutants), hazardous wastes generated and consumption of resources.
- The Pollution Index (PI) of any industrial sector is a number from 0 to 100 and the increasing value of PI denotes the increasing degree of pollution load from the industrial sector.
- There shall be no necessity of obtaining the Consent to Operate for the White category of industries. The red category of industries shall not be normally permitted in the ecologically fragile area/protected area.

Q4. Which of the following statement/s is/are incorrect?

1. Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan is a central government scheme targeted at Unorganized Workers.
2. The scheme assures a minimum pension of Rs 6000/- per month.
3. The person should be within the age limit of 18-55 to be eligible for the scheme.

Options:

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

Answer:

Option c

Explanation:

- Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan is a central government scheme meant for old age protection and social security of Unorganized Workers (UW).
- It is a voluntary and contributory pension scheme, under which the subscriber would receive a minimum assured pension of Rs 3000/- per month after attaining the age of 60 years and if the subscriber dies, the spouse of the beneficiary shall be entitled to receive 50% of the pension as a family pension.
- Eligibility Criteria:
 - Should be an unorganised worker (UW).
 - Entry age between 18 and 40 years.
 - Monthly Income Rs 15000 or below.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Explain, with suitable examples, how the relationship between money and politics has come to be one of the great problems of democracy. (10 marks, 150 words)
2. What is meant by the Minimum Support Price (MSP)? What is the significance of MSP in the Indian context? What are the problems associated with the implementation of the MSP system? (15 marks,

