13 Apr 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. Bihar launches app for govt. school students

Context:

- Government efforts to ensure access to learning opportunities for children during the lockdown phase.

Background:

- Schools and colleges have been shut due to the COVID-19 lockdown. They had closed even before the national lockdown was imposed. It is possible that the reopening of schools and colleges might take more time given the difficulty in ensuring physical distancing norms in schools and colleges.
- The **prolonged shut down can affect the educational outcomes of children.**
- There has been a **spurt of edu-tech companies** offering online courses for students.

Details:

- The Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC), a wing of the State Education Department, has launched a **mobile application "Unnayan: Mera Mobile, Mera Vidyalaya"** for Class VI to XII of over 70,000 **government-run schools.**
  o The app was jointly developed by the **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF),** the Bihar government and Eckovation, a social learning platform.
- Class-wise and subject-wise study materials are being prepared for access under this app. The efforts are oriented towards the needs of government school students.
- Given the deep **penetration of radios into villages** and the relative simplicity of its operation via basic phone or smartphones, BPEC plans to book a slot with the All India Radio for the **audio broadcast of study materials**.

Concerns:

- An independent research by an alumna of the London School of Economics has flagged some **fundamental challenges in the present approach**.
- The research calls into question the **viability of viewing technology-enabled education** as a solution in a state like Bihar which has a **huge digital divide and socio-economic inequalities**.
- Given the deprivation, the research notes that it would be highly unlikely that the children would be able to digitally connect with schools and teachers or participate in online classes.

Way forward:

Ensuring universal access:

- Though there is a good usage of mobiles in rural areas, there might still be lack of access in some parts, where the government will need to step in with **state support**.
- **Common service centres** might act as a resource for digital access to the underprivileged.
- **Community support** would help reduce the disparities in access to digital resources.

Ensuring digital literacy:

- The civil society and NGOs can play an important role in increasing digital literacy among the masses. Government schemes like **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan** can be utilized.
- The **user interface should be made as easy and simple** as possible to ease the user experience.

Involving parents:

- Parents should be made to realize the **importance of education for the development of their children.** This could push the parents to ensure adequate learning opportunities for their children despite any economic hardships.

2. 'People with disabilities have special issues during virus outbreak'

Context:

- Issues faced by people with disabilities during the pandemic.

Background:

- India is home to **nearly 150 million people with some degree of disability**. Nearly 25-30 million have severe disability.

- Most of the people live as part of their families and are dependent on a carer to take care of their daily essential needs.

Details:

Unique challenges faced by people with disabilities:

- People with disabilities have **unique issues** in a situation like the spread of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2).
- They would be experiencing **hardships in accessing information on prevention and risk of infection** and find it **hard to maintain personal hygiene and social distancing.**
    - o People with visual impairment and blindness cannot read the messages that the rest of the population can see. They often need handholding to move around thus **negating the possibility of maintaining physical distancing**.
    - o The hearing impaired, especially those who are not literate, cannot hear the message or read it. Since many depend on lip-reading, they are compromised when the person giving a message is wearing a mask. None of the messages in the media is using sign language interpreters.
    - o The **physically disabled cannot reach a wash basin** or may not be able to wash their hands vigorously.
    - o Children and adolescents with conditions like cerebral palsy or Down's Syndrome **need to be assisted in feeding.**
    - o People with mental health issues **cannot comprehend the messages**. They may experience higher stress because they are unable to understand what is happening all around them.
    - o People with disabilities have a **higher risk of conditions such as diabetes and hypertension,** which are high-risk factors for COVID-19 mortality. **Routine health needs** that they have are also not provided as health centres or transportation facilities are not accessible.

Concerns:

- Given their unique issues and vulnerability, people with disabilities **need much more support than the rest of the population** in the face of a pandemic.
- There is **very little attention being given** to addressing the special needs of people with disabilities and making efforts at reaching out to them.
- The need for the disabled and their carers for special support are not routinely forthcoming.

Way forward:

Government's role:

- The government and its organisations working with people with disabilities have to make efforts to **convert prevention and care messages on COVID-19 into an accessible format.**
- Health facilities should **prioritise the needs of people with disabilities**. Their medicine needs have to be provided for.
- **Mobile health teams** can help provide services at homes. A dedicated helpline can be set up for this so that the medical teams can reach them.

Public's role:

- The **general public needs to be educated** on the need for special support for people with disabilities.
- Technology-savvy professionals can help to make information available in an accessible format for people with disabilities.
- **Civil society** should volunteer their time to provide support for this section.

Conclusion:

- A country's development is measured by its **social support and inclusive policies for the most vulnerable**. Inclusive society is the need of the hour.
- There is the need for a **humane response with affirmative action for people with disabilities.**

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. India talking to U.S. over visa sanctions

Context:

- India seeking an exemption from **U.S. visa sanctions.**

Background:

Illegal Indian immigrants into the U.S.:

- According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's 2018 survey, **Indians constitute one of the largest groups of illegal aliens in the U.S**., numbering an estimated 4,70,000, who had entered by 2015.
- The U.S. administration has pushed for India to tighten its controls on emigration, and accept more deportations in the past few years.
- Recently, India brought back 150 citizens who had entered the U.S. illegally, and accepted 311 others deported by Mexico who were trying to enter the U.S. illegally.
- India had been **cooperating with the U.S. to repatriate illegal Indian nationals from the U.S**. as it is the government's policy not to encourage illegal immigration to any country.

Announcement by the U.S. administration:

- The administration has passed orders to impose visa sanctions on countries that don't repatriate illegal "aliens" in the U.S. within a week.

Details:

- Given the fact that India has **COVID-19-related travel restrictions in place**, which restricts all passengers, including Indian citizens from any other country, the U.S. order poses a major challenge.
  - If U.S. refuses to relent on its seven-day deadline, or India refuses to lift the ban on incoming travel within the week, **Indians could face a major cut in U.S. visas granted for the year.**
- The Indian government is engaged in talks with the U.S. administration to reconsider its orders.
- The U.S. Presidential Memorandum does include a clause permitting the Secretary of State to make exceptions consistent with the foreign policy interests of the United States. This can help India get a reprieve from the deadline.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. 'Resume industrial activity in 15 sectors'

Context:

- Letter written by the Industries Secretary to the Home Secretary seeking relaxations for the industrial sector amid the national lockdown.

Background:

- The National lockdown and the restrictions in place have had a **negative impact on the industrial sector.**
- The sector has been affected by the **disruption of the supply chain of raw materials, shortage of labour force, drastic fall in demand** and cancellations of pre-existing orders, which have severely **affected the financial position of the industries**. This is bound to impact the financial health of the banks and subsequently the entire economy.
- There have been reports of **cancellation of orders from importing countries** due to delays in delivery of goods. There have also been reports of China, which has reopened its industries, bagging some of the orders lost by India. There is the possibility of **India losing its market share to China in the long term**. This, apart from hurting India's exports, will also lead to **reduced employment opportunities.**
- Given the **likelihood of an extension of the lockdown**, there are concerns that the prolonged lockdown would further impact the industrial sector.

Details:

- The Commerce Ministry has called for measures to **mitigate the negative effects** of the lockdown on the industrial sector.
- The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has urged the Home Ministry to allow **relaxations of the restrictions on a number of industrial sectors.** It has called for allowing more activities in the industries **with reasonable safeguards** in place.

Way forward:

- There are recommendations that **industrial activity be restarted in at least 15 core sectors**, including heavy electricals, electronics and telecom equipment, automobiles, steel mills, power looms, defence units, cement, rubber, seeds, agro-chemicals and fertilizers.
- There needs to be a gradual approach to reopening. In the initial phases, manufacturing could be restarted in single shifts of 20-25% capacity, following proper social distancing and sanitation norms.
- To **address the problem of labour shortage**, companies should be allowed to insist on workers returning for duty to avail wages. The relevant authorities should allow for the company administration to ferry people back to work.
- The state administration should also **ensure easy movement of necessary raw materials and supplies** with necessary safeguards in place.

Significance:

- The gradual opening of a few important industrial sectors is **essential to improve the economic activity and provide liquidity** in the hands of the people.
- The opening of the industrial sector is key to **revive and improve the economy**, which would help relieve some of the economic pressure of the lockdown phase.

2. Enough grains for 9 months: Paswan

Context:

- Supply of food grains during the national lockdown.

Background:

- The central government, as part of its economic package, had announced that all **81 crore beneficiaries of the Public Distribution System (PDS)** would get **three months of free supply**. This move was to help remove the burden of **food security** on the poor and vulnerable sections.
- The Public Distribution System (PDS) is implemented under the **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.**
- Apart from the main food grains of Wheat and Rice, the two major grains, **coarse grains and pulses are also supplied through the PDS** in a limited quantity. The monthly supply through the PDS amounts to around 60 lakh tonnes.

Details:

- Considering the current stock in government run godowns, the central government has stated that there is **no shortage of grains** and there is enough stock of grains to ensure **sufficient supplies to all beneficiaries of the PDS system for nine months.**
- There are expectations of a **bumper Rabi wheat crop harvest;** it would further help boost the available stocks for a much longer period.

Steps taken:

Distribution:

- There has been **transportation and distribution of food grains** at an unprecedented scale, with trains playing a key role.
  - Recently, over 20.19 lakh tonnes of grains were moved through trains in one day.

Subsidized grains:

- The government has made it easier for **agencies, public or private, to purchase grains from it at a subsidized rate** if they are involved in helping the poor.

3. Pharma units in limbo amid confusion over HCQ exports

Context:

- Confusion regarding the export rules for medicines from India.

Background:

India's strength in the pharma sector:

- The Indian pharmaceutical industry has a **market of about $22 billion in 206 countries**.

- India is the **lead producer for hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), an anti-malarial drug**, while Indian-made **paracetamol** is used as a fever medication worldwide.

Details:

Contradicting statements:

- The previous two notifications by the **[Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)](#) bans the export of HCQ "without any exceptions", and had kept paracetamol on a restricted list**.
- However, following high demand and requests by many countries, the **Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)** had announced that it would license the malaria drug hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) and **supply it to countries on a government to government basis.**
- After making an assessment of the domestic requirement and maintaining a sufficient buffer which would be assessed on a weekly basis by the Empowered Committee, a Group of Ministers had approved the **release of drugs to other countries.** The government had cleared the release of HCQ for 13 countries.
- However, the decision to allow the exports has not yet been notified by the DGFT.

Concerns:

Stock stuck in warehouses:

- Some small exporters of the drugs have **tonnes of finished goods lying in their warehouses and some at ports** which are not being cleared for exports because of a lack of clarity on the procedure among officials and administration.
- Customs officials are not clearing the consignments of HCQ and paracetamol.

Confusion in the industry:

- The lack of a notification by the DGFT allowing for export has caused some confusion in industry circles.
- There is **huge capacity in the Indian pharma industry for both HCQ and paracetamol production.** But the manufacturers, especially the MSMEs and SMEs, are confused about the process, given the DGFT's previous notification banning exports.
- The uncertainty might **not incentivize the firms to increase their production**.

Loss of opportunity:

- The Indian pharmaceutical industry has been built over 25 years with a market of $22 billion to 206 countries.
- The current phase of **hurdles in exports** would be **counterproductive to the sector**, if it is not allowed to use its potential to **grow at a time when the global demand is at its highest.**
- Notably, none of the major markets in Africa, Latin America, and CIS countries had yet been cleared for the export of HCQ, at a time when demand from them is at its peak.

Conclusion:

- Several industry groups plan to petition the Commerce Ministry and the Ministry of External Affairs to **clarify the rules for export.**

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: ECONOMY

1. Trade in tatters

Context:

- World Trade Organization (WTO)'s outlook for global trade.

Details:

WTO's projections:

- The WTO projects **merchandise trade to decrease by anywhere between 13% and 32%** in 2020.
  - The wide range of possible trajectories for the predicted decline in trade is attributable to the **unprecedented nature of the health crisis** caused by the COVID-19 outbreak and the **uncertainty around its precise economic impact**.
- The WTO expects all regions, save Africa, West Asia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, to suffer **double-digit declines in exports and imports** this year.
- Economists are certain that the disruption and resultant blow to trade due to the COVID-19 pandemic will be **far worse than the slump brought by the global financial crisis of 2008**.

IMF's projections:

- International Monetary Fund (IMF) has made similar downward forecasts that the **global economy is set to contract sharply in 2020.**
  - The **tight restrictions on movement** and **social distancing norms** across geographies have led to severe curbs on labour supply, transport and travel and the **shuttering of whole sectors from hotels and non-essential retail to tourism** and significant parts of manufacturing.

Uniqueness of the current challenge:

- The WTO and the IMF chief have pointed to the fact that unlike the recession that accompanied the global financial crisis just over a decade ago, **the current downturn is unique.**
- There have been many **structural changes which have been witnessed over the years.**

Global value chains:

- **Global supply chains have increased in complexity**. This is even more evident in electronics and automotive industries.
- The disruption in even one country or region can impact the entire value chain. Economies have become more vulnerable to the disruptions.
- Countries that are a part of the global value linkages are set to find trade more severely impacted due to the pandemic.

Prominence of service sector:

- There has been an **increasing contribution from the services sector to the world economy.** Services trade may be significantly **affected by the transport and travel curbs**.

Changed Business models:

- **Increasing consumerism** has been an important growth factor for trade and economy. The sudden demand shock would entail many challenges to the industrial sectors which bank on **large volume and low margin business models**.

India's Case:

- **India has a high global share in services exports ($214 billion, or 3.5%, in 2019) than in merchandise exports**. India's services trade may be **significantly affected** by the transport and travel curbs.
- However, the **increasing role of information technology services** in enabling employees to work from home and people to order essentials and drugs online and socialize remotely augurs well for India.
- India's IT exporters have been supporting overseas clients' business continuity plans in the face of the pandemic. This might help this crucial sector earn some loyalty-linked business when economic activity revives.

Way forward:

- Apart from fiscal and monetary stimulus being announced by the countries, the **rebound in global economic activity will require trade to flow freely across borders**.
- The world will be best served if nations do not restrict the movement of goods, services and people in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. Women's safety during lockdown

Context:

- Reports of increased domestic violence against women during the lockdown.

Background:

- Domestic violence is violence or other abuse in a domestic setting, such as in marriage or cohabitation. Domestic violence can be **verbal, physical, emotional, financial and sexual**. Domestic violence is **rooted in the inequities of power and control.**
- Domestic violence against women is **widespread and under-reported in India**.

Details:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a **huge spike in domestic violence against women** in China, Australia, France, the U.K., Spain, and Bangladesh, among others.
- In India, too, the **National Commission for Women has reported a large increase in distress calls from victims of domestic violence** since the pandemic broke out.
- The United Nations has recognised domestic violence against women as a **"shadow pandemic".**

Correlation between the Pandemic and Domestic Violence:

Safety of homes:

- The national strategy against COVID -19 emphasizes on staying at home to prevent the spread of the pandemic.
- Ironically, for domestic violence victims, home is the most unsafe place to be quarantined as they are forced to live with their abusers. Home is not safe for many women because **abusers have increased access to their victims and survivors have decreased or no access to resources.**

Psychological effect:

- The abusers feel an enormous loss of power and control over their own lives due to the pandemic. They **vent their frustration on the women** in the house.
- **Mental health issues** arise out of isolation as well as reactive depression, but instead of recognising these issues and seeking help, people become violent.

Concerns:

- Tragically, **traditional forms of support are currently not accessible** to domestic violence victims.
  o They don't go to their **parental homes** for fear of infecting elderly parents.
  o The victims are unable to speak out because the lockdown prevents them from seeking help from outside. **The police force is already overburdened** with ensuring that people comply with the lockdown.

Way forward:

Protecting victims:

- The government must initiate priority measures to help domestic violence victims.
- There is a need for a **more responsive police force and other government agencies**. SOS messaging to police should be enhanced with geo-location facilities.

Offering support:

- **Help lines, psychosocial support and online counselling** should be increased, using technology-based solutions such as SMS and **online tools.**
- There is also a need to expand avenues to reach women with no access to phones or Internet.

Raising awareness:

- **The electronic media can help raise awareness** in regional language infomercials. This could involve emphasizing the fact that **domestic violence is a punishable offence under the Indian Penal Code.**

Conclusion:

- The **policy to protect victims of domestic violence must be made part of the overall anti-COVID-19 action plans.**
- It is important for policymakers to address the needs of women who are playing an indispensable role on the front line in the war against COVID-19 — as health workers, sanitation staff, caregivers, scientists, and as long-suffering housewives.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Heritage crafts village in Odisha wears a deserted look

- **Pattachitras or Patachitra** are traditional paintings from the **eastern states of Odisha and West Bengal** in which **mythological, religious stories and folk lore** are told through intricate paintings **on clothes.**

2. Ban on Meru Jatra festival

- **Odisha's** Ganjam district administration has banned the **Meru Jatra festival** and congregations related to it at temples.
    - Meru Jatra marks the end of the 21-day-long festival of penance named 'Danda Nata'. On this day, thousands of devotees used to gather at the **Tara Tarini hill shrine** and other temples.
- Earlier, the administration had banned the famous **Chaitra festival at Tara Tarini hill shrine** that attracts lakhs of devotees.

G. Tidbits

1. Six microsites to promote Kerala

- The Kerala Tourism authority has come up with **six theme-based microsites** to **promote destination and tourism products.**
    - With the focus of Kerala turning to **wellness tourism** and in view of the coronavirus pandemic, **Ayurveda** has been given prominence.
    - **Yoga, Kalaripayattu**, an ancient martial art indigenous to the State, Temples of Kerala**, Judaism in Kerala** and Discovering Malabar are the other new microsites that have been featured.
- COVID-19 has had a **heavy toll on the travel and tourism industry** in the state leading to job cuts and low margins. The present efforts are directed towards a long term strategy the post COVID-19 era.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following pairs of cyclones and the affected regions is/are correctly matched?

1. Ciara: Western Europe
2. Fani: Eastern India
3. Ava: Madagascar
4. Kyarr: Western coast of India and West Asia

Options:

a. 2 only
b. 2 and 3 only

c. 1 and 4 only
d. 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer:

Option d

Explanation:

- Ciara is an extra tropical cyclone which has brought heavy rain and severe winds across the U.K., Ireland, France and Germany.
- The tropical cyclone Ava made landfall on Madagascar with devastating impact.
- Extremely Severe Cyclonic Storm Fani was the strongest tropical cyclone to strike the Indian state of Odisha since the 1999 Odisha cyclone.
- Super Cyclonic Storm Kyarr was an extremely powerful tropical cyclone that became the first super cyclonic storm in the North Indian Ocean in the Arabian sea region since Gonu in 2007. It impacted the western coast of India and the UAE and Oman.

Q2. Which of the following pairs of martial arts and associated states is wrongly matched?

a. Kalaripayattu: Kerala
b. Sqay: Jammu and Kashmir
c. Cheibi gad-ga: Sikkim
d. Thangta: Manipur

Answer:

Option c

Explanation:

- Cheibi gad-ga is one of the most ancient martial arts of Manipur. It involves fighting using a sword and a shield.
- Thangta is a practice of the Meitei people of Manipur. It is an armed martial art. It is also referred to as Huyenlallong.
- Sqay is a Central Asian Martial arts form of sword-fighting originating in Ancient Kashmir. It involves the use of a curved single edge sword.

Q3. Which of the following pairs of art forms and associated regions is wrongly matched?

a. Pattachitra: Odisha
b. Manoti: Rajasthan
c. Chikankari: Lucknow
d. Rabari: Himachal Pradesh

Answer:

Option d

Explanation:

- Pattachitras or Patachitra are traditional paintings from the eastern states of Odisha and West Bengal in which mythological, religious stories and folk lore are told through intricate paintings on clothes.

- Manoti art, which involves decorating articles with camel skin is famous in Bikaner, Rajasthan.
- The Chikankari embroidery is popular in Lucknow.
- Rabari is a form of art associated with the nomadic Rabari tribes of Kutch.

Q4. The Directorate General of Foreign Trade comes under which of the following Ministries?

a. Ministry of Commerce and Industry
b. Ministry of Finance
c. Ministry of External Affairs
d. Ministry of Corporate Affairs

Answer:

Option a

Explanation:

- The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) is the agency of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of the Government of India responsible for administering laws regarding foreign trade and foreign investment in India.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Given the unique issues faced by people with disabilities and their heightened vulnerability, they need much more support in the face of the pandemic. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
2. In the light of recent reports on increased instances of domestic violence during the lockdown period, analyze the reasons for increased domestic violence and the associated concerns. Suggest suitable policy measures to address this shadow pandemic. (15 marks, 250 words)