

21 Apr 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. Hold meeting on steps to curb domestic violence: HC

Context:

The Delhi High Court has directed the Centre and the city government to hold a top-level meeting to deliberate on measures to curb domestic violence and protect the victims during the ongoing lockdown.

Concerns:

- The cases of domestic violence are on the rise on account of women being confined to their homes.

- Research shows that in emergencies, be it conflicts, economic crises or during disease outbreaks, there has been a repeat pattern of increase in domestic abuse, therefore, abusers and their partners having to self-isolate together at home may lead to a rise in new and pre-existing abusive behaviour and violence.
- Research suggests that the heightened domestic tensions and concerns of financial uncertainty brought by the pandemic only adds to the burden of violence.

Details:

- The bench directed that a decision be taken in three days and fresh steps required for protection of the victims of domestic abuse/violence be implemented immediately.
- Strict enforcement of the provisions of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 has been sought.
- During the hearing, the Delhi Government and the Delhi Commission for Women said that there are sufficient measures in place to safeguard victims of domestic violence and child abuse amidst the lockdown.

Way forward:

- Dedicated and responsive emergency helpline numbers and websites need to be launched.
- Domestic violence services should be classified as “essential” and support workers should be classified as “key” workers.
- The Ministry of Women and Child Development has also noticed that a quick response mechanism is required for special circumstances that are prevailing.
- Avenues for help including helpline numbers and websites need to be advertised widely at all media platforms including social media platforms, electronic and print media, public messaging, through supermarkets, pharmacies and other appropriate areas.
- Law enforcement agencies need to lodge complaints and take immediate and effective measures while maintaining confidentiality and safety of victims.

Conclusion:

- Violence against women and girls has always been a social, cultural and economic problem. Despite having legislation in place, the implementation of the laws largely remains a challenge.
- Lockdown has become a real nightmare for victims of domestic violence.
- A crucial safety net therefore, must be offered to some of the most at-risk women, children and anyone vulnerable to abuse in order to triumph over the immediate and long-term impact of this Coronavirus crisis.

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. China says Indian trade curbs are against WTO principles

Context:

The spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy has said that, India’s recent policy to curb opportunistic takeovers of domestic companies goes against the [World Trade Organisation \(WTO\)](#) principles.

Background:

- The Government of India recently reviewed the extant [Foreign Direct Investment](#) (FDI) policy for curbing opportunistic takeovers/acquisitions of Indian companies due to the current COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has imposed restrictions saying companies from countries that share borders with India can invest “only under the government route”.

This topic has been covered comprehensively in 19th April 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis. [Click here](#) to read.

Details:

- The spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy has raised concerns saying that:
 - The additional barriers set by the Indian side for investors from specific countries violate the WTO’s principle of non-discrimination, and go against the general trend of liberalisation and facilitation of trade and investment.
 - They do not conform to the consensus of the [G20](#) leaders and Trade Ministers to realise a free, fair, non-discriminatory, transparent, predictable and stable trade and investment environment, and to keep the markets open.
- The official pointed at the Chinese investments in various sectors of the Indian economy. He said China's overall investment as of December 2019 was above \$ 8 billion and it had driven key sectors like telecom, infrastructure, automobile and household goods in India.
- The Chinese spokesperson invoked the principle of free market economy and said, “Companies make choices based on market principles. We hope India would revise relevant discriminatory practices, treat investments from different countries equally, and foster an open, fair and equitable business environment”.
- The statement said the new policy was clearly going to impact future investment from China.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. IT panel to meet via video conference

Context:

The Lok Sabha Speaker has allowed the holding of a meeting of the Parliamentary Committee on Information and Technology via video conference.

Details:

- The Budget session of Parliament had ended abruptly on March 23, 2020 owing to the nationwide lockdown for containing the spread of [COVID-19](#) and since then no meeting of these parliamentary committees had been held.
- While the Parliamentary Committee on Information and Technology has been allowed to hold a meeting via video conference, there are no formal orders for all the committees to use this means.
- The Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Information and Technology had written to the [Speaker](#) stating that it is imperative that the committees also continue to meet periodically so that they can execute their constitutional mandates of scrutinising the activities of the Executive.

Note:

Rule 267 concerning the functioning of committees says that ‘The sittings of a committee shall be held within the precincts of the Parliament House, and if it becomes necessary to change the place of sitting outside the Parliament House, the matter shall be referred to the Speaker whose decision shall be final’.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Yamuna water quality improves during lockdown: govt. report

Context:

- According to a report by the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC), the quality of water in the Yamuna has improved along the Delhi stretch during the nationwide lockdown, compared to April 2019.
- The river, however, has still not met the ‘water quality criteria’, reveals study.

This topic has been covered in 15th April 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis. [Click here](#) to read.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Vijay Mallya loses U.K. High Court appeal

Context:

The High Court of Justice in the U.K. has dismissed the appeal of businessman Vijay Mallya against a lower court’s order for his extradition to India in connection with the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) Bank fraud case.

Background:

- The agencies have alleged that Mr. Mallya conspired to cheat those who might deposit funds with the IDBI Bank.
- This was done by dishonestly causing and permitting the bank to sanction and disburse loans to Kingfisher Airlines (KFA) with the intention not to repay them.
- The alleged conspiracy was executed by supplying to the bank false information on Kingfisher’s profitability and the value and/or availability of securities to be relied upon.
- The funds so raised were diverted and laundered.
- The High Court, which had heard the case in February, also turned down the appellant’s contention that the lower court had erred in law in its approach to the prima facie case test and the admissibility of the respondent’s evidence.

Details:

- Mallya has 14 days to apply for permission to appeal to the U.K. Supreme Court, which takes up constitutional matters and issues of larger public interest.
- Once he exhausts all legal avenues, there would be 28 days to bring him back to India.

- The [Central Bureau of Investigation](#) said the decision was a result of meticulous probe and would strengthen the war against the economic offenders who evaded judicial proceedings in India.

Note:

- A special court in Mumbai had declared absconding liquor baron Vijay Mallya a **fugitive economic offender** (FEO) on a plea of the Enforcement Directorate.
- Mallya became the first businessman to be declared FEO under the provisions of the new Fugitive Economic Offenders Act which came into existence in August 2018.

2. U.S. crude futures plunge over 40% to 1986 low

Context:

Oil prices have tumbled with the U.S. crude futures contract plunging more than 40% to its lowest level since 1986, as investors worry about lack of storage and German and Japanese data indicated a bleak global economy.

Details:

- Prices have been pressured, hammering demand even as Saudi Arabia and Russia failed to reach an agreement to cut supply.
- Brent oil prices have collapsed around 60% since the start of the year, while U.S. crude futures have fallen more than 80%, to levels well below break-even costs necessary for many shale drillers.
- This has led to drilling halts and drastic spending cuts.

The fall in global oil prices has been comprehensively covered in **10th March 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis**. [Click here](#) to read.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Implement Aarogya Setu, but only through law

Context:

- Aarogya Setu, contact tracing app in India.

Background:

Threat of spurt in cases:

- Despite the possibility of the lockdown being lifted in the coming days, the threat of COVID-19 will continue.
- Studies say that there will be multiple **waves of infection following the first wave**.
- To protect large swathes of the population from possible exposure to infection, the **movement of individuals will have to be regulated**. The government will have to ensure **epidemic surveillance**.

Aarogya setu app:

- Governments around the world are using contact-tracing as a means to **improve their situational awareness to manage the COVID-19 pandemic**. The Indian Government's Aarogya Setu App follows the same trajectory.
- The **Aarogya Setu app** is designed to **enable users who have come in contact with COVID-19 positive patients to be notified, traced and suitably supported**.

Concerns:

- There have been legitimate concerns regarding several aspects of the app:

Data protection:

- The app has been criticized for **not complying with data protection principles** of data minimisation, purpose limitation, transparency and accountability, all of which are crucial to protecting the **privacy of its users**.

Data minimization:

- There are concerns about Aarogya Setu's **use of location data via GPS trails in addition to Bluetooth**.
- This deviates from "**privacy-focused global standards**", which are restricted to Bluetooth-based technology, which can match devices by not revealing the exact location. Bluetooth is preferred from a privacy-respecting perspective.

Purpose limitation:

- According to the app's privacy policy, the personal data of its users is allowed for disclosure to the government to provide it with the necessary details for carrying out medical and administrative interventions necessary in relation to COVID-19. The privacy policy does not exactly state the grounds for disclosure of user's data. Such **vague articulation weakens the app's purpose limitation**.
- The app's privacy policy does not specify which departments or ministry or officials will have access to data. This lack of specificity adds to the **concerns of overreach**.
- In China, a similar phone app was started as a voluntary service for informing users of their potential exposure to infected persons, but soon began to be used as an e-pass for allowing access to public transport. There are concerns that India might follow the same.

Lack of transparency:

- According to the privacy policy, the government is at a liberty to revise the terms of the privacy policy at its discretion without notifying its users. The existing users of the app could be subject to changed service terms without their informed consent.
- The **fluid terms of service** affects the transparency and accountability of the system.

State surveillance:

- Given the fundamental transformation in the role of the state in regulating society in the present crisis situation, there are concerns that the app could lead to an **increased risk of institutionalised surveillance of individuals**.
- The design of the app raises concerns of the dangers of its misuse to carry out surveillance of users.
- **India lacks a comprehensive data protection or surveillance law.**

Threat to fundamental rights:

Freedom of movement:

- Some reports suggest that the government is considering using the app as a criterion for **restricting users' movement**.

Right to life:

- The potential restriction on freedom of movement will have considerable impact on an **individual's access to basic government benefits and services**, thus endangering citizens' [right to life](#).
- The resultant impact will be disproportionately higher on the most vulnerable sections of the society.
- There are also the **risks of misidentification** (or a false-positive) which could unfairly impact people's civil liberties.

Right to autonomy and privacy:

- Citizens may be forced to download the app to be able to access basic amenities and services. Citizens could be forced to **give up their right to autonomy and privacy in exchange for government benefits**.

Arguments in favour of the app:

International experience:

- Similar contact tracing apps in countries such as China, Singapore and Taiwan have been a major contributing factor in their success in limiting the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.
- The **utility of such contact tracing** has been proved beyond doubt by the experience in these nations.

Safety features:

- The app's privacy policy says that the data would be used by the Government of India in **anonymized, aggregated datasets as per international best practices**.
- The government has repeatedly insisted that all the data collected by the app would reside within the device locally and **only in certain conditions (exceptions) the information could be uploaded to a cloud server**.

Unprecedented situation:

- The world is passing through an unprecedented public health emergency - the spread of the novel coronavirus has infected more than 2 million people and claimed more than 1,50,00 lives.
- The **rapid spread and severity of the coronavirus have shattered our assumptions** about politics, society, economics and international relations. It has raised certain ethical and philosophical questions. These **unprecedented times require changed perspectives with respect to privacy norms as well**.

Post lockdown phase:

- Once the lockdown is lifted, the risk of increased infections will increase exponentially and the app could not only **help its users** plan their commute, route of travel or place of travel as per the risk involved but also **help the government** in contact tracing.

Utility of the app:

- The data generated by the app's users (in aggregated, anonymized form) would play a role in **aiding the government make policy interventions**: specifically, managing the eventual removal of the ongoing lockdown.
- These datasets could help generate reports, heat maps, and other statistical visualisations for the purpose of **monitoring the pandemic**.

Way forward:

Statutory backing:

- The concerns of mass surveillance, disproportionate restrictions of fundamental rights, and privacy concerns impose several limitations on **fundamental rights**.
- As per the settled **legal principle** that any **limitation of fundamental rights must be implemented only through a law** pursuing legitimate state interest, it is imperative that the Aarogya Setu app is implemented only through law.
- Such a law will not only **subject government actions to limitations** but will also facilitate its constitutional scrutiny.

Adopting international best practice:

- The **TraceTogether app framework (Singapore)** is touted as being a fine balance between privacy rights and public health needs and could act as a guiding light to India's own efforts in this direction.
 - In Singapore, the ministry of health has access to data of its contact-tracing app and decision-making powers. The law also clearly states the purpose of the data as directed towards disease control and spread.

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. The invisible face of the fallout

Context:

- Disproportionate impact of crises on women.

Details:

- While catastrophes affect people at large, the economical, **sociological and psychological impact on women** is profound.
- The **traditional gender role** that women play distinctly affects them in global crises as seen in numerous examples.

Indian Ocean tsunami:

- In the **2004 Indian Ocean tsunami**, the coastlines of countries in the region, including India, were affected and more than 2,00,000 people were killed or listed missing. Nearly a fourth of these were women.
- The **traditional 'care giver' role** that women play resulted in women staying at homes and getting stranded. Besides, women also **lack essential life skills** like swimming and climbing.
- During the recovery phase too when the homeless were placed in camps, reports suggested that women faced many difficulties like **abuse by men, hygiene challenges** in these camps due to inadequate sanitation facilities, etc.

United States scenario:

- The United States has a high incidence of tornadoes.
- **Families headed by women are affected the most** in times of a natural disaster like tornado.
 - Women often are engaged in sector-specific employment which when impacted result in unemployment.
 - Women are also engaged in post-calamity care, missing job opportunities.
 - Given the prevalence of **pay disparity between genders**, an economic slowdown in times of a disaster leaves women with **additional wage cuts**.

COVID-19 pandemic and gender crisis:

Women in health sector:

- According to [World Health Organization](#) data, around **70% of the world's health workers are women, 79% of nurses are women**. India has **million-plus accredited social health activist (ASHA) workers** who are an integral part of its health system.
- Health workers in general are **highly vulnerable** given the high transmissibility of the infection.
- There have also been reports on attacks while on duty thus impacting their professional safety.

Extra burden:

- Given the lockdown measures in place, entire families are now together within the limited space of their dwellings.
- As **traditional roleplay** is still prevalent in most sections of Indian society, the equal division of household responsibilities among couples is still not observed. Women face **substantial household work in addition to their work from home jobs**.

Domestic violence:

- The lower income groups are already facing job losses and anxiety is leading to alcohol consumption, domestic tensions and **violence against women**.
- There have been reports of increased domestic violence.
 - According to 2015-16 National Family Health Survey, around 30% of women in the age group of 15 to 49 years face domestic violence. A recent report highlighted how the [National Commission for Women](#) has been receiving increased number of complaints.

For more information, refer to:

[CNA dated April 13, 2020](#)

Health impact:

- The crisis has led to an **increased mental pressure on women**, in turn affecting their physical well-being.
- Women are twice as likely to face depression when compared to men.
- **Hormone-induced depression** among women is a key concern. Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) among reproductive age groups, pregnancy-related depression conditions, postpartum depression (PPDs) among new mothers as well as premenopausal and menopausal symptoms are common in women, which interferes in their everyday life and relationships. The lockdown is adding more intensity to these conditions.
- These issues have **not received the necessary attention** and there is a **lack of awareness too**.

Way forward:

- The prevailing data indicates the **need to address the gender crisis during and after disasters**.

Focussed attention:

- Be it domestic violence, women's depression and anxiety-related matters, or their safety while at work, all these issues need to be addressed and responded to.
- Steps such as **roping in non-governmental organisations**, psychology students, teachers and volunteers and also **using technology platforms** would help speed action.
- The government can assign ASHA workers to specifically **address women's welfare** during this pandemic and consider **setting up exclusive** cells to quickly address women's health-related issues.

Domestic violence:

- Even in these disruptive times, women's safety should become a priority. There is a need for **timely and stern action against domestic violence**.
- The police could consider setting up exclusive cells to quickly address domestic violence and have helplines for accessibility.
- **Online counselling** for alcoholism in men can play an important role in addressing domestic violence.

Long term measures:

- It is important to develop a **culture of including women's safety in the planning phase of any crisis management plan**.
- There is a need to **change the stereotyping of women's role** in a society.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Takeover fears

This issue has been covered in the following articles:

[CNA dated April 19, 2020: Govt. nod mandatory for FDI from neighbouring countries](#)

[CNA dated April 19, 2020: New FDI rules may have unintended effects](#)

F. Prelims Facts

1. Braj Bhasha

- Braj Bhasha language, also known as Brij Bhasa, is a language descended from Shauraseni Prakrit and commonly viewed as a western dialect of Hindi.
- Through the devotional poetry of the early medieval period (1450–1700 CE) and the erotic poetry of the late medieval period (1700–1850 CE), Braj Bhasha developed a superb literary tradition; its literary form achieved a wider acceptability than any other dialect of Hindi.
- Among the best-known poets of this language are Mira Bai and Harishchandra.
- It boasts of a rich culture and literature by famous poets like Surdas, Bhai Gurdas and Amir Khusro.
- Braj Bhasha is usually written in the Devanagari script. Its vocabulary contains Sanskrit words in abundance.
- Braj is also the main language of Hindustani classical music compositions.

2. RBI raises WMA limit for April-Sept.

What's in News?

The RBI has decided to increase the ways and means advances limit for the April-September period of the current financial year to ₹2 lakh crore from ₹1.2 lakh crore due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ways and Means Advances:

- Ways and means advances is a mechanism used by the Reserve Bank of India under its credit policy to provide to States banking with it, to help them tide over temporary mismatches in the cash flow of their receipts and payments.
- It is a facility for both the Centre and states to borrow from the [RBI](#).
- Section 17(5) of the RBI Act, 1934 authorises the central bank to lend to the Centre and state governments subject to their being repayable “not later than three months from the date of the making of the advance”.
- The interest rate on WMA is the RBI's repo rate, which is basically the rate at which it lends short-term money to banks. That rate is currently 4.4%.
- The governments are, however, allowed to draw amounts in excess of their WMA limits. The interest on such overdraft is 2 percentage points above the repo rate, which now works out to 6.4%. Further, no state can run an overdraft with the RBI for more than a certain period.

G. Tidbits

1. A robot built to fight COVID-19 in Kerala

- The district COVID centre at Kannur in Kerala is making news for deploying robots to fight COVID-19.
- The robot named ‘Nightingale-19’ has been designed by the students of Vimal Jyoti Engineering College.
- The robot assists health workers in caring for patients, taking food and medicines to them and aiding interaction between the patients and the staff.

2. IMA seeks law to check violence against doctors

What's in News?

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has asked the Centre to enact a law to check violence against doctors and hospitals across the nation. It has called for protests demanding that a Special Central Law Against Violence on Doctors be implemented.

Concerns:

- Doctors have been abused, beaten up, denied entry and residence.
- Residents of a Chennai locality protested against the cremation of a doctor from Andhra Pradesh who died of COVID-19 in the city, saying it might lead to the spread of coronavirus in their area.
- The healthcare professionals are not scared of infections as much as of being assaulted by the very community they treat.

The issue of doctors being abused and beaten up has been seen as an emerging unforeseen occupational hazard. It has been asserted that the legitimate need for safe workplaces has to be met and that abuse and violence against them must stop immediately.

3. No plan for GST relief for key medical items: Centre

What's in News?

The Centre has made it clear that it does not plan to provide an exemption from paying Goods and Services Tax (GST) for key medical items such as ventilators, sanitisers, COVID-19 diagnostic test kits, masks and other protective equipment.

- It is said that exempting GST would increase manufacturing costs without helping the consumer much, and would also incentivise import of such items from China.
- Currently, sanitisers are taxed at 18%, while ventilators and test kits are taxed at 12%. Masks attract 5% GST.
- The government sources say that exemption of GST on these products would be counterproductive. Basic customs duty and health cess have been exempted on most of these items till September, 2020.
 - As GST is a value added tax collected on net basis at each stage of the supply chain, an exemption would lead to blocked input tax credit.
 - It would ultimately result in increasing the cost and compliance burden for manufacturers, without reducing the cost for consumers.
- The increased manufacturing cost would discourage domestic manufacturers and incentivise imports from foreign players who would not face any input tax credit blockage.
- It is said that, given that the government itself is the single largest buyer of these medical items now and is supplying such goods for free, it may not be desirable to distort the rate structure at the cost of the domestic supplier who is making a much-needed effort to ramp up production capacity.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to Adilabad Dokra:

1. It is a form of ancient bell metal craft practiced by the Woj community native to Andhra Pradesh.
2. It is a technique where duplicate metal sculpture is cast from an original sculpture.

3. It has been awarded Geographical Indication (GI) Tag.

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

- 2 and 3 only
- 1 only
- 1 and 2 only
- 3 only

Answer: b

Explanation:

Adilabad Dokra is a form of ancient bell metal craft practiced by the Woj community native to Adilabad district of Telangana. It is a technique where duplicate metal sculpture is cast from an original sculpture, called cire perdue (lost wax casting technique). It has been awarded Geographical Indication (GI) Tag.

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to Fugitive Economic Offenders Act:

- Only those economic offences involving at least Rs. 500 crore or more will come under this Act.
- Upon declaration as a Fugitive Economic Offender, properties of the person will be confiscated and vested in the central government, free of rights and claims in the property.
- No appeals are allowed before any court against the orders of the special court.

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

- 2 only
- 1 and 2 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1 and 3 only

Answer: a

Explanation:

A person can be named an offender under this law if there is an arrest warrant against him or her for involvement in economic offences involving at least Rs. 100 crore or more and has fled from India to escape legal action. The Act empowers Special Court (designated under Prevention of Money-Laundering Act, 2002) to declare a person as Fugitive Economic Offender based on an application made to it. Appeals against orders of the special court will lie before High Court. Upon declaration as Fugitive Economic offender, properties of the person will be confiscated and vested in the central government, free of rights and claims in the property.

Q3. Consider the following statements:

- As per the WTO rules, a member country cannot discriminate between its trade partners.
- Special status granted to a trade partner must be extended to all members of the WTO.
- While India had granted MFN status to Pakistan in 1996, Pakistan hasn't accorded MFN status to India.

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

- 1 and 2 only
- 1 and 3 only

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

As per the WTO rules, a member country cannot discriminate between its trade partners. Special status granted to a trade partner must be extended to all members of the WTO. Most Favoured Nation is a treatment accorded to a trade partner to ensure non-discriminatory trade between two countries vis-a-vis other trade partners. India had granted MFN status to Pakistan in 1996, a year after the formation of WTO. But Pakistan hasn't accorded MFN status to India till now. India has revoked the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status of Pakistan in 2019.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to Amir Khusrau:

- 1. He invented the Sitar.
- 2. His work, Khaliq-e-bari, is the oldest known printed dictionary.
- 3. He was known as Tuti-e-Hind.

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

Amir Khusrau was a Sufi musician, poet and scholar from India. He compiled the oldest known printed dictionary (Khaliq-e-bari) in 1320 which mainly dealt with Hindvi and Persian words. He originated the Khayal Music. Amir Khusrau is known as the Parrot of India. It was he who called himself 'Tuti-e-Hind' (Parrot of India). Khusrau is credited for the invention of the Sitar.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

- 1. Evaluate the concerns being expressed against the Aarogya Setu app and also the arguments in favour of its usage. Suggest the necessary safeguards to address the concerns. (15 marks, 250 words)
- 2. The government's decision to ban Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) through the automatic route from neighbouring countries that share a land border with India, though well-intended, the policy provisions may have some unintended consequences. Discuss. (15 marks, 250 words)

