7 Apr 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. MPLADS suspended; PM, MPs to take 30% salary cut

Context:

The Union Cabinet has approved a 30% cut in the salaries of all Members of Parliament and a two-year suspension of the MP Local Area Development (MPLAD) scheme so that the amount saved can go to the Consolidated Fund of India to fight COVID-19.

Details:

- The Prime Minister has approved an ordinance to amend the Salaries, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament Act, 1954, to cut the salaries of MPs by 30%.
- In addition, the Cabinet has decided to suspend the MPLAD funds for 2020-2021 and 2021-2022.

   o   The amount saved from the scheme would be ₹7,900 crore.
- All the amount saved would go to the Consolidated Fund of India.

Concerns:

- It is believed that MPLADS is a targeted and nimble instrument to customise micro level interventions to alleviate distress.
- Considering the above, it is argued that suspending MPLAD, meant to execute developmental works in the constituency would be a huge disservice to the constituents and would undermine the role & functions of an MP.
- MPLADS is one of the major means for an MP to direct development resources to his/her constituency. It is opined that it would have been better had the government brought in an order to earmark the funds only to be spent for COVID-19 related expenditure.
- Concerns are being raised about imbalances affecting the reallocation of MPLADS funds.

Read more about MPLADS.

2. 'Self-declare or face charges'

Context:

The Assam government has set a deadline for the elusive Tablighi Jamaat attendees who have returned home to come for screening voluntarily.

Details:

- The state government has made it clear that those who do not come forward for screening would face charges under the Disaster Management Act.
- The Centre had provided a list of 556 names of people from Assam who attended the Nizamuddin event while 275 more names were sourced locally.
- Samples of 128 people remain to be collected.

"Laws that come into play during a lockdown situation" has been covered in 4th April 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis. Click here to read.

3. Restrictions on court hearings lawful: SC

Context:

The Supreme Court has deemed all restrictions imposed on people from entering, attending or taking part in court hearings as lawful in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Details:

- The court invoked its extraordinary constitutional powers under Article 142 to step away from the convention of open court hearings.
- The open court system ensures transparency in administration of justice.
- The court made it clear that public health takes precedence over conventions.

- "Access to justice is fundamental to preserve the rule of law in the democracy envisaged by the Constitution of India. The challenges occasioned by the outbreak of COVID-19 have to be addressed while preserving the constitutional commitment to ensuring the delivery of and access to justice to those who seek it... Indian courts have been proactive in embracing advancement in technology in judicial proceedings," the order said.

Way forward:

- It was opined that the judiciary would have to improvise and continue to bank heavily on "videoconferencing technologies" in the wake of unprecedented and extraordinary outbreak of the pandemic.

This issue has been covered in 24th March 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis. Click here to read.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. U.S. gives 'terrorist' label to white supremacist group

Context:

The Trump administration has designated an ultranationalist group based in Russia - the **Russian Imperial Movement** as a terrorist organisation.

Details:

- It is the first time the government has applied the label to a white supremacist group.
- The designation has been seen as an unusual move, as President Trump has previously been criticised for failure to do more about the threat of white supremacy.
- While the label of specially designated global terrorist has been frequently used for Islamist extremists, there have been growing concerns among U.S. officials about violent white supremacists with transnational links over the past five years.
  - In 2018, the White House added that threat to the government's National Strategy for Counterterrorism.
- The authority for either the Treasury Department or the State Department to deem a group or an individual a specially designated global terrorist traces back to an executive order issued by President George W. Bush after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.
- President Donald Trump, in 2019, signed an executive order expanding that authority to cover groups that provide training for terrorists even if the groups are not directly linked to any attack.
- To receive such a designation, a group must be a foreign organisation and must engage in terrorist activity that threatens the security of US nationals or the national security of the US.

Impact:

- The State Department's designation for the organisation, the Russian Imperial Movement, sets up the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control to block any American property or assets belonging to the group.
- It will also bar Americans from financial dealings with the organisation and make it easier to ban its members from travelling to the U.S.

- The U.S. is also designating three of the group's leaders — Stanislav Anatolyevich Vorobyev, Denis Valliullovich Gariev and Nikolay Nikolayevich Trushchalov — as individual terrorists who will face similar sanctions.

Russian Imperial Movement (RIM):

- The RIM is an ultra-nationalist paramilitary group based in St Petersburg, where it has training camps, with alleged links to other white supremacist organisations. According to the US State Department, it is a terrorist group that provides paramilitary-style training to neo-Nazis and white supremacists.
- The RIM is not considered to be sponsored by the Russian government, although President Vladimir Putin has tolerated its activities and it has helped advance the Russian government's external goals by recruiting Russian fighters to aid pro-Russia separatists in eastern Ukraine.
- The group has also helped support neo-Nazi groups in Scandinavia.
- Although a Russian Imperial Movement member has visited the U.S., the organisation does not appear to have domestic members. It is not clear if the group has provided training to U.S.-based neo-Nazis.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. Govt. shifts to 'large outbreak containment'

Context:

The Union Health Ministry has said that India has now stepped out of the local transmission phase and moved into the "large outbreaks amenable to containment phase".

Details:

- With a current case doubling rate of 96 hours and the infection having spread to nearly 300 of the 736 districts across the country, the protocol now followed has been set out in the Union Health Ministry's recently released document "Containment plan for large outbreaks".
- This includes:
  - Re-defining the area of operation
  - Active surveillance for cases and contacts in the identified geographic zone
  - Expanding laboratory capacity for testing all suspect cases, high risk contacts.
  - Operationalizing surge capacities created for isolation (COVID-19 hospitals/COVID-19 dedicated blocks) to hospitalise and manage all suspect/confirmed cases.
- The other measures under the protocol include:
  - Implementation of social distancing measures with strict perimeter control.
  - Providing chemoprophylaxis with hydroxy-chloroquine to asymptomatic healthcare workers and asymptomatic household contacts of laboratory confirmed cases.
  - The further intensification of risk communication through audio, social and visual media.
- As per the surge capacity recommendation, the government is empowered to enhance capacity and bring in private hospitals and augment laboratory testing capacity.
- Anticipating about 15% of the patients are likely to require hospitalisation, and an additional 5% will require ventilator management, the Centre has planned a three-tier arrangement for managing suspect and confirmed cases which is now being implemented to decrease the burden on the COVID blocks and hospitals.

- The mild cases will be kept in temporary makeshift hospital facilities, moderate to severe cases who require monitoring of their clinical status will be admitted to COVID hospitals.
- Some of the severe cases may progress to respiratory failure and/or progress to multi-organ failure and hence critical care facility/dialysis facility, etc. shall be required.
- The Ministry is also looking at scaling down operations if no secondary laboratory confirmed COVID-19 case is reported from the geographic quarantine zone for at least four weeks after the last confirmed test has been isolated and all his contacts have been followed up for 28 days.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Preparing for SAARC 2.0

Context:

- **Virtual summit** of the heads of member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (**SAARC**) to discuss a common strategy to tackle COVID-19.

Background:

- By taking the initiative for the virtual summit, **India showed diplomatic resilience and leadership** by trying to forge unity in the immediate neighbourhood in the war against COVID-19.
- The deliberations and the outcomes of the virtual summit reflected recognition of the serious challenge posed by COVID-19 and the **need for robust regional cooperation** to overcome it.

For more information on the virtual summit refer to:

CNA dated March 16, 2020

- This **innovative exercise in health diplomacy** has been appreciated worldwide and also replicated by other international organizations.

Steps taken:

- Though SAARC has been **dormant for several years due to regional tensions**, the fight against COVID-19 has been taken up by all the members in right earnest through a **series of tangible measures.**

Representation from all members:

- **All the eight member-states were represented in the virtual summit**, by the head of state or government, except Pakistan, pointing to the acceptance of the need to work together.
- All the heads readily **agreed to work together** to contain the virus, and shared their experiences and perspectives.

COVID-19 Emergency fund:

- India's proposal to launch a COVID-19 Emergency Fund has been **accepted by all the members except Pakistan.**
- India had made an initial contribution of $10 million. Within days, all the countries, except Pakistan, contributed to it voluntarily, bringing the total contributions to $18.8 million.
- Though it seems like a small amount, the **spirit of solidarity** behind it matters.
- The arguments that SAARC members have committed rather limited resources seem to neglect the fact that **SAARC countries have reported only 0.64% of the total cases worldwide.**

Operationalization of the emergency fund:

- The SAARC emergency fund has been operationalized.
- Notably, **the fund is controlled neither by India nor by the Secretariat**. Each contributing member-state is responsible for approval and disbursement of funds in response to requests received from others.
- This **decentralized approach** would reduce unnecessary steps and help forge more unity among the members.

Implementation of projects:

- India has received **requests for medical equipment, medicines and other supplies** from Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan, Maldives, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.
- Many of the requests have already been accepted and action has been taken.
- **The quick decisions** being taken come as a welcome relief from the usual lackadaisical approach and delays which had characterized the organization.

Follow-up video-conference:

- A **follow-up video-conference of senior health officials** was arranged.
- Important issues ranging from specific protocols dealing with screening at entry points and contact tracing to online training capsules for emergency response teams were discussed.
- The major outcome is the decision to **enhance technical cooperation through a shared electronic platform** among the members. This would allow exchange of all useful **information among health professionals** through more informal means.

Significance:

Revival of SAARC:

- India's imaginative diplomacy has **leveraged the crisis to create a new mechanism for workable cooperation.**
- The cooperation among the member states will become stronger if the pandemic crisis deepens and if member-states see advantages in working together.

Challenges:

- To conclude that SAARC is now returning to an active phase of cooperation between all its member-states on a broad front may, however, be premature. There are still some **challenges to fully realize the potential of this regional organization.**

Pakistan hindering cooperation:

- Pakistan's decision to represent itself in the virtual summit by a representative of the Pakistani Prime Minister and the subsequent statement over Kashmir reflects the **lack of sincerity on the part of Pakistan in forging a united front with SAARC.**
- This is not something new given Pakistan's similar stance against India's proposal for SAARC. India's offer for a SAARC satellite, for regional transport agreement among SAARC countries have been vetoed by Pakistan.
- Pakistan, though claims to favour regional cooperation, seems to be working against it.

India's move towards BIMSTEC:

- Given the lack of progress in SAARC, **India has been shifting its focus towards increasing engagement in BIMSTEC.**
- India has invested a lot of political capital in strengthening **BIMSTEC as an alternative to SAARC.**

Conclusion:

- **India** has repeatedly stated that it has no preference for a specific organization or platform and is fully committed to the **cause of regional cooperation and connectivity**.
- India has little difficulty in cooperating with like-minded neighbours, as it showed by forging unity in the war against COVID-19.
- If Pakistan continues to hinder cooperation among the member states, India and its friendly neighbours need to start preparing themselves for **SAARC 2.0**, which would involve **informal, decentralized and need based cooperation without the burden for consensus among all the members.**

For more information on this topic refer to:

CNA dated March 17, 2020

Category: AGRICULTURE

1. Restructuring our food system for a healthy world

Context:

- The author of the article argues that the COVID-19 pandemic is a warning as well as an **opportunity for humans to analyse their food system and make changes** for a **healthier and more sustainable future.**

Background:

- Though there is no particular evidence, the past examples of similar epidemics and the origin of the disease from the wet market of Wuhan point to the **possibility of COVID-19 being a zoonotic disease.**
  - o Zoonotic disease means that the disease causing organism got transferred to humans from the animals.
- Like SARS-CoV-2, **SARS too was believed to have spread from civet cats to human beings** in 2002. There are also similar theories about **Ebola and HIV.**

Details:

Animal Agriculture:

- Currently, livestock is one of the fastest growing agricultural sub-sectors in developing countries. Its **share of agricultural GDP is more than 33%** and is quickly increasing.
  - o India has the world's largest livestock population, is the largest producer of buffalo meat and produces about a 100 billion eggs annually.
- Animal agriculture is moving **away from backyard operations to larger industrial facilities** which aim to maximize production, while minimizing costs.
  - o This is referred to as **intensive animal farming or industrial livestock production** or factory farming.
  - o Agribusinesses keep livestock such as cattle, poultry, and fish at high stocking densities, at large scale. The **discovery of antibiotics and vaccines** facilitated raising livestock in larger numbers by reducing disease.

Concerns:

- There are concerns regarding the **sustainability or ethicality of intensive animal farming**. There are also debates over the **benefits and risks** of intensive animal farming.
- Industrializing animal agriculture comes at a **huge cost to the environment, animals and to human beings.**

Antibiotic resistance and health risks:

- According to the [World Health Organization](#), the large volume of **antibiotics given to farm animals contributed to the development of antimicrobial-resistant bacteria.**
- Though the **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** lays down standards and regulations in the way the animals are to be kept and slaughtered, a majority of the standalone meat vendors do not follow the set standards.
- **The immunocompromised animals** are most likely to pass on an infection in the lack of proper safety standards.

Environmental impact:

Climate Change:

- Animal husbandry accounts for a large proportion of the agricultural sector's [GHG](#) emissions. It accounts for a large share of **methane emissions which has a high global warming potential**.
- Hence, unsustainable animal husbandry is contributing to the **climate change problem**.

Environmental pollution:

- The waste from animal farms and slaughterhouses are leading to **eutrophication and water pollution.**
- The environmental impact of industrial animal farming **also impacts human health** in an indirect way.

Efficiency of production:

- **Animal-based Foods are More Resource-Intensive than Plant-Based Foods**.
- Various scientific studies have pointed out that animal husbandry requires far more input resources than plant production.
  - o Production of animal-based foods accounted for more than three-quarters of global agricultural land use in 2009, while only contributing 37 percent of total protein consumed by people in that year.
  - o Animal based foods also have **a large water footprint**.

- Because many animal-based foods rely on crops for feed, increased demand for animal-based foods **widens the food gap** relative to increased demand for plant-based foods.
- Given the increasing demand for food and **decreasing per capita resource base**, there is a need for higher efficiency in food production, which animal based foods do not seem to cater to.

Welfare of animals:

- There is a complete lack of concern for animal welfare in the intensive animal farming. Animals are **injected with hormones to enhance growth and are under high stress** than those raised on pastures.

Challenges:

Protein deficiency:

- **India has a high rate of malnutrition** among children under the age of five. **Protein deficiency** is a major problem. India, like many other developing nations, is trying to combat this by encouraging meat production since they are a major source of protein.

Lack of land:

- The concerns associated with industrialized farming seem to suggest the need for more farm based farming practices, however, the **lack of sufficient land** may pose a challenge to such practices.
- It is worth noting that the paucity of space gave a boost to industrial agriculture.

Way forward:

- Given the concerns associated with industrialized animal farming and the challenges in changing this, there is a need to **rethink animal farming**.

Alternative sources of protein:

- India must explore the potential behind **plant and cultivated meats**.
  - **Plant-based meats are made from plants** and are cholesterol- and antibiotic-free, but taste and feel like meat.
  - Cultivated meat is produced by taking a small sample of animal cells and replicating them outside of the animal.
- The resulting products have the **same nutritional qualities** of real meat, but **without the corresponding concerns associated with animal meat**.
  - These are free from antibiotics, E. coli, salmonella, or animal waste.
- Plant or cultivated meat foods represent an enormous opportunity to solve the problems of rampant malnutrition, land scarcity and inhumane factory farming of animals.
- In the Western world, plant-based meats are already popular and two plant-based companies – the Impossible Foods and Beyond Meat – won the Champions of Earth award, the United Nation's highest environmental honour.

Recognizing the interconnection:

- Advocates of animal rights have argued that within the welfare of animals, lies the welfare of people and rightly so.
- Many disease outbreaks show that within the welfare of animals lies the welfare of people.
- **India's one health policy** rightly recognizes the interconnectedness between animal health and human health and prescribes appropriate steps in this direction.

Stricter regulation:

- It is important that the states, understanding the risk of zoonosis and antibiotic resistance, **ensure strict regulation and adherence to welfare standards in animal husbandry.**

Sustainable animal farming:

- Sustainable animal farming involves raising animals humanely, producing better products, providing a sustenance for farmers and also **ensuring minimal negative impact on environment.**
- Some **sustainable farming practices**:
  - Feed animals less human food. Around 70% of the grains used by developed countries are fed to animals.
  - Raise regionally appropriate animals.
  - Pasture-based livestock farming.

2. Farmers are at their wits' end

Context:

- The article discusses the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on food security and its impact on the agricultural sector.

The issue of impact of COVID-19 on food security prospects has been dealt with in the below article:

CNA dated 31 March, 2020

For information on the issue of the impact of COVID-19 on the agricultural sector refer to:

CNA dated April 6, 2020

F. Prelims Facts

1. Pench tiger death raises COVID-19 fears

What's in News?

A 10-year-old ailing male tiger, in the Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR) has succumbed to a respiratory illness. The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), the organisation that manages the protection of India's 3,000-odd tigers is puzzled on whether the tiger should be tested for the novel coronavirus disease.

- Both the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) and the NTCA have issued guidelines that require zoos to be on the highest alert and monitor animals on closed-circuit cameras 24/7 for abnormal behaviour and symptoms.

Pench Tiger Reserve:

- The Pench Tiger Reserve is located in Madhya Pradesh in Seoni and Chhindwara districts.
- It is named after the Pench River that flows through the National Park.

- As per the All India Tiger Estimation Report 2018 (4th Tiger Census), released in July 2019, the Pench Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of tigers in India.

Tiger Conservation:

- The tiger conservation initiative in India is called 'Project Tiger', under the administration of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).
- In 2018, MSTrIPES - an application, was used to monitor and record the tiger population to release the census in 2019.

Read more about [Tiger Conservation in India](#).

Note:

- The Central Zoo Authority (CZA) in New York has confirmed that a tiger has been tested positive for COVID-19.
- Nadia, the COVID-positive tiger in the Bronx Zoo is believed to have been infected by an asymptomatic zookeeper.

G. Tidbits

1. Modi seeks Ministers' views on calibrated exit from lockdown

What's in News?

The Prime Minister has sought suggestions from his Council of Ministers for a calibrated exit from the 21-day lockdown imposed to contain the COVID-19 outbreak.

- Measures to bolster domestic manufacturing were sought as the pandemic has brought home the fact that essential goods manufacture within the country is very important.
- Ministers have been advised to coordinate with the district authorities for not just harvesting and procuring agricultural produce but also preparing business continuity plans to address the economic situation once the containment ends.
- Authorities have been advised to think in terms of micro plans for districts and specifically focus on the harvest season now on as well as how best procurement can be done from farmers.

Charting the way forward

A look at some of the ideas discussed by the PM and Council of Ministers:

- Promote **Make in India**, as COVID-19 has shown the importance of domestic manufacture
- Co-ordination between Ministers and district authorities to come up with **micro-level plans** for harvest and procurement of farm produce
- Promote ideas such as **"truck aggregation"**, similar to cab aggregation in urban areas, to transport farm produce to markets

Looking ahead: Prime Minister Modi interacting with Union Ministers in New Delhi on Monday. ▪ ANI

- Formulation of various **business continuity plans** for ministries in readiness for lifting of lockdown
- Encourage people to download the **Aarogya Setu app** devised by the government to track and disburse information on COVID-19

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of tigers and Uttarakhand, the second highest.
2. Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of Tiger Reserves in India.

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

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

As per the 4th Tiger Census, Madhya Pradesh saw the highest number of tigers at 526, closely followed by Karnataka at 524 with Uttarakhand at number 3 with 442 tigers. Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of Tiger Reserves in India. The six Tiger Reserves in the state of Madhya Pradesh are Kanha Tiger Reserve, Pench Tiger Reserve, Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, Panna Tiger Reserve, Satpura Tiger Reserve, and Sanjay-Dubri Tiger Reserve.

Q2. Which of the following countries border the Red Sea?

1. Egypt
2. Libya
3. Saudi Arabia

4. Sudan
5. Djibouti

Options:

a. 1, 2 and 5 only
b. 1, 2, 4 and 5 only
c. 1, 3, 4 and 5 only
d. 1, 3 and 4 only

Answer: c

Explanation:

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to BIMSTEC:

1. It came into force through the Bangkok Declaration.
2. BIMSTEC does not have a permanent secretariat.
3. The regional multilateral organisation has members from South Asia and Southeast Asia only.

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional multilateral organisation. It came into force in 1997 through the Bangkok Declaration. The regional group constitutes a bridge between South and South East Asia and represents a reinforcement of relations among these countries. Its permanent secretariat was established in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 2014. The regional multilateral organisation has members from South Asia (5) and Southeast Asia (2) only.

Q4. Consider the following statements:

1. Parambikulam Tiger Reserve is a protected area located in Tamil Nadu.
2. Parambikulam Tiger Reserve implements the Participatory Forest Management Scheme (PFMS).

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

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

Parambikulam Tiger Reserve is a protected area located in Kerala. Parambikulam Tiger Reserve implements the Participatory Forest Management Scheme (PFMS). People from tribal colonies inside the reserve are engaged as guides for treks and safaris, and are provided employment through various eco-tourism initiatives.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. In the light of the recent cooperation seen among the SAARC member nations against the COVID-19 pandemic, analyze the relevance of a more informal, decentralized and need-based cooperation mechanism for the revival of SAARC. (10 marks, 150 words)
2. Given the increasing shift towards industrial livestock production, discuss the associated concerns and suggest suitable alternatives. (15 marks, 250 words)