11 May 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Indian, Chinese troops face off in Ladakh, Sikkim

Context:

- Two incidents of face-off have been reported between Indian and Chinese troops at the border.

Details:

Face off near Pangong Tso lake:

- The first incident occurred in **eastern Ladakh near Pangong Tso lake**, a major part of which China holds. The reported face off has resulted in injuries to several soldiers of both armies.

- Pangong Tso has witnessed such incidents in the past, including in 2017 and 2019.

Face off at Naku la:

- The second incident occurred at **Naku La, Sikkim**, at an altitude of over 16,000 feet. As a result of aggressive behaviour, minor injuries were caused to both sides.

Resolution:

- After the **Wuhan summit** between the Indian Prime Minister and the Chinese President in April 2018, **differences over the border were being settled at the lowest level.**
  - The Wuhan summit took place in the backdrop of the **Doklam standoff** between India and China.
- Any issue is resolved through the **established protocols and mechanisms** put in place to maintain **peace and tranquillity on the border**.
- The **issues were resolved locally**. Troops disengaged after dialogue and interaction at the local level.

Concerns:

Border skirmishes:

- Though such an incident occurred after a long time, **border skirmishes have been common** at the India - China border.

Unresolved issues:

- Temporary and brief face-offs occur between the two armies because the **boundary is undemarcated.**
- Both countries have differing perceptions owing to the non-demarcated boundary, which lead to transgressions and face-offs, as each side patrols up to the areas they claim along the 3,448-km **Line of Actual Control (LAC).**

India's vulnerability:

- At Muguthang in the Naku la sector, the road on the Chinese side is motorable and on the Indian side, it is a remote area. Due to this the **Chinese can mobilize a large number of troops in a short time** if needed as compared to India.
- This puts the Indian forces at a disadvantage.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Massive revamp of Forest Ministry units

Context:

- **Restructuring plan** of the regional offices and departments of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC).

Details:

- The reorganisation plan involves **merging the 10 regional offices of the MoEF&CC and 19 centres** of the Forest Survey of India (FSI), National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) and Central Zoo Authority (CZA) into just **19 regional offices of the Ministry**.
- The stated objective of merging regional offices with the NTCA, WCCB, CZA and FSI centres is **improving efficiency and ensuring better coordination** between the constituent units.

Concerns:

- Though increasing efficiency and transparency is required, there are doubts as to whether merging of these organizations would achieve it given the fact that the **specialized organisations have very different objectives**.
- Environment and wildlife activists are concerned that the proposed restructuring would make the **key conservation wings of the Ministry powerless** and thus weaken India's efforts to protect the environment.

Counter arguments:

- Though the specialised wings of the Ministry have some independence in their functioning, they report to the same higher-ups.
- The merging of the different organizations would help in **better coordination in the sanctioning and implementation of various schemes.**

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. NIV develops test to detect antibodies

Context:

- The **National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune,** has developed a test kit for COVID-19.

Details:

- The National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune, has developed an immunological assay — **enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA)** — to detect antibodies that the body develops in response to infection by the SARS-CoV-2 novel coronavirus.
    - ELISA is routinely **used for detecting HIV infection.**
- NIV had transferred the technology to Zydus Cadila for mass-scale production subsequent to the **Drug Controller General** granting commercial production and marketing permission to Zydus Cadila.

Significance:

Checking for community transmission:

- Since the ELISA test is based on **detection of antibodies**, it helps detect cases in which the infected person has remained **symptom-free (asymptomatic)** during the entire course of the infection. It will also help ascertain if the person was previously infected, which is not possible with the RT-PCR (reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction) test.
- The newly developed kit can test 90 samples together in a single run of 2.5 hours enabling **faster testing.**

- The ELISA test will be used to screen 30,000 samples from 75 hotspot districts to **understand the extent of the spread of the virus in the community**. This would help ascertain whether there is **community transmission** in India.

Increase availability of test kits:

- This is the first time India has developed an **indigenous ELISA test for coronavirus**. While ELISA tests for coronavirus are already available in other countries, procuring them in large numbers may be a challenge, particularly during a pandemic. With the indigenous ELISA test kit, **availability will be a non-issue**.

Better sensitivity:

- The ELISA test developed by NIV gains significance as the rapid antibody tests imported from China were found to be unreliable.
- The kit has **reported high sensitivity and accuracy.**

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. The trends shaping the post-COVID-19 world

Context:

- **Emerging geopolitical trends** in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Details:

- The author of the article discusses geopolitical trends which will define the contours of the emerging global order.

Asia ascending, U.S. waning:

Economic aspect:

- Until the 18th century, Asia accounted for half the global GDP. The Industrial Revolution accompanied by European naval expansion and colonialism contributed to the rise of the West.
- The **2008 global financial crisis** and the resilience of the Asian economies led to the **rise of Asia**.
- Current economic forecasts indicate that out of the G-20 countries, only **China and India are likely to register economic growth during 2020 despite the global lockdown measures.**

Response to the pandemic:

- **Asian countries have demonstrated greater agility and responsiveness in tackling the pandemic** and more effective state capacity compared to the United States and Europe. Consequently, Asian economies will recover faster than those in the West.

Isolationist approach by the U.S.:

- The U.S. **had been at the forefront** of shaping the global order in the last century.
  - The U.S. had a decisive role in the formation of the League of Nations after World War I, creation of the United Nations and Bretton Woods institutions after World War II. It was leading the western world during the Cold War, moulding global responses to threats posed by terrorism or proliferation of weapons or climate change.
- Recently, there has been the observed trend of **retreat of the U.S. from global affairs.**
  - The decision to exit from the Paris climate deal, the exit of America from UN agencies and halting of their funding mark the increasing isolationism on the part of the U.S.
- Recent U.S. decisions and the **"America first" policy** have also **generated resentment**. Countries are losing trust in the U.S.'s leadership.
- The U.S., though still continuing to be the largest economy and the largest military power, has **lost the will and ability to lead.**

Intra-European fission:

Existing challenges:

- The European Union has been preoccupied with its very **own internal challenges**.
  - Ongoing **Brexit** negotiations.
  - The expansion of membership to include East European states has increased the **internal divisions** and made it increasingly difficult to reach agreement on political matters like relations with Russia and China. This has led to a **North-South divide within the Eurozone.**
  - The **financial crisis in the Eurozone** has also given rise to internal divisions. Strains in the EU showed up when austerity measures were imposed on Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal a decade ago by the European Central Bank, persuaded by the fiscally conservative Austria, Germany and the Netherlands.

New challenges:

- The trans-Atlantic divide in NATO member nations is aggravating an intra-European rift.
- **Rising populism** has given **greater voice to Euro-sceptics** and calls for greater autonomy.
- There has been a **dearth of coordination and collaboration in the EU's response to the pandemic.**
  - European Central Bank (ECB) chief has ruled out lower borrowing rates for the affected member states.
  - Italy was denied medical equipment by its EU neighbours who introduced export controls, which led to China airlifting medical teams and critical supplies.
- **Schengen visa or free-border movement has been affected** due to the lockdown and movement regulation measures. Free movement of goods, services, capital and people, which has been the underlying theme of the European Union faces a grave challenge.

Rising China:

- There has been an emergence of a **stronger and more assertive China** in the global order.
  - Though China's growing economic role has been visible since it joined the World Trade Organization, its more assertive posture has taken shape recently under President Xi Jinping's leadership.

- The **Belt and Road Initiative** seeks to connect China to Eurasia and Africa through both maritime and land routes by investing trillions of dollars in infrastructure building. This will give China **greater strategic and economic heft in the region and world at large.**
- Chinese assertiveness has raised concerns in its neighbourhood and the world over.

New cold war:

- The U.S. had initially assisted China's rise and cooperated with it in the hope that an economically integrated China would become politically more open.
- However in recent years, the U.S.-China relationship has **moved from cooperation to competition, to trade and technology wars and is moving steadily to confrontation**.
- A partial **economic de-coupling between the two economic giants** had begun and will gather greater momentum in the days ahead.
- The pandemic has seen increasing **rhetoric from both China and the U.S.**
  - o The U.S. blames the pandemic on a Chinese biotech lab and accuses China of suppressing vital information that contributed to the spread.

Fading organisations:

- Global problems demand global responses. However, with COVID-19, **international and multilateral bodies seem to have been ineffective.**
  - o The **World Health Organization (WHO)**, best suited to lead global efforts against the health crisis, has become a victim of politics.
  - o The UN Security Council (UNSC), the G-7 and the G-20 remain ineffective in ensuring coordination and collaboration.
- Global and multilateral institutions are witnessing the return of the damaging big power politics.
- The absence of a multilateral response highlights the long-felt **need for reform** of these bodies but this cannot happen without collective global leadership.

Energy Factor:

- The growing interest in renewables and green technologies on account of climate change concerns and the U.S. emerging as a major energy producer have fundamentally altered the energy markets.
- The looming economic recession and **depressed oil prices will exacerbate internal tensions in West Asian countries,** which are solely dependent on oil revenues.
- Long-standing rivalries in the region may now create **political instability** in countries where regime structures are fragile.

Greater unpredictability:

- **Rising nationalism and protectionist responses** will prolong the economic recession into a depression, sharpening inequalities and polarisations.
- This will lead to greater unpredictability and turbulent times in international relations.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. The epidemic and ensuring safety in courts

Context:

- Working of the judiciary during and after the national lockdown.

Background:

Supreme Court Ruling for virtual functioning:

- Invoking its powers under **Article 142 of the Constitution**, the Supreme Court had issued certain directions for the **virtual functioning of courts during the lockdown**.
    - A virtual court hearing is one where there is no physical court room. All the participants take part in proceedings using telephone or video conferencing facilities.
- The Supreme Court (SC) had directed the State officials of the **National Informatics Centre (NIC)** to work with the respective High Courts to formulate a plan for the virtual functioning of courts.
- The SC had stated that the guidelines for virtual functioning of courts would be formulated by the NIC and sent to the respective courts and lawyers.
- The district courts would follow the video conferencing rules as formulated by the respective High Courts.

Precedents:

- The **e-filing system was introduced in the Delhi High Court in 2009**. In the Delhi High Court, e-filing is mandatory for company, taxation and arbitration jurisdictions. The facility for e-filing of cases pertaining to the Delhi High Court has been recently made available at all the court complexes of the Delhi district courts.
- About **10 courts in the Delhi High Court function as e-courts.** There are 13 e-courts functioning in the district courts attached to the Delhi High Court. Another 11 e-courts will soon be functional.
- In the **Bombay High Court, e-courts started functioning from 2013**. Initially only company matters, arbitration and conciliation matters, income tax appeals and suits were allowed in e-courts. Now even writs, suits and testamentary matters are heard by e-courts.
- In the **Madras High Court**, the facility for e-filing of cases was initially made available for bail applications. **Filing of urgent cases through e-mail is also permitted now**.

Current concerns of the judiciary:

Increase in volume of cases:

- Though currently, there is less pressure on the courts now, this will change once the lockdown is lifted. There is an expectation that there will be a **deluge of new cases after the lockdown is lifted.**
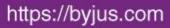
Threat of infection:

- Since the COVID-19 crisis is far from over, once the lockdown is lifted, unless the number of advocates/litigants is restricted in open court proceedings, the **possibility of the virus spreading is high**.

Call for open court system:

- The **Bar Council of India has opposed the continuation of virtual hearings** once the national lockdown is lifted. It has argued that 90% of the advocates and judges are "unaware of technology and its nuances".

Non implementation of SC guidelines:

- The **NIC has not yet notified the guidelines as mandated by the SC**.

Challenges to adoption of e-court system:

Lack of necessary infrastructure:

- International experience with respect to e-court system highlights the need to put in place the **necessary infrastructure to facilitate remote court hearings**. This is lacking in most courts in India.
- Though some form of foundation for an e-court system is available in the Supreme Court and the High Courts, they are **not available in the subordinate courts**, which bear a large burden of the cases.

Lack of knowledge and capability:

- In India, most advocates and litigants are **unaware of and unwilling to use e-filing services**.
  - E-filings and e-court processes involve a certain amount of **technical knowledge and capability.**

Also read: Indian Judiciary

Way forward:

- The courts should **formulate plans based on the availability of infrastructure** to conduct virtual hearings or actual hearings, or by running courts in shifts.
- **Suitable safety measures** with strict social distancing norms must be put in place for conducting proceedings after the lockdown is lifted.
  - Only those lawyers/litigants whose cases are listed for the day's hearing should be allowed to enter court halls.
  - The lawyers must enter in batches according to the serial number in the list.
  - Thermal image cameras must be installed at the entrance of every court building, to identify risk persons.
  - Every person entering the court premises must install the Aarogya Setu app on their phones.
  - The entrance of every court complex must have an automatic hand wash faucet installed.
  - Protective equipment like masks, gloves and sanitizers should be made available.
- The **judiciary must be allotted sufficient funds**. The lack of allocation of sufficient funds to improve and strengthen technical support for the judiciary has resulted in inefficient use of technology in the judiciary.

For more information on this issue, refer to:

CNA dated May 6, 2020

CNA dated April 25, 2020

F. Prelims Facts

1. Tying up with Todas to keep the virus at bay

- More than a hundred women and **indigenous Toda artisans from the Nilgiris** are producing stylish, embroidered cloth masks for local residents, police and sanitary workers.
- Some Toda artisans have been embroidering indigenous designs on bags, shawls and other items.

G. Tidbits

1. 'Collegium system ensures selection of competent judges'

- A Survey conducted by **Delhi-based Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy** covered practising advocates from eight High Courts — Delhi, Allahabad, Bombay, Kerala, Gujarat, Calcutta, Madras and Patna.
- These advocates answered 27 questions across various themes regarding judiciary.
- Over 68% of the advocates were of the opinion that the **collegium system of appointments ensures the selection of the most competent judges.**
  - Under the collegium system, the Supreme Court appoints judges to itself and the HCs.

2. Central experts submit report on A.P. gas leak

- Two experts have been deputed by the Central Government to study the causes that led to the **gas leak at LG Polymers**, killing 12 persons and affecting over 300.
- The expert team visited the site of the accident and interacted with the officials and various stakeholders, and based on its findings, has submitted the **preliminary report to the Central and State governments.**
- The report contains several **recommendatory measures to prevent a recurrence** of such accidents.

3. BPRD scraps online manual on identifying fake news

- The report, '**Fake News & Disinformation: A Guide for LEAs - How to spot and investigate,'** was prepared by **the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD).**
- BPRD has removed the recently released guide for law enforcement agencies to identify 'fake news' from its website.
- This was done subsequent to objections to the inclusion of certain portals on an indicative list of websites that could be accessed for fact check.

Also see CNA dated May 20, 2020

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to Pangong Tso lake?

1. It lies in the western Ladakh region of India.
2. It is the origin for the Shyok river.

Options:

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

Answer:

Option d

Explanation:

- Pangong Tso or Pangong Lake is an endorheic lake in the Himalayas situated in Eastern Ladakh region.
- An endorheic basin is a limited drainage basin that normally retains water and allows no outflow to other external bodies of water, such as rivers or oceans.
- It is not a part of the Indus river basin area and forms a separate geographically landlocked river basin.
- It extends from India to the Tibetan Autonomous Region, China. Approximately 60% of the length of the lake lies within the Tibetan Autonomous Region.

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

1. ELISA is a commonly used analytical biochemistry assay.
2. ELISA has been used in HIV diagnosis.
3. ELISA finds application in the food industry.

Options:

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

Answer:

Option c

Explanation:

- The enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) is a commonly used analytical biochemistry assay.
- ELISA assay technique is designed for detecting and quantifying substances such as peptides, proteins, antibodies and hormones.
- Because the ELISA can be used to evaluate either the presence of antigen or the presence of antibody in a sample, it is a useful tool for detecting various kind of diseases, such as dengue, malaria, HIV test or West Nile virus.
- It has also found applications in the food industry in detecting potential food allergens, such as milk, peanuts, walnuts, almonds and eggs.
- ELISA can also be used in toxicology as a rapid presumptive screen for certain classes of drugs.

Q3. Which of the following pairs is incorrectly matched?

a. Halakki: Karnataka
b. Cholanaikkans: Telangana
c. Todas: Tamil Nadu
d. Chenchu: Andhra Pradesh

Answer:

Option b

Explanation:

- Cholanaikkans are a prominent tribe of Kerala.

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

1. League of Nations was formed in the aftermath of World War I.
2. It was headquartered at Geneva.

Options:

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

Answer:

Option c

Explanation:

- The League of Nations was the first worldwide intergovernmental organisation whose principal mission was to maintain world peace.
- It was founded on 10 January 1920 following the Paris Peace Conference that ended the First World War.
- On 1 November 1920, the headquarters of the League was moved from London to Geneva, where the first General Assembly was held on 15 November 1920.
- The League lasted for 26 years. The United Nations (UN) replaced it after the end of the Second World War and inherited several agencies and organisations founded by the League.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. In the light of the Supreme Court issuing directions for the virtual functioning of courts during the lockdown, discuss the challenges to the adoption of the e-court system in the Indian context. Suggest suitable measures to ensure the access to judiciary in the post lockdown phase. (15 marks, 250 words)
2. The COVID-19 pandemic will only hasten and deepen the recent geopolitical trend lines in international relations. Comment. (15 marks, 250 words)