

31 May 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS 1 Related

GEOGRAPHY

1. [Skymet says monsoon is in; IMD waits](#)

B. GS 2 Related

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [Kerala issues data security guidelines](#)

C. GS 3 Related

ECONOMY

1. ['Airline sector was already weak, COVID-19 exposed it'](#)
2. [Draft e-com policy for comments soon: DPIIT](#)

ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. [Tree transplantation policy may get Cabinet nod soon](#)

D. GS 4 Related

E. Editorials

AGRICULTURE

1. [Why is the locust surge posing a threat to agriculture in India?](#)

F. Prelims Facts

1. [HC questions SEC's appointment](#)
2. [PM CARES not within the ambit of RTI Act: PMO](#)
3. [Military bonding beyond borders](#)

G. Tidbits

1. [India's recovery rate improves to 47%](#)
2. [Nagaland Governor told to defer delimitation process](#)

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

A. GS 1 Related

Category: GEOGRAPHY

1. Skymet says monsoon is in; IMD waits

Context:

- Onset of Monsoon in India.

Background:

- Skymet had forecast that the monsoons would reach Kerala on May 28 with an error margin of two days.
- The [IMD](#) had announced June 5 as the onset date, though recently it said a cyclonic circulation in the Bay of Bengal would help advance the date and the rains could reach Kerala on June 1.

For more information on this issue, refer to:

Details:

- Private agency **Skymet Weather** has announced that the **Southwest Monsoons** have arrived in **Kerala** ahead of its normal onset date of June 1.
- Skymet has announced that all conditions such as **rainfall, outwave longwave radiation (OLR) value and wind speed** had been met to declare the onset over Kerala.
- But the India Meteorological Department said conditions were not yet ripe for the start of the Monsoon season on mainland India.

Parameters for Monsoons:

- The IMD says there are three major conditions to declare the onset.
 - If after May 10, 60% of the **14 weather stations** — Minicoy, Amini, Thiruvananthapuram, Punalur, Kollam, Alappuzha, Kottayam, Kochi, Thrissur, Kozhikode, Thalassery, Kannur, Kudulu and Mangalore — report rainfall of 2.5 mm or more for two consecutive days, the onset over Kerala will be declared on the second day.
 - The **depth of the westerlies** should be maintained up to 600 hectopascals (hPa). This gives an indirect measure of the wind speed.
 - The **Outwave Longwave Radiation (OLR)** should be below 200 watt per square metre (wm-2).

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**1. Kerala issues data security guidelines****Context:**

- **Data Security guidelines** by the Kerala state government.

Background:

- The government had contracted with **Sprinklr, a U.S.-based data analytics firm**, to crunch the health data of citizens to understand how the pandemic would behave in the State.
- The Opposition had approached the Kerala High Court, accusing the Kerala Government of having used the outbreak as a cover to allow the U.S.-based firm to **“harvest and monetise” the medical information of the State’s population**.
- The High Court had considered the Opposition’s plea.

For more information on this issue, refer to:

[CNA dated 25 April 2020](#)

Details:

- The Kerala Government has issued **guidelines for the collection of personal information** following the Sprinklr controversy. The government aims to address some of the points raised by the HC judgment.
- The guidelines mandate that agencies and departments should **collect sensitive personal data of citizens only with their legally recorded informed consent**.

For more related information on the issue, refer to:

[CNA dated 27 April 2020](#)

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. 'Airline sector was already weak, COVID-19 exposed it'

Context:

- Crisis in the airline sector.

Details:

Weak finances:

- Despite many positive developments since **deregulation of the sector**, India's potential has not been realised.
- Indian aviation has been caught in a **cycle of profitless growth**, punctuated by regular crises every 5-7 years. Five of India's six airlines have been operating with weak balance sheets.

COVID crisis:

- The aviation sector which was already weak has been further affected by the COVID crisis. It has exposed the **vulnerability of the aviation industry**.

Challenges:

- One of the main problems with the airlines sector is the **low entry barrier** as airlines require paid-up capital of just \$7 million to start and the renewal of an **Air Operator Permit (AOP)** does not involve any test of financial fitness.
- The entry of many players in the sector and the price war is making the business unviable.
- A major issue with Indian airlines is their **low-yield and high-cost structure**. The operating environment in India is characterised by high costs and poor planning.
- The Indian aviation sector has been suffering on account of profitless growth.

Way forward:

Structural and regulatory changes:

- The industry experts have called for **immediate structural and regulatory changes** that could help revive the sector.

- The changes should result in a **higher yield market** for the airlines to remain sustainable.

Infrastructure development:

- Despite the current setback, India must invest in **improving aviation-related infrastructure**. This will give a fillip to the industry in the form of government expenditure.

2. Draft e-com policy for comments soon: DPIIT

Context:

- Draft e-commerce policy.

Background:

- India does not have an e-commerce policy yet.
- **E-commerce is a fast emerging sector** and there is a need to have a **definite, clear and coherent policy**, keeping in tune with the requirement of the society and service providers.

Details:

- The **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)** will be putting out a draft e-commerce policy in the public domain to seek views and comments.

Challenges:

Data regulations:

- Several foreign e-commerce firms have raised concerns over some points in the draft pertaining to data.

Quality of products:

- There are a lot of **counterfeit and inferior products** being listed on the e-commerce platforms. There have also been reports of violation of various **safety standards** in the products being sold via the e-commerce platforms.

Way forward:

Detailed guidelines:

- The e-commerce policy should lay down a very clear policy on what is data; what kind of data the e-commerce companies can use; how the citizens' right of privacy can be protected; how the e-commerce data is being leveraged for other purposes; commercial benefits accrue to the e-commerce data holder; how citizens can have access to those benefits.

Balancing the interests of all stakeholders:

- The policy measures should **balance the interests of the customers and the service providers**.

Consumer rights:

- The protection of consumer rights is of utmost importance.
- There is a need to prevent the sale of substandard goods on the e-commerce platforms for which the platforms themselves can have quality control measures.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Tree transplantation policy may get Cabinet nod soon

Context:

- The Delhi Government's **Tree Transplantation Policy 2020**.

Details:

- Under the Tree Transplantation Policy 2020, for a development project, **80% of trees affected by the developmental activities at a particular site have to be transplanted**.

Streamlined with previous policy:

- The existing policy of planting 10 saplings for each tree being felled will continue, and also 10 saplings will have to be planted for each tree being transplanted too, according to the new policy.

Institutional framework:

- The government is expected to come out with a list of **empanelled technical agencies**, which will be doing the transplantation.
- A **dedicated 'Tree Transplantation Cell'** will also be established.

Exceptions:

- Exception to the 80% transplantation rule will be given in projects where less than 10 trees are felled and also in "exceptional cases" where a government committee gives permission.

Post implementation evaluation:

- For projects in which 100 or more trees have been transplanted, a **social audit at the end of one year of completion of transplantation** will be done to establish survival rate.

Concerns:

- The environmental experts have been critical about the Tree Transplantation Policy.
 - They have argued the **need for a tree preservation policy** over the tree transplantation policy. They have suggested that the projects should be redesigned keeping tree preservation in mind.
 - Tree transplantation is **expensive and survival rate is problematic**.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: AGRICULTURE

1. Why is the locust surge posing a threat to agriculture in India?

Context:

- Locust invasions being reported from Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

Background:

Previous outbreaks:

- There were 13 locust plagues between 1964 and 1997. From 1997 to 2010, there were five outbreaks that were controlled. The last big locust infestation was in 2010.
- From 2010 to 2018, there were no major swarms or breeding reported, according to the **Locust Warning Organization (LWO)**, in Jodhpur.
- In **2019, Gujarat and Rajasthan reported a significant surge in locust infestations**. This was partly due to an **unusually long monsoon and also because pest-control operations were inadequate** which help wipe out nascent populations of the insect.
 - Nearly 3.5 lakh hectares of cumin, rapeseed and mustard were damaged.

Locust monitoring:

- As a result of the **1926-1931/1932 locust plague in India**, the British Raj at the time began research into the **desert locust** in 1931.
- A permanent **Locust Warning Organization (LWO)**, with a station in Karachi (undivided India), was established in 1939.
- Its main job was to keep an eye for a specific sub-species of the insect, the desert locust, that sprang into the region from the Thar desert. The locust attacks were a major issue during the British rule.
- After Independence, India established its own centre at Jodhpur, Rajasthan, as a part of the **Directorate of Plant Protection Quarantine and Storage, under the Ministry of Agriculture**.

Details:

Indian scenario:

- **The normal locust season in India spans June-November and coincides with the Kharif season.**
- In India in 2020, the existing groups of swarms have **continued to move east** and to the central States of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Much of these movements were associated with the strong westerly winds of [Cyclone Amphan](#).
- Several successive waves of invasions are likely until July in Rajasthan, with eastward surges across northern India as far as Bihar and Odisha, followed by westward movements and a return to Rajasthan on the changing winds associated with the monsoons.
- These movements will cease as swarms begin to become less mobile. The swarms are less likely to reach Nepal, and Bangladesh and south India.

Concerns:

- **Locust swarms** have been recorded in nearly 50,000 hectares in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, and if they continue to thrive as the monsoon arrives, it could **cause serious agricultural damage by leading to huge crop losses**.
 - The monsoon arrival will lead to a new season of sowing rice, sugarcane, cotton and other crops.
- India is gearing up for what could be one of its **worst locust invasions in decades**.

Causes:

- The 2020 locust infestation could be because of a **chain of climate events, administrative laxity** in several countries and the difficult circumstances brought on by the **COVID-19** pandemic.

Relation between climate change and infestation:

Warming in the Indian Ocean:

- **The Indian Ocean Dipole**, in which the **western and eastern parts of the ocean warm differentially**, tend to have an outsized impact in bringing excessive rains to India and West Asia.
- **2019 saw one of the strongest positive dipoles** with a difference of more than two degrees between the western and eastern parts of the ocean.
 - A 'positive' dipole is when the western part is hotter by a degree or more than the eastern.
- The strong Indian Ocean Dipole resulted in **torrential rainfall in India**. The monsoons lasted nearly a month more than what is normal.
- The extended rainfall season continued in several parts of West Asia, Oman, Yemen and in the **Horn of Africa** — Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya — resulting in **high moisture in the mostly dry sands of the region**. This seems to have facilitated the formation of several locust swarms.

Wind patterns:

- The favourable wind pattern seems to have helped swarms to fly and breed in traditional grounds in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

Climatic conditions in India:

- The **unusually mild summer of 2020** in India, and several bouts of **rainfall over north and western India** from March to May also helped the insects breed.

Lack of preventive actions:

- The **traditional spring breeding areas** of the desert locusts are in Baluchistan, Indus Valley (Pakistan) and southern coast and parts of Sistan-Baluchistan. These infestations are likely to move to the summer breeding areas along India-Pakistan from Cholistan to Tharparkar.
- Pakistan has been blamed for **not spraying adequate pesticide to stem the nascent population of the locusts**.

Challenges:

- As pointed out by the Food and Agriculture Organization (**FAO**), the **lack of funds and inadequate monitoring** has been a consistent problem. The novel coronavirus pandemic has led to decreased focus on the locust attacks.
 - The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)**, a specialised agency of the **United Nations** has been sending alerts on developing swarms.

- A locust attack has to be dealt with by spraying pest control and plant protection chemicals. The national lockdown has made the **availability of pesticide** as well as its transportation difficult.
- **Labour also not being available easily due to the lockdown** could affect spraying operations and, as a result, allow locusts to cause significant damage.
- Strong Indian Ocean Dipoles are expected to become more frequent due to the **overall trend of warming oceans**. This phenomenon could trigger **regular locust infestations**.

Way forward:

- There is a need for **better coordination between the affected countries** to ensure a more coordinated approach to the issue.
- Given the increasing possibility of locust invasions, there is a need for **better monitoring** of the nascent populations to ensure minimal efforts for controlling the locust populations.
- There is a need for **increased allocations for locust monitoring**.

Additional information:

- Somalia has announced a national state of emergency due to the outbreak in February 2020, while Pakistan declared a national emergency for the second time in 2020 owing to the locust infestation.

F. Prelims Facts

1. HC questions SEC's appointment

- The **Andhra Pradesh High Court** has termed the appointment of Justice (retired) V. Kanagaraj as State Election Commissioner (SEC) "objectionable".

Appointment of new SEC:

- The court observed that the appointment was made in accordance with Section 200 of the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act, 1994, instead of **Article 243K(1) of the Constitution**.
- The court has asked the State government to revisit certain provisions of Section 200 of the Panchayat Raj Act and take a decision in accordance with the spirit of the Constitution as expeditiously as possible.

Termination of the tenure of the previous SEC:

- The HC noted that an **ordinance** could not take away the right of the previous SEC without the completion of the **tenure (five years)** for which he was appointed.
- The court has held that this was actuated by fraud on the power of the Constitution and did not pass the test of rationality under **Article 14**.

For more related information, refer to:

[CNA dated 30 May, 2020](#)

2. PM CARES not within the ambit of RTI Act: PMO

- The **Prime Minister's Office (PMO)** has refused to disclose details on the creation and operation of the **Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM CARES) Fund** under an RTI applicant claiming that the fund is “not a public authority” within the ambit of the **RTI Act, 2005**.
 - The PM CARES Fund accepts donations and provides relief during the COVID-19 pandemic and other similar emergencies.
- Another RTI request on the issue had also been refused citing a Supreme Court (SC) observation that “indiscriminate and impractical demands under RTI Act for disclosure of all and sundry information would be counterproductive”.

3. Military bonding beyond borders

- Ties between British-India and Nepali Gurkhas, who originate from the mountainous region of Gurkha can be traced to the **Treaty of Sugauli**, signed at the end of the **Anglo-Nepalese war in 1816**.

Under the British rule:

- The Gurkhas played a significant role in the consolidation of the British Empire in India. Gurkhas had engaged in combat during the Gurkha-Sikh War, **Anglo-Sikh wars, the Afghan wars and the First World War**.
- Gurkhas have fought in the **Falklands war** and served the British in Hong Kong, Cyprus, Sierra Leone and East Timor.

After Independence:

- After India gained Independence, six Gurkha regiments were transferred from the British to the Indian Army as part of a **tripartite agreement between Nepal, India and Britain**. A seventh regiment was raised after Independence.

Battle for Siachen:

- The **Bilafond La** is one of the “gates” leading to the Siachen glacier.
- Bilafond La is a mountain pass directly north of map **point NJ 980420**, which defined the end of the 1972 Line of Control between Pakistan and India, as part of the Simla Agreement.

G. Tidbits

1. India's recovery rate improves to 47%

- India's COVID-19 **recovery rate** has improved considerably to 47.4% from 38.29% on May 18.
- Data from State health departments put the total number of cases in the country at 1,76,840 with 87,362 active cases.
- **Doubling time**, which in the past 14 days was 13.3, has improved to 15.4 in the last three days. The **fatality rate** is 2.86%.

2. Nagaland Governor told to defer delimitation process

- The Sumi Hoho, the main social organisation of the Sumi Naga community has asked the Nagaland Governor to pursue the State's **delimitation exercise** only after the peace process with the extremist groups is settled.
- The negotiating parties include the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) or the Isak-Muivah faction of NSCN and the **Naga National Political Groups, a conglomerate of seven other outfits**. The talks have been on since mid-1997.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?

1. The State Election Commissioner is appointed by the Governor.
2. The conditions of service and tenure of office of the State Election Commissioner shall be such as the Governor may determine.
3. The State Election Commissioner shall not be removed from his office except in like manner and on the like ground as a Judge of a High Court.

Options:

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

Answer:

Option c

Explanation:

Under Article 243(K) of the Indian Constitution:

- The superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to the Panchayats shall be vested in a State Election Commission consisting of a State Election Commissioner to be appointed by the Governor
- Subject to the provisions of any law made by the Legislature of a State, the conditions of service and tenure of office of the State Election Commissioner shall be such as the Governor may by rule determine: Provided that the State Election Commissioner shall not be removed from his office except in like manner and on the like ground as a Judge of a High Court and the conditions of service of the State Election Commissioner shall not be varied to his disadvantage after his appointment.

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

1. The decision of the Central Information Commission can be challenged in the Supreme Court.
2. The Central Information Commission shall consist of the Chief Information Commissioner and not more than 2 Central Information Commissioners.
3. Chief Information Commissioner shall hold office for a term of three years and shall not be eligible for reappointment.

Options:

- a. 1 only

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

Answer:

Option d

Explanation:

- The Central Information Commission has been constituted under the Right to Information Act, 2005. The jurisdiction of the Commission extends over all Central Public Authorities.
- The Commission has certain powers and functions mentioned under the RTI Act, 2005.
 - These broadly relate to adjudication in second appeal for giving information; direction for record keeping, suo motu disclosures receiving and enquiring into a complaint on inability to file RTI, etc.; imposition of penalties and Monitoring and Reporting including preparation of an Annual Report. The decisions of the Commission are final and binding.
- The Central Information Commission shall consist of the Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and such number of Central Information Commissioners not exceeding 10 as may be deemed necessary.
- The committee for recommendation of the Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and Central Information Commissioners shall consist of:
 - The Prime Minister as the Chairperson of the committee
 - The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha
 - A Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister
- Section 13 of the RTI Act 2005 provides that the Chief Information Commissioner shall hold office for a term of five years from the date on which he enters upon his office and shall not be eligible for reappointment.
- Section 13(5)(a) of the RTI Act 2005 provides that the salaries and allowances payable to and other terms and conditions of service of the Chief Information Commissioner shall be the same as that of the Chief Election Commissioner.

Q3. Which of the following pairs of glacier and the state/UT is wrongly matched?

- a. Lonak glacier: Ladakh
- b. Kangto glacier: Arunachal Pradesh
- c. Zemu glacier: Sikkim
- d. Pindari glacier: Uttarakhand

Answer:

Option a

Explanation:

Lonak glacier: Sikkim

Q4. Arrange the following battles fought by the British in chronological order:

1. First Anglo-Mysore battle
2. First Anglo-Maratha battle
3. First Anglo-Afghan battle
4. Anglo-Nepalese war

Options:

- a. 1, 2, 4, 3
- b. 1, 2, 3, 4
- c. 2, 1, 3, 4
- d. 2, 1, 4, 3

Answer:

Option a

Explanation:

- First Anglo-Mysore battle (1767-69)
- First Anglo-Maratha battle (1775-82)
- First Anglo-Afghan battle (1839-42)
- Anglo-Nepalese war (1816)

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Enumerate the factors affecting Indian monsoon. Analyze the possible effect of climate change on the Indian monsoons and the concerns associated with it. (15 marks, 250 words)
2. In the light of the locust infestations in India, discuss the causative factors for the unusually large locust infestation in 2020 and the concerns associated with it for India. (10 marks, 150 words)