

30 May 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Category: GEOGRAPHY

1. Nascent Arabian Sea cyclone may delay monsoon arrival

Context:

- Onset of Monsoon in India.

Background:

Development of cyclones:

- Storms that develop in the sea begin as 'Low Pressures' and graduate to Depressions, Deep Depressions and then onto three categories of cyclones.

Influence of cyclones on Monsoons:

- Depressions are normal during the advent of monsoon and usually aid the monsoon's advent and progress in India. However a particularly strong storm can hinder the monsoon.
- In **2019**, cyclone **Vayu** that formed in the **Arabian Sea** stalled the monsoon after it entered Kerala.

Monsoon onset in 2020:

- The official date for the onset of monsoon in 2020 has been set as June 5, by the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)**.

Details:

- There is now uncertainty over monsoon's arrival over Kerala on the previously estimated date.
- The uncertainty is primarily due to a prominent weather model that hints at the **development of a cyclone in the Arabian Sea** after May 31, 2020.
 - The model of the European Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting is showing a cyclone developing in the Arabian Sea.
- The strength and trajectory of this weather system **could delay the monsoon's progress**.

IMD's estimates:

- The IMD's models are predicting that the depression observed in the Arabian Sea would likely be a Deep Depression, at most and would not develop into a cyclone.

- The depression is likely to form in the Arabian Sea and turn towards Oman and not significantly influence the monsoon.

Read more about [Arrival of the monsoon: IMD](#).

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. HC asks A.P. govt. to reinstate Ramesh Kumar

Context:

Background:

- The Andhra Pradesh government through its government Orders had **cut short the term of the State Election Commissioner (SEC) from five to three years**, resulting in the expulsion of the standing EC from the post.

Details:

- The Andhra Pradesh High Court has struck down the **Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj Ordinance and the consequential Government orders**.
- The two-judge Bench has directed the government to reinstate Mr. Ramesh Kumar with immediate effect.
- It is learnt that the State government has decided to challenge the judgment in the Supreme Court.

Arguments in favour of former SEC:

- Ramesh Kumar's argument was based on the fact that the power conferred under **Article 213 of the Constitution to promulgate ordinances** was not an absolute entrustment, but was conditional on the satisfaction that the circumstances existed for such an action.
- The court also agreed with Mr. Ramesh Kumar's view that the impugned ordinance was in violation of **Article 243-K, which states that a SEC could not be removed, except in the same manner as provided for a High Court judge**.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. U.K. moots '5G club' to keep out Huawei

Context:

- Britain's proposal of the "**D10**" club.

Background:

- Britain has allowed **Huawei, the Chinese global leader in 5G technology**, to build up to 35% of the infrastructure necessary to roll out Britain's **new high speed data network**.

- However in the light of the souring relations with China there have been calls to draw up plans to cut Huawei out of the UK network by 2023.

Details:

- Britain has been insisting on the U.S. to form a club of 10 nations that could develop its own 5G technology and **reduce dependence on Huawei**.
- Britain is proposing a “**D10**” club of democratic partners that groups the **G7 nations** with **Australia** and the Asian technology leaders **South Korea and India**.
- One of the options being discussed involves channelling investments into existing telecommunication companies within the 10 member states.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. GDP growth slows to a 11-year low of 4.2%, Q4 slumps to 3.1%

Context:

- Provisional estimates for 2019-20 released by the National Statistical Office.

Details:

- According to the provisional estimates **India’s economic growth has slowed to an 11-year low of 4.2% in 2019-20**.
- The fourth quarter of the 2019-20 fiscal year, the January-March period, saw the growth in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) slump to 3.1%.

Bright spots:

- The fourth-quarter growth of 2019-20, while being slowest in 44 quarters, however, was still faster than the 2.2% pace predicted by most economists and ratings analysts.
 - **Agriculture and government expenditure has helped lift growth** from the earlier projections. Agricultural output and the mining sector picked up steam in the fourth quarter, growing at rates of 5.9% and 5.2% respectively.
 - Public administration, defence and other services grew at 10.1%.

Concerns:

Manufacturing sector:

- The manufacturing sector has contracted with output shrinking by 1.4%.

Demand weakening:

- Most worrying is the fact that the **three components of demand have fallen** — **consumption demand** has slowed, while **investments and exports** are both in the negative territory.

Fiscal position:

- The data from the **Controller General of Accounts (CGA)** shows that the Centre's fiscal position has worsened.
 - **Fiscal deficit has increased to 4.6% of GDP** mainly on account of poor revenue realisation.
 - CGA's data indicates that the **Centre's gross tax revenues have contracted by 3.4% in 2019-20**. Revenue receipts during the year worked out to be only 90% of the revised estimate.
 - The deficit, which signifies the gap between government revenue and expenditure, is **higher than the revised estimate of 3.8% for the fiscal**.
 - According to the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) data, the revenue deficit was 3.27%. The effective revenue deficit was 2.36%.

COVID-19 effect:

- The slowdown has all happened in the year prior to the spread of COVID. The GDP numbers do not yet capture the impact of the four stages of lockdown that started on March 25, 2020.
- Unlike during the **financial crisis of 2008** when India maintained an 8% GDP growth when the capacity to endure and recover was strong, in the current situation India is faced with a **weaker economy and much weaker public finances and fiscal capacity**.
 - The **private expenditure growth has been dwindling** due to shut down and labour migration.
 - **Investment has been contracting** due to weak consumption demand and stretched corporate balance sheets.
- Initial estimates project that the Indian economy would contract in 2020-21 for the first time since 1980.

Conclusion:

- The **weak commodity prices and import demand** would help provide some support to growth.
- The **government expenditure will again be the growth engine** in 2020-21.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. GMR told to stop dredging in Kakinada

Context:

- The Andhra Pradesh Forest Department has directed GMR Energy Limited to stop dredging activity in the Kumbabhishekham mudflat.

Background:

Dredging:

- Dredging is the **removal of silt, sediments and debris from the bottom of lakes, rivers, harbours and other water bodies**.

- Dredging is a **routine necessity in waterways** because sedimentation—the natural process of sand and silt washing downstream—gradually fills channels and harbors.
 - Dredging often is focused on maintaining or increasing the depth of navigation channels, anchorages, or berthing areas to ensure the safe passage of boats and ships.
 - Dredging is also performed to reduce the exposure of fish, wildlife, and people to contaminants and to prevent the spread of contaminants to other areas of the water body.
 - This **environmental dredging** is often necessary because sediments in and around cities and industrial areas are frequently contaminated with a variety of pollutants.

Mudflats:

- **Mudflats or mud flats, also known as tidal flats**, are coastal wetlands that form in **inter-tidal areas** where sediments have been deposited by tides or rivers.
- Most of the sediment within a mudflat is within the inter-tidal zone, and thus the flat is submerged and exposed approximately twice daily. This helps maintain the ecosystem balance.

Significance:

- Tidal flats, along with inter-tidal salt marshes and mangrove forests, are **important ecosystems**.
 - They usually support a large population of wildlife, and are a **key habitat for migratory shorebirds**.
- The maintenance of mudflats is important in **preventing coastal erosion**.

Threats:

- Mudflats worldwide are under threat from predicted **sea level rises, land claims for development, dredging due to shipping purposes, and chemical pollution**.

Details:

- The forest department has ordered the removal of the bund around the mangrove cover adjacent to the company's 220 MW barge-mounted power plant on the Kakinada coast.
- The dredging was being carried out by GMR Energy Limited to shift existing installations.
- The action comes in response to the threat to the mudflat and the mangrove cover and destruction of the prime habitat of birds — **endangered Great knots** (*Calidris tenuirostris*), and **Indian skimmers** (*Rynchops albirostris*), which are listed as a vulnerable species.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Trump's executive order, targeting social media platforms

Context

- President Donald Trump signed an executive order targeting social media companies, days after Twitter called two of his tweets “potentially misleading.”

Background

- Donald Trump had tweeted “There is NO WAY (ZERO!) that Mail-In Ballots will be anything less than substantially fraudulent. Mailboxes will be robbed, ballots will be forged & even illegally printed out & fraudulently signed,” Mr. Trump tweeted, singling out the Governor of California (Gavin Newsom).
- Twitter reacted with a link that said, “Get the facts about mail-in ballots” that linked to a page titled, “Trump makes the unsubstantiated claim that mail-in ballots will lead to voter fraud.” The page included details on the President’s false claims and links to articles from publications including the Washington Post and CNN.

Social Media

- It is decentralised and democratic, which allows people to voice their opinion and influence the outcome.
- But they have also played a major role in genocides and election rigging.
 - It has also been misused to spread falsehoods and incite violence.
- Big tech companies such as Google, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft and Apple have given rise to concerns of privacy, data misuse, political bias, monopoly behaviour, tax avoidance and national security.

Accusation of Political Parties

- **Republicans** say social media platforms are anti-conservative.
- **Democrats** believe some of these platforms are easily manipulated by enemies of the nation and accuse them of unfair trade and labour practices, and call for breaking them up.
- **Facebook’s** attempt to launch a digital currency Libra has triggered sovereignty concerns among nations.
 - It had to pay \$5 billion in fines to settle investigations into its misuse of data in the Cambridge Analytica controversy.

Platforms like twitter have often declared their commitment to stop fake news, but any attempt to enforce content regulation comes with additional complications, as Twitter’s attempt to fact-check the President shows.

What is an executive order?

- An executive order is a signed, written, and published directive from the President of the United States that manages operations of the federal government.
- Such orders are not legislations and don't require the approval of the Congress, which also means that the Congress cannot overturn them.
- According to the American Bar Association, Congress may pass legislation that makes it difficult or impossible to carry out an executive order, such as removing funding.
- However, ultimately, only a sitting U.S. president can overturn an executive order by issuing another one to that effect.

What triggered the move?

The move comes after Twitter labelled two posts made by Trump about California's vote-by-mail plans as fact-checked.

- As part of its new policy undertaken amid the Coronavirus pandemic, the platform has introduced labels and warning messages that aim to provide "additional context and information" on Tweets containing disputed, misleading or unverified claims related to the pandemic.
- However, the labels can also be used in situations where the risk of harm associated with a Tweet is less severe and people may be confused or misled by the content.

Communications Decency Act

- Under Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, tech companies currently enjoy broad immunity from civil lawsuits stemming from what users post because they are treated as "platforms" rather than "publishers".
 - It, therefore, draws a distinction between platforms on the one hand and publishers or speakers on the other.
- Significantly, the Act also protects online platforms from civil liability, which means that they may not be liable for restricting access to certain content that platforms may consider being, "obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, excessively violent, harassing or otherwise objectionable" and when such content is removed in "good faith".

- However, the executive order says that when online platforms remove or restrict access to content, which are not based on the aforementioned criteria, or is in bad taste, it engages in editorial conduct and thereby becomes the “publisher” of all the content posted on its website.
 - Based on this, the order seeks to revoke the liability shield offered to platforms and exposes them to liability “like any traditional editor and publisher that is not an online provider.”

What are the implications of this order?

- The order can certainly give rise to a policy debate about the liabilities and responsibilities of social media platforms.
- Attempts to unilaterally erode the law threatens the future of online speech and Internet freedoms.
- This would mean that social media companies could be sued for defamatory content over what other people post on their platforms.
- The order could discourage companies from taking an active role in curating the content on their platforms and raise the risk and cost of doing business.

In India

Intermediary Guidelines Rules of 2011

- The rules fall under Section 79 of the Information Technology Act, 2000 which provides internet companies a safe harbour from content hosted on their platforms but requires them to carry out a certain level of due diligence.

Revised IT intermediary guidelines

- The government is expected to notify the revised IT intermediary guidelines that seek to make social media companies more responsible for content on their platforms.
- The guidelines propose additional responsibilities on social media companies. These include verifying users through mobile numbers, tracing origin of messages required by a court order and building automated tools to identify child pornography and terror-related content. All these requirements come under the ambit of under due diligence.

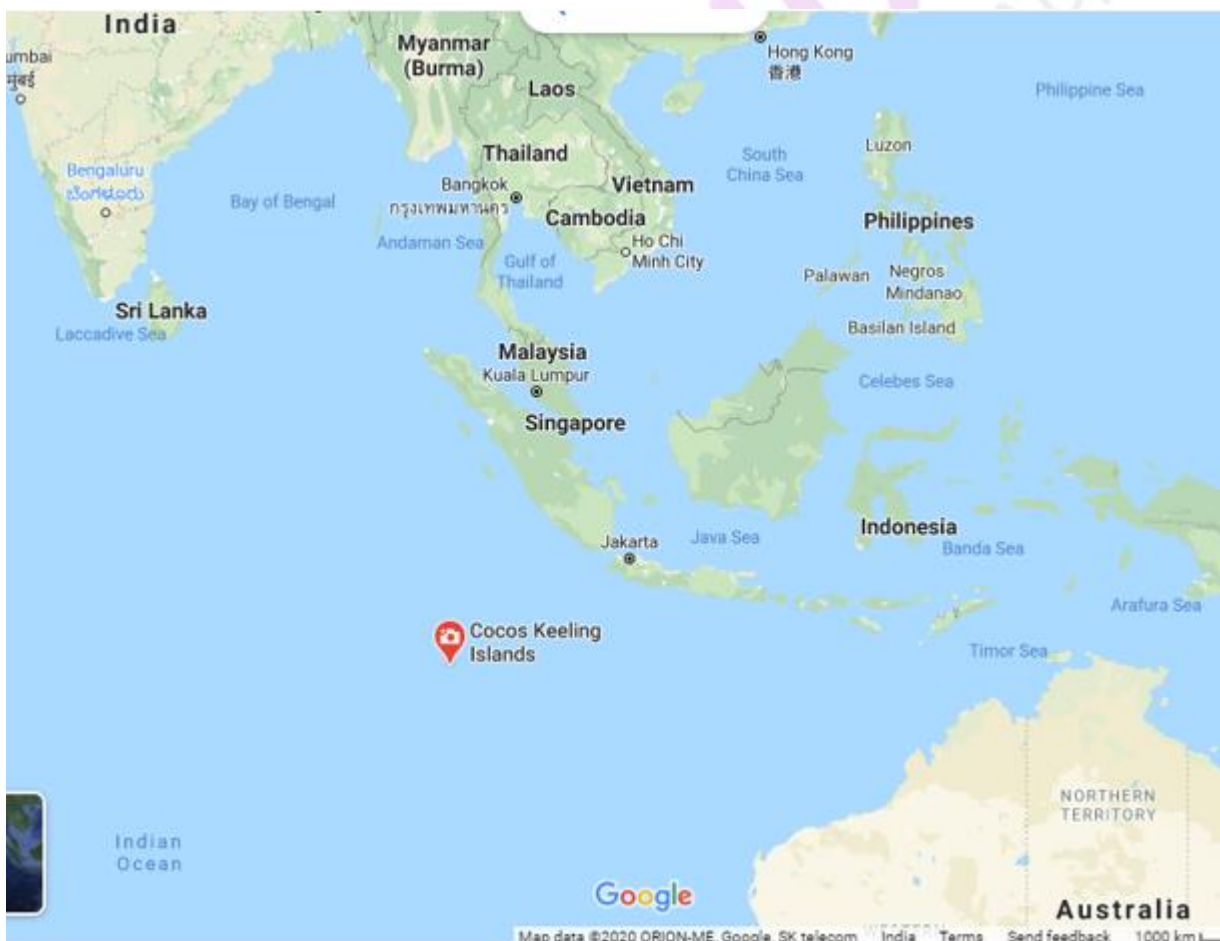
2. Anchoring ties with Canberra the virtual way

Context

- India and Australia under the leadership of Prime Ministers of both the countries are preparing for a virtual summit.
- This will be India's first virtual bilateral summit.

Possible Strategic Initiative

- This could involve the cooperative use of their respective island territories in the Indian Ocean for strategic purposes.
- India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Australia's Cocos (Keeling) islands are well-positioned to offer significant advantages for both countries.



The strategic relationship between the two **countries is currently underdeveloped**, despite strong converging interests.

- One challenge in the relationship comes from differences in priority theatres, with India's in Indian Ocean and Canberra's in the Pacific.
- If New Delhi defines the Pacific as its secondary area of interest then for Canberra the Indian Ocean is its second sea.
- Capacity limitations on both sides mean there is a challenge in deploying resources in secondary areas of interests.

Importance of these Islands

- These islands are located near strategic chokepoints and trading routes, with the Andaman and Nicobar islands near the straits of Malacca, while the Cocos Islands lie in close proximity to the Indonesian straits of Sunda, Lombok, and Ombai-Wetar.
- Together, these straits are the **entry and exit points between the Indian and the Pacific Oceans**. In the current geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific, these islands can provide advantages for strategic, practical, and signalling purposes.
- Both India and Australia already use their islands for maritime surveillance and reconnaissance missions using P-8 aircraft based in southern India and Australia.
 - A joint coordinated effort utilising island territories through mutual access agreements would allow India and Australia to expand its presence and Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) missions beyond their respective individual capacities.
- These islands provide an opportunity for coordinated and joint anti-submarine warfare missions for both the Indian and the Pacific Oceans.

India-Australia collaboration thus sends a strong political message across the Indo-Pacific, sending a message of deepening strategic trust between two key players of the Indo-Pacific.

Convergence of interests

- India and Australia can perhaps begin by using the **AUSINDEX** as a platform for a coordinated patrolling.
- In addition, it may be prudent for New Delhi and Canberra to elevate the **'two plus two' format** for talks from the Secretary level to the level of Foreign and Defence Ministers.

- This will allow both sides to **test logistical and administrative challenges** laying the foundation for more complex and sustained missions in the future.
- This would require political agreement at the highest level.

Mutual Logistics Support Agreement

- The upcoming summit will likely include the execution of a long-awaited mutual access and logistics facilities agreement similar to India's existing arrangements with the US and France.
- This would enhance defence cooperation and ease the conduct of large-scale joint military exercises.

Note: We shall have an elaborate analysis of virtual summit after its conclusion.

F. Tidbits

1. Locust surge may turn into global plague: expert

- The **Food and Agriculture Organisation's** senior officer has opined that the current upsurge in **desert locust attacks** could turn into a full-fledged global plague by the end of 2020 if it spreads to West Africa and the insects begin breeding there.

Scenario in India:

- A changing climate and the recent cyclonic activity have brought the locust swarms into India earlier than expected and driven them further east than usual.
- The swarms are **unlikely to linger in the central Indian States or over large urban centres**, and will return to the deserts of Rajasthan with the arrival of monsoon.

2. Tension unlikely to escalate, say former diplomats

- Former senior Indian officials have opined that the ongoing **border tensions between India and China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC)** are unlikely to escalate into a conflict.
- K. Narayanan, former National Security Adviser who has also served as the Special Representative on the boundary talks has stated that it is not right to view every border skirmish as the beginning of a war between the two nations.
- Narayanan said he was of the view that neither China nor India wanted conflict given the fact that both countries have by and large tried to follow the **political parameters and guiding principles agreed to in 2005**.

- Vijay Gokhale, former Foreign Secretary claims that communication between the leaders of India and China through the **informal summits in Wuhan in 2018 and in Mahabalipuram in 2019** had helped build a certain degree of understanding and trust despite the strains in relations in 2017 during the **Doklam stand-off**.

3. Major Suman Gawani chosen for UN award

- **Major Suman Gawani of the Indian Army**, who served as a women peacekeeper with the **United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)** in 2019, has been selected for the prestigious **United Nations Military Gender Advocate of the year Award**.
- As a military observer in UNMISS from November 2018 to December 2019, Major Gawani was the principal focal point of contact for **gender issues** for military observers in the mission.

G. Prelims Facts

1. 'Rozgar Setu' for skilled workers in M.P.

- **Madhya Pradesh** has announced the launch of the '**Rozgar Setu**' scheme which would help secure **employment for skilled workers who have returned** to their native places from urban areas.
- **Madhya Pradesh is the first state to devise such a work plan**. The attempt is to provide work to the maximum number of returned skilled workers.
- This would fulfil the manpower requirement of industries as well as provide employment to workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Under the Centre's 'Swamitva yojana' rural areas would be surveyed to help prepare land records. This would help prepare the land ownership records.

2. Centre launches online skills training course

- The **Union Ministry of Labour and Employment** has started free online career skills training through its **National Career Service project** for job-seekers registered with it.
- About 1 crore job-seekers and 54,000 employers are registered on the National Career Service portal.

3. Law Minister rakes up SC's NJAC verdict

- The 2015 Supreme Court ruling had quashed the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) in favour of the present Collegium system.

- The SC argument was that the **proposed judicial commission of the NJAC in which the Law Minister was also a member**, and therefore, the appointees from that office may not be fair and objective when litigation comes against them.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

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

1. Dredging activity is a routine necessity in waterways for movement of ships and boats.
2. Dredging is also performed to reduce the exposure of fish, wildlife, and people to contaminants.

Options:

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

Ans: c

Explanation:

- Dredging is the removal of silt, sediments and debris from the bottom of lakes, rivers, harbours and other water bodies.
- Dredging is a routine necessity in waterways because sedimentation—the natural process of sand and silt washing downstream—gradually fills channels and harbors.
 - Dredging often is focused on maintaining or increasing the depth of navigation channels, anchorages, or berthing areas to ensure the safe passage of boats and ships.
 - Dredging is also performed to reduce the exposure of fish, wildlife, and people to contaminants and to prevent the spread of contaminants to other areas of the water body.
 - This environmental dredging is often necessary because sediments in and around cities and industrial areas are frequently contaminated with a variety of pollutants.

Q2. The term “D10” club is associated with which of the following?

- a. The group of countries working towards demilitarization of the Kurds inhabited region in West Asia.
- b. The non-governmental grouping from 10 countries aiming to ensure that the Paris climate deal terms are successfully implemented.
- c. The group of countries working towards ensuring the speedy development of COVID-19 vaccine.
- d. A group of 10 democratic countries for partnership on 5G technology

Ans: d

Explanation:

- Britain is proposing a “D10” club of democratic partners that groups the G7 nations with Australia and the Asian technology leaders South Korea and India.
- Britain has been insisting to form a club of 10 nations that could develop its own 5G technology and reduce dependence on Huawei.

Q3. The central government’s ‘Swamitva yojana’ deals with:

- a. Empowering Panchayats
- b. Rural land ownership records
- c. Skill development programme
- d. Refinancing MSMEs

Ans: b

Explanation:

- Under the Centre’s ‘Swamitva yojana’ rural areas would be surveyed to help prepare land records.
- Swamitva Yojana is aimed to create property ownership record of land in villages and empower rural population with grant of official document confirming their ownership of land titles.

Q4. Which of the following statement/s is/are incorrect with respect to the National Career Service project?

1. It is a project under the Ministry of Electronics.
2. It involves revamping the existing nation-wide set-up of Employment Exchanges into IT-enabled Career Centers.

Options:

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

Ans: a

Explanation:

- The National Career Service project is a Mission Mode Project launched by the Ministry of Labour and Employment (India) Government of India for establishing quick and efficient career related services across the country by revamping the existing nation-wide set-up of Employment Exchanges into IT-enabled Career Centers.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. In the light of recent proposal in the U.S. for greater legislative and executive control over social media, examine the arguments both in favour of and against this proposal. (10 Marks, 150 Words).
2. India and Australia can collaborate on the strategic front to counterbalance China's rise in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Elaborate. (10 Marks, 150 Words).

