

01 Jun 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Category: GEOGRAPHY

1. Cyclone brewing in Arabian Sea

Context:

- The [India Meteorological Department \(IMD\)](#) has forecast a **cyclone in the Arabian Sea** that is likely to move towards Gujarat and Maharashtra by June 3.

Details:

- Currently, the storm in the Arabian Sea has been **classified as a "low pressure area"** and is expected to increase in intensity and culminate into a "cyclonic storm".
- As of now, meteorologists expect the storm to move parallel to the West Coast and then curve and make landfall in either Gujarat or Maharashtra.

Effect on monsoon:

- **Cyclonic storms are common in the pre-monsoon season.** The path taken by the cyclones can have a bearing on the progress of the monsoons.
 - In **2019, Cyclone Vayu, which formed in the Arabian Sea**, stalled the monsoons after it entered Kerala.
- The expected path of the developing cyclonic storm could stall the progress of monsoons in the Indian subcontinent.
 - If the developing cyclone turns inwards towards the mainland, it would, other than the associated destruction, **stall the monsoon progress.**
- If the storm stays close to the coast, it could help push the monsoon related circulation further up along the coast. However, **if it turns towards Oman it could suck away moisture and winds** and reduce the monsoon rains over the Indian subcontinent.

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Friend turned foe: the Oli problem

Context:

- Nepal's decision to pass a **constitutional amendment to change Nepal's official map** to include parts of Indian Territory that have been in dispute.

Background:

- The **promulgation of the Nepali Constitution**, one that India felt was unfair to Madhesis living in the south and unrepresentative of India's interests in the country, seems to mark a drastic change in the relationship between India and Nepal.
- The **blockade at the India-Nepal border** resulted in supplies into landlocked Nepal being stopped for months. This adversely affected the India-Nepal relations.
 - The **eight-point transit and transport facilitation from China** seems to have tilted Nepal towards a stronger relationship with China.
- The **release of India's new political map of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh** has been the latest flashpoint in the relations.

Concerns:

Anti-India poll plank:

- The concern over Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli's "**nationalist politics**" translating into an "**anti-India**" stance seems to be coming true for India.
 - Mr. Oli has been running an anti-India poll plank during recent elections.
- For PM Oli, this anti-India stance based on nationalistic plank seems to be a legacy building exercise in the Nepali political landscape.
- The growing discord against Mr. Oli's leadership within his own party has resulted in Mr. Oli taking a hard stance towards India in an **effort to deflect attention from domestic affairs.**

Deteriorating ties:

- India has also hardened its position with Mr. Oli.
- Despite the agreement in 2014 over Foreign Secretaries meeting on the **Kalapani and Susta disputes**, no meeting on the disputes has been held in six years.
- The Nepal PM, **wooed by the U.S. and China** due to its strategic location, has been insisting on more strategic autonomy in the region and moving away from its **traditionally strong relation with India**.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Too many aspirants for MGNREGS jobs

Context:

- Migrant labour crisis in India.

Details:

- The [COVID-19](#) pandemic has **induced reverse migration** which has brought many families to their native places.
- There is a need for extensive preparations to **gainfully employ labourers**, who have returned from big cities, through the MGNREGS.

Concerns:

- Not all interested people have been able to find jobs under the scheme. The sheer magnitude of reverse migration makes it impossible for the administration to create jobs for all under a single scheme.
- Representatives of farmers' organisations have complained of **corruption and non-cooperation at village level**. Activists complain that village-level officials are not enthusiastic about the scheme.

Way forward:

- There is a need to create more person days under the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)**.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Locust control: 'govt. ignoring non-chemical measures'

Context:

- Locust Infestation in India.

Background:

- The Central Government's **locust control policy has been focussed on the use of pesticides**.
- The government has been taking steps to increase its capacity for **aerial spray of poisonous pesticides for locust control**.

Details:

- Rajinder Chaudhary, Advisor, Kudrati Kheti Abhiyan, Haryana has expressed concerns over the **potential side-effects of aerial spraying of pesticides**.
- The government seems to have completely ignored non-chemical measures despite the fact that a number of effective non-chemical remedies have been suggested by experts from India and abroad.

Ill-effects of chemical methods:

- The ill-effects of aerial spraying of dangerous pesticides are well-established. The **hazardous and long life chemicals** would **pollute the water and soil** which could have a detrimental effect on the environment and human health.

Non-chemical methods:

- The non-chemical methods would provide an effective approach to control locusts **without serious side-effects**.
- There are numerous strategies available under the non-chemical framework.
 - The non-chemical measures could involve the use of **biological methods** to control locusts.
 - One simple strategy would be to protect **birds that eat the predatory insects**.
 - China's deployment of the duck army is now becoming a diplomatic policy. China had even sent its duck army to Pakistan to deal with the locust menace.
 - Use of bio-pesticides provides for an effective solution. The **oil formulations of Metarhizium anisopliae spores (mycopesticide)** provide an effective control measure for locusts. Metarhizium biopesticide kills 70%-90% of treated locusts within 14-20 days, with no measurable impact on non-target organisms.
 - Chintala Venkata Reddy, an organic farmer from Telangana who was awarded the Padma Shri, has suggested a method to control locust infestations.
 - It involves **spraying mud** (sub soil with high clay content) on to the standing crops.
 - Given the fact that the locusts cannot digest the clay content, this measure will help control locusts without serious side-effects.

Way forward:

- There is a need to ensure that the locust control measures do not pollute air, water, environment and the food chain.
- There is a need for an **integrated pest management strategy**.
- If chemical methods cannot be neglected all together, then at least in the areas near the population and close to catchment and storage areas of waterbodies, the government must adopt the safer non-chemical measures instead of adopting chemical measures.

Also see: [Locust Swarms](#)

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: ECONOMY

1. It's time for a universal basic income programme in India

Context:

- The economic crisis brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Challenges for India:

COVID crisis:

- The lockdown in place to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in economic misery to a large section of the population. The migrant labourers have been adversely affected by the lockdown measures.
- With almost 90% of India's workforce in the informal sector without minimum wages or social security, the economic circumstances will be worse in India than compared to developed countries.
- Lockdowns in some format are expected to be the norm till the arrival of a vaccine.

Slowing world growth:

- IMF has projected global growth in 2020 to be -3.0%, the worst since the Great Depression.
- India is projected to grow at 1.9%.
- The slowing growth would entail lesser economic activities and lesser employment opportunities in India.

Employment woes in India:

- Even before the pandemic, India was struggling to find enough opportunities for more than a million job aspirants who were entering the job market each month.

Fourth industrial revolution:

- The fourth industrial revolution has brought forth novel challenges.
- Though disruptive technologies like [artificial intelligence](#) are ushering in productivity gains like never before, they are also steadily reducing human capital requirements, making jobs a premium.
 - The Silicon Valley, home to five of the world's eight most valuable companies, points to the emerging trend. The giant technology companies have a cumulative market cap of over \$4 trillion, yet they together directly employ just 1.2 million people.

Details:

- The author calls for a universal basic income (UBI) programme to help find solutions to some of the critical challenges facing the Indian economy.
- UBI involves the provision of an unconditional fixed amount to every citizen in a country.
- Countries across the world, including Kenya, Brazil, Finland, and Switzerland, have begun controlled UBI pilots to supplement their population.

Significance of UBI:

Alternative to employment generation:

- The universal basic income (UBI) programme could be a potential solution that could mitigate the looming crisis caused by dwindling job opportunities.

Tool to eradicate poverty:

- UBI is also deliberated as an effective poverty-eradication tool.
 - The 2016-17 Economic Survey and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had once proposed quasi-basic income schemes that leave out the well-off top quartile of the population as an effective means of alleviating poverty and hunger.
 - The fiscal cost of a UBI pegged at Rs. 7,620, at 75% universality, was 4.9% of the GDP. A UBI on par with the numbers suggested by the Economic Survey could lead to targeted household incomes increasing by almost Rs. 40,000 per annum given the fact that the average Indian household size is approximately five.

Challenges to implementation of UBI:

- The political will for UBI has been lukewarm because of the fiscal costs involved.
- Requirements to trim some of the existing subsidies to balance the resultant deficit are also politically difficult questions which have not received attention.

Way forward:

- The introduction of unconditional regular pay checks at maximum universality, at least till the economy normalizes is the need of the hour.

2. Open with caution

Context:

- The 'Unlock 1' plan.

Details:

- The severe restrictions to contain COVID-19 have produced traumatic **displacement of the vulnerable sections**.
- Given **the economic impact of the lockdown**, the Centre is looking for a phased unlocking of public activity after the rigorous lockdown.

Way forward:

Resumption of economic activity:

- The 'Unlock 1' plan should ensure a careful **restarting of activities**, the most important of which is the delivery of goods and everyday services, including health services unrelated to COVID-19 infections.

Focussed restrictions:

- **13 cities, including some of the biggest metros, host 70% of the COVID cases**, and many of the earlier restrictions should continue there.

- **Retaining curbs on big gatherings**, such as in religious places, is reasonable, given the history of these sites unwittingly becoming super spreaders.

Remaining vigilant:

- States must show diligence in **actively testing and quarantining individuals** in cities with high incidence to significantly control the spread.
- ‘Unlock 1’ must involve **creating public awareness** that the threat of spread of the infection is still present. There should be **ramping up of testing and providing health services**.
- Strict implementation of the measures mandated by the **National Directives for COVID-19 Management**, such as those on face cover, physical distancing in public places, shops and establishments, spitting, and gathering in large numbers, needs to be strictly done.

Relief measures:

- The severe economic contraction requires **government interventions** especially in favour of the most vulnerable sections given the rising hunger levels and missing financial support for these sections.
 - A **genuinely universal PDS** with adequate supplies of food grain must be ensured in all States.
 - **Cash supplements** should reach all intended beneficiaries.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Rare scorpionfish found in Gulf of Mannar

- Researchers at the **Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI)** have found a rare fish from Sethukarai coast in the **Gulf of Mannar’s seagrass ecosystem**.
- The **band-tail scorpionfish (Scorpaenospsis neglecta)** is well-known for its stinging venomous spines.
- The fish is called ‘scorpionfish’ because its spines contain **neurotoxic venom**.
- The fish has the ability to change colour and blend with its surrounding environment to escape from predators and while preying.

2. SpaceX’s spacecraft successfully docks with ISS

- **SpaceX’s Dragon spacecraft** with two NASA astronauts has successfully docked with the **International Space Station (ISS)**.
- Elon Musk’s SpaceX is a California-headquartered company.
- The SpaceX Crew Dragon spacecraft lifted off atop the **company’s Falcon 9 rocket** from NASA’s Kennedy Space Center.
- With the liftoff, SpaceX became the **first private company to launch people into the orbit**, a feat achieved previously by only three governments: the U.S., Russia and China.
- This marks the dawn of a **new age in commercial space travel**.

3. Tata Sons to manufacture Sree Chitra institute’s test kits

- The **RT-LAMP (Reverse Transcriptase Loop-Mediated Amplification) technology** can produce results in a **significantly less time** thereby increasing the throughput of labs in India.
- The RT-LAMP test uses an isothermal set-up to create copies of viral DNA for detection, which significantly **reduces the complexity** of the overall process compared to the prevalent Real Time PCR technology.
- The test also uses proprietary **magnetic nanoparticle-based RNA extraction**, which gives a highly **purified and concentrated level of RNA** from the swab sample.

4. Bengal's grand old buildings bear the brunt of Amphan

- The **super cyclone Amphan** has severely damaged some of Bengal's centuries-old heritage structures.
 - This includes monuments depicting **Islam's footprint** on the Bengal frontier to architectural traditions of **European colonialism**, gardens from the time of **19th century resurgence in Bengal's cultural landscape** to the recently renovated British-era buildings.
- A team from the **Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH)** has mapped the damage caused due to the cyclone.
- **Serampore College, founded by William Carey**, a cultural anthropologist who played a significant role in the spread of western education, is one of the damaged buildings.
- The **Dupleix Palace at Chandannagar**, built by **French Governor-General Joseph Francois Dupleix**, also suffered severe damage.
- The main structure of an **early medieval brick temple, Jatar Deul**, dating back to the 11th and 12th centuries CE (Current Era) in Namkhana of South 24 Parganas has also been affected.
- The iconic **Andrew's Church** dating back to 1818, also sustained severe damage.

5. Home Ministry gave 94 orders in 68 days

- The Home Ministry's orders during the lockdown have been issued under **the Disaster Management Act, 2005**.
- The Disaster Management Act, 2005 has been **invoked for the first time** in the country since the legislation was drafted after the tsunami in 2004.
- The Act has introduced a legal framework for disaster management in the country, with the **Home Ministry being the nodal Ministry**.
- Under the Act, the States and district authorities can frame their own rules on the basis of broad guidelines issued by the Home Ministry.

6. Bihar asks Centre to bear entire cost of schemes

- Bihar has been urging the Centre to bear the State's share of all 66 **Centrally sponsored schemes** for the next one year owing to the low tax collections because of the extended COVID-19 lockdown.
- The implementation of Centrally sponsored schemes such as the **MGNREGA, the PMAY (Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana), mid-day meal** and others could bear the brunt of insufficient funds.
- Most of the Centrally sponsored schemes have 60:40 ratio, however, in some schemes the ratio is even 50:50.

1. Trump postpones G7 summit, seeks to expand list of invitees

- The U.S. President has stated that he would be postponing the proposed Group of Seven summit.
- The U.S. President has proposed an **expansion of the list of invitees to the G7 summit to include Australia, Russia, South Korea and India** in an effort to make the G7 more **representative of the current status of global affairs**.
- However, it is unclear whether the invite to additional countries was a bid to permanently expand the G7.
- Russia was expelled from what was then the G8 in 2014 after Russia annexed the Crimea region from Ukraine.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

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

1. Cyclonic storms are common in the pre-monsoon season.
2. The 2019, Cyclone Vayu, which formed in the Bay of Bengal, stalled the monsoons after it entered Kerala.

Options:

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

Answer:

Option a

Explanation:

- Cyclonic storms are common in the pre-monsoon season. The path taken by the cyclones can have a bearing on the progress of the monsoons.
- In 2019, Cyclone Vayu, which formed in the Arabian Sea, stalled the monsoons after it entered Kerala.

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

1. The Gulf of Mannar is a large shallow bay forming part of the Laccadive Sea in the Indian Ocean.
2. The Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve is the largest biosphere in India area-wise.
3. Dugong, the endangered herbivorous marine mammal, is found in the Gulf of Mannar.

Options:

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

Answer:

Option c

Explanation:

- The Gulf of Mannar is a large shallow bay forming part of the Laccadive Sea in the Indian Ocean. It lies between the west coast of Sri Lanka and the southeastern tip of India, in the Coromandel Coast region.
- The Gulf of Mannar, endowed with three distinct coastal ecosystems namely, coral reef, seagrass bed and mangroves, is considered one of the world's richest region from a marine biodiversity perspective, and is known for its unique biological wealth. It is a storehouse of marine diversity of global significance.
- The sea bottom of the inshore area around the islands are carpeted with seagrass beds which serve as ideal feeding ground for Dugong dugon, the endangered herbivorous marine mammal.
- Kachchh is the largest biosphere in India area-wise.

Q3. Which of the following is not a centrally sponsored scheme?

- a. Nutrient Based Subsidy
- b. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana
- c. Mid-day meal scheme
- d. Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana

Answer:

Option a

Explanation:

- In India's developmental plan exercise, we have two types of schemes viz; central sector and centrally sponsored scheme. The nomenclature is derived from the pattern of funding and the modality for implementation.
 - The Central sector schemes are 100% funded by the Union Government and implemented by the Central Government machinery. Central sector schemes are mainly formulated on subjects from the Union List. In addition, the Central Ministries also implement some schemes directly in States/UTs, which are called Central Sector Schemes but resources under these Schemes are not generally transferred to States.
 - Under Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS), a certain percentage of the funding is borne by the States in the ratio of 50:50, 70:30, 75:25 or 90:10 and the implementation is by the State Governments. Centrally Sponsored Schemes are formulated in subjects from the State List to encourage States to prioritise in areas that require more attention.
- Nutrient Based Subsidy scheme of the Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers is a central sector scheme.

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

1. India is the largest milk producer in the world.
2. Close to 90% of the marketable surplus of milk production in India is handled by the organised sector.

Options:

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

Answer:

Option a

Explanation:

- India ranks first in milk production, accounting for 20 per cent of world production.
- The 2018-19 Economic Survey notes that though India maintains its position as the world's top milk producer, with production of 176.3 million tonne in 2017-18, more than 50% of the marketable surplus is still handled by the unorganised sector.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Discuss the potential benefits of a universal basic income (UBI) programme in India and the challenges in implementing such a scheme in India. (15 marks, 250 words)
2. In the light of the locust infestations in India, discuss both short and long term measures to address this challenge. (10 marks, 150 words)