30 Jun 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS 1 Related
B. GS 2 Related
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
1. India, Bhutan sign pact for first joint hydel project
2. 'Israel's annexation plans are illegal'
C. GS 3 Related
ECONOMY
1. RBI schedules Op. Twist for July 2
SECURITY
1. TikTok among 59 apps banned by the Centre
DEFENCE
1. 4 Rafales to land in India by July-end
D. GS 4 Related
E. Editorials
GOVERNMENT SCHEMES
1. Grain aplenty and the crisis of hunger
INTERNAL SECURITY
1. Legitimate concern
POLITY AND GOVERNANCE
1. Share public data with the public
F. Prelims Facts
1. Portal for street vendors' loan scheme launched
2. The STARS project needs an overhaul
G. Tidbits
1. DCGI nod for human trials of 'Covaxin'
2. 'Clarify curbs on 3,500 Tablighis'
3. COVID cameras for key rail stations in Kerala
H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions
I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. India, Bhutan sign pact for first joint hydel project

Context:

India and Bhutan took a major step forward for the construction of the 600 MW Kholongchhu project.

Kholongchhu project:

- It is India-Bhutan's first hydropower joint venture project in Bhutan's less developed eastern region of Trashiyangtse.
- Kholongchhu project is one of four additional projects agreed to in 2008, as a part of India's commitment to help Bhutan create a total 10,000 MW of installed capacity by 2020.

Details:

- It is the first time an India-Bhutan hydropower project will be constructed as a 50:50 joint venture, not as a government-to-government agreement.
- Once the project is commissioned, the JV partners will run it for 30 years, called the concession period, after which the full ownership will transfer to the Bhutan government.
- It is considered a milestone in the India-Bhutan partnership, under which four hydropower projects have been built in the last 30 years totalling a capacity of 2,100 MW, and another two are under construction.

Road-blocks:

- The inter-governmental agreement for the Kholongchhu project was signed after prolonged negotiations on the structure of the joint venture, in April 2014, and the foundation stone was laid when Prime Minister Narendra Modi travelled to Thimphu.
- Progress on preparing the site ground to a halt in December 2016 over India's new power tariff guidelines (on Cross Border Trade of Electricity - CBTE), until the government amended its guidelines after negotiations with the Bhutan government.
- However, according to the agreement finalised, the project would be completed in the second half of 2025.

2. 'Israel's annexation plans are illegal'

Context:

Israel's aim to annex parts of the occupied West Bank was clearly illegal, the UN's human rights chief said, warning that the consequences could be "disastrous".

Details:

- Israel intends to kick-start plans to annex its West Bank settlements and the Jordan Valley.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet urged Israel to "listen to its own former senior officials and generals, as well as to the multitude of voices around the world, warning it not to proceed along this dangerous path."
- She urged Israel to shift course, warning that the shockwaves of annexation will last for decades, and will be extremely damaging to Israel, as well as to the Palestinians.
- She warned that "any attempt to annex any part of the occupied Palestinian territory will not only seriously damage efforts to achieve lasting peace in the region, it is likely to entrench, perpetuate and further heighten serious human rights violations that have characterised the conflict for decades."

What are the West Bank settlements?

- The West Bank is a patch of land that was captured by Jordan after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.
- Israel snatched it back during the Six-Day War of 1967 and has occupied it ever since.
- It has built some 130 formal settlements in the West Bank, and a similar number of smaller, informal settlements have mushroomed over the last 20-25 years.

- Over 4 lakh Israeli settlers — many of them religious Zionists who claim a Biblical birthright over this land — now live here, along with some 26 lakh Palestinians.

Are the Israeli settlements illegal?

- The vast majority of the world's nations consider the settlements illegal.
- The United Nations General Assembly, the UN Security Council, and the International Court of Justice have said that the West Bank settlements are violative of the Fourth Geneva Convention.
- Under the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), an occupying power "shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies".
- Under the Rome Statute that set up the International Criminal Court in 1998, such transfers constitute war crimes, as does the "extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly".
- Under the Oslo Accords of the 1990s, both Israel and the Palestinians agreed that the status of settlements would be decided by negotiations. But the negotiations process has been dead for several years now.
- Israel walked into East Jerusalem in 1967 and subsequently annexed it. For Israel, Jerusalem is non-negotiable.
- The Palestinians want East Jerusalem as the capital of their future state. Most of the world's nations look at it as occupied territory.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. RBI schedules Op. Twist for July 2

Context:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has scheduled another round of bond sale and purchase auction of ₹10,000 crores each on July 2, 2020.

Details:

- The RBI decision comes after the review of current and evolving liquidity and market conditions.
- The RBI will purchase longer tenure government bonds, that are maturing in 2027, 2029, 2031 and 2033, while selling four securities of shorter maturity, two of them maturing this year and two next year.
- Operation Twist is primarily aimed at managing yields. The move will help soften the yields on long tenure bonds — that have stayed elevated — and help the government in borrowing funds at a lower rate.

Read more about Operation Twist covered in 21st December 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis.

Also watch below - Explained: Operation Twist

Category: SECURITY

1. TikTok among 59 apps banned by the Centre

Context:

The Government of India banned 59 applications, most of them popular Chinese applications citing threat to national security and sovereignty.

Details:

- The move is seen as a retaliatory step amid the tense border standoff between India and China.
- The ban comes amid continuing tensions on the border between India and China.
- The move was executed by the IT Ministry's Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) and approved by the National Cyber Security Coordinator (NCSC), who is a part of the National Security Council Secretariat.
- It is said that the decision is a targeted move to ensure the safety and sovereignty of Indian cyberspace.

What is the legal basis for India's action?

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (Meity) invoked its power under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act read with the relevant provisions of the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking of Access of Information by Public) Rules, 2009.
- **69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000 deals with "Power to issue directions for blocking for public access of any information through any computer resource"):** "Where the Central Government or any of its officers specially authorised by it, is satisfied that it is necessary or expedient so to do, in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence relating to above, it may, by order, direct any agency of the Government or intermediary to block for access by the public or cause to be blocked for access by the public any information generated, transmitted, received, stored or hosted in any computer resource."
- The move is taken in view of the information available [that] they are engaged in activities which are prejudicial to sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of state and public order.

- Meity said that it received many complaints and reports about misuse of mobile apps for stealing and surreptitiously transmitting users' data in an unauthorised manner to servers that have locations outside India.
- The compilation of these data, its mining and profiling by elements hostile to national security and defence of India, which ultimately impinges upon the sovereignty and integrity of India, is a matter of very deep and immediate concern that requires emergency measures.

How will the ban be enforced?

- The notification is expected to be followed by instructions to Internet service providers to block these apps.
- While this will impact **the apps that need a live feed** to serve any purpose, users might still be able to continue using apps that don't need an active Internet connection to be used. But further downloads of these apps are likely to be blocked.

What will be the impact of the ban?

- Some apps on the banned list are very popular in India.
- Most of these platforms have Indian creators, for many of whom this is the only source of income. Many of these apps have offices and employees in India, and a few thousand jobs could be at stake.

Will the ban be permanent?

- In 2019, TikTok was banned in India on the order of the Madras High Court for a few days, but came back soon after the court vacated the ban.
- This action, however, is more sweeping, impacts more apps, and has been taken in a specific strategic and national security context. It could be a warning to bigger Chinese businesses in India, and to China itself.

Category: DEFENCE

1. 4 Rafales to land in India by July-end

Context:

The first batch of four Rafale fighter jets is scheduled to arrive in India in the last week of July 2020 amid continuing tensions on the border with China.

Details:

- India has contracted 36 Rafale multi-role fighter jets from France in fly-away condition with 13 India Specific Enhancements (ISE) under a €7.87 billion Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) signed in September 2016.
- As per the IGA, deliveries begin 36 months from the signing of the contract and would be completed in 67 months.
- In October 2019, on a visit to France for the Second India-France ministerial-level annual defence dialogue, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh took formal delivery of the first Rafale jet built for the Indian Air Force (IAF) at the Dassault Aviation's final assembly facility.

For more on "Rafale", read 15th October 2019 Comprehensive News Analysis.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

1. Grain aplenty and the crisis of hunger

Context:

- Issue of **food security during the pandemic.**

Background:

- In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures in place to contain its spread, many have **lost their livelihoods and unemployment is high**. Given the fact that India was already facing an economic slowdown along with **high levels of inequality**, the pandemic has added to India's woes.
- This situation would have a **direct impact on the food security of the poor** and migrant labourers.

Details:

- Among other interventions to revive demand in the economy and create employment, it is absolutely essential that **food support** is made available to all.

Measures taken by the government:

Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana:

- The central government announced, as part of the Rs. 1.70-lakh crore relief package under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY), that it would **provide 5kg of foodgrains and 1 kg of pulses for free** to all those who are beneficiaries under the **National Food Security Act (NFSA)** for three months.
- Later, the scheme was expanded to cover an additional eight crore individuals for two months to ensure that **migrants are also included.**

One Nation One Ration Card scheme:

- The government proposes the **expansion of the One Nation One Ration Card (ONOC) scheme across the country by March 2021**. ONOC is already operational in 20 States.
    - Under ONOC, a beneficiary can receive ration entitlements as under the NFSA from any fair price shop in the country using her/his Aadhaar number and biometric authentication. The scheme enables transactions under the Public Distribution System to be brought on to one digital platform.

- **Portability across States** is an important and valid concern that can help ensure that migrant workers can access their entitlements. This becomes all the more important in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic to access their quota of food grains through ONOC portability.

For more information on this topic, refer to:

CNA dated May 2, 2020

Concerns:

Insufficient allocation:

- The author argues that the response from the government has been inadequate and claims that the current foodgrain allotment to states is only 10% more than what they normally get under the NFSA.

ONOC scheme:

- The ONOC scheme, being based on biometric authentication using electronic point of sale (ePoS) machines, is subject to some concerns. It can result in the exclusion of some of the most marginalised because of multiple reasons including **network issues and authentication failure.**
- ONOC cannot be a solution to the immediate crisis of hunger that continues in the aftermath of the lockdown.
- The integrated management of the PDS (IM-PDS) portal, which gives real-time data on transactions under ONOC, shows very little subscription under the scheme.

Overflowing granaries:

- Including unmilled paddy, foodgrain stock in the Food Corporation of India now stands at almost 100 million MTs while the buffer stock norms are 41 million MTs.
- This will increase given the fact that there is still another week of procurement open in the Rabi marketing season and there will be another round of procurement of Kharif crop in a few months' time.
- Ironically, **India faces the issue of burgeoning food stocks along with widespread hunger**. Failure to utilize the available stock in a timely manner would lead to wastage.

Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS):

- There is a possibility of the government getting rid of grains through the **Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS)** so that the fiscal consequences can be contained.
- However, earlier experiences with the OMSS point towards some concerns.
    - There has been minimal interest with respect to OMSS. The quantity sold each year was less than the quantity offered.
    - One-third of all sales were to State governments, thereby **shifting the subsidy burden to State governments.**

Way forward:

- Given the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic, it is very likely that it might take more time for normal economic activity to resume; there is an urgent need for the food support mechanism announced as part of the PMGKY and Atmanirbhar package to be extended for a longer period. The **distribution of free foodgrains can be extended** until September.
- The author argues for a **universal Public Distribution System (PDS) to ensure that nobody is excluded.**

- There seem to be sufficient stocks to undertake a universalised PDS giving 10kg of foodgrains per person per month for another four months. It can be safely assumed that the rich will automatically self-select themselves out of the system.

Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

1. Legitimate concern

Context:

- Concerns expressed by the Governor of Nagaland over the law and order situation in the state.

Background:

For detailed information on the Naga issue and peace process, refer to:

CNA dated Oct 27, 2019

- The Governor had written a letter to Nagaland Chief Minister, alleging that law and order had collapsed in the State and that armed gangs who question the sovereignty and integrity of the nation had challenged the state's authority by **engaging in extortion and siphoning off funds meant for development work.**
- The Governor has stated that henceforth, functions such as transfer and posting of officials who are in charge of law and order above the district level will be done with his approval, as proposed under **Article 371A(1)(b) of the Constitution.**
- In its response, the insurgent **National Socialist Council of Nagalim-Isak Muivah (NSCN-IM),** which has been observing a ceasefire with the government for the last 23 years, has said the group was only engaged in collecting taxes.

Concerns:

Law and order situation:

- There has been a **slide in law and order situation in the state**. Illegal collections by armed groups have been an issue for several years.

Lack of progress on peace accord:

- The much-touted **peace accord is yet to be achieved**, despite the Centre's push to conclude it by 2019.
- The **lack of headway into the negotiations** has been mainly due to NSCN-IM's obstinacy such as its insistence on retaining a separate flag and a Constitution for the State of Nagaland and its unwillingness to dismantle its parallel administrative and paramilitary structure.
- The distrust it invokes among other Naga organisations besides other north-eastern governments because of its core ideology of a **"greater Nagalim"**, and the inherent difficulties in getting other insurgent actors on board have made this a conflict that persists despite the ceasefire and a problem that does not lend itself to a quick solution.

For more information on this issue, refer to:

CNA dated Nov 4, 2019

Way forward:

- Given the fact that a **final Naga peace accord is key to the maintenance of law and order** in the State, there is a need for refocusing on the peace process. The peace accord should involve all the stakeholders.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Share public data with the public

Context:

- Issue of availability and accessibility to public data.

Background:

- From 2006 onwards, several open-source software enthusiasts and civil society activists came together in the U.S. and the U.K. with a demand to unlock the data gathered by governments for access and reuse by citizens.
- The basic argument was that the **data collected at public expense must belong to the people.** This principle is the basis for the **Open Data Charter** adopted by 22 countries since 2015. It calls upon governments to disseminate public data in open digital formats.

India:

- In India, a step towards making non-sensitive government data accessible online was taken in 2012 with the adoption of the **National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy (NDSAP).** The main thrust of the policy is to promote data sharing and enable access to Government of India-owned data for national planning and development. The guidelines prescribe open digital formats suitable for analysis and dissemination.
- As part of the Open Government Data (OGD) initiative, **gov.in,** was launched in 2012.

Significance of sharing public data:

- With the availability of public data, there is a **potential for innovative, evidence-based policy solutions.**
- Sharing public data is a way to create **beneficial social impact**.
- Start-ups have built **novel applications** using Indian Railways data to provide ticket confirmation prediction and real-time train status.

Concerns:

- Despite the lofty ideals of the NDSAP such as openness, flexibility, transparency, quality of data, the **implementation has lagged** far behind its stated objectives.
- Much of the Census and socio-economic data, publicly funded research data, and scientific data are **either not open or remain unused because of their unusable formats**.
- The lack of reliable data in the public domain has **hampered the search for policy alternatives.**

Way forward:

- Every government department must be mandated to share substantive data respecting privacy concerns.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Portal for street vendors' loan scheme launched

What's in News?

The Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry has launched the portal for a loan scheme for street vendors - Pradhan Mantri Street Vendors' AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) scheme.

- PM SVANidhi scheme, a part of the economic package for sectors affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, provides small loans for street vendors to restart their operations.
- The portal provides an "integrated end-to-end IT interface" to users for availing benefits under the scheme.
- The portal will help in managing loan applications, collection of documents, integration with Aadhaar, etc.

Read more about PM SVANidhi Scheme.

2. The STARS project needs an overhaul

- The **World Bank's Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States Program (STARS) aims** to improve the quality and governance of school education in six Indian states.
- The project will be implemented through the **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan**, the flagship central scheme, in partnership with Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Rajasthan.
- Despite India's significant strides in improving access to education across the country, the learning outcomes of students across all age groups continue to remain below par. STARS will support India's renewed focus on **addressing the 'learning outcome' challenge** and help students better prepare for the jobs of the future – through a series of reform initiatives. These include:
    - Focusing more directly on the delivery of education services at the state, district and sub-district levels by providing customized local-level solutions towards school improvement. This will help **strengthen governance and decentralize management**.
    - The program will support **individualized, needs-based training for teachers** that will give them an opportunity to have a say in shaping training programs and making them relevant to their teaching needs.
    - Investing more in developing India's human capital needs by **strengthening foundational learning for children in classes 1 to 3** and preparing them with the cognitive, socio-behavioral and language skills to meet future labour market needs.

G. Tidbits

1. DCGI nod for human trials of 'Covaxin'

What's in News?

The Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) has permitted human clinical trials of 'Covaxin'.

- It is India's first vaccine candidate for COVID-19.
- It has been developed by Bharat Biotech (Hyderabad-based vaccine makers) in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the National Institute of Virology (NIV).
- COVAXIN is an inactivated vaccine, created from a strain of the infectious SARS-CoV-2 virus, that has shown promising results in preclinical studies, demonstrating extensive safety and effective immune responses.
- The SARS-CoV-2 strain was isolated in NIV, Pune and transferred to Bharat Biotech.
- Now, approval has been given for the Phase I and II human clinical trials.

2. 'Clarify curbs on 3,500 Tablighis'

What's in News?

The Supreme Court has asked the Union government to clarify if the blacklisting of 3,500 foreign nationals from 35 countries in connection with the Tablighi Jamaat gathering amid the lockdown was a blanket directive or care was taken to hear and decide the merits of each case individually.

This topic has been covered in the 27th June 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis. Click here to read.

3. COVID cameras for key rail stations in Kerala

What's in News?

Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based 'COVID surveillance' cameras that can detect body temperature and whether a person is wearing a mask will be installed at key railway stations in Kerala.

- Large areas can be covered by the thermal cameras which can detect and record temperatures of many people at once, especially those coming in long-distance mail and express trains.
- A part of the containment strategy, it will have a big role in screening the train passengers and curbing the spread of the virus.
- The State's first thermal and optical imaging camera with AI-powered face detection technology was first used in Thiruvananthapuram Central and later in the international airport.
    - It was procured using the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) funds of Shashi Tharoor, MP. The ₹7.45-lakh camera was first used for scanning migrant labourers before they were allowed to board the Shramik Special to Jharkhand.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States Program (STARS):

1. It aims to improve the quality and governance of school education in all the States and Union Territories of India.
2. The project will be implemented through the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan.

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

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The World Bank approved 500 million USD to improve learning outcomes in India. The fund allocated by the World Bank is to be used to implement the project called STARS (Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States).
- The programme is to be implemented through Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan.
- The **six states** that are to benefit under the programme include Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Odisha, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.

Q2. Kholongchhu hydropower project is a joint venture between India and which one of these countries?

a. Bhutan
b. Nepal
c. China
d. Bangladesh

Answer: a

Explanation:

The 600 MW Kholongchhu project is India-Bhutan's first hydropower joint venture project in Bhutan's less developed eastern region of Trashiyangtse. It is one of four additional projects agreed to in 2008, as a part of India's commitment to help Bhutan create a total 10,000 MW of installed capacity by 2020.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to Rafale jets:

1. Rafale is a Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft.
2. It can be used to perform ground and sea attacks.
3. It is a twin-engine jet capable of nuclear strike deterrence.

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Rafale is a Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA).
- The twin-engine jet is capable of carrying out a variety of missions – ground and sea attack, air defence and air superiority, reconnaissance.
- It is also capable of nuclear strike deterrence.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to PM SVANidhi scheme:

1. It is a Special Micro-Credit Facility Scheme providing affordable loans to women Self Help Groups in urban areas.
2. A working capital loan of up to Rs. 10,000 can be availed, which is repayable in monthly instalments in the tenure of one year.
3. It is a Central Sector Scheme.

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

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- PM SVANidhi (PM Street Vendor's Atma Nirbhar Nidhi) scheme is a Special Micro-Credit Facility Scheme providing affordable loans to street vendors.
- Under the scheme, the vendors can avail of a working capital loan of up to Rs. 10,000, which is repayable in monthly instalments in the tenure of one year.
- It is a Central Sector Scheme to facilitate street vendors to access affordable working capital loans for resuming their livelihood activities.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Discuss the initiatives taken in India to ensure the availability and accessibility of public data to all. Analyze the significance of the open data principle. (10 marks, 150 words)
2. Despite making significant strides in improving access to education across the country, the learning outcomes of students across all age groups continue to remain below par in India. Discuss the causative factors and suggest remedial measures. (10 marks, 150 words)

BYJU'S
The Learning App