13 Jun 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Beijing think-tank raises Article 370

Context:

- The report released by the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR).
  - CICIR is a Beijing-based think-tank that is affiliated to the Ministry of State Security, China's top intelligence body.

Background:

- **Article 370 was abrogated** and two new UT's of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh were created.
- The Union Home Minister had spoken in Parliament about India taking back Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and **Aksai Chin.**

Details:

- The report authored by a senior figure of CICIR has linked the current tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) to India's move to dilute Article 370 and change the status of Jammu and Kashmir.
- The article, for the first time, described the move as a **joint challenge to China and Pakistan**, saying the move had "posed a challenge to the sovereignty of Pakistan and China".
- The author claims that India's moves **to incorporate part of the areas under the local jurisdiction of Xinjiang and Tibet into its Ladakh union territory**, forced China into the Kashmir dispute.
- China had opposed the Ladakh map for including Aksai Chin. The author claims that this has dramatically **increased the difficulty in resolving the border issue between China and India.**

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. SC allows firms to negotiate with staff on lockdown wages

Context:

- Supreme Court directions on the issue of lockdown wages.

Background:

- A batch of petitions was filed by industry owners in the Supreme Court against the **government notification compelling the industry owners to pay full wages to workers.**

- The notification has been **revoked** by the government in May 2020.

Details:

- The SC has made the following observations regarding the petitions filed.

Both stakeholders equally affected:

- Various Industries, establishments were not allowed to function during the lockdown period and those allowed to function also could not function to their full capacity, which has led to the **deterioration of its financial position**.
- The workers and employees, although ready to work, could not due to closure of industries.
- Lockdown had an equally adverse effect on the employers as well as on employees.

Need for negotiations:

- The Supreme Court has asked factory owners and other private industrial establishments to **negotiate terms and enter into settlements** with their workers on the payment of wages during the lockdown period.
- The court urged employers and employees to sort out their differences and resume work in a congenial atmosphere.
- Employers and workers could seek the **help of Labour Department authorities and trade unions** to reach a settlement.
- The court highlighted that the government, too, had an obligation to ensure conciliation between private employers and their workers for the smooth running of industrial establishments.

No coercive action:

- Some industries would be able to bear the financial burden of payment of full or substantial wages for lockdown period, others may not be able to.
- The SC has held that no coercive action should be taken against private factory/industry owners who were unable to pay wages to workers during the lockdown.

2. Government puts off decision on States' GST dues till July

Context:

- GST council meeting.

Background:

- GST collections in the past two months have **only reached 45% of the target amount**.
- Under GST law, the **Centre must pay the States full compensation for any shortfall in revenue collections until 2022.**

Details:

Compensation for the states:

- Recently, the Centre has paid pending compensation dues for December 2019 to February 2020 period. However, with revenues crashing since the lockdown, alternative options may need to be explored for the payment of remaining compensation to states.

- The council will meet again in July to discuss the issue of compensation cess and dues to the States, and the **possibility of borrowing money from the market** to meet these dues.

Relief measures:

- The Council approved a slew of measures to **ease tax compliance**, including a reduction in late fees for past returns, and **COVID-19 related relief for small tax payers** for the period between February and July 2020 provided returns are filed by September.
    - The late fee waivers and an additional moratorium for smaller businesses is a welcome move since with the current financial situation, smaller businesses have been aggressively seeking stimulus.

- A one-time extension is also being granted to those seeking to revoke cancelled GST registrations.

Inversion of duties:

- The GST Council also agreed that there is a need to correct the **inversion of duties**, but postponed a decision on when to do so.
    - Inverted duty structure refers to the **taxation of inputs at higher rates than finished products** which result in a build-up of credits and cascading costs for the producers.

Category: DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. CM unveils Mumbai's new flood warning system, calls it a boon

Context:

- The unveiling of the IFLOWS-Mumbai system

Background:

- Mumbai has been **experiencing floods with increasing periodicity**. The floods of 2005 and 2017 had wreaked havoc on Mumbai.

- The fact that **some areas in Mumbai are below the sea level** increases the risk of flooding. Such areas get flooded even during the high tide.

Details:

- IFLOWS-Mumbai is a state-of-the-art **flood warning system** developed for Mumbai.
    - The Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) has developed the system with in-house expertise and coordination with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

- IFLOWS-Mumbai will enhance the resilience of the city by **providing early warning for flooding**, especially during high rainfall events and cyclones. Using this, it will be possible to have an estimate of the flood inundation three days in advance, along with immediate weather updates.

- The system will help predict floods before they occur, therefore enabling Mumbaikars to take due precautions in advance.
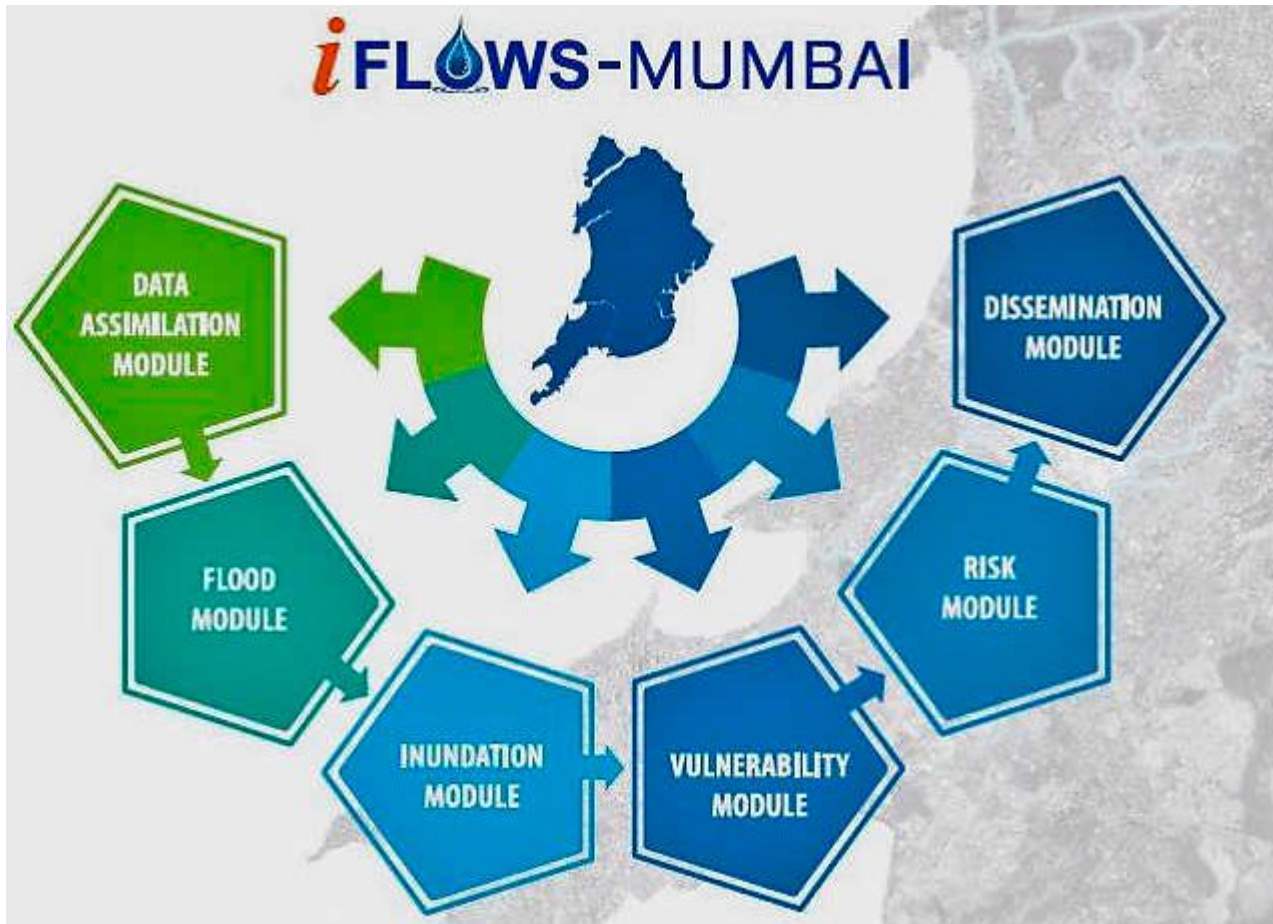
- A similar flood warning system developed by the MoES is in operation in Chennai.

Significance of early warning systems:

- **The 2004 tsunami** resulted in loss of many lives in the absence of an early warning system. Currently, India has developed an early tsunami warning system which will considerably reduce loss of human life in case of another tsunami.

- The Maharashtra State government was able to shift people to safer locations when **Cyclone Nisarga** made landfall near Alibaug in Raigad district recently as Maharashtra had received warnings about the cyclonic storm two to three days in advance. This resulted in minimal loss of human life.

Additional information:

Doppler radars:

- A Doppler radar is a specialized radar that uses the Doppler effect to produce velocity data about objects at a distance. It does this by bouncing a **microwave signal** off a desired target and analyzing how the object's motion has altered the frequency of the returned signal.

Leptospirosis:

- Leptospirosis is a **relatively rare bacterial infection** that affects people and animals. It can **pass from animals to humans** when an unhealed break in the skin comes in contact with water or soil where animal urine is present.
- It's most common in warm climates.
- Without treatment, leptospirosis can lead to kidney and liver damage and even death. Antibiotics are available for its treatment.

Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

1. Your YouTube account is in demand, not just among your friends

Context:

- There has been a steep upsurge in the demand for access to hacked YouTube accounts on the dark web.

Background:

- As of December 2019, India had more than 265 million users who had their own YouTube accounts, showcasing a wide range of content.
- **India has been emerging as one of the biggest markets for the video-hosting website**.

Details:

- YouTube accounts are being hacked and auctioned on the dark web. Once acquired by the highest bidder, the same accounts are then used to hold the original owners to ransom.
    - Hackers are cashing in on the fact that YouTube accounts get monetized after hitting a certain number of followers.
- A major concern has been the fact that the hacking process in itself is simple.
    - Hackers send out thousands of **malware embedded in phishing emails** every day seeking access to YouTube accounts. All the victims have to do is to click a link in an unverified email and malware, which are specifically designed to look for YouTube login details, will sniff them out and convey them to the hackers.
- The trend is being tracked closely by **Indian cybercrime agencies**, at both State and Central level.

Way forward:

- It is recommended to follow **strict cybersecurity practices** like **two-factor authentications** that are not dependent on text messages and not using the same username and password combination on different platforms and accounts.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: EDUCATION

1. Streamed education is diluted education

Context:

- The circular issued by the **University Grants Commission** with respect to online education.

Background:

- Recently, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the University Grants Commission had issued a circular to universities encouraging them to **adopt massive open online courses (MOOCs) offered on its SWAYAM platform** for credit transfers in the coming semesters.

Concerns:

- Though the UGC circular is aimed at easing the pressures during the national lockdown, the author argues that the online system of education leads to dilution of the meaning of education and expresses several concerns regarding the same.

Policy provisions:

- The policymakers behind the SWAYAM platform have left out courses in engineering, medicine, dental, pharmacy, nursing, architecture, agriculture, and physiotherapy on the grounds that they involve laboratory and practical work.

- Although this move makes sense, it seems to suggest that the pure sciences, the arts, the social sciences, and humanities curricula are largely lecture- and theory-based, and, therefore, readily adaptable to the online platform. This amounts to a gross misconception of the idea of education.

Gross Enrolment Ratio target:

- The author views the above step as an attempt to achieve the **country's target Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education (envisioned to be 30% by 2021; it was 25.8% in 2017–18).**

- Instead of expanding the network of higher educational institutions across the country and increasing seats, the government plans to make online degree programmes available for students to enrol and graduate from and add to GER.

- This approach seems like blind fixation on target achievement rather than taking measures meant to truly empower the individual through education.

Hands on experience:

- In education, the classroom acts as a space where skills such as dialogue, debate, disagreement, and friendship are learnt and practised. The **classrooms act as a laboratory for hands-on testing of ideas, opinions**, interpretations, and counterarguments.

- A **diverse and inclusive classroom** exposes to the actual world a child would be exposed to when he/she grows up.

Social values:

- Classroom and campus spaces offer the potential for solidarity in the face of discrimination, social anxiety, and stage fear, paving the way for a proliferation of voluntary associations that lie outside the realm of family, economy, and state.

Education as an economic good/service:

- The **online education model envisages education as a combination of content and consumption model**.

- In the absence of the physical space of a classroom, teaching and learning would give way to mere content and its consumption.

- Without a shared space to discuss and contest ideas, learning dilutes to **just gathering more information.**

- This goes against the very idea of education and can also lead to low learning outcomes in the students.

Lack of improvement:

- MOOC-based e-learning platforms tend to **reinforce a top-down teacher-to-student directionality of learning** whereby the teacher 'creates' and the student 'consumes'. This misses the point that teaching and learning are skills that are always in the making.

- The interaction between the students and teachers helps the teacher facilitate the birth of students' ideas and insights through engaging in critical dialogue. The students also help a teacher develop new ideas.

- Moving to a MOOC-based degree system would rob young teachers and students of these essential lessons in teaching and learning from each other.

Way forward:

- The online education systems being propounded must be seen only as stop-gap variants that help us get by under lockdown situations and complement classroom lectures. It could **add value only as an addendum to the classroom.**

- There is the need to think of **greater value-sensitive and socially just architectures and technologies** that further foster classroom engagement and make it accessible for students of various disabilities and challenges, thereby adding more value to the existing meaning of education.

2. Waiting for a faint signal from a distant tower

Context:

- The article discusses the challenges associated with online classes for the Northeast Indian region.

Background:

- **Educational institutions across the country have switched to online classes** to make up for the time millions of students have lost during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Concerns:

- Students across large swathes of the Northeast are facing many challenges in accessing online classes.

Connectivity issues:

- A large majority of the students are situated in far-flung areas **without telecom connectivity or with very poor quality connectivity.**
- Hence online classes are not a solution for the region unless the mobile phone or broadband connectivity is made robust.
- One of the reasons for the poor connectivity is the **reluctance of telecom service providers to provide connectivity** in areas where the prospective customer base is low

Electricity:

- A bigger challenge is to provide electricity for charging phones and gadgets to facilitate online or distant learning in the region.
- Connecting the sparsely populated and scattered villages high in the mountains to the electricity would involve substantial investments.

Economic challenges:

- The parents of only a few students have **smartphones** while many don't own a phone.
- Those who have internet connectivity would rather not sacrifice their limited data pack on online classes.
- Recharging for parents beyond the basic need to talk is taxing on the lower middle class, not to speak of those economically weaker.

Limited coverage:

- Recent studies have noted that **not more than 20% of the students have been covered under the online education scheme**.
- This would only widen the existing gap between the haves and have-nots in society.

One-way communication:

- The schools seem to be in a hurry to finish the classes through WhatsApp groups comprising the students of a class and some teachers. But the communication is one way as only the teachers can post as the administrators.

Government plans and schemes:

- **The National e-Governance Conference organised in Shillong in August 20**19 ended in the **Shillong Declaration** that "binds the government to improve connectivity in the north-eastern States by addressing issues of telecommunications connectivity at grass-root level and formulating and implementing a comprehensive telecom development plan".
- This was seen as a follow-up of the Comprehensive Telecom Development Plan for North East Region that the Centre had in 2018 said was being finalised through the **Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF).**
- Under the plan, a private service provider was entrusted to set up more than 2,000 mobile towers for connecting 2,128 uncovered villages in Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, parts of Assam and the national highways in the region.

Way forward:

- The lockdown and associated difficulties in conducting online classes could be a lesson for the government in terms of adding **subsidised smartphones** to its beneficiary programmes, particularly for the poor with schoolgoing children as a way of discouraging them from dropping out.
- There is a need to expedite the infrastructure projects to **ensure digital connectivity and reliable electricity for the region.**

F. Tidbits

1. Major General-level talks on LAC continue

- The limited disengagement of troops agreed upon by the armies of India and China is currently underway at some of the standoff points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh.
- India and China held another round of Major General-level talks to resolve the standoff on the border in Ladakh.
- Indian Defence Minister held another review meeting on the progress of these ground level talks with the **Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)** and the three Service Chiefs.
- A major issue needing resolution is **overall de-induction of troops amassed along the LAC by China.** Official sources had recently acknowledged that China had undertaken troop mobilisation along the LAC on its side in various **sectors in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh** and in response India, too, had moved troops forward.

2. 'Use cashless tech for transport'

- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) advisory on public transport for States, cities and Metro rail companies recommends that **Non-motorised transport** should be encouraged and revived and **touchless and cashless technologies** should be adopted to curb COVID-19 transmission on public transit networks.
    - Non-motorised transport requires low cost, less human resource, is easy and quick to implement, scalable and environment-friendly.

- To **reduce human interface**, cashless systems like BHIM, PhonePe, Google Pay and PayTM should be used along with the National Common Mobility Card.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Samples from Lonar lake sent for testing

- Lonar Lake was created by an **asteroid collision** with earth impact during the **Pleistocene Epoch** some 50,000 years ago.
- It is one of the four known, hyper-velocity, impact craters in basaltic rock anywhere on Earth. The other three basaltic impact structures are in southern Brazil.
- Lonar Lake has a mean diameter of 1.2 kilometres.
- Lonar lake has **saline water** and is a notified **national geo-heritage monument.**
- Recently the colour of water in Lonar lake turned pink. Some experts have attributed the change to the mixing of Dunaliella algae with halobacteria, forming a beta carotine pigment and turning the water pink.

2. Reserves surge $8.2 bn in a week, exceed $500 bn for the first time

- India's forex reserves have increased by $8.2 billion in the first week of June 2020, marking the biggest weekly jump since September 2007.
- The increase in reserves was mainly due to a **rise in foreign currency assets**. The sharp increase was due to gains from both **currency revaluation (as the dollar depreciated against major currencies)** and dollar mop-up through **intervention by the central bank**.
- India's foreign exchange reserves crossed $500 billion for the first time as the Reserve Bank of India builds up a war chest even as the rupee has been the worst performer among emerging market currencies since the COVID-19 outbreak was declared a pandemic in March.
  - **In 2020, the rupee has fallen by 6%**, indicating that the RBI has not been aggressive in intervening in the currency market to stem the Indian currency's fall.
- **The RBI's FX policy has reverted to the Jalan-Reddy policy of building high FX reserves** to insure against contagion. Experience suggests that higher FX reserves paradoxically **lead to higher FPI inflows by comforting investors.**

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

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

1. States are guaranteed a 14 per cent tax revenue growth in the first five years after GST implementation.
2. As per the GST act, the Centre must pay the States full compensation for any shortfall in GST revenue collections until 2022.
3. The compensation cess meant to finance the compensation paid to the states is levied on all goods.

Options:

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

Answer:

Option a

Explanation:

- States, in lieu of giving up their powers to collect taxes on goods and services after local levies were subsumed under the GST, were guaranteed a 14 per cent tax revenue growth in the first five years after GST implementation by the Central government.

- Under GST law, states are guaranteed full compensation for any revenue loss for the first five years after the introduction of the goods and services tax (GST) in July 2017.

- States' tax revenue as of FY16 is considered as the base year for the calculation of this 14 per cent growth.

- Any shortfall against it is supposed to be compensated by the Centre using the funds specifically collected as compensation cess.

- Compensation cess is levied on products considered to be 'sin' or luxury goods. The collected compensation cess flows into the Consolidated Fund of India, and then transferred to the Public Account of India, where a GST compensation cess account has been created. States are compensated bi-monthly from the accumulated funds in this account.

Q2. In which of the following fields does Doppler Effect find application?

1. Weather forecasting
2. Flow measurement
3. Radar technology
4. Medical field
5. Aerospace navigation
6. Military applications

Options:

a. 1 and 3 only
b. 1,3 and 5 only
c. 1,2,3,4,5 and 6
d. 1,2,3 and 5

Answer:

Option c

Explanation:

- The Doppler Effect also called the Doppler shift refers to the change in the wavelength or in the frequency of a wave for a viewer who is walking relative to the source of the wave.
- A Doppler radar uses the Doppler Effect to produce velocity data about objects at a distance. It does this by bouncing a microwave signal off a desired target and analyzing how the object's motion has altered the frequency of the returned signal.
- Doppler Effect has numerous applications.

Q3. Which of the following correctly describes the term Phishing?

a. It involves making a machine or network resource unavailable to its intended users by temporarily or indefinitely disrupting services of a host connected to the Internet.
b. It involves disguising oneself as a trustworthy entity in an electronic communication to obtain sensitive information.
c. It involves gaining access to personal electronic devices through mimicking of biometric details of the original user.
d. It involves locking the user out of their files or their device and demanding an anonymous online payment to restore access.

Answer:

Option b

Explanation:

- Phishing is the fraudulent attempt to obtain sensitive information such as usernames, passwords and credit card details by disguising oneself as a trustworthy entity in an electronic communication.

☐ **Q4. Which of the following pairs is wrongly matched?**

a. Lonar lake: Maharashtra
b. Loktak lake: Manipur
c. Wular lake: Jammu and Kashmir
d. Bhojtal: Haryana

Answer:

Option d

Explanation:

- Bhojtal lake is located in Madhya Pradesh.
- For more information on lakes in India refer: Important Lakes in India.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. In the light of the educational institutions across the country switching to online classes in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, evaluate the advantages and concerns associated with such a move. (15 marks, 250 words)

2. The recent border skirmishes along the Line of Actual Control seem to be indicative of the Chinese approach to use the border problem to pressurize India on other issues. In such a scenario analyze what should be India's response to protect its sovereign interests. (10 marks, 150 words).