

# 01 Jul 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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## A. GS 1 Related

### Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

#### 1. 46 million girls went missing in India

#### Context:

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has released its **State of the World Population 2020** report.

#### United Nations Population Fund:

- UNFPA stands for United Nations Fund for Population Activities. Its name was later changed to the United Nations Population Fund in 1987.
- It is a subsidiary organ of the UN General Assembly.

Read more about the [United Nations Population Fund](#).

#### Details:

- The report examines the issue of missing women by studying sex ratio imbalances at birth as a result of gender-biased sex selection as well as excess female mortality due to deliberate neglect of girls because of a culture of son preference.
  - **Sex ratio** measures the number of females born for every 1,000 males.
  - **Excess female mortality** is the difference between observed and expected mortality of the girl child or avoidable death of girls during childhood. It is calculated as a difference between observed and expected mortality rates for girls below age 5.

#### Key findings:

- The figure shows that the number of missing women has more than doubled over the past 50 years, who were at 61 million in 1970.
- With the advent of technology and increased access to ultrasound imaging, the number of girls missing due to female foeticide has exceeded those that were missing because of postnatal sex selection.
  - Gender-biased sex selection tends to be higher among wealthy families but percolates down to lower-income families over time, as sex selection technologies become more accessible and affordable.
- According to estimates averaged over a five year period (2013-17), annually, there were 1.2 million missing female births, at a global level.
- These skewed numbers translate into long-term shifts in the proportions of women and men in the population of some countries, the report points out.
  - In many countries, this results in a “marriage squeeze” as prospective grooms far outnumber prospective brides, which further results in human trafficking for marriage as well as child marriages.
- Globally, roughly one in five (21%) of women are subjected to child marriage.
  - The report said that the drivers of child marriage are poverty, insecurity and limited access to quality education and work opportunities. These factors mean that child marriage is often seen as the best option for girls, or as a means to reduce the economic burden on the family.
- At least 19 harmful practices, ranging from breast ironing to virginity testing, are considered human rights violations, according to the UNFPA report, which focuses on the three most prevalent ones: female genital mutilation, child marriage, and extreme bias against daughters in favour of sons.

#### Key findings with respect to India:

- One in three girls missing globally due to sex selection, both pre- and post-natal, is from India — 46 million out of the total 142 million.
- The report cites a 2014 study to state that India has the highest rate of excess female deaths at 13.5 per 1,000 female births or one in nine deaths of females below the age of 5 due to postnatal sex selection.
  - The same study shows that in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, excess female mortality of girls below 5 years of age was under 3%.
- Also, as per the 2011 Census, the latest to take place in the country, the sex ratio for all Indians was 940 females to 1,000 males.
- The State of World Population Report added that 32% of Indian women who had been married before the age of 18 had experienced physical abuse from their husbands, compared to 17% for those who married as adults.

- This is based on a survey of more than 8,000 women in five states where child marriage is most prevalent – Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.
- However, there is a silver lining. According to the report, advances in India have contributed to a 50% decline in child marriages in South Asia.

### Impact of COVID-19:

- The major concern is that, while progress has been made in ending some harmful practices worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to reverse gains.
- A recent analysis revealed that if services and programmes remain shuttered for six months due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an additional 13 million girls may be forced into marriage and 2 million more girls may be subjected to female genital mutilation between now and 2030.

### Suggestions:

- Countries that have ratified international treaties such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child have a duty to end the harm, whether it's inflicted on girls by family members, religious communities, health-care providers, commercial enterprises or state institutions. Many have responded with laws, but laws alone are not enough.
- According to the report, decades of experience and research show that bottom-up, grassroots approaches are better at bringing change.
- Economies and the legal systems that support them must be restructured to guarantee every woman equal opportunities, the report adds.

## B. GS 2 Related

### Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

#### 1. Free food grain scheme till Nov.

##### Context:

The Prime Minister has announced that the free grain distribution scheme under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) will be extended by five months till the end of November 2020, with an additional estimated outlay of ₹90,000 crore.

##### Details:

- Under this scheme, for the next five months, 5 kg of free food grains (rice or wheat) to each member of a family, and 1 kg of pulses (chana) to each family per month, will be provided free of cost.
- Prime Minister also underlined that the country is moving towards the institution of 'one nation, one ration card', which will be of immense benefit to the poor who travel to other states in search of work.

##### Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY):

- PMGKAY was announced as part of the first relief package during the [COVID-19](#) pandemic.
- The scheme was announced for a three-month period ending June 30, 2020. The scheme has now been extended till November 2020.
- The scheme covers 80 crore ration card holders (2/3rd of India's population).

## 1. Sharp fall in reporting of non-COVID diseases

### Context:

According to the information on weekly outbreaks available on the website of the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP), the ongoing novel coronavirus pandemic has led to India's disease surveillance system recording unusually fewer instances of diseases other than COVID-19.

### Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP):

- It is a disease surveillance scheme under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in India, assisted by the World Bank.
- It is a unit under the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC).
- A large amount of data on disease reports are collected in order to be able to identify the outbreak of a disease, identify its causes and take corresponding preventive and responsive measures.
- An early warning system has been put into place in order to take timely preventive steps.

### Objectives of IDSP:

- To strengthen/maintain a decentralized laboratory based IT enabled disease surveillance system for epidemic-prone diseases.
- To monitor disease trends.
- To detect and respond to outbreaks in the early rising phase through trained Rapid Response Teams (RRTs).

### Details:

- The IDSP issues weekly reports on disease outbreaks across the country based on its surveillance network that spans at least 600 districts.
- In the week of March 16-22, the most updated report that is available, there were only six outbreaks/disease alerts reported.
  - The six alerts in Week 12 of the year included a case of Crimean-Congo Haemorrhagic Fever from Gujarat, three cases of chickenpox from Bihar, and a case each of dengue and food poisoning from Karnataka and West Bengal respectively.
  - An alert is when a sizeable number of cases from a region are reported.
- In the same week in 2019, there were 17 alerts; in 2018, there were 28, and in 2017, there were 45.

### Reasons for fall in reporting on non-COVID diseases:

- Officials said the under-reporting was due to the lockdown and the behavioural change that actually depressed instances of disease spread.
- They also denied the possibility that fewer outbreaks were reported because COVID-19 was prioritised over all else and monitors ignored other diseases.
- Distancing and lack of contact may have seen a decline in contagious diseases as well as say, waterborne infectious diseases.

## Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## 1. Despite opposition, China passes Hong Kong security law

### Context:

China's Parliament passed national security legislation for Hong Kong.

### Details:

- The legislation sets the stage for the most radical changes to Hong Kong's (former British colony) way of life since it returned to Chinese rule 23 years ago.
- The law comes in response to last year's often-violent pro-democracy protests in the city and aims to tackle subversion, terrorism, separatism and collusion with foreign forces.
- Details of the law are yet to be released.

### Global reaction:

- Britain, the EU, Japan, Taiwan and others have also criticised the law. However, China has hit back at the outcry, denouncing interference in its internal affairs.
- The legislation pushes Beijing further along a collision course with the U.S., Britain and other Western governments, which have said it erodes the high degree of autonomy the city was granted at its July 1, 1997 handover.
- The U.S., already in dispute with China over trade, the South China Sea and the coronavirus, began eliminating Hong Kong's special status under U.S. law, halting defence exports and restricting technology access.
- China said it would retaliate.

This topic has been covered in [23<sup>rd</sup> May 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

## C. GS 3 Related

### Category: DISASTER MANAGEMENT

## 1. Gas leak in Vizag pharma plant kills two

### Context:

A gas leak at Sainor Life Sciences Pvt Ltd, Jawaharlal Nehru Pharma City, in Visakhapatnam has claimed two lives and injured four people.

### Details:

- Hydrogen sulphide vapours leaked from the reactor of a pharmaceutical company's plant.
- According to the Commissioner of Police, the leak has been brought under control.
- This is the second incident in the Sainor Life Sciences plant since it began operations at JNPC.
  - In September 2015, two workers were charred to death and five others injured in a reactor blast.
  - Cases were booked against the company and it was allowed to resume operations only after the management paid a hefty fine.

- There have been about 40 industrial accidents in Visakhapatnam district, over 20 in pharma and chemical units alone, since 1997. About 130 lives have been lost and hundreds injured.

### Hydrogen Sulfide:

- Hydrogen sulfide (H<sub>2</sub>S) is a colourless chalcogen hydride gas with a characteristic foul odour.
- It is very poisonous, corrosive, and flammable.
- The gas can irritate the eyes, nose, throat, and lungs.
- Too much H<sub>2</sub>S can halt the breathing centre in the brain, which can cause death.
- It dissolves in water and oil, and it may be released when these liquids are heated, depressurized, or agitated. Because it is heavier than air, it may settle in low spots.
- It occurs in volcanic gases, natural gas, and in some sources of well water.

### Uses:

- Hydrogen sulfide is used primarily to produce sulfuric acid and sulfur.
- It is also used to create a variety of inorganic sulfides used to create pesticides, leather, dyes, and pharmaceuticals.
- Hydrogen sulfide is used to produce heavy water for nuclear power plants.

Also read about the [Styrene monomer gas leak from a chemical plant in Vizag, covered in 8th May 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

## Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

### 1. World Bank okays funds for Namami Gange

#### Context:

The World Bank has approved a five-year loan to the Namami Gange project worth ₹3,000 crore (\$400 million) to develop and improve infrastructure projects to abate pollution in the river basin.

#### Details:

- The Second National Ganga River Basin Project (SNGRBP), approved by the World Bank's Board of Executive Directors, will support the government's Namami Gange programme and its long-term vision for controlling pollution in the river and restoring its water quality.
- The World Bank has been supporting the government's efforts since 2011 through the ongoing National Ganga River Basin Project, which helped set up the [National Mission for Clean Ganga \(NMCG\)](#) as the nodal agency to manage the river, and financed sewage treatment infrastructure in several riverside towns and cities.
- NMCG has already received ₹4,535 crore (\$600 million) from the World Bank until December 2021 as part of the first phase of the National Ganga River Basin Project.
- So far, 313 projects worth ₹25,000 crore have been sanctioned under the mission.

#### Projects under the second phase:

- The Project will help NMCG develop state-of-the-art tools to help manage the river basin more effectively.
- Spillover projects from the first phase of the mission as well as cleaning projects in tributaries such as the Yamuna and Kali.
- In the second phase, the loan would fund \$150 million for three new 'Hybrid Annuity Projects' in Agra, Meerut and Saharanpur for the tributaries of the Ganga.
- Other heads of distribution would include 'Institutional Development'; 'Improving Investments Resilience to COVID-19 Like Emergency Situations'; Performance-Based Incentive for Urban Local Bodies and Programme Communication and Management.

## Category: ECONOMY

### 1. External debt rises \$15.4 billion to \$558.5 billion in March

#### Context:

According to RBI data, India's external debt stood at \$558.5 billion in March 2020, an increase of \$15.4 billion compared with the year-ago period.

#### Details:

- Commercial borrowings remained the largest component of the external debt, with a share of 39.4%, followed by non-resident deposits at 23.4% and short-term trade credit at 18.2%.
- The data showed valuation gains due to the appreciation of the U.S. dollar against the Indian rupee and other major currencies were at \$16.6 billion.
  - Excluding the valuation effect, the increase in external debt would have been \$32 billion instead of \$15.4 billion.
- At the end of March, long-term debt, with an original maturity of above one year, saw a rise of \$17 billion over the level recorded in March 2019.
- U.S. dollar-denominated debt continued to be the largest component of India's external debt, with a share of 53.7% at end-March 2020, followed by the Indian rupee (31.9%), yen (5.6%), SDR (4.5%) and the euro (3.5%).
- The RBI also said debt service (principal repayments plus interest payments) increased marginally to 6.5% of current receipts at the end of March compared to 6.4% in the same period a year ago. This reflects higher interest payments on commercial borrowings and lower current receipts.

## D. GS 4 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## E. Editorials

## Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## 1. Reviving SAARC to deal with China

### Context:

- India's diplomatic efforts to strengthen its position vis-a-vis China.

### Background:

#### India's hesitancy with SAARC:

- In the last few years, due to increasing animosity with Pakistan and India's attempts at isolating Pakistan internationally for its role in promoting terrorism in India, **India's political interest in SAARC dipped significantly**. SAARC has been in the doldrums since 2014.
- India started investing in other regional instruments, such as **BIMSTEC, as an alternative to SAARC**.
  - The author argues that BIMSTEC cannot replace SAARC for reasons such as lack of a common identity and history among all **BIMSTEC** members. He further adds that given the fact that BIMSTEC's focus is on the Bay of Bengal region, it becomes an inappropriate forum to engage all South Asian nations.

#### For more information on this, refer to:

#### [BIMSTEC vs SAARC: RSTV - The Big Picture](#)

- Indian Prime Minister's act of reaching out to SAARC leaders in the face of the COVID crisis was a laudable effort but there has been a lack of sustained engagement.

#### For more information on this, refer to:

#### [CNA dated Mar 16, 2020](#)

#### Chinese foray into South Asia:

- **China, as part of its global expansionism, is increasing its influence in the South Asian region.**
  - China shares a strong bilateral relationship with Pakistan and has invested heavily in Pakistan through the **China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**. The two countries also share strategic ties in international forums.
  - Nepal is also seen moving closer to China for ideational and material reasons.
    - China offers Nepal an alternative for its dependence on India and is capable of making high economic investments in the relatively underdeveloped Nepal.
    - The Communist parties in Nepal share similar ideologies with China.
  - China, through its **economic diplomacy**, is wooing Bangladesh by offering tariff exemption for 97% of Bangladeshi products.
  - China has intensified its ties with Sri Lanka through massive investments.
- According to a Brookings India study, **most South Asian nations are now largely dependent on China for imports despite geographical proximity to India**.
- The increasing influence of China in the South Asian region is a major cause of concern for India given the fact that it results in the decrease of India's influence in South Asia.

#### Details:



- As India-China border tensions continue to fester and there being increasing build up along the LAC, India while preparing militarily will also have to redouble its **diplomatic efforts to counter China's intransigence**.
- Several foreign policy experts argue that India's strategic dealing with China has to begin with South Asia. In this regard, it is **important to reinvigorate SAARC**.

### **Way forward:**

#### **Economic integration:**

- One way to reinvigorate SAARC is to **revive the process of South Asian economic integration**.

#### **SAARC's economic ineffectiveness:**

- South Asia is one of the least integrated regions in the world with **intra-regional trade being a low 5%** of total South Asian trade, compared to 25% of intra-regional trade in the ASEAN region.
- According to the World Bank, trade in South Asia stands at \$23 billion of an estimated potential value of \$67 billion.
- While South Asian countries have signed trade treaties, the lack of political will and trust deficit has prevented any meaningful movement in this direction.
- The **negotiations of the SAARC investment treaty have been pending** since 2007. According to the UN Conference on Trade and Development, intra-ASEAN investments constitute around 19% of the total investments in the region.
- India should take the lead and work with SAARC members to slash the tariff and non-tariff barriers. There's a need to resuscitate the negotiations on SAARC investment and trade treaties.
- Deeper regional **economic integration will create greater interdependence with India** acquiring the central role, which, in turn, would serve India's strategic interests too.

#### **Dealing with domestic factors:**

- There are two major domestic challenges that India faces in revitalising SAARC.
  - Of late, domestic politics have had an undesirable influence on foreign policy. This has had an effect on India's neighbourhood relations and fuelled an **anti-India sentiment in India's neighbourhood**.
  - The economic vision of the current government focussing on atma nirbharta (self-reliance) and cutting down India's dependence on imports should not seem like signalling a return to the obsolete economic philosophy of import substitution. A sense of protectionism might indicate India's disinterest in deepening South Asian economic integration.
- India will have to ensure that domestic politics does not adversely affect India's standing in the region and India's economic policies consider the South Asian region into consideration in long term planning.

#### **For more related information, refer to:**

[CNA dated Mar 17, 2020](#)

#### **Category: ECONOMY**

#### **1. Making trade more digitised**

**Context:**

- Effect of the COVID pandemic on trade.

**Background:**

**Efforts in India:**

- Recognizing digitisation of procedures and lower human intervention as the two major pillars that drive trade across borders, India has embarked on multiple reforms.
- Post the **ratification of the Trade Facilitation Agreement of the World Trade Organization** in April 2016, India's reforms focused on **infrastructural up-gradation, digitisation and automation**.
  - Schemes such as Direct Port Entry and Direct Port Delivery, the Radio Frequency Identification system and the **Single Window Interface for Facilitating Trade**, significantly reduce the time and cost of clearance of goods.
  - The **Port Community System** aimed at seamlessly integrating all maritime trade-related stakeholders on a single platform and **e-SANCHIT (e-Storage and computerised handling of indirect tax documents)** have significantly reduced human intervention.
- There has been an increased focus on effective logistics and smooth export-import (EXIM) procedures at Indian borders. This has contributed to India's **continuous improvement in the Ease of Doing Business ranking**, particularly in the 'trading across borders' parameter (ranked 68 in 2020).

**Pandemic effect:**

- India's exports in April 2020 have contracted by 60% year-on-year.
  - There has been a drastic drop in the cargo handled by the Jawaharlal Nehru Port in April 2020 as compared to April 2019 which is indicative of the drop in India's trade.
- The slump in international trade due to the pandemic is understandable. As countries slowly emerge out of this, new demand and supply chains will form, which will be located in countries that re-orient their existing trade structures.
  - The significance of a more digitised trading environment, with minimal manual touchpoints, will increase.
  - With the current crisis, there will be the **demand for a greater leap in trade facilitation measures** to expedite the movement, release and clearance of goods.

**Challenges:**

- While different interventions of the government have positively developed the logistics sector, there are still some gaps that need to be bridged.
  - Some of the delays in moving to a paperless trade ecosystem can be attributed to gaps in the **effective implementation of digital platforms**. The shortcomings in the functionality of the digital system and technical glitches result in limited use of the system.
  - The **lack of connectivity/message exchanges between different stakeholders' systems** results in delayed cargo clearance.
  - The **lack of awareness, acceptability and adaptability** of new initiatives among the users is a concern, due to issues with respect to training and capacity building amongst the users, restricting the optimal utilisation of digital platforms.
  - There is also the **issue of standardisation and coordination** of processes across ports.

**Way forward:**

- The present crisis presents an opportunity to develop new systems and enhance existing platforms.

- Measures to facilitate and expedite the clearance process to make it more automated, online and paperless should be promoted.
- There is a need to further **augment the digital infrastructure in the trade ecosystem.**
- **Enhanced integration of systems and coordination** between the different stakeholders with the sharing of input data between them on a real-time basis should be promoted.
  - Promoting the use of a multi-stakeholder single platform like the Port Community System can streamline EXIM procedures.
- These efforts will be instrumental towards improving India's trading ecosystem and achieving the **desired target of Ease of Doing Business (ranking under 50)**. The more digitised our trade facilitation infrastructure, the more immune we will be to future disruptions.

## Category: GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

### 1. Utilise MGNREGA to the fullest capacity

#### Context:

- Work programmes during the pandemic crisis.

#### Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA):

#### Significance:

- The experience of the lockdown has brought to light the role of the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)** as a lifeline for the working poor in rural India by ensuring a **livelihood opportunity and financial stability**.
- There has been a marked increase in the number of households who have taken work under MGNREGA in the months of May and June of 2020.
- The absence of MGNREGA could accentuate rural distress.

#### Challenges:

- According to figures available on the Rural Development Ministry's website, as many as 1.82 crore workers who demanded work were turned back.
- In spite of a **legal provision of unemployment allowance**, compensation for not providing work has not been paid.
- The issue of unemployment allowance would become more relevant given the advent of monsoons in India. **During the rainy season even though demand is high, work provision is low.**
- With the return of migrant workers to their home States and with substantial numbers having completed the quarantine period, the demand for work is bound to increase. Despite the Central government's release of additional grants, the **funds remaining with the States would be insufficient.**

#### Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan:

- The Central government's new scheme, the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan, aims to provide **work to migrant workers in 116 selected districts**.
- The Ministry of Rural Development is the nodal Ministry for this scheme.
- The scheme is primarily meant for migrant workers in those districts where their numbers are 25,000 or more.

For more information on this topic, refer to:

[PIB dated June 18, 2020](#)

[CNA dated June 19, 2020](#)

**Concerns:**

- The author of the article claims the lack of a credible criterion for the selection of states for the implementation of the new scheme and alleges favouritism in the selection of states.
- The author claims a high degree of similarity between the MGNREGA and the new scheme and questions the need for a new scheme even with the existence of the effective MGNREGA.
- While the **right to work is a legal right under the MGNREGA, under the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan, there is no such legal binding** on the administration.
- The author expresses concerns about how the **new scheme might impact the MGNREGA work** in the selected districts and laments the lack of clarity on this critical issue in the set of guidelines issued by the Ministry.
- The scheme is primarily meant for migrant workers in those districts where their numbers are 25,000 or more. That means in these selected districts, women who comprise a smaller percentage of migrant workers will be largely excluded. So **unless the work under the new scheme is in addition to MGNREGA, women will suffer.**

**Conclusion:**

- The author calls for not diluting the MGNREGA scheme in the name of the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan. The author argues for the full utilization of the potential of the MGNREGA to provide relief to the suffering of rural India.
  - This could involve the move **to remove the restriction of only one person per household to make every individual eligible.** The **cap of 100 days should also be removed to expand it to at least 200 days.** Unemployment allowance should be guaranteed for all those turned away from work.
  - It is essential for the Central government to ensure that States are provided with timely funds to pay for the work under MGNREGA and also unemployment allowance to workers demanding work.

## F. Prelims Facts

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## G. Tidbits

### 1. Core industry output contracts for third month

**What's in News?**

According to data released by the Commerce Ministry, the output of eight core sector industries shrank 23% in May 2020, the third straight month of contraction.

- Of the eight core sectors, the fertilizer industry was the only one that saw actual growth in output in May 2020, rising 7.5% in comparison to May 2019.

- The rest continued to contract, with the steel sector performing the worst and recording a 48.4% fall, while cement production dropped 22%.
- The energy sectors also showed negative growth.

Read more about [Core sectors](#).

## 2. Banned apps will get chance to send in their clarifications

### What's in News?

The Union government has banned 59 Chinese applications citing threat to national security and sovereignty.

This topic has been covered in the [30th June 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

- Information Technology Ministry official has said that the banned platforms would be given a chance to submit their clarifications.
- This is in line with provisions of the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking of Access of Information by Public) Rules, 2009.

## 3. Centre to focus on online education

### What's in News?

With the social inequity in online education coming to the fore due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centre has proposed long-term measures to bridge the divide.

- The measures include plans to distribute laptops or tablets to 40% of all college and university students over the next five years, and to equip all government schools with information and communication technology (ICT).
- The School Education Department also estimated it would need to spend up to ₹1 lakh per school for sanitisation and quarantine measures in preparation for the safe reopening of schools that have been shut due to the pandemic.
- Funds for these measures are being provided under the composite grant for schools, ranging between ₹25,000 for small schools with less than 100 students and ₹1 lakh for schools with over a thousand students.
- For college and university students, the promotion of online education, which has become more urgent due to the pandemic, will be twofold. On the one hand, the Human Resource Development Ministry proposes to spend ₹2,306 crore on developing and translating digital course content and resources over the next five years.
- On the other, it intends to provide laptops and tablets to 4.06 crore students — that is, 40% of the projected student population — by 2026, at a total cost of ₹60,900 crore. The largest chunk of 1.5 crore students are to receive devices in the next financial year 2021-22. An average cost of ₹15,000 has been assumed per device.
- The Centre and States are to share the cost of making devices available, in a 60:40 ratio, according to the presentation to the Finance Commission.

## 4. India, Sri Lanka hold talks over debt

## What's in News?

India is holding close and constructive discussions with Sri Lanka on Colombo's pending requests for rescheduling its debt repayment and for currency swap facilities under bilateral and SAARC arrangements.

- Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa had sought a moratorium on the debt owed by Colombo — totalling \$960 million — during his New Delhi visit in February 2020.
- The request “was under consideration”. The matter [Sri Lanka's requests] had been taken up at the leadership level and has been followed up by senior functionaries bilaterally.
- Sri Lanka's mounting external debt was a concern even before the coronavirus pandemic, but its impact has aggravated the strain on the island nation's economy that is saddled with loans — bilateral, multilateral and in the international money market — amounting to billions of dollars.
- This year alone, Sri Lanka is scheduled to repay \$2.9 billion of its debt, which Colombo is reportedly trying to reschedule with bilateral partners.
- It is unclear how Sri Lanka will repay the apparently non-negotiable \$1 billion international sovereign bond maturing in October 2020.
- While economists and experts have been arguing that Sri Lanka must avoid resorting to further debt in this situation, Colombo appears to have few other options in hand.
  - Sri Lanka is in talks with the IMF, from whom it sought a rapid financing instrument.
  - Following the global pandemic, Beijing has pledged a loan of \$500 million to help Colombo deal with its immediate impact.
  - Sri Lanka already owes China about \$5 billion.
  - Further, upon Sri Lanka's request, the China Development Bank (CDB) entered into a \$140 million-facility agreement with the Bank of Ceylon, drawn under two tranches of \$70 million each to help the State-owned bank cope amid the pandemic.

## 5. The rural salve

- The high levels of **reverse migration** recorded during the COVID-19 related lockdown led to a **sudden surge in demand for work through MGNREGS** in states where the bulk of the migrants returned.
- **Sowing of Kharif crops has doubled** this year following a massive increase in rural labour and an above-average monsoon.
- Increased demand for work under MGNREGS and increased sowing activities has led to **increased levels of employment in rural areas**.
  - Available data on employment shows that the rural employment rate has bounced back to pre-COVID levels while the urban rate is still suffering after a decent recovery following the unlock.

### Concerns:

- The sudden rise in sowing has to be met with an equal increase in government procurement. If not, the **glut in the market will cause prices to crash and profits to dwindle**.
- Though rural jobs have increased, the **excess supply of labour may result in wage rates decreasing significantly**.

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to Attorney General (AG) of India:

1. AG enjoys all the privileges and immunities that are available to a Member of Parliament.
2. AG's remuneration is fixed by the Parliament.
3. AG has the right to take part in a meeting of any committee of the Parliament of which he is named as a member, but without a right to vote.
4. The Indian Constitution mentions the procedure and grounds for the removal of the Attorney General.

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

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

**Answer: a**

**Explanation:**

- President of India appoints Attorney General for a term which is decided by President.
- He can be removed by the president at any time. There is no procedure or ground mentioned in the Constitution for his removal.
- He shall hold office during the pleasure of the President, and shall receive such remuneration as the President may determine.
- He enjoys all the privileges and immunities that are available to a Member of Parliament.
- AG has the right to take part in a meeting of any committee of the Parliament of which he is named as a member, but without a right to vote.

**Q2. Wari-Warkari tradition is geographically associated with the state of:**

- a. Karnataka
- b. Maharashtra
- c. Gujarat
- d. Odisha

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

- Wari-Warkari is a Maharashtrian festival celebrated by the Warkari sect.
- It is a tradition within the Bhakti spiritual movement of Vaishnavite Hinduism.
- It is geographically associated with the state of Maharashtra.

**Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to Hydrogen Sulfide:**

1. It is a colourless and odourless gas.
2. It is poisonous, corrosive and inflammable.
3. It is used to produce heavy water for nuclear power plants.

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

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

**Answer: a**

**Explanation:**

- Hydrogen sulfide is a colourless chalcogen hydride gas with a characteristic foul odour.
- It is very poisonous, corrosive, and flammable.
- Hydrogen sulfide is used primarily to produce sulfuric acid and sulfur.
- It is also used to create a variety of inorganic sulfides used to create pesticides, leather, dyes, and pharmaceuticals.
- Hydrogen sulfide is used to produce heavy water for nuclear power plants.

**Q4. Consider the following statements:**

1. IUCN classifies both Javan and Sumatran Rhinos as Critically Endangered in its Red List.
2. Greater one-horned rhinoceros is classified as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.

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

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

**Answer: d**

**Explanation:**

Both statements are correct.

## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. In the light of China increasing its influence in the South Asian region as part of its global expansionism, discuss the need and strategy for India to reinvigorate SAARC to counter Chinese plans for the region. (15 marks, 250 words)
2. Enumerate the reforms introduced in India to up-grade, digitize and automate its logistics systems for inter-country trade. Discuss the existing challenges in this sector and suggest suitable measures. (15 marks, 250 words)



