

17 Jul 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: HEALTH

1. India registers a steep decline in maternal mortality ratio

Context:

According to the special bulletin on Maternal Mortality in India (2016-18) released by the Office of the Registrar General’s Sample Registration System (SRS), India has registered a steep decline in Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR).

Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR):

- MMR is defined as the number of maternal deaths per 1,00,000 live births.
- It is one of the key indicators of maternal mortality.
- The target 3.1 of [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDG\)](#) set by the United Nations aims to reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 1,00,000 live births.

Details:

- The **Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) in India has declined to 113 in 2016-18 from 122 in 2015-17 and 130 in 2014-2016.**
 - This is almost 100 deaths less than the 2007-09 period where MMR was at 212.
- Maternal mortality in a region is a measure of the reproductive health of women in the area.
- As per the [World Health Organization](#), maternal death is the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management.

Note:

- The MMR of various States according to the bulletin includes Assam (215), Bihar (149), Madhya Pradesh (173), Chhattisgarh (159), Odisha (150), Rajasthan (164), Uttar Pradesh (197) and Uttarakhand (99).
- The southern States registered a lower MMR — Andhra Pradesh (65), Telangana (63), Karnataka (92), Kerala (43) and Tamil Nadu (60).

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Traders upbeat over resumption of business with Afghanistan

Context:

Traders in Punjab's Amritsar are upbeat about resuming their business after Pakistan recently allowed Afghanistan to send goods to India using the Attari-Wagah border under the Pakistan-Afghanistan Transit Trade Agreement.

Pakistan-Afghanistan Transit Trade Agreement:

- The **Afghanistan–Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement** (also known as APTTA) is a bilateral **trade agreement** signed in 2010 by **Pakistan** and **Afghanistan**.
- The 2010 agreement supersedes the 1965 Afghanistan Transit Trade Agreement, which granted Afghanistan the right to import duty-free goods through Pakistani seaports, most notably from Karachi.
- It calls for greater facilitation in the movement of goods amongst the two countries.
- It allows for both countries to use each other's airports, railways, roads, and ports for transit trade along designated transit corridors.
- The agreement does not cover road transport vehicles from any third country, be it from India or any Central Asia country.
- However, the signed Agreement permits Afghanistan trucks access to the Wagah border with India, where Afghan goods will be offloaded onto Indian trucks.
- This agreement does not permit Indian goods to be loaded onto trucks for transit back to Afghanistan.
- Instead, Afghan trucks offloaded at Wagah may return to Afghanistan loaded only with Pakistani, rather than Indian goods in an attempt to prevent the formation of a black market for Indian goods in Pakistan.

Both Pakistan and India had suspended trade through the Attari-Wagah border in March 2020 to deal with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

This topic has been covered in the [14th July 2020 CNA](#).

2. Pak. did not allow free access to Jadhav: India

Context:

India accused Pakistan of not allowing free and unimpeded consular access to death row prisoner Kulbhushan Jadhav.

Details:

- The official spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs said that the circumstances of the meeting did not allow them to get Mr. Jadhav's consent for legal representation.
- India had demanded that consular access should be without interference from Pakistani security officials, as consent is necessary for filing a review plea against the death sentence.
- Earlier reports had suggested that Pakistan was willing to consider a review petition through a legal representative to appeal against the death sentence given to Mr. Jadhav by a military tribunal but the absence of written consent makes the prospect of a legal representative impossible.

Read more about Kulbhushan Jadhav Case covered in [18th July 2019 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. SC to examine Kerala Act on animal, bird sacrifices

Context:

The Supreme Court has asked the Kerala Government to respond to an appeal against the High Court decision **upholding the constitutional validity of the state's law which prohibits animal or bird sacrifice for propitiating a deity**.

Details:

- The Supreme Court has agreed to examine the constitutional validity of the Kerala Animals and Birds Sacrifices Prohibition Act of 1968 that prohibits the sacrifice of animals and birds in temples to 'please' the deity.
- Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde, heading a three-judge Bench, highlighted the "dichotomy" in animal protection law that allows the killing of animals for food but does not permit "killing of animals for offer to a deity and then consumption".

What is the issue?

- The killing of animals for consumption of their meat is allowed as per the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

- However, the law which is under challenge in the present case, the Kerala Animals and Birds Sacrifices Prohibition Act, 1968 (Act), prohibits the killing of animals for the appeasement of deities in temples.
 - The State law bans the killing of animals and birds for religious sacrifices but not for personal consumption.
- Recently, the Kerala High Court dismissed the [PIL](#) challenging the validity of the Kerala Animals and Birds Sacrifices Prohibition Act on the ground that no material was brought on record to establish that the practice was essential to the religion.
- The High Court had observed that the Prevention of Cruelty Act does not have the word "sacrifice" for the purpose of religion.
- The petitioner in his appeal claimed that animal sacrifice was an integral part of his religious practice. The plea said that the high court order violates his [fundamental right](#) under Article 25(1) of the Constitution.
- The petitioners claimed that the Act violates the right to equality because identical practices by other religious communities are not prohibited by the Act.
- The impugned Act criminalises the intent behind the animal sacrifice and not animal sacrifice per se. If the sacrifice is not for propitiating any deity but for personal consumption even in the precincts of a temple, it is not forbidden.
 - This arbitrary classification is violative of Article 14 of the Constitution of India, the plea said.
- Petitioner also argued that Section 28 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 1960 does not make the killing of animals for religious purposes an offence.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: SECURITY

1. 'Is India a hub for drug peddling?'

Context:

The Madras High Court has directed the Centre to spell out whether India is being used as a hub by international drug cartels.

Details:

- The High Court has directed the Centre to explain the steps it had taken so far to curb the menace.
- It has called for information about the involvement of international drug mafias in crime, the approximate value of drugs transacted in the country, and the remedial measures undertaken by the Centre.
- The queries were posed in interim orders passed on a habeas corpus petition which had challenged the preventive detention of a drug peddler under the Goondas Act.

Issues:

- The Madras HC observed that Punjab is serving as the transit point for the smuggling of narcotic drugs which make their way as far as Kerala.
- It also asked if the money involved was being used to fund terrorists and anti-national activities.
- The Bench referred to a recent survey by the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in association with the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), which revealed that 3.1 crore Indians use cannabis, bhang, ganja, charas, heroin and opium.
- It was also noted by the Bench that only one in 20 drug addicts gets treatment at a hospital.

Concerns:

- The problem of drug addiction of children is more prevalent in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi and Haryana.
- The Kerala police filed an affidavit conceding that educational institutions had become a hotbed of drug peddlers.
- Many youngsters, especially students, are getting addicted due to the easy availability of narcotic drugs.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. For equal treatment

Context:

- Supreme Court judgment on entitlements for the disabled people.

Background:

Delhi High Court judgment of 2012:

- In 2012, a university had allowed a 10% concession in the minimum eligibility requirement for SC/ST candidates, and 5% concession for disabled applicants. This was challenged in the Delhi High Court.
- In its 2012 judgment in the *Anamol Bhandari (minor) through his father/Natural Guardian v. Delhi Technological University*, the High Court ruled against this differential treatment, terming it discriminatory.
- The major principle behind this judgment was that without imparting proper education to those suffering from disabilities, there cannot be any meaningful enforcement of their rights as mentioned under the Constitution and the prevailing legislation on providing **equal opportunities to the disabled and protecting their rights**.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016:

- The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 aims to empower disabled people. This Act replaces the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995.
- The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 fulfills the obligations to the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**, to which India is a signatory.

Salient provisions:

- The Act defines disability based on an evolving and dynamic concept. The types of disabilities covered under the Act have been increased from the existing 7 to 21 and the Central Government will have the power to add more types of disabilities.
- The Act envisages certain **affirmative measures** to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy their rights equally with others. Benefits such as **reservation in higher education (not less than 5%), government jobs (not less than 4%)**, reservation in the allocation of land, poverty alleviation schemes (5% allotment), etc. have been provided for persons with benchmark disabilities.
- Every child with a benchmark disability between the age group of 6 and 18 years shall have the right to free education. Government-funded educational institutions as well as the government recognized institutions will have to **provide inclusive education to children with disabilities**.
- National and State Fund will be created to provide financial support to persons with disabilities.
- The Act provides for penalties for offences committed against persons with disabilities and also violation of the provisions of the new law. Special Courts would be designated in each district to handle such cases.

Details:

- The SC has upheld the 2012 judgment of the Delhi High Court, holding that **persons with disabilities are socially backward** and hence are entitled to the same benefits of relaxation as Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe candidates in public employment and education.
 - Similar to how SC/ST candidates get a relaxation of a certain percentage of marks to qualify for admission or employment, the same relaxation shall apply to disabled candidates too.

For more information on this, refer to:

[CNA dated July 13, 2020](#)

Significance:

- Through this judgment, the Supreme Court has recognised the difficulties faced by the disabled in accessing education or employment, regardless of their social status. People suffering from disability have always been an **under-privileged and under-represented section**.
- There is the issue of **low literacy and employment rates among persons with disabilities**.
 - As per the 2001 Census, in educational indicators, illiteracy among the disabled was much higher than the general population figure. The share of disabled children out of school was quite higher than other major social categories. The 2001 Census put the illiteracy rate among the disabled at 51%.
 - According to a study, only 34 lakh of the about 1.34 crore people with disabilities (PwDs) in the employable age have a job in India.
- The judgment could help alleviate some of the difficulties faced by this section through this affirmative action.
- According to the National Statistical Office (NSO) survey, the **overall percentage of persons with disabilities in the population is around 2.2 percent**. This significant segment of the population should not be left out of social and economic advancement.

Concerns:

- A counterpoint to the idea of eliminating the distinction between the disabled and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is that this could end up equating **physical or mental disability with social disability** and the experience of untouchability suffered by marginalised sections for centuries.
 - This would allow disabled persons from a traditionally privileged community an advantage over those suffering from a historical social disability.

For more information on the issue, refer to:

[CNA dated March 6, 2020](#)

Category: ECONOMY

1. Improvement in economy might slow down or even stagnate in the second quarter

This article is from the Indian Express.

Context:

- The article discusses the economic impact of the pandemic and analyzes India's approach.

Details:

- Reopening of the economy post the lockdown phase has led to some improvement in economic activity towards the latter part of the April-June quarter.
- However, there are concerns that the improvement in economic activity is unlikely to sustain. There are concerns that in the July-September quarter, the **pace of economic growth would slow down or even stagnate and fall**.
 - CRISIL Ltd foresees a 25 percent contraction in India's GDP in the first quarter of the current financial year, and a 5 percent contraction for the entire fiscal year. It estimates a permanent loss of 10 percent of GDP for India.
 - Despite the improvements in some sectors like the grocery and pharmacy sectors, they have been below their pre-COVID levels.

Challenges:

Existing pressures:

- The COVID-19 pandemic struck at a time when **India was growing at its slowest pace (4.2 percent in 2019-20) since the global financial crisis**, lowering demand and economic activity.
- The pandemic has led to a big reduction in incomes and loss of sources of livelihood.

Lockdown approach:

- The major approach to containing the spread of COVID-19 in India has been its **reliance on lockdown and social distancing**. The longer the lockdown, the greater is the **impact on livelihoods**. That, in turn, necessitates income support for vulnerable households and financial support for susceptible businesses. This becomes a challenge due to the current fiscal pressure.
- Regions that have accounted for the fast spread of COVID-19 have reintroduced containment measures, which will adversely impact economic activity.
- The partial unlocking of the economy and the back and forth on containment measures will continue to pose a **hindrance to supply chains, transportation and logistics**.

Inadequate responses:

- The monetary measures announced after the pandemic do not have the potential to trigger an economic recovery because of the **underlying issue of rising financial sector stress and lack of fiscal space**.

For more information on the issue of financial sector stress, refer to:

[CNA dated July 12, 2020](#)

India's vulnerability:

- The economic recovery look will depend on the shape the COVID-19 infection curve takes.
- Given **India's high population density and weak health infrastructure**, a rapid outbreak and crumbling of the system are not impossible.

India's approach to the problem:

- Unlike most countries which have announced large fiscal stimulus to revive their economies, **India has followed a calibrated approach, which does not lean much on direct fiscal spending, but emphasizes on reforms.**
 - There are risks to both these contrasting approaches. The effectiveness of a generous stimulus is reduced by a rise in precautionary savings among households. Further, if there is a second wave, it raises the question of whether there will be enough fiscal ammunition left.
 - The risk with India's approach is that too little a stimulus can hurt the productive capacity of the economy and complicate the recovery process.

For more related information, refer to:

[CNA dated June 9, 2020](#)

Conclusion:

- An interesting aspect of the government's economic package has been the emphasis on **economic reforms**, particularly in agriculture and mining.

For more information on reforms introduced in the agricultural sector, refer to:

[CNA dated May 17, 2020](#)

- This would, by helping improve medium-term growth prospects over time, also help control the rise in the debt-to-GDP ratio and make it easier for the government to consider a fiscal push.
- These reforms need to be relentlessly pursued, complemented by other reforms to improve the business environment.

F. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Tidbits

1. No postal ballot facility for voters above 65: EC

What's in News?

The [Election Commission](#) said that the postal ballot facility for electors above the age of 65 in the Bihar Assembly elections would not be implemented. The poll body said the option of postal ballots would be available to electors over 80 years of age, persons with disabilities, essential service workers and those infected with COVID-19 or suspected to be.

Details:

- Until October 2019, the provision of voting through the postal ballot was available to armed forces personnel and those assigned poll duty.
- In October 2019, however, the Union Government accepted the poll panel's recommendation and the Law Ministry made amendments by allowing voters who are 80 years of age and above or those with disabilities to use the postal ballot for voting during parliamentary and assembly elections.
- The assembly elections to Bihar's neighbouring state, Jharkhand, held in November-December, were the first that saw the provision being implemented.

2. 'Judicial review can't be done prior to Speaker's decision'

- Constitutional courts cannot judicially review disqualification proceedings under the [Tenth Schedule](#) (anti-defection law) of the Constitution until the Speaker or Chairman makes a final decision on merits.
- **Kihoto Hollohan versus Zachillu and Others Judgement:**
 - A 28-year-old judgment of the Supreme Court in Kihoto Hollohan versus Zachillu and Others has said that "judicial review cannot be available at a stage prior to the making of a decision by the Speaker/Chairman and a quia timet action would not be permissible. Nor would interference be permissible at an interlocutory stage of the proceedings."
 - "The only exception for any interlocutory interference being cases of interlocutory disqualifications or suspensions which may have grave, immediate and irreversible repercussions and consequence," the Bench had held.

What's in News?

- The judgment is significant in the case of the ousted Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot and the 18 MLAs, who were issued a notice under the anti-defection law after the ruling Congress sought their disqualification.
- They have approached the Rajasthan High Court challenging the constitutionality of Paragraph 2(1)(a) of the Tenth Schedule which makes "voluntarily giving up membership of a political party" liable for disqualification.

3. Taiwan holds military drills against potential China threat

- Taiwan's military fired missiles from the air and the island's shore facing China in a live-fire drill to demonstrate its ability to defend against any Chinese invasion.
- The drills were part of a five-day annual exercise.
- Assault helicopters launched missiles and fighter jets dropped bombs on targets at sea, while tanks and missile trucks fired from a beach to deter a simulated invading force.
- China regards Taiwan as a breakaway province that is part of its territory. The self-governing island of 24 million people lies 160 kilometers off China's southeast coast across the Taiwan Strait.

4. Russia accused of trying to steal vaccine data

- Britain, the U.S. and Canada have accused Russia of trying to steal information from researchers seeking a COVID-19 vaccine.
- The three nations alleged that hacking group APT29, also known as Cozy Bear and said to be part of the Russian intelligence service, is attacking academic and pharmaceutical research institutions involved in vaccine development.
- Cozy Bear and Fancy Bear are the names that cybersecurity firms have given to two separate — and possibly competing — computer espionage groups based in Russia.
- Cozy Bear has been identified by Washington as one of two Russian government-linked hacking groups that broke into the Democratic National Committee computer network and stole emails ahead of the 2016 presidential election.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) :

1. It is the principal judicial body of the UN.
2. It is composed of 15 judges elected to five-year terms of office by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council.
3. Its judgements are final and without appeal.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation

- The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the principal judicial body of the UN, established in 1946 to replace the Permanent Court of International Justice.
- The International Court of Justice is composed of 15 judges elected to nine-year terms of office.
- They are elected by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council.
- Judgments are final and without appeal. If there is a dispute about the meaning or scope of a judgment, the only possibility is for one of the parties to make a request to the Court for an interpretation.

Q2. Which of the following conventions has/have NOT been ratified by India?

1. UN Convention on Rights of the Child
2. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
3. UN Convention Against Torture (CAT)

Choose the correct option:

- a. 1 only
- b. 1 and 2 only

- c. 3 only
- d. None of the above

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

- India has ratified both the UN Convention on Rights of the Child and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- The UN Convention Against Torture (CAT) is an international human rights treaty, under the review of the UN and was adopted in 1984. It aims to prevent torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment around the world. India has not ratified the treaty yet.

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) is defined as the number of maternal deaths per one thousand live births.
2. Sustainable Development Goal has set a target for the reduction of MMR to fewer than 70 by 2030.
3. The Government of India launched the LaQshya Initiative with the objective of reducing Maternal Mortality.

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) is defined as the number of maternal deaths per one lakh live births.
- Sustainable Development Goal has set a target for the reduction of MMR to fewer than 70 by 2030.
- Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India launched *LaQshya* - Labour room Quality Improvement Initiative with the following objectives:
 - Reduce maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality.
 - Improve the quality of care during delivery and the immediate post-partum period.
 - Enhance satisfaction of beneficiaries, positive birthing experience and provide Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) to all pregnant women attending public health facilities.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement:

1. It allows for both countries to use each other's airports, railways, roads, and ports for transit trade along designated transit corridors.
2. This agreement does not permit Indian goods to be loaded onto trucks for transit back to Afghanistan, except at the Wagah border.

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The Afghanistan–Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (also known as APTTA) is a bilateral trade agreement signed in 2010 by Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- It allows for both countries to use each other's airports, railways, roads, and ports for transit trade along designated transit corridors.
- The signed Agreement permits Afghanistan trucks access to the Wagah border with India, where Afghan goods will be offloaded onto Indian trucks, but does not permit Indian goods to be loaded onto trucks for transit back to Afghanistan.
- It does not offer Afghanistan the right to import Indian goods across Pakistani territory.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. The recent judgment of the Supreme Court on the entitlement of the disabled people to benefits on par with the SC/STs helps uphold the rights of the disabled as mentioned under the Constitution and the existing legislation. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words) (GS Paper 1/Social Issues)
2. Unlike most countries which have announced large fiscal stimulus to revive their economies, India has followed a calibrated approach, which does not lean much on direct fiscal spending, but emphasizes on reforms. Evaluate the significance and concerns associated with such an approach. (10 marks, 150 words) (GS Paper 3/Economy)

