

31 Jul 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. ‘Why no Parliament debate on NEP?’

Context:

The Union Cabinet has approved the new National Education Policy. While the New National Education policy has been largely welcomed, concerns have been raised for not having presented it before the Parliament for discussion before approval.

For Key Highlights of the National Education Policy, [click here](#).

Challenges:

- It has been opined that the challenge of revising the 1986 policy is to ensure aspiration is matched by implementation.
- Education being a concurrent subject and most of the states having their own school boards, state governments would have to be brought on board for effective implementation of the policy.
- Critics point out that the goal of a 50% gross enrolment ratio in higher education and 100% in secondary school education could be tough since it is currently 25.8% in higher education & 68% in Class 9.
- It is pointed out that more tangible and realisable targets should have been set for research.
 - Total investment on research and innovation in India declined from 0.84% of GDP in 2008 to 0.6% in 2018.
 - There are currently only 15 researchers in India per 100,000 of the population, compared with 111 in China.
- Concerns are being raised as the policy is silent about the upgrade of school infrastructure and shortage of qualified and trained teachers.
 - Placing the burden of pre-primary education on the overstretched, under-funded and under-equipped anganwadis could prove to be disastrous.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. China conducts drills in South China Sea

Context:

Despite growing tensions in the contested waters of the South China Sea, Beijing recently conducted high-intensity naval exercises there.

Details:

- China is locked in disputes with neighbours including India, Japan and Vietnam.
- China's expanding military presence in the region has worried several of its neighbours.
- It has infuriated other nations by building artificial islands with military installations in parts of the sea.

Global Reaction:

- The U.S. declared Beijing's claims to most of the sea illegal, ramping up support for Southeast Asian nations with claims to parts of it.
- It has vowed to stand up against Beijing's territorial claims to much of the South China Sea, including the contested Paracel Islands.
- The U.S. regularly conducts so-called "freedom of navigation operations" in the South China Sea in order to stand up to Beijing.
- Australia has also rejected Beijing's territorial and maritime claims in the sea, saying there was no legal basis for several of China's claims.

Read more about the [South China Sea dispute](#).

2. Clarifying LAC could create new disputes: Chinese envoy

Context:

China's Ambassador to India, Sun Weidong has asserted that China was not in favour of resuming the process of clarifying the Line of Actual Control (LAC) because it could create new disputes.

Details:

- According to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), there has been some progress made towards complete disengagement along the LAC, but the disengagement process has as yet not been completed.
- The Senior Commanders of the two sides will meet in the near future to work out steps in this regard.

Concerns:

- India has been particularly worried after the Indian Army reported that the Chinese PLA had not yet withdrawn troops from several face-off points.
- India is also worried as China has not yet shown signs of thinning out the large number of troops it deployed in the recent past, in the depth areas on its side of the LAC – the de facto border between the two nations.
- With no settled border between the two nations, the LAC in the western sector and the McMahon Line in the eastern sector serve as the de facto boundary between the two nations.
- The two sides, however, have mutually conflicting perceptions about the alignment of both the lines, which often lead to soldiers of the Indian Army and the Chinese PLA transgressing the LAC into each other's territory.

For an in-depth understanding of the India-China Border Clash, read [Indo-China Border Standoff](#).

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY**1. SC looks to save both animals and crops****Context:**

The [Supreme Court](#) has underlined the urgent need to find an alternative to killing marauding wild animals as vermin even while protecting crops from them.

Concerns:

- Human encroachments into forests are driving wild animals away from their natural habitats, forcing them to foray into human settlements for food.
- Man-animal conflict on the rise is leading to both killing of wildlife and crop loss.

Read more about man-animal conflict, covered in [5th June 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Vermin:

- Vermin refers to pests or animals which spread diseases or destroy crops or livestock.
- In India, Section 62 of the [Wildlife Protection Act, 1972](#) empowers the states to send a list of wild animals to the Centre requesting it to declare them vermin for selective slaughter.

- The Centre is empowered to declare wild animals other than those listed in Schedules I & II to be vermin for a specified area and period.
- The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 divides species into 'schedules' I to V. Schedule I members are the best protected.

2. Parliamentary panel to discuss draft EIA

Context:

The Parliamentary Committee of Science and Technology headed by Former Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh will deliberate on the subject at its meeting.

Background:

Former Environment Minister had raised objections to the draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification 2020.

This topic has been covered in the 26th July 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis. [Click here](#) to read.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: EDUCATION

1. An education policy that is sweeping in its vision

Context:

- The approval of the new National Education Policy by the Union Cabinet.

Background:

Challenges in the Educational sector:

- India faces many challenges in providing quality education to children and the youth.
- Despite many schemes like the [Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan](#), there continues to be a **lack of adequate resources and capacity in the public education system**.
- **Poor learning outcomes** have been a consistent concern in India as indicated by the Annual Status of Education Report. Primary schools have recorded poor literacy and numeracy outcomes.
- The dropout levels in middle and secondary schools have been significant.
- India faces huge inequality challenges. The challenge faced by the disadvantaged and disabled in accessing quality education is only further deepening the inequality in India.
- The increasing private sector share in school education has led to the **rapid commercialisation of the critical educational sector in India**. Despite the [Right to Education Act](#), fee regulations exist only in

some States even now. This can lead to exclusion of the disadvantaged classes while further accentuating access asymmetries.

- The presence of multiple mother tongues in India and the lack of adequate English language skills in the populace of the country pose critical questions on the language of education in India.
- There has been a persistent **mismatch between the knowledge and skills imparted in degree courses and the job requirements**.

Details:

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:

- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks the fourth major policy initiative in education since Independence. It replaces the **1986 National Education Policy**.
- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is based on two committee reports and extensive nationwide consultations.
 - Recommendations made by the **Committee for Evolution of the New Education Policy (NEP) Chaired by T S R Subramanian (2016)** and a **panel headed by K. Kasturirangan (2018)** have been incorporated in the NEP.
- NEP 2020 seeks to address the entire gamut of education from preschool to doctoral studies, and from professional degrees to vocational training.

For more information on this, refer to:

[CNA dated July 30, 2020](#)

Significance:

Necessity of the policy:

- Given the importance of education in the process of national development, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is an important step forward in India's transition from deprivation to development.
- Given **India's current demographic profile and the aspirations of the youth**, the new policy has come at the right time.
- The National Education Policy 2020 sets for itself the goal of transforming the system to meet the **needs of 21st Century India**.

Improving learning outcomes:

- By **adopting a 5+3+3+4 model for school education starting at age 3**, the NEP 2020 recognises the primacy of the formative years from ages 3 to 8 in shaping the child's future. This could help address the challenge of poor learning outcomes in schools.
- The NEP 2020 recognises the importance of **learning in the child's mother tongue** until at least Class 5. This can also play a critical role in helping improve learning outcomes.
- Among the many imperatives, the deadline to achieve universal literacy and numeracy by 2025 would lead to considerable progress at higher levels too.
- The NEP 2020 aims to **eliminate problems of pedagogy** through the following provisions:
 - The doing away with rigid straitjackets of arts, commerce and science streams in high school would allow the students to take up courses of their choice, thus **allowing flexibility**.
 - The **introduction of vocational courses with internships** would help streamline vocational education in India.
 - The introduction of early childhood education from age 3, the offering of school board examinations twice a year to help improve performance and moving away from rote learning mark important changes in approach to education in India.

- The NEP, 2020 thus rightly acknowledges the 21st century need for flexibility, **alternate pathways to learning, and self-actualisation**. These would give rise to better learning outcomes.

Language education:

- The NEP 2020 recognises the importance of learning in the child's mother tongue until at least Class 5. This along with exposure to English between ages 3 and 8 would allow for **multilingual skills** to become the USP of the educated Indian.

Higher Education:

- The NEP 2020 proposes a **multi-disciplinary higher education framework** with portable credits, and multiple exits with certificates, diplomas and degrees. This would provide interested students with the flexibility to plan their education according to their means and interests.
- The phasing out of the affiliated college system and recognizing the colleges as autonomous degree-granting institutions, empowers such colleges to contribute to the attainment of the **ambitious GER target of 50% by 2035**.

Research and Development:

- The Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities would form the apex of the higher education system. Research in these institutes would be supported by a **new National Research Foundation**. This will give the necessary impetus to research and development in India.

Inclusive education:

- Inclusion is a major theme of the NEP, 2020.
- The provision for a '**Gender-Inclusion Fund**', the **designation of aspirational districts as 'special educational zones'** and **special funds earmarked for the education of challenged children** will help ensure that no child is deprived of education. The creation of 'inclusion funds' will help socially and educationally disadvantaged children pursue education. These measures will help provide **equitable quality education to all**.
- The NEP 2020's **recognition for online education** would enable an increase in the GER and increase inclusivity in higher education.
- The **provision of an energy-filled breakfast**, in addition to the nutritious mid-day meal, will help children achieve better nutrition and also increase enrolment among the disadvantaged sections.

Regulatory system:

- The creation of a Higher Education Commission of India is a welcome move. The NEP 2020 proposes a single regulatory body with four verticals for standards-setting, funding, accreditation and regulation. This would provide for **"light but tight" oversight**.
- This would free the schools, colleges and universities from periodic "inspections" and place them on the path of self-assessment and voluntary declaration.

Challenges in implementation:

Resource allocation:

- The implementation of NEP 2020 will require enormous resources.
- The ambitious **target of public spending for the educational sector at 6% of GDP** though necessary, will be difficult to ensure, given the current tax-to-GDP ratio and competing claims on the national exchequer of healthcare, national security and other key sectors.

Language policy:

- The provision for education in mother tongue till class 5 could pose **challenges to the mobility of students in a large and diverse country like India.**
- The option to study in a language like English or Hindi that enables a transfer nationally needs adequate attention.

Resentment by states:

- The idea of a **National Higher Education Regulatory Council as an apex control organisation and a national body for aptitude tests is bound to be resented by States.**
- In a federal system, any educational reform can be implemented only with support from the States, and the Centre has the task of building a consensus on the ambitious plans.

Other challenges:

- The **lack of popularity of vocational training and the 'blue-collarisation' of vocations in the society** act as obstacles in the introduction of vocational training in school.
- The shift to a four-year undergraduate college degree system may lead to a situation where overzealous parents may stream their children into professions at the earliest thus **burdening the students further.**

Way forward:

- Apart from resource allocation, there is a **need for public and political will** to ensure the targets set by the NEP, 2020 are achieved.
- **Private investment in the educational sector will have to complement the public expenditure in the sector.**

Category: HEALTH

1. Banking on serology

Context:

- Serological survey of COVID-19.

Background:

Serological surveys:

- **Serological surveys are usually used to quantify the proportion of people or animals in a population positive for a specific pathogen.**
- Such serological surveys are increasingly being used by States.
- The prominent objective behind such surveys is **to check for levels of 'herd immunity'**, or if 60%-70% of the population have encountered the infection. This level of exposure is believed to be effective in protecting the rest of those uninfected.

Details:

- The analysis of the surveys shows high exposure to the SARS- CoV-2 in cities like Mumbai and Delhi.

- An estimated three in five, or 57% of those tested in Mumbai slums had been exposed to the virus and had developed antibodies against it as compared to 16% of those tested in residential societies of Mumbai.
- Delhi's seroprevalence study has shown that nearly a quarter of the 21,000-odd samples tested had been exposed to the virus and some of the densest districts had over 20% prevalence.
- Similar observations have been made in surveys from cities like Ahmedabad.

High infection rates:

- The result of the surveys points to a **higher prevalence of the virus in India**. This seems to support previous observations by the Indian Council of Medical Research which had predicted that the numbers of those infected by the virus were many multiples of those that were being reflected in official confirmed-case statistics.
- This points to the fact that **COVID-19 may be more infectious than previously believed**.
- It also indicates that in the absence of a reliable vaccine, the vast majority of people everywhere continue to be vulnerable.

Low fatality:

- A large proportion of those in whom antibodies were detected was asymptomatic and this pointed to the fact that the fatality rate may be much lower than the existing values.

Conclusion:

- Given the absence of knowledge about how long antibodies last and the extent to which they protect from fresh infections, **herd immunity should not be pursued by a state as a matter of policy**.
- Serology surveys must be only used as crude pointers to understand the progress of the pandemic.

F. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Tidbits

1. In the red, Railways puts on hold all non-safety work

What's in News?

The Ministry of Railways has suspended all new/umbrella works included in the 'Pink Book' in 2020-21 in view of the unprecedented fall in revenue caused by the [COVID-19](#) pandemic.

- The pandemic has brought passenger train operations to a grinding halt.
- Works that were approved for 2019-20 but made insignificant physical progress would also be frozen until further orders, except those which were essentially required for the safe operation of trains.

Note:

- The Railways received a budgetary allocation of ₹70,000 crore for 2020-21 and an outlay for capital expenditure amounting to ₹1.61 lakh crore.

- Of this, ₹20,000 crore is earmarked for funding critical safety-related works under the Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK).

2. Gandhi-King initiative passes U.S. House committee

What's in News?

A Bill, authored by American civil rights leader and lawmaker John Lewis, that seeks to establish an exchange programme between India and the U.S. to study the work and legacies of Mahatma Gandhi and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., has passed an important committee in the U.S. House of Representatives.

- It will establish annual scholar and student exchange programmes for Indians and Americans to study the leaders' legacies.
- Students would visit historic sites in India and the U.S., relevant to India's freedom struggle and the U.S.'s civil rights movement.
- It seeks to establish the Gandhi-King Global Academy, a conflict resolution initiative based on the principles of non-violence.
- The establishment of the U.S.-India Gandhi-King Development Foundation is proposed.
 - It would be tasked with administering grants to NGOs that work in health, pollution and climate change, education and empowerment of women.
- The Bill will need to be voted through the House and Senate before it becomes law.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) :

1. It is an initiative of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.
2. ARISE initiative under the AIM is a national mentor network in collaboration with the public sector, corporates and institutions, to support all the initiatives of the mission.
3. AIM-iCREST is an incubator capabilities enhancement programme for creating high-performance start-ups.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) is a flagship initiative set up by the NITI Aayog to promote innovation and entrepreneurship across the length and breadth of the country.
- ARISE (Atal Research & Innovation for Small Enterprises) is an initiative under the AIM to stimulate innovation and research in the MSME industry.

- AIM-iCREST is an incubator capabilities enhancement programme for a robust ecosystem for creating high-performance start-ups.
- Mentor India Campaign under AIM is a national mentor network in collaboration with the public sector, corporates and institutions, to support all the initiatives of the mission.

Q2. Memba Tribe belongs to which of the following regions?

- a. Arunachal Pradesh
- b. Kerala
- c. Nagaland
- d. Gujarat

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

The last Indian village – Bishing, is closest to the McMahon Line, and it demarcates the boundary between China's Tibet region and Arunachal Pradesh. The Memba tribe which has a population of 100 stays in that village.

Q3. Which of the following committee/s is/are associated with the National Education Policy?

1. T.S.R. Subramanian Committee
2. K. Kasturirangan Committee
3. Madhav Gadgil Committee
4. Bibek Debroy Committee

Choose the correct option:

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- 'Committee for Evolution of the New Education Policy' under the Chairmanship of Shri T.S.R. Subramanian, submitted its report in May 2016.
- In 2017 a 'Committee for the Draft National Education Policy' was constituted under the Chairmanship of Dr. K. Kasturirangan.
- Kasturirangan Committee submitted the Draft National Education Policy, 2019.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to Assam Rifles:

1. The Assam Rifles is the oldest paramilitary force of India.

2. The administrative control of the Assam Rifles lies with the Defence Ministry, while the operational control is with the Home Ministry.

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 Assam Rifles is the oldest paramilitary force of India. The unit can trace its lineage back to a paramilitary police force that was formed under the British in 1835 called Cachar Levy. The administrative control of Assam Rifles lies with the Home Ministry, while the operational control is with the Defence Ministry.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Analyze how the National Education Policy, 2020 aims to address the existing challenges in the educational sector and also rightly acknowledges the 21st century educational needs. (15 marks, 250 words)(GS paper 2/Education)
2. What is meant by serological survey and herd immunity? Discuss the significance and limitations of serological studies. (10 marks, 150 words)(GS paper 2/Health)