

# 19 Jul 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

### A. GS 1 Related

#### Category: GEOGRAPHY

#### 1. Previously unknown faults at the foot of the Himalaya discovered

##### Context:

- Scientific study of faults along the Himalayas

##### Details:

- Data from an oil and gas exploration company has helped geologists discover **a series of faults at the foot of the Himalaya**.
  - Faults are discontinuities or cracks that are the result of differential motion within the earth's crust. Vertical or lateral slippage of the crust along the faults causes an earthquake

##### **Methodology of the study:**

- The study looked into the **seismic reflection data**. In this method, seismic waves are produced by small explosions at multiple sources, and multiple recorders called geophones record the sound echoing off layers beneath the surface.
- The signals are combined to make an image showing layers of the earth's surface through the top few kilometres of the Earth's crust.
- The researchers were able to identify the faults because the pattern of layers showed bends.

##### **Significance of the findings:**

- This network of faults shows that the **Himalayan deformation reaches further [about 40 kilometres further south] than previously thought** hence highlighting the need to look below the surface, and further afield, to fully understand earthquakes and structures within the Himalaya.

##### Concerns:

##### **For Nepal:**

- This newly discovered fault system in the southeastern region of Nepal has the potential to cause earthquakes in Nepal.
  - The **2015 Nepal earthquakes** occurred much within the Himalayan mountain belt and the newly discovered faults may not have moved in that event.

**For India:**

- Though the newly discovered faults don't appear to extend into India, seismic waves from an earthquake occurring on them might **affect regions of India near the border**.
- Other yet to be discovered similar faults might be present elsewhere along the southern edge of the Himalaya and might extend beneath northern India.

**Way forward:**

- Given the challenges with earthquake prediction, **general earthquake preparedness** is most important. **Earthquake resistant buildings and infrastructure** can play an important role in this direction.

For more information on the earthquake preparedness refer: [CNA 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2020](#).

**Category: SOCIAL ISSUES****1. Students with disabilities struggle with online classes****Context:**

- A report titled '**Digital education in India: Will students with disabilities miss the bus?**' based on surveys conducted by Swabhiman — a community-based organisation, and the disability legislation unit of eastern India of the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People has been released recently.

**Details:**

- A majority of students with disabilities, in response to the survey, have said that online learning was proving to be a big hurdle to them.
- Majority of the students with disabilities were finding it hard to cope with online education and feared falling behind in learning due to their inability to access distance learning methods.

**Challenges:**

- **No sign language interpreters** were present in the webinars which severely impairs its utility to students with speech impairment.
- There have been claims of students with disabilities not being given attention by the teachers. The clubbing of children with disabilities with other children into one group fails to recognize the special needs of the disabled.
- A large majority of such students also **do not know how to use technology**. The use of technology poses a huge challenge to children with visual impairment and intellectual challenges.
- A large proportion of teachers have stated that they **did not have accessible educational material, suitable for online learning**.

### Conclusion:

- There is the need for **study material in formats suitable for children with disabilities**. There is the need for an **inclusive approach** considering the special needs of the disabled children.

## B. GS 2 Related

### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

#### 1. Govt. mulls Australia's entry into Malabar drill

##### Context:

- Inclusion of Australia into the Malabar naval exercise.

##### Background:

- The **Malabar exercise** began as a bilateral exercise between India and the U.S. in 1992 and was expanded into a **trilateral format with the inclusion of Japan in 2015**. The Malabar exercise has grown in scope and complexity over the years.
- Japan and the U.S. have been pressing India for Australia's inclusion in Malabar. Australia first requested for observer status in the trilateral exercise in April 2017. **India has been reluctant to include Australia due to China's sensitivities.**

##### **India's approach:**

- While India has been reluctant to accept Australia's participation in Malabar exercise, the **bilateral cooperation between India and Australia has gone up significantly** over the years.
- Recently, India and Australia have signed the long-pending **Mutual Logistics Support (MLSA) agreement**, elevated their partnership to **Comprehensive Strategic partnership** and have also announced a joint declaration on a shared vision for maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

##### Details:

- A key meeting of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has discussed the issue of inviting Australia for the trilateral Malabar naval exercise with Japan and the United States. However, no final decision has been taken yet.
- There has been the **increasing consensus at the official level that Australia should join the naval war games.**
- The final decision has been delayed in view of the ongoing standoff with China on the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

##### **Significance:**

- The move to include Australia will bring all Quad countries together as part of the annual war games and mark a **major shift for India's Indo-Pacific plans**. This could point towards the militarisation of the Quad coalition.
  - The **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad** is an informal strategic forum between the United States, Japan, Australia and India.

## C. GS 3 Related

### Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

#### 1. Mobile app KURMA helps save turtles in India

##### Context:

- Conservation efforts for Tortoise and freshwater turtles.

##### Background:

##### Threat perception:

- **Tortoise and freshwater turtles are among the most trafficked in the country.**
  - A report released in 2019 by **TRAFFIC**, an international wildlife trade monitoring organisation, showed that at least 200 tortoises and freshwater turtles fall prey to illicit poaching and smuggling every week, or 11,000 each year.
- 23 of the 29 species of freshwater turtle and tortoise species found in India come under the threatened category in the IUCN Red List and are under severe existential threat due to human activities.

##### Details:

- Recently, a number of conservation agencies have launched a **citizen science initiative, a mobile-based application called KURMA**, aimed at turtle conservation.
- The application has been developed by the Indian Turtle Conservation Action Network (ITCAN) in collaboration with the Turtle Survival Alliance-India and Wildlife Conservation Society-India.
- This app not only provides a **digital database which helps identify species** but also provides the location of the nearest rescue centre for turtles across the country.
  - The KURMA App serves as a digital database, with a built-in digital field guide covering 29 species of freshwater turtles and tortoises of India, and information on turtle identification, distribution, vernacular names, and threats.

##### Significance:

- One of the major challenges for freshwater turtle conservation in the country is that wildlife crime prevention agencies are not sufficiently equipped to know how to distinguish one species from the other, or their protection status in accordance with CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) and the **Wildlife Protection Act**. The KURMA app helps overcome this problem.

- The information of nearby rescue centres will aid **timely support to the rescued animals**.

## Category: ECONOMY

### 1. Levy on digital services is ambiguous, say tax experts

#### Context:

- Tax on e-commerce.

#### Background:

- Earlier, the government had imposed a **6% equalisation levy on online advertisement services by non-resident entities**. Later, the scope was expanded to online sale of goods and provision of services from April 1.
- The Finance Ministry has imposed an **equalisation levy of 2% on e-commerce supplies and services from April 1, 2020**.
  - Digital offerings such as online books/online games/online gaming services would come under the purview of the expanded equalisation levy. This is in line with digital tax enactments by some other economies.

#### Concerns:

- According to tax experts, the Finance Ministry's move has **led to a lot of ambiguity** leading to confusion and increased litigation.
- There are concerns that the way the provisions of the new tax were worded, one could also interpret the same to bring sale of physical goods as also services enjoyed offline within the purview of the equalisation levy.
  - This could end up taxing transactions where the medium is only the Internet. Many businesses negotiate supply and service agreements online and use electronic means for confirming contracts but the delivery of goods and/or services was largely offline. This **could affect the businesses** of such enterprises.

#### Way forward:

- There should be a distinction between digital goods/digital services on one hand and goods and services supplied using the digital medium as a mode of delivery or for transacting.
- The government needs to provide clarity to help avoid litigation on this matter.

### 2. 'Agriculture sector needs reforms for sustainability'

#### Context:

- Agricultural sector of India.

#### Challenges in Agricultural sector:

### **Low productivity:**

- The agriculture sector employs over 52% of the workforce, contributing to only 14% of the GDP.

### **Limitations of MSP:**

- Except for a few crops (rice, wheat) and a few States (Punjab, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh), the selling price for the farmer is 15-50% below the minimum support price (MSP).
- Increasing MSP has drawbacks as it can **trigger food inflation and macroeconomic instability**.

### **Low food processing in India:**

- The country's **food processing value addition is less than 10% of the produce** while for most developed economies this is 100 to 300%.

### **Way forward:**

- The country should **focus on sustainable yield improvements through scientific farming practices**.
- There is the need to **improve agriculture marketing to increase farmers' price realisation** through policy changes.
  - The use of technology and supply aggregation platforms for storage, logistics and better price discovery should be explored. There is the need to promote direct marketing through farmer producer organisations.
- An **Integrated Agriculture Export Mission** can be set up to scale up food processing and exports to increase value addition from 10% to 50%.

## **Category: INTERNAL SECURITY**

### **1. Govt. sends notice to Twitter after recent hacking**

#### **Context:**

- **Cyber attack** on the twitter platform.

#### **Background:**

#### **Bitcoin scam:**

- Twitter has stated that hackers manipulated employees and accessed tools only available to internal support teams to target **130 high profile twitter accounts**.
- Posts trying to dupe people into sending the hackers Bitcoin were tweeted by the official accounts of some high profile accounts.
- More than \$1,00,000 worth of the virtual currency was sent to email addresses mentioned in the tweets, according to Blockchain.com, which monitors crypto transactions.

#### **Details:**



- India's **cybersecurity** nodal agency **CERT-In** has issued a notice to Twitter asking it for full details of the recent global hack, as it sought complete information on the number of Indian users affected as well as the impact on data.
- The government has also demanded information of the vulnerability exploited by the attackers and the modus operandi of the attack. It also sought details of the remedial actions taken by Twitter to mitigate the impact of the hacking incident.

## D. GS 4 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## E. Editorials

### Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

#### 1. What is plea bargaining and how does it work?

##### Context:

- Recently, many members of the Tablighi Jamaat belonging to different countries have obtained release from court cases by means of plea bargaining.
  - Accused of violating visa conditions, these foreign nationals have walked free after pleading guilty to minor offences and paying the fines imposed by the court.

##### Background:

- Plea bargaining refers to a person charged with a criminal offence negotiating with the prosecution for a lesser punishment than what is provided in law by pleading guilty.
- It is **common in the United States**, and has been a successful method. It primarily involves **pre-trial negotiations between the accused and the prosecutor**. It may involve bargaining on the charge or in the quantum of sentence.

##### Details:

- In India, the concept of plea bargaining was not part of law until 2006.
  - There has always been a provision in the Code of Criminal Procedure for an accused to plead 'guilty' instead of claiming the right to a full trial, but it is not the same as plea bargaining.
  - The **Law Commission of India, in its 142nd Report**, mooted the idea of "concessional treatment" of those who plead guilty on their own volition, but was careful to underscore that it would not involve any plea bargaining with the prosecution.
- Plea bargaining was introduced in 2006 as part of a set of **amendments to the CrPC as Chapter XXI-A, containing Sections 265A to 265L**.

##### **Salient aspects of Indian provision:**



- Unlike in the U.S. and other countries, where the prosecutor plays a key role in bargaining with the suspected offender, the Indian code makes plea bargaining a process that **can be initiated only by the accused**.
  - The accused will have to apply to the court for invoking the benefit of bargaining.
- **Cases for which the practice is allowed are limited.**
  - Only someone who has been charge-sheeted for an offence that does not attract the death sentence, life sentence or a prison term above seven years can make use of the scheme. Other categories of cases that cannot be disposed of through plea bargaining are those that involve offences affecting the “socio-economic conditions” of the country or committed against a woman or a child below the age of 14.

### **Process:**

- The applicant should approach the court with a petition and affidavit stating that it is a **voluntary preference** and that he has understood the nature and extent of punishment provided in law for the offence.
- The court would then issue a notice to the prosecutor and the complainant or victim, if any, for a hearing.
- Thereafter, the court may permit the prosecutor, the investigating officer and the victim to hold a meeting for a “satisfactory disposition of the case”. The outcome may involve **payment of compensation and other expenses to the victim** by the accused.
- Once mutual satisfaction is reached, the court shall formalise the arrangement by way of a report signed by all the parties and the presiding officer. The accused may be sentenced to a prison term that is half the minimum period fixed for the offence.

### **Significance:**

- The **Justice Malimath Committee on reforms of the criminal justice system** endorsed the various recommendations of the Law Commission with regard to plea bargaining based on the following advantages offered by it.
  - Some of the advantages of the plea bargaining provision are that the practice would **ensure a speedy trial**, end uncertainty over the outcome of criminal cases, **save litigation costs** and relieve the parties of anxiety.
  - It would also have a positive impact on conviction rates. **Conviction rates are significantly high in such cases.**
  - This would also help avoid prolonged incarceration of undertrials without any progress in the case by reducing pendency of cases and subsequently help **decongest prisons**.
  - Moreover, it may help offenders make a fresh start in life.

### **Concerns:**

- Even though plea bargaining is available to those accused of criminal offences in India for over a decade, it is **not yet common or not used adequately**.

- Earlier judgments of various courts show **reservations on the use of the provision among the judiciary**. Some verdicts disapprove of bargaining with offenders.
- Courts are also very particular about the voluntary nature of the exercise, as **poverty, ignorance and prosecution pressure should not lead to someone pleading guilty of offences that they may not have committed**.

## Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### 1. Why is India out of the Chabahar rail project?

#### Context:

- Iran's decision to go it alone on the rail link project between Chabahar port to Zahedan.

#### Background:

For information on the Chabahar port project and recent developments refer: [CNA 15<sup>th</sup> July 2020](#).

#### Details:

- While the Chabahar port development has moved forward in the last five years, there was no development on the proposed railway line. After several threats and appeals to India, Iran said it was moving ahead to build the Chabahar-Zahedan line on its own this month, with approximately \$400 million from the National Development Fund of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

#### Significance of Chabahar to India:

- India-Iran relations are historic and India has sought to maintain these ties despite opposition from Iran's adversaries, namely the United States, Saudi Arabia and Israel. Though the Chabahar project would require a large investment, India has always weighed its strategic benefits above the costs.
- The Chabahar project would strengthen India and Iran ties as India looks to deal with its difficult neighbour to the west, Pakistan.
- A major trade and connectivity hub on Iran's coast in the form of Chabahar port would not only have given India an alternative route to Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan, but also has the potential to provide an Indian strategic counter to Pakistan's Gwadar port being developed by China close to Chabahar.
- The Chabahar trade zone could act as a major trade centre for India's energy imports and food and material exports coming from Kandla and Mundra ports.
- The associated rail project would have allowed India an independent corridor not only to Afghanistan, but also to Central Asia and Russia in the future.

#### Concerns for India:

- Despite the strategic potential of the project, India's investment in Chabahar has been held hostage to international policy shifts on Iran.
- S. policy has swung from one end to another in the last two decades. It placed heavy sanctions on Iran until nuclear talks between the P-5+1 (the U.S., the U.K., France, China, Russia and Germany) that began

in 2006, ended successfully with the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015. In 2018, however, U.S. President overturned the JCPOA, and re-imposed stringent sanctions on Iran.

- India's energy imports from Iran, which was its third largest supplier, has dropped to zero. Bilateral trade between India and Iran, which depended on a rupee-rial exchange mechanism, has stopped. This may have an economic impact for India too.
- Other Indian projects in Iran might also be affected.
- According to reports, India's ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL) has been cut out of the development of an Iranian gas field project, Farzad B, talks for which between the two sides had been happening since 2009.
- The announcements on the two projects come even as news of a China-Iran 25-year partnership for \$400 billion to build infrastructure and energy resources in Iran has been reported. This might indicate Iran's tilt towards China. China's growing inroads in Iran could make Indian projects there more unviable.
- There is worry that the Chabahar port project, the enduring symbol of India-Iran friendship, could become collateral damage in a larger proxy war between the U.S. and China.

### **Conclusion:**

- Though India's stakes in Chabahar continue to remain strong, and India would be able to use the railway line no matter who builds the railway line and the fact that India's monetary losses are minimal with respect to the railway project, there is the worry of reputational damage for India due to the current development.

For more information refer: [CNA 18<sup>th</sup> July 2020](#).

## **F. Tidbits**

### **1. In a first, Maharashtra to use drones to inspect power lines**

- Maharashtra has become the first State in the country to get the go-ahead to use drones for aerial surveillance and inspection of extra high voltage power transmission lines and towers.
- The move will reduce risk to staff, slash maintenance costs and minimise losses from outages

## **G. Prelims Facts**

### **1. Govt. opens up NDRF for individual donations**

- The Centre has allowed any person or institution to contribute to the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) for the purpose of disaster management as per Section 46(1)(b) of the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

### **State Disaster Response Fund:**

- The Home Ministry had invoked the **Disaster Management Act, 2005** notifying the pandemic as a "disaster," paving the way for the States to utilise the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) for treatment of patients and other logistics such as quarantine centres, setting up laboratories among other things.

- The other notified disasters are cyclone, drought, earthquake, fire, flood, tsunami, hailstorm, landslide, avalanche, cloudburst, pest attack, frost and cold waves.
- As per Section 46 of the DM Act, the “NDRF supplements the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) in case of a disaster of severe nature, provided adequate funds are not available in the SDRF”.
- The States have to submit **utilisation certificates**, pending which no future allocation is made.

## 2. Warm close-up

- The **Solar Orbiter** is a Sun-observing mission jointly organised by the **NASA and European Space Agency**.

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

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

1. Malabar exercise has been a trilateral exercise between India, U.S. and Japan since its inception in 1992.
2. Malabar exercise has always been conducted in Indian waters.
3. Australia has never participated in the Malabar exercise.

Options:

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1,2 and 3 only
- d. None of the above

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The Malabar exercise began as a bilateral exercise between India and the U.S. in 1992 and was expanded into a trilateral format with the inclusion of Japan in 2015.
- Malabar exercise is not restricted to Indian waters and has been previously held off the Japanese coast and Guam.
- Australia has previously participated in the Malabar exercise as a non-permanent participant.

Q2. Equalisation levy is associated with which of the following?

- a. Inter-country transfer of assets
- b. Digital services
- c. Wealth tax imposed on transfer of assets from parents to children
- d. Tax on companies for use of natural resources like water

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

- Earlier, the government had imposed a 6% equalisation levy on online advertisement services by non-resident entities. Later, the scope was expanded to online sale of goods and provision of services from April 1.
- The Finance Ministry has imposed an equalisation levy of 2% on e-commerce supplies and services from April 1, 2020.

**Q3. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?**

1. National Disaster Response Fund supplements the State Disaster Response Fund in case of a disaster of severe nature, provided adequate funds are not available in the State Disaster Response Fund.
2. The States have to submit utilisation certificates, pending which no future allocation is made from the National Disaster Response Fund to State Disaster Response Fund.

**Options:**

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

**Answer: c**

**Explanation:**

- As per Section 46 of the Disaster Management Act, the “NDRF supplements the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) in case of a disaster of severe nature, provided adequate funds are not available in the SDRF”.
- The States have to submit utilisation certificates, pending which no future allocation is made.

**Q4. The Solar Orbiter mission is associated with which of the following organization/s?**

1. NASA
2. European Space agency
3. ISRO

**Options:**

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

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

**Answer: c**

**Explanation:**

- Solar Orbiter is an international cooperative mission between the European Space Agency and NASA.

## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. The move to include Australia in the Malabar exercises would mark a major shift for India's Indo-Pacific plans. Comment. Also discuss the associated significance and concerns of such a move. (10 marks, 150 words) (GS paper2- International relations)
2. What is meant by plea bargaining? Discuss the salient provisions of plea bargaining mechanism in India. What are the advantages that this mechanism offers? (15 marks, 250 words) (GS paper2- Polity and Governance)