

01 Aug 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: EDUCATION

1. [KVs unlikely to change medium of instruction](#)

Context:

The Union Cabinet has approved the new National Education Policy.

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

Details:

- One of the recommendations of the New Education Policy is that the medium of instruction will be in Home Language/Mother tongue/Regional Language till at least Grade 5, and preferably till Grade 8 and beyond.
- The RTE Act 2009 also states that the medium of instruction, as far as practicable, shall be the mother tongue.
- The Centre is unlikely to implement the recommendations regarding the medium of instruction in Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs) or in schools affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education.
 - KVs are directly controlled by the Education Ministry.
- It is because the KVs and CBSE schools cater to the needs of people in transferable jobs and hence, it would not be practical to use students' mother tongues or regional languages as the medium of instruction.
- It is up to the State governments to decide on how this would be implemented in schools under their jurisdiction.
 - Education is a Concurrent Subject.
- In private unaided schools, parents' choice with regard to the medium of instruction would prevail.

Category: POLITY

1. Is Trump empowered to delay the election?

Context:

- The U.S. President Donald Trump has suggested, the November elections be delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Trump has displayed resistance for mail-in voting, making claims of a rigged election. He has implied that mail-in voting would allow election fraud to occur on a more widespread scale across the US, without offering any evidence.

Does the President of the U.S. have the powers to do so?

- According to the U.S. Constitution, it is Congress, not the President, that decides the timing of the elections.
- A federal law approved on January 25, 1845, has unambiguously set the election timing.
- It can only be changed by passing a new law. Such law would need the approval of both the House of Representatives and the Senate, and would be subject to legal challenges.
- Senior leaders have dismissed Mr. Trump's suggestion to postpone the election.

What's next?

- President Trump's first term is set to expire at noon on January 20, 2021.
- The 20th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution moved the beginning and ending of the terms of the President and the Vice-President from March 4 to January 20. These dates cannot be changed.
- Ordinarily, if the presidency is vacant, the Vice-President assumes charge.
 - But here, the terms of both President Trump and the Vice-President will expire on January 20.
- The House Speaker is the next in the line of succession.
 - But the two-year term of the current House expires on January 3, 2021. So, Speaker cannot assume the presidency.
- The next in line is the 'president pro tempore' of the Senate, largely a ceremonial position.
- According to Article 1, Section Three of the Constitution, the Vice-President is the president of the Senate, and the Senate should choose a president pro tem to act in the absence of the Vice-President.

- If elections are not held in November (for 23 Republican Senate seats and 12 Democrat seats), the current equation of the Senate would change.
- The Democrats would have a majority and they could elect a new president pro tem.

Read more about [Presidential Elections in India](#).

Note:

A presidential election has not been delayed ever in the 244-year history of the institution – not even during the Spanish Flu outbreak of 1918, or the American Civil War (1861 – 1865), or World War II.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. 1947 pact on Gurkha soldiers redundant: Nepal Minister

Context:

Foreign Minister of Nepal has said that the 1947 agreement among India, Nepal and the United Kingdom that deals with the military service of Gurkha soldiers has become redundant.

Background:

- Impressed by the discipline and ferocity of the Gurkha soldiers, following the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814-16, the British decided to recruit Gurkha soldiers in 1815.
- Ever since, the Gurkhas have fought on the side of the British Empire in almost every war, including both World Wars.
 - The Gurkhas are recruited every year at the British Gurkha camp at Pokhara in Nepal.
- After India's Independence in 1947, the question of allotting the 10 regiments of Gurkha soldiers was settled by the Britain-India-Nepal Tripartite Agreement.
- In 1948, the 11th Gurkha Rifles regiment was created in India in order to accommodate the Gurkhas who refused to depart with the now-British regiments.

Details:

- Nepal has proposed to the UK to review the 73-year-old tripartite agreement with India and Britain over the recruitment and deployment of Gurkha soldiers and their perks and facilities.
 - Gurkha veterans have been alleging that the U.K. has been discriminating against them.
- A possible bilateral arrangement with India regarding the Gurkha soldiers has been indicated by the minister.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Fiscal deficit touches 83% of full-year target

Context:

As per official data, the Centre's fiscal deficit for the first three months of fiscal 2020-21 is ₹6.62 lakh crore (83% of the budgeted target for the year).

What is Fiscal Deficit?

- It is the difference between the government's expenditure requirements and its receipts.
- It is the money that the government needs to borrow during the year. A surplus arises if receipts are more than expenditure.
- It indicates the total borrowing requirements of the government from all sources.
- In India, the [Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management \(FRBM\) Act](#) suggests bringing the fiscal deficit down to about 3% of the GDP as the ideal target.

Concerns:

- Economists opine that, given the government's additional borrowing plans, both to meet stimulus spending and bridge the revenue shortfall as a result of the pandemic, the fiscal deficit may end up as high as 8% of GDP (exceeding the budget's goal).
 - As per the [budget 2020-21](#), the fiscal deficit is targeted at 3.5% of GDP.
- The Union Government has received ₹1.53 lakh crore (in terms of tax, non-tax revenue and loan recoveries) from April to June 2020. This is less than 7% of budget estimates for the full year.

The Centre has already announced plans for additional borrowing that amounts to about 5.7% of GDP, and then on top of that, some more stimulus spending may be undertaken in the latter part of the fiscal year.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Diluting the EIA process spells a path of no return

The editorial talks about the 2020 draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification and the reasons why it has widely been criticised.

What is Environment Impact Assessment?

- Environmental Impact Assessment or EIA is the process or study which predicts the effect of a proposed industrial/infrastructural project on the environment.
- It prevents the proposed activity/project from being approved without proper oversight or taking adverse consequences into account.

Environment Impact Assessment in India:

- A signatory to the Stockholm Declaration (1972) on Environment, India enacted laws to control water (1974) and air (1981) pollution soon after.

- But it was only after the [Bhopal gas leak disaster](#) in 1984 that the country legislated an umbrella act for environmental protection in 1986.
- Under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, India notified its first EIA norms in 1994, setting in place a legal framework for regulating activities that access, utilise, and affect (pollute) natural resources.
- Every development project has been required to go through the EIA process for obtaining prior environmental clearance ever since.
- The 1994 EIA notification was replaced with a modified draft in 2006.
- The 2006 draft attempted to decentralise the process. It increased the number of projects that required an environmental clearance, but also created appraisal committees at the level of both the Centre and States, the recommendations of which were made a qualification for a sanctioning. The programme also mandated that pollution control boards hold a public hearing to glean the concerns of those living around the site of a project.
- In early 2020, the government redrafted it again to incorporate the amendments and relevant court orders issued since 2006, and to make the EIA “process more transparent and expedient.”

Concerns being raised:

Critics opine that the new draft is riddled with problems.

- It enables a sweeping clearance system to a number of critical projects that previously required an EIA of special rigour. They will, under the new notification, be subject to less demanding processes. These include aerial ropeways, metallurgical industries, and a raft of irrigation projects, among others.
- It proposes to bolster the government’s discretionary power while limiting public engagement in safeguarding the environment.
- While projects concerning national defence and security are naturally considered strategic, the government gets to decide on the “strategic” tag for other projects.
 - The 2020 draft says no information on “such projects shall be placed in the public domain”.
- The new draft exempts a long list of projects from public consultation.
 - Linear projects such as roads and pipelines in border areas will not require any public hearing.
 - The border area (is defined as “area falling within 100 kilometres aerial distance from the Line of Actual Control with bordering countries of India) would cover much of the Northeast, the repository of the country’s richest biodiversity.
- All inland waterways projects and expansion/widening of national highways will be exempt from prior clearance.
 - These include roads that cut through forests and dredging of major rivers.
- It also does away with the need for public consultation for a slew of different sectors, negating a redeeming feature of the 2006 notification.
- The two most significant changes in the new draft are the provisions for post-facto project clearance and abandoning the public trust doctrine.
 - Projects operating in violation of the Environment Act will now be able to apply for clearance.
 - All a violator will need are two plans for remediation and resource augmentation corresponding to 1.5-2 times the ecological damage assessed and economic benefit derived due to violation.
 - In an order, the Supreme Court held “ex post facto environmental clearances” contrary to law.
- Violations have to be reported either by a government authority or the developers themselves. There is no scope for any public complaint about violations.

Read more about the objections raised by the former Environment Minister, Jairam Ramesh to the draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification 2020. [Click here.](#)

Conclusion:

There is no doubt that a mere strengthening of the existing EIA norms will not by itself be sufficient. There is a need for a renewed vision for the country; one that sees the protection of the environment as not merely a value unto itself but as something even more foundational to our democracy.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. War and talks

Context:

Afghanistan's government and the Taliban have announced a three-day ceasefire for the Muslim Eid al-Adha holiday.

Background:

- Under the US-Taliban deal signed in February 2020, the Afghan government is supposed to release up to 5,000 Taliban prisoners while the insurgents would free about 1,000 Afghan security force personnel.
- The prison swap was delayed because of a political feud between President Ashraf Ghani and his rival Abdullah Abdullah. Subsequently, both leaders reached a power-sharing deal.

This topic has been covered in the 18th May 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis. [Click here](#) to read.

Details:

- The ceasefire decision comes as a relief for Afghans who have seen unabated violence.
- This is the third official respite since the war started in 2001.
 - In June 2018 and May 2020, the Taliban had briefly ended hostilities to mark the end of the holy month of Ramadan.
 - On both occasions, it refused to extend the ceasefire, returning to war as soon as the celebrations were over.

Significance:

- At present, hopes are high that the truce could be extended as Kabul and the insurgents are preparing to launch the intra-Afghan talks that were promised in the U.S.-Taliban deal.
- Both sides have now agreed to kick-start talks after Eid and they could do it in a peaceful environment if the ceasefire is extended.

Concerns:

There are underlying issues that continue to plague the peace process.

- When the U.S. entered into talks with the insurgent group, it did not insist on a ceasefire. So the [Taliban](#) continues to engage in war and talks simultaneously.
- The Americans, badly looking for a way out of the conflict, kept the Afghan government out of the peace process.
- After the U.S.-Taliban agreement was signed in February 2020, according to which the U.S. agreed to pull out its troops in return for security assurances from the Taliban, the onus was on a weakened Afghan government to start talks even as the Taliban continued attacks.
- Infighting made matters worse for the government.

- The presidential election saw a record low turnout.
- The results, announced months later, were contested by the main opposition candidate, Abdullah Abdullah, who formed a parallel administration.
- He backed off, but only after being appointed the head of the High Council for National Reconciliation that will lead talks with the Taliban.
- These factors allowed a resurgent Taliban to maintain the upper hand in both war and in talks.

F. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Tidbits

1. Indian bid for airport too high: Dhaka

What's in News?

A Chinese firm, Beijing Urban Construction Group (BUCG) has been awarded the contract for construction of a new terminal at MAG Osmani International Airport at Sylhet, Bangladesh.

- The proximity of Sylhet to India's northeast and a possible concentration of Chinese workers in the area has given rise to security concerns.
- Bangladesh Foreign Minister quoted financial reasons for choosing the Chinese firm over India's Larsen & Toubro that had submitted its bid for the same project.

2. Pension for those jailed during Emergency scrapped

What's in News?

The Maharashtra Government has decided to discontinue the pension provided to those detained under the National Emergency under the provisions of the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA).

- The scheme was launched in July 2018 under which over 3,000 beneficiaries were to get ₹10,000 per month under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) pension scheme.

Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA):

- MISA came into force in 1971 when Indira Gandhi was Prime Minister and it gave the government and law enforcement agencies the right to detain certain individuals in order to maintain internal security.
- Under this act, a person could be detained for a maximum period of 12 months.
- In the same decade, Gandhi declared a [national emergency \(1975-1977\)](#), under which, journalists, scholars and activists, among others, were detained without trial.

3. Forced decoupling will hurt India and China: Chinese envoy

What's in News?

As India reassesses its trade relations with China and considers a range of moves to reduce dependencies, China has called for equal treatment for its firms.

- The Chinese envoy has said that forced decoupling between the two economies is harmful to both.
- He cited the statistics from 2018-19 showing that “92% of Indian computers, 82% of TVs, 80% of optical fibre, 85% of motorcycle components are imported from China.”
- He asserted that various such examples are the reflection of globalisation and that the trend is difficult to reverse.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to the President of India:

1. The President of India is elected for 5 years, is eligible for immediate re-election and can serve for two terms.
2. The process of impeachment of the President can begin in either the Lok Sabha or the Rajya Sabha.
3. The President can resign from his office at any time by addressing the resignation letter to the Lok Sabha.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

- There is no limit on how many times a presidential candidate can contest elections and serve as the President of India. He can be elected for 5 years, is eligible for immediate re-election and can serve for any number of terms.
- The process of impeachment of the President can begin in either the Lok Sabha or the Rajya Sabha.
- The President can resign from his office at any time by addressing the resignation letter to the Vice President.

Q2. Mullaperiyar Dam dispute is between which of the following states?

1. Karnataka
2. Kerala
3. Tamil Nadu
4. Andhra Pradesh

Choose the correct option:

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

- c. 1, 3 and 4 only
- d. 1 and 3 only

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Mullaperiyar Dam is a masonry gravity dam on the Periyar River in the Indian state of Kerala.
- The dam is located in Kerala on the river Periyar, but is operated and maintained by Tamil Nadu state.
- The dispute between Kerala and Tamil Nadu states is because of the control and safety of the dam and the validity and fairness of the lease agreement. The dispute began in 1998 when Tamil Nadu wanted to raise the height of the water level and Kerala opposed it.

Q3. Arrange the following core sectors in the ascending order of their respective weights in the Index of Industrial Production:

1. Steel
2. Natural Gas
3. Coal
4. Crude Oil
5. Cement

Choose the correct option:

- a. 5, 2, 4, 3, 1
- b. 5, 4, 2, 1, 3
- c. 3, 5, 2, 4, 1
- d. 2, 3, 4, 3, 1

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

Weight of Core Sectors in Index of Industrial Production (IIP): Cement<Natural Gas<Crude Oil<Coal<Steel.

Read more about the [Index of Industrial Production \(IIP\)](#).

Q4. Consider the following statements:

1. La Nina occurs because of the cooling of the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean.
2. It causes greater than normal monsoons in India and Southeast Asia.

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: c

Explanation:

La Nina is a climate pattern that describes the cooling of surface ocean waters along the tropical west coast of South America. La Nina is considered to be the counterpart to El Nino, which is characterized by unusually warm ocean temperatures in the equatorial region of the Pacific Ocean. La Nina occurs because of the cooling of the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean. It causes greater than normal monsoons in India and Southeast Asia.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan will require patience and compromise among all parties. In light of this statement, discuss the challenges involved in the Afghan peace process. (15 Marks, 250 Words).
2. Outline the evolution of Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) in India and critically examine the draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification 2020. (15 Marks, 250 Words).