

04 Aug 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. MGNREGS running out of funds

Context:

Government data shows that the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act ([MGNREGA](#)) scheme has used up almost half its allocated funds, one-third of the way through the financial year.

- Azim Premji Foundation (APF) conducted the survey in 13 states on the functioning of the Scheme.

Issues:

- The scheme has used up more than ₹48,500 crore out of the expanded ₹1 lakh crore allocation announced following the COVID-19 outbreak.
- With this, on the ground:
 - A number of gram panchayats in vulnerable areas have already exhausted their funds for the scheme.
 - Employment rates are dropping as the monsoon stops work in several States.
 - There are fewer livelihood options for more than four lakh families across the country which have completed their allotted 100 days of work.
- Ground observations suggest the payments are more or less in time where banking correspondents are in place.
- Payments through banks continue to be inefficient as rural branches of banks have limited capacity and infrastructure, and are often overwhelmed by overcrowding.
- Wages in the scheme are 25-30% lower than the minimum wages for agricultural workers in most States.

Recommendations:

- APF has recommended that the Centre allocate another ₹1 lakh crore to the scheme, and double the permitted work limit to 200 days per household.
- In several Gram Panchayats, the approved projects have already been exhausted. There is an urgent need for a quick process of creating further sets of projects.
- The entire process cycle of implementation and making payments needs to be eased to respond to the current needs for work and payment.
- There is a need to put money into the hands of rural consumers via MGNREGA as it is key to kickstarting the economy.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. SpaceX with NASA crew is back home

Context:

The first commercial crewed mission to the International Space Station (ISS) has returned to Earth.

Background:

- The Dragon capsule launched to the space station on a Falcon 9 rocket, was supplied by SpaceX.
- Elon Musk's SpaceX became the first private company to send humans to orbit.

This topic has been covered in the [1st June 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Details:

- The SpaceX Dragon Capsule carrying two astronauts came down in the Gulf of Mexico, south of Pensacola on Florida's Gulf coast.
- The spacecraft was commercially built and operated to carry people to and from orbit.
- The touchdown marks the first crewed US water landing in 45 years.

- The last time NASA astronauts returned from space to water was in 1975, in the Pacific to end a joint U.S.-Soviet mission known as Apollo-Soyuz.

Category: DEFENCE

1. Govt. issues draft policy to ramp up defence exports

Context:

Ministry of Defence (MoD) has put out a draft 'Defence Production & Export Promotion Policy (DPEPP) 2020' for public feedback.

Details:

DPEPP has been drafted with the vision to make India amongst the leading countries of the world in the defence sector, including aerospace and naval shipbuilding sectors, from design to production, with the active participation of public and private sector and thus fulfilling the twin objectives of self-reliance and exports.

Goals and objectives:

- To achieve a turnover of Rs 1,75,000 Crores (US\$ 25Bn) including export of Rs 35,000 Crore (US\$ 5 Billion) in Aerospace and Defence goods and services by 2025.
- To develop a dynamic, robust and competitive Defence industry, including Aerospace and Naval Shipbuilding industry to cater to the needs of Armed forces with quality products.
- To reduce dependence on imports and take forward "[Make in India](#)" initiatives through domestic design and development.
- To promote the export of defence products and become part of the global defence value chains.
- To create an environment that encourages R&D, rewards innovation, creates Indian IP ownership and promotes a robust and self-reliant defence industry.

What are the focus areas?

The Policy brings out multiple strategies under the following focus areas:

- Procurement Reforms
- Indigenization & Support to MSMEs/Startups
- Optimize Resource Allocation
- Investment Promotion, FDI & Ease of Doing Business
- Innovation and R&D
- Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) and Ordnance Factory Board (OFB)
- Quality Assurance & Testing Infrastructure
- Export Promotion

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Report on leopard sightings soon

What's in News?

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) is set to release a dedicated report on leopard sightings as part of its global tiger census.

Wildlife Institute of India (WII)

- WII is an autonomous institution under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- It is based in Chandrabani, Dehradun.
- Its functions include conducting specialised research in areas of study like Endangered Species, Biodiversity, Wildlife Management, Wildlife Policy, Wildlife Forensics, Habitat Ecology, Spatial Modelling, Eco-development, and Climate Change.
- Quadrennial tiger survey is the highlight of the WII, conducted in coordination with the Environment Ministry.
- The population of other animals is also estimated by relying on camera trap images.

Details:

- In 2014, the last formal census on India's leopards was conducted.
 - The census estimated the leopard's population at between 12,000 and 14,000.
 - 8,000 leopards were estimated in the vicinity of tiger habitats.
- In the latest Tiger Survey, cameras installed across 72,000 sq km of tiger habitat yielded 76,651 and 51,777 images of tigers and leopards respectively.

Issue:

- Critics have pointed out that conducting a leopard survey, along with the tiger survey is problematic because leopards are adapted to living on the edge of forests and human habitats, unlike the tiger which is an elusive creature.
- This had led to gross errors in estimating the true numbers of leopards.

Leopard

- Leopard (*Panthera pardus*) is the smallest of the big cats and is nocturnal.
- In India, the leopard (*Panthera pardus fusca*) is found in all forest types, from tropical rainforests to temperate deciduous and alpine coniferous forests.
- It is also found in dry scrubs and grasslands, the only exception being desert and the mangroves of Sundarbans.
- It shares its territory with the tiger in 17 states.

Conservation Status:

- It is classified under the 'vulnerable' category in the IUCN Red List.
- It is listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- It is included in Appendix I of [CITES](#).

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

<https://byjus.com>

1. Toxic brew

Context:

- Consumption of illicit liquor has led to the death of more than 100 people in Punjab.

Background:

- There have been many instances of **large-scale loss of life due to consumption of illicit liquor** in the recent past.
- Such major incidents have been reported recently in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Assam.

Details:

Health impact:

- The illicit liquor vendors in a bid to keep the costs low almost invariably use **toxic methanol** instead of ethanol.
- Consumption of illicit alcohol produces **long-term health impacts**. Illicit liquor, apart from causing death in a few cases, has also been reported to cause permanent damage in the form of blindness and tissue damage.

Apathy by government:

- The typical state government response in such cases has been providing financial relief for the affected families without addressing the root cause of the problem.
- Notably, many States have **accorded low priority to revamping the excise administration and policing**, resulting in low regulation of the illicit liquor trade.

Issue of corruption:

- There are also allegations that often **corrupt bureaucracies allow the sale of illicit liquor by illicit liquor vendors in lieu of some share in the sales proceeds**.
- Illicit liquor is sold openly by small-time vendors in some places without the fear of the state.

Impact of the pandemic:

- The issue has become further complicated during the COVID-19 pandemic, as people desperate for alcohol consumed hand sanitiser as a substitute, most recently in Andhra Pradesh.
- People with limited means to consume commercial alcohol often turn to the cheaper illicit liquor.

Way forward:

Priority area for the state:

- The state must show determination to end the sale of illicit liquor. Governments should regulate the quality of legal alcoholic drinks, while **actively tracing and tracking illicit alcohol**.

Ensuring health infrastructure:

- The **capability of the health system in every district needs to be raised**, to reduce the damage from methanol through immediate, simple detoxification therapies.

Public health campaign:

- A sustained public health campaign to wean people away from the drinking habit and to warn them about the effects of contaminants in illicit liquor are key interventions that can help reduce the instances of fatalities caused by the consumption of illicit liquor.
- The **health communication** about harm from alcohol is particularly relevant during the pandemic, since there is evidence of reduced immunity to viruses among those who are chronic alcohol consumers.

Cooperation with community:

- To succeed in its efforts against the sale of illicit liquor, the state can consider **cooperation with the community, particularly from women's groups**. This would allow the administration to address the issue at the grass-root level with the involvement of active stakeholders like women who often have to bear the brunt of alcohol consumption.

Category: GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTIONS

1. Profiteering during a pandemic

Background:

- The **nationwide lockdown phase witnessed an exponential rise in prices of essential items** like masks and sanitizers across the country.
- With the rise in the number of cases, there have been reports of **private hospitals overcharging patients**, even after state governments capped COVID-19 treatment charges. In some private hospitals, patients have been asked to pay lakhs even before being allotted beds.
- The **cost of medicines like Remdesivir has also shot up** leading to a situation where the poor have been unable to afford the essential medicines.
- There have been reports of overcharging by the ambulance owners too in these pandemic times.
- Buses operated by private agencies have charged exorbitant fares from poor migrants looking to go back to their native places.

Details:

Epidemic Diseases Act:

- The British enacted the **Epidemic Diseases Act in 1897** empowering the government to implement any measures that would prevent the outbreak or spread of any disease.
- According to the law, **anyone disobeying the orders of any public servant can be punished under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code**.
- However, the provisions of the Epidemic Diseases Act in 1897 seem insufficient to effectively curb the economic exploitation of the common man during the pandemic crisis.

For more information on this topic, refer to:

Way forward:

- The article argues in favour of **incorporating a provision in the Disaster Management Act of 2005 to make overcharging the public a punishable offence.**
- Denying admission in hospitals, refusing to bury the dead in cemeteries, etc. need to be made punishable offences.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN)

- The Health Ministry has announced the use of the Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN).
- eVIN is an innovative technological solution aimed at strengthening immunisation supply chain systems across the country.
- This is being implemented under the National Health Mission (NHM), to get real-time information on vaccine stocks and flows, and storage temperatures across all cold chain points in the country.

Note:

This system has been used with the requisite customization during the COVID pandemic for ensuring the continuation of the essential immunisation services and protecting children and pregnant mothers against vaccine-preventable diseases.

Read more about this topic covered in the [3rd August 2020 PIB Summary and Analysis](#).

G. Tidbits

1. Imparting education to tribals in their languages won't be hard

What's in News?

The Draft [National Education Policy 2020](#) lays emphasis on mother tongue-based instructions up to Class 5.

Multilingual Education in Odisha:

- Odisha has been working on multilingual education (MLE) for more than the past two decades.
- The state has the most diverse tribal communities. It is home to 62 different tribal communities including 13 particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs).
- The tribes in Odisha speak 21 languages and 74 dialects. Of the 21 tribal languages, seven have their own scripts.
- There are a total of 3,500 tribal language teachers under the MLE programme in the State.
- Santhali, a widely spoken tribal language in Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts, included in Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, is the medium of instruction in more than 500 primary schools.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to 'Falcon 9':

1. It is a two-stage rocket designed and manufactured by NASA.
2. The first commercial crewed mission to the International Space Station (ISS) was launched aboard Falcon 9.

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: b

Explanation:

- Falcon 9 is a two-stage rocket designed and manufactured by SpaceX for the reliable and safe transport of satellites and the Dragon spacecraft into orbit.
- Falcon 9 delivers payloads to space aboard the Dragon spacecraft or inside a composite fairing. Falcon 9 made history in 2012 when it delivered Dragon into the correct orbit for rendezvous with the International Space Station, making SpaceX the first commercial company ever to visit the station.
- Falcon 9, along with the Dragon spacecraft, was designed from the outset to deliver humans into space and under an agreement with NASA.
- The SpaceX Dragon Capsule carrying two astronauts launched aboard Falcon9 has successfully returned to Earth.

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to Indian Leopard:

1. It is classified under the endangered category in the IUCN Red List.
2. It is included in Appendix I of CITES.
3. A dedicated quadrennial leopard survey is carried out by the Wildlife Institute of India in coordination with the Environment Ministry.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Unlike the tiger census held once in four years, there is no dedicated census for the leopard.
- In 2014, the last formal census on India's leopards was conducted. The leopard count accompanying the tiger census of 2014 estimated its population to be 12,000-14,000 with about 8,000 in the vicinity of tiger habitat.

- Leopard is classified under the 'vulnerable' category in the IUCN Red List.
- It is included in Appendix I of CITES.

Q3. International Space Station program is a joint project of which of the following space agencies?

1. Indian Space Research Organisation
2. National Aeronautics and Space Administration
3. ROSCOSMOS
4. European Space Agency
5. Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency
6. Canadian Space Agency
7. Israel Space Agency

Choose the correct option:

- a. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 only
- b. 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7 only
- c. 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 only
- d. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The International Space Station (ISS) is a space station, or a habitable artificial satellite, in low Earth orbit.
- The ISS programme is a joint project between five participating space agencies: NASA, Roscosmos, JAXA (Japan), ESA (Europe), and CSA (Canada).
- The ownership and use of the space station are established by intergovernmental treaties and agreements.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN) :

1. It is an indigenously developed technology system that digitizes vaccine stocks and monitors the temperature of the cold chain through a smartphone application.
2. It is being implemented under the National Health Mission (NHM).
3. eVIN was first rolled out in Sikkim.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN) is an indigenously developed technology system that digitizes vaccine stocks and monitors the temperature of the cold chain through a smartphone application.
- It is being implemented under the National Health Mission (NHM).
- eVIN is yet to be rolled-out in Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Ladakh and Sikkim.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. In the light of repeated instances of large-scale loss of human life due to consumption of illicit liquor in India, discuss the associated concerns and suggest suitable measures to address these concerns. (10 marks, 150 words)(GS Paper 1/Social Issues)
2. Discuss the salient provisions of the Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897 and analyze its shortcomings in dealing with the current pandemic crisis. (10 marks, 150 words)(GS Paper 2/Government Policies and Interventions)