07 Aug 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. SC to hear petition against contempt law on August 10

Context:

Supreme Court is scheduled to hear a writ petition jointly filed by veteran journalists, along with advocate Prashant Bhushan, against the law of holding a person in contempt for 'scandalising the court'.

Details:

- The petition has challenged the legality of Section 2(c)(i) of the Contempt of Court Act and the chilling effect it has on free speech and right to dissent.
- Section 2(c) (i) holds it is criminal contempt if a person publishes, by words spoken or written or by any other act, anything "which scandalises or tends to scandalise or lowers or tends to lower the authority of any court."

Read more about the subject of Contempt of Court covered in 2nd August 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Pompeo against vote for Cuba on Human Rights Council

Context:

U.S. Secretary of State has urged UN members not to support Cuba's bid to join the organisation's Human Rights Council.

Details:

- He has accused Cuba of being a brutal dictatorship that traffics its own doctors under the guise of humanitarian missions and urged that no country should vote Cuba onto the council.
- Under President Donald Trump, Washington has reversed an opening with Cuba initiated by former President Barack Obama, hardening a trade embargo in effect since 1962.
- Cuba, which sat on the UNHRC in 2014-2016 and 2017-2019, has applied to fill one of the regional vacancies for 2021-2023.

UNHRC Membership:

- **UNHRC** is a subsidiary of the General Assembly and the General Assembly elects the members of **UNHRC**.
- The Council is made of 47 Member States.
- The seats are distributed geographically and are awarded for a period of three years.
- Members are not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms.
- Seats are distributed as follows:
  - African States: 13 seats
  - Asia-Pacific States: 13 seats
  - Latin American and Caribbean States: 8 seats
  - Western European and other States: 7 seats
  - Eastern European States: 6 seats

Note:

The U.S. withdrew from the council in 2018, with Ambassador Nikki Haley calling it a cesspool of political bias and a hypocritical and self-serving organisation that makes a mockery of human rights.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. EIA norms will make polluter pay heavy penalty: Javadekar

Union Environment Minister has said that one of the key motives of the proposed Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2020 (EIA 2020) was to bring environmental violators under a regulatory regime by imposing a heavy penalty on them.

Read more about Draft Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2020 (EIA 2020) covered in the 1st August 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis.
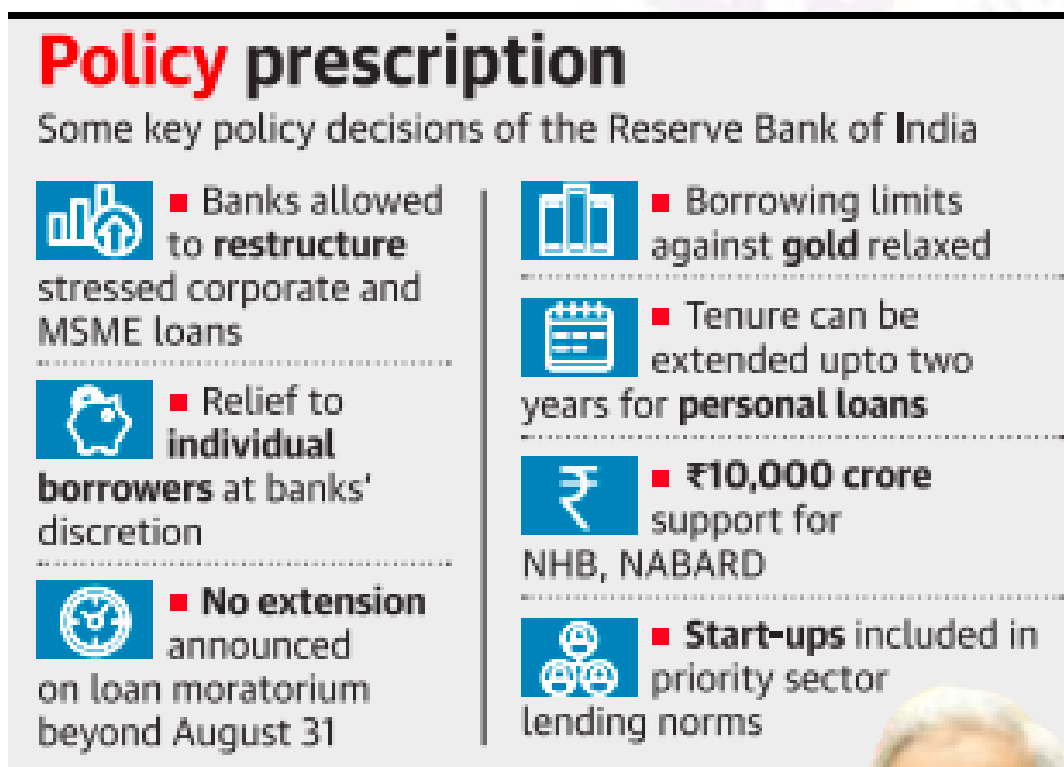
Category: ECONOMY

1. RBI keeps key policy rates unchanged

Context:

The third review of the monetary policy by the Reserve Bank of India since the COVID-19 pandemic spread in the country.

Key Policy Decisions:

Details:

- The RBI has left the key policy rates unchanged in the face of rising inflation pressures.
  - It has asserted that propping up economic recovery has assumed primacy.
- The moratorium on loan repayments offered to borrowers has not been extended beyond August 31.
- Banks have been allowed to restructure loans from large corporates, micro, small and medium enterprises as well as individuals.

- o This will help stem the rising stress on incomes and balance sheets.
  - o Also, banks are free to decide if they want to extend the moratorium on instalment repayments.
- Rs 10,000-crore facility has been offered to the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and the National Housing Bank (NHB) to boost rural lending and affordable housing.
  - o It is expected to ease liquidity concerns at the bottom of the pyramid.
  - o The facility to the NHB is to shield the housing sector from liquidity disruptions and augment the flow of finance to the sector through housing finance companies.
  - o Funds to NABARD will help ameliorate the stress being faced by smaller NBFCs and microfinance institutions in obtaining access to liquidity.
- Banks have been allowed to restructure individual borrowers' loans by December 31, 2020, permitting a maximum extension of two years.
- Limits for loans against gold have been enhanced.
- Banks are required to assign 40% of adjusted net bank credit or credit equivalent amount of off-balance sheet exposure, whichever is higher, to priority sector, including agriculture and micro-enterprises.
  - o The scope of priority sector lending (PSL) has been broadened by including start-ups and enhancing borrowing limits for renewable energy sectors.
  - o The targets for lending to 'small and marginal farmers' and 'weaker sections' under the PSL will also be increased.

2. Credit discipline: current account norms tightened

Context:

To curb misuse, norms for opening current accounts have been tightened.

Details:

- The RBI has stated that no bank can open a current account for a customer who has already availed himself of credit facilities from the banking system. All transactions should be routed through the CC/OD account.
  - o This is to ensure that customers do not open current accounts even while availing themselves of credit facilities through cash credit (CC)/overdraft (OD) accounts across multiple banks.
- Currently, banks must ensure that they do not open current accounts of entities that enjoy credit facilities from the banking system without specifically obtaining a No-Objection Certificate (NOC) from the lending bank(s). But many banks do not follow such due diligence.
- Credit balances in such accounts cannot be used as margin for availing any non-fund based credit facilities.
- Restrictions have been placed on debits from the CC/OD account in certain cases.
  - o If a bank's exposure to a borrower is less than 10 percent of the total exposure of the borrower in the banking system, then debits from the borrower's CC/OD account can only be for credit to another CC/OD account of that borrower with a bank that has 10 percent or more of the exposure.
  - o However, credits are freely permitted.

For instance, if a borrower enjoys credit facilities of ₹100 crore across several banks: of this, if Bank A has given a facility of ₹8 crore (under 10 percent of the total exposure) and Bank B has provided ₹92 crore, then debits from Bank A can only be for transfer of funds to Bank B (and not for other vendor payments).

Significance:

- It can help check diversion of funds and frauds.
- The measures will also help discipline collective actions by creditors to speed up the resolution of accounts, critical in the implementation of the new restructuring framework.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Academic research is necessary, but not sufficient

Context:

- Public consultation in the process for formulation of a **new national Science Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP 2020).**

Background:

- The Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India and the Department of Science and Technology has recently initiated the process for the formulation of a new national Science Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP 2020).

For more information on this topic, refer to:

[PIB dated June 2, 2020](#)

- STIP 2020 will be the 5th STIP of India, with the **Science, Technology and Innovation Policy of 2013** being the most recent.

Science Technology and Innovation Policy, 2013:

- It aims to position India among the **top 5 global scientific powers**.
- It intends to synergize STI to **transition to a knowledge-based economy.** It acknowledges the significance of being a knowledge-based economy and works towards building a **robust national innovation ecosystem.**
- It aims to **link STI to socio-economic priorities.**
- It aims to **attract the private sector into Research and Development**.

Details:

- The article suggests policy measures in the domain of **Research and Development in higher education institutions and national laboratories.**

Re-defining the architecture of R&D systems:

- As against the nomenclature often used by researchers to classify their research into pure, applied, unrestricted, fundamental, basic, academic, industrial, practical, etc, the article argues for alternate frameworks and terminology to define research.
- The article suggests using the terminology '**Academic Research (AR)'**, and '**Post-Academic Research (PAR)'**. This approach would act as a type of measurement system used to **assess the maturity level of a particular technology.**
- Academic Research would involve observation of basic principles and would result in publications. Post-Academic Research would involve the formulation of technology at the level of concepts. This would involve proof of concept, validation in a laboratory environment, followed by a relevant environment, and then to prototype demonstration, and ending with actual deployment.

Division of research:

- The article suggests that while **AR and early-stage PAR can be done at higher education institutions** and large laboratories, **PAR has to be done by large laboratories (national or those supported by industry).**

Complementarity of AR and PAR:

- While both AR and PAR generate knowledge that is necessary for national development, the article argues that the pursuit of AR though necessary is not sufficient. **AR and PAR must be pursued together.**
- AR and PAR when pursued together and taken to their logical conclusion will result in a product or a process.
  - For example, while AR can pursue research into high energy physics, PAR can concentrate on pursuing accelerator technology relevant for industries. Similarly, while AR can pursue research in electro-chemistry, PAR can concentrate on the development of battery technologies.

Prioritizing investments:

- **India's investment in research is lower than that of advanced countries.**
- While an increase in Science and Technology is a must, it is equally important to decide where to increase investment: in AR or in PAR. Given the low public spending in the domain of science and technology, it becomes critical to funnel these limited resources into the right areas.
- The investments need to **prioritise research in areas that relate to national development** and the article suggests **higher investment in PAR.**

Limitations of AR:

- Notable academics have noted that the Indian industries have not reached a stage where they can absorb research being done by higher education institutions. This observation reveals that **research being pursued is either not addressing national needs or is limited to AR**.
- Judging the growth of S&T based only on scientific publications provides an incomplete picture. It is important to note that scientific publications alone cannot lead to national development. In short, academic research is necessary, but not sufficient.

Potential of PAR:

- Industries that have high technology intensity, such as aircraft and spacecraft, medical, precision and optical instruments, and communication equipment, have a low presence in India.

- There is a need to **increase the technology intensity of industry which can result in an increase of value addition to raw materials in India**. This could become an important aspect of the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' programme.

Road ahead for academia:

- The research community in higher education institutions must be motivated to pursue early-stage PAR. This could involve the academics pursuing early-stage PAR themselves, or in collaboration with industries.
- The academia needs to reorient its priorities to **address national needs and engage in both AR and early-stage PAR and provide inputs necessary to raise the technology intensity of the industry**.

Suggestions for STI policy:

- The STI policy should **emphasise on PAR** to ensure that investment in research results in economic growth and national development.

Category: EDUCATION

1. Can the NEP fix access to universal education?

Context:

- The recently approved National Education Policy, 2020.

Details:

- The article discusses the salient provisions of the **National Education Policy, 2020** and analyzes the significance and associated concerns.

Early childhood care and education (ECCE):

- The policy has brought into its ambit children in the **age group of 3 to 18 years**. The 5+3+3+4 system envisaged involves clubbing of three years of ECCE with Grade 1 and 2 of primary school as part of the **'foundational literacy and numeracy mission'**.
- It has set itself a 10-year deadline, to make all children entering Grade 1 school-ready through Early Childhood Care and Education.

Significance:

- In the early childhood phase, the child's brain is developing fast and they can learn a lot and hence early start can **improve the learning outcomes** to a great extent.
- The Right to Education Act provides a fundamental right of every child aged between 6 and 14 years to get free and compulsory education, in a neighbourhood school. This right begins at age 6 which has been considered late by some experts. The move to bring children into some sort of formal education fold at age three marks the intention of the government to **universalize education between 3 and 18 years in line with the 2019 draft NEP proposal.**

Challenges:

- There are lots of practical issues with the anganwadis and preschools which are assigned the function of early childhood care and education. **The anganwadi workers are not professionally trained to be teachers.** The lack of a provision of a good, professional teacher for the earliest years may not yield the expected improvement in learning outcomes.
- The NEP envisages not relying on regular schooling and allowing open schooling for the first 3 years of schooling. This marks a break away from the spirit of the Right to Education Act which envisions the provision of well-qualified teachers for the children.

Private sector participation:

- The policy **envisions education as a public service**, but also advocates philanthropic private participation.

Significance:

- The NEP 2020 envisages substantial investment in a **strong, vibrant public education system**. It recognizes education as a public good and the need to ensure accessibility, affordability of quality education for all.
- Public education would contribute immensely to the social, economical, political, cultural and technological growth of the nation.
- Given the need to pool in all existing resources into service to ensure that every child gets quality education, the vision to enable private sector participation is welcome.
    - o In the last 25 years, private sector involvement in education has witnessed a substantial rise. There is nearly 50% private school education, and nearly 70% of enrollment in higher education through the private sector.

Challenges:

- Given that it is very unlikely that the private sector is going to open schools in remote areas with less than 10 children, it is very important to emphasize public education with private schools only supplementing governmental efforts.
- There are also concerns that there are many private players who are not of good quality and are only looking for profits.
- The only way to make sure that every child is given education is by strengthening the government education system. However, the **quality of education in government schools is of concern.**

Proposal to create school complexes:

- **The Kothari Commission** had recommended the 'school complex' model to have a collaborative synergy between high or higher secondary schools and the smaller neighbourhood and primary schools, which actually become feeder schools for the high school.
- The NEP 2020 also proposes the 'school complex' model.

Significance:

- The NEP's suggestion of larger institutions would ensure co-ordination among the different schools and **ensure better resource utilization.**

Concerns:

- Some experts have raised concerns over this provision based on the recent developments.
    - o 14,000 schools in one State have been closed under the name of consolidation, saying that small schools are sub-optimal.

- Schools that actually provide access in the proximity of the child, within the community have been closed or merged. This would **decrease the accessibility of children in remote areas.**

Language policy:

- The language policy of the NEP 2020 states that wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5 will be the home language/mother-tongue/local language/regional language.
- The policy envisages allowing the State governments to allow local schools to teach in their own language by hiring local teachers.

Significance:

- This would enable the education of children in certain areas in their mother tongue, despite the fact that the state language may be different. This would **help increase accessibility to education and also help improve learning outcomes.**

Concerns:

- The implementation of this policy would be a challenge given the l**ack of availability of teachers proficient in the concerned languages.**
- The proposal to impart education in the mother tongue is open-ended.

Common school curriculum:

- There is no mention of a common school curriculum in the NEP, 2020.

Significance:

- This policy measure envisions strengthening SCERTs so that they can attend to children's need to be educated within their own context and culture. This would allow the child the opportunity to relate to their real life through their education.

Concerns:

- A common school curriculum would have aided in **ensuring equitable and inclusive education.** There are concerns that the lack of this provision in the NEP 2020 would only broaden the existing inequities.
- There are concerns regarding the **quality of State boards**.

Vocational education:

- The NEP, 2020 envisions the introduction of vocational courses with internships to help streamline vocational education in India.

Significance:

- This would allow the children to pick up certain skills which could be useful either in a general way or if they choose a profession based on that particular skill.
- The emphasis on vocational training would help ensure **more holistic education** and also help **break the monotony of book-based education for the children**.

Concerns:

- There are concerns that the thrust on pushing vocational education early in school may **weaken students academically, or lead to early exits**.

For more related information, refer to:

CNA dated August 3, 2020

F. Prelims Facts

1. Japan marks 75 years of atomic bombing

What's in News?

Japan on 6th August 2020 marked 75 years since the world's first atomic bomb attack.

Details:

- On August 6, 1945, during World War II, the U.S. B-29 Superfortress bomber Enola Gay dropped an atomic bomb code-named "Little Boy" on Hiroshima, Japan, resulting in an estimated 140,000 deaths.
- Three days later, the United States exploded a nuclear device over Nagasaki; five days after that, Imperial Japan surrendered.

G. Tidbits

1. Easy liquidity led to faster monetary transmission: Das

What's in News?

RBI has said that the monetary transmission has improved considerably.

- This is due to comfortable liquidity condition and the benefit being passed to borrowers by the bank, by reducing lending rates by about 1.62 percentage points in the last nearly one-and-a-half years.
- RBI had slashed the benchmark lending rate by 250 basis points (bps).
  - Of this, cuts of 115 bps have taken place in 2020.
- Lower borrowing costs have led to record primary issuance of corporate bonds of ₹2.09 lakh crore in the first quarter of 2020-21.

2. Debt resolution plan to help borrowers, lenders: bankers

What's in News?

RBI's debt resolution plan for corporate and personal loans has been welcomed by analysts, bankers and corporates.

- Under the facility, lenders can go for a one-time restructuring of loans under stress due to the pandemic.
- The move will help soften the impact on both banks as well as borrowers on the twin dimensions of controlling a rise in NPAs and supporting credit flow.
- Restructuring option had been extended to retail personal loans as well since many of these borrowers had faced challenges in debt servicing due to salary cuts and job losses.
- MSMEs, who have been substantially impacted by disruptions, also get relief in the form of a three-month extension in the existing restructuring scheme.

3. Offline retail payments set for fillip

What's in News?

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has unveiled a scheme of offline retail payments using cards and mobile devices.

- Lack of Internet connectivity or low speed of the Internet, especially in remote areas, is a major impediment in the adoption of digital payments.
- Against this backdrop, providing an option of offline payments through cards, wallets and mobile devices is expected to further the adoption of digital payments.
- The move is aimed at fostering financial inclusion.

Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) mechanism for digital payments:

- It has also decided on an Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) mechanism for digital payments as the numbers of digital transactions are rising significantly giving rise to more disputes.

Positive Pay Mechanism:

- To reduce instances of fraud occurring on account of tampering of cheque leaves, the RBI has decided to introduce a mechanism of Positive Pay for all cheques of value ₹50,000 and above.
- Under this mechanism, cheques will be processed for payment by the drawee bank based on information passed on by the issuer at the time of issuance of the cheque.

4. India rejects China's UNSC move on Kashmir

What's in News?

On the first anniversary of the revocation of Article 370, which led to the creation of the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh and ended the special status for the region, China has prompted the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to discuss the Kashmir issue in a closed-door meeting.

- China initiated a similar move in August 2019 when it revived "The India-Pakistan Question" at the UNSC.
- The issue had not been taken up at the council since it last figured in the world body before the India-Pakistan war of 1971.
- China attempted a similar move in January 2020 as well, but it did not attract sufficient support from the UNSC members.
- India has firmly rejected China's interference in the issue, stating it as internal affairs.

5. U.S. examines if Riyadh has nuclear goals

What's in News?

U.S. intelligence agencies are inspecting the efforts by Saudi Arabia to build up its ability to produce nuclear fuel that could put it on a path to developing nuclear weapons.

- A classified analysis about the efforts underway inside Saudi Arabia, working with China, to build industrial capacity to produce nuclear fuel was circulated by the spy agencies.
- According to the U.S. officials, the analysis has raised alarms about secret Saudi-Chinese efforts to process raw uranium into a form that could later be enriched into weapons fuel.
- The House Intelligence Committee included a provision in the Intelligence Budget Authorisation Bill, requiring the administration to submit a report about Saudi efforts since 2015 to develop a nuclear programme.
- The provision stated that the report should include an assessment of the state of nuclear cooperation between Saudi Arabia and any other country other than the U.S., such as the People's Republic of China or the Russian Federation.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC):

1. The UNHRC has 47 members elected for two-year terms.
2. Members are not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms.
3. Eastern European states are allotted the maximum number of seats amongst all the regional groups.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is made of 47 Member States.
- The seats are distributed geographically and are awarded for a period of three years.
- Members are not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms.
- Seats are distributed as follows:
  o African States: 13 seats
  o Asia-Pacific States: 13 seats
  o Latin American and Caribbean States: 8 seats
  o Western European and other States: 7 seats
  o Eastern European States: 6 seats

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to Uranium:

1. All uranium isotopes are radioactive and fissionable.
2. Largest viable deposits of Uranium are found in Australia, Kazakhstan, and Canada.
3. Uranium is weakly radioactive and remains so because of its long physical half-life.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: d

Explanation:

All the statements are correct.

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. An atomic bomb derives its explosive and destructive force from Nuclear Fusion.
2. Sun generates its energy by the nuclear fusion of hydrogen nuclei into helium.
3. Nuclear fusion is also called a thermonuclear reaction as it takes place at extremely high temperatures.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- An atomic bomb derives its explosive and destructive force from Nuclear Fission.
- Sun generates its energy by nuclear fusion of hydrogen nuclei into helium.
- Nuclear fusion is also called a thermonuclear reaction because it takes place at extremely high temperatures and hence creates an enormous amount of energy. Example: reactions in the sun.

Q4. Consider the following statements:

1. Tsunami Ready is a community performance-based programme initiated by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO to promote tsunami preparedness.
2. India is the first country to implement Tsunami Ready in the Indian Ocean Region.
3. Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services is the nodal agency to provide tsunami advisories to India.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Tsunami Ready is a community performance-based programme initiated by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO to promote tsunami preparedness through the active collaboration of public, community leaders, and national and local emergency management agencies.
- The initiative is modelled after the US National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Weather Service's successful TsunamiReady program.
- Based on the National Board recommendations, UNESCO-IOC has approved the recognition of two communities viz., Venkatraipur and Noliasahi as Tsunami Ready Communities. The two communities are villages in Odisha.
- With this recognition, India is the first country to implement Tsunami Ready in the Indian Ocean Region and Odisha is the first state.
- Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services is the nodal agency to provide tsunami advisories to India.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Enumerate the major aspects of the Science Technology and Innovation Policy, 2013. Discuss the major challenges in the domain of Research and Development in the Indian scenario and suggest suitable policy measures to address these challenges. (15 marks, 250 words)(GS paper 3/Science and Technology)
2. The recently approved National Education Policy, 2020 is a major step forward towards ensuring universal, more inclusive, holistic and quality education for children. Examine. (15 marks, 250 words)(GS paper 2/Education)