

10 Aug 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Amid pandemic, India & Pak. spar over Indus water talks

Context:

India has refused a request by Pakistan to hold a meeting on issues around the [Indus Water Treaty \(IWT\)](#) at the Attari checkpoint near the India-Pakistan border.

Details:

- The last such meeting between the two countries was in October 2019 in Islamabad.

- As per the agreement in IWT, a meeting was to be scheduled in India before March 31, 2020.
- The practice at the IWT meetings is that they are led by Indus Water Commissioners from both countries.
- A range of issues on the construction of dams and hydropower projects concerning the Indus river system are discussed.

Key points on the table:

- Evolving a procedure to solve differences on technical aspects governing the construction of the Ratle run-of-the-river (RoR) project on the Chenab in the Kishtwar district of Jammu and Kashmir.
- A consensus is yet to be reached upon a final resolution on the design parameters of this hydropower project.
 - India has called for the appointment of a 'neutral' party.
 - Pakistan favours a Court of Arbitration to agree upon a final resolution.

Issue:

- According to the terms of the IWT, India has the right to build RoR projects on the three 'western' rivers — the Chenab, Jhelum and Indus — provided it does so without substantially impeding water flow in Pakistan downstream.
 - Pakistan believes that the project's current design does pose a serious impediment and has told the [World Bank](#) that it wants a Court of Arbitration (CoA) set up to decide on the issue.
 - India says this is only a technical issue and mutually solvable. It has agreed to a 'neutral party' since a CoA potentially could stall any construction on all Indus projects.

Indus Water Treaty:

- The IWT has been in existence since 1960.
- It reached a flashpoint in the aftermath of the Uri attacks in 2016 with Prime Minister declaring that India would utilise the full hydropower capacity of its share of the Indus systems.

Read more on this topic covered in the [16th October 2019 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

2. Loya jirga approves prisoner release

Context:

- The Afghan government and the [Taliban](#) are on the verge of peace talks after thousands of prominent Afghans approved the release of about 400 contentious militant prisoners.
- The resolution was passed at the end of a three-day loya jirga.

Significance:

- The prisoners' fate has been a crucial hurdle in launching peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, which had committed to completing a prisoner exchange before negotiations can start.
- "The decision of the loya jirga has removed the last excuse and obstacles on the way to peace talks. We are on the verge of peace talks," said Abdullah Abdullah, who is leading the government's peace process and was appointed head of the loya jirga.
- Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said he would sign a decree to release the prisoners.
- The decision has raised hopes for talks between the two warring sides.

- The Afghan government has demanded the Taliban to agree to serious, immediate and lasting ceasefire.

What is Loya Jirga?

- A loya jirga is a special type of jirga, or legal assembly, in Pashtunwali, the traditional code of laws of the Pashtun people.
- It is mainly organized for choosing a new head of state in case of sudden death, adopting a new constitution, or to settle national or regional issues such as war.

Read more on the latest developments in the Afghan Peace Process covered in the [1st August 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. PM launches farm infra scheme

Context:

A new financing scheme has been launched under the ₹1 lakh crore Agriculture Infrastructure Fund meant for setting up storage and processing facilities, which will help farmers get higher prices for their crops.

Details:

- The scheme will support farmers, PACS [primary agricultural credit societies], FPOs [farmer producer organisations], agri-entrepreneurs, etc. in building community farming assets and post-harvest agriculture infrastructure.
- These assets will enable farmers to get greater value for their produce as they will be able to store and sell at higher prices, reduce wastage, and increase processing and value addition.

This topic has been covered in the 8th August 2020 [PIB Summary and Analysis](#).

C. GS 3 Related

Category: DEFENCE

1. Defence Ministry to impose import embargo on 101 items

Context:

The Defence Minister has stated that the Defence Ministry will introduce import embargo on 101 items beyond the given timeline.

Background:

The policy change comes in the wake of Chinese transgressions and the build-up along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh.

Details:

- The government intends to boost indigenisation of defence production.
 - It aims to reach a turnover of \$25 billion through indigenously manufactured defence products.
 - It also expects to export products worth \$5 billion.
 - In any government contract over ₹200 crore, no foreign company can participate in the tendering process.
- A list of 101 items has been prepared by the Ministry for which there would be an embargo on the import beyond the timeline indicated against them.
 - The list is prepared after several rounds of consultations with all stakeholders.
 - Current and future capabilities of the Indian industry for manufacturing various ammunition & equipment within India have been assessed.
 - The embargo on imports is planned to be progressively implemented between 2020 to 2024.
- The items comprise of not just simple parts but also some high technology weapon systems like artillery guns, assault rifles, corvettes, sonar systems, transport aircraft, LCHs, radars.
- The list also includes wheeled Armoured Fighting Vehicles (AFVs) with indicative import embargo date of December 2021.
 - The Army is expected to contract almost 200 AFVs at an approximate cost of over ₹5,000 crore.
- In another relevant step, MoD has bifurcated the capital procurement budget for 2020-21 between domestic and foreign capital procurement routes.

Significance:

- These measures are considered a big step towards self-reliance in defence.
- It offers a great opportunity to the Indian defence industry to manufacture the items in the negative list by using their own design and development capabilities or adopting the technologies designed and developed by the Defence Research Development Organisation ([DRDO](#)) to meet the requirements of the Armed Forces.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Andaman and Nicobar will be a maritime hub: Modi

Context:

Prime Minister has said that the Andaman and Nicobar Islands region, owing to its strategic importance, is going to be developed as a maritime and startup hub.

Details:

- 12 islands of the archipelago have been selected for high-impact projects with an emphasis on boosting trade of sea-based, organic and coconut-based products of the region.

Government initiatives:

- Proposed transshipment hub in the Andaman will help the group of islands become an important centre of blue economy and a maritime and startup hub.
- Over 300 km of national highway is expected to be completed in record time.
- The government is working to improve air connectivity within these islands and between them and the rest of the country.

- A submarine optical fibre cable between Chennai and the islands has been installed.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. Balancing priorities

Context:

- **Landslide in Idukki** district of Kerala has claimed 22 lives thus far and rendered several families homeless.

For more information on this, refer to:

[PIB dated Aug 7, 2020](#)

Details:

Landslides in Kerala:

- Landslips or landslides have been a recurrent phenomenon in the **Western Ghat state of Kerala**.
- Data from the **Geological Survey of India** shows that Kerala has experienced 67 major landslide events and several minor ones from 1961-2013.
- In 2019, Wayanad district witnessed multiple landslides that claimed several lives and destroyed multiple hamlets.
- **The National Landslide Susceptibility Mapping (NLSM) programme** of the Geological Survey of India notes that nearly 13 of the State's 14 districts are prone to landslides.
 - As part of a National Landslide Susceptibility Mapping (NLSM) programme, the Geological Survey of India mapped States facing high landslide risk to assess the vulnerability of the districts to landslides. This included states in the Western Ghats, the north-eastern States, Jammu and Kashmir and Uttarakhand.
 - The objective of the NLSM maps is to help State and district authorities incorporate the risk of landslides into zoning laws.
- The **high population density of Kerala** (over 800 per square kilometre) makes the state more hazard-prone to landslides as compared to other states.

Causative factors:

Heavy rainfall in Kerala:

- Kerala has been receiving heavy monsoon rainfall. Most districts have received three or four times more rain than what is normal.
- Lying in the Western Ghats, Kerala receives high monsoonal rainfall.

Topography:

- Given the **hilly topography of the state**, Kerala is prone to landslides.

Climate change:

- Climate change has brought out a **new climate normal**. Frequent high-intensity bursts of rain will co-exist along with long dry spells. This would only increase the threat of natural calamities like landslides.

Developmental activities:

- Extensive deforestation** for developmental work has led to an increased possibility of soil erosion.
- Given the hilly topography of Kerala, human activities like **quarrying and the unscientific cutting of slopes for road construction** have only increased the risk of soil erosion.

Way forward:

- The strategy to counter the risk posed by landslides must be based on the four pillars of disaster management: **Mitigation, Preparedness, Response and Recovery**.

Mitigation:

- Methods of preventing landslides: modifying slope geometry, using chemical agents to reinforce slope material, installing structures such as **piles and retaining walls**, and rerouting surface and underwater drainage, **restriction of certain types of land use** where slopes are vulnerable.
- Methods of reducing the impact of landslides: Restriction of population from landslide-prone areas.

Preparedness:

- Important preparatory strategies could involve **monitoring and landslide prediction**. The National Landslide Susceptibility Mapping (NLSM) programme of the Geological Survey of India could help assess the vulnerability of the districts and this could allow the concerned states to plan accordingly.
- Installing **early warning systems** based on the monitoring of ground conditions like slope displacement, strain in soil and rocks, groundwater levels can help warn the residents and authorities of the risks.
- Landslide Education, Awareness and Capacity Building** among the residents and the local administration must be an important preparation strategy.
- The **district and state disaster management apparatus** should be ready for intervention at a short notice.

Response:

- Ensuring **medical service** to the injured people.
- Providing **emergency shelters** for those who lost their homes.
- Opening up of access road in case of blocks. This could ensure an uninterrupted flow of resources to the affected region.

Recovery:

- Given the overwhelming evidence available indicating the effect of developmental activities in the increased incidence of landslides, there is the need to **ensure strict enforcement of environmental regulations and zoning laws**. If necessary such laws must be made more stringent.

- There is a need for new models of development. **Development goals must be pursued without breaching environment regulations.**

For more related information, refer to:

[CNA dated August 26, 2019](#)

Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

1. Bringing nuclear risks back into popular imagination

Context:

- Commemorating the **75th anniversary of the nuclear bombing of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki**, the article calls for greater awareness and public discourse on the issue of nuclear weapons.

Details:

- The article argues that nuclear risks have increased over the years and expresses concerns over the following aspects.

Damage potential:

- Recent studies have indicated that use of even a fraction of the current stock of nuclear weapons would cause a massive human tragedy and also have long-term repercussions for food and water availability, agricultural output and climate change.
- Any nuclear use between nuclear adversaries would cause a **humanitarian disaster**.

Dangers of unintended use:

- Though it is very unlikely that nations would resort to pre-meditated, deliberate nuclear attacks given the risks posed by nuclear retaliation, there is the underlying risk of inadvertent **escalation due to miscalculation or misperceptions**.
- Possibilities of unintended use are increased by the following factors.
 - **Stressed inter-state relations** have diminished inter-state trust.
 - Growing tensions between North Korea and the U.S.
 - Tensions between Russia and the west
 - Tensions between the U.S. and China
 - Tensions between India and its two nuclear-armed neighbours, China and Pakistan.
 - Unchecked **strategic modernisation of nuclear weapons**:
 - Russia and the USA have extensive and expensive programmes underway to replace and modernize their nuclear warheads. Similar demands have been observed in countries like the U.K. as well.
 - China has been increasing its nuclear arsenal at a substantial rate.
 - North Korea has been making attempts to produce nuclear weapons.
 - **Failure of arms control arrangements**:
 - The 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (**New START**) expires in 2021 and the U.S. administration has expressed its reluctance to renew the treaty. This removes

the check on the nuclear weapons programmes of the two nations with the largest nuclear weapons inventory.

- **New START is a nuclear arms reduction treaty between the United States and the Russian Federation** with the formal name of Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms.
- The nuclear talks between Iran and the P5+1 seem to have failed, with Iran vowing to restart its nuclear programme in the wake of increased U.S. sanctions.
- Adoption of **aggressive nuclear postures**:
 - Abandonment of no first use policy
 - Support for the idea of 'limited' nuclear war
- **Emergent technologies** have created anxieties and these new developments threaten to create unknown risks.
 - Advancing capabilities of **cyberattacks** on nuclear command and control
 - Blurring lines between conventional and nuclear delivery with conventional weapon delivery systems being upgraded to enable the delivery of nuclear weapons as well
 - Induction of **hypersonic missiles** capable of high speed and manoeuvrability
 - Incorporation of **artificial intelligence** in nuclear decision making

Complacency:

- Post the Cold War, the perceived sense of danger of nuclear war has receded, though the nuclear war risk continues to increase.
- A high level of **public apathy and political complacency** has led to a situation where the risks remain high but the desire to address them is low.
- There are no efforts being made for nuclear risk reduction. Led by the **principle of nuclear deterrence**, there has been an increasing tendency to use strategies of **nuclear brinkmanship** and ambiguity that actually is adding to the nuclear risks.

For more information on the issue of deterrence, refer to:

[CNA dated August 6, 2020](#)

Lack of public discourse:

- There is a lack of public participation in the nuclear policy formulation and nuclear strategies are being dictated and driven primarily by security conclaves.
- Popular participation is important to temper national choices and create the much-needed checks and balances.

Way forward:

- There is the need to **bring nuclear risks back into popular imagination and into the political agenda**.
- The article argues for a public campaign to expose leaders and societies to the full range of physical, economic, social, political, health, environmental, and psychological effects of nuclear weapons.
- Public pressure in the form of civil society movements can compel leaders to **rationalise their weapon requirements**; force nations to find ways of **reducing nuclear risks**, and gradually pave the path towards the **elimination of nuclear weapons**.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Scientists find 77 new butterfly species in Matheran

What's in News?

Scientists have found 140 rare species of butterflies, including 77 new ones, in Matheran.

- The research paper titled 'Finding the forgotten gems: Revisiting the butterflies of Matheran after 125 years', provides a glimpse of the rare butterflies in the hill station.
 - Biostatistical techniques were used by the team. The team used a barcode system to denote seasons and the activities of the butterflies.
- The last time butterflies were codified in this region was in 1894, when a researcher identified 78 species.

Note:

- Matheran is a hill station in the Raigad district, Maharashtra.
- It is declared as an eco-sensitive region by the Union Ministry of Environment.

G. Tidbits

1. 'LAC complicates India's options'

What's in News?

Discussion between experts in Delhi and Washington on India's Foreign Policy.

- Experts have opined that while threat from China is pushing India into closer ties with the U.S., it is unlikely to yield a military alliance at present.
- Former National Security Advisor Shiv Shankar Menon said, "We have a problem with China on land and the U.S. is not going to get involved in a continental war here. The [U.S.] is pulling out of Afghanistan. The landmass of Eurasia is being consolidated under China's [Belt and Road Initiative](#) and by various other means, and even the Russians have decided they need to work with China. India needs to find a continental strategy that works for it as the relationship with China gets more and more adversarial".
- U.S.-based foreign policy think tank expert, who served as a diplomat to India, said the U.S. would not seek an alliance with India unless both sides were committed to a collective defence of each other in both the continental and maritime spheres.

2. DSLSA organises first online Lok Adalat

- The Delhi State Legal Services Authority (DSLSA) under the [National Legal Services Authority \(NALSA\)](#) organised the first-ever online Lok Adalat.
- The pandemic has brought about new and immediate challenges for the justice delivery system and the testing times have resulted in new innovations and creative solutions.

Lok Adalat:

- A Lok Adalat is one of the substitute dispute [redressal mechanisms](#).

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to 'Loya Jirga':

1. It is a special type of legal assembly, in the traditional code of laws of the Pashtun people.
2. It is a mass national gathering that brings together representatives from the various ethnic, religious, and tribal communities in Afghanistan.
3. It is an official decision-making body and its decisions are legally binding.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- A Loya Jirga (grand council in Pashto) is a mass national gathering that brings together representatives from the various ethnic, religious, and tribal communities in Afghanistan.
- Loya Jirga is not an official decision-making body.
- Its decisions are not legally binding and its verdicts must be approved by the two houses of the Afghan Parliament and the president. Unofficially, however, the Loya Jirga's decision is seen as final, with the president and Parliament expected to rubber-stamp it.

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. Teachings of Buddha are known as Dhamma.
2. Buddha's birth is called 'Dharmachakrapravartan' or 'Turnin of the wheel of law'.
3. The First Buddhist Council was held at Vaishali under the patronage of Kalasoka.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Teachings of Buddha are known as Dhamma.

- The First Buddhist Council was convened at the Sattapanni caves in Rajgriha. It was held under the patronage of King Ajatashatru.
- Buddha's first sermon is called 'Dharmachakrapravartan' or 'Turnin of the wheel of law.'

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to Matheran:

1. It is located in the Western Ghats in Maharashtra.
2. It has been notified as an eco-sensitive region.

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:

- Matheran is a hill station and a municipal council in the Raigad district of Maharashtra.
- It is located on the Western Ghats.
- It has been notified as an eco-sensitive region by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to River Tungabhadra:

1. It is a right bank tributary of River Krishna.
2. It originates in the Western Ghats at Gangamula.
3. The river flows east across the Deccan Plateau.
4. It joins River Krishna in Andhra Pradesh state and then empties into the Bay of Bengal.

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

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 3 and 4 only
- d. None of the above

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: d

Explanation:

- River Tungabhadra originates in the Western Ghats at Gangamula.
- It is a right bank tributary of River Krishna.
- The river Tungabhadra flows east across the Deccan Plateau, joins the Krishna in Andhra Pradesh state and then empties into the Bay of Bengal.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. In the light of the recent landslides in Kerala, discuss the reasons for the high vulnerability of the state to landslides. Suggest appropriate disaster management strategies. (15 marks, 250 words)(GS paper 3/Disaster Management)
2. As against the popular perception that nuclear risks have reduced since the end of the cold war, the risks of a nuclear war have only increased over the years. Comment. (15 marks, 250 words)(GS paper 3/Internal Security)