

17 Aug 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: HEALTH

1. **U.S. FDA nod for rapid, inexpensive saliva test**

What's in News?

A new rapid diagnostic test called SalivaDirect, for the novel coronavirus, that uses saliva samples was granted an emergency use authorisation by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

- It is an inexpensive test, developed by a team from the Yale School of Public Health.

- Collecting and testing saliva samples involves three steps — collecting saliva without preservative buffers, proteinase K treatment and heat inactivation, and dualplex RT-qPCR virus detection.

Significance:

- It has high sensitivity and can detect the virus even when the number of virus copies in the saliva sample is as low as 6-12 copies per microlitre.
 - According to a preprint, the sensitivity of the new test is about 93%.
- In contrast, tests using nasopharyngeal swabs lead to false negative results due to errors at the time of sample collection.
- The new test makes sample collection non-invasive and reduces the need for trained healthcare workers to collect the samples.
 - This reduces the risk of infection during collection.
- The easier saliva test is likely to increase testing compliance. It can allow for at-home, self-administered sample collection for accurate large-scale SARS-CoV-2 testing.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**1. UAE, Israel establish direct phone service after deal****Context:**

The Israeli and UAE Foreign Ministers have inaugurated direct phone services between the two countries after an agreement to normalise relations.

Israel-UAE Deal:

- Announced by the U.S President, the Israel-UAE deal is only the third such accord Israel has struck with an Arab country.
- It raises the prospect of similar deals with other pro-Western Gulf states.
- Under the deal, Israel pledged to suspend its planned annexation of West Bank territories.
 - This concession has been welcomed as a boost for hopes of peace, by European and some pro-Western Arab governments.

This topic has been covered in the 16th August 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis. [Click here](#) to read.

Category: EDUCATION**1. Time for a change****Context:**

The article talks about Social Work Education and its professional practice within the country.

Details:

- Higher education in India is regulated through autonomous bodies such as the University Grants Commission (UGC), the All India Council of Technical Education ([AICTE](#)), the Medical Council of India (MCI), and the Bar Council of India (BCI) among others.
 - This allows for a professional outlook and facilitation of research at the macro level.
- It is opined that Social Work Education needs a regulatory authority in the form of a national council.

Statutory Provisions:

- ‘The National Council for Professional Social Work Bill, 1993’, which sought to get a national status for the profession, did not see the light of day.
- The National Council of Professional Social Work Practitioners Bill, 2018 sought to establish a national council of professional social work practitioners to coordinate, develop and regulate the professional practice of social work in India.
 - Statutory provisions can exercise a professional authority on the management and implementation of Social Work Education.
 - The council can not only offer recommendations on various social policies adopted by local, state and central governments, but can also offer consultancy services to private, corporate and government agencies when required.
 - It can also facilitate interaction and networking between professional social work and other allied disciplines like Rural Development, Science and Technology, Welfare and Social Justice, Health and Rehabilitation, Human Resource Development, and Research and Training Councils among others.
 - While such a council may seem to take away the autonomy of individual institutions, it will be in the larger interest of enhancing the professional status of social work and its relevance for the future.

The issues and way forward:

- There seems to be no coherence in terms of syllabus, teaching practices, fieldwork and evaluation at various levels.
 - A mechanism to monitor the methodology and evaluation of Social Work Education is required.
- Adequate infrastructural facilities are lacking and there is no adherence to the requisite norms.
- The approach to social work education also needs to change.
 - The charity-based approach should be replaced by a socio-economic and developmental approach.
 - Emerging rise of civil societies and the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) must be incorporated in the syllabus.
 - With the Human Development Index (HDI) being the benchmark for progress, the standard of social work education is important to address the different needs of various communities.
- The inclusion of disability along with modern rehabilitative systems is essential.
 - Social Work Education should also encompass working with special groups such as adolescents, victims of natural calamities, the elderly, [self-help groups](#), and others.
 - Social legislations have to be reviewed and newer acts must be included, as must topics like human rights, community health, social networking, NGO management, fundraising and communication strategies.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. PMO denies RTI plea seeking info on PM-CARES

Context:

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has denied a Right to Information (RTI) request related to the PM-CARES Fund.

Issue:

- RTI request has been denied on the grounds that providing it would “disproportionately divert the resources of the office”.
- “The information sought by you is not maintained in this office in compiled form. Its collection and compilation would disproportionately divert the resources of this office from the efficient discharge of its normal functions, thereby attracting the provisions under Section 7(9) of the Act,” said the PMO's Chief Public Information Officer (CPIO).
 - Section 7(9) of the Act says, “An information shall ordinarily be provided in the form in which it is sought unless it would disproportionately divert the resources of the public authority or would be detrimental to the safety or preservation of the record in question.”
 - Section 8 (1) of the Act lists the various valid reasons for exemptions under the Act, which would allow denial of information.
- A High Court judgment and multiple orders of the [Central Information Commission \(CIC\)](#) have previously held that, under the RTI Act, this rationale can only be used to change the format of information provided, not deny it altogether.

Read more about [PM CARES Fund](#) and [Differences between PMNRF and PM CARES Fund](#).

C. GS 3 Related

Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

1. 'IB team to fast-track Naga peace process'

This issue has been covered in the [12th August 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Lapsing into contempt

For information on this issue, refer to:

[CNA dated July 27, 2020](#)

Category: ECONOMY

1. New agriculture infrastructure fund is a major step forward

(Article from The Indian Express)

Context:

- The launch of the **Rs 1 lakh crore Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF)**.

For information on this, refer to:

[PIB dated Aug 8, 2020](#)

Background:

- As part of the reform measures in the agricultural sector, the government has previously issued ordinances aiming to bring in some degree of **liberalization in the agri-market sector**.
- These included amendments in the **Essential Commodities Act**, allowing farmers to sell their produce outside the APMC mandis and encouraging **farming contracts** between farmers, processors, exporters and retailers.

For more information on this, refer to:

[CNA dated May 17, 2020](#)

- Though these changes in the legal framework are welcome they were insufficient to truly exploit the potential of agri-markets in India and there have been calls for the **creation of sufficient and quality post-harvest physical infrastructure**.

Details:

- The Agriculture Infrastructure Fund will be **managed by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)** in association with the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare.
- Under the scheme, financing will be to **develop cold chain storage, processing facilities and other post-harvest management infrastructure** at the farm gate and aggregation points.
- The fund would mainly focus on the Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) and primary agriculture cooperative societies, but loans from the fund can also be availed by agriculture entrepreneurs and start-ups.
- The fund will be used to **provide loans, at concessional rates** through primary agriculture credit societies (PACs).
- The government would bear the burden of interest on such loans through **interest subvention subsidy**.

Significance:

- The Fund will provide an impetus to the creation of post-harvest management infrastructure and assets such as cold storage, collection centres, processing units, etc.
- The availability of more and better storage facilities can help farmers **avoid distress selling** immediately after the harvest. This can lead to **better price discovery** for the farmers.
- The availability of cold storage facilities can also help **reduce wastage** and also ensure the uniform availability of seasonal produce throughout the year for the consumers.
- The processing units will enable farmers to get greater value for their produce through **increased processing and value addition**.
- By facilitating formal credit to farm and farm processing-based activities, the fund is also expected to **create numerous job opportunities in rural areas** addressing the crucial employment issue.

Challenges:

- The article argues that the mere creation of storage facilities will not be enough to benefit farmers and there are systemic challenges to ensure the effectiveness of this governmental intervention.

Cash needs of small and marginal farmers:

- Small farmers cannot hold stocks for long as they may have urgent cash needs to meet family expenditures.
- This would lead to a situation where despite the availability of storage facilities, the small and marginal farmers who account for the largest share of farmers in the Indian scenario will not be in a position to make use of the facilities.
- This would lead to a situation where the newly created facilities would not be able to remain economically viable due to low demand for such facilities.

Possible remedy:

- The article suggests the **negotiable warehouse receipt system** as a possible solution for the above challenge.
- The availability of the negotiable warehouse receipt system can help meet the urgent needs of farmers, under which the FPOs can give advances to farmers against their produce as collateral.

Working capital needs of the FPOs:

- The implementation of a negotiable warehouse receipt system would entail the need for **large working capital for the FPOs**.
- However, currently, most FPOs get a large share of their **loans for working capital from microfinance institutions at very high rates**. At such rates, stocking may not be economically viable for the FPOs.

Possible remedy:

- NABARD can help ensure that FPOs get their working capital at interest rates of 4 to 7 percent through financial support and interest subsidy.

Condition of agri-futures markets in India

- A vibrant agri-market system would not only be **spatially integrated (one nation, one market)** but also be **temporally integrated (spot and futures markets convergence)**.

- Only such an agri-market system can ensure the Indian farmers the best price for their produce and also help them hedge market risks.

- The **size of the agri-futures markets of India is much smaller** compared to say China or the US.
- The value of traded contracts on agri-futures in **the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX), the largest agri-commodities derivatives exchange in India**, has been decreasing over the years. In terms of volume too, the numbers of futures contracts have also fallen.
- There is little support for the idea of futures markets in the agricultural sector in India. These markets are often blamed for any abnormal price rise or fall in agricultural products. A rise in agri-prices would often result in the banning of agri-futures.

Possible remedy:

- NABARD should devise a compulsory module that trains FPOs in the domain of agri-futures.
- Government agencies like the Food Corporation of India (FCI), National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) and State Trading Corporation (STC) should increase their participation in agri-futures.
- Banks providing loans to FPOs and traders should participate in commodity futures as **“re-insurers” for the growth of agri-markets.**
- Government policy has to be more stable and market-friendly.

Conclusion:

- There is a need to create a comprehensive package that will help the stakeholders realise better prices and also hedge market risks.
- NABARD can play a leading role in the effective implementation of such a package system.

F. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Tidbits

1. Biodiversity park to come up in Aravalli

What's in News?

A biodiversity park will be developed on around 100 acres in Gurgaon's Kasan village in the Aravalli mountain range.

- The village panchayat has adopted a resolution to pledge land for this park.
- Also, Haryana had the target to increase its reserve forest cover from 3% to 20%.
- 125 million saplings would be planted in the State in 2020.

2. Chinese Minister makes rare visit to Tibet border

What's in News?

In the so-called efforts to safeguard national security, China's Foreign Minister and State Councillor Wang Yi has made a rare visit to inspect border infrastructure in Tibet.

- Among the BRI projects underway in Tibet is a cross-border economic corridor to Nepal, called the Trans-Himalayan Multi-dimensional Connectivity Network project.
 - It also envisages a railway link connecting China and Nepal.
- Wang conducts special research trips to several Chinese regions every year and had visited the China-Myanmar border in 2019.
- The trip came against the backdrop of the [China-India border clash](#) in the Galwan Valley in June 2020.
 - Five rounds of Corps Commander-level talks have been held so far.
 - The Chinese side has so far turned down India's demand for a return to the status quo ante prior to the tensions that saw multiple transgressions.
 - The People's Liberation Army (PLA) remains present on India's side of the LAC on the north bank of Pangong Lake.
 - It has continued to obstruct India's patrols in the Depsang plains.

3. The centrality of devolution in development

- The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka created the provision for **Provincial Councils in Sri Lanka**.
- The 13th amendment was brought up as part of the **Indo-Sri Lanka accord in 1987**.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following are the left bank tributaries of River Godavari?

1. Dharna
2. Penganga
3. Mula
4. Manjra
5. Pench

Choose the correct option:

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Left bank tributaries of River Godavari are Sabari, Indravati, Penganga, Wainganga, Wardha, Pench, Kanhan, etc.
- Right bank tributaries are Peddavagu, Maner, Manjra, Pravara, Mula, Dharna, etc.

Q2. Who among the following British officials was assassinated by Madan Lal Dhingra?

- a. Lord Curzon
- b. Curzon Wylie
- c. Sir Joseph Bampfylde Fuller
- d. Lord Mayo

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- India House was the centre of revolutionary activities for Indian independence outside India.
- The organisation was liquidated after the assassination of an army officer Curzon Wylie by its member Madan Lal Dhingra.
- Curzon Wylie was assassinated on 1 July 1909 in London by the Indian revolutionary Madan Lal Dhingra.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to PM-CARES Fund:

1. Both Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF) and PM CARES fund are chaired by the Prime Minister.
2. PM-CARES Fund does not get any budgetary support and consists entirely of voluntary contributions from individuals or organizations.
3. Spending from PMNRF requires approval from Parliament.
4. PM CARES Fund is barred from accepting donations and contributions from individuals and organizations based in foreign countries.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Both Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF) and PM CARES fund are chaired by the Prime Minister.
- PM-CARES Fund does not get any budgetary support and consists entirely of voluntary contributions from the individuals or organizations.
- Spending from both the PM CARES Fund and the PMNRF does not require approval from Parliament.
- A separate account for receiving donations from foreign countries has been opened. This enables PM CARES Fund to accept donations and contributions from individuals and organizations based in

foreign countries. Foreign donations in the PM CARES Fund would also get exemption under the FCRA.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to Common Services Centre (CSC) programme:

1. It is an initiative of the Ministry of Human Resource Development.
2. They are the access points for the delivery of various electronic services to villages in India.
3. It is also one of the approved projects under the Integrated Mission Mode Projects of the National eGovernance Plan.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Common Services Centre (CSC) programme is an initiative of the Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY).
- Common Services Centres (CSCs) are a strategic cornerstone of the Digital India programme.
- They are the access points for the delivery of various electronic services to villages in India, thereby contributing to a digitally and financially inclusive society.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. The newly launched Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) is a welcome measure in the domain of agri-marketing but its effectiveness will depend on addressing the implementational challenges. Comment. (15 marks, 250 words)(GS paper 3/Economy)
2. Given the conflict-ridden history of the Arab-Israeli ties, the recent deal between Israel and UAE comes as a welcome relief for the region. Examine. (10 marks, 150 words)(GS paper 2/International Relations)

