

18 Jul 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. 7 months on, probe drags on in lawyer-policeman clash case

Context:

- In November 2019, a policeman was allegedly assaulted by a lawyer at Saket Court premises, an incident that led to massive protests outside Delhi Police headquarters.
- Two separate FIRs were registered in the case under various sections of IPC, including assault and

- using criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty.
- There seems to be no progress made in the case.

This topic has been covered in the 7th November 2019 Comprehensive News Analysis. [Click here](#) to read.

2. Appeal to pause work on legal reform

Context:

Raising concerns that Indian criminal law cannot be overhauled in six months amidst a pandemic, 123 eminent personalities including former [Supreme Court](#) judges, senior lawyers and academics have written a letter to the national committee to reform penal laws in the country, set up by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

This topic has been covered in the 11th July 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis. [Click here](#) to read.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. UN blacklists Pak. Taliban leader Noor Wali Mehsud

What's in News?

Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terror group's leader Noor Wali Mehsud has been designated as a global terrorist by the UN.

Details:

- The [UN Security Council's](#) 1267 ISIL and Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee added Mehsud to the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaeda Sanctions List.
- This would subject the Pakistani national to an assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo.

Who is Noor Wali Mehsud?

- In June 2018, Mehsud was named the leader of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, following the death of former TTP leader Maulana Fazlullah.
- The TTP was blacklisted by the UN on July 29, 2011, for its association with al-Qaeda.
 - The group had claimed responsibility for an attempted bombing in Times Square in April and May 2010.
 - It had launched a multi-pronged assault against the United States Consulate in Peshawar.

Why is Mehsud black-listed?

- He has been blacklisted for participating in the financing, planning and perpetrating acts on behalf of and in support of entities associated with al-Qaeda.
- According to the sanctions committee, under Noor Wali's leadership, TTP has claimed responsibility for numerous deadly terrorist attacks across Pakistan, including an attack targeting Pakistani security forces in North Waziristan and a bomb attack against Pakistani soldiers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2019.

- The U.S. domestically designated Noor Wali as a terrorist in September 2019.

Note:

Blacklisting by the UN Security Council entails that all states are required to freeze without delay the funds and other financial assets or economic resources of designated individuals and entities.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. 'Draft EIA gives licence for violations'

Context:

Concerns are being raised about the Draft Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) 2020 diluting existing protections.

Read more about Draft Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) covered in the 13th March 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis. [Click here](#) to read.

Also read the Editorial [Green-lighting ecological decimation amidst a pandemic](#) covered in 9th July 2020 CNA.

Category: SECURITY

1. Customs unravels hawala trail in Kerala gold smuggling case

Context:

The Customs Department has moved to track down the network of sponsors who had purportedly financed the illegal import of gold in trade quantities via air cargo shipments addressed to the consulate of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), in Kerala.

Details:

- Investigators believe the money raised in Kerala was sent to Dubai via an informal hawala banking system headquartered in Hyderabad.
- The role of the hawala operator and the likelihood that the secretive money transfer channel could be used to send cash to finance terrorist activities had kindled the NIA's interest in the smuggling case.
- Hawala channels were also active conduits for laundering proceedings from illegal activities.

Hawala

- Hawala is an informal method by which money can change hands without the use of banks.
- This works through codes, contacts and trust with no paperwork at all.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

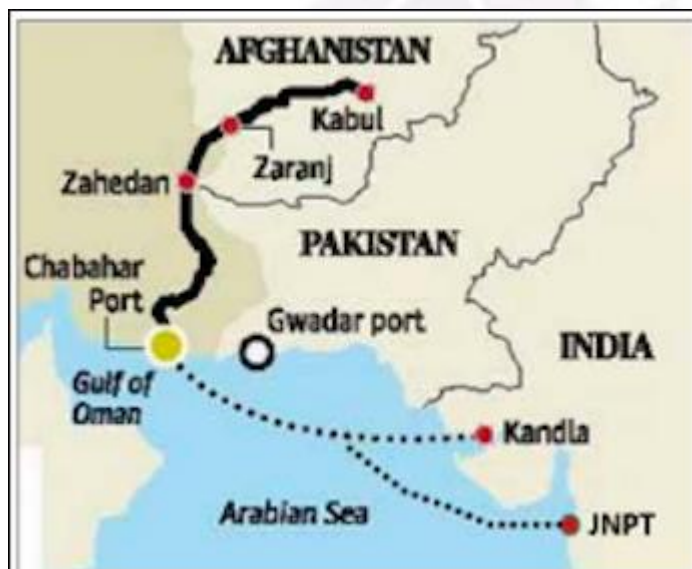
E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Iran ties need quiet diplomacy

Background

- Iran's Chabahar port is the only deep seaport and India's gateway to Central Asia. The port was inaugurated in 2017, it not only side-stepped Pakistan but also counter-balanced the Chinese-controlled Gwadar port.
 - India had an ambitious plan - offload shipments in Chabahar, load them on trucks and trains, send them to Zahedan in Iran, go further to Zaranj in Afghanistan and take the goods to the central Asian republics.
- For this plan to be successful, India needed to develop better connectivity to the port - enter the Chabahar-Zahedan railway line, the 628-km-long track connecting the port to Zahedan.
- The project was part of a trilateral agreement between India, Afghanistan and Iran and India's plans to build an alternate trade route to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- Indian government-owned Indian Railways Construction Ltd (IRCON) was tasked to finance the project costing up to \$1.6 billion and to provide services, superstructure work.



Context

- India's involvement in the Chabahar-Zahedan railway project in Iran may have run into trouble.
- Iran has decided to go it alone on the rail line from Chabahar port to Zahedan — the project that was

slated to be carried out with Indian assistance.

Reason for the cancellation of the project

- Iran said that India was delaying funding and other associated aspects.
 - The delays were also over contract disagreements.
- The project was being stalled because of US sanctions on Iran.
 - India was given a waiver from U.S. sanctions to continue cooperation on Chabahar as it contributed to Afghanistan's development.
 - Despite the waiver, the project has suffered delays because of the time taken by the U.S. Treasury to actually clear the import of heavy equipment such as rail-mounted gantry cranes, mobile harbour cranes, etc.
 - Thus, finding suppliers and partners continued to remain a challenge as banks too were reluctant to provide loans.
- India's dilemma also stems from the fact that robust support from the US is essential when it is locked in a border stand-off with China.

Funding

- The project is expected to complete in less than two years by March 2022 as the Iranian Railways is going to work without Indian assistance.
- The cost of the project is estimated at approximately \$400 million, from the Iranian National Development Fund.

Impact on India

- It is a diplomatic loss to India. It is a sign of Iran losing confidence in India.
- The development of the port, and the link overland through Iran to the Afghan border, was supposed to be India's answer to Pakistan's denial of the trading route through Wagah to Khyber pass into Afghanistan and beyond, to Central Asia.
 - It now seems like a big roadblock in India's strategic ambitions in Central Asia.
- It loses its influence in the trade corridor and it is a setback for India's bigger plan since the railroad was supposed to be a transit corridor to Afghanistan after connecting Chabahar to Zahedan, the railroad was to be linked to Zaranj in Afghanistan.
 - Also, it was India's Border Roads Organisation that helped build the 218 km Route 606 in Afghanistan, known otherwise as the Delaram-Zaranj highway that cut road travel time between Afghanistan and Iran.

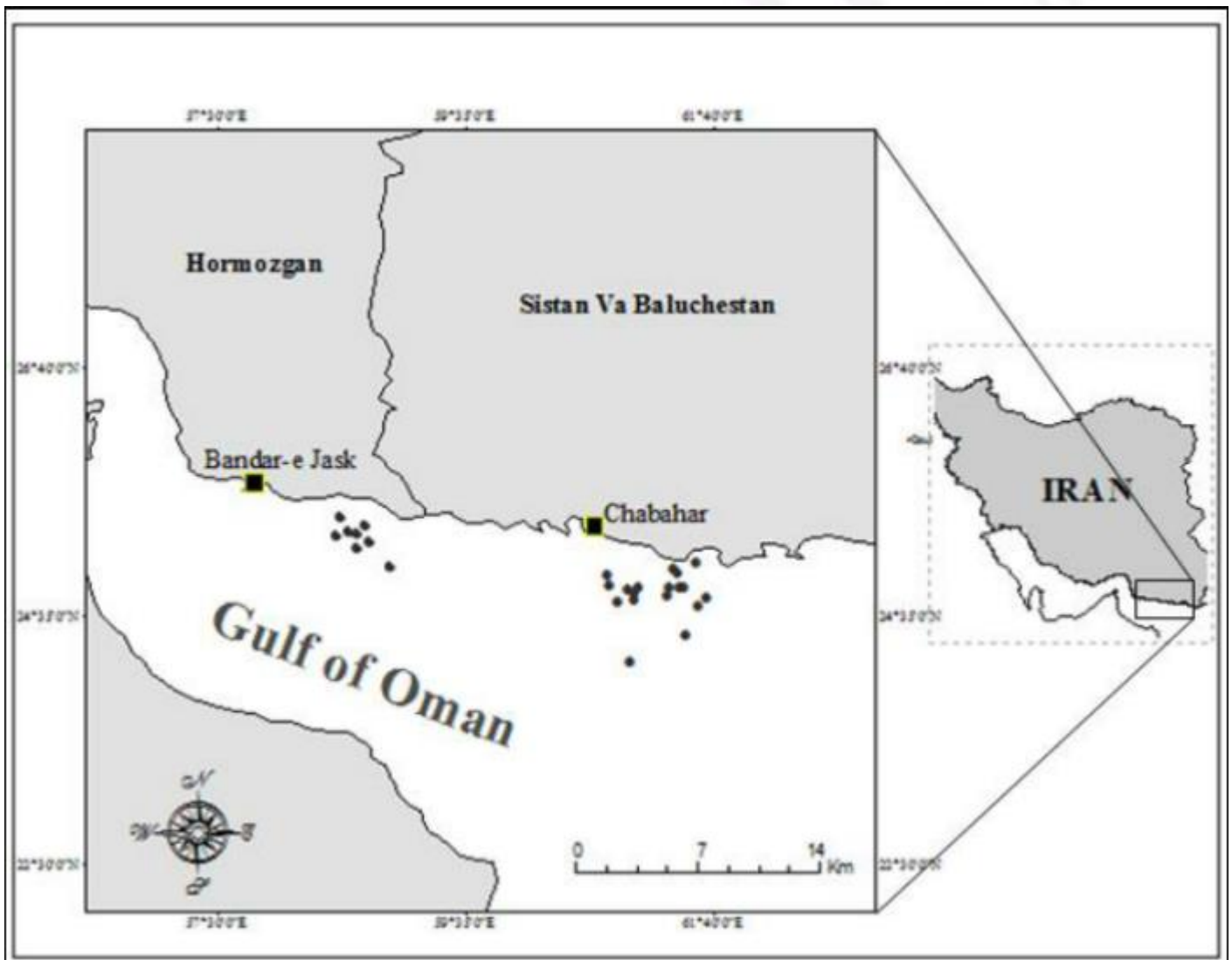
China's Strategic Partnership Deal

- Beijing is set to gain from this Chabahar development. The development comes at a time when China is finalising a \$400 billion deal with Iran. Not surprising given the two countries have a common enemy - the United States.
 - Once the agreement is in place, China might look to have a major controlling role at Chabahar port, similar to its role at Pakistan's Gwadar port, along with access to its duty-free zone and an oil refinery nearby.
- China will also invest \$120 billion into **Iran's transport and manufacturing infrastructure**, thus giving it inroads into major sectors in Iran including banking, telecommunications, ports and railways.
- Beijing is also concluding a **security and military partnership with Tehran**. It calls for "joint training and exercises, joint research and weapons development and intelligence sharing" to fight "the lopsided battle with terrorism, drug and human trafficking and cross-border crimes".

- Initial reports in Iran have suggested China will deploy 5,000 security personnel to protect its projects in Iran. Some reports suggest **Kish Island in the Persian Gulf**, located at the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz, may be “sold” to China. Iranian officials have denied this.
- Iran is already a signatory of China’s [Belt and Road Initiative \(BRI\)](#).

India's loss is China's gain

- Firstly, it will ensure a tighter grip over Iran which is a country with a population of 80 million and 60 percent people under 30.
- Secondly, Chabahar's loss is Gwadar's gain. The two ports are just 172 km away. Gwadar already has better connectivity, and China is unlikely to be shy of promoting it as the go-to port for trading with Central Asia.
- Thirdly, by kicking India out of a project in Iran, China gets to poison one more of India's allies and China gets to carve its way into trying to influence the affairs in Chabahar.
- Fourthly, the Iran-China deal impinges on India’s “strategic ties” with Iran and the use of Chabahar port. **Bandar-e-Jask** lies to the west of Chabahar & right before the Straits of Hormuz. China would thus extend its control along the Pakistan-Iran coast.
 - If China gets access to the Iranian city of **Jask** (supposed entrance to the Persian Gulf), it would give China a strong hand in the sea route for most of the world's oil.



Cautious Approach towards China

- Iran may well be considering a long-term partnership with China, but Iranian negotiators are wary of growing Chinese mercantilist tendencies.

Advantage India

- It is true that China has a greater capacity to resist U.S. sanctions compared to India but Iran realises the advantage of working with its only partner that enjoys a sanctions waiver from the U.S. for Chabahar since it provides connectivity for land-locked Afghanistan.
- Iran and India also share an antipathy to a Taliban takeover in Afghanistan. This is why Iran would like to keep the door open.
 - Iranian officials confirmed that India could join later and the MoU between IRCON and Iran's Rail Ministry was still in place.

Way forward

- There are numerous tales of Indian cooperation projects in Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, etc. suffering delays and cost overruns that only make it easier for China to expand its footprint in India's neighbourhood.
 - For instance, the **Pancheshwar Dam project in Nepal** has been hanging fire since 1991. Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised to speed it up when he visited Kathmandu in August 2014, but little progress was made.
 - A **still to be completed trilateral highway between India, Myanmar and Thailand** has been overshadowed by a Chinese-built highway that has boosted China-Myanmar border trade.
- India needs to improve its implementation record of infrastructure projects that it has taken up in its neighbourhood.

Conclusion

- New Delhi cannot take its allies for granted especially when Beijing is expanding its horizons of control.
- The key is to continue to remain politically engaged with Iran so that there is a better appreciation of each other's sensitivities and compulsions.
- The Chabahar project is important for India's regional goals, and for its relations with Iran. Therefore, India needs to act quickly.

Category: EDUCATION

1. University examination guidelines that score low

Context

- According to an official statement from the [University Grants Commission \(UGC\)](#), final year university examinations may be postponed until the end of September 2020, but must be conducted in either online or offline mode.
- Students who are unable to appear for these examinations will be given the opportunity to appear for special examinations which will be conducted later.
- The Home Ministry has also given its approval for the conduct of the examinations in a letter to the Ministry of Human Resources Development, and directed that final term exams must be

“compulsorily conducted” as per UGC guidelines.

Why was this decision taken by UGC?

- There had been a vociferous demand from a section of students and parents to cancel the examinations due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and use alternative grading mechanisms. At least seven state governments have already announced the cancellation of examinations.
- However, the UGC decided that it was important to “**protect academic quality and credibility**”.
- It further said it was “very crucial to ensure academic credibility, career opportunities and future progress of students globally”.

UGC Act 1956

- The UGC was fundamentally meant to be a fund granting institution as is clear from its nomenclature. But the UGC Act 1956 does confer on it the power of ‘coordination and determination of standards’ in universities as well and, therefore, it has become the regulator of higher education.

Issues surrounding the Indian education system

- Most examinations in India merely test an ability to recall facts or information rather than an understanding of those facts or an ability to use them in practical situations.
- Teachers usually are trained to set papers for the offline mode and transition to online mode may be a bit difficult.
- Certification through examination is important but cannot and should not be the sole goal of education.
- A one size fits all cannot apply to our universities as we have all kinds of universities, i.e. unitary, affiliating, private and subject-specific.

Criticism

1. Importance should be given to cooperative federalism

- Before the new UGC guidelines were released, many State Governments like Rajasthan, Haryana and Maharashtra had already cancelled examinations for final-year students.
- Their decisions should be respected and not be dominated, by respecting the principles of cooperative federalism.
 - This creates fresh uncertainty for states that had already decided to cancel exams.
- With the UGC recommendations in logger-heads with the decision of the States, students and parents are worried about the situation and are requesting clarity.

2. The shadow of the virus

- India has nearly one million cases of the novel coronavirus and a number of State Governments are enforcing periodic lockdowns to prevent the spread of the disease. So, the September 2020 deadline does not inspire much confidence.
- If the virus continues to spread, university administrations will not be in a position to announce examinations, and students will continue to be in limbo about their future.
- It will compromise the safety of students.

3. Furnishing Proof

- The guidelines state that the decision has been taken keeping in view the future of the students —

jobs and higher education — these prospects are, in fact, harmed by this decision.

- In normal circumstances, examinations would have been conducted and either results announced or provisional certificates given by this time.
- These help students who are graduating confirm their admissions in institutes of higher education or report at their places of employment by providing proof of them having completed the course.
- The current system does not provide for any such possibility.

4. More discrimination possible

- In case the infection does not subside, it would mean that the UGC either extends the deadline further or universities are forced to **conduct online exams**.
- In the latter case, the UGC would have imposed a patently discriminatory policy on the students — issues with access to the Internet, electricity and study materials, as well as a lack of a study environment in homes would go unaddressed — and it would only manifest the disparity prevalent in the education system.
- In the former case, it only furthers the uncertainty, and even if the UGC decides to allow universities not to conduct examinations, this entire exercise would be pointless.

5. The privileged class have an advantage over the poor

- The elite, with the privilege of being unaffected by the crisis caused by the infection as well as its economic ramifications, will be much better placed than their peers without the same level of assuredness. The whole purpose of the university acting as an equalizer will be lost.
- Students from a humble background, from remote areas and those with doctors/health workers as parents or are coronavirus positive in families would be at a disadvantage.

Advantages of cancelling examination amidst the Covid-19 crisis

- First, it avoids the extended uncertainty created by repeated (but unavoidable) postponements.
- Second, it protects the integrity of the examination by refusing to abandon its two most basic features – impartiality, or equal treatment of all examinees; and close supervision to prevent cheating.
 - Given the realities facing the overwhelming majority of our students and institutions, examinations held in the “online” or “mixed” modes will be biased because they will favour students with better access to the internet.

Way Forward

- Using alternative methods of evaluation based on each student’s own past performance (in exams conducted in normal times) offers a fair solution and brings closure, with the option of retaking the exam when normalcy is restored.

Conclusion

- UGC will have to take the decision that would be equitable, fair, pragmatic and beneficial and not one that is risky and exclusionary of any set of students.
- Let the mental health of students and their anxieties be taken into account.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Indian Pangolin

What's in News?

A rare pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) was rescued from suspected smugglers in an undercover operation by the Forest Department in Andhra Pradesh.

Indian Pangolin:

- Scientific name: *Manis crassicaudata*
- It is listed in Schedule I of the [Wildlife \(Protection\) Act, 1972](#).
- It is classified as Endangered on the IUCN Red List.

Note:

- Of the eight extant species of pangolin, the Indian Pangolin *Manis crassicaudata* and the Chinese Pangolin *Manis pentadactyla* occur in India. [/su_box]

Conservation Issues:

- Major threats to pangolins in India are hunting and poaching for local consumptive use (e.g. as a protein source and traditional medicine) and international trade, for its meat and scales in East and Southeast Asian countries, particularly China and Vietnam.
- There is now greater evidence of its inclusion in illicit international trade, in particular for its scales, from both India and Pakistan, with Myanmar and China comprising the most likely final destinations.

Conservation Initiatives:

- TRAFFIC (Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network) is mapping pangolin trade hubs, conduits, transportation, high poaching areas and drivers in relation to poaching and illegal trafficking of pangolins.
- In 2015, TRAFFIC, in partnership with WWF-India and Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) launched a social media campaign to create awareness and divert efforts towards curbing illegal trade in pangolins.

G. Tidbits

1. 9 parties against digital campaign in Bihar

What's in News?

A day after the Election Commission (EC) reversed its decision to extend postal ballot facility to voters above 65 years of age, nine opposition parties opposed the panel's move to hold only a digital campaign for the upcoming Bihar Assembly election in view of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. **The topic has been**

covered in the [17th July 2020 CNA](#).

- The parties came up with a joint memorandum opposing the EC's decision to prohibit the traditional mode of campaign and allow only a 'virtual election campaign'.
- They pointed out that as per the [Telecom Regulatory Authority of India \(TRAI\)](#), only 34% of Bihar voters had a smartphone.
- The parties said almost two-thirds of the electorate would be left out.
- The election, they argued, would end up being a mere formality and it would be a 'travesty of democratic processes'.

2. 'T.N. emerges as top investment destination'

- Tamil Nadu has emerged as India's top investment destination in the first quarter of the financial year 2020-21, even as overall fresh investment announcements in India slumped to the lowest in five years amidst a period marred by the extended pandemic-induced lockdown.
- This is according to the 'Projex Survey' released by Projects Today, an independent firm that tracks investment projects in the country.
- The survey noted that while States like Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra held investors meet and signed MoUs, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka reworked labour laws, started building land banks and sent feelers to foreign companies for investing in their States.

3. At UN meet, Modi calls for 'reformed multilateralism'

What's in News?

The Prime Minister of India, speaking at a high-level dialogue of the UN's [Economic and Social Council \(ECOSOC\)](#) on "Multilateralism after COVID-19: What kind of UN do we need at the 75th anniversary?", called for reforms within the world body.

- The PM called on members of the United Nations to pledge for reform within the UN, stating that the multilateral system needed to be more representative.
- He said "India believes that the path to achieve sustainable peace and prosperity is through multilateralism. Only reformed multilateralism with a reformed United Nations at its centre can meet the aspirations of humanity," indicating India's push for a permanent seat in a more globally representative United Nations Security Council.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to Indian Pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*):

1. It is the only species of pangolin occurring in India.
2. It is listed in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
3. It is classified as Endangered on the IUCN Red List.

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

- a. 1 and 2 only

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Of the eight extant species of pangolin, the Indian Pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) and the Chinese Pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*) occur in India.
- It is listed in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- It is classified as Endangered on the IUCN Red List.

Q2. Which of the following cases are covered under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)?

1. It is mandatory for loanee farmers to take insurance cover under this scheme.
2. It does not cover losses occurred due to war or similar hazardous activities.
3. Losses occurred after harvesting crops are covered under the scheme.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- When the scheme was launched in February 2016 it was mandatory for loanee farmers to take insurance cover under the PMFBY. However, currently subsequent to recently introduced changes, crop insurance has been made optional for both agriculture loanee and non-loanee.
- It does not cover losses occurred due to war or similar hazardous activities.
- It provides post-harvest coverage. Losses occurred after harvesting crops are covered under the scheme. Coverage is available only upto a maximum period of two weeks from harvesting.

Q3. Kish Island, recently in news, is located in:

- a. Persian Gulf
- b. South China Sea
- c. Philippine Sea
- d. Gulf of Oman

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

Kish Island, in the Persian Gulf, is located at the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz.

Q4. Arrange the following from East to West:

1. Kedarnath
2. Badrinath
3. Gangotri
4. Yamunotri

Options:

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The Char Dham programme is an initiative to improve connectivity to the Char Dham pilgrimage centres in the Himalayas, namely Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath.
- East to West: Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Yamunotri.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Iran's decision to drop India from a plan to build a rail link from the strategic Chabahar port to Zahedan on the Afghan border is a wake-up call for Delhi to rethink its strategies towards Tehran. Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words) (GS Paper 2, IR)
2. Should the University Grants Commission (UGC) reconsider its decision to conduct final year university examinations? Critically analyze. (10 Marks, 150 words) (GS Paper 2 - Education)

