

19 Aug 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. No need to audit PM CARES: SC

Context:

The Supreme Court judgement on PM CARES.

Background:

NGO Centre for Public Interest Litigation had argued that:

- The PM-CARES Fund was not subject to CAG audit.
- It was not under “public scrutiny”.
- Contributions to it were “100% tax-free”.

SC Judgement:

- The Supreme Court has endorsed the PM CARES Fund as a “public charitable trust” to which donors contribute voluntarily.
- It said that there is no occasion for the [Comptroller and Auditor General \(CAG\)](#) to audit a public charitable trust independent of budgetary support or government money.
- The Bench also refused to direct the transfer of funds from the PM CARES Fund to the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF), saying that they were two separate entities.
 - The NDRF is a statutory fund created under Section 46 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
 - The court held that individual and organisations are free to contribute to NDRF and there is no prohibition on the same.
- The court rejected the need for a fresh national disaster management plan to take on the COVID-19 challenges.

Note:

The Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) has repeatedly denied Right to Information (RTI) requests for details on donations and donors, on the grounds that the Fund is not a public authority under the Act.

This issue has been covered in [17th August 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Well ‘killing’ work suspended

Context:

The operation to ‘kill’ the blowout gas well at Baghjan in eastern Assam’s Tinsukia district was suspended, after a valve in the well casing pipe gave way.

Background:

- In May 2020, there was a continuous flow out of gas in Baghjan gas well, following a blowout.

This topic has been covered in [18th June 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#). [Click here](#) to read.

- Experts engaged by exploration major Oil India Limited (OIL) had begun killing Well No. 5 after capping it by placing a blowout preventer.
 - Two earlier attempts to place the preventer, vital for stopping the outflow of gas, had failed.

Details:

- Killing is a technical term for injecting a viscous mud-cement mixture through an inlet in the blowout preventer at very high pressure to stop the pores at a depth of 3.5 km underground from where the natural gas and associated condensates have been spewing since the blowout.
 - Injecting the killing fluid can be done at a stretch for up to 10 hours.
- Killing the well will help stop the uncontrolled outflow of gas as well as the fire.

2. Indian copters fight oil spill in Mauritius

Context:

India has sent copters and equipment to help Mauritius deal with an oil spill.

What caused the Mauritius oil spill?

- Japanese bulk carrier MV Wakashio struck a coral reef off the capital, Port Louis, in July 2020 resulting in an oil spill of over 1,000 tonnes into the Indian Ocean.
- The ship was carrying an estimated 4,000 tonnes of oil.

Concerns:

- It has raised concerns over the ecological damage caused to the region.
- The accident had taken place near two environmentally protected marine ecosystems and the Blue Bay Marine Park Reserve, which is a wetland of international importance.

How dangerous are oil spills?

- Oil spills affect marine life by exposing them to harsh elements and destroying their sources of food and habitat.
- According to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), both birds and mammals can die from hypothermia as a result of oil spills. For instance:
 - The insulating ability of fur-bearing mammals such as sea otters is destroyed by oil.
 - It also decreases the water repellency of birds' feathers, without which they lose their ability to repel cold water.

How are oil spills cleaned?

- Skimming: involves removing oil from the sea surface before it is able to reach the sensitive areas along the coastline.
- In situ burning: means burning a particular patch of oil after it has concentrated in one area.
- Releasing chemical dispersants: helps break down oil into smaller droplets, making it easier for microbes to consume, and further break it down into less harmful compounds.

India's Assistance to Mauritius:

- India's assistance is in line with its policy to extend humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to its neighbours in the Indian Ocean region, guided by the Prime Minister's vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region).
 - India has dispatched over 30 tonnes of technical equipment and material on board an Indian Air Force (IAF) Aircraft to Mauritius to help the island nation deal with the oil spill on its south-east coast.

- The indigenous Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) and Chetak helicopters given by India to Mauritius are being used extensively for rescue missions to clear the oil spill.
- A 10-member technical response team, consisting of Indian Coast Guard (ICG) personnel specially trained for dealing with oil spill containment measures, has also been deployed to Mauritius.

Category: ECONOMY

1. RBI unveils framework for retail payments entity

Context:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released a framework for setting up of a pan-India umbrella entity for retail payments systems.

Details:

- The entity that will focus on retail payments systems would be incorporated under the [Companies Act, 2013](#).
- The formation of the umbrella entity has been authorised under the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.
- The entity will be permitted to participate in Reserve Bank's payment and settlement systems, including having a current account with Reserve Bank, if required.

Functions:

- The umbrella entity will set up, manage and operate new payments systems in the retail space comprising ATMs, white label PoS, Aadhaar-based payments and remittance services.
- The entity will operate clearing and settlement systems for participating banks and non-banks, identify and manage relevant risks, monitor retail payments system developments and related issues in the country and internationally.
- It will be the responsibility of the entity to frame necessary rules and the related processes to ensure that the system is safe and sound, and that payments are exchanged efficiently.

2. Centre targets PSBs' stake sale by March

Context:

The Finance Ministry is working to expedite the sale of stakes in four state-owned banks with the aim of completing the disinvestment process in the current fiscal.

Background:

- The [Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan](#) announced a stimulus package that had promised a new Public Sector Enterprise Policy that would notify specific strategic sectors in which no more than four PSU players would be allowed, with the rest being privatised, merged or brought under holding companies.

- Also, Chief Economic Advisor Krishnamurthy Subramanian asserted that banking would be categorised as a strategic sector, meaning that apart from four public sector banks, all others would have to be privatised or merged.

Details:

- The four banks are IDBI Bank, Bank of Maharashtra, Punjab & Sind Bank and UCO Bank.
 - The government currently owns about 47% stake in IDBI Bank.
 - In 2019, state-run LIC completed the acquisition of 51% controlling stake in the lender.
- The government is looking to divest its stakes in multiple public sector companies at a time when its finances have taken a hit from significant shortfalls in tax revenue amid the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This topic has been covered in the [28th July 2020 CNA](#).

Category: SECURITY

1. Railways deploys 'Ninjas' for surveillance

Context:

The Railways has introduced a drone-based surveillance system to enhance security at railway stations, tracks and workshops.

This topic has been covered in the [18th August 2020 PIB Analysis](#).

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Troubled waters

Context:

- Tension in the **eastern Mediterranean region**.

Background:

Territorial disputes in the region:

Turkey-Greece:

- **Turkey and Greece have overlapping maritime claims.**

- The maritime dispute is with respect to the **Aegean Sea**. The dispute is related to the maritime jurisdiction areas, including the territorial waters and the continental shelf and their delimitation.



- The dispute has to do with Turkish claims to maritime territories in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Turkey has been arguing that the many Greek islands off Turkey's Aegean coast should be only entitled to a much reduced **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** as compared to the normal 200 nautical miles limit.
 - An EEZ is a sea zone in which a sovereign state has special rights regarding the exploration and use of marine resources. EEZs are prescribed according to the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982**. [Read more on Exclusive Economic Zones \(EEZs\)](#).
 - Only islands that are inhabitable or can support independent economic activity can claim an EEZ of 200 nautical miles.
- It is a fundamental rule of international law that delimitation of maritime boundaries between adjacent and opposite states in locations where maritime areas overlap or converge should be effected by agreement on the basis of international law. However, the **maritime boundaries between Turkey and Greece are yet to be delimited by agreement**.
 - **Turkey is one of the few countries which have not signed the UNCLOS framework agreement.**

Cyprus-Turkey issue:

- Cyprus is physically divided with the southern part ruled by the internationally-recognised government and the northern part controlled by Turkey.
 - **Turkey is the only member state of the United Nations that does not recognise Cyprus.**



- The Republic of Cyprus (Cyprus) and Turkey have been engaged in a dispute over the extent of their exclusive economic zones. Turkey objects to Cypriot drilling in waters that Cyprus has asserted a claim to under international maritime law.
 - Turkey is not a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, while Cyprus has signed and ratified the UNCLOS.

Discovery of gas:

- New gas reserves have been discovered in the **eastern Mediterranean Sea offshore Egypt**. This is in addition to the gas reserves discovered in the **Leviathan gas field in the eastern Mediterranean Sea offshore Israel**.
- The EU plans to transport the gas from this region to its mainland to help it reduce its dependency on Russia.
- This development has raised the Eastern Mediterranean **region's geopolitical profile**.

Recent developments:

- In early 2020, the **EastMed Gas Forum** was formed by Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan and Palestine. EU members and its allies in West Asia and North Africa have made plans to build a **gas pipeline from the Mediterranean to Europe's mainland**.
- Turkey has been kept out of this plan which has infuriated the Turkish administration which has been taking countermeasures.
- In a move meant to challenge the proposed pipeline project, Turkey reached an agreement with Libya's Tripoli-based government, to form an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) from its southern shores to Libya's northern coast across the Mediterranean. Greece has claimed that the Turkish zone violated its maritime sovereignty.
- Later, Greece too announced its EEZ with Egypt, which clashes with Turkey's zone. Immediately thereafter, **Turkey sent an exploration vessel, accompanied by a Navy fleet, to the disputed waters in the Aegean Sea**.
- Turkey's survey ship plans exploration activities around **Greece's Crete Island**, which lies just outside the Turkish-Libya economic zone, and Greece has called it a violation of their sovereignty. France, the EU's most powerful military force has dispatched warships to assist Greece.
- Drilling off Cyprus by Turkey has been ongoing since 2019. Turkey is planning to expand such operations in the coming times.

Concerns:

Complex issue:

- The territorial dispute is at the heart of the overall tensions in the region, which can be reduced only by a mutual agreement on the territory delineation.
- It is difficult to demarcate the maritime boundaries in the eastern Mediterranean, which is dotted with Turkish and Greek islands. That Turkey is not a signatory of the UNCLOS further complicates the possible negotiations.

Affecting the region:

- The highly complicated issue now has the **potential to involve Europe, West Asia and North Africa**.
- An alliance is emerging among Greece, Cyprus, Italy and France, which is backed by Egypt, Israel and the UAE. Turkey, though seems to be almost isolated, may get support from its new allies like Russia and China.
 - The European Union's relationship with Turkey has been already under strain owing to differences over issues regarding the conflicts in Syria and Libya and the question of refugee policy and human rights.
- The issue can have **ramifications for the region and the global relations at large**.

Way forward:

Diplomacy:

- The EU and Turkey should not let tensions in the eastern Mediterranean lead to open conflict.
- There is an urgent need to bring down tensions and find a **diplomatic and mutually acceptable solution to the gas contest**.
- The maritime dispute which happens to fuel tensions in the region must be resolved in line with the established related jurisprudence, while taking into consideration the **equity and security requirements of the stakeholders**.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Resurrecting the right to know

Context:

- The All Assam Students' Union's decision to release the High Level Committee report.

Background:

- A High Level Committee (HLC) was constituted by the Home Ministry in July 2019, to recommend measures to implement **Clause 6 of the Assam Accord** and define "Assamese People".
 - Clause 6 of the Assam Accord states that: "Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people."

- The HLC finalised its report by mid-February 2020. With the Central government apparently “sitting idle” over the report, the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU), which was represented in the HLC, released the report recently based on the argument of people’s right to know.

Details:

- The author, Justice (retd.) Madan B. Lokur, a former Supreme Court judge claims that the All Assam Students’ Union move to release the High Level Committee report marks a **significant development in the right to information campaign**.
- The article discusses the **major judicial observations** with respect to the [right to information](#).

State of U.P. v. Raj Narain case (1975):

- Though in the State of U.P. v. Raj Narain case (1975), the Supreme Court carved out a class of documents that demand protection like Cabinet papers, foreign office despatches, papers regarding the security of the state and high-level interdepartmental minutes, one of the judges held a pragmatic view that the citizens have a right to know every public act. It was argued that the **right to know is derived from the concept of [freedom of speech](#)**.

S.P. Gupta v. President of India case (1981):

- In the S.P. Gupta v. President of India case (1981) one of the judges had famously remarked that the current **emphasis should be on the right of a citizen to know than on his ‘need to know’ the contents of official documents**, recognizing the growing tendency in democratic countries to liberalise the restrictions placed on the right of the citizens to know what is happening in the various public offices.
- The Supreme Court in S.P. Gupta case also held that the observance of secrecy in the functioning of government and the processes of government could promote and encourage corruption and misuse or abuse of authority in the **absence of public accountability**.

Yashwant Sinha v. Central Bureau of Investigation case (2019):

- In Yashwant Sinha v. Central Bureau of Investigation (2019), the Supreme Court held that there is no provision by which the government could either restrain the publication of documents marked as secret or prevent the placing of such documents before a court of law which may have been called upon to adjudicate a legal issue concerning the parties.
 - It referred to **Section 8(2) of the Right to Information Act, 2005** which provides that a citizen can get a certified copy of a document even if the matter pertains to security or relationship with a foreign nation, if a case is made out, thus making it clear that the right to know can be curtailed only in limited circumstances and if there is an overriding public interest.
- The court referred to the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in **New York Times v. United States (1971)** wherein the adjudicating judge declined to recognise the right of the government to restrain publication of the Pentagon Papers.
- The SC didn’t accept the argument from the government that the provisions of **the Official Secrets Act, 1923** had been violated while filing for the review petition in the Rafael case.
 - The Official Secrets Act, 1923 is applicable to government servants and citizens and provides the framework for dealing with espionage, sedition, and other potential threats to the integrity of the nation.
 - The law makes spying, sharing ‘secret’ information as punishable offences. If guilty, a person may get up to 14 years’ imprisonment, a fine, or both.

- The information could be any reference to a place belonging to or occupied by the government, documents, photographs, sketches, maps, plans, models, official codes or passwords.

Conclusion:

- Recognizing that the right to know flows from the right to information, there is a need for **more transparency in government functioning**.
- Governments must effectuate the citizen's right to know and be more transparent in public interest, as long as the security of the country is not jeopardised.

Additional information:

- **The Vohra Committee report** dealt with the issue of nexus between politicians and criminals.
- It studied the problem of the **criminalisation of politics** and of the nexus among criminals, politicians and bureaucrats in India.

2. Aiming to decolonise through colonial logic

This issue has been dealt with in the following article:

[CNA dated July 11, 2020: Reform with caution](#)

F. Prelims Facts

1. African cheetah

What's in News?

- The century-old Mysuru zoo has become the second Indian zoo to house the African cheetah.
- The zoo has got one male and two females from a cheetah conservation centre in South Africa under an animal-exchange programme.

African cheetah:

- African Cheetahs are bigger in size as compared to Asiatic Cheetahs.
- They are classified as "Vulnerable" in the [IUCN Red List](#).
- They are a part of Appendix-I of CITES.

This List comprises of migratory species that have been assessed as being in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of their range.

Note:

- The cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) is listed as vulnerable among IUCN red-listed species.
- The Asiatic Cheetah was declared extinct in India in 1952. According to reports, the last Indian cheetah died around 1948.

- The Asiatic cheetah is classified as a “critically endangered” species in the IUCN Red List and is believed to survive only in Iran.

Read more about this topic covered in [29th January 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

G. Tidbits

1. Integrate depression and diabetes treatment: study

What's in News?

A joint Indo-U.S. research study found that integrating depression and diabetes treatment (‘INDEPENDENT’) improved parameters for both conditions. The study was published in a recent issue of the peer-reviewed journal JAMA.

- The study found that a low-cost one-year collaborative care model delivered in diabetes clinics can lower depressive symptoms and improve cardiometabolic health at the same time.
- The key takeaway from the study was that depression and diabetes have a bi-directional relationship.
- Depression causes counter-regulatory hormones to be secreted — adrenaline and noradrenaline — which nullify the effect of insulin on the body.
- This study has shown that treating both together has a supportive impact on both diabetes and depression among patients.

Read more about “Diabetes” covered in [14th November 2019 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

2. Report predicts 12% rise in India's cancer burden

What's in News?

The figures relating to cancer cases have been released by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the National Centre for Disease Informatics & Research (NCDIR), Bengaluru.

- According to the National Cancer Registry Programme Report 2020, cancer cases in the country are likely to increase to 15.6 lakhs by 2025 (12% increase) from the current estimated cases, based on current trends.
- The report also found that in 2020, tobacco-related cancers are estimated to contribute to 27.1% of the total cancer burden, and highest in the northeastern region of the country.
- Cancers of the lung, mouth, stomach and oesophagus were the most common cancers among men.
- Cancers of the breast and cervix uteri were the most common cancers among women.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following country/s has/have not signed the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)?

1. France
2. Greece
3. Turkey

4. Israel

Choose the correct option:

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

Turkey and Israel are not signatories of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Q2. N.N Vohra committee report is associated with:

- a. Criminalisation of Politics
- b. Banking Reforms
- c. Draft National Education Policy
- d. Panchayati Raj Institutions

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The Vohra Committee report dealt with the issue of nexus between politicians and criminals.
- It studied the problem of criminalisation of politics and of the nexus among criminals, politicians and bureaucrats in India.

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. In India, the first coal mine was opened at Raniganj in West Bengal.
2. Odisha has the largest coal reserves in India.
3. Commercial mining is prohibited in the coal sector in India.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

- In 1774, the first coal mine was opened at Raniganj in West Bengal.
- Jharkhand has the largest coal reserves in India, followed by Odisha and Chattisgarh.
- In India, commercial mining in the coal sector has been permitted. Permission has also been granted for the allotment of partially explored blocks.

Q4. Which of the following countries border Libya?

1. Mali
2. Morocco
3. Tunisia
4. Egypt
5. Sudan

Choose the correct option:

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

Libya is bounded by the Mediterranean Sea on the north, Egypt on the east, Sudan on the southeast, Niger and Chad on the south, and Tunisia and Algeria on the west.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. In the light of the tension in the eastern Mediterranean Sea region over differing maritime claims, discuss the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982. (10 marks, 150 words)(GS Paper 2/International Relations)
2. Discuss the major judicial observations with respect to the often contradicting need to balance the right to information of the people and the need to maintain secrecy in sensitive issues. (10 marks, 150 words)(GS Paper2/Polity and Governance)

