

21 Aug 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS 1 Related

SOCIAL ISSUES

1. ['Private firms employ more women in R&D'](#)

B. GS 2 Related

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [India, Bangladesh to monitor projects](#)

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [Arunachal groups differ on autonomous zones](#)

C. GS 3 Related

ECONOMY

1. ['Slowdown to extend as virus goes rural'](#)
2. [Monetary arsenal must be kept dry for use: Das](#)

D. GS 4 Related

E. Editorials

EDUCATION

1. [Technology as an enabler](#)

REGIONALISM

1. [A losing proposition](#)

SOCIAL ISSUES

1. [The marriage age misconception](#)

F. Prelims Facts

1. ['Sputnik V will be made available to Indians'](#)

G. Tidbits

1. [Indore wins cleanest city title again](#)
2. ['Namath Basai', a big hit among Kerala tribal children](#)

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

A. GS 1 Related

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. 'Private firms employ more women in R&D'

Context:

- The release of the **Science and Technology Indicators (STI), 2018 report**.

Background:

Science and Technology Indicators (STI) report:

- The STI report is a periodic compilation of the **state of scientific research in India**.
- The STI is prepared by a division of the Department of Science & Technology, the National Science and Technology Management Information System.

Details:

Dominance of government research institutes:

- Almost 60% of the total scientists in the R&D domain in India are employed by government institutions or are in the higher education sector.

Low women representation:

- Male scientists account for a higher proportion of the total scientists in India's R&D establishments. **The ratio of women to men scientists is the range 1:6 to 1:4.**
- This indicates the **inadequate representation of women scientists in the R&D domain**.
 - There has been a trend of a large drop in the number of women between the doctoral and professional stages due to **social pressure on women** to have a family that is seen as incompatible with a professional career.
 - There are also **patriarchal attitudes in hiring practices** that might be leading to lower women hiring.

Private sector performance better:

- Data from the STI report notes that India's private sector research companies employ a larger proportion of women in core research and development activities than government-funded major scientific agencies.
- Private sector companies seem to have a **greater commitment** to ensuring that women scientists are fairly represented in recruitment, promotions and appraisal processes than in many scientific organisations.

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. India, Bangladesh to monitor projects

Context:

- India-Bangladesh relations.

Details:

- India and Bangladesh will set up a **high-level monitoring mechanism** to regularly review and monitor the ongoing **bilateral projects**.
- The monitoring mechanism is expected to assist in the timely completion of many ongoing projects, including the **Rampal Maitree Power Plant, India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline, and rail links** between Akhaura-Agartala, Chilahati-Haldibari and Khulna-Mongla rail line.

For information on the recent developments in India-Bangladesh ties, refer to:

[CNA dated Aug 20, 2020: India offers vaccine to Bangladesh on priority](#)

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Arunachal groups differ on autonomous zones

Context:

- The first meeting of the consultative committee in Arunachal Pradesh.

Background:

[CNA dated Aug 16, 2020: Arunachal forms panel for autonomy demands](#)

Details:

- The community-based organisations (CBOs) taking part in the consultative committee have differed on the issue of the creation of two autonomous councils but agreed that Arunachal Pradesh needs to be brought under the **Sixth Schedule of the Constitution**.
- Currently, Arunachal Pradesh is in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution.

For more information on this issue, refer to:

[CNA dated Aug 14, 2020: Arunachal groups push for 6th Schedule status](#)

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. 'Slowdown to extend as virus goes rural'

Context:

- The economic impact of the pandemic.

Background:

Economic slowdown:

- As per the estimates based on a Reuters poll, India's economy is likely to have **contracted 20% over the first quarter (April-June)** of the current fiscal year.
- **The Indian economy is forecasted to shrink 5.1% in the current fiscal year ending in March 2021.** This would mark the weakest growth rate since 1979.

Agriculture to help revive growth:

- The administration has been citing higher fertiliser demand and sowing of monsoon crops, as signs of **increased rural activity**.
 - Farmers planted almost 14% more between June 1 and July 31 compared to last year and also, fertiliser output rose by 4.2% in June. The normal monsoon has contributed to a robust sowing activity in the country.

- There are hopes that the resurgent rural economy will be a **buffer against shrinking exports and manufacturing** and help guard against a sharp decline in economic activity.
 - Agriculture supports almost 50% of the Indian population and accounts for 15% of economic output.

Concerns:

- Some economists are arguing that as against the perception that the economic impact of the [COVID-19](#) pandemic has subdued post the lifting of the lockdown, the economic situation has, in fact, worsened since April and May.

Cases in rural areas:

- India has the third-highest global number of virus infections and **new cases are increasingly emerging outside major cities in rural areas** that were initially isolated from the pandemic.

Challenges in rural areas:

- The reverse migration has led to the issue of **surplus labour in rural areas** with the associated concerns of **lowering of wage rates and incomes**. This might cause distress in the rural economy.
- The sluggish consumer demand and a slowdown in rural lending are causes for concern.

Demand slump:

- There has been a **slump in monthly demand for fuel, electricity, steel, consumer durables and auto sales over April-June months**.
- The low capacity utilisation amid subdued domestic and external demand is likely to delay the revival of investment.

Fiscal challenges:

- India's fiscal deficit has hit 83.2% of the fiscal year's target. A **widening fiscal deficit** will limit India's ability to provide more stimulus to the economy.

Conclusion:

- The signs of recovery in the rural economy may at best be a mitigating factor and it is likely that India may be **moving towards a longer economic slowdown than earlier expected**.

2. Monetary arsenal must be kept dry for use: Das

Context:

- **Review of the monetary policy** by the Monetary Policy Committee.

For more information, refer to:

[CNA dated Aug 7, 2020: RBI keeps key policy rates unchanged](#)

Background:

- There has been a **cumulative 250 basis points reduction in policy rate since February 2019** in an effort to support the economic recovery process.

Details:

- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has opted for status quo and **left interest rates unchanged in the current review.**

Arguments for status quo:

Wait for stabilization of the economy:

- Though there was room for further rate cuts, the MPC decided against it so as to wait for a better assessment of the outlook for growth and inflation as the **economy has been opening in a staggered manner.**
- There are high **uncertainties regarding the macroeconomic environment** and making policy decisions in such volatile situations might become counter-productive.
- The economy is expected to exhibit a slow recovery with the economic situation likely to worsen before it gets better. It would be prudent to wait for the economy to stabilize before employing stimulus measures.

Inflationary concerns:

- **Inflation is currently above the upper band of 6%.** Further rate cuts could only stoke higher inflation rates in the economy.
 - The primary mandate given to MPC for inflation targeting is 4% (with +/- 2%).

Stagflation concerns:

- Despite the large rate cuts to spur growth, growth has steadily declined.
- Generalised inflationary pressures, in a situation where growth is expected to contract sharply, lead to stagflation concerns.
 - Stagflation is a condition where persistently **high inflation is combined with high unemployment and stagnant demand** in a country's economy.

To wait for monetary rate transmission:

- Given the **general lag between the policy rate cuts and the decrease in loan rate from the banks**, one line of argument has been that there is the need to wait for the monetary rate transmission to occur.
 - The monetary transmission mechanism is the process by which general economic conditions are affected as a result of monetary policy decisions.

Conclusion:

- As suggested by the RBI Governor, it would be wise to keep some room for further **rate cuts to use them judiciously for promoting growth.**

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: EDUCATION

1. Technology as an enabler

Context:

- The [National Education Policy \(NEP\) 2020](#).

Details:

- The integration of technology in the teaching-learning process for enhancing teaching-learning outcomes is an important policy prescription of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.
- The **NEP emphasises the vital linkage between education and technology**.
- An autonomous body called **National Educational Technology Forum (NETF)** will be entrusted with the task of advising institutions on the use of technology, capacity building, providing directions for research and innovation and creating avenues for exchange of ideas.

Arguments against the adoption of new technology:

- Some sceptics argue that given the existing **digital divide and associated challenges on equity**, the emphasis on new technology may go against the **ideals of equity and inclusion**.

Accessibility:

- The lack of resources like digital devices and internet connection can act as structural hindrances to access of technology-based education.
- The **urban-rural disparity** in the conduct of online classes is alarmingly high indicating the disparity in access.

Non-inclusive:

- Students from marginalised social groups face severe **challenges due to academic non-integration**.
- A large share of the student population is from the lower social strata of society. A significant proportion of these students are from government schools, under-developed regions, remote villages and urban margins. They are more likely to have had the regional language as a medium of instruction in schools. Given the predominance of English as the medium of instruction in digital learning modes, such students face difficulties.
- Given that the institutional mechanisms to bridge the gaps are also inadequate, there is a **lack of access to quality educational experience and equitable academic outcomes**.

Arguments in favour of adoption of new technology:

Self-paced learning:

- Digital education is capable of tackling the temporal restrictions on learning.
- In technology-mediated learning, the pace of the learning is mostly not determined by the teacher and the students can learn at their own pace. They have the freedom to learn according to their convenience.

- This feature of **self-paced and student-centred learning** can provide greater support to marginalised learners and help teachers to assume a new role of the facilitator.
- The technologies like big data, [artificial intelligence](#), machine learning can help tailor the courses as per the student's abilities and interests.

Reach students in remote areas:

- Digital education is also capable of **tackling the spatial restrictions on learning**. E-learning opportunities can allow students from rural areas and hinterlands without the means and resources to shift to cities for educational purposes an opportunity to learn from the best institutes.

Affordable and quality education:

- The e-learning system would be able to reach a higher number of students at much lower costs. This could **ensure affordable and quality education for everyone**.
- Opportunities provided by digital technology can act as a potential source for promoting **egalitarianism in higher education** if access to technology is democratised and values of inclusion are institutionalised.

Better learning outcomes:

- The skill gap of graduating students is often pointed out by the industries.
- Technology can play a key role in **providing additional learning inputs**. This could enable better learning outcomes among the students.
- Eg., the use of virtual reality technology can help students visualize real components and processes, helping them understand the concepts better.

Conclusion:

- Though the NEP's emphasis on technology is a welcome step, the context and purpose of technology adoption are equally important steps.
- Universities and colleges should **invest in ICT infrastructure keeping the larger goals of affordable, quality and inclusive education**.
- This can help ensure the country's transformative journey towards a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy.

Category: REGIONALISM

1. A losing proposition

Context:

- The recent announcement by the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister that only those domiciled in the state would be eligible for government jobs in the State.

Details:

- India has been witness to many versions of the '**sons of the soil**' argument over decades.

- Some states are trying to introduce various types of domicile eligibility for job seekers, in private and government jobs. Some states are pushing measures to give priority to locals in employment in the private sector while some states are pushing for reservation of government jobs for the locals.

Concerns:

Mainstreaming of nativism:

- The developments seem to denote a **certain mainstreaming of nativism** with more political parties and states appearing to be adopting the ‘sons of the soil’ argument.
- Similar demands are propositions that have been made in the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana and Telangana in recent years.
- Apart from the regional parties which have always focused on local sentiments, even the national parties seem to be taking forward the ‘sons of the soil’ argument.

Against national integration:

- The calls for reservation for locals go against the spirit of national integration.

Diversionary tactics:

- Such moves are meant to incite local passions in order to divert public attention from the real challenge of generating employment for the country’s increasing youth population.
- India has a **severe unemployment crisis** and nativism cannot solve this problem.

Bad economic policy:

- The corporates often view increasing nativism with scepticism.
- Migrant populations fulfil a market demand created by gaps in skills and preferences. The move to restrict migrant inflow can lead to a **lack of requisite human resources in the region**.
- Nativism can aggravate the employment crisis by creating a **hostile environment to investment, growth and employment generation**.

Conclusion:

- There is a **need to guard against the rising tide of nativism while accepting the exceptions provided in the legal and constitutional scheme of India** to manage its remarkable diversity.
 - States requiring a certain proficiency in the local language to be employed in government jobs, which is for administrative reasons, cannot be counted as regionalism.
 - A restriction on the movement of people into tribal areas of India does not amount to regionalism.

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. The marriage age misconception

This issue has been previously covered in the following article:

[CNA dated Aug 16, 2020: Govt. may review the age of marriage: PM](#)

F. Prelims Facts

1. 'Sputnik V will be made available to Indians'

- Russia has recently announced the **world's first vaccine to combat COVID-19, named Sputnik V.**
- The vaccine is based on the principle of **using adenoviral vectors** to introduce the genetic code of the coronavirus spike into the human body.

G. Tidbits

1. Indore wins cleanest city title again

- For the fourth year in a row, Indore has been ranked the cleanest city in the country, according to the **Swachh Survekshan 2020 report released by the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry.**

Know more about Swachh Survekshan 2020 in [PIB dated Aug 18, 2020](#).

2. 'Namath Basai', a big hit among Kerala tribal children

- 'Namath Basai' is the name of the **Kerala government's programme** involving the teaching of tribal children in their mother tongue.
 - The languages include **Irula, Muduka and Kurumba.**
- The programme has succeeded in retaining hundreds of tribal children in their online classes and is also helping preserve the ethnic culture and language of the tribal people.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. The Swachh Survekshan is commissioned by which of the following ministries?

- a. Ministry of Urban Development
- b. Ministry of Rural Development
- c. Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
- d. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Swachh Survekshan is meant to monitor the performance of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.
- The extensive sanitation survey is commissioned by the Ministry of Urban Development and carried out annually by the Quality Council of India.
- The survey was introduced by the government with the objective of generating large-scale participation in Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

Q2. Which of the following are autonomous councils listed under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution?

1. Karbi Anglong
2. Chakma
3. Lai
4. Mara
5. Bodoland
6. Dima Hasao

Options:

- a. 1, 5 and 6 only
- b. 1, 2 and 5 only
- c. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6
- d. 3, 5 and 6 only

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India allows for the formation of autonomous administrative divisions which have been given autonomy within their respective states.
- The list contains 10 Autonomous Councils in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura.
- Karbi Anglong, Dima Hasao and Bodoland are from Assam.
- Chakma, Lai and Mara are from Mizoram.

Q3. The Maitree Super Thermal Power Project is a collaborative project between India and which of the following countries?

- a. Germany
- b. Bangladesh
- c. Sri Lanka
- d. France

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Maitree super thermal power project is a 1,320MW coal-fired power station under construction in Rampal, Bangladesh.
- The power plant is being developed by Bangladesh India Friendship Power Company (BIFPCL), a 50:50 joint venture between India's state-run National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) and Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB).

Q4. Which of the following best describes Stagflation?

- a. It is a condition where the inflation rate remains stagnate over an extended time period.
- b. It represents a decrease in the rate of inflation.

- c. It is a decrease in the general price level of goods and services.
- d. It represents a situation in which the inflation rate is high and the economic growth rate slows.

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Stagflation or recession-inflation is a situation in which the inflation rate is high, the economic growth rate slows, and unemployment remains steadily high.
- Deflation is a decrease in the general price level of goods and services.
- Disinflation is a decrease in the rate of inflation – a slowdown in the rate of increase of the general price level of goods and services in a nation's gross domestic product over time.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. The integration of technology in the teaching-learning process can lead to significant advantages in the Indian educational system. Examine. (10 marks, 150 words)(GS Paper 2/Education)
2. The mainstreaming of nativism in India is a cause of concern. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)(GS Paper 1/Regionalism)