

22 Aug 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Haryana has more water than Punjab: Amarinder

Context:

Asserting that Haryana already has more water than Punjab, the Punjab Chief Minister has expressed the hope that Haryana would see Punjab's viewpoint on the issue of the Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal, given Punjab's critical groundwater situation.

Background:

- In 1966, with the reorganisation of Punjab state, it was decided that the new state of Haryana would get a share of the Sutlej River water.
- Punjab was opposed to sharing waters of the Ravi and Beas with Haryana, citing riparian principles, and arguing that it had no water to spare.
- In 1976, the Centre issued a notification allocating to Haryana 3.5 million acre-feet (MAF) out of undivided Punjab's 7.2 MAF.
- Subsequently, a tribunal headed by Supreme Court Judge V Balakrishna Eradi was set up to reassess the availability and sharing of water.
 - In 1987, the tribunal recommended an increase in the shares of Punjab and Haryana to 5 MAF and 3.83 MAF, respectively.
- To enable Haryana to use its share of the waters of the Sutlej and its tributary Beas, a canal linking the Sutlej with the Yamuna, cutting across the state, was planned.
- A tripartite agreement was also negotiated between Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan in this regard.

Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal:

- The Satluj Yamuna Link Canal is a proposed 214-kilometer long canal to connect the Sutlej and Yamuna rivers.
- The proposal met obstacles and was referred to the Supreme Court.
- It defines river water sharing between Punjab and Haryana.

Details:

- Haryana has been seeking the completion of the SYL canal to get its share of 3.5 million acre-feet of river water.
- In 1980, Haryana completed its portion of the project, Punjab skipped the deadlines and moved to the SC.
- Haryana has maintained that Punjab must comply with the Supreme Court orders of 2002 and 2004 in this regard.
- The issue is back on centre stage after the Supreme Court directed the chief ministers of Punjab and Haryana in July 2020 to negotiate and settle the SYL canal issue.

Why is Punjab not willing to share the River Water?

- Punjab is facing a severe water crisis due to over-exploitation of its underground aquifers for the wheat/paddy monocycle.
- According to the Central Underground Water Authority's report, its underground water is over-exploited to meet the agriculture requirements in about 79 percent area of the state.

2. M.P. will offer govt. jobs on NRA scores: Chouhan

Context:

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that state government jobs would be offered based on marks obtained in the National Recruitment Agency (NRA) test.

Background:

- The Union Cabinet approved the creation of the NRA to conduct a preliminary examination, the Common Eligibility Test, for recruitment to Group B and C (non-technical) vacancies in the Central Government.

- Currently, these posts are being filled through different examinations.

National Recruitment Agency (NRA):

- The agency will have representatives from the Staff Selection Commission (SSC), Railways Recruitment Board (SSC) and Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS).
- The proposed National Recruitment Agency (NRA) will conduct a common preliminary examination for various recruitments in the Central Government.
- However, the present recruitment agencies– IBPS, RRB and SCC — will remain in place.
- Based on the screening done at the CET score level, final selection for recruitment shall be made through separate specialized Tiers (II, III, etc.) of examination which shall be conducted by the respective recruitment agencies.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: DEFENCE

1. Army issues tender for 7.62mm ammunition from private firms

Context:

The Army has issued a Request for Information (RFI) for procurement of five different types of 7.62mm calibre ammunition to meet the annual requirement for the next 10 years.

Details:

- The RFI was issued by the Army's Master General of Ordnance.
- It gets particular focus following the 101 negative import list announced by the Defence Ministry that includes a range of ammunition.
- The five types notified include ammunition for Dragunov sniper rifle and Galil sniper rifle.

Terms mentioned in RFI:

- The selected manufacturer is expected to commence supply within six months of signing the contract and initial supply may be through Semi Knocked Down (incompletely disassembled kit), Completely Knocked Down ammunition procured from the Transfer of Technology (ToT) partner. The subsequent supply of ammunition will be manufactured in India.
- It proposes that the manufacturer will ensure continuous availability of minimum one year's stock components during the first two years after signing of contract or 100% indigenisation, whichever is earlier.
- In case full indigenisation is either not possible or not proposed, from the third year the manufacturer will have to hold two year's stock.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Kerala readies to host its first dragonfly festival

Context:

The WWF-India Kerala unit, in association with the Society for Odonate Studies (SOS) and Thumbipuranam, is organising the first-ever State Dragonfly Festival in Kerala.

Details:

- The Dragonfly Festival is named Thumbimahotsavam 2020.
- The festival is expected to culminate with the state dragonfly summit to be organised in January 2021.

Note:

The events are a part of a national dragonfly festival being organised by the WWF India, Bombay Natural History Society and the Indian Dragonfly Society in association with the National Biodiversity Board, [United Nations Environment Programme](#), United Nations Development Programme and the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Why are Dragonflies important?

- Dragonflies act as important bio-indicators of the ecological health of an area.
- They help in controlling the population of harmful insects and mosquitoes.
- Dragonfly larvae are equally important as they feed onto mosquito eggs and larvae, protecting the surroundings from Malaria and Dengue.
- They survive in pure and clean water ensuring that the water body is clean.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Repeal and reform

What's in News?

Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, in his first address to the newly elected Parliament, has declared his intention to repeal the landmark 19th Amendment to the Constitution, and, thereafter, work towards a new constitution.

19th Amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka

- The 19th Amendment had put a two-term limit on the Presidency and curtailed the executive powers of the President and transferred it to parliament and independent commissions.
- It made it difficult for the legislature to be dissolved at the President's whim, but also sought to protect the independence of oversight institutions.
- The legislation that introduced it was also based on a popular mandate for change in the 2015 presidential election, and received more than the required two-thirds support in the previous Parliament.

- The Rajapaksa family had alleged that the amendment was brought specifically to target the family.
 - Mahinda Rajapaksa could not contest the last November presidential elections because of the term limit and his younger brother Gotabaya became the candidate.

Issue:

The Rajapaksas secured a two-third majority in parliament during the recent general elections, thus the paving way for constitutional amendments.

- The President's remarks on the proposed Constitution can be looked at in the predictive sense of moving away from the concept of devolution.
- It will be retrograde if the idea of sharing more power with the provinces is abandoned altogether.

Distortion of democratic principles:

- If the independence of institutions such as the Election Commission (EC) is now curbed in the name of undoing the 19th Amendment, it would be a distortion of democratic principles.
 - It is now recognised that the largely peaceful and orderly polling was only because of the EC's autonomy.

Political spite between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils:

- The President's address lacked any reference to ethnic minorities.
 - For a long time, Sri Lankan leaders have maintained that they can give little by way of constitutional concessions to the minorities without the consent of the majority Sinhalese.

Way Forward:

- There is an urgent need for a new inclusive constitution that would put the country on the path of equality and reconciliation.
- The plan to rewrite the Constitution under the pretext of a 'one country, one law' principle should not be at odds with this need.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Moving resolutely toward the post-pandemic future

The COVID-19 pandemic has plunged the global economy into its deepest economic contraction since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The editorial talks about the measures taken by India to tackle the pandemic situation and its after-effects.

Steps taken by India:

When [COVID-19](#) was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO), a series of decisive, calibrated actions were taken by the Government of India which includes:

Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY):

- Following the lockdown, a massive relief package was announced for the needy. Read more about [PMGKY](#).
 - Around 80 crore citizens are being provided rations through the Public Distribution System.
 - Over 20 crore Jan Dhan women account holders, 2.3 crore construction workers, 2.8 crore beneficiaries in the National Social Assistance Programme have benefitted from the package.

Improvement in the rural economy:

- The excellent Rabi harvest has resulted in over ₹75,000 crores in farmer payments by the government.
- Almost 10 crore farmers have received ₹40,000 crores as income support through the [PM Kisan Samman Nidhi](#).
- Over 4 crore households are benefiting from the expanded Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Act scheme.
- The rural economy has benefitted from the relief programmes of the Central Government as well as the State governments.
- These massive cash payments have driven rural confidence, with consumer goods, motorcycle, and tractor purchases at or above pre-pandemic levels.

RBI and policy actions:

- Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and large corporates have been provided substantial relief through coordinated action between the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the government.
- Extensions were provided for compliance filings and tax payments. Borrowers received a loan moratorium of six months.
- RBI has cut rates by 115bps and pumped in more than ₹9 lakh crore in liquidity into the financial system.
- ₹3 lakh crores have been made available as guaranteed collateral-free loans for MSME borrowers.
- The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development ([NABARD](#)), Small Industries Development Bank of India, National Housing Bank, and Non-banking financial companies have all been provided refinancing facilities.
- The RBI has undertaken vast long-term repo operations to bring down the yield curve.
- RBI has also announced a one-time restructuring scheme to provide relief to stressed sectors. Borrowers will be able to restructure their loans to match their cash flows, thereby protecting their businesses and jobs.
- The net result of these relief actions has been to prevent widespread business failures and job losses, which would have resulted in permanent damage to the Indian economy.

Other Key reforms:

- The [Atmanirbhar Bharat](#) revival package was announced by the government.
- The reforms introduced in agriculture, defence production, electronics manufacturing, coal mining, and the public sector, position India for the future and generate confidence among business people and investors.
- The agriculture sector has seen the most transformational changes.
 - Through a series of ordinances, price controls have largely been removed in agriculture and contract farming has been allowed.
 - Kisan credit cards are being provided to all fishermen, dairy farmers, and other agriculturists.
 - ₹1 lakh crore has been earmarked to build post-harvest facilities.
 - ₹15,000 crore has been sanctioned for animal husbandry.
- Defence production is being indigenised with 101 items meant only for domestic production.
 - Also, defence foreign direct investment of 74% is now allowed through the automatic route.
- Coal mining has been opened up for the private sector.

- The government has declared that there will be full disinvestment in all public sector enterprises in non-strategic sectors.

2. Differential impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown

The pandemic has been described as a leveller because:

- The disease can strike anyone.
- The resultant lockdowns have led to widespread job losses and economic hardships across a range of income and occupational distribution.

Walter Scheidel's Analysis

Walter Scheidel, the Austrian economic historian, argues that throughout human history, there have been four types of catastrophic events that have led to greater economic equality: pandemic, war, revolution and state collapse. In Scheidel's analysis, the decline in inequality is a result of excess mortality that raises the price of labour.

The marginalised at risk:

- Preliminary data and early indirect evidence from several parts of the world indicate that the incidence of the disease is not class-neutral.
- Poorer and economically vulnerable populations are more likely to contract the virus as well as to die from it.
- The risks extend beyond mortality as the economic consequences of the current pandemic are likely to be most concentrated among the low wage earners, and less-educated workers, segments of the labour force where racial and ethnic minorities are over-represented.

The Indian shutdown:

- The authors of the editorial found that the proportion of employed upper castes dropped from 39% to 32% between December 2019 and April 2020, a fall of 7 percentage points.
- The corresponding fall for Scheduled Castes (SCs) was from 44% to 24%, i.e. a fall of 20 percentage points.
- Thus, the fall in employment for SCs and STs was far greater in magnitude than that for upper castes.

Education as a factor:

- Data from a nationally representative survey, the India Human Development Survey for 2011-12 (IHDS-II) show that 51% of SC households have adult women who have zero years of education, i.e. are illiterate, and 27% have an illiterate adult male member.
- These proportions are in contrast to Upper Caste (UC) households, where the corresponding proportions are 11% and 24%, respectively.
- Thus, in the face of current school closures, parents of SC children would be much less equipped to assist their children with any form of home learning, compared to parents of UC children.
- The global evidence suggests that job losses associated with COVID-19 are much more concentrated among individuals with low levels of education and those with vulnerable jobs with no tenure or security.

- This would be the case both because of educational differences among parents as well as due to other significant differences in material living conditions.

Issue of technology:

- There are many dimensions that reveal the continued disparity between caste groups, which would affect the ability of Dalit and Adivasi families to access online education.
- There exists differential access to information technology.
- While investment in technology is critical in shaping access to online education, a disparity in the ability to invest in technology persists.

Conclusion:

- The economic distress that resulted from pandemic-induced lockdown is exacerbating pre-existing structures of disadvantage based on social identity, and investments in education.
- It is essential to reduce/close the gaps between social groups to build resilience in the face of future shocks.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Indian Gaur

What's in News?

With the involvement of a sniffer dog to solve the case, forest officials in West Bengal have arrested a person for killing a bison (Indian Gaur). The practice of introducing sniffer dogs to solve cases of wildlife crime has resulted in considerable success in different states.

Indian Gaur:

- Indian Gaur is the largest extant bovine.
- It is native to the Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia.
- Indian Gaur is the state animal of Goa.
- It is listed under [CITES](#) Appendix I.
- It is classified as Vulnerable in the IUCN Red List and listed in Schedule I of the [Wild Life Protection Act, 1972](#).

Note:

- In June 2020, the first population estimation exercise of the Indian Gaur was carried out in the Nilgiris Forest Division, Tamil Nadu.
- The exercise was assisted by World Wide Fund for Nature, India.

This topic has been covered in the [12th June 2020 CNA: First estimation exercise of Indian gaur in Nilgiris in recent years](#).

2. Strides gets USFDA nod for liver disease drug

What's in News?

Strides Pharma Science's step-down subsidiary has received approval from the United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) to market Ursodiol tablets, used for the treatment of patients with primary biliary cirrhosis.

Ursodiol:

- Ursodiol is a bile acid that decreases the amount of cholesterol produced by the liver and absorbed by the intestines.
- Ursodiol helps break down cholesterol that has formed into stones in the gallbladder.
- Ursodiol also increases bile flow in patients with primary biliary cirrhosis.

Primary Biliary Cirrhosis:

- Primary biliary cirrhosis (PBC) is a progressive disease of the liver.
- It is caused by a buildup of bile within the liver that results in damage to the small bile ducts that drain bile from the liver. Over time, this pressure build-up destroys the bile ducts leading to liver cell damage.

3. Srisailem project

What's in News?

Nine people have been killed in a fire in one of the units of the state-run hydel station of the Srisailem project on the Telangana side of the inter-state border across River Krishna.

- The Srisailem Dam is constructed across the Krishna River on the border of Mahabubnagar district, Telangana and Kurnool district, Andhra Pradesh.
- Srisailem Dam has the hydroelectric station with the second-largest working capacity in the country, after Tehri Dam.
- The dam was constructed in a deep gorge in the Nallamala Hills in between Mahabubnagar and Kurnool districts.

4. Turkey to convert another former church to mosque

What's in News?

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has ordered the conversion of the Kariye Museum into a mosque.

Details:

- The ancient Orthodox church, Kariye Museum became a mosque and then a popular Istanbul museum.
- The 1,000-year-old building's history closely mirrors that of the Hagia Sophia.
- The Holy Saviour in Chora was a medieval Byzantine church decorated with 14th-century frescoes (paintings) of the Last Judgement.

- It was originally converted into the Kariye Mosque half a century after the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks in 1453.
- It became the Kariye Museum after the Second World War as Turkey pushed ahead with the creation of a more secular new republic.

G. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to Bioindicators:

1. Lichens are indicators of air quality.
2. Algal blooms indicate an increase of nitrates and phosphates in lakes.

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:

- The lichens are useful bioindicators for air pollution, especially sulfur dioxide pollution.
- Algal blooms indicate an increase of nitrates and phosphates in lakes.

Q2. Consider the following statements about the distribution of coal in India:

1. Anthracite is found only in Jharkhand.
2. Bituminous coal is found in Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh.
3. Lignite is found in the regions of Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Jammu and Kashmir.

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. 3 only

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Anthracite: It is the highest grade of coal containing a high percentage of fixed carbon. It is hard, brittle, black and lustrous. In India, Anthracite is found only in Jammu and Kashmir and that too in small quantity.
- Bituminous: It is a medium grade of coal having high heating capacity. It is the most commonly used type of coal for electricity generation in India. Most of the bituminous coal is found in Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh.
- Subbituminous: It is black in colour, dull (not shiny) and has a higher heating value than lignite.
- Lignite: It is the lowest grade coal with the least carbon content. It is found in the regions of Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Jammu & Kashmir.

Q3. Which of the following is/are the functions of the Central Water Commission (CWC)?

1. It is responsible for the monitoring of the flood situation during monsoons.
2. It is responsible for the appraisal of project reports pertaining to major inter-state project proposals.
3. It is responsible for coordination with states for establishing river basin organisations as per National Water Policy, the examination of project reports, etc.
4. It is responsible for the monitoring of water resource projects at the central level.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: d

Explanation:

- CWC is responsible for monitoring the flood situation through Central Flood Control Room during the monsoon period.
- CWC is responsible for the appraisal of the preliminary/detailed project reports pertaining to major inter-state project proposals.
- It is responsible for coordination with states for establishing river basin organisations as per National Water Policy, the examination of project reports, etc.
- Monitoring of WR projects at the central level is done by CWC under the aegis of a three-tier monitoring system.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to Indian Gaur:

1. It is the state animal of Goa.
2. It is classified as Endangered in the IUCN Red List.
3. Indian Gaurs can only be found in India.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Indian Gaurs (*Bos gaurus*) is the state animal of Goa.
- It is classified as Vulnerable in the IUCN Red List.
- Indian Gaurs are found on the forested hills and grassy areas of South to South-east Asia.
- They are found in India, China, Thailand, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Discuss the salient features and the role of the recently established National Recruitment Agency. (GS 2 Polity and Governance) (10 Marks, 150 Words).
2. Constitutional crises in India's neighbourhood have a major impact on India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy. Examine. (GS 2 International Relations) (15 Marks, 250 Words).