

19 Sep 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS 1 Related

B. GS 2 Related

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [Delhi HC steps in to bridge digital divide](#)

C. GS 3 Related

ECONOMY

1. [Country-of-origin: onus is on importers](#)

ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. [SC seeks response to plea to ban ART in livestock](#)

SECURITY

1. [‘National security plan for safe cyberspace soon’](#)

D. GS 4 Related

E. Editorials

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Another Afghan peace push and a role for India](#)

ECONOMY

1. [Market failure – on Agriculture Reforms](#)

F. Tidbits

1. [‘Bamboo shoots can be among cheapest immunity boosters’](#)
2. [U.S. to ban WeChat & TikTok, cites privacy, national security](#)
3. [To boost trade, Pak. plans to set up markets on Afghan, Iran borders](#)
4. [Continuity in change](#)

G. Prelims Facts

1. [Death of two sloth bears worries Nandankanan zoo authorities](#)
2. [Vaishwik Bharatiya Vaigyanik \(VAIBHAV\) Summit](#)

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Delhi HC steps in to bridge digital divide

Context:

The Delhi High Court has directed both private and government schools in the Capital to provide gadgets and Internet package free of cost to poor students for attending online classes.

Details:

- A Bench said that, if a school decides to opt for online mode as a medium of instruction, it will have to ensure that students belonging to the economically weaker section (EWS) and disadvantaged group (DG) category also have access and are able to avail of the same.
- The HC said that the intra-class discrimination, upsets the level playing field and amounts to discrimination as well as creates a vertical division, digital divide or digital gap or digital apartheid in addition to segregation in a classroom which is violative of RTE, 2009, and Articles 14, 20 and 21 of the Constitution.
- The High Court opined that the schools are erecting a financial barrier for EWS/DG category students by not providing the required equipment, preventing them from pursuing their elementary education. It said that this was in violation of Sections 3, 8, 12(1)(c) of the [Right to Education Act, 2009](#).
- The Bench made it clear that the private unaided schools will be entitled to claim reimbursement of reasonable cost for procurement of the gadget and Internet package from the government under Section 12(2) of the RTE Act.

Significance:

- The High Court's direction came on a public interest litigation seeking direction to authorities to supply free laptops or mobile phones with high-speed Internet to EWS/DG students so they could attend online classes.
- It is a verdict aimed at narrowing the [COVID-19](#) pandemic-induced digital divide.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Country-of-origin: onus is on importers

Context:

The Finance Ministry has said that the Importers will have to do their due diligence to ensure that imported goods meet the prescribed 'rules of origin' provisions for availing concessional rate of customs duty under free trade agreements (FTAs).

Details:

- The Customs Administration of Rules of Origin under Trade Agreements Rules, 2020 (CAROTAR, 2020), will come into force from September 2020.
- Under the rules, the importer has to possess all relevant information related to country of origin criteria, including the regional value content and submit the same to the proper officer on request.
- Also, an importer would now have to enter certain origin related information in the Bill of Entry, as available in the Certificate of Origin.

CAROTAR, 2020:

- The Department of Revenue has notified the 'Customs (Administration of Rules of Origin under Trade Agreements) Rules, 2020.
- CAROTAR 2020 comprises of norms for the enforcement of 'rules of origin' provisions for allowing preferential rate of customs duties on products imported under free trade agreements.
- Under this provision, a country that has inked an FTA with India cannot dump goods from some third country in the Indian market by just putting a label on it.
- The new norms have been framed with a view to checking inbound shipments of low quality products and dumping of goods by a third country routed through an FTA partner country.
- Preferential rules of origin ensure that only goods originating in participating countries enjoy tariff or other preferences.
- CAROTAR 2020 supplements the existing operational certification procedures prescribed under different trade agreements.
- India has inked FTAs with several countries, including Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and ASEAN members.
- Under such agreements, two trading partners significantly reduce or eliminate import/customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them.

Note:

- ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) FTA allows imports of most items at nil or concessional basic customs duty from the 10-nation bloc.
- Major imports to India come from five [ASEAN countries](#) — Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam.
- The benefit of concessional customs duty rate applies only if an ASEAN member country is the country of origin of goods.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. SC seeks response to plea to ban ART in livestock

Context:

The Supreme Court on Friday asked the government to respond to a plea to ban Artificial Reproduction Technique (ART), including Artificial Insemination (AI), used on livestock and other animals.

Issue:

- A petition filed said that ART performed on livestock/animals without any proven biomedical need was cruel, illegal, mala fide and contrary to the established principles of law.
- The petition complained of invasive techniques being used on animals which were not even anaesthetised to the pain but merely restrained physically.
- It argued that bypassing and preventing natural mating, and artificially reproducing as a principle/policy is by itself cruel.
- It also highlighted the cruelty or pain inflicted by the artificial process and the methods of reproduction in animals.
- The petition said ART is violative of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, the Biological Diversity Act and the Environment (Protection) Act.

Read more about the lacunae in Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, covered in the Editorials segment of **18th September 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis**.

Category: SECURITY

1. 'National security plan for safe cyberspace soon'

Context:

The National Security Advisor has said that the Union government is set to come up with National Cyber Security Strategy 2020 for ensuring a safe, secured, trusted and resilient cyber space.

Why does India need a National security plan for safe cyberspace?

- Cyber intrusions have increased in scope and sophistication targeting sensitive personal and business data, and critical information infrastructure.
- Cyber attacks have a huge impact on Indian economy and national security.
- The present cyber threat landscape poses significant challenges due to rapid technological developments such as Cloud Computing, Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, 5G, etc.
- Ransomware-related cyber attacks on the Indian enterprises saw a significant rise in the first quarter of 2020-21, and the increase has been enabled by operators offering ransomware as a service (RaaS) to cyber attackers.

Challenges:

- Digitisation in India and across the globe, is expected to dramatically rise in a post COVID-19 scenario.
- Increased digitisation will increase demand for greater cybersecurity and privacy.
- Challenges include data protection/privacy, law enforcement in evolving cyberspace, access to data stored overseas.
- Securing international cooperation on cybercrime & cyber terrorism could be a challenge.
- Misuse of social media platforms and their regulation is yet another challenge.

Steps taken by the government:

- The government recently banned several Chinese apps to protect the personal data of the Indian users.
- To keep the data of Indians to remain within the boundaries of the country, the government has envisioned the “National Cyber Security Strategy 2020”.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Another Afghan peace push and a role for India

What's in News?

- The much awaited intra-Afghan talks between the Taliban and the Afghan High Council for National Reconciliation opened in Doha, Qatar in September 2020.
- The initiation of intra-Afghan talks was a key element in the U.S.-Taliban peace deal signed in Doha in February 2020 between the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, and the Taliban deputy leader, Mullah Abdul Ghani Barader.

Dynamics of negotiations:

- Direct negotiations with the Taliban began with Ambassador Khalilzad's appointment as Special Envoy.
- The negotiations that began two years ago actually became a three-way negotiation.
 1. The Doha track was with the Taliban.
 2. A second track was with Islamabad/Rawalpindi to persuade the Pakistan Army to pressurise the Taliban to get them to the negotiating table.
 3. The third was with Kabul to ensure that the Afghan government would accept the Doha outcome.
- Originally Ambassador Khalilzad had spelt out four objectives:
 1. An end to violence by declaring a ceasefire.
 2. An intra-Afghan dialogue for a lasting peace.
 3. The Taliban cutting ties with terrorist organisations such as al Qaeda.
 4. S. troop withdrawal. Within months, the Taliban had whittled these down to just the last one with some palliatives regarding the third.

Concerns:

- The two elements that remained open ended in the U.S.-Taliban deal are the ceasefire declaration and the intra-Afghan talks.
- Instead of an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled reconciliation, it became a U.S.-led and Taliban-controlled process with nobody claiming ownership or responsibility.

Finite interests of major powers:

- The reality is major powers have limited interests. That is why no major power is taking ownership for the reconciliation talks, but merely content with being facilitators.
 - For the U.S., the peace talks provide U.S. President Donald Trump an exit opportunity before his re-election bid.
 - The European Union has made it clear that its financial contribution will depend on the security environment and the human rights record.
 - China can always lean on Pakistan to preserve its security and connectivity interests.
 - For Russia, blocking the drug supply and keeping its southern periphery secure from extremist influences is key.

Evolving Indian stand:

- Addressing the opening session of the Doha meeting, India's External Affairs Minister reiterated that the peace process must be "Afghan led, Afghan owned and Afghan controlled"; but Indian policy has evolved from its earlier hands-off approach to the Taliban.
- However, both Ambassador Khalilzad and Russian Special Envoy to Afghanistan Ambassador Zamir Kabulov have, on multiple occasions bluntly pointed out that if India had concerns regarding anti-India activities of terrorist groups, it must engage directly with the Taliban.

Read about [Afghan Peace Process and India](#). For information on India's concerns over Afghan peace deal refer: [2nd March 2020](#) and [2nd May 2020](#) Comprehensive News Analysis.

Way forward:

- As much as the prospect for peace in Afghanistan depends on actual progress in the intra-Afghan talks, what is equally essential is regional consensus to support the peace process.
- India's vision of a sovereign, united, stable, plural and democratic Afghanistan is one that is shared by a large constituency in Afghanistan, cutting across ethnic and provincial lines.
- India should increase its active engagement in the peace process which would allow it to work with like-minded forces in the region to ensure that the vacuum created by the U.S. withdrawal does not lead to an undoing of the progress made so far.

Category: ECONOMY

2. Market failure – on Agriculture Reforms

Context:

The ambitious initiative government to bring about far-reaching reform in agriculture has drawn criticisms on a large scale, mainly over fears that the free market philosophy at its core could spell the end of Minimum Support Price (MSP) for produce that has so far been centrally procured by the government.

Background:

- Amendments have been proposed to the Essential Commodities Act. It is opined that the amendments to the Essential Commodities Act remove all cereals, pulses, oilseeds, potato and onion from trade restrictions and price control — which would ultimately benefit only the middlemen and traders.
- Lok Sabha passed the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020 and the Farmers' (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020.

This issue has been covered in: [17th September 2020 PIB Summary and Analysis.](#)

Also, read more about the agri marketing reforms covered in [17th May 2020](#) and [4th June 2020 Comprehensive News Analyses.](#)

Concerns:

- Provisions in the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020, providing for unrestricted commerce in designated trade areas outside APMC jurisdictions without levy of any fee have alarmed the states.
- Empowering the Centre to issue orders to States in furtherance of the law's objectives, has drawn criticisms from the states.
 - The opposition to the Bills, particularly on trade, is because agriculture and markets are State subjects, and there should be no tinkering with the MSP and Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMC).
 - MSPs and APMCs form the backbone of existing trading arrangements.
- Several States have already liberalised agricultural marketing, amending their APMC Acts, and some have allowed regulated private commerce including direct marketing.

Way forward:

- Evidence point out that mere liberalisation does not lead to private investment in new markets.
 - When Bihar removed the APMC system, markets suffered loss of fee revenue, with no significant private investments in the sector.
- To strengthen competition, the Centre should massively fund the expansion of the APMC market system.

- Efforts must be made towards removing trade cartels, and providing farmers good roads, logistics of scale and real time information.
- The emphasis should be on empowering farmers through State Farmers Commissions recommended by the NCF, to bring about a speedy government response to issues.
- Small farmers have been remarkably productive and shored up the economy even during a pandemic. Without strong institutional arrangements, laissez-faire (no economic interventionism) policy may harm lakhs of unorganised small farmers.

F. Tidbits

1. 'Bamboo shoots can be among cheapest immunity boosters'

- Bamboo, the tallest grass on earth, according to experts is an immunity booster for increasing the human body's resistance to viral attack.
- Bamboo shoots are emerging as high-value and safe edibles and growing in utility globally along with all other value-added bamboo products.
- The protein content in fresh bamboo shoots, considered as a nutraceutical. The term 'nutraceutical' is used to describe medicinally or nutritionally functional foods.
- They also contain 17 amino acids, eight of which are essential for the human body.

Note:

- According to the National Bamboo Mission, India has the highest area (13.96 million hectares) under bamboo and is the second richest country after China in terms of bamboo diversity with 136 species.
- As per International Network for Bamboo and Rattan (INBAR) data, China exports 68% of the world's bamboo and rattan products.

Read more about World Bamboo Day covered in 18th September 2020 PIB Summary and Analysis.

2. U.S. to ban WeChat & TikTok, cites privacy, national security

- The U.S. will ban downloads of the Chinese apps TikTok and WeChat, with a total ban on the use of WeChat.
- It has cited national security and data privacy concerns for its move.
- Some security experts have raised concerns that ByteDance Ltd., the Chinese company that owns TikTok, would maintain access to information on the 100 million TikTok users in the U.S., creating a security risk.
- TikTok collects user data and moderates users' posts. It grabs users' locations and messages and tracks what they watch to figure out how best to target ads to them.

3. To boost trade, Pak. plans to set up markets on Afghan, Iran borders

What's in News?

Pakistan will set up 18 markets along its border with Afghanistan and Iran to simultaneously boost trade with the both its neighbours.

- It also plans to curb the menace of smuggling that has dented the economies on both sides.
- Pakistan has been fencing its border with Afghanistan and Iran to curb the movement of militants and smuggling of goods.
- However, it has been setting up border crossings at designated points to promote lawful movements of persons and goods.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Death of two sloth bears worries Nandankanan zoo authorities

What's in News?

Authorities at the Nandankanan Zoological Park (NZP) are concerned over the back-to-back deaths of two sloth bears at the park.

Sloth Bear:

- Sloth bear (*Melursus ursinus*) is a nocturnal insectivorous species of bears found in India.
- It feeds on fruits, ants and termites.
- It is listed as Vulnerable on the [IUCN Red List](#).
- The sloth bear is listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- International trade of the sloth bear is prohibited as it is listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species ([CITES](#)).

Nandankanan zoo

- It is located in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.
- It lies in adjacent to Chandaka-Dampara Wildlife Sanctuary.
- It is the only zoological park in India to become an institutional member of World Association of Zoos and Aquarium (WAZA).
- The Nandankanan zoo hosts India's only pangolin conservation breeding centre.
- It is the first zoo in the World to breed White tiger and Melanistic tiger.

2. Vaishwik Bharatiya Vaigyanik (VAIBHAV) Summit

What's in News?

The Department of Science and Technology and the [Defence Research and Development Organisation](#) will be organising a month-long session of webinars and online discussions as a part of Vaishwik Bharatiya Vaigyanik (VAIBHAV) Summit involving non-resident Indian (NRI) scientists.

VAIBHAV Summit:

- The VAIBHAV Summit, is being organised to help develop a comprehensive road map to leverage the expertise and knowledge of global Indian researchers for solving emerging challenges.
- The summit is designed with the goal of creating an ecosystem of Knowledge and Innovation in the country through global outreach.
- By bringing the Indian overseas and resident academicians/scientists together, a structure of association will be evolved.
- The end product will be a road map and broad direction on the kind of research that will benefit India in the future.
- Key areas of discussion will include: quantum technologies, artificial intelligence and machine learning, electronics and semi-conductor technologies, communications technologies, photonics, computational and data sciences and aerospace technologies among others.

3. Continuity in change

What's in News?

Japan's longest serving Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe has passed on the baton to his long-term associate, Yoshihide Suga who promises continuity rather than change as he takes the reins.

- For India, Mr. Abe's exit is a loss, given his game-changing moves on India-Japan ties which included :
 - Upgrading the relationship to a Special Strategic and Global Partnership
 - Instituting the annual Prime Ministerial summits from 2006.
 - Spearheading both versions of the Quadrilateral with the U.S. and Australia.
 - Personally moving the India-Japan civil nuclear partnership through the Diet (parliament), Japan's first with a non-NPT country.
 - Signing of the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, a significant step in defence cooperation.
- He shared his famous "three arrows" economic strategy called 'Abenomics' with India's former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

India hopes that under PM Suga, Japan will not steer away from the course set by Japan's longest serving Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

1. Consider the following statements with respect to Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS):

1. It is a centrally-sponsored scheme.
2. Under the scheme, funds are released in the form of grants in-aid directly to the district authorities.
3. The funds released under the scheme are non-lapsable.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- MPLADS is a centrally-sponsored plan scheme fully funded by the government of India under which funds are released in the form of grants in-aid directly to the district authorities.
- Under the scheme, funds are released in the form of grants in-aid directly to the district authorities.
- The funds released under the scheme are non-lapsable.
- Funds not released in a particular year is carried forward to the subsequent years, subject to eligibility.

2. Consider the following statements with respect to Nandankanan Zoological Park:

1. It is located in Madhya Pradesh.
2. It hosts India's only pangolin conservation breeding centre.
3. It is the only zoological park in India to become an institutional member of World Association of Zoos and Aquarium (WAZA).

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

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 2 only
- d. None of the above

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Nandankanan Zoological Park is located in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.
- It lies in adjacent to Chandaka-Dampara Wildlife Sanctuary.
- It is the only zoological park in India to become an institutional member of World Association of Zoos and Aquarium (WAZA).
- The Nandankanan zoo hosts India's only pangolin conservation breeding centre.

3. What is the classification of Sloth Bears in the IUCN Red List:

- a. Vulnerable

- b. Least Concerned
- c. Near Threatened
- d. Endangered

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Sloth bear (*Melursus ursinus*) is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.
- The sloth bear is listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- International trade of the sloth bear is prohibited as it is listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

4. Consider the following statements with respect to National Bamboo Mission:

1. It is a sub-scheme under Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH).
2. National Bamboo Mission is a Central Sector scheme.

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

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: b

Explanation:

- National Bamboo Mission is a sub-scheme under Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH).
- It is a 100% Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
- The Mission envisages promoting holistic growth of the bamboo sector by adopting the area-based, regionally differentiated strategy and to increase the area under bamboo cultivation and marketing.
- Under the Mission, steps have been taken to increase the availability of quality planting material by supporting the setting up of new nurseries and strengthening of existing ones.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Analyse India's role in Afghan peace process and examine how the developments in Afghanistan are closely related to strategic security of India. (GS 2, International Relations)(15 Marks, 250 Words).

2. What are the concerns raised by the farmers and the states on the reform measures announced by the government to deal with the issues in the agricultural marketing? Discuss. (GS 3 Economy) (15 Marks, 250 Words).

