

27 Sep 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Centre for early rollout of mother tongue as medium of instruction

Context:

The Union Ministry of Education has informed the [Supreme Court](#) that it is fully backing a push for mother tongue as medium of instruction in schools.

Background:

The Centre's affidavit is in response to the Supreme Court's inclination to examine whether imposing English on a multitude of schoolchildren, whose language of instruction is their mother tongue, will amount to depriving them of an effective education guaranteed to them under [Article 21A](#) (fundamental right to education) of the Constitution.

Details:

- The centre has opined that the use of “home language” for learning will bridge the gap between the intelligentsia and the masses.
- An order has been initiated to academic authorities to initiate the implementation of the [National Education Policy \(NEP\)](#) to promote multilingualism and use of home language as a mode of instruction.
- It was asserted that the NEP recognises the power of local languages to help young children learn and grasp non-trivial concepts more quickly.

Note:

- According to the 2011 census, there are 1,369 rationalised ‘mother tongues’ spoken by more than 10,000 people.
- There are 22 national languages in the [Eighth Schedule of the Constitution](#).
- There are six classical languages recognised in India.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. The land of peaks, streams and disputes

This topic has been covered in [25th September 2020](#) and [5th May 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

2. PM pitches for larger role in UN

This topic has been covered in **22nd September 2020** and **23rd September 2020** Comprehensive News Analysis.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. CAG moots probe over cess accounting dodge

Context:

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has mooted an investigation against the Central government's accounting officials for incorrectly recording ₹10,250 crore of cess receipts from additional excise duties on petrol and diesel, as non-tax receipts for the exchequer in 2018-19.

Details:

- Cess collections from petrol and diesel are to be routed to the Central Road Fund (CRF), created by the Parliament as a dedicated non-lapsable Reserve Fund to be used only for designated purposes.
- The CRF was replaced with a Central Road and Infrastructure Fund (CRIF) through amendments introduced in the Union Budget for 2018-19.

Issue:

- The CAG said that it was done primarily for the purpose of artificially inflating revenue receipts of the year.
- The CAG termed the journal entry as a violation of accounting procedure.
- He observed that it not only had the effect of understating deficit, but also made funds available for expenditure for other than designated purposes, which was contrary to the will of the Parliament.

Category: DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. Using cloud computing for better flood inundation mapping

Context:

An international team has developed a powerful tool for a near real-time mapping of flood extent, using openly accessible satellite data and a cloud computing platform.

Details:

- Space-based sensors known as synthetic aperture radar (SAR) have been used widely for monitoring and mapping of flood-water inundation.
- SAR is capable of acquiring data in all-weather condition, making it useful for mapping and monitoring flood inundation areas.
- These sensors operate on the constellation of two SAR satellites belonging to the Copernicus Programme launched by the European Space Agency.

- The data from the satellites was utilised on a cloud-based platform for the rapid processing of big data. The platform has publicly made available numerous satellite image collections and has functions for image processing and analysis.

Significance:

- Once the data is available, machine learning and computer vision techniques is applied to quickly generate the water inundation maps.
- This can help swiftly deploying the rescue team and rescue operations can be started immediately.
- Maps showing where flooding may occur or flood inundation maps can help in better flood risk preparedness.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Weeding out lantana restores grasslands in Rajasthan

Context:

“Mission Lantana” has helped in ecological restoration of grasslands and saved biodiversity of Sajjangarh wildlife sanctuary.

Issue:

- Lantana Camara is a thicket forming shrub.
- It has covered vast tracts of land in the sanctuary. This is stopping the natural light and nutrition for flora and fauna. Its expansion has stopped the natural growth of grass and other shrubs.
- Lantana was first introduced in 1807. It had spread to wildlife reserves, river banks and the Project Tiger areas where it had obliterated native grass and reduced biodiversity.
- In some regions, the plant has made inroads into pastures and shrunk the cattle grazing areas, affecting the livelihood of villagers.
- The toxic substance in its foliage and ripe berries affect the animals.
- With the herbivores not getting sufficient forage, the prey base for carnivorous animals was declining, leading to ecological disturbances in the food chain.

Mission Lantana:

- It is a special drive to uproot the invasive lantana bushes in the famous Sajjangarh wildlife sanctuary.
- The drive involved collective efforts and ‘shram daan’ (voluntary physical work) by the forest officials, police personnel, wildlife lovers, representatives of voluntary groups and local villagers.

Sajjangarh wildlife sanctuary:

- Sajjangarh wildlife sanctuary is located in Rajasthan’s Udaipur district in the southern Aravalli Hills.
- The park houses an artificial lake named Jiyan Sagar popularly known as the “Tiger Lake”.
- It was declared a protected area in 1987.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: ECONOMY

1. Where are the funds collected through cess parked?

Context:

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India, in the latest audit report of government accounts, has observed that the Union government withheld in the Consolidated Fund of India (CFI) more than ₹1.1 lakh crore out of the almost ₹2.75 lakh crore collected through various cesses in 2018-19.

Concerns:

Given that cess does not need to be a part of the divisible pool of resources, increasing share of cess in the Union government's tax receipts has a direct impact on fiscal devolution.

For more on this topic refer to the article “Cess pool” covered in the Editorials segment of 26th September 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis.

How many cesses does the government levy?

- According to a report by Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy (August 2018) submitted to the Fifteenth Finance Commission, 42 cesses have been levied at various points in time since 1944.
- The very first cess was levied on matches.
- Post-Independence, the cess taxes were linked initially to the development of a particular industry, including a salt cess and a tea cess in 1953.
- Subsequently, the introduction of a cess was motivated by the aim of ensuring labour welfare.
 - Example: iron ore mines labour welfare cess in 1961, the limestone and dolomite mines labour welfare cess of 1972 and the cine workers welfare cess introduced in 1981.
- The introduction of the [GST](#) in 2017 led to most cesses being done away with and as of August 2018, there were only 7 cesses that continued to be levied.
 - Cess on Exports, Cess on Crude Oil, Health and Education Cess, Road and Infrastructure Cess, Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Cess, National Calamity Contingent Duty on Tobacco and Tobacco Products and the GST Compensation Cess.
- In February 2020, Health Cess of 5% on imported medical devices was introduced in the [Finance Bill](#) for 2020-2021.

2. Changes in labour laws

This topic has been covered in 26th September 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis.

3. Farm Bills: who gains and who loses

Context:

Farmers have taken to the streets, protesting against three Bills on agriculture market reforms that were passed by Parliament.

This topic has been covered in the **17th September 2020 PIB Summary and Analysis** and **17th May 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis**.

What are the three Bills?

- **The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020**, allows farmers to sell their harvest outside the notified [Agricultural Produce Market Committee \(APMC\)](#) mandis without paying any State taxes or fees.
- **The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020**, facilitates contract farming and direct marketing.
- **The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020**, deregulates the production, storage, movement and sale of several major foodstuffs, including cereals, pulses, edible oils and onion, except in the case of extraordinary circumstances.

Will farmers get minimum support price?

- Farmers opine that, minimum support prices (MSP), are threatened by the new laws.
 - MSPs are the pre-set rates at which the Central government purchases produce from farmers, regardless of market rates.
 - They are declared for 23 crops at the beginning of each sowing season.
 - Centre only purchases paddy, wheat and select pulses in large quantities, and only 6% of farmers actually sell their crops at MSP rates, according to the 2015 Shanta Kumar Committee's report using National Sample Survey data.
- None of these recently passed bills directly impinge upon the MSP regime.
- It is feared by the farmers that encouraging tax-free private trade outside the APMC mandis will make these notified markets unviable, which could lead to a reduction in government procurement itself.
 - Because most government procurement centres in Punjab, Haryana and a few other States are located within the notified APMC mandis.
- Farmers are also demanding that MSPs be made universal, within mandis and outside, so that all buyers government or private will have to use these rates as a floor price below which sales cannot be made.

What are some other concerns?

- One of the major concerns raised is that, since agriculture falls in the State list, Centre should not be making legislation on this subject.
- They are concerned about the loss of revenue from mandi taxes and fees.

- Some economists state that both Punjab and Rajasthan are considering to expand the bounds of their APMC mandi yards to ensure that they can continue collecting taxes on all agricultural trade within their State's borders.
- Paddy farming has received a major boost with procurement at MSPs and farmers fear their newly assured incomes are at stake.

Conclusion:

- The government opines that the new laws will provide farmers with more choice, with competition leading to better prices, as well as ushering in a surge of private investment in agricultural marketing, processing and infrastructure.
- With only 7,000 APMC markets operating across India, the majority of agricultural marketing already happens outside the mandi network.
- States like Bihar, Kerala and Manipur do not follow the APMC system.
- However, most private buyers are currently small traders at local mandis.
- The removal of stock limits and facilitation of bulk purchase and storage through the amendment to the Essential Commodities Act could bring large corporate players into the agriculture space.
- Although corporates will bring much-needed investment, they could also distort the playing field, as small farmers might not be able to match them in bargaining power.

F. Tidbits

1. Address aspirations of Tamil people, Modi urges Rajapaksa

What's in News?

The Prime Ministers of India and Sri Lanka spoke via a videoconference, marking the first virtual summit held by PM Mahinda since he won the general elections. It is the first such bilateral summit the PM of India has held with a neighbouring country.

Details:

- A \$15-million grant for the promotion of Buddhist cultural exchanges has been promised by India.
- However, India has not yet responded with a decision on the requests made personally by the Sri Lankan PM during his visit to Delhi, for a 3 year moratorium on Sri Lanka's \$960-million debt owed to India, and for a \$1.1-billion currency swap arrangement, in addition to the \$400-million currency swap that the **RBI** has already sanctioned.

2. CM writes to Javadekar over IARI technique to tackle stubble burning

What's in News?

In order to tackle the menace of stubble burning in the North Indian states, the Chief Minister of Delhi has written to the Union Environment Minister recommending the scaling up of the bio-decomposer technique developed by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI).

Bio-decomposer technique:

- Under the technique, chemical which when sprayed on fields with crop stubble, ensures speedy bio-decomposition of the stubble and its conversion into fertiliser.
- The scientists opine that burning stubble damages nutrients in the soil which negatively impacts the fertility of the soil. With the chemical sprayed on fields, quality and productivity on the field will increase while limiting the use of fertiliser.

Read more on this topic covered in [26th May 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

G. Prelims Facts

1. Field study adds five amphibians to Madhya Pradesh's fauna list

What's in News?

A study conducted by researchers from Wildlife Institute of India, on amphibians in the Panna Tiger Reserve has come up with a list of five species previously undocumented in the region.

- Apart from compiling an entire amphibian inventory of this region, they have recorded a call library of eleven species and also have obtained molecular confirmation (through DNA) of the cryptic species.
 - Cryptic species is a term used to refer to species that appear the same but show up a difference when their DNA is examined.
- **Of the five species are:**
 - Dwarf toad found in peninsular India
 - Odisha paddy frog, an inhabitant of eastern India
 - Wrinkled cricket frog, earlier observed in Karnataka
 - Pierre's cricket frog, seen in Nepal, Bhutan and Assam
 - Western burrowing frog, earlier seen in western India

Click here to read more about the [Tiger Conservation in India](#).

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

1. Which of the following are recognised as Classical languages in India?

1. Tamil
2. Odia
3. Urdu
4. Hindi
5. Malayalam
6. Maithili

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

Currently, six languages enjoy the 'Classical' status: Tamil (declared in 2004), Sanskrit (2005), Kannada (2008), Telugu (2008), Malayalam (2013), and Odia (2014).

2. Consider the following statements with respect to the Wakhan Corridor:

1. It is a narrow strip in North-eastern Afghanistan.
2. It separates Tajikistan from China.

Which of the given statement is/are INCORRECT?

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Wakhan Corridor is a narrow strip in North-eastern Afghanistan.
- It separates Tajikistan from Pakistan.

3. Consider the following statements with respect to Copernicus Programme:

1. It is an Earth observation programme.

2. The programme is co-ordinated and managed by National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).
3. It was previously known as Global Monitoring for Environment and Security programme (GMES).

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

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Copernicus is an ambitious Earth observation programme.
- It is coordinated and managed by the European Commission in partnership with the European Space Agency, the EU Member States and EU Agencies.
- Copernicus is the new name for the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security programme, previously known as GMES.

4. Sajjangarh wildlife sanctuary, recently in news, is situated in:

- a. Gujarat
- b. Madhya Pradesh
- c. Rajasthan
- d. Uttar Pradesh

Answer: c

Explanation:

Sajjangarh wildlife sanctuary is located in Rajasthan's Udaipur district.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. What is Cess? Increasing share of cess in the Union government's tax receipts has a direct impact on fiscal devolution. Discuss and suggest measures. (10 Marks, 150 Words).
2. What are the concerns with respect to recent agriculture market reforms introduced by the Government? Critically Examine. (15 Marks, 250 Words).

