

12 Oct 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: HEALTH

1. Sanitisers, soaps can do damage: experts

Context:

Health experts at the All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS) have warned that the increased use of antibiotics and the widespread use of hand sanitisers and antimicrobial soaps can worsen the situation of antimicrobial resistance.

Challenge:

- Antibiotic resistance is one of the biggest challenges of modern medicine.
- Antibiotic-resistant organisms have become rigidly established in the environment with many infections failing to respond to antimicrobials.
- Antimicrobial resistance mounts problems beyond the geographical as well as species barriers and can transmit from animals to humans.

What is Antibiotic Resistance?

- Antibiotic resistance occurs when bacteria change in response to the use of these medicines. It means bacteria are resistant to antibiotics.
- Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a broader term, encompassing resistance to drugs to treat infections caused by other microbes as well, such as parasites, viruses, and fungi.

Read more on [Antibiotic Resistance and Antimicrobial Resistance](#).

Conclusion:

AMR needs to be addressed in totality by all sectors, including healthcare, veterinary and agricultural domains.

Read more on this issue covered in [2nd December 2019 CNA: Battling anti-microbial resistance](#).

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**1. At 15, RTI Act crippled by huge backlog****Context:**

Fifteen years after the [Right to Information \(RTI\) Act 2005](#), came into force, more than 2.2 lakh cases are pending at the Central and State Information Commissions.

Issues:

- Central and State Information Commissions are the final courts of appeal under the transparency law, RTI Act.
- Under the law, every commission should have a chief and up to 10 commissioners.
 - Most commissions are functioning at a reduced capacity including the [Central Information Commission \(CIC\)](#).
 - CIC has no chief since August 2020 and has only five commissioners.
 - Odisha is functioning with just four commissioners, while Rajasthan has only three.
 - Jharkhand and Tripura have no commissioners and their commissions have been defunct for months.
- According to a report, Maharashtra has the highest number of pending appeals, with over 59,000 cases, followed by Uttar Pradesh (47,923) and the CIC (35,653).
- At the current rate of disposal, the Odisha commission would take more than seven years to dispose of all pending complaints, while the CIC would take more than two years.
- The analysis also found that government officials face hardly any punishment for violating the law.

- Non-imposition of penalties in deserving cases by commissions sends a signal to public authorities that violating the law will not invite any serious consequences.
- This destroys the basic framework of incentives built into the RTI law and promotes a culture of impunity.

Conclusion:

The need to ensure access to relevant information is greater than ever given the unprecedented crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The role of information commissions is crucial to ensure that people can obtain information on healthcare facilities, social security programs and delivery of essential goods and services meant for those in distress. There is a dire need to scrutinise the functioning of information commissions.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. 'Blue Flag' tag for Kasarkod, Padubidri beaches

Context:

Eight beaches in India have bagged the coveted eco-label 'Blue Flag' from the international agency, Foundation for Environment Education, Denmark.

Details:

- In 2019, the Indian Government had identified 13 other beaches in the country for blue flag certification.
- The eight Indian beaches which got this tag are Shivrajpur (Dwarka, Gujarat), Ghoghla (Diu), Kasarkod and Padubidri (Karnataka), Kappad (Kerala), Rushikonda (Andhra Pradesh), Golden Beach (Puri, Odisha) and Radhanagar (Andaman & Nicobar Islands).
- Kasarkod beach in Uttara Kannada and Padubidri beach in Udupi in Karnataka have grey water treatment plants, solid waste management plants, disabled-friendly equipment to enable them to enter seawater, seating arrangements, clean drinking water, washroom, changing room, bathing facility, disabled-friendly and general toilets, parking facilities, solar power plant, etc.

Blue Flag Certification:

- Blue Flag beach is an eco-tourism model to provide tourists clean and hygienic bathing water, facilities/amenities, safe and healthy environment and sustainable development of the area.
- The certification is awarded by the Denmark-based agency based on 33 stringent criteria in four major heads: environmental education and information, bathing water quality, environment management and conservation and safety and services in the beaches.

Read more about [Blue Flag Certification](#).

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

Category: ECONOMY

1. Signalling optimism

Context:

- Latest **Monetary policy review**, after the reconstitution of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC).

Details:

- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has voted to keep **policy interest rates unchanged** and has stated that it would continue with the **accommodative stance** at least through the end of the current financial year.
 - An accommodative stance means that the central bank will cut rates to inject money into the financial system whenever needed. This is often employed to expand the overall money supply to boost the economy when growth is slowing.
- This move seems to be indicative of the MPC's **priority to revive economic growth** on a durable basis and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the economy.
 - This is a welcome move given that the economy needs all the support it can get to recover from its 23.9% estimated contraction of the first quarter.
- This move would **help maintain liquidity and stability in the financial markets**, at a time when the resources-strapped governments are expected to resort to substantially higher levels of borrowing to meet their spending needs.

Concerns:

Sidelineing inflation concerns:

- The latest monetary policy review seems to be indicative of the sidelining of inflation concerns. The **MPC seems to have tilted away from its inflation-targeting mandate**.
 - The MPC considers that the reason for the current inflation being above the tolerance band is mainly due to supply shocks and it expects these shocks to dissipate as the economy unlocks and supply chains are restored.
 - Even the RBI Governor has repeatedly stated that the **current 'inflation hump' is a transient phenomenon**.

Doubts over inflation estimates:

- The **inflation assumptions seem inaccurate** given that it estimates the [CPI](#) inflation to sharply ease from 6.8% in Q2 to 5.4% in Q3 and 4.5% in Q4, given the **persistence of supply bottlenecks, cost-push pressures from higher taxes on transport fuels and the possibility of food-price inflation**.
- Economists have suggested that through this move the MPC has sought to talk up confidence ignoring the risks of inflation.

Risk of forward looking guidance:

- The MPC has projected that it would stick with the accommodative stance “at least during the current financial year and into the next financial year”. This forward-looking guidance would **leave the MPC with little near-term leeway to tame price pressures**.
- This could hamper the MPC’s ability to take measures to support the ‘emerging impulses’ and help the economic revival.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Ending conflict in the Caucasus

Context:

- The military confrontation between Armenia and Azerbaijan

Background:

For information on this issue, refer to:

[CNA dated Sep 30, 2020.](#)

Details:

- Given that the military confrontation has been raging on between Armenia and Azerbaijan there have been calls for a ceasefire.
- The Madrid Principles could be the starting point for ending the hostility between Armenia and Azerbaijan.
 - The Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) consisting of Russia, France and the U.S. had put forward in 2007 the Madrid Principles as a guiding principle for a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan.
- The Madrid Principles provide for a prohibition on the use of force and demilitarisation of [Nagorno-Karabakh](#), respect for territorial integrity, and recognition of the equal right to self-determination. It also envisaged Nagorno-Karabakh’s right to self-governance and the election of officials with legislative and executive powers during the interim period preceding a plebiscite.

2. Food for peace

For information on this development, refer to:

[CNA dated 11 Oct, 2020](#)

F. Prelims Facts

1. SVAMITVA Scheme

- SVAMITVA stands for Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improvised Technology in Village Areas.

- The scheme uses drone and satellite technology to map physical assets in rural areas and aims at digitisation of property records, easing the way for village dwellers to access institutionalised credit against property.
- It was launched on National Panchayati Raj Day, 24th April 2020 by the Prime Minister.
- It is a Central Sector Scheme aiming to provide the 'record of rights' to village household owners in rural areas and issue Property Cards.
- The Scheme is being implemented across the country in a phased manner over a period of four years (2020-2024) and would eventually cover around 6.62 lakh villages of the country.

This topic has been covered in the [27th April 2020 PIB Summary and Analysis](#).

G. Tidbits

1. Paper-strip virus test to be out soon: Vardhan

What's in News?

Union Health Minister has said that the Ministry would soon roll out the FELUDA paper-strip test for SARS-CoV-2 diagnosis.

- FELUDA has been developed by the CSIR-IGIB and approved by the Drug Controller General of India for a commercial launch.
- The test showed 96% sensitivity and 98% specificity.

This topic has been covered in the [19th September 2020 PIB Summary and Analysis](#).

2. School closure may cost India dear

What's in News?

In its latest South Asia report titled "Beaten or broken: Informality and COVID-19", the World Bank has highlighted that - among South Asian nations, India's future earnings would be impacted the most due to school closures.

- South Asian governments spend only \$400 billion a year on primary and secondary education, so the total loss in economic output would be substantially higher, the bank highlighted.
- The World Bank has said that the extended closure of schools amid the COVID-19 pandemic could dent India's future earnings by anywhere between \$420 billion and \$600 billion.
- The projected learning loss for the region is 0.5 years of learning-adjusted years of schooling at present, and this will already lead to substantial future earning losses.

Labour productivity:

- Labour productivity will also take a greater hit from COVID-19 than most previous natural disasters, not just due to the disruptions in training and education.
- Increased integration of the global economy will amplify the adverse impact of COVID-19.
- Contagion prevention and physical distancing may render some activities unviable unless they are radically transformed.

- Even in less directly affected sectors such as manufacturing, banking and business, severe capacity underutilisation lowers total factor productivity while restrictions to stem the spread of the pandemic remain in place.
- Disruptions to training, schooling and other education in the event of severe income losses, even once restrictions are lifted, will also lower human capital and labour productivity over the long term.

3. China backs Iran nuclear deal, calls for new West Asia forum

What's in News?

China's Foreign Minister has called for a new forum to defuse tensions in West Asia after a meeting with his Iranian counterpart.

Details:

- China reiterated its support for Iran.
- Both countries reaffirmed their commitment to Iran's 2015 nuclear deal or the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with world powers.
 - The U.S. withdrew from the accord in 2018.
- Iran has been locked in an acrimonious relationship with Saudi Arabia, the other major West Asian power - over the war in Yemen, Iranian influence in Iraq and Saudi support for U.S.A.'s sanctions on Iran.
- China proposes to build a regional multilateral dialogue platform with equal participation of all stakeholders.

4. U.S. turns focus on Dhaka for Indo-Pacific strategy

What's in News?

Bangladesh could be the focus of the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific strategy.

- Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun is expected to arrive in Dhaka for a visit.
- The visit by the senior American official is the first such attempt by the U.S. administration to engage Dhaka directly ever since Beijing undertook several proactive measures to help the South Asian country deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The visit is the clearest sign of the Trump administration's desire to draw Bangladesh closer as a key Indo-Pacific partner.
- Bangladesh has not hosted a senior U.S. diplomat of this stature since the visit of Secretary of State John Kerry in August 2016 during the last phase of the Obama administration.

5. Kashmir tourism takes baby steps to normalcy

What's in News?

Kashmir has won the bid to host the 50th annual Skar International Asia Area (SIAA) Congress in 2021 against four other cities of Europe and Asia.

- Skai International is an organisation of tourism leaders around the world, promoting global tourism and friendship.
 - It is a Spain-based tourism body with 15,000 members and 150 chapters across the world.
- This event is expected to pave way for international tourism players to visit the Union Territory and give a fillip to international tourist footfall.
- J&K administration needs to further streamline COVID 19-related measures to ensure hassle-free movement.

6. Vaccines with a global common good guarantee

- Any vaccine developed against COVID-19 must be a global common good. Already, **many Nobel Laureates and global personalities have signed on to an Appeal to Declare the COVID 19 Vaccines as a Global Common Good.**
- This is indispensable given that mankind's history has shown us that to eradicate major diseases such as smallpox or polio, global efforts are required to ensure the availability of vaccines to all who needed it anywhere in the world.
- The world must **commit to sharing the anti-virus therapeutics and vaccines with the poor.** This would require the need to stress for the open-source production of vaccines without any commercial ownership of any COVID-19 vaccine.
- This act of human solidarity, to ensure that medicines and vaccines get to the whole human family simultaneously, would not just be an act of charity but would be in everyone's self-interest.
- Going forward all the countries of the world need to unite to pass a resolution at the [United Nations](#) to make novel coronavirus vaccines a product without any commercial ownership.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Antibiotics are used to treat infections by viruses and bacteria.
2. Antibiotic resistance means that the body of the human or animal is becoming resistant to antibiotics.
3. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria can be transmitted between humans and animals.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Antibiotics are strong medicines that treat bacterial infections. Antibiotics won't treat viral infections because they can't kill viruses.
- Antibiotic resistance is the ability of bacteria to stop an antimicrobial (such as antibiotics, antivirals and antimalarials) from working against it.

- Antibiotic resistance does not mean the body is becoming resistant to antibiotics; it is that bacteria have become resistant to the antibiotics designed to kill them.
- Antibiotic-resistant bacteria can be transmitted between humans and animals.

Q2. "Madrid Principles" recently in news, is related to:

- a. Nagorno-Karabakh conflict
- b. Israel-Palestine conflict
- c. Korean War
- d. South China Sea Dispute

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The Madrid Principles are one of the proposed peace settlements of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
- The Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) consisting of Russia, France and the U.S. had put forward in 2007 the Madrid Principles as a guiding principle for a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Q3. Which of the given pairs are correctly matched?

1. Padubidri Beach – Kerala
2. Radhanagar beach – Gujarat
3. Golden Beach - Odisha
4. Rushikonda Beach – Andhra Pradesh
5. Ghoghala Beach – Diu

Choose the correct option:

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

- In 2019, the Indian Government had identified 13 beaches in the country for blue flag certification.
- The eight Indian beaches which have now been given this tag are Shivrajpur (Dwarka, Gujarat), Ghoghla (Diu), Kasarkod and Padubidri (Karnataka), Kappad (Kerala), Rushikonda (Andhra Pradesh), Golden Beach (Puri, Odisha) and Radhanagar (Andaman & Nicobar Islands).

Q4. SVAMITVA scheme has been launched for:

- a. Making collateral-free working capital loans available to street vendors.
- b. Provision of an integrated property validation solution for rural India.

- c. Promoting entrepreneurship across Indian tribal communities by connecting agriculture and forest produce with markets using technology and creating self-sustainable enterprises.
- d. Supporting innovations by the soldiers in the Indian Armed Forces.

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- SVAMITVA stands for Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improved Technology in Village Areas.
- The scheme uses drone and satellite technology to map physical assets in rural areas and aims at digitisation of property records, easing the way for village dwellers to access institutionalised credit against property.
- It was launched to provide an integrated property validation solution for rural India.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Discuss the significance of the Monetary Policy Committee and also throw light on the composition and mandate of the Monetary Policy Committee. (10 marks, 150 words)(GS Paper 3/Economy)
2. Discuss the factors which contribute to inflation and also enumerate the measures that are available to control inflation in an economy. (10 marks, 150 words)(GS Paper 3/Economy)