

20 Dec 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. 'Any exploitation of Sentinel Island will wipe out tribals'

Context:

- The Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) has released a policy document for the Sentinelese island.
- The policy document was prepared at the behest of the Andaman and Nicobar administration.

Details:

- The North Sentinel Island of the Andamans consists of one of the most secluded tribal population in the name of Sentinelese.
- The policy document released by the Anthropological Survey of India talks about the need to protect the rights of the Sentinelese.
- The policy document highlights the need to develop a repository of the Sentinelese tribe, which could help in understanding the tribe better.

What are Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)?

- In 1973, the Dhebar Commission created Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) as a separate category, who are less developed among the tribal groups.
- In 2006, the Government of India renamed the PTGs as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).
- PVTGs have some basic characteristics -they are mostly homogenous, with a small population, relatively physically isolated, social institutes cast in a simple mould, absence of written language, relatively simple technology and a slower rate of change etc.

Who are the Sentinelese?

- The Nicobar tribes are Mongoloid; the Andaman tribes, including the Sentinelese, are Negrito.
- The Sentinelese are a pre-Neolithic people who have inhabited North Sentinel Island for an estimated 55,000 years without contact with the outside world.
- The Sentinelese have remained hostile to any efforts from the Government to reach out, they have time and again rebuffed any such efforts.
- In 2006, two fishermen who went harvesting crabs illegally off North Sentinel Island did not return. The more recent incident of John Allen Chau who set foot on the shores of the land of Sentinelese met the same fate.



Policy document

- The document has warned that any attempts at commercial exploitation or a strategic venture in the North Sentinel Island of the Andamans could be detrimental to the existence of the Sentinelese tribe.
- AnSI says that the right of the people to the island is non-negotiable and cannot be traded off for commercial and strategic gains.
- The state has the cardinal duty to protect is to protect these rights as eternal and sacrosanct.

- The Sentinelese, with a population of about 50 to 100 on the North Sentinel Island, are among the most isolated of nearly 70 PVTGs across the country.
- Sentinelese also is among the five in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands which include the Great Andamanese, the Onge, the Jarawa, and the Shompens

B. GS 2 Related

Category: HEALTH

1. India's COVID-19 fatality rate is among the lowest in the world.

Context:

- The Union Health Minister while chairing the high-level Group of Ministers(GoM) has spoken optimistically about the fatality rate, recovery rate concerning the COVID-19.

Details:

- The Union Health Minister has revealed data that shows India is currently coping with the virus better.
- The COVID-19 cases have not risen sharply despite festivities in October and November.

Optimistic data

- India's COVID-19 case fatality rate (CFR) is currently at 1.45% and is currently one of the lowest in the world.
- **The case fatality rate**, also called **case fatality risk** or **case fatality ratio**, in epidemiology is the proportion of people who die from a specified disease among all individuals diagnosed with the disease over a certain period of time.
- India has done well when compared to other countries like Mexico, China, Indonesia, Italy etc.
- India's recovery rate is very encouraging, India has the highest recovered patients in the world.
- The recovery rate presently stands at 95.46% and the cumulative positivity rate has decreased to 6.25%.

Vaccination blueprint

- The Government has come up with a vaccination policy, outlining the groups to be given priority, beginning with healthcare workers.
- The vaccination will cover different groups in a phased manner, currently, Phase 1 of the vaccination drive is expected to cover around 30 crore people.

Conclusion

- The data with regards to fatality rate and recovery rate and the announcement of the vaccination blueprint gives a feeling of comfort, but the fight against the virus is far from over.
- People have to continue with social distancing and following the precautions.

2. Ethical challenges of vaccinating people with comorbidities.

Context:

- The Government has recently unveiled the blueprint to vaccination drive for the COVID-19.

Details:

- The COVID-19 vaccine policy announced the Government will be at the forefront in tackling the virus.
- The vaccine drive will hope to diminish the pace at which spreads as there is no conclusive cure available as of today.
- Concerns have been raised over the vaccination of people suffering from comorbidities.

The vaccination priority

- The scale of vaccination is set to be graded with identified beneficiaries to be given preference.
- The health care workers have been given the priority as they are the frontline personnel and are exposed to the virus on a very frequent basis and at a proximate distance.
- The elderly population follow the health care workers, people above the age of 50 are considered under this, with preference being given to those that are aged 60 and above.
- This first phase of vaccination is expected to cover up to 30 crore people.

People with comorbidities.

- *Comorbidity* means more than one disease/condition is present in a person at the same time.
- Comorbidity people have been very vulnerable to the COVID-19, this can be seen in the number of deaths related to COVID-19 by those having comorbidities.
- Comorbidities range from hypertension, diabetes, asthma, chronic renal failure, cancer, bronchitis etc.

Comorbidities that increase the risk of COVID-19

- Considering this wide range of comorbidities, it is a challenge and an ethical dilemma to identify which comorbidities require vaccination more than other comorbidities.
- As per some of the pieces of evidence gathered, diabetes, hypertension, coronary artery disease increases the risk of COVID-19.
- In general, elderly people having multimorbidity followed by elderly people with comorbidity and then the elderly people should be the priority, this can be further followed by young with multimorbidity, young with comorbidity.

No comprehensive database for people with comorbidities.

- There is no national database for people with comorbidities, there have been data from the screening processes associated with National Programme for the Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS) guidelines.
- Under the Ayushman Bharat initiative, states have been screening people above the age of 30 years for non-communicable diseases to identify individuals with comorbidities for COVID -19 vaccination.

Health inequality

- The poor people and those living in rural areas are often not aware of their disease status, thus leaving them out of the ambit of vaccination policy is not fair.

- If there arises a scenario wherein there is a need to submit documents confirming comorbidities, then it will leave the poor and the rural people at a very disadvantageous position, favouring the rich and the educated.
- Ignorance of underlying chronic conditions is not just confined to poor and the rural people but also millions of middle-class Indians.

Way forward.

- States should permit people with comorbidities to self-report and back it up with a quick survey to screen, enrol, schedule the vulnerable for vaccination.
- Also, the private hospitals and diagnostic centres should be alerted to go through their records and submit the list of people with such comorbidities.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Why elephants and tigers did not go extinct in India

Context:

- A team from Yale University has set out to investigate why certain big mammals in India continue to exist while they have been disappearing elsewhere.

Details:

- During the course of the last 100 thousand years, the world has witnessed extinctions of several land-dwelling mammals, to cite few examples, North America lost its sabertoothed cat, North American lion, scimitartooth cat, American cheetah.
- The team is looking to establish factors that have contributed to extinctions.

Co-evolution.

- The adaptation mechanism developed by the indigenous animal population to counteract the threat of a new predator is one such factor.
- The co-evolution involved practices shifting the dwelling place, a spatial change in hunting grounds etc to avoid being seen by the new set of predators.

Environmental factors behind extinctions in India

- Extinctions of elephant, rhino, horse species have been studied to establish common a thread that could link these extinctions.
- An observation made during this study was that all the species mentioned above were large, slow reproducers and were very susceptible to any fluctuations in climate.
- The climate variations can have a profound impact on species that produce slowly.
- Elephants have a two year pregnancy period and usually takes close to 6 years between calving events.
- The hippos when stressed is reflected in their breeding.

Human intervention

- The fossil remains have indicated that the above-mentioned animals were able to tide through numerous environmental changes, thus their extinction cannot be tied to environmental changes alone.
- The phase of the rise of humans has coincided with the decline in the population of few species.
- The case in point for humans contributing significantly to the extinction of certain species is the disappearance of Ostriches in India.
- There have been numerous pieces of evidence of Ostriches in India, ostrich eggshells were used in bead making.
- Ostrich eggs became a part of human dietary needs and this fastened up the pace of decline of Ostrich population in India.

Habitat shrinkage

- The species which survived had a large geographic range, but with rising population levels and the sophisticated technology available for tapping natural resources have meant that these populations have been confined to small pockets.
- Habitat shrinkage has led to several problems such as interbreeding, conflict over limited resources, increased human-animal conflict.

Conclusion.

- Several paleoanthropologists have cited that it is very difficult to pinpoint one reason behind extinctions of different species.
- Environmental factors such as availability of food, nature of the habitat, presence of predators along with climatic factors and human interventions have contributed to the extinction of species.
- However, it would not be entirely wrong to say that human activities have rendered a larger number of species vulnerable to extinction than ever before.

1. Overexploitation, long life cycle have endangered a common Himalayan herb.

Context:

- The Himalayan trillium, a common herb of the Himalayas was declared 'endangered' by the [IUCN](#).

Details:

- The Himalayan trillium has been exploited beyond the capacity leaving the herb's survival threatened.
- The herb has numerous uses for human beings thus inviting people to utilize it, paving way for overutilization.

Medicinal value

- It is used as a traditional medicine to cure,
 - Dysentery.
 - Sepsis.
 - Wounds.
 - Inflammation
 - Skin boils
 - Menstrual and sexual disorders
- Recent studies have revealed that the rhizome of the herb is a source of steroidal saponins and has its application as an anti-ageing agent and anti-cancer drug.

Natural habitat

- Temperate and sub-alpine zones of the Himalayas at an altitude of 2400 meters to 4000 meters.
- India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan has been home to this specie.
- Indian Himalayan states like Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir possess the herb

Factors that have threatened the survival

- Over-exploitation
- Long life cycle, implying slow to reach reproductive maturity.
- Poor seed dispersal capacity.
- High trade value.
- Specific habitat requirement.
- Increase in market demand.
- Poaching.

Ways to protect the herb

- Implementation and enforcement of sustainable collection protocols
- Designation of areas of natural habitat to local communities for management of harvest.
- Implementation of FairWild standard, a set of ecological and fair trade guidelines can assist traders and concerned agencies in sustainable harvest and trade of species without harming its survival.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Are NRI's likely to get postal voting rights soon?

Background:

- Up until 2010, an Indian citizen who was an eligible voter and was residing abroad for more than six months for reasons such as education, employment etc, was ineligible to vote in elections.
- Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) names in the electoral rolls would be deleted, thus would be ineligible to cast their votes.
- The 2010 amendment to the Representation of People Act paved way for NRIs to vote, those who stayed beyond the borders for more than six months and were considered eligible for voting in person at the polling station.

Context:

- The [Election Commission of India](#) (ECI) has written to the Law Ministry over exploring the option of extending the postal ballots to eligible overseas, non-resident Indians (NRIs) for assembly elections in Kerala, Assam, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

The story so far

- The response from overseas voters has been lukewarm, the bulk of the voting from overseas voters has been witnessed in the state of Kerala.
- The RPA envisages voters as “ordinary residents” in a constituency, thereby provides an opportunity for NRIs to vote in their respective constituency.

Why poor response?

- The condition of having to be present physically has dissuaded many from casting their votes during elections.
- Thus calling for postal ballots to be extended to them, like how it has been currently available to the ‘service voters’.
- Service voters are those too who
 - belong to the Army
 - to whom the Army Act 1950 apply.
 - serving outside the state.
 - employed under the Government of India, in a post outside India.

The lapsed bill

- In 2017, a bill to amend the RPA to enable postal voting to NRIs was tabled in the Parliament.
- The bill provided for overseas voters to be able to appoint a proxy to cast their vote, provided they comply with the conditions laid down in the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, but the bill lapsed with the dissolution of the 16th Lok Sabha.

Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System(ETPBS)

- The Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 was amended in 2016 to allow service voters to make use of ETPBS
- The service voter has to download the ETPB, register their mandate and send it to the returning officer of the particular constituency via ordinary mail.
- The posted ballot has to reach the returning officer by 8 in the morning on the day of counting.
- To extend ETPBS to overseas voters require amending the Conduct of Election Rules 1961. The process will be very similar to what is being followed for service voters in the country currently.
- The overseas voter has to notify the returning officer within 5 days of notification of election.
- The returning officer will send the postal ETPBS, the overseas voter has to download, register the mandate and send it back with an attested declaration.

The viability of ETPBS

- The Lok Sabha election of 2019 saw an increased voter turnout courtesy ETPBS.
- An election gains credibility with increased voter turnout, ETPBS has been recognized by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance as an effective way to allow overseas voters to cast their mandate.
- Postal ballots have been seen as a secure and convenient way to cast votes, this is seen during the US Presidential elections as well especially owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

- A postal ballot system that allows for proper safeguards to ensure there are no malpractices involved will only contribute to increasing the voter turnout.

- An election in a democracy will benefit from more participation and the postal ballot offers one such opportunity and also it will enable the overseas voters to enjoy their constitutional right.

F. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements

1. LOFAR (Low-Frequency Array) is currently the largest radio telescope operating at the lowest frequencies that can be observed from Earth.
2. LOFAR is a single-dish telescope located in the US.

Which of the following statements are correct?

- a. 1 only.
- b. 2 only.
- c. Both 1 and 2.
- d. Neither 1 and 2.

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- LOFAR (Low-Frequency Array) is currently the largest radio telescope operating at the lowest frequencies that can be observed from Earth. Unlike single-dish telescope, LOFAR is a multipurpose sensor network, with an innovative computer and network infrastructure that can handle extremely large data volumes.
- After a decade, the International LOFAR Telescope has grown to encompass nine countries. Next to the Netherlands (38 stations), these are Germany (six stations), Poland (three stations), France, Ireland, Latvia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (one station each); a station in Italy is funded to be built soon

Q2. Arrange the following places from north to south

1. Rutland Island
2. North Sentinel Island
3. Barren Island
4. Havelock Island

Which of the following is the correct answer?

- a. II-I-IV-III

- b. III-I-IV-II
- c. III-IV-II-I
- d. III-I-II-IV

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

III-IV-II-I is the correct order.

Q3. Which of the following countries are members of NATO:

- 1. Denmark
- 2. Turkey
- 3. Switzerland
- 4. Greece

Identify the correct combination.

- a. II only.
- b. I, III, IV.
- c. I, II, IV.
- d. All of the above.

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

Switzerland is not a part of NATO, while the other three are the members of NATO.

Q4. The town of Chibok, seen in news is located in which of the following countries?

- a. Sudan
- b. Nigeria
- c. Ethiopia
- d. Chad

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Christian female students were kidnapped from the Secondary School in the town of Chibok in Borno State, Nigeria.
- Responsibility for the kidnappings was claimed by Boko Haram, an extremist terrorist organization based in northeastern Nigeria.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. What are the salient features of Tribal Panchsheel? Explain its relevance today in the context of protection of the tribes in Andaman and Nicobar. (15 marks, 250 words; SOCIAL ISSUES).
2. "India is a mega-diverse country, however, commercial exploitation is driving many species to the verge of extinction", in the light of the above statement, explain the applications and the nature of the threat faced by the Himalayan trillium. (10 marks, 150 words; ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY).

