

23 Jan 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Myanmar, Mauritius and Seychelles receive Covishield

Context:

Large consignments of Covishield vaccine doses were flown in special Indian aircraft to Seychelles, Mauritius and Myanmar.

Details:

- The shipments of the vaccine, manufactured by the Serum Institute of India (SII) in Pune, is part of the Vaccine Maitri diplomacy.
- The Ministry of External Affairs said it will also cover Africa, which is in need of affordable COVID-19 vaccine doses.
- India also has shipped out lakhs of doses of the novel coronavirus vaccine to neighbouring countries.
 - New Delhi wants to portray the exercise as yet another testament to its Neighbourhood First policy — the government is going to brand it as “Vaccine Maitri” diplomacy.

This topic has been covered in [20th January 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis.](#)

C. GS 3 Related

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. India proposes to expand research, tourism in the Arctic

Context:

India has unveiled a new draft ‘Arctic’ policy.

Details:

- Among other things, the policy commits to expanding scientific research, sustainable tourism and mineral oil and gas exploration in the Arctic region.
- Other objectives of the policy include:
 - Putting in place Arctic-related programmes for mineral/oil and gas exploration in petroleum research institutes.
 - Encouraging tourism and hospitality sectors in building specialised capacities and awareness to engage with Arctic enterprises.
- India expects the Goa-based [National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research](#) to lead scientific research and act as a nodal body to coordinate among various scientific bodies to promote domestic scientific research capacities by expanding “earth sciences, biological sciences,

geosciences, climate change and space-related programmes, dove-tailed with Arctic imperatives in Indian universities.”

Significance:

- The document notes that Arctic research will help India’s scientific community to study melting rates of the Himalayan glaciers, which are endowed with the largest freshwater reserves in the world outside the geographic poles.

Note:

India launched its first scientific expedition to the Arctic Ocean in 2007 and opened a research base named "Himadri" at the International Arctic Research Base at Ny-Alesund, Svalbard, Norway in July 2008 for carrying out studies in disciplines like Glaciology, Atmospheric sciences & Biological sciences.

Category: ECONOMY

1. RBI moots scale-based tighter regulatory framework for NBFCs

Context:

The Reserve Bank of India ([RBI](#)) has released a discussion paper on the revised regulatory framework which is formulated on a scale-based approach.

Details:

- RBI has suggested a tougher regulatory framework for the non-banking finance companies (NBFC) sector.
 - It aims to prevent recurrence of any systemic risk to the country’s financial system.

Proposed Framework:

- The regulatory and supervisory framework of NBFCs will be based on a four-layered structure — the base layer (NBFC-BL), middle layer (NBFC-ML), upper layer (NBFC-UL) and the top layer.
- When the framework is visualised as a pyramid,
 - The bottom of the pyramid, where least regulatory intervention is warranted, can consist of NBFCs currently classified as non-systemically important NBFC (NBFC-ND), NBFCP2P lending platforms, NBFCAA, NOFHC and Type I NBFCs.

- Moving up, the next layer may comprise NBFCs currently classified as systemically important NBFCs (NBFC-ND-SI), deposit-taking NBFCs (NBFC-D), HFCs, IFCs, IDFs, SPDs and CICs, where the regulatory regime is stricter.
- The next layer may consist of NBFCs identified as 'systemically significant'. This layer will comprise of NBFCs having a large potential of systemic spill-over of risks and the ability to impact financial stability.

Proposals:

- NBFCs residing in the upper layer will constitute a new category.
- The revisions applicable to lower layers of NBFCs will automatically be applicable to NBFCs in the higher layers, unless there is a conflict or otherwise stated.
- The current threshold for systemic importance, which is ₹500 crore now, is proposed to be revised to ₹1,000 crore.
- The extant NPA classification norm of 180 days will be reduced to 90 days.

Category: SECURITY

1. CBI books Cambridge Analytica, another firm in data theft case

Context:

The Central Bureau of Investigation has booked Cambridge Analytica (U.K.) Limited and Global Science Research Limited (U.K.) for alleged illegal harvesting of personal data of about 5.62 lakh Indian users on Facebook through an application.

Details:

- The FIR names Global Science Research Limited (GSRL) and Cambridge Analytica as accused.
- The FIR has been filed under various sections of the Information Technology Act and also accused them of criminal conspiracy under the [IPC](#).
- It stems from a preliminary enquiry launched by CBI in July 2018 on a complaint from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) following media reports alleging the illegal harvesting of personal data.
- MeitY had earlier sought details from Facebook and Cambridge Analytica about:
 - The alleged violations
 - The extent of the leak of personal data of Indian users and their possible misuse by Cambridge Analytica for profiling and influencing elections in India.

- Facebook reported that the data of potentially 5.62 lakh Indian users might have been illegally harvested.

Concerns:

- One of the big issues with the Cambridge Analytica controversy centres on how the data was collected.
- The data-mining firm has been accused of harvesting personal information from Facebook illegally to influence polls in several countries.
- Although Facebook has claimed to have destroyed the data collected by the two firms in 2016-2017, the CBI investigation did not find any evidence to support these claims.

What is Data Mining?

- Data Mining is a process of finding potentially useful patterns from huge data sets.
- It is a multi-disciplinary skill that uses machine learning, statistics, and AI to extract information to evaluate future events probability.
- The insights derived from Data Mining are used for marketing, fraud detection, scientific discovery, etc.
- Data Mining is about discovering hidden, unsuspected, and previously unknown yet valid relationships amongst the data.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Yet another mysterious disease in A.P. village

Context:

West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh is seeing yet another outbreak of a mysterious disease where 25 villagers were taken ill with epilepsy, convulsions, giddiness, fever and other symptoms.

Issue:

- In the last one-and-a-half months, about 700 people from the district have fallen ill due to an unknown disease.
- Expert doctors and researchers collected samples and found nickel and lead in the blood samples of the patients.

- The doctors did not reveal how the chemicals entered the patients' bodies.
- However, after a thorough investigation, the Andhra Pradesh government had declared that pesticide residues in drinking water was the main cause for the outbreak of the mysterious disease in Eluru.
- On the other hand, NEERI scientist detected the presence of mercury in the surface water beyond permissible limits.
- It was suspected that high quantities of organo-chlorine pesticides in drinking water samples could be the cause of the mystery illness.

Steps taken:

- The civic authorities have taken steps to ensure the supply of safe drinking water to the people in the town.
- The chief minister asked the agriculture department to focus on withdrawing harmful pesticides from the market and emphasized on organic methods and organic farming.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: SOCIETY

1. A new framework around caste and the census

The article talks about the need for a closer engagement between all stakeholders of the Census and the Socio-Economic and Caste Census.

Importance of Census:

- Enumerating, describing and understanding the population of a society and what people have access to, and what they are excluded from, is important not only for social scientists but also for policy practitioners and the government.
- In this regard, the Census of India enumerates and collects demographic and socio-economic information on the Indian population.

About the Census:

- India's Census is one of the largest exercises of its kind.
- The synchronous decennial Census which dates back to the colonial exercise of 1881 has evolved over time.
- The census data has been used by the government, policymakers, academics, and others to capture the Indian population, its access to resources, and to map social change.
- However, W.W.M. Yeatts, Census Commissioner for India for the 1941 Census had pointed out that, "the census is a large, immensely powerful, but blunt instrument unsuited for specialised enquiry".
- Other critiques also consider the Census as both a data collection effort and a technique of governance, but not quite useful enough for a detailed and comprehensive understanding of a complex society.

Issue:

- The usefulness of the Census cannot be disregarded, for instance with regard to the delimitation exercise.
- However, there is a lack of depth where some issues are concerned.
- In this context, the discussion around caste and its enumeration has been controversial.

Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC):

- Since Independence, aggregated Census data on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes on certain parameters such as education have been collected.
- With demands to conduct a full-scale caste census gaining traction over time, some have seen the inclusion of broader caste information as a necessity to capture contemporary Indian society and to understand and remedy inequalities.
- However, a few believe that this large administrative exercise of capturing caste and its complexities is not only difficult, but also socially untenable.
- Following decades of debate, the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) was conducted in 2011 and took a few years to complete; this was a distinct exercise from the Census of 2011.
- The SECC, which collected the first figures on caste in Census operations since 1931, is the largest exercise of the enumeration of caste.
- It has the potential to allow for a mapping of inequalities at a broader level.

The main concerns:

- It would be tricky to ignore the emotive element of caste and the political and social repercussions of a caste census.

- There have been concerns that counting caste may help solidify or harden identities, or that caste may be context-specific, and thus difficult to measure.
- These discussions along with various counterarguments are not new.
- In discussions around caste, scholars have demonstrated that the Census had the effect of marking out caste and community in the forms that are seen today.
- The other concern is whether an institution such as caste can even be captured completely by the Census.
- Also, questions remain on whether the SECC is able to cover the effects of caste as an aspect of Indian social structure in everyday life. And, can the SECC take into account the nuances that shape caste and simultaneously the ways in which caste shapes everyday life in India?
- There is a time lag between each Census, also delay in the release of data. For instance, nearly a decade after the SECC, a sizeable amount of data remains unreleased.

Census v/s SECC:

- The Census and the SECC have different purposes.
- Since the Census falls under the Census Act of 1948, all data are considered confidential, whereas according to the SECC website, “all the personal information given in the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) is open for use by Government departments to grant and/or restrict benefits to households”.
- The Census thus provides a portrait of the Indian population, while the SECC is a tool to identify beneficiaries of state support.
- This difference is significant as it influences not only the methods of collection but also the use and potential for misuse of data.

Way Forward:

- The need of the hour is a discussion on the caste data that already exists.
 - How it has been used to grant or withdraw benefits.
 - Its utility for the important academic exercise of mapping social inequalities and social change.
- Linking and syncing aggregated Census data to other large datasets such as the National Sample Surveys or the National Family Health Surveys that cover issues that the Census exercises do not, such as maternal health, would be significant for a more comprehensive analysis, enabling the utilisation of the large body of data that already exists.
- There needs to be a closer and continuous engagement between functionaries of the Census and SECC, along with academics and other stakeholders concerned, since the Census and the SECC are projects of governance as well as of academic interest.

- Before another SECC is conducted, a stocktaking of the previous exercise, of what has been learnt from it, and what changes are necessary are crucial to enable the Census to facilitate effective policy work and academic reflection.

Conclusion:

- Census operations across the world are going through significant changes, employing methods that are precise, faster and cost-effective, involving coordination between different data sources.
- However, care must be taken to ensure that digital alternatives and linking of data sources involving Census operations are inclusive and non-discriminatory, especially given the sensitive nature of the data being collected.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Helpful pause

Context:

The Union government recently proposed to suspend the implementation of the three contentious farm reform laws for the next year-and-a-half while a committee is formed to look into their demands.

Read about the Agricultural Reforms covered in [27th September 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Details:

- The Centre's offer to suspend the implementation of the three farm laws for 18 months is a conciliatory gesture.
- They have been demanding the repeal of the three laws and a legal guarantee of Minimum Support Price for their produce.
- While the government has refused to concede these demands, its willingness to put off the implementation of the laws is a right step that could lead to a viable reform package for the agriculture sector.
- It is regrettable that the farmers protesting against the laws that encourage market forces in the sector have rejected the government offer.

Way Forward:

- That reform is needed in India's agriculture sector is an indisputable fact.

- The challenge lies in identifying the viable measures from the economic, environmental and scientific perspectives and building a wide political agreement for the reforms.
- By creating an environment of trust with the aggrieved farmers, the government can reclaim its authority and role.
- The Supreme Court which has assumed an unwarranted role for itself must step back.
- If the agitation can be ended with this concession from the government, it will be a victory for democracy.
- Harassment of farmer leaders by investigative agencies must immediately stop.
- The consultations on the three laws and reforms, in general, must take place in an ambience of mutual trust and a spirit of give and take.
- The talks must be without preconditions but with an agreed premise that agriculture and farmers cannot be left at the mercy of market forces, and the current crop and remuneration patterns are not sustainable.
- This requires both sides to be more open-minded than they have been so far.
- The government has put the right foot forward by offering to start consultations.
- Farmers must not allow their maximalism to obstruct the path to an agreement.
- The farmers, who are being represented by several organisations, must arrive at a common platform for talks with the government.

For a complete understanding of the issue and the constitutionality of the three farm laws, watch

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjxOwnv_vBs&list=PLkJ-kjtioPGqIUxUXouzs6wKfjXvkg2xA&index=1&t=2086s

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Flu among the feathers

Context:

The article talks about the bird flu outbreak and how it aggravated the fate of farmers already struggling to come to terms with the losses inflicted by the 2018 floods and the ongoing pandemic.

Read more on this topic covered in [10th January 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

F. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Tidbits

1. Offensive posts against Bihar Ministers may land you in jail

What's in News?

Bihar is set to use the cybercrime law to deter individuals and organisations from making offensive comments against the government, its officials, Ministers, MPs and MLAs.

- It had regularly been coming to light that certain persons and organisations had been making offensive comments through social media against the government, honourable Ministers, MPs, MLAs and government officials, which is against the prescribed law.
- All Principal Secretaries and Secretaries are requested to inform the Economic Offences Wing about any such act so that suitable legal action can be taken against those organisations/individuals after investigation.

2. Biden respects successful India-U.S. ties: WH

What's in News?

White House Press Secretary asserted that the U.S. President Joe Biden respects and values the successful bipartisan relationship the country has with India.

Details:

- She said that the President who has visited India many times, respects and values the long, bipartisan, successful relationship between leaders in India and the United States and looks forward to a continuation of that.
- Biden visited India in 2008 — the year the U.S. Congress approved the civil nuclear deal between the two countries.
 - As Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he played a key role in pushing the deal through.
- In 2013, Mr. Biden visited India again, as Vice-President.
- In 2014, he chaired a joint session of the U.S. Congress that Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed.

3. Navy to highlight operations of 1971 war

What's in News?

The Navy's tableau at the Republic Day parade 2021 aims to showcase its role in the 1971 Indo-Pak war.

- This coincides with the golden jubilee celebrations of the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh being observed as ‘Swarnim Vijay Varsh’.
- Besides, a tri-service contingent of the Bangladesh armed forces is taking part in the parade on Rajpath this year.

Note:

- The forward part of the tableau showcases the attack on the Karachi harbour by missile boats. The attacks were undertaken as part of
 - Operation Trident on December 3 and 4 night.
 - Operation Python on December 8 and 9 night.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. “Operation Trident” and “Operation Python” were a part of which of the following?

- a. Indo-Pakistani War of 1971
- b. Sino-Indian War of 1962
- c. Kargil War of 1999
- d. Indo-Pakistani War of 1965

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Operation Trident was an offensive operation launched by the Indian Navy on Pakistan's port city of Karachi during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971.
- Operation Python, a follow-up to Operation Trident, was the code name of a naval attack launched on West Pakistan's port city of Karachi by the Indian Navy during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971.

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to Mohiniyattam:

1. It is the classical solo dance form of Kerala.
2. Vyavaharamala written by Mazhamangalam Narayanan Namputiri has references of the art form.
3. In this the dancer usually stands on a brass plate locking the feet and moves the plate rhythmically with great dexterity.

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

- a. 2 only

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Mohiniyattam is the classical solo dance form of Kerala.
- Vyavaharamala written by Mazhamangalam Narayanan Namputiri in 1709 has references to the art form.
- Ghoshayatra, written later by great poet Kunjan Nambiar also has its mentions.
- The dancer standing on a brass plate locking the feet and moving the plate rhythmically with great dexterity is a feature of Kuchipudi of Andhra Pradesh.

Q3. Which of the following is/are Indian Arctic Research Base/s?

- 1. Maitri
- 2. Himadri
- 3. Bharati

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- “Maitri” and “Bharati” are **Indian Antarctic Research Bases**.
- “Himadri” is an **Indian Arctic Research Base**.
- India launched its first scientific expedition to the Arctic Ocean in 2007 and opened a research base named "Himadri" at the International Arctic Research Base at Ny-Alesund, Svalbard, Norway in July 2008 for carrying out studies in disciplines like Glaciology, Atmospheric sciences & Biological sciences.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to Charminar:

1. Charminar was built by Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah of the Qutb Shahi dynasty.
2. Each of the four minarets stands on a lotus-leaf base.
3. It was used as a madrassa during the Qutb Shahi period.

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Charminar was built by Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, the fifth ruler of the Qutb Shahi dynasty.
- It was built in 1591 to commemorate the end of the plague in the city.
- Four (char) minarets (minar) give the building its name 'Charminar'.
- Each minar/minaret stands on a lotus-leaf base, a special recurrent motif in Qutub Shahi buildings.
- The first floor was used as a madrassa (college) during the Qutub Shahi period. The second floor has a mosque on the western side.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. What do you understand by Data mining? Data-mining companies, if left unregulated can infringe on the fundamental rights. Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words). [GS 3, Security]
2. What are the challenges and flaws involved in conducting the census and the Socio-Economic Caste Census in its current form? Discuss the roadmap for a framework around caste and the census to enhance the utility of census data. (15 Marks 250 Words) [GS 1, Society]