

## 29 Apr 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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### A. GS 1 Related

#### Category: ART AND CULTURE

##### 1. Govt. starts planning for Haridwar Kumbh Mela

###### Context:

The government has begun planning for the Maha Kumbh Mela in Haridwar, Uttarakhand, in January 2021.

- A similar Kumbh was organised in Prayagraj in 2019.

###### Concerns:

- Amidst the [COVID-19](#) Pandemic situation, crowds, or even the prospect of one, may be anathema everywhere.
- The Maha Kumbh Mela is organised once in 12 years, and the last time the event was held in 2010, about 10 million reportedly congregated in the city.

###### Kumbh Mela:

- Kumbh Mela comes under the UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.
  - It was added to the list in 2017.
- Kumbh Mela is celebrated four times over a course of 12 years.
- Kumbh Mela locations in India:
  - Haridwar on the Ganges in Uttarakhand.
  - Ujjain on the Shipra in Madhya Pradesh.
  - Nashik on the Godavari in Maharashtra.
  - Prayagraj at the confluence of the Ganges, the Yamuna, and the mythical Sarasvati in Uttar Pradesh.
- The Mela site keeps rotating between one of the four pilgrimage places on four sacred rivers.

### B. GS 2 Related

#### Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

##### 1. 'Anti-graft law covers deemed universities'

###### Context:

The [Supreme Court](#) has held that bribery and corruption in a deemed university can be tried under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

#### Details:

- The three-judge Bench has said that individuals, authorities or officials connected to a deemed university, whatever be their role or designation, come under the definition of a ‘public servant’.
- They can be tried and punished under the anti-corruption law.
- As per the judgement, officials of a deemed varsity, though not seen as public servants in the conventional sense, perform duties in the discharge of which the State, the public and the community at large has an interest.
- Deemed universities come within the ambit of the term ‘university’ in Section 2(c)(xi) of the Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act, 1988.
  - A deemed institution under the University Grants Commission Act of 1956 has the same common public duty like a university to confer academic degrees, which are recognised in the society.
- “The object of the PC Act was not only to prevent the social evil of bribery and corruption, but also to make the same applicable to individuals who might conventionally not be considered public servants. The purpose under the PC Act was to shift focus from those who are traditionally called public officials, to those individuals who perform public duties. Keeping the same in mind, it cannot be stated that a deemed university and the officials therein, perform any less or any different a public duty.”, the judgement said.

## 2. Kerala HC stays State govt. order on salary deferment

#### Context:

The Kerala High Court has stayed for two months, the operationalisation of the State government order to defer the payment of the salary of government employees and the staff of State government-owned undertakings.

#### Details:

- The interim order was passed on a slew of petitions filed by various unions challenging the order to defer payment of six days’ salary every month from April to August.
  - The order is not applicable to employees who draw a gross salary below ₹20,000.
- Counsel for the unions contended that Article 300A of the Constitution (right to property) would include within its ambit ‘salary’ as well.
  - The article mandates that no person shall be deprived of his/her property save by the authority of the law.
- It was further argued that no law empowered the government to defer the salary payment of the employees.
  - Besides, the payment could not be deferred without their consent.

#### Kerala High Court Order:

- Rejecting a contention of the government, the court pointed out that the Disaster Management Act or the Epidemic Diseases Act did not specifically confer any power on the government to defer salary payments during the times of any disaster.
- The court said that financial difficulty was not a ground for the government to defer payment of salary of its employees.

- It said that, prima facie, deferment of payment of salary, for whatever purposes, amounted to denial of the right to property.

## **Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

### **1. USCIRF downgrades India in 2020 list**

#### **Context:**

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has downgraded India to the lowest ranking, “countries of particular concern” (CPC) in its 2020 report.

#### **Details:**

- USCIRF had placed India on CPC and watch list in 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2009 and 2010.
- In its 2019 report, India continued to remain a Tier 2 country, a list it has been unable to get off of since 2009.
  - **Tier 2 countries** are those in which violations engaged in or tolerated by government are serious and characterized by at least one of the elements of systematic, ongoing, and egregious (horrible)’.
- The 2020 report, released in Washington by the federal government commission that functions as an advisory body, placed India alongside countries including China, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.
- This is the first time since 2004 that India has been placed in this category.
  - **CPC** is designated to a nation guilty of particularly severe violations of religious freedom under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998. The term ‘particularly severe violations of religious freedom’ means systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom.

#### **Why has India been moved to Countries of Particular Concern?**

- The commission noted in its report that “India took a sharp downward turn in 2019, which included specific concerns about the Citizenship Amendment Act, the proposed National Register for Citizens, anti-conversion laws and the situation in Jammu and Kashmir.”
- “The national government used its strengthened parliamentary majority to institute national-level policies violating religious freedom across India.”
- The panel said that the CPC designation was also recommended because “national and various State governments also allowed nationwide campaigns of harassment and violence against religious minorities to continue with impunity, and engaged in and tolerated hate speech and incitement to violence against them”.
- However, three of the 10 USCIRF commissioners, dissented with the panel’s recommendation on India as being ‘too harsh’ and that ended up placing the country alongside what they termed as “rogue nations” like China and North Korea.

#### **Concerns:**

- The commission also recommended that the U.S. government take stringent action against India under the “International Religious Freedom Act” (IRFA).
- It called on the administration to “impose targeted sanctions on Indian government agencies and officials responsible for severe violations of religious freedom by freezing those individuals’ assets and/or barring

their entry into the United States under human rights-related financial and visa authorities, citing specific religious freedom violations”.

- In 2005, Prime Minister Narendra Modi who was at the time the Chief Minister of Gujarat was censured by the USCIRF.
- The commission had recommended sanctions against Mr. Modi for the 2002 riots and the U.S. government had subsequently cancelled his visa.
- The USCIRF 2020 report makes a specific mention of Home Minister Amit Shah, for not taking what it deemed as sufficient action to stop cases of mob lynching in the country, and for referring to migrants as termites.
- In December 2019, the USCIRF had also asked the U.S. government to consider sanctions against Mr. Shah and other principal leadership over the decision to pass the Citizenship Amendment Act.

### **The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF):**

- The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is a bipartisan, independent federal government commission in the US.
- It was created by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998.
- USCIRF’s principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and the Congress.
- The Commission on International Religious Freedom issues an annual report that includes policy recommendations to the U.S. government based on the report’s evaluation of the facts and circumstances of religious freedom violations worldwide.

## **2. NITI Aayog slams India’s terror ranking**

### **Context:**

A report compiled by the [NITI Aayog](#) has questioned the methodology adopted by an Australian-based institute to rank India as the seventh worst terrorism affected country ahead of conflict-ridden countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Sudan, Burkina Faso, Palestine and Lebanon.

### **Background:**

India was placed at seventh place in the Sydney-based Institute for Economics and Peace’s list of countries most affected by terrorism.

### **Details:**

- India has moved to the seventh position from the previous year’s eighth in the annual Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2019. The countries ahead of it are Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Syria, Pakistan and Somalia.
- The Cabinet Secretariat had asked NITI Aayog to track 32 such global indices to see how they could help drive reforms and growth.
- It is believed that the positioning in the global indices impacted investments and other opportunities.
- The purpose was to see which of the indices could be used to drive reforms or which of these would require some amount of engagement with the publishing agency to make the indices more relevant.
- The report also questions the opaque funding of the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP).
  - Emailed queries by the government think tank (NITI Aayog), seeking list of its donors, remained unanswered.

## Category: HEALTH

### 1. South Asia faces health crisis as children miss vaccination

#### Context:

The UN has warned that South Asia could face a further public health crisis as children miss routine vaccinations.

#### Concerns:

- Vaccine stocks are running low in some countries as lockdowns and travel bans have disrupted supply chains.
- The United Nations' children's agency, [UNICEF](#), said hundreds of thousands were at risk as lockdowns across South Asia halted immunisation drives and parents refrained from taking their children to doctors to be inoculated.
- The fallout from the pandemic might reverse hard-earned gains in the region.
- The agency estimated that 4.5 million of South Asia's children had already missed out on routine immunisations, even before the pandemic struck.
- Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan were struggling to vaccinate children as local populations viewed inoculation teams with suspicion.

#### Details:

- Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Bangladesh and Nepal have halted their measles and rubella campaigns.
- Pakistan and Afghanistan have suspended their polio drives.
- UNICEF noted sporadic outbreaks of preventable diseases that can be cured with vaccines, including measles and diphtheria, have emerged in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal.

#### Way forward:

- UNICEF strongly recommends that, where immunisation campaigns are suspended, governments begin rigorous planning now to intensify immunisation activities once the COVID-19 pandemic is under control.
- It has suggested that, as long as health workers take hygiene precautions, there is no reason for vaccinations not to continue.

## C. GS 3 Related

## Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

### 1. No improvement in Ganga water quality during lockdown

#### Context:

According to a report by the [Central Pollution Control Board \(CPCB\)](#), despite the lockdown, significant reduction in pollution cannot be seen in the River Ganga.

#### Details:

- The dissolved oxygen (DO) concentration, a measure of the amount of free oxygen available in river systems, rose marginally.
  - A high DO value is considered a good indicator of river health.
- Two other measures, BOD (Biological Oxygen Demand) and COD (Chemical Oxygen Demand) — both indicators of the amount of oxygen necessary to break down organic and inorganic pollution — showed insignificant reductions.
  - The lower these numbers are, the better is the river health.

### Improvement in River Yamuna:

- The CPCB, however, said that there was notable improvement in water quality in the Yamuna.
- Analysis results indicate there is considerable improvement in the water quality of river Yamuna with respect to DO, BOD and COD when compared with pre-lockdown and lockdown period.

## D. GS 4 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## E. Editorials

### Category: ECONOMY

#### 1. Signalling support

##### Context:

- The Reserve Bank of India has opened a **special facility for mutual funds**.

##### Background:

##### Pressure in the mutual fund industry:

- The COVID-19 pandemic had led to **heightened volatility in the capital markets** and increased **redemption pressures** on mutual fund houses which had led to **liquidity strains** in the industry.
- Recently, Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund had announced the winding up of six debt funds, which collectively had assets under management (AUM) amounting to about 26,000 crore rupees.
- There are concerns that there might be a **contagion impact on the industry** from the closure of the funds by Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund.

##### RBI measures:

- Recognizing the urgent need to intervene, the **RBI** has assigned **50,000 crore rupees** exclusively for commercial banks to lend to mutual funds.
- The new facility is a **90-day repo-based lending** window from which banks can avail credit to provide loans to mutual funds.
- There are several provisions in place to incentivise the banks to lend to ease the flow of credit to the fund houses.
  - RBI has allowed the banks to breach their **25% ceiling on held-to-maturity investments** as a consequence of lending to mutual funds.

- The support extended from banks through this facility would not be counted under the overall **capital market exposure limits** of the bank.

Also check CNA dated April 28, 2020

### Significance:

- The RBI's move helps **reassure investors of adequate liquidity** in the mutual fund houses.
- The move also signals to the investors that RBI is alert to the need to **preserve financial stability** in these challenging times.
- This will help **reduce unnecessary speculation and redemption pressures** in the industry.

### Concerns:

#### **Credit risk:**

- With the economy still in lockdown and the credit ratings of even relatively well-established companies facing the threat of downgrades, there is **considerable credit risk** involved in lending.
- The banking industry is already **plagued by bad loans** and there are doubts about the banking industry's willingness to expose itself to the credit risk involved in making fresh loans.

#### Way forward:

- In case of the RBI's scheme failing to relieve pressure on the mutual fund industry, the Central government may need to step in with a direct intervention.

## **Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

### **1. Privacy concerns during a pandemic**

#### Context:

- The article examines the concerns regarding the government's policies and measures employed during the pandemic.

#### Background:

- The world finds itself in the midst of a grave public health crisis. This has necessitated the government, which is best placed to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, to take extraordinary actions.
  - Imposition of a nationwide lockdown, enforcement of strict norms of physical distancing and restriction of movement.

#### **Technological solutions:**

- The state's response to the pandemic has mainly involved the following measures.
  - The state has created a list of persons suspected to be infected with COVID-19.
  - There have been extensive measures to ensure **geo-fencing and use of drone imagery** to monitor compliance by quarantined individuals.
  - Use of **contact-tracing smartphone applications**, such as AarogyaSetu.

#### Concerns:



- Though the measures employed by the state seem reasonable, the methods used in implementing them **overlook important concerns relating to the rights to human dignity and privacy.**

#### **Publicizing of data:**

- In creating a list of infected persons, the state seeks to utilise people's personal health data. Though the **Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897** allows the state to do so, the state does not have the power to publicize such **sensitive information**. This amounts to **breach of the right to privacy of an individual.**

#### **Also Check: CNA dated March 28, 2020**

- Such publicizing also leads to other unintended consequences. Medical experts are of the view that the stigma attached to the disease has led to an increase in morbidity and mortality rates, since many with COVID-19 or flu-like symptoms have refused to go to hospitals.

#### **Rule of law:**

- The use of geo-fencing and drone technologies is **unsanctioned under any existing law.**
- While cell-phone based surveillance might be plausible under the Telegraph Act of 1885, there have been **no orders authorising** such surveillance as per the procedure established by law.

#### **Use of drones:**

- Contrary to regulations made under the Aircraft Act of 1934, the drones deployed also do not appear to possess any visible registration or licensing. Indeed, many of the models are simply not permitted for use in India.

#### **Concerns regarding AarogyaSetu:**

- AarogyaSetu, the contact-tracing application has been extensively employed in limiting the spread of the infection.
- There have been concerns regarding the use of AarogyaSetu.
  - Contrary to best practices, details of the application's technical architecture and its source code have not been made public.
  - The programme is **not backed by legislation**. In the **absence of a data protection law** and the lack of a statutory framework backing the use of the app, there is a lack of restriction on the agencies using the data generated by the app users.
  - AarogyaSetu may amount to a **technological invasion into personal privacy**, in a bid to achieve a larger social purpose.
  - There have been reports of employees of both private and public institutions being compelled to download the application.

#### **Also check CNA dated April 26, 2020**

#### **Limitless powers to the state:**

- With the pandemic being an existential threat to humanity and the paramount need to save lives, it can be tempting in such circumstances to argue that the executive's powers are limitless.
- The author argues that such an argument is not only wrong but also dangerous because such **limitless powers to the government are prone to overreach.**

- There are also the concerns that the temporary measures imposed may develop to become a ‘new normal’ even after the crisis has passed. Such conditions may severely **impact the civil rights of the citizens**.

### **Conclusion:**

- The Supreme Court’s judgment in **S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017)** is a landmark judgment upholding the **fundamental right to privacy**. The observations made in the Judgment can help in the prevailing circumstances.
  - The **right to privacy is not absolute**. There exist circumstances in which the right can be legitimately curtailed. However, any such restriction must be tested against the requirements of **legality, necessity and the doctrine of proportionality**.
- As per the above observation, the following conditions must be fulfilled.
  - **Appropriate legislation** to back any restriction being imposed by the government.
  - Restrictions must be in **pursuance of a legitimate aim**.
  - There should be a **rational relationship between the purpose and the restriction** imposed.
  - Restrictions must be the **“least restrictive” measure** available to achieve an objective.

## **Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

### **1. A task for South Asia**

#### **Context:**

- The health challenges of COVID-19 for the South Asian region.

#### **Background:**

- The South Asian region has been comparatively less affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and seems to be doing better than most other countries in limiting the spread.

#### **Also check CNA dated April 19, 2020**

- However, the South Asian region remains vulnerable given the **economic impact of the pandemic**.
- **Also check CNA dated April 20, 2020**

#### **Challenges:**

- The South Asian region remains prone to the health impact of the pandemic due to the following reasons.

#### **Densely populated regions:**

- South Asia, being one of the **world’s most populous regions**, houses some of the world’s most **densely populated** cities which are prone to large scale outbreaks of infections making them vulnerable to pandemics.

#### **Poor healthcare system:**

- South Asian countries have invested very little in health. This has resulted in a **dysfunctional public healthcare system** reflected in the abysmally low health parameters of the region.

#### **Increased privatization of the health sector:**

- Governments in the region have encouraged increased **privatization of the crucial health sector**.

- Whilst privatisation has brought in advanced technology and expertise, the **high costs of treatment** in the private sector have resulted in impoverishment as most of the population has **no insurance or third-party coverage**, and pays out of pocket.
- The sector has also been **poorly regulated**.

#### **Poor life styles:**

- **Hunger, malnutrition, poor sanitation and large-scale migration** are features of this region. These would amplify the effect of any pandemic on the population and make them more vulnerable.

#### **Poor health indicators:**

- Existing **infectious diseases** like TB, **HIV** and malaria have been worsened by emerging ones like dengue, chikungunya, healthcare-associated infections and antimicrobial resistance.
- The South Asian region is also an epicentre of an **epidemic of lifestyle diseases**.

#### **Diversion of scarce funds:**

- **Constant internal and external conflicts in South Asia** have consumed a large portion of national budgets and have also diverted the attention of the public and policymakers from healthcare needs.
- **Defence budgets** take the largest share of national budgets, which adversely **impact social sector spending**.

#### **Way forward:**

- There is a need for a long-term commitment to universal health care, with not only a national but also a regional and global focus.
- There is a need for **regional collaboration and cooperation through the SAARC framework**. A regional strategy has a better chance of controlling the pandemic than isolated national-level efforts.
  - **Pooling of resources and sharing data** may help flatten the curve.
  - **Joint research** can be a unifying point for SAARC.

## **F. Prelims Facts**

### **1. Animal poaching registers a sharp increase during lockdown**

#### **What's in News?**

The instances of poaching of wild animals and birds have registered a sharp increase across Rajasthan during the COVID-19 lockdown, with the hunters taking advantage of slack monitoring and sparse public movement in the remote areas.

#### **Chinkara or Indian gazelle:**

- Indian gazelles, *Gazella bennettii*, are primarily found in the northwestern region of India in the state of Rajasthan.
- Their distribution extends from south of the Krishna River, as far east as central India, and into the north-central region of Iran (east of the Zagros Range and south of the Alborz).
- They are found in grasslands and desert areas in India, parts of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- IUCN Red List Classification: Least Concerned.

- The Chinkaras are usually poached in Rajasthan, allegedly by the Bawaria community, whose traditional occupation is hunting.

## G. Tidbits

### 1. 'Vidya Deevana' to benefit 14 lakh students

- Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister has launched 'Jagananna Vidya Deevana', a fee reimbursement scheme that aims to benefit 14 lakh college students in the State.
- From the 2020–21 academic year, the fee reimbursement would be credited directly into the accounts of the mothers of the students in four instalments.
- The government has released over ₹4,000 crore for the scheme and ₹1,880 crore more towards pending dues.

### 2. BRICS should help entrepreneurs: India

- In a videoconference of Foreign Ministers of the [BRICS](#) group which was convened by the Russian Foreign Minister, the External Affairs Minister of India spoke of the need for reform in the multilateral global platforms.
- Member countries of the BRICS group should assist private entrepreneurs to help them deal with the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, he said.
- It was emphasised that support must be provided to businesses, especially MSMEs, to tide over the crisis and ensure livelihoods are not lost.
- The Minister emphasised that the pandemic is not only posing a great risk to the health and well-being of humanity but is also severely impacting global economy.

### 3. \$1.5 billion ADB loan to fund COVID response

#### What's in News?

The Government of India has taken a \$1.5 billion loan from the [Asian Development Bank \(ADB\)](#) to fund its immediate response to COVID-19, both in terms of the health and socio-economic impacts.

- The loan, approved by the ADB under its COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support (CARES) Programme, is the bank's largest ever to India.
- It will also be used to provide social protection for 80 crore poor people over the next three months.
- The bank is also in talks with the government to fund further stimulus measures, including support for Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises and for extending health services through public-private partnerships.
- The money, translating to more than ₹11,000 crore, will be spent to implement the containment plan and rapidly ramp up the test-track-treatment capacity.

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. The Kumbh Mela is organised on the banks of:

1. Ganges in Haridwar
2. Gomti in Ujjain
3. Godavari in Nashik

4. Confluence of the Ganges, the Yamuna, and the mythical Sarasvati in Prayagraj

**Which of the locations of Kumbh Mela are correct?**

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

**Answer**

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**Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to Chinkaras:**

- 1. Chinkaras can be found in India, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan.
- 2. It is the state animal of Rajasthan.
- 3. It is classified as endangered in the IUCN Red List.

**Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?**

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

**Answer**

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**Q3. Consider the following statements:**

1. Biological Oxygen Demand is the amount of dissolved oxygen needed by bacteria in decomposing the organic wastes present in water.
2. A high value of dissolved oxygen (DO), BOD (Biological Oxygen Demand) and COD (Chemical Oxygen Demand) are all indicators of good river health.
3. A low value of Biological Oxygen Demand indicates low Dissolved Oxygen content of water.

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

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

**Answer**

**Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to Asian Development Bank:**

1. India is a founding member of Asian Development Bank.
2. India and China hold the largest share in the bank.
3. It is headquartered in Manila, Philippines.

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

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

**Answer**

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## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. The landmark Judgment of the Supreme Court in the K.S. Puttaswamy v/s Union of India case upholds right to privacy as a fundamental right but also notes that this right is not absolute. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
2. Article 21 of the Indian Constitution has been the fountain head of many human rights. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
3. Examine the health and economic challenges for the South Asian region from the COVID-19 pandemic. Suggest both short and long term measures to mitigate the risks involved. (15 marks, 250 words)