

20 Feb 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: EDUCATION

1. NEP is a milestone to self-reliant India: PM

Context:

Addressing the convocation at Visva-Bharati University, the PM of India described the new education policy as a major milestone in the making of a self-reliant nation.

Read more on [National Education Policy \(NEP 2020\)](#)

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Rahul flags delay in review of OROP

Context: In a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence meeting, Congress leader questioned government officials on the review of One Rank One Pension (OROP). Details:

- Ministry officials have informed the panel that there were certain 'loopholes' that need to be fixed.
- In June 2020, the Defence Ministry had formed a committee to work out the modalities of the revision.

OROP:

- OROP implies uniform pension to personnel based on rank and length of service, irrespective of the date of retirement.
- The Government had implemented the long pending demand of veterans in November 2015.
- As per the notification, it is to be revised every five years.

Read more on [One Rank One Pension \(OROP\)](#).

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Govt. said to likely file appeal against Cairn arbitration award

Context: Cairn Energy has filed a case in a U.S. district court to enforce a \$1.2 billion arbitration award it won in a tax dispute against India, adding pressure on the government to pay its dues. **This topic has been covered in the 17th February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis.** Details:

- Cairn has called for India to return the value of the shares sold, dividend seized and tax refund withheld by the income tax department to recover part of the tax demand it had raised using retrospective legislation.
- It has indicated it could seize overseas assets such as aircraft and ships if New Delhi fails to comply with the arbitration award.

India's Response:

- The Centre is likely to file an appeal against the international arbitration award.
- Also, the government has kept open the possibility of a resolution within Indian laws.
- The options include Cairn opting for the Vivad se Vishwas scheme, which gives relief on interest and penalty if the principal tax demand is paid.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. NASA's Perseverance rover

Context: NASA's Perseverance rover has landed on the surface of Mars.

- With this, NASA is set to become the first space agency to fly a drone in the atmosphere of another planet.

Perseverance:

- Perseverance is an SUV-sized Mars rover designed to explore the Jezero crater on Mars as part of NASA's Mars 2020 mission.
- Its primary task is to:
 - Seek signs of ancient life.
 - Collect samples of rock and regolith to possibly return these to Earth.
- It is fuelled by electrical power by using the heat of plutonium's radioactive decay.
- Perseverance carries 23 cameras, including 7 specifically for scientific purposes, and a sample-caching system, which will package and lay aside samples for a later mission to pick up and carry back to Earth.

Perseverance Rover's seven instruments:

1. SuperCam: For imaging, chemical analysis, and mineralogy in rocks and regolith from a distance. It is an upgrade of ChemCam on the Curiosity mission.
2. MastCam-Z: For stereoscopic imaging.
3. Scanning Habitable Environments with Raman and Luminescence for Organics and Chemicals (SHERLOC): It is an ultraviolet spectrometer that uses imaging and an ultraviolet laser to determine fine-scale mineralogy and detect organic compounds.
4. Planetary Instrument for X-Ray Lithochemistry (PIXL): to determine the elemental composition of Martian surface materials.
5. Radar Imager for Mars' subsurface experiment (RIMFAX): Ground-penetrating radar to image different ground densities, structural layers, buried rocks, meteorites, underground water ice, and salty brines.
6. Mars Environmental Dynamics Analyzer (MEDA): for measuring temperature, wind speed and direction, pressure, relative humidity, radiation, and dust particles' size and shape.
7. Mars Oxygen ISRU Experiment (MOXIE): Technology test to produce oxygen (O₂) from atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂).
 - It will, for the first time, manufacture molecular oxygen on Mars using carbon dioxide from the carbon-dioxide-rich atmosphere.

- ISRU means In Situ Resource Utilization which is the use of local resources to meet human needs or requirements of the spacecraft.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. A verdict that has ended a long silence

Context:

A Delhi court rejected a criminal defamation case filed by former Union Minister M.J. Akbar against journalist Priya Ramani for her tweets accusing him of sexual harassment.

This topic has been covered in the **18th February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis.**

Significance:

- The verdict has come as a vindication to a long line of women who have not been taken seriously earlier when they have alleged sexual harassment.

Defamation and the defence:

- Defamation is the communication of a false statement that harms the reputation of an individual person, business, product, group, government, religion, or nation.
- The law of criminal defamation is premised on a person's right to reputation.
 - Making or publishing any imputation concerning any person, intending to harm, or knowing or having reason to believe that such imputation will harm, the reputation of such person is criminal defamation.

Defamation:

- Akbar alleged that Ms Ramani's allegations were defamatory and had damaged his personal reputation and as a minister, thereby causing him irreparable loss and tremendous distress.

Defence:

- Ramani's lawyers pleaded truth as her defence, made in good faith, in the public interest, and for the public good.
- Ramani premised her defence on the First Exception to Section 499.
 - "Imputation of truth" which is required for the "public good" and thus has to be published, on the public conduct of government officials, the conduct of any person touching any public question and merits of the public performance are exceptions.
- She also relied upon the Ninth Exception which says:

- “It is not defamation to make an imputation on the character of another provided that the imputation be made in good faith for the protection of the interests of the person making it, or of any other person, or for the public good.”

Conclusion:

- The case has been placed in the correct perspective by noting that a woman cannot be punished for criminal defamation when she raises her voice against sexual harassment because “the right of reputation cannot be protected at the cost of the right of life and dignity of [the] woman”.
- By rarely visiting retribution upon the perpetrators, the legal process has hitherto yielded little in terms of relief to the victim.
- A conviction in this case would have had disastrous consequences for the many courageous women who have come out with disturbing revelations about the extent to which a large number of professions and fields in the country have been unsafe.
- Against all odds, the verdict may come to be a defining image in India’s long walk towards respecting female sexual autonomy.
- With this verdict, many more women will now be emboldened to resist harassment at the workplace and elsewhere.
- Hopefully, a few men are now deterred from trading power and position to secure sexual favours.

Category: EDUCATION

1. Too many IITs, unrealistic expectations

Institutes of Technology:

- The Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) are the crown jewels of Indian higher education.
- They are world-renowned for the quality of their graduates and for their academic programmes in a range of fields in technology and engineering — and in the past decade, in research and innovation through research parks as well.
- They are among the few Indian higher education institutions that do reasonably well in the global rankings.
- The original five IITs were established in the 1950s and early 1960s. Four had a foreign collaborator.
- Currently, there are 23 IITs.

Details:

- The IITs are funded generously by the central government.
- The IITs are not universities; they have neither the range of disciplines nor the size that characterise universities worldwide.
- The IITs were, and are, self-consciously elite institutions aiming at the highest international academic standards.
 - This is a tradition that is important but increasingly difficult to maintain.
- They can be called the most selective institutions in the world.

- Also, IITs have traditionally attracted high-quality faculty, where most have doctorates from the most respected western universities.
- Top quality professors have been attracted to the IITs because of the quality of the students, the chance to work with the best academic minds in India, and a commitment to India's development.

Shortcomings:

- The IITs focused exclusively on technology and engineering.
- They later added humanities and social science. However, these programmes were modest until the 2020 National Education Policy emphasised the IITs should focus more on holistic and multidisciplinary education.
- While salaries of the faculties do not compare well on the international market, working and living conditions on the older IIT campuses are comfortable.
- Most of the new IITs are located in smaller towns.
 - While it is important to provide educational opportunities outside the major metropolitan areas, top institutions are seldom located far away from urban amenities.
- Another area is the lack of correlation between the local needs and IITs. Also, there are few community outreach programmes.

Concern:

- For the past decade or so, and according to current plans, the IIT system has expanded beyond its capacity to maintain its high standards and is in danger of sinking into mediocrity.
- The recent decision of the [University Grants Commission](#) to permit select IITs under the 'Institutions of Eminence' category to set up campuses abroad could further weaken these already stretched institutions.
- With increasing number of IITs and in smaller towns, facilities and infrastructure are unlikely to be "world-class."
- It is, thus, inevitable that quality will decline and the "IIT brand" diluted.
- This would be very unfortunate for India since the IITs are without doubt India's most recognisable and respected academic institutions.
- It is time to rethink the changing role and mandate of IITs in order to ensure that quality and focus are maintained.

Way Forward:

- While excellent engineering/STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) institutions are needed, they all do not have to be IITs.
- Perhaps 10 to 12 "real" IITs located near major cities are practical for India.
- Some of the newly established institutes can be renamed and provided with sufficient resources to produce high-quality graduates and good research.
- A more limited "IIT system" needs to be funded at "world-class" levels and staffed by "world-class" faculty, perhaps with some recruited from top universities internationally.

- The recent decision to liberalise the recruitment rules to attract more foreign faculty is a good step in the right direction.
- IITs need to pay attention to internationalisation beyond sending their brightest graduates abroad and recruiting Indians with foreign PhDs.
 - In-depth collaboration with the best global universities, and hiring foreign faculty, would yield excellent results, and further build the IITs international brand.
 - IIT Bombay-Monash Research Academy, and University of Queensland-IIT Delhi Academy of Research (UQIDAR), are promising examples.
- The IITs need robust policies to attract international students.
- Adequate and sustained funding is mandatory both from the government and from the philanthropy of tremendously successful IIT graduates at home and abroad.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Arunachal Statehood Day

What's in News? The north-eastern state Arunachal Pradesh is celebrating its 35th Statehood Day on February 20, 2021. **Details:**

- During the British colonial era, it was known as the North-East Frontier Agency.
- In 1972, Arunachal Pradesh became India's Union Territory.
- It became a state on 20th February 1987.

Note:

- Arunachal Pradesh is the largest of the Seven Sister States of Northeast India by area.
- It shares international borders with Bhutan in the west, Myanmar in the east, and a disputed border with China in the north at the McMahon Line.

G. Tidbits

1. 4 PLA soldiers died in Galwan: China

What's in News?

8 months after the LAC clash, China has said that it had lost four soldiers, including a battalion commander in the clash in the Galwan Valley.

- Twenty Indian soldiers died in the clash, which marked the worst violence on the border since 1967.

Latest Development:

- India and China have completed disengagement on both banks of Pangong Tso (lake) in eastern Ladakh.
 - All landforms have been restored as they existed before April 2020.
- The 10th round of Corps Commander talks is to be held in Moldo on the Chinese side to discuss pullbacks from other friction areas.

- The other major friction areas between the two countries are Gogra, Hot Springs and Depsang Plans.

Read about the **India-China Border Clash at Galwan Valley** in detail. Also, read about the agreement between India China on disengagement of troops along Line of Actual Control (LAC) covered in **16th February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis**.

2. 'New PSE policy envisages at most 4 strategic-sector firms'

What's in News?

As part of the 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan', Finance Minister had announced that there would be a maximum of four public sector companies in strategic sectors.

- The new public sector enterprises policy envisages that the strategic sectors have limited number of players restricting it to maximum four public sector enterprises of a holding nature.
- The remaining enterprises would be rationalised in terms of mergers, amalgamations and privatisation if feasible.

3. Indian IT workers to benefit from U.S. immigration bill

What's in News? The Biden administration has introduced an immigration bill in Congress.

- The U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021 proposes:
 - A pathway to citizenship to 11 million undocumented workers.
 - Elimination of per-country quota for employment-based green cards and work authorisation for dependents of H-1B foreign workers.
- The bicameral immigration bill must be passed by both the chambers of the Congress — House of Representatives and the Senate — and signed into law by the President.

Significance:

- It would bring citizenship to millions of foreign nationals, including undocumented workers and those who came to the country legally.
- Those waiting for a green card for more than 10 years would get the legal permanent residency immediately as they would be exempted from the visa cap.

India:

- The number of Indian IT professionals waiting for more than a decade runs into thousands. They are likely to be the biggest beneficiaries.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. "Aoleng" and "Lao Ong Mo" are the festivals of which of the following tribes?

- a. Konyak Nagas
- b. Khasi
- c. Bodo

d. Kuki

Answer:

a

Explanation:

- Aoleng is the biggest festival of the Konyak Nagas. It is the festival celebrated to welcome the spring (in April).
- Lao Ong Mo is the traditional harvest festival celebrated in the months of August/September.

Q2. Which of the following is/are the component/s of Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT):

1. Water supply systems, water treatment plants and universal metering.
2. Sewerage connections.
3. Urban transport, constructing facilities for non-motorized transport.
4. Development of green space and parks.

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer:

c

Explanation: The purpose of Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) is to:

- Ensure that every household has access to a tap with the assured supply of water and a sewerage connection,
- Increase the amenity value of cities by developing greenery and well maintained open spaces (e.g. parks) and
- Reduce pollution by switching to public transport or constructing facilities for non-motorized transport.

Water supply systems, water treatment plants and universal metering; Sewerage connections; Urban transport, constructing facilities for non-motorized transport; Development of green space and parks are all among its program components.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to District Development Councils (DDC):

1. The Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act, 1989 was amended to facilitate the setting up of District Development Councils (DDC).
2. DDCs will prepare and approve district plans and capital expenditure.
3. The term of the DDC is three years.

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

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

Answer:

a

Explanation:

- The Centre amended the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act, 1989, to facilitate the setting up of District Development Councils (DDC).
- DDCs are tasked with the preparation and approval of district plans and capital expenditure.
- This system effectively replaces the District Planning and Development Boards in all districts.
- The term of the DDC is five years.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to Perseverance rover:

1. It is a rover designed as part of NASA's Mars 2020 mission.
2. It is fuelled by electrical power by using the heat of plutonium's radioactive decay.
3. It carries a technology test to produce oxygen (O₂) from atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂).

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

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

Answer:

d

Explanation:

- Perseverance is an SUV-sized Mars rover designed to explore the Jezero crater on Mars as part of NASA's Mars 2020 mission.
- It is fuelled by electrical power by using the heat of plutonium's radioactive decay.
- It carries the Mars Oxygen ISRU Experiment (MOXIE): Technology test to produce oxygen (O₂) from atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂).
- It will, for the first time, manufacture molecular oxygen on Mars using carbon dioxide from the carbon-dioxide-rich atmosphere.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. There is a dire need to rethink the changing role and the mandate of the IITs in order to ensure that they remain world-renowned for the quality of their graduates and for their academic programmes. Elucidate. (15 Marks, 250 Words) [GS-2, Education]
2. With many countries having decriminalised defamation, is it time for India to do so? Critically analyse with suitable examples. (15 Marks, 250 Words) [GS-2, Polity and Governance]

