

26 Dec 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

CNA 26 Dec 2019:- [Download PDF Here](#)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS1 Related

MEDIEVAL HISTORY

1. [Earliest Sanskrit inscription in South India found in A.P](#)

B. GS2 Related

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [Anti-CAA stir brings Adivasis into focus](#)
2. [Study warns of growing cancer burden across India](#)
3. [IPC law on suicide is redundant, says expert](#)
4. [Modi launches Atal scheme on groundwater](#)
5. [Government employees warned against political posts](#)
6. [Centre promises free Wi-Fi to 48,000 villages till March 2020](#)

C. GS3 Related

ENVIRONMENT & ECOLOGY

1. [Massive locust invasion in Gujarat](#)

DEFENCE

1. [CDS will bring in synergy, say experts](#)

ECONOMY

1. [NITI member bats for 2 GST slabs](#)
2. [India eyes 60% share of global ship recycling business](#)

D. GS4 Related

E. Editorials

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [Dangerous doublespeak](#)
2. [Mind the gap](#)
3. [The return of the secular](#)

F. Tidbits

1. [Rohtang Tunnel named after Vajpayee](#)

G. Prelims Fact

1. [Typhoon Phanfone batters Philippines](#)
2. [35 civilians killed in terrorist attack in Burkina Faso](#)

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

I. Practice Questions for UPSC Mains Exam

A. GS1 Related

Category: MEDIEVAL HISTORY

1. Earliest Sanskrit inscription in South India found in A.P

Context:

- In a significant find, the Epigraphy Branch of the Archaeological Survey of India has discovered the earliest epigraphic evidence so far for the Saptamatrika cult.
- It is also the earliest Sanskrit inscription to have been discovered in South India till date.

Details:

- Saptamatrikas are a group of seven female deities worshipped in Hinduism as personifying the energy of their respective consorts.
- The inscription is in Sanskrit and in Brahmi characters and was issued by the Satavahana King Vijaya in 207 A.D.
- The inscription was discovered in the Chebrolu village in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh.
- The inscription was first copied and studied, and it transpired that it records the construction of a prasada (temple), a mandapa and consecration of images on the southern side of the temple by a person named Kartika for the merit of the king at the temple of Bhagavathi (Goddess) Saktimatruka (Saptamatrika) at Tambrape; Tambrape being the ancient name of Chebrolu.
- There are references of Saptamatrika worship in the early Kadamba copper plates and the early Chalukya and Eastern Chalukya copper plates. But the new discovery predates them by almost 200 years.
- The verification of all the available records proved that the Chebrolu inscription of Satavahana king Vijaya issued in his 5th regnal year – 207 A.D. — is also the earliest datable Sanskrit inscription from South India so far.
- According to Matsya Purana, Vijaya is the 28th king of the Satavahana dynasty and ruled for 6 years. So far the Nagarjunakonda inscription of Ikshavaku King Ehavala Chantamula issued in his 11th regnal year corresponding to the 4th century A.D. was considered the earliest Sanskrit inscription in South India.

B. GS2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Anti-CAA stir brings Adivasis into focus

Context:

The anti Citizenship (Amendment) Bill protests have brought demands of the Adivasis or tea tribes in Assam to the forefront.

Details:

- Assam's Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal has met the leaders of two influential Adivasi students' unions and assured them that the State government would take steps to fulfil their demands.
- Their demands include providing land deeds for settlement of landless Adivasis, appointment of Adivasi language teachers in the State's higher secondary schools and taking in more students of the community for free UPSC, medical and engineering coaching classes.
- The Adivasis, comprising 106 subgroups, are the largest of the six communities demanding the ST status.
- The others are Chutiya, Koch-Rajbongshi, Moran, Matak, and Tai-Ahom.
- The Adivasis comprise 18% of Assam's 3.1 crore population and are considered a major vote bank because of their alleged tendency to back political parties or individual candidates en masse.
- They are said to be the determining factor in at least 30 to 35 of the State's 126 Assembly seats.
- Assam's Devakanta Barooah, the then Congress president during the Emergency era, had infamously said that his party would continue to rule the State on the strength of the "Ali-Kuli" voters. Ali represents the State's 34% Muslims, while Kuli means the "tea tribe".

2. Study warns of growing cancer burden across India

Context:

A study tracing the growing burden of cancer in India states that most of the increase in cancer incidences are attributable to its epidemiological transition and improvement in the use of cancer diagnostics.

Details:

- A recent study published in the Journal of Global Oncology has warned that India's cancer burden will continue to increase as a result of the ongoing ageing of India and improving access to cancer diagnostics in rural India.
- The study has stated that while cancer-like diseases were documented since antiquity, but the recording of cancer in India began in the 19th century when the Western practices of biopsy and pathological examination were introduced to India during the colonial British regime.
- Cancer is primarily a disease of older people, hence, as life expectancy went up, cancer incidences too went up.
- Maximum increases will occur in the most populous and least developed States, where the facilities for cancer diagnostics and treatment are inadequate.
- The findings of the study offer lessons for planning cancer care in States and as well as in other countries experiencing epidemiological transition.
- In India, the fastest epidemiological transition happened in Kerala, whereas Uttar Pradesh remained in the slowest group.
- **Epidemiological transition** is a phase of demographic development, witnessed by a sudden and stark increase in population growth rates brought by improved food security and innovations in public health and medicine, followed by a re-levelling of population growth due to subsequent declines in fertility rates.

Kerala vs U.P:

- A direct comparison of the demographic and social variables, available health care facilities and leading causes of mortality in these two States shows how the low incidences of infectious diseases in Kerala have given rise to more cancer compared to U.P., which is still battling high mortality from communicable diseases.
- The types of cancers in India are also undergoing a transition, similar to a report from Japan five decades ago.
- There has been a decline of cancers caused by infections, such as cervical, stomach, and penile cancer, and an increase in cancers associated with energy intake, physical activity imbalance and ageing, such as breast, colorectal and prostate cancers.
- The study says cancer transitions can influence the requirements for site-specialized cancer surgeons.
- For example, Kerala will need more breast oncologists and U.P. will need more gynaecological oncologists.
- According to the study, the association of tobacco chewing with cancer was published over a century ago. But the habit is now estimated to cause a fifth of all cancers in India.
- Out-of-pocket expenditure is three times higher for private inpatient cancer care in India. Approximately 40% of cancer costs are met through borrowing and contributions from friends and relatives.

No evidence of cancer in Indus Valley sites

- Evidence of cancer in early humans was found in a review of 154 paleopathological studies dating back to 1.8 million years in historic Egyptian and German sites.
- However, the study states that no comprehensive historical review could be gathered by scanning through voluminous data on medical literature from prehistoric times.
- According to the study, no paleo-oncology reports of cancer have been recorded at the Indus Valley civilization or Deccan Chalcolithic sites except for the mention of some benign osteomas.
- Fewer samples and poor preservation were some of the limitations of these studies.
- The study says, there are references to cancer-like symptoms in many ancient texts including the 'Atharva Veda' and two ancient medical systems, Ayurveda and Siddha, which have been in use for more than 2,500 years.
- These texts mention the use of surgery and herbal medications for these diseases.
- The ancient medical classics of India have devoted little attention to cancer-like illnesses, suggesting a low prevalence of cancer in those times perhaps.

3. IPC law on suicide is redundant, says expert

Context:

- A national strategy for suicide prevention is under discussion at the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- Psychiatrist Lakshmi Vijayakumar has said that the government should remove the confusion surrounding Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code, according to which attempted suicide continues to be treated as a criminal offence.

Details:

- Vijayakumar, who is also a member of WHO's Network on Suicide Research and Prevention, has said that after the Mental Healthcare Act (MCHA), 2017, the Section has become "redundant" but continues to remain in the law books.
- While Section 309 of the IPC says that a suicide attempt is punishable with simple imprisonment, which may extend up to one year, Section 115 of the MCHA, 2017 states: "...any person who attempts to commit suicide shall be presumed, unless proved otherwise, to have severe stress and shall not be tried and punished under the said Code (Section 309 of IPC)."
- This provision of the IPC makes attempted suicide a medico-legal case and the golden hour of providing effective treatment to the person is wasted.
- India continues to have the dubious distinction of recording the highest number of all suicides (34%) in the world.

4. Modi launches Atal scheme on groundwater

Context:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the **Atal Bhujal Yojana** to strengthen the institutional framework for participatory groundwater management and bringing about behavioural changes at the community level for sustainable groundwater resource management in seven States.

Background:

- Over-exploitation of groundwater resources in India has been of great concern due to its impact on water availability and as well as on the environment.
- A recent report of [NITI Aayog](#) on groundwater level says 21 Indian cities including Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Hyderabad – will run out of groundwater by 2020.
- It also says that 40 percent of India's population will have no access to drinking water by 2030.
- So in order to promote conservation of groundwater resources and their sustainable usage, the government has been working on various strategies.

Details:

- The scheme will be implemented in about 8,350 gram panchayats in 78 districts of Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.
- Of the total outlay of ₹6,000 crore to be provided from 2020-21 to 2024-25, 50% will be in the form of World Bank loan to be repaid by the Central government.
- The remaining part will be made available via Central assistance from regular budgetary support.
- The entire World Bank's loan component and the Central assistance will be passed on to the States as grants.
- The Prime Minister said the scheme, or the guidelines related to the Jal Jeevan Mission, were big steps in proving the resolve to deliver water to every household in the country by 2024.
- He said the country had to prepare itself for dealing with every situation of water crisis, for which the government had been working at five levels.
- Modi said a comprehensive and holistic approach had been adopted with the setting up of the Jal Shakti Ministry, which this monsoon made extensive efforts for water conservation.
- The Jal Jeevan Mission would work towards delivering piped water supply to every house and Atal Bhujal scheme would pay special attention to those areas where the groundwater was very low.

- To incentivise gram panchayats, the Prime Minister said those with better performance would be given more allocation under the scheme.
- He said both the Central and State governments would spend ₹3.5 lakh crore on water-related schemes in the next five years.

5. Government employees warned against political posts

Context:

- A number of government employees have been sharing political posts on social media platforms in the backdrop of contentious issues such as – revocation of Article 370, Ayodhya verdict, Citizenship Amendment Act, etc.
- This trend goes against the service rules and hence, the Central and the State governments are looking to initiate disciplinary action and set a framework for the future.

Details:

- The Assam government has warned its employees of disciplinary action for “indulging and participating in political activities” on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Instagram.
- The warning follows the strike by some four lakh Assam government employees on December 22nd in protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.
- The office of the Director of Elementary Education, Assam, issued a letter to all district elementary education officers on December 24th seeking action against government employees, including contractual workers, who violate the provisions of Assam Services (Discipline & Appeal) Rules, 1964, for taking to social media to express dissent.

6. Centre promises free Wi-Fi to 48,000 villages till March 2020

Context:

In order to promote the uptake of the Internet in rural areas, the government has promised free Wi-Fi to about 48,000 villages, which are connected through the government’s flagship [Bharatnet project](#), for three months from January to March 2020.

Details:

- Under the Bharatnet initiative, the government has already connected 1.3 lakh gram panchayats.
- The target is to take this to 2.5 lakh gram panchayats. With the Bharatnet initiative, the Centre aims to connect all 2.5 lakh gram panchayats through optical fibre.
- Till now, about 48,000 villages have been connected to Wi-Fi using Bharatnet.
- The government is aiming to convert at least 15% of the total villages to digital villages in the next 34 years.
- Digital Village, which was conceptualised by the Common Service Centre (CSC) SPV under the Ministry of Electronics and IT, is a village where citizens can avail various e-services of the Central and the State governments, as well as of private players.
- These include banking, insurance, tele-medicine, pension and e-governance services.
- Such villages are also equipped with LED bulb assembly unit, sanitary napkin unit, and rural Wi-Fi infrastructure.

- The scheme has been unveiled at five locations as a pilot project. Considering the success of the pilot, the government is looking to set up 700 Digital Villages across the country, one in every district.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT & ECOLOGY

1. Massive locust invasion in Gujarat

Context:

Crops in Gujarat are under attack from grasshoppers known as locusts that have flown in from Pakistan.

Background:

- Locusts are a collection of certain species of short-horned grasshoppers in the family Acrididae that have a swarming phase.
- Under suitable conditions, they start to breed abundantly, and become nomadic (loosely described as migratory) when their populations become dense enough.
- Swarms of these pests move around and rapidly strip fields and cause damage to crops.
- The adults are powerful fliers; they can travel great distances, consuming most of the green vegetation wherever the swarm settles.
- The **UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)** had earlier warned of a massive locust attack in South Asia, covering Pakistan and India.
- Also, the **Locust Warning Organization (LWO) in Jodhpur** had noticed the swarms and predicted their trajectory across the international border.
- However, preventive measures were not taken by the authorities in Gujarat and they have been caught napping.
- According to the Agriculture Ministry's Locust Warning Organisation (LWO), locusts are flying in from Pakistan's Sindh province and spreading in villages in Rajasthan and Gujarat where south-western monsoon was prolonged in 2019.
- Originally, the locusts emerged in February 2019 from Sudan and Eritrea on Africa's Red Sea Coast and travelled through Saudi Arabia and Iran to enter Pakistan, where they invaded the Sindh province and from there they moved into Rajasthan and Gujarat.

Aerial pests

At their prime, locust swarms, which are usually found in the Horn of Africa, West Asia and the Indian subcontinent, have the potential to damage the livelihood of a tenth of the world's population. The current locust invasion in Gujarat is the highest in recent times.



A farmer from Tharad Village, Gujarat, holding up locusts.

• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

▪ Locust invasions usually occur in areas that receive less than 200 mm of rain annually. This is an area of about 16 million sq km, consisting of

about 30 countries

▪ Locusts travel at 16-19 kmph, and swarms can cover 130 km or more in a day. Usually, there are 40 million, and sometimes as many as 80 million locust adults in each sq km of a swarm

▪ The last major upsurge in India occurred in 1993, which saw the incursion of 172 locust swarms. India has only one locust breeding season — from July to October

▪ The primary method of controlling locust swarms is by spraying small amounts of concentrated insecticide using vehicle-mounted and aerial sprayers. A total of 3,10,584 hectares have been treated up to the December 15, 2019

Details:

- As the swarms mature, they have ravaged farms in north Gujarat, devastating farms in the three border districts — Banaskantha, Patan and Kutch.
- The locusts, known as **tiddis** locally, have wreaked havoc on standing crops including castor, cumin, jatropha and cotton, and fodder grass in around 20 talukas. Gujarat has not witnessed such an invasion of locusts since 1993-94.
- The insects fly in during the day and settle on the farms at night, making it difficult to ward them off.
- The farmers under siege are hiring workers and using age-old techniques like beating drums and vessels to scare the locusts away without much success.

- The State administration, along with the central teams, has launched a huge pesticide spraying operation to kill the insects.
- The government has now assured farmers that the administration will carry out a survey to assess the damages and will accordingly compensate farmers.

Category: DEFENCE

1. CDS will bring in synergy, say experts

Context:

Recently, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) approved the creation of a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) who will be the single-point military adviser to the government as suggested by the Kargil Review Committee.

Background:

- The CDS will be a four-star general and his salary will be equivalent to that of the service chiefs.
- The CCS also approved the report of a high-level committee, headed by National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, which finalised the responsibilities and the enabling framework for the CDS.
- As per the recommendations, a Department of Military Affairs headed by the CDS will be created under the defence ministry.
- The CDS will be the first among equals among service chiefs. However, in the list of protocol, the CDS will be higher than the service chiefs.
- The main task of the CDS will be to ensure ‘jointmanship’ among the three services. This will include powers to work on setting up a few theatre commands as well as allocating military assets among the services to synergise their operations.
- At present, the three services coordinate their work under the framework of the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS), which will be subsumed into the new structure after the appointment of the CDS.
- The CDS will also act as a single-point military adviser to the prime minister and defence minister on key defence and strategic issues.

Details:

- Strategic experts have said that the government’s approval for the creation of the post of Chief of the Defence Staff • (CDS) is a welcome move to bring in synergy among the three Services at the higher level and optimise resource utilisation.
- However, it needs a change in the mindset of all stakeholders, and the CDS has to take the three Service Chiefs along to achieve the mandate, they observed.
- The CDS will be a four-star General with salary and perquisites equivalent to a Service Chief. The CDS will head the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) to be created within the Defence Ministry and function as its Secretary and the Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC).
- It has taken 18 years and a long political trajectory from Atal Bihari Vajpayee to Narendra Modi for the creation of the post.
- Experts have termed the creation of a new department, DMA, with the CDS at the helm and the dual roles as Secretary to the Government of India and Permanent Chairman, COSC, as “very innovative”.
- Basically, the CDS will be ‘wearing two hats’, he will also be functioning as a Secretary in the MoD that already has four Secretaries.

- Evolving a stable hierarchy and equivalence for the CDS with the civilian bureaucracy will call for some deft give-and-take by all the principal stakeholders.
- The government's intent seems to be the long-term restructuring as the responsibilities include the establishment of theatre commands.
- Another positive step was the three-year time frame to the first CDS to bring about jointness in several areas including operations, logistics, transport and training.
- If the CDS is able to do that, it will be a positive step and will lead to further integration. The Services will have to slightly change from a service-oriented mindset to a more joint approach.
- Experts feel the post has the requisite mandate and authority. The CDS should consolidate the headquarters of the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) and the charter and has to "carry the three Services along as the first among equals" and ensure that the DMA is keyed into the apex decision making level.

Category: ECONOMY

1. NITI member bats for 2 GST slabs

Context:

Government think-tank NITI Aayog Member Ramesh Chand made a case for only two slabs under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime as against the current multiple slabs, and said rates should be revised annually, if required.

Details:

- The GST, which replaced almost all the indirect taxes, came into force in July 2017 and the tax rates have been revised several times since then.
- Currently, there are four GST rate slabs — 5%, 12%, 18% and 28%. Several items fall in the exempt or nil duty category.
- Besides, cess is also levied on five goods. Mr. Chand said that when a large taxation reform such as GST is brought in, there are always 'teething problems' but soon they stabilise. He said most of the countries took a long time for GST stabilisation.
- The NITI Aayog Member is also strictly against frequent changes in GST rates as it leads to problems.
- The GST Council, presided over by the Union Finance Minister and comprising State Finance Ministers, decides the rates for particular goods and services.
- Besides frequent demand for reduction in the rates on various goods and services, there has also been a clamour for a slash in the number of tax slabs.
- The tendency of every sector is to ask for lower GST. But Mr. Chand feels that there should not be fiddle with rates or rate changes frequently and instead of having multiple rates, there should be only two rates.
- Chand said the focus should be on a steady increase in revenue collection from the new indirect tax regime rather than tinkering with rates.
- He prescribed that if at all rates needed to be changed, it should be done annually.
- While every sector was demanding a lower rate, they should also understand that governments need revenue to spend on development works.

2. India eyes 60% share of global ship recycling business

Context:

With the passing of the Recycling of Ships Act, India aims to garner at least 60% of the global ship recycling business and emerge as a key destination for recycling warships and other ships.

Background:

- India is just a blip on the global shipbuilding radar. Just 0.05% of the world's ships by weight were made in India in 2018, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).
- But when it comes to taking these ships apart at the end of their life, India is a world leader, or at least used to be, till the competition from neighbouring Bangladesh became too hot to handle.
- Between 2016 and 2018, India's share of the gross tonnage of ships recycled worldwide slid from 31% to 26%, as per UNCTAD data, while Bangladesh's rose from 28% to 47%.
- But India hopes its new Recycling of Ships Act and its recent accession to the **Hong Kong International Convention (HKC) for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships, 2009**, will put the country back on top. The provisions of HKC have been included in the new law.

Hong Kong International Convention (HKC) for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships, 2009:

- The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) adopted the Hong Kong Convention in 2009, which is aimed at ensuring that ships being recycled after reaching the end of their operational lives do not pose any unnecessary risks to human health, safety and to the environment.
- In November 2019, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved India's accession to the Hong Kong Convention, which will help provide a boost to the ship-wrecking industry in India.

Details:

- The Shipping Ministry exuded confidence that contribution from ship recycling activities to the country's GDP would reach \$2.2 billion, almost double compared to the current level.
- According to the government, Gujarat's Alang, the world's biggest shipyard, was ready to cater to the projected increase in the number of ships for recycling.
- Currently, India recycles around 300 of the 1,000 ships which are demolished per annum globally. However, the likes of Japan, the United States and Europe were not sending their ships for recycling to India in the absence of ratification of the Hong Kong Convention.
- That scenario is set to change with the Recycling of Ships Act, 2019. The Act ratifies the Hong Kong Convention and would facilitate an environment-friendly process of recycling ships and adequate safety for yard workers.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY & GOVERNANCE

1. Dangerous doublespeak

Context:

- The Centre appears to have marginally mellowed its position on rolling out a National Register of Citizens (NRC), going by the statements of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah.
- But the Prime Minister’s contention that the widespread concerns about the NRC are merely fear-mongering by his political opponents is disingenuous and lame.
- The Prime Minister said no discussion on NRC had taken place in the government, which may be a clever statement but is certainly not reassuring.
- The plans for a countrywide NRC were announced repeatedly by senior functionaries of the government including Mr. Shah, even in Parliament.

The concerns of such an exercise:

- The fear that a nationwide NRC, in combination with the recently enacted Citizenship (Amendment) Act, or CAA, could lead to disenfranchisement and harassment of the poor and undocumented segments of the population, was not born out of anyone’s imagination.
- Such a link has been stated by the ruling dispensation. The political thought behind the CAA-NRC fusion is the distinction that Mr. Modi makes between “infiltrators” and “refugees”, as if they could be separated on the basis of their religion.
- If the government has a rethink on its strident position on the NRC, it must say so upfront, and at any rate, desist from denigrating critics.
- So far, what has come as clarification has only added to the confusion. In fact, the government must seriously reevaluate its position.
- India has a host of other serious national challenges to tackle, the economy being the most critical. So it is time the government starts realigning its misguided policy priorities.

2. Mind the gap

Context:

- The World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index 2020 has been released.
- India has dropped four points from 2018, to take the 112th rank on the Index.
- This poor performance of India, raises questions over women’s access to equal opportunity and resources against the access that men have in the Indian society.
- It also raises questions over government policies that are designed to promote equal access to opportunities and resources for both genders.

Editorial Analysis:

- The Global Gender Gap Index measures the extent of gender based gaps on four key parameters —
 1. Economic participation and opportunity
 2. Educational attainment
 3. Health and survival
 4. Political empowerment
- Notably, it measures gender based gaps in access to resources and opportunities in countries, rather than the actual levels of the available resources and opportunities.

- Despite a small score improvement, India has lost four positions as some countries ranked lower than India have shown better improvement.
- The country has reportedly closed two-thirds of its overall gender gap, with a score of 66.8%, but the report notes with concern that the condition of women in large fringes of Indian society is 'precarious'.

Concern over India's economic gender gap

- Of significant concern is the economic gender gap, with a score of 35.4%, at the 149th place, among 153 countries, and down seven places since the previous edition, indicating only a third of the gap has been bridged.
- The participation of women in the labour force is also among the lowest in the world, and the female estimated earned income is only one-fifth of the male income.

Concern over India's gender divide in health & survival

- An alarming statistic is India's position (150th rank) on the very bottom of the Health and Survival sub-index, determined largely by the skewed sex ratio at birth, violence, forced marriage and discrimination in access to health.
- It is on the educational attainment (112th rank) and political empowerment (18th rank) fronts that the relative good news is buried.

Way Forward:

- The Gender Gap Index definitely presents India with an opportunity to make the necessary changes without further delay.
- Doing what the government is currently doing is clearly not going to be sufficient; it needs to engage intimately with all aspects indicated by the Index to improve the score, and set targets to reduce the gender gap in the foreseeable future.
- It will have to drastically scale up efforts it has introduced to encourage women's participation, and increase opportunities for them.
- To do so it also needs to make sure there is actual implementation at the ground level.
- While a good score on any global index is a target worth pursuing, what is being questioned here is basic — is the state reneging on its commitment to half its population? A commitment to ameliorate the conditions for women is a non-negotiable duty of any state.

3. The return of the secular

Context:

The ongoing protests against CAA & NRC have reignited the debate on secularism. Young protesters across India have brought Gandhi's vision of the secular into the public discourse.

Editorial Analysis:

- A number of young protestors have stated that they are trying to defend Gandhi's idea of secularism, while opposing the CAA and NRC.
- Mentioning Mahatma Gandhi in this context can be seen as entirely appropriate because, Gandhi's contribution to an everyday understanding of secularism is massive, one different from at least three other understandings.

- First, the political secularism of Western Europe and North America in which some form of separation between church and state is required to defend equality and individual liberty but has no room for the idea of fraternity or community. This form of secularism will fit perfectly in deeply diverse societies.
- Second, the more legal and philosophical, constitutional secularism of India. This form is not only nuanced and complex but is also cognisant of the deep diversity in the Indian society as well as oppression within communities. Here, the state is required to maintain a principled distance from all religious communities. This is concerned with preventing inter-religious domination as much as fighting religiously grounded hierarchies and fanaticism within religions.
- Finally, the secularism practised in recent times by most political parties in India, what the author labels as – ‘party-political secularism’. This secularism does not really deserve to be called so because it is unprincipled and opportunistic, plays footsie with the most orthodox, bigoted and regressive elements of all religions, is concerned solely with seeking and maintaining power, and is willing to engineer riots or capitalise on inter-communal estrangement.

Gandhian Secularism:

- In contrast to the above forms of secularism, Gandhi made secularism simple.
- All religious communities inhabiting a particular territory must live with continuing ease and comfort with one another.
- This is a people dependent notion, one that Gandhi believed was already part of popular Indian consciousness but jeopardised in modern times by communal politics.
- To counter it, he felt, support was needed from the state that is not partial to any one particular religion.
- Moreover, whenever any estrangement or hostility ensued, then the state must help restore communal harmony.
- To perform its primary duty of maintaining fraternity, to prevent political alienation, the state must distance itself equally from all religions.

Against discriminatory laws

- The current protests have invoked Gandhian secularism and are mainly focussed on opposing the religion-based discriminatory policies of the State.
- This is noteworthy on the following counts:
- The fundamental injustice of policies with unambiguous discriminatory intent. This is unconstitutional. And offends the dignity not only of those discriminated against but also of every citizen in the polity.
- The protests have made it clear that any law or policy that discriminates on the basis of religion is not acceptable.
- The whole idea of proving one’s citizenship by producing documents before government officials is abhorrent — anyone born in India must be presumed to be an Indian citizen and should not be compelled to demonstrate this.
- Article 14 provides for equal protection of the laws within the territory of India. This should apply uniformly to illegal migrants as well as refugees fleeing persecution. Either all should be given refuge or all deported by due process of law.
- No one within the territory of India, Indian citizen or foreign national, must be treated differently on the basis of one’s religion or country of origin.
- The protesters seem to suggest, that such discriminatory policies disrupt peace and stability by generating a vicious cycle of resentment and mutual hostility.

- Conflicts and skirmishes have not been uncommon between communities in the past, but a deep division between them occurred only when a pernicious ethno-nationalist ideology was imported into India in the 19th century, with tragic results in 1947.
- The protests have also seen a public acknowledgement by young Hindus of the contribution of Muslims to Indian culture and civilisation, to constructions of Indian notions of civility.
- Young women and men asserted that their religious identity is not defined against other religions. One can be Hindu without being anti-Muslim and vice versa.
- Indian citizens cohabit a shared social and public space not through mutual toleration but by actively accepting one another, and are committed to participating in each other's suffering and destiny.

India's Composite Culture

- Norms of public etiquette, civility and refinements in culture have been shaped in India by multiple religious traditions in which Muslims have played a prominent role.
- For example, the qawwali and the ghazal are as much a part of our culture as the bhajan. There is a whole tradition of such scholarship alive today that harks back to Dara Shikoh and Amir Khusro, and continues in Modern India with renowned Sanskrit scholars such as Mohammed Hanif Khan Shastri and Pandit Ghulam Dastagir.
- Finally, the protesters made it clear that an obsession with religious identity takes focus away from pressing challenges that are facing the country.
- No more divide and rule is the mantra that the protestors are averring to; the business of government is to facilitate a better everyday life for all ordinary citizens, including Hindus and Muslims, not to destroy it.
- The reappearance of secularism in Indian public discourse, initiated by young Indian students, is surely a matter of relief and joy to those who aspire to protect India's diverse cultural heritage, defend India's Constitution and wish every Indian to have a better standard of living.

F. Tidbits

1. Rohtang Tunnel named after Vajpayee

- The government named the strategic tunnel under Rohtang Pass in Himachal Pradesh after former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in a tribute to him on his 95th birth anniversary.
- The historic decision to construct the strategic tunnel below the Rohtang Pass was taken in 2000 when Vajpayee was the Prime Minister.
- The tunnel connects Manali in Himachal Pradesh to Leh, Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir.
- The 8.8-km-long tunnel will be the world's longest above an altitude of 3,000 metres and will reduce the distance between Manali and Leh by 46 kilometres.
- The construction of the strategic tunnel will be completed by 2020. Once thrown open, the tunnel will provide all-weather connectivity to remote border areas of Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh which otherwise remain cut off from the rest of the country for about six months during winters.
- The project is being implemented by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO).

G. Prelims Facts

1. Typhoon Phanfone batters Philippines

- Typhoon Phanfone has made landfall in the Philippines and brought widespread devastation to property, crops and human life.

- Phanfone was tracking a similar path to Super Typhoon Haiyan, the country's deadliest cyclone on record which left more than 7,300 people dead or missing in 2013.

2. 35 civilians killed in the terrorist attack in Burkina Faso

- In one of the deadliest terror attacks in nearly five years of violence in the West African country, jihadists have killed 35 civilians, almost all of them women.
- Burkina Faso, bordering Mali and Niger, has seen regular jihadist attacks which have left hundreds dead since 2015 when militant violence began to spread across the Sahel region.
- No group immediately claimed responsibility for jihadist violence in Burkina Faso but militants linked to both the Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State groups are active in the region.

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is a non-UN, inter-governmental body.
2. In 2004, the FAO adopted the Right to Food Guidelines, offering guidance to states on how to implement their obligations on the right to food.
3. The FAO is headquartered in Rome, Italy.

Options:

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

Answer

Q2. The World Investment Report is published by -

- a. IMF
- b. World Bank
- c. UNCTAD
- d. World Economic Forum

Answer

Q3. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The Satavahana dynasty was based in the Deccan region.
2. They formed a cultural bridge and played a vital role in trade and the transfer of ideas and culture to and from the Indo-Gangetic Plain to the southern tip of India.

Options:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer

Q4. Which of the following statements are correct?

- 1. The Atal Bhujal Yojana is focussed on promoting panchayat-led groundwater management and behavioural change at the community level.
- 2. It is funded entirely by the World Bank.

Options:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer

Q5. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

- 1. Burkina Faso is a West African country that faces the Atlantic Ocean.
- 2. Formerly, it was a colony of France.

Options:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

- 1. The latest Global Gender Gap Index paints a dismal picture of India on the gender equality front. Critically evaluate. (250 words; 15 marks)
- 2. Examine the relevance of Gandhian secularism in present-day Indian society. (250 words; 15 marks)