

24 Apr 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. China's national security office to open permanent base in HK

Context:

Hong Kong is set to grant a site on the western Kowloon peninsula to **Beijing's national security office for its permanent base in the city.**

Details:

- The office would operate beyond the scrutiny of local courts or other institutions.
- It will oversee the **Hong Kong government's enforcement of the national security legislation** that Beijing imposed on the city.
- The national security law has **allowed officers from China's security forces to take enforcement action in the city for the first time.**

Note:

- The former British colony of Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule in 1997 with the guarantee of continued freedoms.
- Pro-democracy activists say those freedoms are being whittled away, especially with the national security law cracking down on dissent.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. RBI extends States' Ways and Means credit to Sept.

Context:

The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has decided to continue with the existing **interim Ways and Means Advances (WMA) scheme limit of ₹51,560 crore** for all States/UTs till September 2021.

- It said that the **Special Drawing Facility** shall continue to be **linked to the quantum of their investments in marketable securities** issued by the Government of India, including the Auction Treasury Bills.

Ways and Means Advances:

- Ways and means advances is a **mechanism used by RBI under its credit policy** to provide to States banking with it, to help them tide over temporary mismatches in the cash flow of their receipts and payments.
- Under this scheme, **a government can avail itself of immediate cash from the RBI.**
- The **increased limit for WMAs will help the states plan their market borrowing programmes better** while ensuring greater containment and mitigation efforts by the states.
- The WMA is to be **repaid after 90 days**. The interest rate for WMA is currently charged at the **repo rate**.

- The governments are, however, allowed to draw amounts in excess of their WMA limits. The interest on such overdraft is more than the repo rate. Further, no state can run an overdraft with the RBI for more than a certain period.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. Infernal infernos

Context

- A fire broke out at Vijay Vallabh Hospital in Mumbai.
- It was due to short-circuit in the air conditioner in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) where at least 14 patients severely ill with the coronavirus died.

Fire safety guidelines for hospitals issued by the Centre in 2020

- States and UTs were directed to carry out regular inspection and re-inspection of hospitals and nursing homes to ensure strict compliance with the implementation of fire safety measures as stipulated in various Act and codes.
- States and UTs were directed to undertake short duration training and awareness programme for hospital staff/doctors/managers/authorities.

Measures to be taken

- Fires have been reported in COVID-19 hospitals in states like Maharashtra, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh. State authorities should be able to document their learnings and put out a checklist to save patients.
- The **Supreme Court** had earlier directed all the states to carry out a fire safety audit of dedicated COVID-19 hospitals across the country to prevent fire incidents in medical institutions.
 - This is particularly important in Maharashtra's context, given that devastating fires have been recurring, and Chief Minister should lose no time in ordering a comprehensive audit.
- Responding to fire in an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) requires-
 - periodic maintenance of safety equipment
 - exhaust system to prevent smoke accumulation
 - evacuation plan for the sickest patients, who may be attached to life-saving equipment
- If precautionary measures are not met by the hospitals and if it results in serious hospital fires, there is always an option of judicial oversight and systematic inquiries into such mishaps.

Ex-Gratia Payment

- Prime Minister condoled the loss of lives in the hospital blaze and approved an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh each for the next of kin of the victims.
- The Maharashtra government has also announced an ex gratia compensation of Rs 5 lakh for the kin of the deceased and Rs 1 lakh for those injured.

Conclusion

- Patients should be able to go to a hospital without the fear of fires threatening their lives. Therefore, State bureaucracies have to diligently implement existing regulations.

Category: POLITY

1. Arise and rejuvenate the third layer of governance

Context

- The article discusses the need for strong local bodies for the good governance of the villages in India.

The journey of Panchayati raj

- The origin of decentralised – local self-government under British Rule can be traced to the constitution of district road funds in 1854.
- 1866 saw the Madras District Road Cess Act wherein Government was authorised to collect a road cess on land revenue. The aim of such a cess was to construct, repair and maintain district roads.
- The British, in 1884, passed the Madras Local Boards Act for the seamless administration which heralded the three-tier local self-government.

Mahatma Gandhi

- “The voice of the people is the voice of god; the voice of the Panchayat is the voice of the people,”- Mahatma Gandhi
- He advocated Panchayati Raj, a decentralized form of Government where each village is responsible for its own affairs, as the foundation of India’s political system. His term for such a vision was “Gram Swaraj” or Village Self-governance.
- According to Gandhi the vehicle that was most ideal to initiate both political and economic democracy at the grassroots level was the Panchayat Raj system.

73rd Amendment

- It brought about a massive turning point in the Panchayati Raj.
 - It led to the formation of a three-tier Panchayati raj methodology of governance,
 - reservation for the downtrodden and women,
 - consistency in economic development,
 - local body elections once in five years,
 - The formation of the State Election Commission, Finance Commission, and the power to draft the rules and responsibilities of the Panchayat.

Issues and concerns

- The decisions taken during a grama sabha meeting and the proposed solutions with a feasible deadline are not being executed.
- In projects where people might face significant impact, their opinions were not considered.
 - Even if meetings were held they were marked by poor attendance.
 - The government has continued with the projects in spite of poor representation from the people.
- Several projects are being implemented for the benefit of private and corporate entities as the focus of politicians is profit at the expense of people's welfare.
- Women do not find themselves in major administrative roles in the local bodies, though, on paper, women are shown to be a considerable force.
- If the state is headed by one Political Party and the Mayor is from another political party at the municipal level, it could result in an impasse, further deteriorating development.
- The Constitution is clear in stating that local body elections must be conducted once in five years. But the ruling party keeps postponing the holding of local body elections, which is a breach of the Constitution.

Way forward

- To ensure efficiency, we need to strengthen our grama sabhas, hold area sabhas in cities, form ward committees, hold online Panchayat meetings, ensure decent remuneration to Panchayat chiefs and councillors and also bestow the grama sabha with the power to revoke appointed members and representatives. These steps are what will ensure real growth in the State.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Centre allots 5 kg of grains free to poor

What's in News?

The Union government announced that 5 kg of foodgrains would be provided to 80 crore beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY).

Details:

- The foodgrains will be **allocated free-of-cost** @ 5 Kg per person per month to nearly 80 Crore beneficiaries covered under the **National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA)** over and above NFSA foodgrains.
- It would be on the same pattern as the earlier PM-GKAY.

Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY):

- PMGKAY is a **food security welfare scheme announced** in March 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It is operated by the **Department of Food and Public Distribution** under the **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution**.

- The scheme **aims to feed the poorest citizens of India** by providing grain **through the Public Distribution System**, to all the priority households (ration cardholders and those identified by the Antyodaya Anna Yojana scheme).

2. NHRC assigns six studies on human rights issues

What's in News?

The **National Human Rights Commission** has commissioned six **studies on human rights issues**.

- The issues include food security for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the extent of cyber exploitation of children and the falling participation of women in the workforce.

National Human Rights Commission:

- NHRC is a statutory body established in 1993 under the 'Protection of Human Rights Act.'
- The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is composed of a Chairperson and eight other members.

Read more on **National Human Rights Commission**.

G. Tidbits

1. 'RBI intent is key to curb further rupee weakness'

Context:

Reserve Bank of India intends to prevent any further depreciation in the currency as the COVID-19 cases surge.

Background:

- Rising cases have been one of the main factors behind the recent fall in the rupee, but the **RBI's decision to commit to large bond purchases has added to downside momentum**.
 - The RBI has committed to buying ₹1 trillion worth of bonds in the April-June period in its effort to temper the rise in bond yields to help the government borrow from the market at low-interest rates.
- RBI said it would do more going forward, and this would be alongside its regular **open market bond purchases** and **special open market operations** (the simultaneous sale and purchase of government securities over different tenors), the **equivalent of the U.S. Operation Twist**.

Note:

- **A weaker rupee helps exports.**
- **A weaker rupee makes imports expensive and exports cheaper** in dollar terms.

2. Emergency use nod for Virafin

Context:

The **Drug Controller General of India (DCGI)** granted emergency use approval for **antiviral drug 'Virafin'** to treat moderate COVID-19 in adults.

- The drug's safety profile is already well known as it is used in **treating people with chronic hepatitis B and C**.
- The drug has been repurposed for treating moderate COVID-19 disease.

3. Japan to host joint drill with U.S., France

What's in News?

Japan will hold a **joint military drill with U.S. and French troops** as China's actions in regional waters raise concern.

- The exercise will be the **first large-scale exercise in Japan involving ground troops from all three countries**.
- It comes as **Japan seeks to deepen defence cooperation beyond its key ally the U.S., to counter Beijing's growing assertiveness in the East and South China seas**.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Uttarakhand is vulnerable to which of the following disasters?

1. Earthquakes
2. Landslides
3. Cloud bursts
4. Glacial bursts
5. Forest fires

Choose the correct option:

- a. 1 and 4 only
- b. 2, 3 and 4 only
- c. 1, 4 and 5 only
- d. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Uttarakhand is geologically unstable and ecologically sensitive.
- Due to anthropological factors, the frequency and intensity of natural hazards have increased in the fragile state over the last few decades.
- Due to its topography and geology, the state faces the risk of calamitous events like flash floods/floods, cloudbursts, earthquakes, landslides, mudflows, and forest fires among others.

Q2. India draws its human rights obligations from:

1. Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993

2. Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN
3. Rights guaranteed by the Constitution

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- There is an apparent impact of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on drafting Part III (Fundamental Rights) of the Indian Constitution.
- Every citizen is guaranteed basic human rights under the Indian Constitution.
- India has acceded to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN.
- As per the provisions of the Protection of Human Rights Act of 1993, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) was established in 1993 as an independent statutory body as a watchdog of human rights in the country.

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

1. ASEAN grouping is open for membership to all countries in the Asia-Pacific region.
2. No ASEAN country shares a land border with India.
3. India is one of the founding members of ASEAN.

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- ASEAN was founded in 1967 with five members: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. India is not a founding member.
- It is headquartered in Jakarta.
- Myanmar which is a member of ASEAN shares its land border with India.
- ASEAN grouping is not open for membership to all countries in the Asia-Pacific region. ASEAN is an organisation of South-East Asian Nations only.

Q4. Which country is known for having 'self-defence forces' in the place of regular armed forces?

- a. Switzerland
- b. Norway
- c. Japan
- d. Finland

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The Japan Self-Defence Forces also referred to as the Self-Defence Forces (SDF), is the unified military forces of Japan that were established in 1954, and are controlled by the Ministry of Defence.

Q5. With reference to the British colonial rule in India, consider the following statements:

1. Mahatma Gandhi was instrumental in the abolition of the system of 'indentured labour'.
2. In Lord Chelmsford's 'War Conference', Mahatma Gandhi did not support the resolution on recruiting Indians for World War.
3. Consequent to the breaking of the Salt Law by the Indian people, the Indian National Congress was declared illegal by the colonial rulers.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The indentured labour system soon died after Gandhi left South Africa. Mahatma Gandhi was instrumental in the abolition of the system of 'indentured labour'.
- Gandhi did support the resolution on recruiting Indians for World War.
- Consequent to the breaking of the Salt Law by the Indian people, the Indian National Congress was declared illegal by the colonial rulers.

Note: This question is from Civil Services Prelims (2019) Question Paper.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Illustrate the journey of Panchayati Raj in India and with suitable examples suggest ways to strengthen the system. (250 words; 15 marks) [GS-2, Polity and Governance]
2. The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on India caused by the collapse of its healthcare system. In this context, examine the policy failure on the part of the Central and State governments. (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-3, Disaster Management]

