

26 Nov 2022: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis



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A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: SOCIAL JUSTICE

1. Govt. forms panel to look into MGNREGA's efficacy

Syllabus: Welfare schemes and the performance of these schemes

Prelims: About MGNREGA Scheme

Mains: Challenges associated with the implementation of the MGNREGA scheme and the way forward

Context: The Union Government has set up a committee to review the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme

- MGNREGA was introduced in 2005.
- The MGNREGA scheme provides 100 days of guaranteed unskilled work per year for every rural household.
- The scheme was launched as a poverty alleviation tool for rural areas by providing rural households with a safety net in the form of guaranteed work and wages.
- Currently, over 15.51 crore active workers are part of the scheme with 6.92 crores worth of assets being created to date which has benefited over 5.2 crore households.

Details

- The committee/panel set up by the government will be headed by former Rural Development secretary Amarjeet Sinha.
- The panel is mandated to assess the overall efficacy of the scheme as a poverty alleviation measure.
- The panel is entrusted to examine various factors behind the demand for MGNREGA work, trends in expenditure, the composition of work and the inter-State disparities.

- The committee after its assessment will recommend various amendments to the focus of the scheme and the governance structures that increase the efficacy of the MGNREGA scheme.

Various issues associated with the scheme

- **Higher costs:** Critics have often complained that the cost of providing work has increased significantly since the scheme first started.
- **Asset creation:** Experts have also raised concerns about the lack of tangible asset creation through the scheme.
- **Inter-state disparities:** There have been concerns about the poorer States such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar not being able to utilise the scheme optimally but economically better performing states like Kerala have been utilising the scheme efficiently for asset creation.
- **Other challenges:** Fake job cards and fake beneficiaries, corruption, late uploading of muster rolls and a huge pendency in the payment of wages.

Way forward

- The committee set up by the government must review various reasons for the underlying challenges in the implementation of the scheme and recommend ways to ensure greater focus on poorer areas.
- Further, the committee must also review whether more focus should be laid on community-based assets or individual works.
- Based on the latest trends, the demand for MGNREGA work is expected to be very high and it is important to ensure that adequate amounts of funds are available to match the demand.

***Nut graf:** Despite the criticism of being an inefficient instrument of shifting income to the poor, the MGNREGA scheme has remained a crucial safety net for rural households and its significance was particularly highlighted during the COVID pandemic. Therefore, it has become essential to address and resolve various challenges associated with the scheme in order to make it much more efficient and reach out to a larger number of beneficiaries.*

C. GS 3 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Referendum

Syllabus: Effect of Policies & Politics of Developed & Developing Countries on India's Interests

Mains: Examples of Direct Democracy.

Context: The United Kingdom's Supreme Court recently gave a ruling on Scotland's decision to call a referendum on its independence.

Introduction:

- The United Kingdom's Supreme Court gave its verdict on a petition by the government of Scotland, disallowing it from holding a referendum on becoming an independent country.
- The semi-autonomous Scottish government wants to hold a referendum in October 2023 to become an independent country.
- The court said, "the Scottish Parliament does not have the power to legislate for a referendum on Scottish independence."
- Under the Scotland Act, all matters relating to the "Union of the Kingdoms of Scotland and England" are reserved for the UK Parliament in London.
- The UK Parliament can grant the Scottish government the authority to hold a referendum using its "Section 30" order, a process that was used to allow a similar vote in 2014.
- But the UK has repeatedly said the 2014 vote should not be repeated for a generation and refused permission for a referendum.

Background:

- The island that makes up Great Britain at the moment is made up of Wales in the west, England in the middle and north, and Scotland in the north. These together with Northern Ireland make up the political union of nations known as the United Kingdom.
- However, each of these areas has a unique relationship with the union as a whole. The nations of Britain have shared the same monarch since 1603 when King James VI of Scotland became James I of England. The Kingdom of Great Britain was established through a formal union in 1707.
- There are 68 million people living in the UK as a whole, of whom 5.5 million are Scots. The Scotland Act, which established the Scottish Parliament and devolved some authority from Westminster, was approved by the then-Labour administration in 1998.

- Scotland also has its own legal and education systems and banknotes.
- Previously, a [referendum](#) for Scottish independence was held in 2014. Scotland had voted to remain in the UK.

Main case for independence:

- Scotland would have more control over its politics. Currently, many decisions are taken and influenced by the UK Parliament.
- Scotland, which is more liberal than the rest of the UK, might advance policies that would boost social welfare.
- Those who support independence believe Scotland “would be richer” if it breaks from England.
 - It could exploit more freely some economic resources, in particular, the North Sea oil.
 - The London School of Economics has predicted that independence from the UK would cost Scotland up to three times as much in lost revenue as [Brexit](#) will.
- Independence supporters want Scotland to have the freedom to decide how resources are managed and where money is invested.
- The Scottish National Party (SNP), which is spearheading the independence drive, also wants to remove Britain’s nuclear weapons from western Scotland.
- In 2016, the UK voted as a whole on Brexit. Among regions, Scotland had some of the fiercest ‘remainers’ — supporters of the demand to stay in the EU. After the result to leave, many Scots expressed dissatisfaction with having to bear the consequences of a result they did not vote for.

***Nut Graf:** In a recent ruling, the Supreme Court of the UK ruled that the “Scottish Parliament does not have the power to legislate for a referendum on Scottish independence.” But the Scottish government says that the right to self-determination is “fundamental and inalienable”, and there were no practical means to push for a referendum through the UK legislature.*

F. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Tidbits

1. Russia offers advanced fuel option for Kudankulam plant

- Rosatom, which is Russia’s state-owned nuclear energy corporation, has offered an advanced fuel option to [the Kudankulam Nuclear plant](#) which helps the reactors of the

plant to operate for an extended period of time without the need for stopping to load fresh fuel.

- Kudankulam Nuclear plant is India's largest nuclear power station.
- Rosatom's nuclear fuel division named the TVEL Fuel Company is the current supplier of TVS - 2 M fuel for the two VVER 1,000 MWe reactors generating power in the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project.
- The fuel which is being supplied currently has an 18-month fuel cycle i.e the reactor has to be stopped for fresh fuel loading once every 18 months.
- TVEL has now offered the more modern **Advanced Technology Fuel (ATF)**, which has a fuel cycle of 24 months.
- The use of ATF will help in increasing the efficiency, ensure additional power generation on account of prolonged operation and also save foreign exchange required to buy fresh fuel assemblies from Russia.

2. States ask Centre to rein in reliance on surcharges, cess while raising revenue

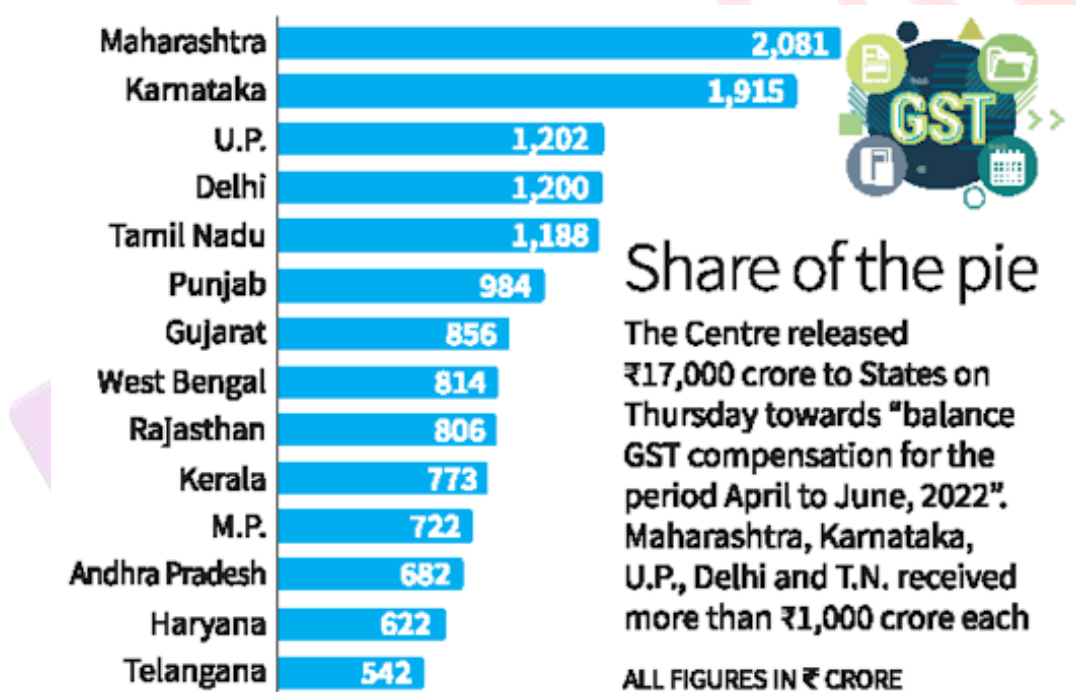


Image Source: The Hindu

- Several States including those being governed by the ruling party in the centre have sought the Centre to stop increasing its revenues in the form of [cess and surcharges](#) as it reduces the share of states in the divisible pool of taxes.
- States at a consultation meeting for the Union Budget of 2023-24, chaired by the Union Finance Minister also have asked for increased fiscal support to help revive the economy and have reiterated their demands for extending the [Goods and Services Tax \(GST\)](#)

compensation period. Key concerns associated with the federal fiscal framework were also raised.

- The Finance Minister of Tamil Nadu highlighted that the share of cesses and surcharges has increased from 10.4% of gross tax revenue in 2011-12 to about 26.7% in 2021-22 which has deprived the States of their legitimate share of revenue collected by the Union Government.
- The Finance Minister of Kerala asked the Centre to phase out more spending on the subjects under the State List mentioned in the [Seventh Schedule of the Constitution](#) and provide more flexible funds as grants rather than the centrally sponsored schemes with rigid criteria.
- The Union Finance Ministry has said the states also thanked the central government for financially supporting the States and Union Territories by increasing their borrowing limits, providing two advanced devolution instalments and through special assistance for capital expenditure.

3. Railways creates a roadmap to export Vande Bharat trains

- The Ministry of Railways is preparing a roadmap to begin the export of the indigenously manufactured [Vande Bharat trains](#) by 2025-26 and the Ministry is also working on increasing the production of Vande Bharat trains and introducing new versions with sleeper coaches.
 - The sleeper version of the Vande Bharat trains is expected to be ready by the first quarter of 2024 and will be manufactured by the Integral Coach Factory in Chennai.
- The Railways is preparing to operate 75 new Vande Bharat trains for 10 to 12 lakh kilometres before aggressively pursuing the exports.
- The Ministry is also developing “standard gauge” tracks in Rajasthan which are used outside India to test the trains which will be exported, as trains in India run on broad-gauge tracks.
- Further, the Ministry is collaborating with global firms to develop “tilting trains” which can operate on curved tracks without slowing down by 2025-26. About 400 Vande Bharat trains are expected to be manufactured by 2025 using this technology.

4. Indians received the biggest share of U.K. work visas: report

Migration and mobility

The sharp rise in demand for U.K. work-related visas has been attributed to post-pandemic recovery

Total U.K. work visas issued (year ending September 2022):

1,45,258

Work visas issued to Indians

This year: 56,042

In 2019: 29,552

Skilled Worker visas:

Indians received 33% of total

Skilled Worker - Health and Care visas:

Indians accounted for 36% of total



Image Source: The Hindu

- As per the British government, Indian nationals with over 39% of the total work-related visas granted by the UK for the year ending September 2022 have received the largest number of work-related visas issued by the U.K.
 - Out of the total 1,45,258 work-related visas issued by the U.K., Indians have received 56,042, which has witnessed a 90% increase as compared to the pre-pandemic figure of 29,552 in 2019.
- India is followed by countries such as the Philippines, Nigeria, and the US as the visa-seeking nations seeking work visas.
- Indians along with the US and South Africa, have featured in the top three nationalities that were granted “Skilled Worker” visas from the U.K.
- During the same period, the U.K. further granted about 1,27,731 student visas to Indian nationals, which also saw an increase of 93,470 from the 34,261 visas granted in 2019.
- However, the issue of pending visa applications has impacted the flow of people from India to the U.K. in the recent past. If the situation improves, more Indians are expected to be granted work-related and student visas in the future.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following statements are correct? (Level – Difficult)

1. A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court decriminalized homosexuality in the Shreya Singhal case of 2015.
 2. The Special Marriage Act of 1954 currently allows solemnisation of same-sex marriages under it.
- a) 1 only
 - b) 2 only
 - c) Both 1 and 2
 - d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: d

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is not correct**, Supreme Court through the Shreya Singhal case judgement struck down **Section 66A of the Information Technology Act, 2000**.
 - The Supreme Court in 2018 through its landmark judgement in the **Navtej Singh Johar case** decriminalized homosexuality.
- **Statement 2 is not correct**, The Special Marriage Act of 1954 provides a civil form of marriage for couples who cannot marry under their personal law and at present, sex marriages are not non-recognised under the Act.

Q2. The shore line of this lake is encompassed by a boulevard lined with Mughal era gardens, parks, houseboats and hotels. Scenic views of the lake can be witnessed from the shore line Mughal gardens, such as Shalimar Bagh and Nishat Bagh built during the reign of Mughal Emperor Jahangir and from houseboats cruising along the lake in the colourful shikaras. During the winter season, the temperature can sometimes reach as low as -11°C and ends up freezing the lake. This description refers to -
(Level – Easy)

- a) Dal Lake
- b) Mansar Lake
- c) Wular Lake
- d) Gadsar Lake

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The description in the question refers to Dal lake in Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir.
- The urban lake is integral to tourism and recreation in Kashmir and is regarded as the “Jewel in the crown of Kashmir” or “Srinagar’s Jewel”.

- The lake is also an important source for commercial operations in fishing and water plant harvesting.

Q3. Which among the following states does not enjoy the Special Category Status? (Level – Medium)

- a) Arunachal Pradesh
- b) Nagaland
- c) Punjab
- d) Uttarakhand

Answer: c

Explanation:

- A Special Category Status (SCS) is a classification given by the Centre to assist in the development of those states that face geographical and socio-economic disadvantages.
- States/UTs that enjoy Special Category Status (SCS): Assam, Nagaland, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Uttarakhand.

Q4. National Milk Day is marked on 26th November and in this context examine which of the below statements are correct? (Level - Medium)

- a) It is marked to commemorate the birth anniversary of the “Father of the White Revolution in India” - Dr. Verghese Kurien.
- b) It celebrates the importance of milk in a human’s life and spreads awareness of the benefits of drinking milk.
- c) It aims to strengthen the dairy sector by increasing the production of milk products.
- d) All the above

Answer: d

Explanation:

- National Milk Day in India is celebrated every year on the 26th of November in honour of Dr. Verghese Kurien who is regarded as the “Father of the White Revolution in India” and the “Milkman of India”.
- National Milk Day celebrates the importance of milk in a human’s life and spreads awareness of the benefits of drinking milk.
- National Milk Day aims to strengthen the dairy sector by increasing the production of milk products.

Q5. With reference to the Genetically Modified mustard (GM mustard) developed in India, consider the following statements: (Level - Medium) PYQP (2018)

1. GM mustard has the genes of a soil bacterium that give the plant the property of pest resistance to a wide variety of pests.
2. GM mustard has the genes that allow the plant cross-pollination and hybridization.
3. GM mustard has been developed jointly by the IARI and Punjab Agricultural University.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is not correct**, The DMH-11 (GM mustard) is produced as a result of a crossing between two varieties of mustard namely the Varuna and Early Heera-2.
 - To facilitate such crossing, genes from two soil bacterium called **Barnase** and **Barstar** were introduced.
 - Barnase in Varuna induces temporary sterility and restricts its natural self-pollination traits and tendencies.
 - On the other hand, Barstar limits the effects of Barnase on Heera thereby allowing seeds to be produced.
- **Statement 2 is correct**, GM mustard has the genes that allow the plant cross-pollination and hybridization.
- **Statement 3 is not correct**, GM mustard has been developed by **researchers at the Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants at the University of Delhi**.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. [“The use of surcharges to raise revenue distorts the GST regime.” Elucidate.](#) (150 words, 10 marks) (GS-3; Economy)
2. [Discuss the role of advanced nuclear fuel technology in India’s energy security.](#) (150 words, 10 marks) (GS-3; Energy)