28 Dec 2022: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

> By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education or even the beginning.
>
> - M.K. Gandhi

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A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: GOVERNANCE

1. What is the CAG audit report on Assam's NRC?

Syllabus: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Prelims: Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) and National Register of Citizens (NRC)

Mains: Details about NRC exercise, associated concerns and key recommendations

Context

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) in its compliance report of "logistical arrangements for NRC update project in Assam" has found several anomalies in the updating of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam.

What is the NRC exercise?

- The National Register of Citizens (NRC) was first created in Assam in 1957.
- NRC was created with the aim to identify individuals born in India and migrants from Bangladesh (former East Pakistan).
- In 2013, the Supreme Court directed the Union and the State Governments to undertake an exercise to update the 1951 register in Assam.
- Thus the key objective of the drive was to identify illegal immigrants who had migrated to Assam during the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war.
  - The NRC has only been published once in 1951 and it has not been updated since then.
- The first draft was notified in 2018 and a final list was published in 2019. This register included those who could establish their Indian citizenship by being residents or descendants of people living in Assam before March 25, 1971, which was the cut-off date for deportation of foreigners according to the Assam Accord of August 1985.
- Over 19.06 lakh people out of 3.3 crore applicants were not included in the register due to inadequate documentation in order to prove their citizenship.

- The issue has become controversial as various political parties have dismissed the final list as faulty and the process is now paused because the Registrar General of India (RGI) has not yet released the final list.

Read more about - [National Register of Citizens (NRC)](#)

Concerns highlighted by the CAG

- **Cost overrun:** When the process to update the NRC was initiated in December 2014 and was to be completed by February 2015, the project cost was estimated to be ₹288.18 crores.
  - However, the CAG report has pointed out a fivefold increase in the cost by March 2022 because of the extended time taken to complete the process.
  - As per the report, the final draft was notified in August 2019 and the project cost had increased to ₹1,602.66 crores.
  - The test check of records has further revealed irregularities in the usage of funds such as excess and inadmissible payments to vendors.
- **Payment of wages:** The CAG in its report has noted that the wages paid to the outsourced staff were about 45% to 64% less than the amount approved by the NRC coordination committee.
  - Further, this difference in wages was used to extend an undue benefit of ₹155.83 crores to the system integrator beyond the 10% reasonable profit margin.
- **Irregularities with the system**: The CAG in its report has pointed out that secure and reliable software was needed to facilitate the NRC exercise, but more than 215 software utilities were added to the core software.
  - Further, this was done without abiding by the due process of software development and vendor selection through the means of tendering.
  - Wipro Limited was one of the prime software installation companies for NRC.

Recommendations of the CAG

- The report of the CAG has recommended strict actions against the State Coordinator of National Registration (SCNR) for excess, irregular and inadmissible payments.
- The CAG report has also recommended holding the SCNR accountable as the principal employer for its failure to comply with the Minimum Wages Act.
- Further, the CAG has also recommended penal actions against Wipro Limited for not complying with the provisions of the Minimum Wages Act as payments to the data operators were made at rates less than the amount prescribed as minimum wages.

Nut graf: The CAG has recommended various actions in order to ensure an error-free NRC after its report revealed that the key objectives of preparing the NRC were not achieved despite incurring excess expenditure and that the haphazard development of software posed a significant risk of data tampering.

C. GS 3 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: SOCIAL JUSTICE

1. A retelling of the Indian migrant worker's plight

Syllabus: GS-2, Issues related to the management of Human Resources.

Mains: Migrant labours and associated concerns.

Prelims: International Migrants Day.

Context: International Migrants Day is observed annually on December 18.

Background Details:

- The factors which have resulted in large-scale migration in the past few years are:
  - o COVID-19 pandemic
  - o Taliban takeover of Afghanistan
  - o Russia's invasion of Ukraine
  - o Worsening poverty in the sub-Saharan region
  - o Climate change

For more information on Migration, read here: Human Migration in India, Features of Migration & Advantages

Data on Migration:

- As per the World Migration Report 2022 of the International Organization of Migration (IOM), there were approximately 281 million international migrants globally in 2020, with around two-thirds being labour migrants.
- There were around 169 million labour migrants in 2019 and 164 million in 2020.

- The share of South Asia is 40%. Moreover, the South Asia-Gulf Migratory Corridor is the world's largest migrant corridor.
- The long-term data analysis has shown that migration is not uniform across the world. It is shaped by economic, geographic, and demographic factors, that result in distinct migration patterns.
- It was reported that as a consequence of the "post-pandemic job search" around 300 Indian engineers from Tamil Nadu were trafficked to Myanmar to work for a crypto-scam and about 20 Indian nurses were trafficked to the United Arab Emirates for fake job offers.
- Kerala government data showed that 1.7 million people returned from abroad during the pandemic (between June 2020 and June 2021) and 1.5 million suffered job losses.
- As per a document tabled in the winter session of Parliament, about nine million Indian migrants are working in the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) countries.

Associated Concerns:

- It is argued that though India is the largest source of migrants and remittance-receiving country, the welfare of Indian migrants abroad is hardly prioritized by policymakers.
- It is also a matter of serious concern that India lacks a tangible and comprehensive migration policy to ensure the safe movement of migrants and decent living.
- India still governs international migration through the four-decades-old Emigration Act of 1983.
- The situation in many GCC countries is worrisome. For instance, the existing exploitative nature of the Kafala system has resulted in the mass retrenchment of the labour force.
  - Kafala system is described as a sponsorship system that regulates the relationship between employers and migrant workers.
- COVID-19 has increased the cases of unemployment, under-employment, reduction in salaries, and, even non-payment of salaries, compensation, and residual dues.
- Other recurring issues faced by migrant labourers are irregular payment, poor working conditions, the negation of labour rights, the absence of proper grievance redress mechanisms, and inaccessibility to a transparent judicial system.

Also read: [Challenges of Migration](link)

Initiatives for Migrant Issues in Asia:

- Several South Asian countries along with their civil society organizations, scholars, and activists are leading a 'justice for wage theft' campaign for the disbursement of the pending salary benefits and other associated dues of labour.
- Countries like the Philippines have recorded the wage theft of their migrants and are legally working on the issue.

Way Ahead:

- Women Migrants:
  - It should be noted that Indian nurses and caregivers have been working in the most volatile and remote countries like Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Israel, and Papua New Guinea.
  - Moreover, the women migrant workforce is largely limited to GCC countries and also to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.
  - Indian Government should thus comprehensively assess the situation of migrant women and create women-centric, rights-based policies.
- The Government should revisit its policies in the context of the post-pandemic scenario by engaging all stakeholders and passing the Emigration Bill 2021.
- The policies should be aligned with the United Nations' Global Compact for Safe, Orderly Migration and Regular Migration.
  - It is a non-binding resolution that recognizes the challenges of migrant labour across the world.

Also read: International Migrants Day (18 December)

Nut Graf: *The COVID-19 pandemic has not only impacted global migration patterns but has also exposed the untold vulnerabilities and miseries of international migrant labour. It is in India's interest that it revisit the existing policies and devise a new migration policy covering all aspects of the present scenario.*

Category: HEALTH

1. Staying prepared

Syllabus: GS-2, Issues related to health.

Mains: Rising COVID-19 cases and India's preparedness.

Context: Surging COVID-19 cases in China.

Details:

- China abandoned its Zero-COVID strategy abruptly after three years of strict enforcement. This led to a massive jump in the daily number of cases. It was estimated by media, hospitals, and crematoria that approximately 250 million people were infected in 20 days in December 2022.
- It was observed that BF.7 appears to be the dominant variant in China. There is fear that the uncontrolled spread of the virus in China might cause newer variants with higher

transmissibility. For example, the BF.7 sub-lineage with three additional immune escape mutations was already found in other variants infecting people arriving from China.

- It is suggested by experts that these mutations may increase transmissibility further but will not increase disease severity.
- With the COVID cases rising in a few more countries, India has adopted proactive measures.
- Approximately 90% of the adult population in India was already fully vaccinated by July 2022. Moreover, around one-fourth of adults were also boosted, and a large share of the population was also naturally infected. This reduces the chances of India facing the risk of large-scale deaths from existing variants.
- As a large share of the population enjoys hybrid immunity (vaccination and natural infection), India should focus on the increase in hospitalizations, specifically ICU admissions instead of daily cases.

India's response to rising cases:

- The Health Ministry has rightly urged States to ramp up genome sequencing (instead of testing) so that new variants are tracked. It should be noted that a virus evolves by accumulating mutations.
- In order to minimize the risk of the spread of new variants, the government has introduced 2% random post-arrival sampling of international passengers and mandatory RT-PCR tests for arrivals from China and four other countries.
- The states are also advised to ensure an uninterrupted supply of medical oxygen and conduct a drill in health facilities to ensure operational readiness.
- In terms of vaccines, India is self-sufficient with seven COVID-19 vaccines. Moreover, apart from homologous boosters, a couple of vaccines have got approval as heterologous booster doses too.
- On the antiviral front, a Hyderabad-based company has received WHO's prequalification for a generic version of Pfizer's COVID-19 oral antiviral drug, Paxlovid.

Also read: 22 Dec 2022: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

Nut Graf: The rising cases in China have once again raised the risk of yet another wave of the pandemic. The Indian government is proactively looking at the issue. However, it is advised to scale up the pace of its genome sequencing to trace any new variant of the virus.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Focus on Africa, the heart of the Global South

Syllabus: GS-2, Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India's interests.

Mains: G20 Presidency and India-Africa relations.

Details:

- India is willing to be remembered as the voice of the Global South, during its G20 presidency.
- It should be noted that the heart of Global South is Africa with the majority of the 54 countries being either developing or least developed.
- It is thus important to grasp the mood and changes in Africa, especially in its external partnerships.

Details about Washington Summit:

- The second U.S.-Africa summit was organized in Washington from 13 to 15 December 2022. The summit was attended by the leaders of 49 countries and the chair of the African Union (AU).
- U.S. President Joe Biden discussed several aspects of political, security, and economic cooperation. Other deliberations were held on issues like the ways to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and future pandemics, climate crisis, food security, and diasporic ties.
- It was declared during the summit that African voices, leadership, and innovation are crucial to addressing the global challenge and realizing the vision of a free, open, prosperous, and secure world.
- The U.S. President stressed that the US is "all in on Africa and all in with Africa".
- Important decisions taken during the summit are:
  - The U.S. declared its support for the AU to join the G20 as a permanent member.
  - It was further highlighted by the U.S. that it "fully supports" reforming the UN Security Council (UNSC) to include permanent representation for Africa.
  - It has also been promised that the president and the vice president of the U.S. would visit Africa shortly. It should be noted that no U.S. president visited Africa since 2015.
  - The U.S. has also announced new investments comprising:
    - $21 billion to the International Monetary Fund for providing the necessary funding to low-and middle-income countries
    - $10 million for a pilot programme to boost the security capacity in Africa
  - The U.S. administration is planning to invest $55 billion in Africa over the next three years.
- It is analyzed that the first assurance would be implementable once both the U.S. and India overcome the likely resistance from the ASEAN and European Union. However, UNSC reform is still a distant future.

For information on UNSC reforms, read here: United Nations Security Council Reforms

China Challenge:

- China became the largest trading partner and the fourth largest investor in the African continent, ahead of the U.S., due to its consistent diplomacy and extensive economic engagement.
- The U.S.-Africa trade stood at $44.9 billion in 2021, whereas China-Africa trade exchanges were somewhere near $254 billion. Moreover, the U.S. investment stock in Sub-Saharan Africa was $30.31 billion in contrast to China's total investment of $43.4 billion in 2020.
- The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was set up in October 2000.
  - The FOCAC is composed of ministers/leaders from both Africa and China who meet once in three years. The Chinese president participates either in person or digitally.
  - China has established a full-fledged inter-ministerial mechanism to ensure the timely implementation of FOCAC decisions.
  - The last meeting of the forum was held in Dakar in 2021, where support was extended for the Chinese agenda of the One-China Principle, the Global Development Initiative, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the vision of "a community with a shared future."
  - Moreover, for years, the Chinese foreign minister begins his annual series of foreign visits by travelling to Africa.
- Just before the Washington summit, the U.S. Deputy Commerce Secretary highlighted that the U.S. had fallen behind China in terms of trade with Africa.
- African leaders have reiterated multiple times that they don't want to choose and are willing to work with the U.S., China, and all other partners.

Also read: India's G20 Presidency: Sansad TV Perspective

India-Africa Relations:

- India has worked hard in the last two decades to strengthen its political and economic partnership with Africa at the continental, regional and bilateral levels.
- A special momentum was created by organizing high-level exchanges and forging cooperation initiatives during the period of 2015-19.
- However several factors like COVID-19, the economic downturn, the war in Ukraine, and the border conflict with China have resulted in a slowdown.
- The G20 presidency is a unique opportunity for India to ensure that the AU becomes a permanent member of this grouping and to reflect Africa's Agenda 2063 for development.
- Additionally, India and the U.S. should collaborate in Africa.
- The fourth India-Africa Forum Summit should also be organized in early 2024 as the third summit was held long back in 2015.

For more on India-Africa relations, read here: India's Relations with Africa

Nut Graf: *The African continent plays the most crucial role in the Global South. The United States and China are already cooperating with African countries through several initiatives, and India should also use the opportunity of the G20 presidency to set its mark on the continent.*

F. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Tidbits

1. Odisha CID to probe death of Putin critic

- Odisha CID has started a high-level investigation into the mysterious death of two Russian tourists namely, Pavel Antov who was a millionaire businessman and a political critic of Russian President Vladimir Putin, and his close friend Vladimir Bydanov.
- Bydanov was found dead on the morning of December 22, who according to doctors died of a heart attack.
- After the death of Bydanov, Antov appeared to have slipped into depression and according to the preliminary investigation, Antov also ended his life by falling from the hotel roof.
- Odisha Police have registered a case of unnatural death and are conducting investigations. The Consulate General of Russia in Kolkata is also following the case with the help of local authorities.

2. Parliamentary panel pulls up govt. for failure to create Tourism Council

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture has urged the government to set up a National Tourism Council on the lines of the GST Council to make recommendations directly to the Union and the State governments.
- The Committee also asked about the steps taken by the Tourism Ministry with respect to its earlier recommendation of adding tourism to the Concurrent List under the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.
  - According to the Committee, the inclusion of tourism in the Concurrent List will help address the challenges posed by the pandemic to the tourism sector since tourism is a multi-sectoral activity.
- The Committee also questioned why a few States have not yet accorded industry status to hospitality projects.

- o At present, only eight States namely Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand have accorded industry status to hospitality projects.
- The Committee further raised concerns over the progress achieved in projects such as the "Development at Hazratbal" in Jammu and Kashmir and "Infrastructure Development at Puri, Shree Jagannath Dham – Ramachandi – Prachi River front at Deuli under Mega Circuit" in Odisha which were sanctioned before 2017-18.

3. 'Green hydrogen may get $2 bn incentive'

- In order to cut emissions and become a major export player, India is planning a $2-billion incentive programme for the green hydrogen industry.
- The key aim of the incentive programme would be to reduce the production cost of green hydrogen by over 20% in the next five years.
- Hydrogen which can be used as a fuel is produced by splitting water with an electrical process called electrolysis and if the electrolysers used in the process are fueled by renewable energy, the product is called green hydrogen as the fuel produced would be free of greenhouse emissions.
- At present, it costs around ₹300-400/kg to produce green hydrogen in India.

Learn more about green hydrogen - [Sansad TV Perspective: Green Hydrogen](#)

4. 'Significant govt. control under data protection bill to hit data centre investments'

- According to the Information Technology Industry Council (ITI), the significant controls and exemptions provided to the government under the Draft Digital Personal Data Protection Bill 2022 would make it harder for companies to invest in data centres and data processing activities in India.
  - o ITI is a global technology industry body founded in 1916 with its headquarters in Washington, DC.
- The government released a [draft Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Bill 2022](#) in November 2022 and had invited comments.
- ITI, whose members include global technology majors like Apple, Amazon, Meta, Microsoft, Cisco, Dell, Samsung, etc. has said that the draft Bill provides extended controls to the executive arm of government and delegates much of the detailed rule-making authority to separate processes which are yet to be defined.

- However, the Minister of State for Electronics and IT had said that the exemptions for the government would be provided only in some special circumstances such as for maintaining public order.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Who among the following advocated the introduction of Roman Script for the Hindi Language while delivering the Presidential address at a session of the Indian National Congress? (Level - Difficult)

a. Mahatma Gandhi
b. Subhash Chandra Bose
c. Abul Kalam Azad
d. George Yule

Answer: b

Explanation:

- **Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose** in the Haripura session of 1938, proposed the use of the Roman script for Indian languages.

Q2. Consider the following statements: (Level - Medium)

1. Nipah Virus is a type of RNA virus in the genus Henipavirus.
2. Pigs can also act as intermediate hosts of the Nipah Virus.
3. The Nipah Virus can survive in the Indian Flying Fox's body without causing disease.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is correct,** The Nipah virus is a type of RNA virus in the genus Henipavirus.
- **Statement 2 is correct,** Nipah Virus is an airborne transmission infection and can affect those who come in direct contact with contaminated bodies such as pigs or bats carrying the virus.

o Nipah virus host species include flying foxes and pigs. Domestic pigs can also act as intermediate hosts.

- **Statement 3 is correct,** Fruit bats also known as flying foxes belong to the Pteropodidae Family – Pteropus genus.
  - o They're found in South East Asia.
  - o The Nipah Virus can survive in the bat's body without causing disease and antibodies were found in the Indian Flying Fox during the Bangladesh outbreak.

Q3. "Naegleria fowleri" recently seen in News: (Level - Difficult)

a. Is a brain-eating amoeba.
b. Is a shrub found along the Western Ghats which blooms only once in 12 years.
c. Is a bioluminescent alga.
d. Are composite organisms made up of symbiotic algae and fungi that can be found in abundance in the Western Ghats, the Eastern and Western Himalayas.

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Naegleria fowleri, commonly known as a "brain-eating amoeba" is an amoeba (single-celled living organism) that lives in soil and warm freshwater, such as lakes, rivers, and hot springs.
- Naegleria fowleri infects people when water containing the amoeba enters the body through the nose.
- The amoeba then travels up the nose to the brain and affects the brain tissues causing an infection called primary amoebic meningoencephalitis (PAM).

Q4. Consider the following statements: (Level - Medium)

1. Under Article 82, the Parliament enacts a Delimitation Act after every Census.
2. In case of a difference of opinion among members of the Delimitation Commission, the opinion of the Chief Election Commissioner prevails.
3. 42nd Amendment Act laid down that there would be no delimitation till after the 2001 census.

How many of the given statements is/are correct?

a. One statement only
b. Two statements only
c. All three statements
d. None of the above

Answer: b

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is correct,** According to Article 82 of the Constitution, the **Parliament** by law enacts a Delimitation Act after every census.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect,** In case of a difference of opinion among the members of the Delimitation Commission, the opinion of the majority shall prevail.
- **Statement 3 is correct,** The 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976 had put a ban on any further delimitation of the constituencies after the 2001 census.
  - Further, in 2001, the 84th Constitutional Amendment, 2001 extended the freeze on the number of constituencies by another 25 years i.e. till 2026.

Q5. Which one of the following foreign travellers elaborately discussed about diamonds and diamond mines of India? (Level - Difficult) PYQ-2018

a. Francois Bernier
b. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier
c. Jean de Thevenot
d. Abbe Barthelemy Carre

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605 – 1689) was a 17th-century French gem merchant and traveller.
- Jean-Baptiste Tavernier was the first European to describe the diamonds and diamond mines in India.
- In a book written by Valentine Ball, "Travels in India by Jean Baptiste Tavernier", he clearly states that Tavernier identified the diamond mining sites in India.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. The Government of India has to revisit its migratory policies by engaging all stakeholders. Discuss. (10 marks, 150 words) [GS-2, IR]
2. For India to be remembered as the voice of the Global South through the G20 presidency, it needs to understand the mood and changes in Africa. Elaborate. (10 marks, 150 words) [GS-2, IR]